



Planning Commission MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, August 5, 2025 - 2:30 PM
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office
14 S Harrison Street

1. Call to Order

2. Draft Comprehensive Plan Review

- a. Draft Comprehensive Plan Review of the Economic Development and Implementation Chapters.

3. Discussion

- a. This meeting will be conducted as a workshop. As such, it will be informal in nature and there is no scheduled opportunity for public comment. Written public feedback may be forwarded to the Planning and Zoning Department at planningandzoning@eastonmd.gov.

4. Adjournment

Topics for August 5, 2025
Planning Commission Comprehensive Plan Workshop

The focus of the next Planning Commission review of the Draft Comprehensive Plan will be the Economic Development and Implementation Elements. There will also be discussion of the document in general as this is the first review of the edited/condensed/reorganized version of the Plan. The following is a list of potential questions/issues/talking points on which to center discussion at this Workshop:

Economic Development

1. The revised Economic Development Chapter is more concise than the previous version. As such, do you think it needs to be edited by chat gpt a la the balance of the document or is it OK as is?
2. The reference to and summary of the Downtown Small Area Plan is dropped in this version. Is that OK or do you want to add it back in?
3. Is there any other aspect of economic Development that you think should be discussed in our Comp Plan?
4. Do you have any suggested revision to the proposed Goals & Objectives for this chapter?

Implementation

5. Most of the questions related to this section were discussed at your previous Workshop. As such, I think the focus should be on:
 - Do you like the revised version of this Element?
 - Is there any issue/area not covered?
 - Does the chapter require review by chat gpt? At 50pages it would represent about a quarter of the Plan is incorporated in as is. Maybe that is appropriate for this particular chapter, but I don't doubt it could be consolidated.
6. Are you Ok with my rephrasing of the growth strategy about the rate of growth?
7. Are there any revisions/additions to the Goals & Objectives?

General Questions

8. What are your feelings about the edited and condensed version of the document? (Style? Tone? Organization? Level of simplicity?)
9. What are your thoughts about the general flow of the document and the order of the Chapters?

10. I observed that the vast majority of Chapter 9 (History and Future of Design regulations in Easton) is a direct copy of Subsection 4.3 (+) in the Place Chapter. There appears to only be about one page of material unique to Chapter 9. Given that, should we:
 - A. Delete Subsection 4.3 et al?
 - B. Delete Chapter 9 altogether (and move the little bit of unique material to Chapter 4)?
 - C. Keep the material in both places, but revise to make them more directly speak to the subject of each particular chapter?
11. Did you identify any other areas of duplication?
12. Has any particular issue of importance been dropped?
13. Are you OK with simply including population projections based on the past (i.e., linear regression) rather than identifying a “target” growth rate? You made the decision to remove the target, but there are still a few references to it as the basis for planning (e.g., the WWTP will need to be expanded in 20XX based on 1.75% growth).
14. Consideration of one addition to the Future Growth Area to incorporate the parcel on which the Town’s Wastewater Treatment Plant sits. There are potential advantages to the Town of having the site under our jurisdiction and although annexation may be a long way off, the first step in ultimately accommodating that is to include it in the Growth Area in the Plan. I believe this could be accomplished by simply adding this parcel and Seth Forest to the Growth Area, meaning we would essentially not be increasing our developable area.

IMPLEMENTATION

“A plan without action is not a plan. It’s a speech.”

~ T. Boone Pickens

INTRODUCTION

The quote cited above all speaks to the necessity to link planning with action. The bulk of this Plan frames the context of the present day and outlines the Plan for the future. If the Plan is to avoid the fate of "sitting on the shelf and gathering dust", this final chapter on Implementation will likely be largely responsible.

As much as any element in the Comprehensive Plan, this, the Implementation Element, ponders the future. In particular it considers the future that the rest of the Plan envisions and describes the means to make that vision a reality. It also addresses certain requirements of state law. Finally, it touches on the general topic of inter-jurisdictional coordination. Specifically, it will describe how Easton’s Plan relates to Talbot County’s Plan for the same area and discuss the roles of the two governing bodies in making these Plans become reality as envisioned.

The stage for much of what will be written in this chapter has been set in previous elements of the Plan, particularly the Land Use, Municipal Growth and Community Character chapters. This chapter will take the conversation one step further by tying the whole discussion together, and proposing concrete actions that will be necessary to make the vision of this Plan a reality.

A GROWTH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR EASTON

In contemplating a growth management strategy for Easton, it is necessary to first consider what the community feels is undesirable with the current situation. In doing so, it is apparent that there are many great aspects to the Town. What

drives the desire for a growth management strategy is the recognition of trends contrary to these aspects. These include:

- Development that is too wasteful. Density in the older, historic parts of Easton is two to three times as dense as that found in many of the subdivisions of the last 40 to 50 years and yet, these older historic parts of Easton are consistently identified through public input as the best parts of Easton.
- Commercial development that is too ubiquitous. That is to say, it is virtually indistinguishable from that in any other community.
- Growth that is spreading outward too quickly. There is concern amongst many residents that Easton is spreading too far, too fast. Much of this problem relates to the first point above. That is, since density is so low in Easton, more and more land is necessary to accommodate even a constant rate of growth. To this point, public input in the early stages of this Plan's preparation indicated a clear and strong preference for accommodating the majority of growth during this Planning cycle in the form of Infill, Redevelopment, and Adaptive Reuse rather than on newly annexed Farmland and Forests.
- The construction of single-use subdivisions rather than neighborhoods. Again, this causes a need for more land and also necessitates increased automobile usage.

With this as the backdrop, the following Growth Management Strategy for Easton is proposed. It is identical to that which was first proposed in the 2010 Plan, with one notable addition and a modification.

Contain Sprawl with an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB)

The first step in Easton's proposed Growth Management Strategy is designed to contain the seemingly endless outward expansion of the Town. This is

accomplished through the establishment of an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), as first implemented in the 2004 Plan Update. An UGB is essentially “a line in the sand.” On the Town side of this line, town-scale development will occur. On the other side of the line, development is much less dense. In Easton and Talbot County’s case, the difference will be even more dramatic because both jurisdictions are proposing that the UGB be bounded on the County side of the line by a greenbelt. This would be a green ring surrounding the future ultimate Town limits consisting of forests, wetlands, and farms. This greenbelt would become a top priority area for land preservation programs and initiatives at the County level.

The UGB is depicted on the Growth Area and Future Land Use Maps. It has been sized to correspond to the size of a community that we ultimately feel comfortable with in terms of the ability of Easton to maintain its charm and quality of life. What this translates into in terms of future populations depends on the density of development within the UGB as well as how successful we are in terms of encouraging revitalization and infill redevelopment. What this population is or when we achieve it is less important than ensuring that when we get there, Easton is the kind of place that current and future residents will be proud to call home.

The location of the UGB was based upon consultation with the Talbot County Planning Commission, current development trends, anticipated trends due to goals and objectives suggested in this Plan and logical boundaries established by property lines, roadways and natural features. Thus while it is viewed as a permanent dividing line demarcating urban and rural development, the precise location of the UGB will be examined again in 10 years as part of the next Comprehensive Plan update, just as it has been in association with this Plan revision.

This 2010 Plan Update proposed no changes to the UGB and this Update does not as well. It has, in fact, remained unchanged since the adoption of the

2004 Plan with one exception. That was the expansion of the growth area (and thus the Growth Boundary and Green Belt) to accommodate the site of the proposed future Hospital and the Talbot Community Center.

While the establishment of an Urban Growth Boundary and Green Belt can achieve the objective of containing the outward expansion of the Town’s urban footprint, the character of Easton of the future could still be a wide variety of things, depending on what is allowed or encouraged to happen on the in-Town side of the boundary. Filling in the growth area with single-family detached homes at the 2.0 du/ac or so density of many of the subdivisions built since 1980 would be an inefficient, unsustainable use of this land. On the other hand, dramatically increasing density in the name of greater sustainability could also lead to a future Easton that would be out of the expressed desired character for our community. This Plan seeks to narrow that range of possible future outcomes and this chapter in particular begins to prescribe how to achieve that future.

In 2024, the Planning/Economic Development Firm Urban3 modelled the fiscal impacts of land uses on the Eastern Shore in general, and then in Talbot County specifically. The basis of Urban3’s methodology involves examining “value per acre” for the area being analyzed. The Urban3 study for Talbot County is referenced and summarized in the Land Use Element of this Plan. The complete document is available at [XXXXXXXXXXXXX](#). Additional selected highlights of the study, as they relate to future development patterns of Easton follow:

As Easton continues to grow, the town will be able to make choices regarding how that growth will look and the resulting financial implications of that growth. Urban3 conducted three Growth Projections Scenarios for the following sites within Easton: Poplar Hill, Four Seasons, and Gannon Ridge. These scenarios leverage the values and productivity of existing land uses and building types within Easton (Figure 14), and then apply them to conceptual site plans provided by Easton

(Figure 15).



Figure 14. Example properties used in projections scenarios for the Town of Easton
Source: Maryland Department of Planning (2024), Google Maps

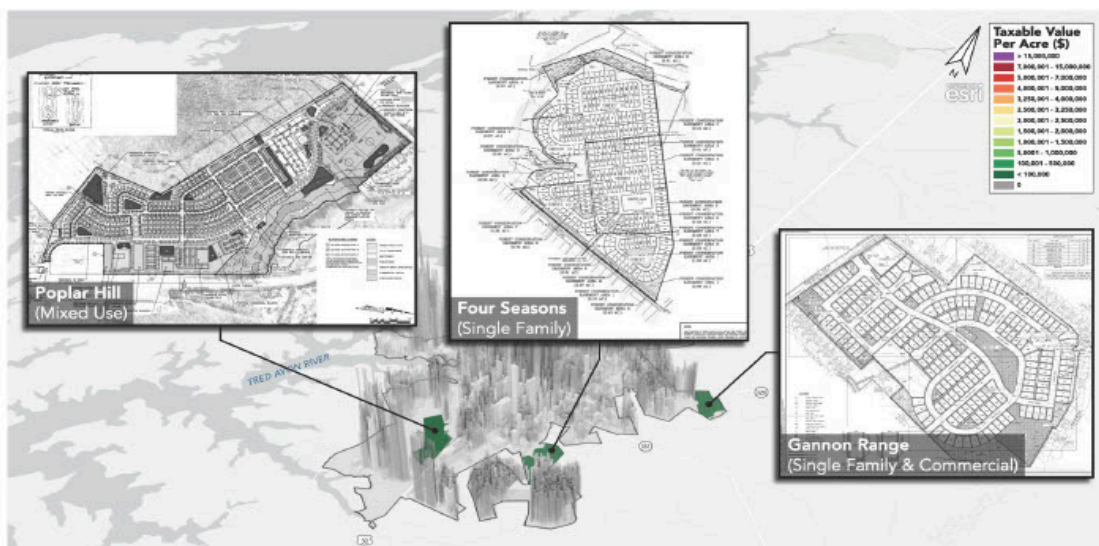


Figure 15. Example site plans used for projections scenarios for the Town of Easton
Source: Maryland Department of Planning (2024), Google Maps

In Figure 16 we look at the Four Seasons location and the potential for this site to become a single family residential development, while also comparing the difference in value change between the use of single family attached and detached building types. We see that the Four Seasons site, if developed as single family attached comparable to the homes on Jasper Lane, would have a taxable value increase that is 743 times its current value. If developed as traditional single family detached housing, this site's value potential increases less than that with more

compact single family homes. It is important to consider building type alongside the development pattern of these sites when determining best use with the highest potential in property tax revenue for the Town of Easton.

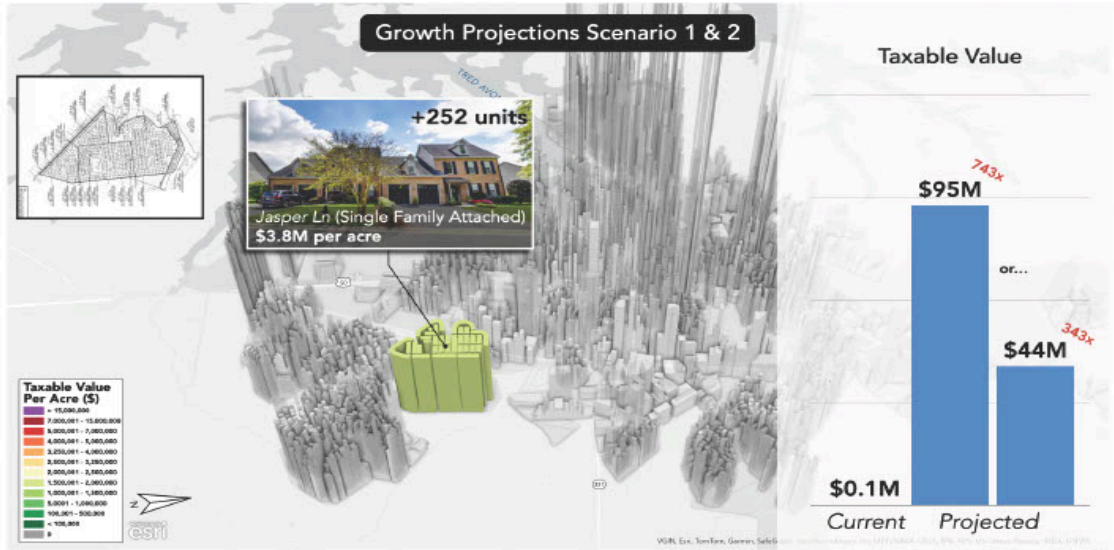


Figure 16. Two growth projections scenarios for the Four Seasons site
Source: Maryland Department of Planning (2024), Google Maps

Growth Projections Scenarios		Taxable Value Per Acre Picos Leaves	Development Type	City Property Tax Revenue
Poplar Hill			Commercial/Multifamily/Townhomes/ Single Family Attached	\$637K
Four Seasons Scenario 1			Single Family Attached	\$494K
Four Seasons Scenario 2			Single Family Detached	\$228K
Gannon Range Scenario 1			Commercial/Single Family Attached	\$347K
Gannon Range Scenario 2			Commercial/Single Family Detached	\$230K

Figure 17. Summary of all projections scenarios at the three sample sites in Easton
Source: Maryland Department of Planning (2024), Google Maps

Figure 17 shows a summary table of the scenario projections for each site, the scenario development type, and the potential amount of property tax revenue for the Town of Easton. While the Poplar Hill site (now owned by Talbot County) may no longer have this mixed use development planned for the future, the scenario and resulting value can be a model for the Town of Easton to consider when looking at future mixed-use development patterns.

Key Takeaways

How can we increase our Value Per Acre (VPA)?

Understand Current Revenue and Spending Patterns

Urban3's analysis shows how land use can be tied to the economic cash flow in the Town of Easton and how it impacts the town's ability to act as a corporation. Understanding how different land uses affect property tax revenue will allow Easton to make informed development decisions that maximize revenue productivity that can then be used in providing services such as public safety and continuing economic development.

Repeat What Works

Inspecting the Value Per Acre (VPA) model allows communities to link fiscally productive areas with their associated land use types. Using a moderate to high productivity sample development, such as mixed use commercial or missing middle housing types, as an example for how to build in the future can guide community conversation, vision, processes, and future regulations.

Increase Density Incrementally

Allowing greater density is a simple way to increase VPA. Increasing the numerator in the "value divided by acres" equation will naturally yield a higher value per acre. Stacking your stories means stacking your dollars. Increasing density by just one or two stories can have a significant impact on productivity. Density increases typically are achieved with land development regulation changes, which may be contentious.

As Easton continues to grow, the town will be able to make choices regarding how that growth will look and the resulting financial implications of that growth. By using Urban3's

analysis, Easton can continue to locate and reproduce some of its most highly productive land use patterns and building types.

How can we increase our VPA and lower our costs?

Understand the Cost to Maintain Infrastructure Systems

Urban3 has seen that funding for infrastructure systems(roads, sewer, water, stormwater) is insufficient in covering the lifecycle expenses for these systems. Certain users of these systems may not be paying for the true cost of what it takes to serve them (meaning other users are subsidizing them). Adjust fees, with geography in mind, to adequately cover the costs of operation and maintenance or encourage infill development rather than servicing new areas.

Increase Density

Perhaps the most readily apparent difference between the Downtown area that so many people love and hope to see replicated and the newer “suburban” scale development that has occurred more recently, is the density of these two types of development. Accomplishing the first step in the Growth Management Strategy, establishing an Urban Growth Boundary, will accomplish little if within its borders development continues at a scope and scale such as we have seen for much of the last 30-50 years.

The most telling indictment of Easton’s recent densities is the fact that in and of themselves, they would not even come close to qualifying as Priority Funding Areas under the terms of the State’s guidelines. The minimum density necessary to qualify as such is 3.5 dwelling units per acre (net). Easton’s more recent developments have a density of just less than 2 dwelling units per acre. This has a number of implications, including promoting the suburban style of development that is generally disparaged throughout this Plan, representing a wasteful use of land, and inefficiently serving the resulting homes with various utilities and public

services.

In order to reverse this trend, the previous Plan proposed the creation of a new zoning district that would be assigned to all future residential areas. The Plan even suggested the development standards for this new district. As described in a previous chapter of this Plan, this new Traditional Neighborhood Zoning District was proposed but never adopted by the Town Council. Instead, changes were made to the existing R-10A and R-7A zoning districts as well as to the Subdivision Regulations, in an attempt to get some of the suggested changes added to our existing development standards. In an effort to increase the likelihood that future development patterns are more traditional and less suburban, the TND concept has been reintroduced in this Plan Update, as described in the Community Character Chapter.

Build Neighborhoods

This concept has been a recurring theme throughout this Comprehensive Plan. It was discussed extensively in the Community Character chapter and touched upon in several other places. The key is to ensure that this approach is the easiest one under which to develop and that the more recently commonplace suburban type of development is the difficult method that would only be approved under truly unique and extenuating circumstances.

Assuming these changes in future development patterns can be achieved, only part of the problem will be addressed. Easton will still ultimately be left with a suburban-style middle surrounding a truly traditionally developed core with a neo-traditional style collection of neighborhoods on the periphery. Undoubtedly, the biggest challenge facing the Town is in creating ways to “retrofit” the suburban-style subdivisions to make them denser, more connected, and more mixed use. This will be difficult and ultimately may never be fully achieved, but some things can be done to improve the situation, and some were implemented

following the original suggestion for such changes in the 2004 Plan. These include:

- Permit additions to be made to single-family houses to create granny flats or duplexes as an outright permitted use. This change was made to the Ordinance, but little development activity of this type has occurred.
- Effectively narrow streets by striping or using a textured surface to create a pedestrian/bicycle lane. This concept was illustrated in the Quality Community Survey and the results were striking. The image of the existing wide street (in this case, Corbin Parkway) received a -1.7 rating. The computer-simulated image with a textured bike lane on both sides of the street received a +2.5 rating. This has not been accomplished, although the concept has been discussed for possible implementation at another location. Furthermore, over the course of the past year, the Town's Engineering Department has begun striping some of our major in-Town roads to better define parking and traffic lanes and to "calm" traffic. Aurora Street and Brooklets Avenue serve as two examples where this has been accomplished.



Corbin Parkway Existing Situation Corbin Parkway "calmed" with paving

- Permit more neighborhood scale commercial uses by special exception in residential zoning districts. This has recently been accomplished for offices, which are allowed by Special Exception in the R-10A and R-7A

Zoning Districts. A number of supplemental standards apply in order to assure that the neighborhood is not adversely impacted. Similar standards can and should be added for whatever other commercial uses might be permitted in the suburban-style subdivisions (since hopefully the newer developments will be mixed-use in nature to some degree). There has been no further progress on this recommendation beyond the limited office uses that are allowed as discussed above.

- Budget for and strategically purchase houses as they become available in order to demolish them and redevelop the sites for civic or park use. This has not been accomplished or even discussed since the last Plan. The current economic climate makes it difficult for the Town to consider such investments, even though more opportunities exist to purchase such properties at reasonable prices in such times. Going forward this is a concept that should at least be discussed for possible implementation.
- Allow for residential uses more generally in commercial zoning districts. When discussing the encouragement of mixed uses, the notion of allowing commercial uses in residential developments is often raised. However, it may be more feasible to add residential uses to commercial areas. Allowing multi-family housing in commercial zoning districts seems particularly appropriate given two recent apartment projects, on Brant Court and Elliott Road, in a shopping center/industrial park and along a commercial corridor, respectively.
- Explore options for the development of vacant land adjacent to “suburban” style subdivisions. In such scenarios requiring a TND style development may not always be compatible with the adjacent suburban form of development. In such locations, something that can serve as a transition between these two types of development is

appropriate. They may, for example, contain some of the lower unit count middle housing types but not, perhaps, the higher unit counts or at the overall density we anticipate in the TND form of development.

Improve Design

The steps outlined above will go a long way towards making Easton a better place to live. The establishment of a UGB will contain the outward spread of development and the establishment of a greenbelt in the County adjacent to this UGB will offer some permanence to this limit. Increasing the density within the Town will improve the appearance and function of neighborhoods as well as decrease development pressures on other areas in and around the Town, not yet as ready to be developed. Building neighborhoods rather than subdivisions or developments will dramatically improve the livability of Easton and will decrease traffic by offering more goods and services within walking distance of where people live. Still, with all these changes, the Town will not generate a “sense of place” feeling unless improvements are made to the way the built environment looks.

This issue was discussed extensively in the Place chapter of this Plan and recommended Design Principles for 2025 immediately follows this subsection, so there is little need to repeat that material here.

The challenge of this Comprehensive Plan is to ensure that this effort to achieve improved design continues, in fact advances even more, rather than retreats. In order to accomplish this, the following recommendations are offered:

- Vigorously and consistently promote and require compliance with the “Design Principles for Easton” as described in the Community Character Element.
- Update/Create Design Guidelines for various types of development (including residential).
- Utilize Forest Conservation monies and off-site plantings to enhance

sparsely landscaped areas along Route 50 and the Easton Parkway.

- Develop a Tree or Urban Forestry Plan outlining areas proposed for new tree plantings, identifying sites/locations suitable as receiving areas for off-site planting that developers cannot accommodate on their properties, and establishing priorities and tools for establishing the “Green Ring” around downtown called for in the AKRF Downtown Study.
- Accept (if not solicit) annexation requests from those businesses located on Route 50 north of the current Town Boundary and require conformance with the Town’s architectural, signage, and landscaping requirements as a condition of annexation, in order to improve this key visual gateway into Town.

Plan in Accordance with the Rate of Growth

The issue of actively and purposely controlling Easton’s rate of growth has been the subject of a great deal of debate for each of the last three Comprehensive Plan Updates, including this one. Historically the Planning Commission and Town Council have elected to allow the free market to determine Easton’s growth rate. However, in the 2010 Plan the Planning Commission decided that indeed the dominant theme of that Plan to retain and/or return to an older way of doing things in Easton was endangered by a continued rate of growth in the range that we had experienced in the previous 20 years or so. The fear was that at 3% growth (or more) development pressures are so great that it becomes more and more difficult to achieve all the goals relative to the type and form of development we want to see. Furthermore, growth at such a rate makes some of our most challenging problems, such as improving traffic conditions, or lessening our impact on the environment, even more difficult to achieve. As a result, the Planning Commission and Town Council ultimately enacted a Plan which identified a preference for a 1%

annual rate of growth.

They also recognized that by merely stating that we want to achieve growth closer to our long-term average of 1%, absolutely nothing changes to make that happen. The Commission and Town Council discussed this issue at great length and ultimately decided that, for that Planning period, the issue should most appropriately be addressed by adhering to an Annexation Policy that does not allow for an exceedingly high rate of growth. The Priority Growth Areas were viewed as suited to do this. The only potential shortcoming of this policy is the rate at which infill/build-out occurs. For this reason, the staff was directed to explore policies and tools which could achieve a specified targeted growth rate, in the event that growth gets out of control.

This Plan proposes revisions to this policy. First, after a decade where the average annual growth rate has dropped to 0.7%, the concept of aiming for a “targeted” or “preferred” growth rate for the Planning period has been dropped. Instead, the directive relative to our Growth Rate is not so much an attempt to limit (or increase) any particular rate, but rather to consistently monitor the rate/amount of growth we are experiencing so that whatever growth that does occur, is at a rate that does not overly tax the Town’s infrastructure and services.

Encourage More Sustainable Development Patterns

The one addition to the Town’s overall growth management policy presented in this update is to encourage more sustainable development patterns. As discussed in the Sustainability Chapter, this should be considered broadly to include environmental and economic sustainability. It should also be noted that a more sustainable Easton helps to achieve a more sustainable Talbot County. For example, Easton functioning as a growth center improves the chances of Talbot County successfully avoiding sprawling development throughout unincorporated parts of the County and enhances the likelihood of successful agricultural preservation.

Environmental sustainability can be advanced by such actions as protecting and enhancing natural features of proposed development sites and planning for development with sea-level rise in mind. Development with a mix of uses and which accommodates multiple modes of transportation can also enhance environmental sustainability by decreasing vehicle miles travelled, thereby improving air quality (in addition to the overall transportation system benefits).

Economic sustainability can be thought of in at least a couple of different ways. One is the cost to serve new development. By this measure, infill and redevelopment is clearly preferred over new “greenfield” development and new greenfield development that is more compact and more proximate to existing development is preferred over more sprawling and isolated projects.

Another way to consider economic sustainability is the net fiscal benefit to the Town. That is, what forms or types of development provide more to the Town in terms of new revenue, after factoring in the cost to provide services to those same developments?

2025 DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR EASTON

With the frequency that applications for development exceed by-right standards established by zoning regulations, the Town’s Staff, Boards and Commissions, and Council are often tasked to interrogate this lengthy Comprehensive Plan for conformance with the established goals of the community. Though this open-ended approach to development review can provide flexibility in evaluating an application, its breadth can obscure expectations for applicants and disempower approving bodies in their decision-making; put frankly, one can find a number of aspects of the Comprehensive Plan to either support or dissuade a given application in line with one’s own opinion. Previous iterations of this plan have attempted to cement some of the more nebulous aspects of its vision through the

adoption of Design Principles that applicants and reviewers alike can reference. While previously maintained within the Community Character chapter given their focus, these Design Principles have been reconfigured to encompass all elements of the Comprehensive Plan and relocated to the Implementation chapter in recognition of their importance as an evaluation tool. The principles were not ordered to prioritize one over the other in any way, but rather to organize them for coherence. They are as follows:

Principle #1 – Neighborhoods are Places to Live, Not Just Sleep

Originally in the 1997 Plan, this Design Principle stated, “Mixed Uses are Desirable.” Since that time we have found that it is not enough to simply mix uses within a development. A vast area of residential uses with a disconnected pod of commercial use is not the concept we are trying to promote. Unfortunately that was often what was presented. Too often, when any commercial development was presented at all, it was improperly located, of an inappropriate scale, or both. We attempted to capture this dissatisfaction in the 2010 iteration of the plan by restating it as “Integrated Uses are Desirable”. Given the persistence of this trend in recent developments of merely designating land for commercial uses removed from the local context, the vision behind this principle has been further-clarified with its current phrasing.

In short, what Easton needs is a return to a pattern of Traditional Neighborhood Development. Characteristics include:

- 1A)** Neighborhoods integrate a diversity of non-residential uses located at or near the center of the area.

1B) The scale and nature of non-residential uses in a development should reflect the needs of the neighborhood, including those adjacent without such amenities.

1C) Non-residential uses should be designed as interesting and welcoming third spaces for the community, not exclusive amenities.

1D) Open space should be abundant, accessible, and promote active lifestyles.

To clarify what is not Traditional Neighborhood Development:

- Strip shopping centers or regional-scale retail located along a State Road with the remainder of the site devoted to housing
- Marginal lands devoted to open or civic space without intention

Providing an integrated mix of uses in a community most directly serves the vision of this comprehensive plan and accomplishes several of the goals throughout its component elements. Traditional Neighborhood Development promotes shorter commutes and multimodal mobility, reducing strain on the overall transportation system and the environmental impacts associated with it. It deters retail of a scale not consistent with economic development priorities and provides spaces for the location of community services within communities themselves. And as the name suggests, TND reflects the historic typology of Easton, producing spaces that complement the character of our downtown and parallel its fiscal benefits.

Principle #2 – Automobiles should not Determine Design

Much of what is undesirable with contemporary development is directly related to the automobile, resulting in patterns that have been sprawling,

suburban, and fiscally irresponsible, isolating communities from each other and individuals within communities. Automobile-centric design also has micro-scale impacts, such as uninviting and dangerous streetscapes, vast impervious surfaces, and wasteful amounts of land dedicated to parking. Though implied across many of the other Design Principles, it is worth stressing for its importance in achieving the goals of the Comprehensive Plan that development patterns return to serving humans as opposed to automobiles. To this end, design standards to consider include:

2A) Streets should be “Complete Streets” that actively encourage use by not only automobiles, but also pedestrians and cyclists of all abilities

2B) Arterial roads should minimize accesses to promote traffic flow and safety.

2C) Automobile parking should be deprioritized, locating lots and garages away from the streetscape and normalizing parking for bicycles.

2D) Subdivisions should utilize alleys for service vehicles and interior access.

2E) Developments should be designed for walkability first and foremost, minimizing impacts to the transportation network from automobile traffic.

2F) Developments located near pedestrian corridors such as the Rails-to-Trails should orient the site with respect to them.

2G) Developments should occur in a density and form that promote the future feasibility of transit service.

Automobile-centric designs to avoid include:

- Sidewalks that are disconnected or merely wrap around building frontages for access from parking spaces
- Parking lots with prominent street frontages and excessive parking spaces
- Front-facing driveways and garages that protrude and dominate the facade
- Wide streetscapes befitting arterial roads within neighborhoods, rather than narrow streets and alleys

Multimodal design not only aligns with the Plan's Transportation Chapter, but also upholds Community Character objectives, honors Historic and Cultural Resources, promotes Sustainability, and enhances our capacity for growth without compromising Sensitive Areas or Water Resources.

Principle #3 – Neighborhoods Should Connect

Concerned with the connectivity of neighborhoods and subdivisions, this Design Principle is intrinsically tied to the preceding principles. It was the only new Design Principle that was added in the 2010 Plan, and is every bit as relevant today. In short, we believe that neighborhoods should be connected to neighboring properties to the maximum extent possible. This is a fundamental characteristic of the older parts of Easton that is essential to emulate in new development projects. When implemented correctly with new development, the myriad benefits of Traditional Neighborhood Design can be extended to adjacent, otherwise-isolated suburban subdivisions. Beyond these aforementioned benefits, connected neighborhoods also promote robust traffic networks that are resilient to disruptions thanks to its multiple routes for standard users and emergency vehicles alike. Connecting neighborhoods also expands opportunities for customers to access retail and residents to access employment, contributing to the

Town's Economic Development objectives while fostering a shared sense of community between residents of different areas of the Town. Future developments should be evaluated in consideration of the following:

- 3A)** Sites should provide multiple points of access across all modes of transit.
- 3B)** New streets should be arranged in a traditional grid pattern where site conditions permit.
- 3C)** Multimodal connectivity should be provided to both existing and potential future developments adjacent to the site.
- 3D)** Open spaces should similarly connect, contributing to the overall green infrastructure of the town and region.

Principle #4 – Neighborhoods Should Contain a Diversity of Housing

Adopted in 2004, this Design Principle seeks to promote economic mobility and access for residents for all backgrounds and life stages through the provision of diverse housing options throughout the community. In addition to the socioeconomic benefits of attainable housing, this Principle aims to create neighborhood facades that evoke the incremental approach to Easton's historic development that make it so endearing. Echoing sentiments expressed in Principle #1 regarding the importance of varying uses within a single development, housing with a wide array of form, type, size, and affordability should occupy the same neighborhood. To accomplish this, the following should be considered in evaluating residential developments:

- 4A)** Units designed for affordability should aesthetically blend with their neighbors.

4B) Prominent facades should depict a variety of housing types, sizes, and designs.

4C) Unit typology and price points should meet a housing need not captured by nearby neighborhoods.

4D) Where appropriate, adaptive reuse and integration of housing among underutilized non-residential uses is desirable.

To proactively address applications that attempt to meet requirements without promoting the spirit of this Principle, residential developments should avoid:

- Designs that employ a selection of minimal adjustments to an otherwise monotonous typology and form.
- Prices ranges that do not include options attainable for families earning less than 100% of Easton’s AMI.
- Different unit types segregated to different areas of the site
- Unit typologies consisting only of single-family homes and apartment complexes.
- “Missing Middle” units consisting merely of townhomes without variation.

Principle #5 – Environment Should Determine Design

In accordance with Smart Growth principles, intentional development within the Town helps to shift its associated impacts from the productive agricultural soils, habitats, and sensitive environmental features of surrounding rural areas. This does not absolve the Town from the responsibility of mitigating environmental impacts within its boundaries, however, which this Design Principle aims to address. Though entitled “Natural Features Should Determine Design” in previous plans, this

Principle has been broadened to ensure consideration of both current and anticipated environmental conditions. Proposed developments should align with the objectives of the Sensitive Areas, Water Resources, Mineral Resources, and Sustainability chapters of this Comprehensive Plan through the following criteria:

- 5A)** Greenfield developments should make the case for conversion of land - a finite resource and one of our most valuable assets.
- 5B)** Brownfield redevelopment and adaptive reuse are desirable.
- 5C)** Natural features and topography should be preserved and made an integral part of the design of the site.
- 5D)** Site landscaping should utilize existing vegetation complemented with abundant native species.
- 5E)** Buildings and landscaping should be designed to minimize the risk of bird collision to protect both resident and migrant species.
- 5F)** Buildings should be energy efficient and utilize durable materials.
- 5G)** The built environment should address climate change impacts such as flooding and ambient heat.
- 5H)** Site development should improve local stormwater capacity.

In summary, development should occur in harmony with - not in spite of - the environmental realities of the site. A site's design should enhance and highlight the features that make it unique, and communities should be built in a way that promotes sustainable lifestyles.

Principle #6 - Developments Should Be Fiscally Sustainable

Building upon the importance of longevity captured in the previous Principle, development in Easton should also promote sustainability in a fiscal sense. And just as established that land is a finite resource with

some unavoidable environmental costs to convert, proposed developments should also seek to justify their value to the community in light of the costs to maintain infrastructure and provide services thereto. This Principle has been adopted to reflect a Smart Growth approach to infrastructure planning and encourage development patterns highlighted by Easton's ValuePerAcre analysis as beneficial to the long-term financial position of the Town. Pursuant to the Land Use, Infrastructure, and Community Services chapters among others, applications should be evaluated with the following considerations:

- 6A)** Fiscal impact analyses should accompany major subdivisions and greenfield developments of a similar scale.
- 6B)** Infill and adaptive reuse are desirable.
- 6C)** Conversion of underutilized parking lots is desirable.

In contrast, the following characteristics should be avoided:

- Sprawling, low-density single-family neighborhoods
- "Leapfrog" development that rebukes an incremental approach to growth
- Provision of new or upgraded infrastructure by the developer without projected revenues to maintain it
- Excessive automobile parking provisions

Principle #7 – Easton is a Unique Place

This principle attempts to capture several design principles from previous iterations of the Comprehensive Plan that align most closely with the objectives of the Community Character and Historical and Cultural Resources chapters. In short, the rich history of Easton and the incremental, individualized approach to its development are worth

protecting, and should serve as a North Star for modern developments to continue that story. Not to be mistaken with merely replicating the aesthetic of the historic district, development should show reverence to Easton's identity by creating unique and interesting places that elicit pride and curiosity. To this end, applicants should consider:

- 7A)** Designs should be distinctly modern yet harmonious, complimenting adjacent sites in a way that continues the architectural rhythm of Easton's development.
- 7B)** Restoration and adaptive reuse of historic structures is desirable.
- 7C)** Historic and other unique features should be preserved and made an integral part of the design of the site.
- 7D)** Open spaces are engaging, inviting, and interact with the built environment in interesting ways.
- 7E)** For larger projects, multiple builders should be integrated throughout the site.
- 7F)** When employed, repetition of design is intentional and evocative.
- 7G)** Signs should inform, not dominate.

Conversely, design characteristics such as these should be considered antithetical to promoting the identity of Easton:

- Monotonous, template-based residential developments
- 5-over-1 apartments with "fast-casual architecture"
- Strip shopping centers and regional-scale retail
- Retail designs with corporate standards to reinforce brand identity over context
- Half-hearted use of veneers or minimal finishes to mimic historic architecture

- Redevelopment that displaces established communities

Put most broadly, developers should create unique spaces that the community will recognize and cherish for years to come, just as we do now for our historic downtown and neighborhoods.

Principle #8 - Be a Good Neighbor

Just as no person is an island, no lot in Easton exists in a vacuum. As such, land use and development decisions for a property should be made in the context of those who live, work, and play around it. The need for greater community consideration has been apparent in the tenor of public opposition to recent development applications, with angst frequently expressed regarding developer outreach and transparency. The citizens of Easton have a clear appetite for collaborative placemaking, which if employed constructively can produce stronger designs and in turn promote positive outcomes at public hearings. Beyond procedural characteristics, sites should ultimately be developed with courtesy toward neighbors and mindfulness of externalities.

In the spirit of community-oriented development, evaluators should expect the following:

8A) For larger projects, developers engage the surrounding community in the design process before review by the Town.

8B) Projects in accordance with charrettes and small area plans are desirable.

8C) Developments should include amenities or improvements to infrastructure that are a clear boon to the surrounding community, not solely for their own users.

- 8D)** Where appropriate, open spaces should be creatively employed to buffer incompatible uses or discordant shifts in aesthetics.
- 8E)** Site design and development should avoid and mitigate noise, light, air quality, and odor impacts to surrounding properties.

This Principle is not a tool for stonewalling variations in density or innovative designs. Rather, it should encourage the community to engage with each other honestly about their intentions and needs. It is important to remember that Easton is, in fact, a Growth Area. It is identified as such by Talbot County and the State of Maryland, and the Town has planned under the assumption that it will be a regional growth center for decades, if not throughout its history. As such, residents (current and future) must expect that growth will occur in and around them. This extends to the development of currently vacant forests and farmlands, as well as redevelopment of underutilized/neglected/outdated properties within existing neighborhoods. The key to this principle is achieving a balance such that development is, in fact, accommodated, but is of a character appropriate to and consistent with the neighborhood where it is proposed.

INTER-JURISDICTIONAL COORDINATION

Throughout this Comprehensive Plan there have been numerous references to Talbot County and the relationship between Easton's Planning effort and that of the County. This suggests the strong need for inter-jurisdictional coordination and cooperation between these two entities.

Due to the requirements specified by the Growth Act, it is imperative that the Town and County work closely together to coordinate growth policies. This occurred during the development of Easton's 2004 Plan, as well as the County's 2005 Plan, at an unprecedented level. In particular, a great deal of thought went into planning

the future of that area located between the present Town boundary and the proposed Urban Growth Boundary. The County's 2005 Comprehensive Plan consultant (Redman/Johnston Associates, Ltd.) prepared a conceptual development plan for this area. A copy of this map, as well as a proposed concept for what a future neighborhood development might look like is included on the following pages. A close examination between the County's proposed Plan for Easton's Growth Area and Easton's Plan for the same area, reveals that the two Plans are virtually (if not actually) identical.

In the preparation of this Plan Update, there was less direct coordination with the County, but that is largely because neither entity is proposing any changes to the boundaries of the Growth Area. We have worked very cooperatively regarding the one issue that has changed in this area, namely the proposed relocation of the Hospital.

TOWN IMPROVEMENTS

While the primary purpose of a Comprehensive Plan is to direct and shape the actions of the private sector, it also plays a role relative to the public sector. Throughout the Plan there are a number of recommendations related to potential Town projects that are suggested because it is believed they will advance and/or incentivize the Vision and Spirit of the Plan.

Successful implementation of the Plan will involve the advancement (or at least the consideration) of such projects. The affected Town agencies should be notified and develop plans to implement the projects relative to their functions that are called out in the Plan. When necessary, this should extend to inclusion of such projects in the Town's Capital Improvements Planning and Budgeting.

IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES

The preceding subsection of this chapter, and frankly, the bulk of the Plan, describes *what* it is that the Plan seeks to accomplish. At least a brief mention is

merited concerning **how** the Plan will be implemented. While there are potentially a number of ways this could be accomplished, generally speaking, the following four techniques will be of paramount importance:

- 1. Budgeting
- 2. Development Tools
- 3. Small Area Plans
- 4. Goal-Tracking

With regards to budgeting, as mentioned above, there are a number of projects/programs called for in this Plan. Such projects will need to be funded, or at the very least, plans for their eventual funding need to be made.

Funding does not necessarily mean that the project shows up in future budgets as a line item for the taxpayers of Easton to pay for that year. Many of the projects proposed herein are of a scope and nature that they would likely be Capital Improvement projects and subject to the process for any such project, and eligible for the financing options that exist for these "big ticket" items. Other projects may align nicely with available grant funding opportunities. Lastly, a few projects are of a scope and nature that they will require that some other entity fund them. Relocation of Route 50 and/or significant improvements to that highway come to mind as examples. For these projects, the Town needs to make the appropriate entities aware of our plans and advocate for their funding by other levels of government.

One of the most immediate ways that this Plan will be followed up on with an eye towards implementation is an examination of the various Town Development-related regulatory tools. This Plan talks extensively about potential changes to the Zoning Code. In particular, the parameters of a new Traditional Neighborhood zoning district envisioned to be applied to the majority of unimproved land in the Town and the Future Growth Area, were included in the Place (???) chapter. That will likely be the most drastic such measure intended to implement

this Plan, but any number of potential revisions are possible that would be more straightforward in nature, but which could have a significant impact on the built environment. Changing one development standard, for example, would necessitate simply replacing X with Y in the applicable zoning district, but such a change could fundamentally change the look and feel of future neighborhoods. The Zoning Code, Subdivision Regulations, and Design Guidelines will all be examined and comprehensively revised/updated following the adoption of this Plan to ensure that the built environment that they enable is consistent with the tenets of this Plan.

Small Area Plans have been utilized in Easton for decades. These Plans function as an extension of the Comprehensive Plan. Because they focus on a smaller geographic area, more specific recommendations can often be made than in the overall Comprehensive Plan, sometimes right down to the parcel-specific level. Currently we have three active Small Area Plans. The most recent is the Port Street/Easton Point Plan. Although little development activity has occurred since that Plan was adopted, it was not so long ago as to be considered irrelevant. Furthermore, the Vision it advances is still considered appropriate and desirable for the area.

The other two adopted Small Area Plans are those for the Downtown or Town Center and the East End. These are both somewhat more dated. The East End Plan is in the process of being significantly revised. Given the passage of time and the changes that have occurred in Downtown Easton since that Plan was adopted, it seems appropriate to begin planning and budgeting for a replacement of it during this upcoming planning period.

Given the growth dynamics in the Town and our Future Growth Areas, a number of candidates for Small Area Plans come to mind for future planning. These include:

- The site of the current hospital and its immediate surroundings.
- The general area of the new hospital.
- Idlewild and Dutchman's corridors (where so many medical offices are located and which may potentially relocate closer to the new hospital).
- Marlboro Avenue Corridor (potential redevelopment).
- Route 50 Corridor (redevelopment, design and access improvements).

- Future Growth Areas (a closer examination of discrete subsection of the growth area to consider more detailed land use suggestions).

The final way in which the effectiveness of this Plan will be measured is through goal-tracking. The Plan contains dozens of goals and hundreds of objectives. Monitoring their relevance and the success (or lack thereof) of achieving or advancing them can be a useful exercise for staying on track to realize the Vision of this Plan.

There are two prime opportunities to assess our progress towards the Plan's goals and objectives. First, the MD Land Use Article requires what they call a "mid-cycle" assessment of a jurisdiction's Plan. This means that at the five year mark of the planning period, we are required to examine the Plan to, essentially, evaluate whether we are still on track with its goals and objectives, whether the Plan is still relevant, or whether circumstances have changed significantly enough since it was adopted that we should consider amending it, or even initiating the next Comprehensive update earlier than legislatively mandated. Goal-racking is at least an implied part of this exercise.

The other opportunity to evaluate the continued relevance of Comp Plan goals is via the creation of the Planning Commission's Annual Report. This is also a legislatively mandated requirement. It primarily focuses on reporting the amount of growth that occurred in the previous year and whether it was of a nature that was planned for and accommodated (i.e., we had adequate infrastructure and services), but there is nothing restricting the scope of that report to these issues. A section that examines the goals and objectives of the Plan would be an appropriate addition to such reports, perhaps every other year.

GROWTH AREAS AND FUTURE LAND USE MAPS

The Land Use Chapter of this Plan mentioned that the heart of a Comprehensive Plan is its treatment and recommendations concerning land use. That chapter also contained many recommendations concerning land use. It is tied to this, the Implementation Element, via the maps that will implement those

recommendations. The primary difference between the two is that whereas the Land Use Element looks at things as they are now, this Chapter contemplates how things might be in the future. In most communities, the number one predictor of future land use, is current land use. As such, the focus of the Future Land Use Map is generally on two areas: (1) those parcels identified as appropriate for (or needing to) change and (2) those areas not currently within the Town limits but as envisioned as someday being so; in other words, the Future Growth Area.

This Comprehensive Plan contains two maps relative to land use. The first is the Growth Map and the second is the Future Land Use Map.

In previous iterations of this Plan, the Growth Map was primarily about the appropriate sequence of development for the ultimate Town of Easton. It began with the (then) current Town boundary. Next, it depicted the Urban Growth Boundary that represents the “ultimate” Town limit. It then examined the area between these two lines and considered the appropriate priority for development of this area in terms of a sequence.

The next step was to consider what areas within the Urban Growth Boundary were not then within the Town of Easton but should be already for a variety of reasons. These were labeled “Priority 1 – Boundary Refinement” on the Growth Area Map. Generally these consisted of already developed areas like Crofton, Old Stoney Ridge, Old Beechwood, and most of Easton Point. They had long ago been developed under Talbot County rules and regulations and have increasingly become surrounded by properties developed under Town of Easton guidelines. To virtually any outsider, these areas would be assumed to already be in the Town of Easton corporate limits. It was stated that it was important to bring these areas into Town for at least three reasons. First, all of these areas are served by septic systems and most utilize individual private wells for water. This is both potentially environmentally damaging and inefficient given the relative close proximity and availability of Town water and sewer.

The second reason these properties should be in the Town of Easton is that given their location, they enjoy many of the conveniences of being in Town without paying a fair share. Finally, from the Town's perspective the most important reason these areas should be in Town is that they preclude the Town's ability to grow in the future. This is due to the fact that Maryland annexation law makes it illegal to create an enclave or island of unincorporated land surrounded by a municipality. Thus when such areas exist, they have the short-term effect of causing some rather strange Town boundaries as developers annex in such a way as to technically comply with this requirement. The long-term effect is that growth is stopped in a given direction.

The future growth area was further partitioned into three levels of priority for development. Priority 1 Areas were the "Boundary Refinement Areas" as was described previously. Priority 2 and 3 Areas were undeveloped, and generally (although not always) located the greatest distance from the existing Town Boundaries. There was no time-frame associated with the development of these latter two growth areas except that they were not deemed appropriate for development during the last Planning period (i.e. originally 2010 through 2016), and that when developed, Priority 2 Areas ought to be developed before Priority 3 Areas.

With this Plan Update, the Planning Commission is proposing to change the Priority Growth Areas System. It is still believed that the areas identified as Priority 1 in previous Plans should be entertained for Annexation any time they are ready to apply. The Commission believes there is little reason to continue with Priority 2 and 3 Growth Areas and alternately, this Plan proposes that any proposed Annexation in what was formerly Priority 2 or 3 on the Growth Areas Map should be evaluated against the following Annexation Policies:

- Proximity to Town Boundaries should be a significant consideration. Any area annexed must be adjacent to the Town, preferably for a

considerable distance and on more than one side. The higher the degree of contiguity, the higher the preference should be given to the parcel.

- Land on which a future amenity or public facility is identified (in this Plan, a Small Area Plan, or functional Plan such as EUCs Water & Wastewater Master Plan or the soon-to-be completed Town Complete Streets Plan) should be given favorable consideration. This is especially true when the need for such amenity or facility is significant and/or imminent.
- Developers/Landowners who propose to provide land for amenities or public facilities which are specified in the Plan or in other Town Plans as being needed, but have no specific location attached thereto, should be afforded favorable consideration.
- Land that facilitates the annexation of long-standing enclave Priority 1 Areas, if applicable, should be given strong preference over other areas.
- Annexations which include an affordable housing component should take precedence over those that do not.
- Proposed annexations should include aspects that provide some form of benefit to the Town. This could take the form of job creation, a demonstrable positive fiscal impact or the provision of the regional-scale park on the east side of Town mentioned elsewhere in this Plan.
- Annexations must propose to minimize harm to sensitive environmental features, which should be protected and enhanced rather than ignored or eliminated.
- Projects which propose to develop pursuant to the Traditional Neighborhood style of development or serve as a transition between

existing suburban development and future Traditional development should be prioritized over additional strictly suburban development.

- Projects that “align” with Town infrastructure with regards to timing, location, etc., should be given priority over more isolated and remote projects.
- Projects that propose to provide Capital Improvements for a future multi-modal transportation system should take precedence over those that do not.

While the Priority Growth Areas are proposed to be replaced with this list of policies for annexation, the Future Growth Areas Map is still a part of the Plan. It has just changed in nature. Instead of identifying a sequence for future annexations, it instead suggests the type or character of development envisioned for the Growth Area. Five such types are identified. The first is identified as “Boundary Refinement/Extension of Services” and it is essentially a carryover of the Priority 1 areas depicted on the previous Growth Area Map. The next two areas look at the lands envisioned for future residential development and characterize them as either “Future Traditional Neighborhoods” or “Future Suburban Development”. The final two classifications are for non-residential development. One simply identifies “Non-Residential” areas and the other is specific to Easton Point and identifies it as “Mixed-Use Waterfront”.

These classifications now become less about a sequence of development and more about the character of development, regardless of when or in what order it occurs. The Boundary Refinement areas represent lands that have developed under Talbot County rules and regulations. Most even casual observers would likely assume that they are already within the Town limits of Easton. The advantage of annexing these lands for the property owner is that they can receive Town services, most notably municipal wastewater service as opposed to septic systems. This is

clearly beneficial from an environmental perspective. Another advantage is that being in the Town opens up possible intensification of the development of the property since (a) Town Zoning rules and regulations are generally more permissive in terms of the range of uses permitted and the intensity of development allowed, and (b) more of the property can be developed since septic reserve areas are no longer necessary once connection to the Town's wastewater service is established. From the Town's perspective such annexations represent an opportunity to improve the design and appearance of these properties through conditions of Annexation and/or during review of any proposed redevelopment or additions to the properties. It also adds a source of revenue through new property taxes on these properties. Lastly, in some cases it may alleviate hurdles to future development by removing potential enclaves of non-Town land that could be surrounded by Town, which is illegal under Maryland Annexation Law (thus when it could occur, annexation of properties around such areas is precluded).

Land envisioned for future residential development is classified as either Traditional Neighborhood or Suburban. The majority of such land is planned for the Traditional Neighborhood style that is described throughout this Plan, particularly in the Community Character Chapter, which includes the outline of a potential new TND Zoning District. These areas are intended to eventually be developed in accordance with New Urbanist or Neotraditional principles. They would have a variety of lot sizes and housing types, with an associated range of price points. Where it makes sense, they would provide a mix of uses. They should be built with a gridded or modified gridded street system that emphasizes walkability.

Much of this Plan decries a lot of the residential development of the last 50 years or so as inappropriately Suburban in nature, especially that which has occurred on the east side of U.S. Route 50. The lands identified as suitable for future Suburban Development are a recognition that given the development patterns surrounding such parcels, a TND style development may not necessarily

be compatible with neighboring properties and thus further suburban development may make sense in these limited circumstances. Even in these instances, however, we envision improvements over existing Suburban development patterns through improved connectivity, better design, transitional housing types and densities, and more walkable communities.

The remaining two categories on the Growth Areas Map are reserved for lands planned for non-residential development. One is very general and identifies areas for Non-Residential development. These correspond to lands largely considered appropriate for future job creation (i.e., Industrial) opportunities. The other classification is very specific, Mixed-use Waterfront. It corresponds to Easton Point and reflects the vision of the Port Street Small Area Plan and the Mixed Use Waterfront (MXW) Zoning District we created to facilitate that vision.

The second map that will guide the future growth and development of the Town of Easton during the planning period is the Future Land Use Map. This is the more traditional Map found in a Comprehensive Plan. It maps proposed land uses throughout the Town and within the Urban Growth Boundary.

The dominant land use in this Plan, as in the past, is residential. However, as has been discussed throughout the Plan, the way in which this development will occur in the future is proposed to change. Rather than simply designating land for future residential growth, collections of neighborhoods are proposed. Depending on the location, these neighborhoods may be created entirely in the form of new development, or by combining and harmonizing with adjacent development to compliment what already exists and provide any elements lacking to create true neighborhoods. Such neighborhoods should contain a variety of housing types, as well as limited, neighborhood-scale commercial development where it is feasible and makes sense to do so. The types of uses in this neighborhood scale commercial development are residentially-compatible office uses, and small, convenience type retail uses such as small grocery or convenience stores, service uses like

Laundromats, beauty/hair salons, fitness centers, movie rental stores, and small sit-down or carry-out café-style restaurants or delis, as examples. The size of these commercial areas should be relatively small as again, they are intended to provide what are essentially convenience goods and services to a neighborhood, not such goods or services at a regional or even Town-wide scale. One standard for this kind of use is 26 to 52 square feet per dwelling unit (See *Visions for a New American Dream*, Anton Clarence Nelessen, Planners Press, 1994.). As an example of the scale this implies, even a 300 unit development (among the largest in Easton) would, per this standard, only generate a need for 7,800 to 15,600 sq. ft. of retail space. For comparison purposes, the Aldi's (18,076 sq. ft.) and former Safeway (22,547 sq. ft) grocery stores are both larger than even the high end of this range. The CVS (10,107 sq. ft) and Walgreen's (14,465 sq. ft.) pharmacies are examples of stores within this size range.

The first step in the preparation of the Future Land Use Map was to identify those areas that, for whatever reason, are either now or are planned to be out of play for development. These are depicted on the map as existing and proposed green spaces. These spaces consist of existing and planned parks, forest that is protected via the Town's Forest Conservation Ordinance, existing and proposed extensions to the Rail-Trail, and a network of stream buffers and wildlife corridors.

There is a maxim in Planning to the effect of "80% of Future Land Use is Current Land Use." In other words, once uses are established, they very rarely change. The majority of the remaining 20% that will propose a new land use, is represented by our Future Growth Areas, which are largely unimproved. The vision for these areas is more particularly described in the discussion concerning the Growth Areas Map above. The remaining areas that are subject to a different future land use are those areas already within Town and envisioned for something different than exists today. This could be vacant land that becomes developed through infill, or it could be in the form of adaptive reuse of existing buildings

and/or redevelopment of improved sites. The perceived potential for these types of projects was discussed in the Municipal Growth Element. As was noted in that chapter, it can be very difficult to predict when and how such sites might redevelop for a number of reasons. We can, however, identify the sites that we see as appropriate or desirable for change and describe what we envision as the replacement land use on such parcels.

The next step in creating the Future Land Use Map was to identify those areas which are already within the Town limits, but which are undeveloped. The larger of these areas are identified on this map by a series of numbers. Previous versions of this Plan included as many as 8 such areas. However, the number is dwindling as the development of some of the sites has occurred (or is in the process of occurring). Each remaining area will be briefly described below:

Area 1 – Area 1 is a highly visible parcel located on the west side of US Route 50 at the southern gateway into Town. Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church owns the property. A new Church was constructed on a portion of this parcel prior to the 2010 Plan and during this (2010-2025) cycle. Saints Peter and Paul has relocated their private high and middle schools to the same parcel. Ultimately, the elementary school is envisioned to follow. To the extent that the balance of the parcel has additional development potential, it seems appropriate to take the form of any number of church-affiliated uses. It should be noted that this is a highly visible parcel of land and as such, when/if the balance of the site develops, special consideration should be given to the design of whatever is built given its visibility and that it will essentially serve as one of the major gateways into Easton.

Area 2 – Area 2 is the farm on Dutchman’s Lane described earlier in this chapter, plus an adjacent farm that is already in the Town. The in-Town parcel is in the early days of being developed as an age-restricted residential community. It is separated from Easton Club East (a similar type of project) by a wedge-shaped parcel that is not (as of 2025) within Town limits. Collectively, these properties

should be developed in the mode of a new neighborhood as has been described extensively throughout this plan, although given the nature of what is (and will) surround the out-of-Town parcel, it is one of those classified on the Growth Areas Map as appropriate for suburban development. This likely means developing the parcel in a manner similar to what will occur at Four Seasons and already exists at Easton Club East, but to do so in a way which connects all three developments, with perhaps a modestly higher density and variety of housing types.

Area 3 – Area 3 is land owned by Talbot County. Until recently, this land was owned by Shore Health Systems and was at one time envisioned to be the site of a new hospital campus to replace the existing Memorial Hospital at Easton facility. More recently such plans changed. SHS is in the process of constructing a new regional Hospital and medical campus north of the Easton Airport. While the site is still suitable for development, under Talbot County ownership that seems highly unlikely other than for potential County Offices or uses. Prior to Talbot County's purchase of the property, the site was proposed for a predominantly residential development, with limited commercial/service uses and a large area proposed to be dedicated to active park space in the form of new athletic fields. Given that the parcel lies immediately adjacent to the Town-owned Easton Woodland Park, the opportunity exists for mutually beneficial and synergistic park development at this site.

Area 4 - Area 4 represents the site previously proposed for first a Shopping Center and later a Home Depot. These proposals were the driving force in the enactment of the moratorium on big box applications and subsequent amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The biggest problem with the previous proposals is that they contemplated regional-scale commercial development at a site ill suited to handle such development. This site is more logically suited for transient-oriented commercial development and its depth affords the opportunity to do so in an attractive alternative to typical highway strip

development. It has, in fact, subsequently been developed with such uses, including four sit-down restaurants (formerly five, but the burned-down Bob Evans restaurant has never been rebuilt) and a hotel. There are still two parcels of just under 2 acres on the west side of Sunflower Drive and a larger (17 acre) parcel on the east side of Sunflower. These lots represent a logical opportunity for additional transient-oriented uses. The larger lot 7 could potentially also be improved with multi-family housing, as a transition between the single family detached homes in Chapel East to the east and the sit-down restaurants located between Sunflower Drive and Route 50 to the west.

Area 5 – Area 5 represents the large undeveloped area on the west side of Route 50, south of Chapel Road, generally referred to as the “Lapides” property for a long-time owner of the property. Given its location, it is perhaps the parcel with the greatest development potential, at least in terms of the number of options for development. Its elongated shape may preclude a true neighborhood style of development, but something along that line modified to accommodate the size and shape of the property seems in order. This would involve predominantly residential development. The northern portion adjacent to Chapel Farms would be logical for continued single-family housing. The portion of the property that borders the RTC Park seems ideally suited for residential development fronting on this park. A small area for commercial development to serve the users of the Park is appropriate as well. Access to the Park from Route 50 should be provided across Area 6. Finally, the southern portion of the site could serve as a combination of transient commercial, offices and/or apartments, the latter two of which would seem ideally suited to overlook the park and greenway corridor.

These five areas are envisioned by this Plan as the primary location for new development that does not require Annexation of property. It should be noted that only Area 3 and Area 5 currently remain undeveloped as of 2025, and Area 3 would seem to be out-of-play for development since it has been purchased by Talbot

County. Combined with the existing planned and/or approved lot inventory and potential infill/redevelopment, growth at our target rate of 1.75% may exhaust the development potential of these areas. Thus, in planning for the time when this does occur, either in this or a future Planning cycle, the Future Land Use Map identifies properties that represent the next logical step in the development sequence of the Town. In addition, the Future Land Use Map also shows future commercial, industrial, park, and institutional uses. Commercial Use, presumably a continuation of the Transient-oriented retail already present, is shown along much of U.S. Route 50. Institutional Uses were a new addition to the 2010 Future Land Use Map and have been continued in this edition of the Plan. So too are two Redevelopment Areas, a Mixed Use Commercial/Residential Area and areas identified as Business Commercial.

The Institutional Uses reflect both the current and future site of the Hospital as well as larger government facilities (i.e. Police Barracks, Public Works Barns). One of the Redevelopment Areas shown corresponds to the industrially-zoned land along the Rail-Trail that was the inspiration for the establishment of the Planned Redevelopment Zoning District. These properties have long been identified as suitable for redevelopment and several have been. The other Redevelopment Area is Easton Point. To date this area has slowly been redeveloped with the location of the County's Public Works Facility and the establishment and expansion of the Londonderry Retirement Community. As redevelopment occurs on lands closer to the water, more of a mixed-use project(s) is envisioned with open space and public access to the waterfront, commercial uses along the water or this open space, and residential uses located landward of the commercial uses. Ground Floor commercial with upper floor apartment or condominium space is not inappropriate either. The development potential of this area is so significant that the Town completed and adopted a Small Area Plan for Easton Point and the Port Street Corridor during the most recent Planning period. That Plan envisions a waterfront largely dedicated to public use and access, with graduated tiers of mixed-use development moving

further away from the water. Subsequently, a new Mixed-Use Waterfront Zoning District (MXW) was carefully crafted by the Town with the intent to facilitate the development of the area consistent with the Small Area Plan and with special sensitivity to the quality of design and environmental protection.

The Business Commercial Areas are those that correspond primarily to existing industrially-zoned land that has slowly become less industrial and more commercial in nature. This thinking has recently been reflected in the creation of a new Zoning District (Business Commercial - BC) to legitimize this shift, while at the same time tightening up on the remaining Select Industrial Zoning Districts so that we will have land available for truly industrial uses. Uses in the Business Commercial District include light manufacturing, but also offices, service uses, and warehousing.

When evaluating future development proposals both of these maps should be consulted. Together they will indicate the type of use the Town expects to see on a given parcel, both in terms of the nature of those uses, as well as its proposed development style. In addition, specific parcels are discussed throughout the Plan and some may be subject to planning issues that can only be found in the Parks or Transportation elements. Thus, it is essential to consider what the whole Plan says about a given parcel, not just one Map or Element in isolation.

2025 - 2035 GROWTH STRATEGY

Throughout the course of developing this Plan, the Planning Commission has grappled with the question of what the appropriate strategy should be for accommodating the expected growth during the life of this Plan. The rationale for targeting 1.75% growth rather than 1% has previously been discussed. In short, this was picked for a number of reasons including an expectation that there is some demand in our housing market that will naturally result in more growth, that 1.75% corresponds to a rate that the Town can comfortably handle in terms of administrative processing, and the Town's infrastructure is more than adequate to accommodate such growth.

Another aspect of growth is where it will occur. This Plan has described the options for future growth in terms of inward-looking options (i.e., Infill Development, Redevelopment, and Adaptive Reuse) or the more outward-focused options of annexing more of the Future Growth Area to accommodate future "Greenfield" development applications. The question of how much of our growth should come from these options during this Planning period was a focus of the public input phase, where an overwhelming preference for Infill/Redevelopment options was expressed. The Municipal Growth Element of this Plan estimates that 2,745 additional housing units can be constructed within the existing Town limits of Easton. These would all be considered of the inward-focused type of development. **Given this convergence of a preference for Infill/Redevelopment and the ability to accommodate the residential growth needs of this 10 year Planning cycle, the Planning Commission has determined that it is both possible and appropriate to not prioritize annexation of additional lands for residential development until at least the next Comprehensive Plan Update.** This statement is made with a number of caveats. One, it assumes that development in the pipeline proceeds through to project completion. Two, it assumes that there will be sufficient landowners willing to develop or redevelop their properties to accommodate the remaining projected growth for the next 10

years. Finally, it does not preclude new annexation. Boundary refinement annexations should be welcomed at any time. Non-residential annexations are also not subject to this determination. Lastly, it does not definitively preclude annexing new land for residential development. It does, however, suggest that doing so would be limited strictly to development proposals of extraordinary quality that have minimal adverse impacts to the environment or the Town's fiscal sustainability, and that adequately address the aforementioned annexation policies.

ACHIEVING THE VISION

This Comprehensive Plan for Easton lays out a future that accommodates significant growth, but does so in a manner with which we are comfortable. It acknowledges mistakes of the past, specifically in decreasing density beginning in about the 1950's and allowing a suburban-style of development to take root in Easton in the 1970's and 80's. It calls for a marked departure from these mistakes and a return to the traditional small-Town Eastern Shore style of development that shaped this community for 250 years.

Easton is not a suburban community like those found on Maryland's Western Shore or in numerous other metropolitan areas. We are a small but growing community in the heart of a rural, agricultural and maritime region. Ubiquitous power centers and strip shopping centers are not part of what we are about. Neither are cul-de-sacs, disconnected streets and subdivisions that might as well be gated because they are so isolated. Clearly Easton has some of these types of development and the people who live, work, or shop there are no less valued members of our community than anyone else. We simply have decided such developments are an inappropriate form of development going forward in Easton. Those considering Easton as a future home that desire such a community should frankly look elsewhere, as such development will be discouraged, if not prohibited, in the future and we will be looking to "retrofit" those parts of our Town that are suburban in nature to a more urban scale, albeit in a Small Town context.

In order to achieve the Vision laid out in this Plan, much help will be required. Fortunately Easton is blessed with a well-educated and involved citizenry. The level of involvement of many of these citizens throughout the process of preparing this and previous Plans has been described elsewhere in this document. In order to make the Easton we have all said we want, these same people and more must continue with this same level of commitment, interest and caring for our community. The authors of this Plan will eventually become less active and ultimately pass away, but the Vision we have created and the policies set forth herein will share this community well beyond our years here. If we want our children and our grandchildren to care about Easton as much as we all do, we need to maintain the passion and commitment to this Plan and its Vision.

By the same token, the Town should be as clear as possible to those seeking to move to Easton in the future about the kinds of things we envision. Ultimately the final responsibility lies with those contemplating a move here, but the Town can help make our goals, policies, and plans more clearly known so that this decision about whether to locate to Easton is as informed as possible. We should strive to communicate in as many means and mediums as possible. Our website should be easily navigable and up-to-date and we should look into means of communicating that are just now exploding in other realms, such as blogging, podcasts, streaming audio (or video) of meetings, social networking sites, etc., so that all existing and future residents have the greatest possible opportunity to participate in shaping our community in the future.

Generally speaking, the two principle tools that will be utilized to implement this Plan are (1) the review and updating (as necessary) of Town Land Use Guidelines and Regulations and (2) the closer examination of specific areas through the completion of Small Area Plans. Both should begin as soon as possible following the adoption of this Plan and are envisioned to continue throughout the Planning cycle, a reflection of the fact that effective planning is a continuous process of

experimentation and evaluation.

Critics of Urban Planning often point out that while Comprehensive Plans often describe the Smart Sustainable type of community that this Plan envisions, they are rarely achieved. This is usually because there is a disconnect between the Plan, which lays out the desired vision, and the community's land use regulations, which actually specify what can and cannot be built in the community. There are a number of reasons that suburban, sprawling, non-sustainable development patterns consume so much of the built environment, but the fundamental reason is that such a development pattern is a product of what developers/landowners are allowed and required to build.

If the Town of Easton is truly serious about facilitating the type of community described throughout this Plan, it will be imperative to take a critical look at our various development regulations, audit them, and change them wherever necessary to make sure that they allow the Easton we want to see become a reality. This examination should include the Zoning Code, the Subdivision Regulations, Design Guidelines, and any other regulation, standard, or guideline that affects the built environment. An audit of such documents will identify prohibitions and impediments to infill and redevelopment and the creation of the new more Traditional Neighborhood form of development we (eventually) would like to see in our Growth Area.

The second major way in which the Vision of this Plan gets advanced is through the exercise of Small Area Planning. A Small Area Plan is essentially a Comprehensive Plan for some subset of the overall Town. This often takes the shape of a Neighborhood Plan or a Corridor Plan.

We have done a bit of Small Area Planning in Easton to this point in time. The Downtown Area has had Small Area Plans, the most recent of which is summarized in the Economic Development Chapter of this Plan. In 1997, Town Planning staff facilitated a citizen-driven Small Area Plan for the East End Neighborhood. That

Plan is in the process of being updated and should be reviewed concurrent with, or shortly after this Plan. Lastly, the Small Area Plan for Easton Point/Port Street has been referenced a number of times in this Plan.

Small Area plans are advantageous in that due to the significantly smaller area of their scope, they often go into greater detail with proposed land use changes, sometimes down to the parcel-by-parcel level. Such Plans should generally be consistent with the overall Comprehensive Plan, but they represent an opportunity to present more specific recommendations and actions than a Plan for the entire Town is usually able to do. As such, when reviewed and adopted (via the same process as for the Comprehensive Plan), Small Area Plans should be given the same standing as the Comprehensive Plan and considered an extension of the Plan.

The core of Town is already covered by Small Area Plans. The one for the East End, as mentioned above, is in the process of being updated. It is now an appropriate time to update the Small Area Plan for the Downtown. Given the potential it possesses, a Small Area Plan focused on the redevelopment of the current Hospital site would be prudent, although if it only considers the hospital properties alone, that is better suited to something like a design charrette with extensive community involvement. Finally, although not envisioned as being developed during this Planning Period, a Small Area Plan for one or more portions of the Future Growth Area represents a way to be especially proactive, rather than reactive, in planning for the eventual development of these areas.

IMPLEMENTATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL: To ensure that future development, proposed development related programs and redevelopment projects are implemented consistent with the spirit of this Comprehensive Plan.

OBJECTIVES:

✓ Provide an analysis of the implementation progress of the Comprehensive Plan's

Goals and Objectives each July as part of the Annual Report of the Easton Planning & Zoning Commission.

✓ Audit the Town's Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to insure that

future growth of the Town occurs in a system of neighborhoods rather than a collection of single-use, suburban style subdivisions, and that sufficient tools exist to facilitate Infill, Redevelopment and Adaptive Reuse of buildings.

✓ Develop, evaluate and refine Design Standards for all types of development in all parts of Town.

✓ Work with various local groups in order to prepare Small Area Plans similar to

that done by the East Side neighborhood several years ago. Where the institutional capacity exists, these neighborhood plans can be largely prepared by the neighborhood groups themselves.

GOAL: To realize the benefits of revitalization with a Smart Growth focus in order to make our older neighborhoods more affordable, more attractive, more varied, walkable, safer and healthier, utilizing existing infrastructure.

OBJECTIVES:

✓ Target public investment in infrastructure and infrastructure upgrades to already developed areas since opportunities to acquire such infrastructure from new development are rare.

- ✓ Support efforts to revitalize neighborhoods through infrastructure grants, housing rehabilitation loans and programs, environmental clean-ups, etc.
- ✓ Establish policy that builds on the strengths of existing housing stock, thus preserving Easton's history and sense of place

GOAL: To research and where appropriate enact policies and measures which implement the Vision and spirit of this Comprehensive Plan.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Research the legality of various methods of limiting growth to achieve an annual growth rate of no more than 1.75% per year.
- ✓ Evaluate the effectiveness of existing rules and regulations in achieving the design goals and principles of this Plan.

GOAL: To coordinate planning efforts for areas and issues of mutual concern to both the Town of Easton and Talbot County.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Work with County Planning officials to ensure that areas designated for future growth of the Town are treated similarly by the Plans of both jurisdictions.
- ✓ Continue to work cooperatively with Talbot County to determine the feasibility and practicality of an Inter-jurisdictional Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program, should the Talbot County TDR ever be revived.

GOAL: To facilitate an informed and involved citizenry.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Investigate methods to insure that significant future projects (e.g. roads, community facilities, parks, etc.) are known by prospective homebuyers prior to the finalization of the sales process.
- ✓ Explore more and innovative ways to inform and involve the general public in planning issues.
- ✓ Create a Citizen's Planners Academy to inform and educate interested members of the public about planning and planning issues and provide a pathway to increased civic involvement through membership on various Planning-related boards, commissions or task forces.

PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

One of the most critical components in maintaining and enhancing a community's quality of life is its system of parks, recreation, and open space. The careful location of parks and open space areas and preservation of the Town's natural resources as a complement to existing development can be a useful tool in guiding the Town's development into a logical, orderly and environmentally sensitive pattern. In addition to recreational and aesthetic benefits, open spaces provide a framework for various land uses. Properly located, they become boundaries and buffers between conflicting uses of land and a nucleus for building neighborhood areas. Natural features can be preserved as valuable scenic and environmental attributes of the Town. A park system and recreational program can also go a long way toward resolving the age-old problem of a community offering nothing for young people "to do."

This chapter examines the current state of Easton's Parks and Recreation system and proposes methods by which it might be improved. It also calls for the advancement of a Town-wide system of "green infrastructure." This refers to the parks and open space areas, as well as the paths and corridors that link these areas. It also proposes areas for new parks to be developed in the future as the Growth Area becomes developed.

BACKGROUND

The Municipal Growth Element analyzed the adequacy of the Town's overall parks from an acres per capita perspective, based on a State-suggested ratio. It found that the current park system meets this standard and that we would continue to exceed the threshold throughout the buildout of the Growth Area by merely relying upon the open space requirements of the Town's Subdivision Regulations. This chapter looks more closely at the state of Easton's Parks and Recreation system overall and makes recommendations for improving and enhancing it so as to further sustain and improve the quality of life for Town residents and visitors.

Table 12 represents an inventory of existing Town parks and open space areas. One of the most notable points is that there are a fairly large number of parks (30) in Easton. This is even more significant in that when this Table was originally created for the 1997 Plan, there were 14 entries on this Table. Clearly the expansion and development of our Park system has been a significant achievement over the last three decades. Such improvements include enhancements at Idlewild and Moton Parks, two Rail-Trail extensions, the addition of Easton Point Park, and the development of North Easton Park into a first class sports complex, to the degree that it has since hosted a number of State and Regional Championship Tournaments. More recently, even during the drafting of this Plan, the Town has opened its first Dog Park in Downtown (Brewers Lane), opened a new Skate Park/Pump Track at the North Easton Sports Complex, and acquired, Easton Woodland Park, a large (197 acres) tract of land dominated by mature forest that will preserve this land for passive recreation.

Table 12

TYPES AND AREAS	SIZE (ACRES)	OWNERSHIP	FACILITIES
Passive Parks			
Train Station Park 46 Pennsylvania Avenue	0.540	Town	Drinking fountain Benches
Memorial Walk 100 W. Dover Street	1.07	Town	Memorial Bricks
Thompson Park 30 W. Dover Street	0.316	Town	Benches Fountain
Easton Woodland Park	197	Town	Planned trails and conservation area.
Neighborhood Parks			
Hunters Mill Park 8633 Camac Street	1.78	Town	Playground Benches
Ian "Mac" Morrell Park (Chapel East) 29452 Zinnia Court	1.9	Town	Playground Pavilion
Matthewstown Run Park 29650 Aldan Street	4.11	Town	Playground Picnic Area and Table Baseball/Softball Field Open Space Little Free Library
Stoney Ridge Park 29288 Corbin Parkway	19.8	Town	Playground Picnic Area Open Space Benches
Golton Park 29416 Golton Drive	0.791	Town	Playground
Mulberry Station Park 8764 Mulberry Drive	3.169	Town	Playground Open Space Benches
Spur Lane Park 8688 Spur Lane	0.783	Town	Open Space
Waylands Park 29667 Penny Lane	0.859	Town	Playground Picnic Area Benches
Bretridge Park 29593 Country Lane Way	2.76	Town	Open Space
Vickers Park (Easton Village)	8.839	Town	Canoe/Kayak Launch Bocce Ball Area Pavilion

Table 12			
TYPES AND AREAS	SIZE (ACRES)	OWNERSHIP	FACILITIES
Community Parks			
Idlewild Park 116 Idlewild Avenue	12.0	Town	Restrooms AED station Softball Fields Track Picnic Area, Barbecue Grills & Tables Tennis Courts Basketball Court Football Field Playground Children's Park Area Ornamental Fountain/Garden Areas Gazebo/Pavilion Little Free Library
Moton Park 501 Port Street	12.2	Town	Restrooms Track Picnic Tables, Barbecue Grills & Pavilion Playground Basketball Court Soccer Field Volleyball Area Benches Little Free Library
Easton Point Park 672 W. Glenwood Avenue 801 Port Street	13.021	Town	Kayak launch Boat Ramp and associated parking Drinking Fountains Benches
John F. Ford Park 100 Plum Street	58.0	Town	Restrooms AED station Playground Track Exercise Stations / Equipment Open Space Drinking Fountains
Rails-To-Trails	2.75 miles (north/south) 0.90 miles (east/west)	Town	Drinking fountains Walking/Bicycling Path Benches Frederick Douglass Mural
Special Areas			
A James Clark North Easton Sports Complex 1078 N. Washington Street	26.2	Town	Restrooms AED stations Concession stands (4) Baseball Fields Playgrounds (4) Football/Soccer/Lacrosse/Field Hockey Fields Field Lights Picnic Area Gazebo/Pavilion

Table 12			
TYPES AND AREAS	SIZE (ACRES)	OWNERSHIP	FACILITIES
			Batting Cages Bounce Back Wall Skate Park/Pump Track
Easton Dog Park 109 Brewers Lane	0.507	Town	Restrooms Gated Small & Large Areas for off-leash play Drinking Fountains Benches
Others			
YMCA of the Chesapeake (Main Facility)	10.0	Quasi-Public	Indoor Facilities* (9) Tennis Courts (6) Pickleball Courts Deck Tennis
YMCA of the Chesapeake (Lynn Rich Tennis Center)		Quasi-Public	Indoor Facilities* (4) Indoor Tennis/Pickleball Courts (3) Outdoor Tennis Courts
George P. Murphy Swimming Pool	2.8	County	Outdoor Swimming Pool
VFW	5.0	Quasi-Public	Baseball Field* Open Space Fields
The Elks	13.2	Quasi-Public	Athletic Fields*
Talbot County Community Center	51	County	Indoor Facilities: Ice Rink Curling Rink Basketball Courts Pickleball Courts Volleyball Courts Athletic Fields Playgrounds Concession Area Pavillion
Easton Point Landing	0.50	County	Boat Ramp Pier Fishing/Crabbing
Mount Pleasant	6.46	County	Open Space Fields
Easton Village Trail	0.83 miles	Town	Walking Trail

Source: Town of Easton Parks & Recreation Annual Plan, 2024 & Easton Comprehensive Development Plan, 2010.

Multiple entities are responsible in some way for Easton’s overall Park System. The Planning and Zoning Commission obtains land for parks through the subdivision process as one of the requirements for subdivision is the provision of 1,200 square feet of parkland per dwelling unit. The Commission also is involved in the specifics of where the parks should be located, how many there should be, etc... for a subdivision during the review process.

Once the land is obtained, it becomes the responsibility of the Easton Park Advisory Board to recommend how that parkland should be improved. This group operates with the assistance of a full-time Parks and Recreation Director who also is responsible for Easton's parks and recreation plans, programs and activities.

The ongoing maintenance of Town parks is the responsibility of the Department of Public Works, providing trash pick-up, grass cutting, landscaping, and installation and maintenance of equipment, furniture, etc... With a growing system of parks, this area of responsibility grows proportionally as well.

The Mayor and Town Council have the important role of prioritizing the development of the Town's park system, primarily through the budget process. They determine which improvements are implemented (and when) and occasionally also approve funds for the acquisition of park land. These tend to be the larger, regional-scale parks as opposed to the smaller neighborhood parks that are more customarily obtained by the Planning and Zoning Commission through the subdivision process.

Finally, under the general guidance of Talbot County Parks and Recreation, Easton, along with other towns and entities in the County, work collaboratively on issues of mutual interest and concern. This includes coordinating programs, activities and events; and, formulating plans and policies for public recreation and for the acquisition and preservation of land for public recreation and open space. Easton participates day-to-day via its partnership and ongoing communications with the Town and County Parks and Recreation Directors. In addition, a member of the Easton Parks Advisory Board represents Easton on the Talbot County Parks Advisory Board and provides direct linkage between the Town and County as it relates to parks and recreation.

FUTURE PARKS

One area in which it is crucial for the Planning Commission and Park Board to work together is the planning for future park sites. The Park Board is more acutely aware of specific demands and needs in terms of our overall park system. By being aware of such needs, the Planning Commission can be proactive in addressing them through the park dedication requirements of the Subdivision process. Furthermore, special needs (e.g., a new regional-scale park) can be considered by both the Planning Commission and Town Council during the review of discretionary approvals, such as Planned Unit Developments and Annexations.

Previous iterations of The Comprehensive Plan have made a number of recommendations regarding future parks, many of which have come to fruition. Such parks included the original Rail-Trail, the expanded Rail-Trail, the development of the John F. Ford Park, and a Waterfront Park on Easton Point.

Key priorities over the course of this 2025 Plan's time span include the following:

- Build-out Easton Woodland Park, including a multi-modal accessway, parking area, conservation area, trails, and restrooms.
- Continue build-out of Easton Point Park as described in the Port Street Small Area Plan. Additional amenities to include: a new boat ramp, living shoreline, boardwalk/promenade, and parking area.
- Perpetual upgrades to existing Town parks (i.e., programs, grounds, and amenities) to enhance user experiences and increase utilization rates.
- Extension of the rail trail through Moton Park, across Rt. 322 (Easton Parkway) at Glenwood Ave., and connecting to the bridge over the Tred Avon River at Easton Point Park and Easton Village.
- Seek funding for the extension of the rail trail crossing Route 50 to the east side of Town in the vicinity of Chesapeake Ave. {It is hoped that future rail trail extensions will eventually connect to a wider-scale County-initiated Trail System.}
- Consider creating an active community-sized park on the east side of Route 50. Explore the possibilities of requiring future developers to build or fund such a park.
- Seek funding and location for construction of a new indoor sports facility. A project of this scope and scale will likely require a location that is along or easily accessible to a major transportation corridor. Possibilities include a portion of the John F. Ford Park and/or the adjoining property to the east, or (depending on the interest of Talbot County) the Talbot Community Center site or the property the County purchased in 2024, formerly known as the Poplar Hill Farm.

The following suggestions from previous Plans have not been achieved but are still relevant today:

- The Town should work with the State of Maryland to promote and help ensure the preservation of Seth Forest. The Town should also ask the State to consider the possibility of making this property more usable by enhancing forest trails.
- (Not depicted on Future Land Use Map) In the long-range planning period (i.e. Year 2035) a new Community Park, on the scale of Idlewild or Moton, should be considered on the eastern side of Town, east of U.S. Route 50. This is the portion of Town anticipated to accommodate the majority of future growth and as such, a community park may be warranted. Furthermore, this area may not necessarily be provided by any one development. As an alternative, the area for the park might be pieced together by adjoining subdivisions (i.e., Hunter's Mill Playground and Gannon Range open space). Such a park should be a consideration during the review of any development proposals on the east side of Town.

As pointed out in the Municipal Growth Element of this Plan, State guidelines for parkland indicate that the park needs of the existing Town population are above State guidelines and that the land needed to satisfy the needs of the potential future population of the Town should be met via the subdivision process. In addition, more recreational land lies immediately adjacent to the current Town boundaries at the previously mentioned Seth Forest and a public golf course (Hog Neck).

These two areas represent an additional 121 acres at the Seth Demonstration Forest and 265 acres at Hog Neck Golf Course.

As mentioned, since virtually all future residential development will occur to the east of the current Town boundaries, Easton should consider the merits of creating an active community-sized park to serve residents located in this area. Locations for such a park were discussed in the 2010 Plan and include the following possibilities:

- At the terminus of Seth Drive that traverses through Easton Club East on the parcel of land immediately north of that development. This land is adjacent to Seth Forest and would be in very close proximity to Chesapeake Avenue, a potential connection (or standalone) to the Town's extended Rail-Trail.
- In the general vicinity of the Waylands/Matthewstown Run/Dover Road/Black Dog Alley area.
- In the northern portion of the growth area that would be convenient to the Mulberry Station and Chapel East subdivisions as well as future growth in surrounding areas.

General locations for each of these potential parks are shown on the Future Land Use Map found in the Implementation Element of this Plan.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The concept of green infrastructure was first introduced to the Easton Comprehensive Plan in 2004 when the term was still relatively new in the field of planning. It refers to the system of parks and open spaces in a community, as well as the linkages or connections between these areas. A community's green infrastructure is important because just as the more commonly known infrastructure (i.e. roads, water, sewer, etc...) is essential to support a community's physical development, so too a community's green infrastructure supports its ecological functions. It also is important for making communities more livable.

The Conservation Fund defines green infrastructure as "the Nation's natural life support system - a strategically planned and managed network of wilderness, parks, greenways, conservation easements, and working lands with conservation value that supports native species, maintains natural ecological processes, sustains air and water resources, and contributes to the health and quality of life for America's communities and people."

There are numerous benefits provided by a system of green infrastructure. These include both ecological and economic benefits. From an ecological perspective the benefits include:

- Ensuring plant and animal biodiversity.
 - Creating pathways to allow for interchange between native plant and animal communities.
 - Maintaining the health of native ecosystems and landscapes by sustaining their physical, chemical, and biological processes.

- Filtering pollutants from air, water, and soil.
 - Helping to cool streams and soil through shading.
 - Buffering developed areas from floodwaters.

The economic benefits include:

- Increasing property values as homes located near parks and greenways sell for more than those that are not.
- Raising the community’s quality of life.
 - Communities that have planned systems of open space, including greenways, parks and trails, generally develop the reputation of being desirable places to live.
 - Seattle, Washington, Boulder, Colorado, Portland, Oregon and Raleigh North Carolina are examples of such places.
- Attracting businesses.
 - The communities cited above, not coincidentally, also have had great success in attracting new businesses as oftentimes a community's quality of life is a key factor for businesses when deciding where to relocate or open a new business.
 - Increasing tourism and tourism-based businesses.
- Attracting environmentally sensitive development and the developers who specialize in that niche.

Given these benefits, as well as the existing skeletal system of green infrastructure, it seems like a “no-brainer” for Easton to develop a more formal and planned green infrastructure system. Such a system will also further sustainability goals discussed in more detail in the Sustainability chapter of this Plan. Elements of this Green Infrastructure system are discussed in the Economic Development Chapter of this Plan where the AKRF Plan for the redevelopment of Downtown Easton is described. Two of the more significant projects proposed in that plan involve the day-lighting of Tanyard Branch and the development of a “green ring” of heavily treed streets and open spaces around downtown.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal: To meet the park and recreational demands of all of Easton’s citizens.

Objectives:

- ✓ Continue to study and monitor the demand for various park and recreation uses (above and beyond National Standards, which the Town largely meets).
- ✓ Coordinate the work of the Planning and Zoning Commission, Park and Recreation Advisory Board, and Town Council in acquiring and planning parks.
- ✓ Coordinate park planning, programs, and activities with Talbot County Parks and Recreation and other local organizations (i.e., schools and YMCA) to prevent duplication of

amenities/services, pool resources and ensure that between the various entities, all of Easton's recreational needs are satisfied.

- ✓ Seek funding to finish the eastward expansion of the Rail-Trail in the right-of-way for Chesapeake Avenue, including a grade-separated bicycle/pedestrian crossing of Route 50, and require future developers of land bordering Chesapeake Avenue to build (or fund) a Rail-Trail in right-of-way.
- ✓ Seek funding opportunities to continually build-out and upgrade various Town parks, particularly Easton Woodland Park and Easton Point Park.
- ✓ Seek funding opportunities to locate and build an indoor sports facility.
- ✓ Revise the Town's Subdivision Regulations to better define what does and does not count as meeting parks and/or open space requirements associated with conventional subdivisions.

Goal: To provide a system of green infrastructure (see Future Land Use Map).

Objectives:

- ✓ Identify appropriate open space areas to serve as green centers or anchors and connect them through a series of pathways and green corridors.
- ✓ Plan future parks, open spaces and corridors in a manner that compliments and helps to build a green infrastructure system.
- ✓ Encourage green space connectivity and access.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Economic and community development are vital to the health of a town because they foster sustainable growth, improve quality of life, and strengthen its position as a desirable place to live and visit.

The nonprofit Easton Economic Development Corporation (Easton EDC) provides economic and community development services to the Town of Easton. The Easton EDC also manages the Main Street District and Arts & Entertainment Districts, as well as the Easton Visitor Center. A Board of Directors has been established, with representatives from the community, the Mayor of the Town of Easton and one designated Councilmember.

In 2025, the Easton EDC adopted a forward-looking Strategic Plan that identifies four key Strategic Priorities aimed at fostering sustainable growth, improving quality of life, and strengthening Easton's position as a premier destination on Maryland's Eastern Shore. This Comprehensive Plan is aligned with those priorities and incorporates them into Easton's long-term development framework.

In addition, this Plan recognizes that Easton's economic development strategy must reflect regional collaboration. Therefore, it integrates the priorities and initiatives of both the Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism and the Mid-Shore Regional Council. This collaborative approach ensures that local efforts are supported by broader regional initiatives and that resources are coordinated for maximum impact.

BACKGROUND

As in many Comprehensive Plans, economic development analysis often depends heavily on quantitative data such as tables and charts. While this Plan minimizes the overuse of such tools, essential insights are drawn from Census data (see Tables 13 and 14). Key findings include:

- Income levels in Easton are below those of Talbot County and the State of Maryland, with a corresponding higher rate of poverty.
- Educational attainment in Easton lags behind both the county and state, especially in the percentage of residents with bachelor's degrees or higher.
- Easton has an aging population, with a significantly higher percentage of residents aged 65 and older compared to state averages.
- Commute times in Easton are slightly shorter than regional and state averages, reflecting local employment opportunities.
- The homeownership rate in Easton is lower than Talbot County and the State, which may reflect affordability challenges or housing stock limitations.

Table 13 - Select Economic Characteristics

Source: 2020 Census, U.S. Census Bureau

	EASTON	TALBOT CO.	MARYLAND
PER CAPITA INCOME (2022 dollars)	\$43,844	\$52,555	\$49,865
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2022 dollars)	\$75,198	\$81,667	\$98,461
PERSONS IN POVERTY, PERCENT	11.5%	10.2%	9.6%
IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE, TOTAL, PERCENT OF POPULATION AGE 16+, 2018-2022	58.3%	55.7%	66.6%
IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE, FEMALE, PERCENT OF POPULATION AGE 16+, 2018-2022	51.3%	49.5%	62.7%
TOTAL RETAIL SALES, 2017 (\$1,000)	\$598,129	\$716,678	\$84,966,185
TOTAL RETAIL SALES PER CAPITA, 2017	\$36,204	\$19,340	\$14,095
MEAN TRAVEL TIME TO WORK (MINUTES), WORKERS AGE 16+, 2018-2022	24.9	26.4	32.0
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE OR HIGHER, PERCENT OF PERSONS AGE 25+, 2018-2022	90.1%	92.2%	91.0%
BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER, PERCENT OF PERSONS AGE 25+, 2018-2022	39.3%	41.5%	42.2%
ALL EMPLOYER FIRMS, REFERENCE YEAR 2017	686	1,259	104,529
MINORITY-OWNED EMPLOYER FIRMS, REFERENCE YEAR 2017	48	60	23,789
NON MINORITY-OWNED EMPLOYER FIRMS, REFERENCE YEAR 2017	480	987	72,623
VETERAN-OWNED EMPLOYER FIRMS, REFERENCE YEAR 2017	52	86	7,365
NON VETERAN-OWNED EMPLOYER FIRMS, REFERENCE YEAR 2017	433	886	87,818

Table 14 below provides a broader comparison of Easton, Talbot County, and the State of Maryland in a number of economic and non-economic characteristics.

Table 14 - Comparison of Easton, Talbot County and State of Maryland in Selected Demographic Characteristics from the 2020 Census (and 2023 ACS)			
Subject	Easton	Talbot County	Maryland
Total Population	17,101	37,526	6,177,224
% Female	53.6%	52.2%	51.4%
Median Age			
% < 18	21.8%	18.3%	22.0%
% 65+	26.8%	30.5%	17.3%
% White	69.9%	82.1%	57.2%
% Black or African American	16.1%	12.9%	31.6%
Total Households	7,195	16,270	2,318,124
Average Household Size	2.32	2.29	2.60
Total Housing Units	Not Reported	19,861	2,572,412
% Owner-occupied	58.9%	72.9%	67.5%
Median value of owner-occupied homes	\$328,000	\$382,000	\$380,500
Growth Rate (%) in 90's	24.9%	10.7%	10.8%
Growth Rate (%) in 00's	36.2%	11.7%	9.0%
Growth Rate (%) in 10,s	7.2%	-0.7%	7.0%

BUSINESS MIX / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

A diverse and resilient business mix is essential to the sustainability of Easton's economy. Overdependence on a single sector can expose the Town to economic fluctuations and job losses. Easton's strategy emphasizes resilience by investing in workforce development, nurturing entrepreneurship, and supporting both legacy businesses and emerging industries.

The Easton EDC Strategic Plan (FY 2026–2028) underscores the importance of business retention, expansion, and recruitment—particularly for high-wage industries.

Initiatives include:

- Facilitating leadership forums and industry roundtables to identify infrastructure needs, workforce trends, and business challenges.
- Developing an Easton Business Recruitment Packet that highlights incentives, infrastructure, real estate opportunities, and the benefits of Easton’s location and community character.
- Marketing key sites like Mistletoe Hall and other strategic locations for development, ensuring readiness for new investment.
- Partnering with the Town of Easton, Talbot County, and local institutions to coordinate incentives and implement joint marketing campaigns.
- Promoting infill development and redevelopment—particularly projects that support affordable workforce housing in proximity to job centers.
- Diversifying funding streams by pursuing federal, state, and philanthropic grants as well as private sponsorships and innovative funding models.

TOURISM AND DOWNTOWN

Tourism remains a cornerstone of Easton’s economy—contributing not only through visitor spending but also by enhancing the Town’s visibility and quality of life. As a year-round destination with a thriving cultural and culinary scene, Easton has the opportunity to further develop its tourism sector in strategic and sustainable ways.

The Easton EDC has identified several priorities to strengthen Easton’s brand as the Eastern Shore’s premier destination:

- Create a data-informed tourism marketing strategy that targets regional and national audiences, tailored to Easton’s unique offerings.
- Enhance the visual appeal and accessibility of Downtown Easton with improved signage, plantings, banners, and public art.
- Activate the Easton Visitor Center as an educational and experiential hub for tourists and residents alike.
- Collaborate with surrounding jurisdictions (e.g., St. Michaels, Oxford, Talbot County) to launch joint tourism campaigns and shared event calendars.
- Support authentic local experiences and signature events that highlight Easton’s history, arts, food culture, and community spirit.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A successful economic development strategy must also build community wealth and pride. The Easton EDC Strategic Plan recognizes that broad resident engagement and civic participation are essential to long-term prosperity.

- Expand outreach and transparency through newsletters, public presentations, and direct engagement with neighborhood groups, clubs, and schools.
- Launch a formal volunteer program with training, leadership opportunities, and recognition efforts to build local ownership and capacity.
- Host a calendar of inclusive events that reflect Easton’s cultural richness and foster community connectedness.
- Evaluate civic engagement and quality of life through periodic surveys, helping to align future investments with public needs and values.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL: To nurture a healthy and diverse local economy in Easton.

- Conduct leadership forums and focus groups with local industries to guide economic strategies
- Market and support strategic sites like Mistletoe Hall
- Develop a comprehensive business attraction and retention strategy in coordination with Easton EDC
- Prioritize redevelopment projects that support workforce housing
- Expand grant writing capacity and partnerships to fund economic initiatives

GOAL: To maintain and recreate a vital Downtown.

- Increase awareness, usage and value of the Easton Visitor Center
 - Improve visitor wayfinding, visual appeal, and access to downtown attractions
- coordinating with Easton EDC to market downtown events and tourism opportunities

GOAL: To engage the community in Easton’s economic future.

- Seek community input via community charrettes
- Community outreach and communication via in-person presentations, and print and electronic media
- Launch a town-wide volunteer program
- Use placemaking surveys to assess civic engagement and guide future priorities

Town of Easton Comprehensive Plan – Draft 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

“If you don’t know where you are going, you might end up someplace else.”

— Casey Stengel

“Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work..”

— Daniel Burnham

Envisioning the future and identifying the steps necessary to achieve it is essential in long range planning, particularly establishment of a community’s Comprehensive Plan. That Plan will have a greater chance of being realized if it is prepared with wide scale and broad-based input from community members. It is our framework for this Comprehensive Plan update.

Those interested in the evolution of the Planning process in Easton, the different techniques used in Comprehensive Plan Updates, and how our philosophy was shaped by, and aligned with, policies at the State level, including those advocating for Smart Growth, are encouraged to review the archive of Comprehensive Plans maintained on the Town of Easton Planning Department’s web page (see <https://eastonmd.gov/186/Comprehensive-Plan>).

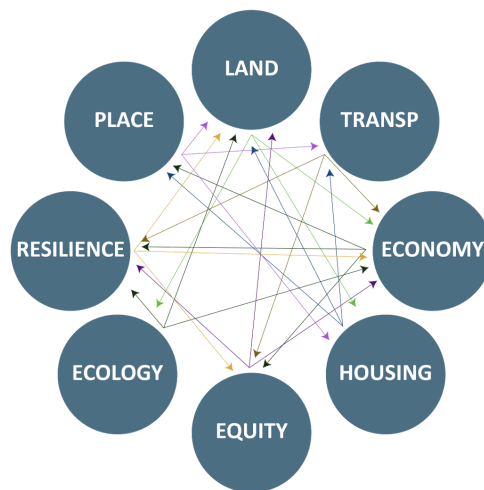
1.1 PURPOSE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Land Use Article of the Maryland Annotated Code delegates planning and land use regulatory powers to the Town of Easton. When these powers are exercised, they must be exercised in accordance with the applicable provisions of the statute. Accordingly, this Comprehensive Plan for Easton is prepared in compliance with Sections 3.05, 3.06, 3.07, and 3.08 of the statute. Sections 3.05 and 3.06 address the Plan’s content and organization, and Sections 3.07 and 3.08 address procedures for the Plan’s review and adoption.

The Easton Comprehensive Plan serves as the Town’s foundational document for land use policy, infrastructure planning, and long-range civic investment. This document fulfills the requirements of the Maryland Land Use Article (§3-201 et seq.), which mandates that

municipalities prepare and adopt a comprehensive plan to guide the coordinated and efficient development of their jurisdiction.

In April 2025, Maryland enacted new legislation creating 8 Sustainable Growth Planning Principles, modernizing and replacing the former 12 Planning Visions. These new principles reflect the State's shift from Smart Growth to Sustainable Growth to achieve more balanced land use and development. Sustainable Growth focuses on policies addressing economic, social, and environmental factors for both current and future generations. These eight Planning Principles are designed to make sustainable growth policies simpler, clearer, and easier for everyone involved in planning and development to use effectively.



The new Planning Principles are summarized below:

Maryland's Planning Principles

1. **Land:** Optimize productivity of **working landscapes**, including **farms** and **forests**, and **fisheries**, and prioritize **development within population centers** that are in proximity to existing infrastructure and facilities.
2. **Transportation:** Prioritize transportation networks that create **energy efficient**, **affordable**, and **reliable access** to jobs, housing, and services.
3. **Housing:** Enable a mix of **quality housing types** and **affordability** options to accommodate all who want to live in the state.
4. **Economy:** Allow for **adaptive reuse**, **mixed-use**, and **context appropriate** new development that responds to changing markets and innovations.

5. **Equity:** Engage **all sectors of the community** in plan development to ensure **diverse voices** are heard and the needs of **underserved populations** are prioritized.
6. **Resilience:** Integrate resiliency measures that will **minimize** the **impacts** of rapid and unexpected **natural- and human-caused threats** on communities.
7. **Place:** Provide for **public spaces** that encourage **social interaction** and value **cultural, historical, and natural resources**.
8. **Ecology:** Protect and restore **sensitive ecological systems** and conserve **natural resources**, including forests, agricultural areas, and waterways.

These Principles ensure that local planning efforts align with State funding, capital improvement programs, and resource conservation policies. The Plan is also designed to coordinate with Talbot County's planning framework.

The 2025 Easton Comprehensive Plan establishes Town policies relative to the most desirable development patterns for present-day Easton as well as the Easton of the future, including potential growth areas for the Town. It identifies areas for living and working activities and related services that are required to assure a quality environment for all residents. Implementation proposals are included as methods for coordinating public and private development activities. Together these influence Town development form and function. Attention is also given to the Town's role in the development of Talbot County.

The Town Council is responsible under Maryland law for adopting the Plan. The Town Planning Commission is responsible for drafting the Plan and thereafter for general administration and enforcement of the Plan. All development proposals are reviewed for conformance to basic policies and programs identified by the Plan.

Additionally, after adoption, a Comprehensive Plan serves as:

- A unified statement of desirable development policies.
- A framework within which development issues can be evaluated and public policy effectuated consistent with the Town's long-range growth and development goals and objectives.
- An information document for local elected officials, citizens, developers and special interest groups concerning critical development issues and policies.

Easton's Comprehensive Plan is a cornerstone of the complex process of guiding future development in the interest of the public. Adoption of the Plan constitutes an important step in directing development in manner that maintains and enhances Easton's special and unique sense of place.

1.2 EASTON'S ROLE AND IDENTITY

Easton is the economic, governmental, and cultural center of Talbot County and Maryland's Mid-Shore region. As the County seat, it houses the region's major hospital, courthouse, library, and other key institutions. Easton supports a population of a little over 17,000 residents, with services that extend to tens of thousands more from the surrounding area.

Easton is frequently recognized as one of the best small towns in America. The Town is defined by its walkable historic downtown, traditional neighborhoods, and compact form. Its character is shaped by architectural continuity, preserved open space, and a strong civic tradition. Easton is situated at the crossroads of U.S. Route 50 and Maryland Route 322, giving it strategic access to the Chesapeake Bay, Annapolis, Washington, and Baltimore. Its rural setting and cultural amenities make it both a desirable place to live and a key regional destination. Easton's growth over the past century reflects its increasing role as a regional center and its attractiveness as a place to live and invest.

For an overview of Easton's historical development and growth dynamics, and that of the region, see Appendix ____ **[insert reference – use Historical and Regional Setting content from v2]**.

2 PLAN BACKGROUND

2.1 PLANNING HISTORY AND FOUNDATIONS

Easton’s modern planning era began with the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, which was developed in response to community concerns about uncoordinated growth, loss of open space, and weakening of traditional neighborhood character. That Plan introduced a new framework based on community identity, compact form, and public participation.

The 2010 Plan built upon that foundation, introducing five core growth strategies: contain sprawl, increase density, build neighborhoods, improve design, and manage growth rate. These strategies guided the Town’s zoning reforms and capital improvement priorities for more than a decade.

This 2025 Plan affirms those guiding principles and introduces a sixth strategy: encourage more sustainable development patterns. This addition reflects emerging concerns about climate change, infrastructure efficiency, fiscal resilience, and equitable access to housing and opportunity. Looking back over the past decades of the modern planning process, most of the overarching themes of this 2025 Plan originally appeared in the one that was adopted in 1997.

2.2 PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Work on this Comprehensive Plan update began in 2021 with a review of the 2010 Plan’s implementation outcomes. Through 2022, 2023 and 2024, Town staff and consultants gathered data, conducted mapping and zoning analysis, and assessed growth capacity. Community engagement began in 2023 and continued into 2024, including public open houses, stakeholder workshops, online surveys, and formal public hearings.

Since 1997, each subsequent update of the Comprehensive Plan has continued to refine the Town’s growth strategy, summarized in the 2010 Plan as:

- Contain Sprawl within an Urban Growth Boundary
- Increase Density
- Build Neighborhoods
- Improve Design

- Manage the Rate of Growth

The 2024 Plan adds a sixth component to this Growth Management Strategy:

- Encourage More Sustainable Development Patterns

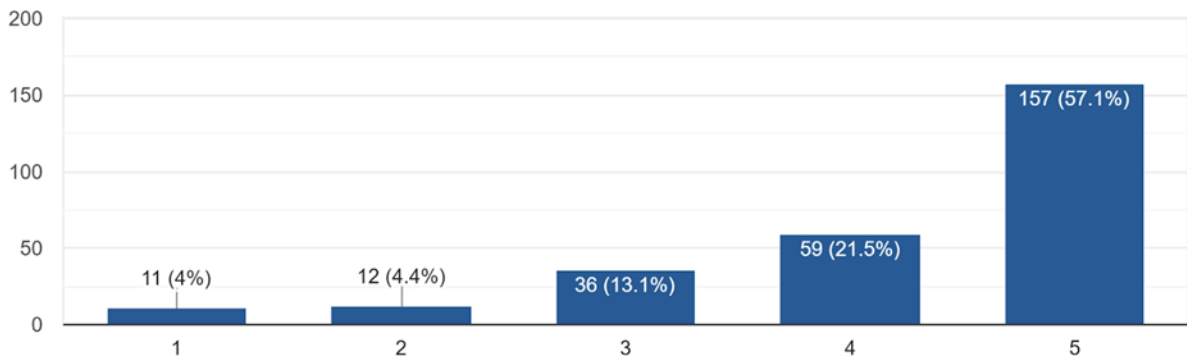
Key themes identified through public input included the need for workforce housing, reinvestment in the downtown core, traffic and multimodal transportation improvements, protection of neighborhood character, and preservation of Easton’s agricultural and open space edges. The Planning Commission oversaw the process and incorporated community feedback into all major chapters and policy recommendations.

2.2.1 Community Feedback Process Highlights

The community input phase of this Plan Update asked the public about the continued relevance or appropriateness of each component of the Growth Management strategy. The results were clear: each received something between moderate to very strong support for continuing to be included in the next Planning Period (2025-2035). As a result, this Plan Update begins with the premise that there is no desire to throw any of these strategies out. Rather, the objective is to build on these ideas, refine and improve them where possible, and update them based on new information or issues where necessary. In a nutshell, this is the context and spirit of this Plan update. The results of the questions about Town’s Growth Management strategy are summarized in the following charts (for each response, 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree):

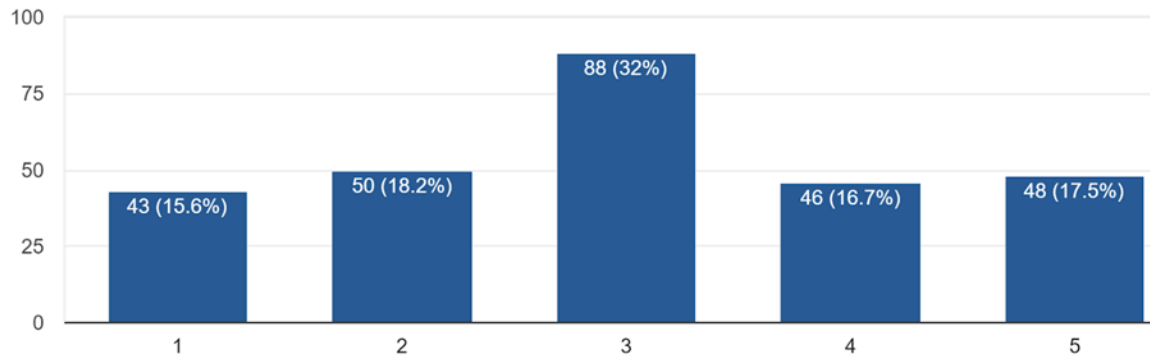
Contain Sprawl with an Urban Growth Boundary

275 responses



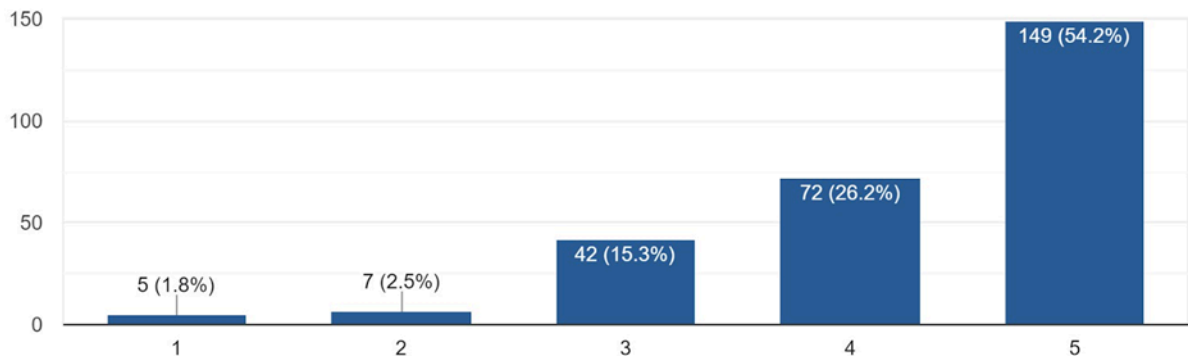
Increase Density

275 responses



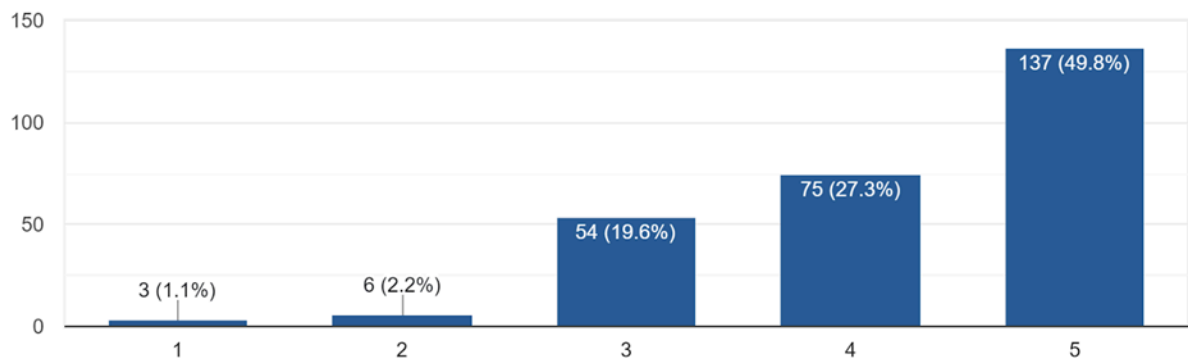
Build Neighborhoods (as opposed to Subdivisions)

275 responses



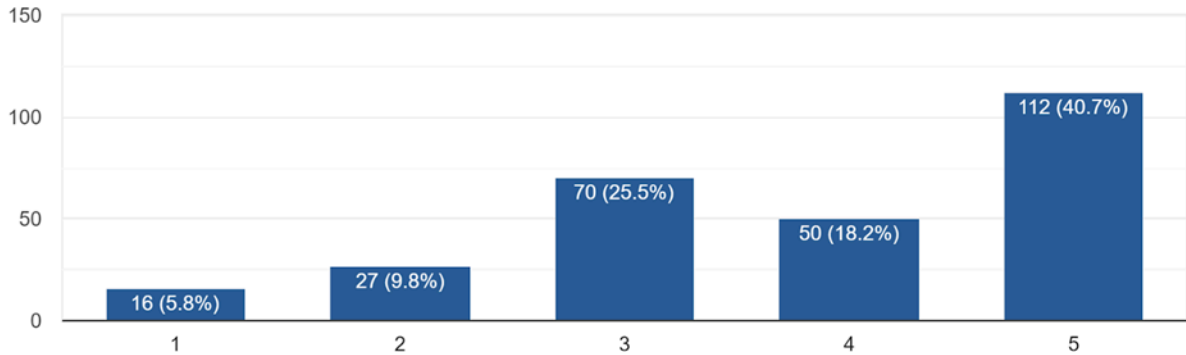
Improve Design

275 responses



Restrict Rate of Growth

275 responses



Detailed survey results from the public outreach program are provided in Appendix

2.3 SCOPE AND USE OF THIS PLAN

This Plan provides a policy framework to guide Easton’s development through 2035. It is organized into thematic chapters covering land use, community character, infrastructure and services, environmental stewardship, housing, transportation, municipal growth, and implementation. Each chapter includes guiding principles, context, objectives, and recommendations.

The Comprehensive Plan is used by the Planning Commission, Town Council, staff, and the public to guide development review, budget decisions, capital investments, and updates to zoning and subdivision ordinances. It is also used by State and regional agencies in assessing funding eligibility and regulatory compliance. The Plan is intended to be updated as needed to remain current with demographic trends, regulatory changes, and community priorities.

2.4 FOUNDATIONS AND DATA SOURCES

This Plan is based on a range of data, analysis tools, and prior studies that provide a foundation for its goals and recommendations. Appendix A includes detailed demographic tables, economic indicators, and land use maps. Appendix B presents projections of population growth, housing demand, and infrastructure needs under multiple development

scenarios. Appendix C includes maps of future growth areas, zoning districts, transportation networks, and natural resource features.

Sources include the U.S. Census Bureau, Maryland Department of Planning, Talbot County Geographic Information Systems (GIS), local infrastructure capacity studies, and Easton’s building permit and land use data. The Plan also incorporates fiscal analysis tools such as Urban3 value-per-acre assessments to evaluate development patterns.

[LIST SUPPORTING TABLES, CHARTS AND PROJECTIONS]

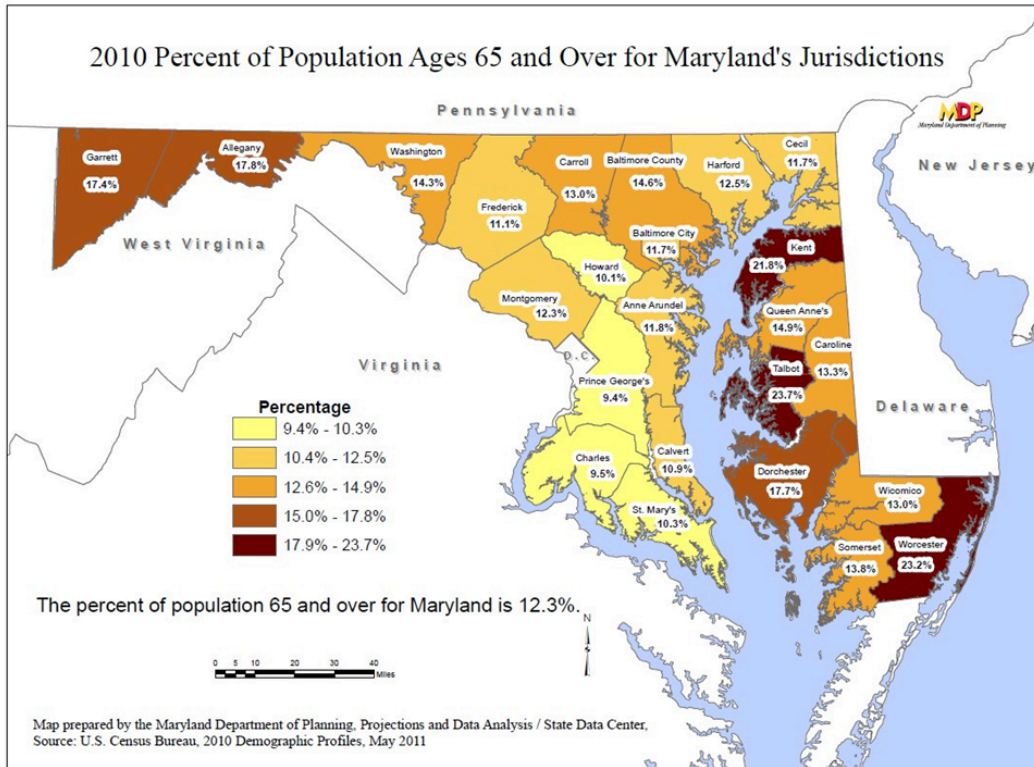
[note - should we include in intro any projections in the body here?]

Taken together, these tools provide a comprehensive and evidence-based foundation for land use policy, infrastructure planning, and growth management.

One demographic change evident in (although not unique to) Easton is the growth of the Hispanic population, which mirrors the decline in African-American population. The chart below shows how these components of Easton’s population have changed since 1990 when Hispanics were first reported separately.

YEAR	% AFRICAN-AMERICAN	% HISPANIC
1990	26.9%	0.4%
2000	23.5%	3.5%
2010	17.2%	9.8%
2020	14.7%	14.4%

Easton and Talbot County have a high concentration of people over age 65. In 2010 Maryland Department of Planning produced the following map illustrating this:



American Communities Survey data for 2021 indicates that senior citizens remain a significant portion of the local population. It found that while the state percentage of the population that was 65 or over in 2021 was 16.3%, Talbot County's was 29.9% and the Town of Easton's was 24.9%.

3 LAND USE

At its heart, a Comprehensive Plan remains first and foremost a land use plan. This Land Use Element provides the foundation upon which later plan elements are based. It is the blueprint for the future development of the Town. Together with the Municipal Growth Element, the Land Use Element outlines policies for the orderly and planned development of the Town.

The use of land within the Town is the result of many physical, economic and social forces. The Land Use Element reflects an attempt by the Town to equitably balance the attainment of Town goals and objectives for development with private property rights and interests. The Land Use Element addresses issues and identifies Town policies relative to residential, commercial, and industrial development as well as the provision of lands for parks and open spaces. It analyzes the appropriate mix of uses in the short and long term given projected growth. It will address reversing and rectifying what are now viewed as poor land use decisions (made not just in Easton but throughout the nation) that were made in the past, primarily since the late 1940's. In short, it lays the groundwork that will be repeated throughout the Plan for ensuring that future growth is not in the form of auto-centric, isolated, suburban style subdivisions but rather takes the form of multi-use, integrated, and connected neighborhoods.

At its founding in 1710, Easton was located at the headwaters of the Tred Avon River. Current visitors to Easton may well be confused by that statement and wonder why the Town moved from that location. Actually the Town did not move. Rather, the river changed. It does still exist in this area, but has been reduced to a stream that has been enclosed in culverts in the vicinity of Talbottown Shopping Center and the Easton Utilities Electric Generating Plant.

In 1786, Easton was a mere 94.5 acres. Not only was the overall size of the Town small, but also the pattern of development was dense, reflecting that the primary means of travel at that time was walking. Today, Easton consists of almost 6,600 acres and within the most recently developed parts of the Town the development pattern is relatively sparse. This reflects the mode of travel of today, the private automobile, which has had the effect of spreading out development and greatly separating the places where people live, from the

places where they shop and work. A table detailing Easton's growth through Annexation is provided in Appendix ____.

Directing growth is a critical task facing local governments throughout the country today. Many communities view growth as essential to their economic health. Communities without growth may be forced to continually raise taxes on existing residents and businesses since the tax base does not expand. On the other hand, unchecked, unmanaged growth can also cause many problems. Achieving the right balance of land uses is critical in avoiding these problems. For example, a community that focuses primarily on residential growth may become a bedroom community where the residents are forced to travel to other places for everything from work to shopping. A community with an overabundance of commercial development invites traffic congestion. And unless the community has adequate design standards, whatever development occurs may not be aesthetically pleasing.

Further, as part of Talbot County, Easton has been designated as a growth area so that the rural nature of the County can be protected and preserved through restrictive zoning.

3.1 EXISTING LAND USE PATTERNS

Easton's current land use pattern reflects both its historic compact form and the evolution of development along its edges. The older parts of town feature walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods with civic, institutional, and small-scale commercial uses integrated into the residential fabric. These areas, such as the downtown core and nearby traditional neighborhoods, exemplify the kind of development the Town aims to preserve and replicate.

In contrast, the newer areas along the Town's fringe exhibit more suburban, automobile-oriented patterns. These include large-footprint retail, isolated office or institutional campuses, and conventional subdivisions with limited street connectivity. In some cases, land use and zoning remain mismatched, and legacy industrial or underused commercial areas present opportunities for reinvestment.

[Insert Existing Land Use Map]

See Appendix _____ for a detailed summary of current land use categories by acreage and function.

Much of Easton's residential growth since 1990 has occurred in conventional subdivisions on the Town's periphery, resulting in lower densities, more fragmented street grids, and

greater reliance on private automobiles. While these areas meet market demand for single-family housing, they lack the mixed-use and walkable character of older neighborhoods.

Institutional and commercial growth has also concentrated on the edges of Town. Large-format retail, medical campuses, and single-use office complexes have introduced new land use patterns that often conflict with Easton's traditional form. These areas require careful planning and, in some cases, retrofitting to better connect with the community fabric.

Map 2 is an insert showing graphically the growth of the Town over time. This map was first included in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan and has been updated to show changes over time. In many ways the most interesting aspect of this information may be what has occurred since 2004. In short, we followed our Plan. There were only three annexations approved during the 2004 - 2010 Planning period.

Two of these were shown as Priority 1 Growth Areas in the 2004 Plan. The third was not, but a Comprehensive Plan Amendment Process to made it a Priority 1 Area. There have been 111 Annexations throughout the current Planning Period, but it is important to note that it has been 13 years rather than the previously mandated six years as a result of the amendment to that provision of the State Land Use Article. Notably, all eleven annexed properties were indicated as Priority 1 Growth Areas in the 2010 Plan.

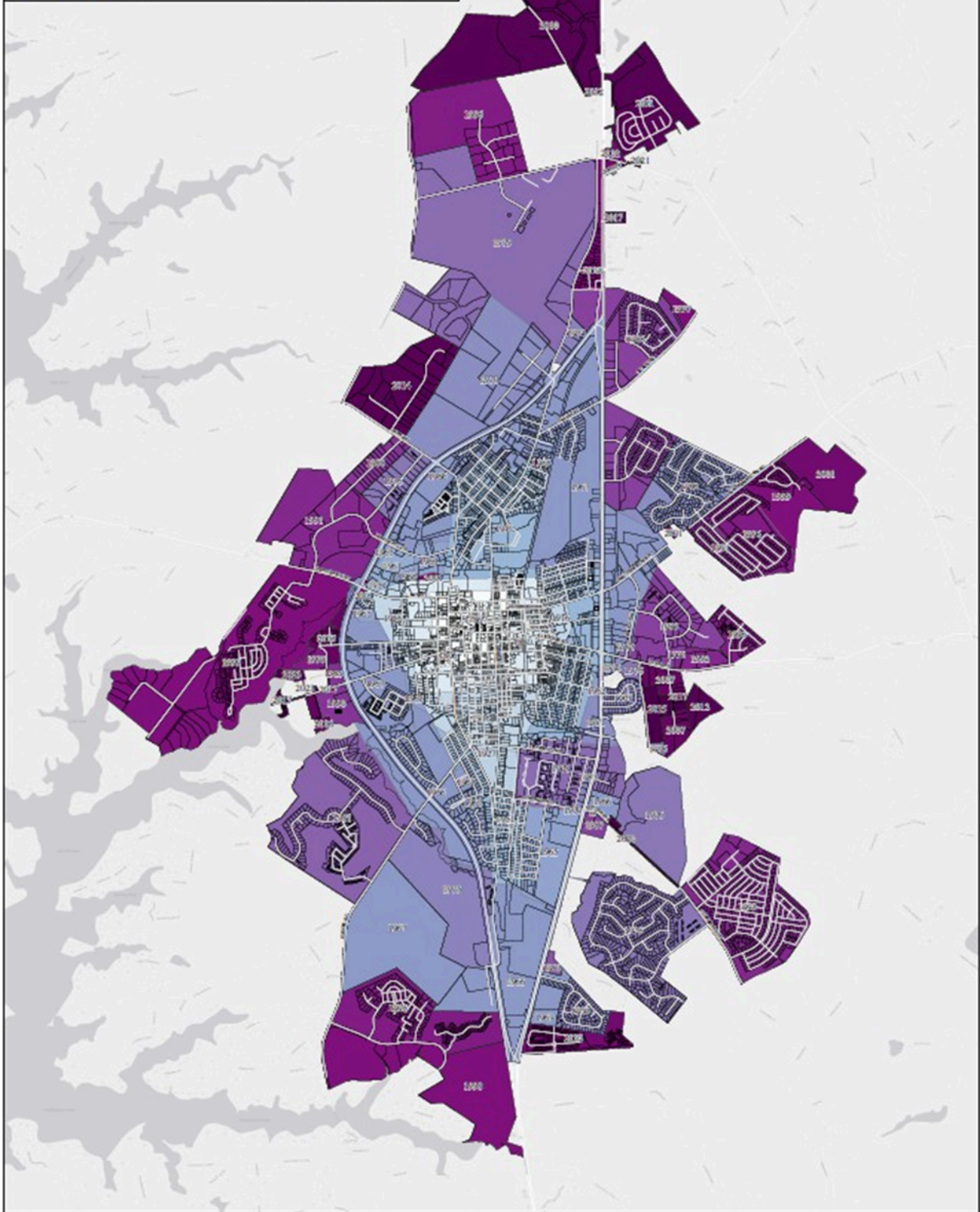
One other annexation was reviewed in the 2004 - 2010 Planning Period, but it was rejected because the Plan indicated the area as a Priority 3 Growth Area, therefore it was determined by both the Planning Commission and the Town Council to be inconsistent with the Plan. Lastly, one Annexation request was also denied in the most recent Planning Period. That one was for a Priority 1 designated area, but it was denied over concerns centered around unknown impacts (primarily, traffic) that might occur with future development/redevelopment of the properties in question.

Historic Annexations



0 0.5 1 Miles

Cartographer: Nicholas Johnson



3.2 LAND USE GOALS AND POLICY DIRECTION

Easton’s land use strategy is grounded in a practical understanding of land availability, infrastructure capacity, and fiscal impacts. With limited undeveloped space remaining within Town boundaries, strategic infill and redevelopment are essential to future growth. The Town’s land use goals remain consistent with the core principles outlined in the 1997 and 2010 Comprehensive Plans: preserving neighborhood character, maintaining a compact development pattern, and focusing growth within a defined boundary supported by infrastructure and public services.

The foundation for future land use decisions begins with understanding current land use patterns. A key indicator is shown in the table below, which presents the acreage of each zoning district established under the 2021 Zoning Ordinance, along with estimated amounts of unimproved land within each district.

Table 7 AVAILABLE LAND BY ZONING CLASSIFICATION			
Zoning	Total Acreage	Estimated Unimproved Acreage **	Percentage of Total Town Area
A-1	65	24	
R-10A	2199	107	
R-10M	117	62	
R-7A	332	6	
Total Residential	2713	199	41.18%
CBD	131	3	
CG	391	33	
CL	153	122	
Total Commercial	675	158	10.25%
BC	502	113	
I	815	45	
Total Industrial	1317	158	19.99%
PUD	1373	217	
HC	100	0	
RH	233	233	
GA	101	0	
MXW	76	17	
Total Floating, Mixed-Use & Governmental/Institutional Districts	1883	467	28.58%
Total all Districts	6588	1,398	

** Not all unimproved acreage is conducive to development, i.e. environmental factors, open space, etc.

Source: Estimates originally prepared by Brent Spicer, Easton Utilities Commission, on January 3, 1994, and updated to include new annexations and rezonings. Estimates of unimproved acreage prepared by Current Planner Zach Smith on September 23, 2009. Updated for this Plan by Nicholas Johnson on March 17, 2023.

Achieving a healthy, vibrant community depends on balance—and the first step is assessing whether Easton’s current land use is already out of balance. Table 7 highlights a key issue: the limited supply of unimproved land within Town limits. This constraint means future growth must be met through annexation in designated Future Growth Areas, redevelopment within the existing boundary, or both.

Buildout analysis confirms that under current zoning, Easton can accommodate only modest additional residential and nonresidential development without annexation. As such, policies

that promote higher density, infill, and redevelopment are essential. In areas where infrastructure exists but capacity is limited, targeted investment in water, sewer, and transportation systems will be necessary. Growth must occur where public systems can support it efficiently and where the design enhances walkability, access to services, and long-term fiscal sustainability.

The 2025 Plan emphasizes that sustainable land use planning is not only about where growth happens, but how. The Future Land Use Map and supporting policies direct development to areas already served by public infrastructure while discouraging inefficient sprawl that burdens the community with long-term maintenance costs.

Each land use category in the Plan reflects both function (e.g., residential, commercial, open space) and expectations for form, intensity, and infrastructure compatibility. These categories aim to reinforce planning goals while allowing flexibility for context-sensitive design and public input during development review.

While the 2004 Plan explored the ideal mix of residential, commercial, and industrial uses, the 2010 Plan omitted that discussion, acknowledging the subjectivity of such targets. The original intent was never to cap any land use type, but rather to flag imbalances. At the time, it was clear—both from data and public input—that Easton had significantly more commercial development than typical for a town its size.

Public input for the 2025 Plan suggests that imbalance persists, likely worsened by the national decline of traditional retail and the accelerated shift to online shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing this imbalance will require thoughtful land use strategies that reflect modern economic trends while supporting a more diversified, resilient community fabric.

3.2.1 Retail Uses

Public input for this Plan revealed what seems at first to be a contradiction: while Easton is perceived as over-commercialized, many residents also expressed a desire for more variety in retail and food establishments. This apparent conflict begins to make sense when we examine Easton’s commercial landscape by subcategory. Not all retail is equal, and the perception of over-commercialization is likely tied to certain types of retail, not the concept itself.

Easton’s retail environment can be broadly grouped into four categories: Neighborhood Retail, Regional Retail, Transient-Oriented Retail, and Downtown Retail. Each plays a distinct role in the Town’s land use future.

- Neighborhood Retail
 - This type of small-scale, walkable retail is nearly absent outside the Town Center.
 - Older neighborhoods should be retrofitted to include neighborhood-serving shops to reinforce a sense of place and reduce car dependence.
 - New residential developments should integrate, or at least accommodate, neighborhood-scale commercial uses—small retail nodes at the intersection of well-defined neighborhoods.
 - Planning must ensure such retail remains neighborhood-serving in scale and does not evolve into broader commercial centers. Properly located and scaled, neighborhood retail can reduce local traffic rather than increase it.
- Regional Retail
 - This is the dominant retail form in Easton and the primary contributor to its unusually high per capita retail space—estimated at 80 square feet per person, roughly double the level recommended in the 2004 Plan.
 - It is also the most frequently cited concern in public feedback about over-commercialization.
 - Future regional retail development will be limited to:
 - Undeveloped commercially zoned land,
 - Redevelopment of existing shopping centers.
 - No expansion of regional retail areas is proposed in the Future Land Use Map.
 - Any new regional retail must comply with strict design standards. Done well, it can reinforce local character; done poorly, it risks making Easton indistinguishable from “Anywhere, USA.”
- Transient-Oriented Retail
 - This category includes gas stations, fast food, and quick-service retail that serve through-traffic as well as residents.

- While new growth opportunities are limited, redevelopment potential is strong—especially along Route 50.
- This retail type is valued by residents and workers for its convenience (e.g., lunch spots, fuel).
- Like regional retail, it requires careful design regulation to improve Easton’s visual character and avoid corridor sprawl.
- Future expansion will focus on:
 - Improving undeveloped commercial sites near the Town’s northern edge,
 - Redevelopment along the Route 50 corridor.
- Downtown (Town Center)
 - Easton’s Downtown is the heart of the community, with its historic buildings, government offices, the courthouse (dating to 1794), the Avalon Theatre, museums, restaurants, inns, and specialty shops.
 - While space for new development is limited, there are opportunities for targeted redevelopment and infill.
 - A Plan for Downtown Redevelopment and Infill, adopted in 2009, guides this work and is discussed further in the Economic Development chapter.
 - Preserving and strengthening existing businesses will be key to keeping Downtown vibrant and maintaining Easton’s unique character.

Easton’s perceived over-commercialization stems largely from an oversupply of regional-scale retail. At the same time, residents are asking for more neighborhood-serving, diverse, and vibrant commercial experiences, especially in underserved parts of town. Future land use policy should support a balanced commercial mix, regulate scale and design, and encourage development that reinforces neighborhood identity and local character.

Table 9 summarizes these commercial retail types. For purposes of comparison, “Neighborhood” aligns with the category described above, while “Community” and “Regional” fall under the broader discussion of regional retail.

	Neighborhood	Community	Regional
Location	- within convenient walking distance of residential areas - intersections of collector and secondary roads	- intersection of major roads and expressways	- intersections of expressways
Service Radius	0.5 mile	2 miles	4 miles (urban setting) 8-10 miles (suburban) 15+ miles (rural area)
Catchment Area	5 - 10 minute travel	10 - 20 minute travel	30 - 60 minute travel

Population Served	4,000 – 10,000	35,000 – 50,000	Over 150,000
Max. Desirable Size for Shopping Centers	1 acre/1000 served	0.75 acres/1000	0.67 acres/1000
Total Size	4 - 8 acres	10 - 30 acres	40 - 100 acres
Avg. Gross Floor Area	30,000 - 75,000 sq. ft.	100,000 -250,000 sq. ft.	400,000 - 1,000,000
Number of Stores for Shopping Center	5 - 20	15 - 40	40 - 80

Source: Adapted from Urban Land Institute (1982); Lynch and Hack (1984); Leung (1989).

3.2.2 Residential Uses

Residential Land Uses are generally not described in terms of a ratio. In fact, to the contrary, the needs of the other land uses are often projected based on ratios involving the number of residential units (or population) in the community. The discussion about residential land uses tends to focus more on the arrangement, appearance, variety, and density of this land use. That is discussed thoroughly in the Neighborhood Character Element. Suffice it to say that we continue to see things changing for this land use. We do not envision the future of Easton as a series of disconnected, isolated, monotonous subdivisions. Rather we want to see a seamless, attractive, interesting, Sustainable Growth inspired Easton; one Easton, not a collection of suburban residential enclaves.

3.2.3 Industrial

The discussion in the 2004 Plan did not talk about a ratio of industrial land acreage or square footage to residential units, but rather talked about jobs to housing ratio. For this

land use, the 2004 Plan concluded that there were more jobs in Easton than the population would suggest is necessary. However, as the 2010 Plan noted, there were a number of factors that skewed this estimate. These included:

- a large proportion of Easton's population is retired - there are a lot of dwelling units for which no jobs are necessary
- a shifting in the focus of jobs away from the manufacturing and traditional "industrial" type jobs towards service-oriented jobs
- tourism has become more important in Easton and more jobs are found in the food and hospitality sectors of the job market
- Easton is the governmental center of Talbot County – this results in many government jobs, as well as jobs in allied professions such as legal, real estate, accounting, surveying and engineering, etc.
- as the largest community on the Mid-Shore, Easton is a hub for medical services, entertainment, retail, etc.
- Easton serves as an employment hub for a much larger area than Talbot County

Lastly, Easton is a regional hub for jobs.

The 2010 Plan stated "It is clear that there has been a gradual erosion of the availability of this[industrially-zoned] land for classic industrial uses by allowing more and more commercial and service uses." Changes were made to the Town's Zoning Regulations in recognition of this issue. Also, a partially developed Industrial Park (Talbot Commerce Park) was annexed into Town in this Planning period, to provide Town infrastructure, which has accelerated its build-out. Finally, in response to this diminishing supply of industrial property, the Town obtained a US Department of Commerce grant to extend and install utilities to the Town-owned Mistletoe Hall property, facilitating its development as a Commerce and Business Park.

Many of the jobs in Easton are filled by residents of jurisdictions other than Easton, impacting our transportation system. The other side of the coin of having so many people commuting into Easton for work is the fact that many Easton residents are commuting out of town to work. Thus, jobs which better meet the needs of Easton residents would be of great benefit in reducing traffic and the associated environmental impacts. For this reason

specifically there are industrial areas proposed on the eastern side of Town for development in the long-range planning period.

The benefits of mixed land uses will be a recurring theme throughout this Plan, particularly in the Community Character and the Transportation Elements. In short, mixed uses:

- Increase housing options for more diverse household types.
- Provide more transportation options.
- Reduce automobile dependence.
- Create a truer sense of place than single-use suburban style development.
- Activates urban areas throughout more times of the day.
- Provide greater opportunity for social interaction.
- Reduce a community's carbon footprint by encouraging walking and biking as an alternative to automobile use.
- Increase the safety of the neighborhood by putting more eyes on the street.

The 2025 Plan adds greater emphasis on sustainability, fiscal efficiency, and redevelopment. Land use policy is increasingly tied to infrastructure investment, public space, transportation networks, and economic productivity. New fiscal tools, including value-per-acre modeling, help the Town assess where land use patterns generate long-term public value relative to cost.

3.2.4 Value-per-acre modeling

In 2024, the Planning/Economic Development Firm Urban3 modelled the fiscal impacts of land uses on the Eastern Shore in general, and then in Talbot County specifically. The basis of Urban3's methodology involves examining "value per acre" for the area being analyzed. The following is excerpted from the Urban3 study for Talbot County.

Highlights from the Urban3 study for Talbot County include:

- Mixed use projects provide the highest property value per acre
- Higher density development is significantly more productive than less dense land uses

- Understanding how different land uses affect property tax revenue will allow Easton to make informed development decisions that maximize revenue productivity that can then be used in providing services such as public safety and continuing economic development
- Using the Value Per Acre (VPA) model allows communities to link fiscally productive areas with their associated land use types
- Using a moderate to high productivity sample development, such as mixed use commercial or missing middle housing types, as an example for how to build in the future can guide community conversation, vision, processes, and future regulations
- Urban3 has seen that funding for infrastructure systems(roads, sewer, water, stormwater) is insufficient in covering the lifecycle expenses for these systems. Certain users of these systems may not be paying for the true cost of what it takes to serve them (meaning other users are subsidizing them). Adjust fees, with geography in mind, to adequately cover the costs of operation and maintenance or encourage infill development rather than servicing new areas.



Figure 8. Comparison of values per acre by land use in Easton
 Source: Maryland Department of Planning (2024), Google Maps



Figure 9. Comparing value vs. dwelling units on a per acre basis for nine example properties in Easton
 Source: Maryland Department of Planning (2024), Google Maps

Urban3 modeling has helped the Town evaluate where existing development patterns provide strong return on public investment. Compact, walkable neighborhoods generate more tax revenue per acre and require less infrastructure to support than low-density fringe

development. This analysis supports land use decisions that promote long-term sustainability.

See Appendix __ for additional information on the Urban3 Analysis

3.3 FUTURE LAND USE FRAMEWORK

This Plan organizes Easton’s future growth into a series of land use categories that describe the general pattern, scale, and intent for development. These categories guide zoning decisions and help ensure that growth occurs in appropriate locations and forms. While this Plan is not a zoning map, it provides the foundation for future amendments to the Zoning Code and Subdivision Regulations.

Future land use designations are not intended to be parcel-specific or regulatory. Rather, they provide a generalized vision for how areas of the Town should evolve over time. Zoning changes and site plan approvals will be guided by these designations but must also consider compatibility, capacity, and design quality.

The Future Land Use Map contained and described more thoroughly in the Implementation Element, provides a graphic representation of the desired pattern of land uses within the Town.

The Future Land Use Map identifies where residential, commercial, mixed-use, open space, and institutional development is anticipated. These areas are tied to infrastructure readiness, access to services, and their ability to support complete neighborhoods.

[Insert Future Land Use Map]

See Appendix B for detailed definitions and acreage summaries by land use category.

3.4 SPECIAL DISTRICTS AND PLACE TYPES

The Future Land Use Framework includes several key districts that serve as focal points for the Town’s identity and growth strategy. These include:

- Downtown Easton – walkable, civic and cultural hub with mixed-use development.
- East Gateway – commercial node with opportunities for infill and street-front redesign.
- Port Street Corridor – targeted for redevelopment with housing, employment, and civic amenities.

- Hospital District – medical and institutional anchor, with supportive residential and commercial uses.

These districts will benefit from targeted planning efforts, including small area plans, design guidelines, and infrastructure investments.

Of particular importance this planning cycle is the Hospital District. **The Hospital relocation and expansion to the northern end of the Town’s Growth Area requires ...**

3.5 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following goals and objectives guide Easton’s future land use policy. These reflect the vision and values adopted in the 2025 Plan and build on the foundations established in 2010 and earlier.

Goal 1: Limit the geographic outward expansion of Easton.

- Reaffirm the current Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) and use it to guide annexation and utility extensions.
- Coordinate with Talbot County and various land preservation and environmentally-aligned organizations to secure easements and other long-term protection devices on properties along and in close proximity to the Urban Growth Boundary on the County side of the line.
- Establish annexation policies that include criteria for development readiness, consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, and expected phasing or pacing of growth.
- Explore incentive annexation to gain control of land on the town’s border that might have previously been developed under Talbot County rules and regulations to facilitate more appropriate redevelopment or expansion on such parcels.
- Slow the demand for more land by increasing the density of future residential areas. At a minimum, the State of Maryland’s minimum acceptable density for qualification as a Priority Funding Area of 3.5 units (net) per acre should be achieved in these developments.
- Consider adoption of an Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) if the rate of growth is exceeding the current or planned capacity for specific types of infrastructure.

- Follow a Capital Improvement Program which will allow the Town to provide a rational basis for implementing improvements and increase funding opportunities, in a planned manner to locations where growth may be prioritized.

Goal 2: Make Easton more walkable and connected / achieve a more balanced and integrate mix of uses.

- Encourage development patterns that promote walkability, including higher densities, mixed-use areas, and traditional neighborhood form.
- Support neighborhood-scale commercial development and live/work spaces that reduce the need for automobile trips.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and ensure it is included in all new development and redevelopment projects.
- Encourage connections between neighborhoods and commercial areas through a fine-grained street network and active transportation routes.
- “Retro-fit” developed subdivisions within the Town by adding neighborhood-scale retail, civic and open space elements to existing residential subdivisions.
- Amend the Town’s Zoning Ordinance to change the focus from regulation by building use, to building type and site impact.
- Simplify the process for developers to achieve the Town’s objectives

Goal 3: Use land efficiently and sustainably.

- Prioritize infill and redevelopment of vacant or underutilized sites within the Town’s boundary.
- Balance new development with infrastructure capacity, using water, sewer, transportation, and stormwater data to guide land use decisions.
- Use fiscal modeling tools, such as value-per-acre assessments, to evaluate the long-term sustainability of proposed land use changes.
- Discourage low-density development at the fringe of Town that generates higher infrastructure costs and undermines compact growth goals.
- Refine and work with Design Standards that ensure that Easton stands out as a unique place rather than looking like “Anyplace USA.
- Update the Town’s Design Guidelines applicable to properties/projects located outside of the Historic District.

- Utilize the Town's Forest Conservation Account and other sources to add landscaping along heavily traveled corridors.
- Explore options to expedite permit approvals for permitted uses if extraordinary design improvements are included.
- Develop an Urban Forestry Plan to expand the Town's tree canopy.
- Update the Town's Design Guidelines applicable to properties/projects located outside of the Historic District.

4 PLACE (COMMUNITY CHARACTER)

4.1 EASTON'S COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Improving the quality of Easton's built environment has been a central goal since the Town adopted Vision-based Planning in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. Since then, the Town has taken multiple steps to elevate development standards. It added site planning and architectural requirements for specific uses, upgraded landscaping standards, overhauled sign regulations—cutting freestanding sign height in half—and imposed size and strict design limits on big-box retail and shopping centers. Town officials also began opposing formulaic “corporate-franchise architecture,” as recommended in the 1997 Plan.

The 2004 Plan reaffirmed the need for higher design standards and extended the focus from commercial to residential development, culminating in the adoption of Design Guidelines for New Construction. The 2010 Plan updated Easton's design principles, revising several and adding one new principle based on observed development trends. This Plan continues that process, proposing additional refinements based on the past 15 years of experience and public feedback.

This chapter also revisits the topic of big-box retail—a longstanding concern since the 1997 Plan, which was amended in 2000 to address the issue directly. It further explores how zoning shapes Easton's character and proposes ways to modernize outdated zoning and subdivision tools. In particular, it revives the concept of “Traditional Neighborhood Development (Design?)”—first proposed in 2004 but not pursued in 2010—as a viable framework for future growth areas. Finally, it expands the Town's Growth Management Policy to emphasize the importance of both infill and redevelopment, with new recommendations to ensure compatibility with existing neighborhoods.

4.2 EASTON'S DESIGN PRINCIPLES

4.2.1 Evolving Design Principles for Easton

Since the adoption of Vision-based Planning in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, improving the quality of Easton's built environment has been a consistent priority. That Plan introduced a set of Design Principles recommended by the Visioning Committee—particularly the “Growth” station—to encourage more flexible, design-oriented development. The guiding

premise was simple: *a well-designed project with strong site planning and architectural elements should be more favorably received than one that merely meets technical standards but lacks visual and functional quality.*

To support this approach, the 1997 Plan drew on a range of influential planning and design publications, including:

- **Rural by Design** (Arendt et al., 1994)
- **Site Planning and Community Design for Great Neighborhoods** (Jarvis, 1993)
- **Dealing with Change in the Connecticut River Valley** (Yaro et al., 1990)
- **Visions for a New American Dream** (Nelessen, 1994)

These resources were suggested reading for developers and reviewers alike, offering deeper insight into the design expectations of the Town.

4.2.2 Core Principles from 1997

The original Plan outlined the following key principles:

1. **Mixed Uses are Desirable** – Segregated land uses contribute to traffic congestion and loss of community identity. Mixed-use neighborhoods promote walkability and vibrancy.
2. **Natural Features Should Determine Design** – Development should work with the land, not against it.
3. **Automobiles Should Not Determine Design** – Streets in residential areas should be narrower, greener, and designed to prioritize safety and social interaction—not just traffic flow.
4. **Ample Open Space Should Be Provided** – Parks and open spaces serve as recreational hubs, buffers, ecological assets, and neighborhood anchors.
5. **Substantial Landscaping Should Be Incorporated** – Landscape design enhances aesthetics, provides shade, screens unsightly areas, supports wildlife, and contributes to environmental function.
6. **Parking Should Not Dominate Sites** – Parking areas should be hidden or minimized. Alleys and shared access help reduce visual and spatial dominance of parking. Where parking needs are uncertain, green space should take precedence.

7. **Architecture Should Reflect Easton’s Character** – New development should respect the Town’s historic architecture. Franchises must avoid standardized designs and instead build to fit the Easton context.
8. **Signs Should Inform, Not Overwhelm** – Signage should be minimal, compatible with the architecture, and oriented to enhance rather than dominate visual space.

4.2.3 2004 and 2010 Updates

In 2004, additional design publications were added to reinforce Easton's direction and address criticisms that earlier principles were too vague about what the Town “wanted” rather than what it opposed. Resources included:

- **Crossroads, Hamlet, Village, Town** (Arendt, 1999)
- **Aesthetics, Community Character, and the Law** (Duerksen & Goebel, 1999)
- **Better Models for Superstores** (Beaumont, 1997)
- **Saving Face: How Corporate Franchise Design Can Respect Community Identity** (Fleming, 1994)

These works are intended as “conceptual guides”—not mandates—but they reflect the vision Easton strives to achieve. Some recommendations may conflict with one another or be unsuitable in specific local contexts.

The 2010 Plan further refined the Design Principles and added a ninth:

9. **Neighborhoods Should Connect** – Interconnected neighborhoods support walkability, access, and community interaction. Street and path networks should link areas logically and functionally.

4.2.4 Continuing the Evolution

As part of this 2025 Plan Update, the Planning Commission recommends revisiting and refining these principles once again. Over the past 15 years, development trends, public feedback, and lessons learned from implementation have highlighted areas where Easton can continue to raise its standards.

The forthcoming section proposes revised and additional principles, consistent with the Town’s goal of shaping development that is *visually attractive, functionally efficient, environmentally sensitive, and socially cohesive*.

The 8 principles supporting the 2025 Plan are summarized below:

Principle #1 – Neighborhoods are Places to Live, Not Just Sleep

- integrate a diversity of non-residential uses located at or near the center of the area
- scale and nature of non-residential uses in a development should reflect the needs of the neighborhood, including adjacent ones
- Non-residential uses should be designed as interesting and welcoming third spaces for the community, not exclusive amenities
- Open space should be abundant, accessible, and promote active lifestyles

Principle #2 – Automobiles should not Determine Design

- Streets should be “Complete Streets” that actively encourage use by not only automobiles, but also pedestrians and cyclists of all abilities
- Arterial roads should minimize accesses to promote traffic flow and safety.
- Automobile parking should be deprioritized, locating lots and garages away from the streetscape and normalizing parking for bicycles
- Subdivisions should utilize alleys for service vehicles and interior access
- Developments should be designed for walkability first and foremost, minimizing impacts to the transportation network from automobile traffic
- Developments located near pedestrian corridors such as the Rails-to-Trails should orient the site with respect to them
- Developments should occur in a density and form that promote the future feasibility of transit service

Principle #3 – Neighborhoods Should Connect

- Sites should provide multiple points of access across all modes of transit
- New streets should be arranged in a grid pattern where site conditions permit
- Multimodal connectivity should be provided to both existing and potential developments adjacent to the site
- Open spaces should similarly connect, contributing to the overall green infrastructure of the town and region

Principle #4 – Neighborhoods Should Contain a Diversity of Housing

- Units designed for affordability should aesthetically blend with their neighbors
- Prominent facades should depict a variety of housing types, sizes, and designs

- Unit typology and price points should meet a housing need not captured by nearby neighborhoods
- Where appropriate, adaptive reuse and integration of housing among underutilized non-residential uses is desirable

Principle #5 – Environment Should Determine Design

- Greenfield developments should make the case for conversion of land - a finite resource and one of our most valuable assets
- Brownfield redevelopment and adaptive reuse are desirable
- Natural features and topography should be preserved and made an integral part of the design of the site
- Site landscaping should utilize existing vegetation complemented with abundant native species
- Buildings and landscaping should be designed to minimize the risk of bird collision to protect both resident and migrant species
- Buildings should be energy efficient and utilize durable materials
- The built environment should address climate change impacts such as flooding and ambient heat
- Site development should improve local stormwater capacity

Principle #6 - Developments Should Be Fiscally Sustainable

- Fiscal impact analyses should accompany major subdivisions and greenfield developments of a similar scale
- Infill and adaptive reuse are desirable
- Conversion of underutilized parking lots is desirable

Principle #7 – Easton is a Unique Place

- Designs should be distinctly modern yet harmonious, complimenting adjacent sites in a way that continues the architectural rhythm of Easton’s development
- Restoration and adaptive reuse of historic structures is desirable
- Historic and other unique features should be preserved and made an integral part of the design of the site
- Open spaces are engaging, inviting, and interact with the built environment in interesting ways

- For larger projects, multiple builders should be integrated throughout the site
- When employed, repetition of design is intentional and evocative
- Signs should inform, not dominate

Principle #8 - Be a Good Neighbor

- For larger projects, developers engage the surrounding community in the design process before review by the Town
- Projects in accordance with charrettes and small area plans are desirable
- Developments should include amenities or improvements to infrastructure that are a clear boon to the surrounding community, not solely for their own users
- Where appropriate, open spaces should be creatively employed to buffer incompatible uses or discordant shifts in aesthetics
- Site design and development should avoid and mitigate noise, light, air quality, and odor impact on surrounding properties

Design Principles are describe in depth in section XXX, YYYY.

4.3 HISTORY AND FUTURE OF DESIGN REGULATIONS IN EASTON

Easton’s strong interest in design and preservation has deep roots. Long before the formalization of local design principles, the town benefitted from early builders who showed foresight and craftsmanship, shaping the vibrant and enduring downtown core we value today. That legacy survived thanks to decades of stewardship by civic leaders, engaged property owners, and preservation advocates who resisted pressures to replace historic buildings with incongruous modern development.

Organizations like the Talbot County Historical Society—founded in 1954—and Historic Easton, Inc., founded in 1973, played central roles in promoting preservation. Their efforts helped lead to the creation of the Easton Historic District Commission and the establishment of a local historic district in 1976.

Easton’s evolving design standards are discussed in detail in the preceding section on Design Principles, but public engagement has long supported this trajectory. A key example occurred in June 2000, when Easton hosted a Quality Community Survey (QCS) as part of a Maryland Mass Transit Authority initiative. The survey, facilitated by renowned planner Tony Nelessen, used a Visual Preference Survey to gauge community sentiment on

development. Over 140 residents participated in evaluating 82 paired images on aspects such as housing density, street width, and corridor development. A 55-question written survey accompanied the session.

The results confirmed broad community support for many of the design values that Easton now promotes—including:

- denser housing,
- narrower streets, and a
- reimagined Route 50 corridor.

Since then, every update to the Comprehensive Plan has reaffirmed these preferences.

While perspectives may differ on the ideal amount of growth, there is near-unanimous consensus that Easton should continue raising the bar on design quality. This chapter—and the larger Plan—seek to honor that community mandate.

4.4 ZONING AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

4.4.1 Rethinking Zoning and the Built Environment

Much has been written in recent years about the “sins” of modern planning and the failures of the built environment in many American communities. Movements like Smart Growth, New Urbanism, and Neo-Traditional Planning emerged in response to development patterns that sacrificed livability, character, and sustainability in favor of automobile-dependent sprawl.

Sprawl has been characterized by low-density, single-use development; monotonous subdivisions; congested roads; and the loss of farmland and forests. These patterns stand in stark contrast to the compact, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods this Plan seeks to promote.

4.4.1.1 How Did We Get Here?

A major reason for these outcomes lies in the very tools used to regulate growth—most notably, zoning. While zoning was originally intended to protect public health and safety—such as separating housing from noxious uses—it has evolved into a rigid system that over-segregates land uses and suppresses the integrated, mixed-use development patterns of traditional towns.

The roots of zoning date back to 1867 in San Francisco, with broader adoption following the landmark 1926 Supreme Court decision in *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, which upheld the constitutionality of zoning. Since then, the tool has become ubiquitous—but not without consequences.

In Easton, as in many places, zoning has too often discouraged the very types of communities we value. Wide separation of uses, minimum lot sizes, and restrictive codes have made car-dependent subdivisions the default. The time has come to rethink this model.

4.4.1.2 Is It Time to Abandon Zoning?

Not entirely. Zoning still has a role in protecting residents from heavy industry and incompatible land uses. However, Easton should reform its Zoning Ordinance to encourage mixed-use, walkable, and human-scaled neighborhoods—especially in undeveloped areas within the Town’s Growth Area.

For example, commercial uses and workplaces that are compatible with nearby housing should not be excluded. Residential densities should be increased and minimum lot sizes reduced to support more efficient and livable neighborhoods. At a minimum, new development should meet the State’s Smart Growth Priority Funding Area threshold of 3.5 units per acre (net)—with higher densities encouraged in appropriate areas.

4.4.1.3 The Case for Traditional Neighborhood Zoning

The 2004 Comprehensive Plan outlined a model for a Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) District, designed to encourage the kinds of mixed-use, compact neighborhoods Easton values. That proposal was ultimately rejected—not due to disagreement with its content, but because it removed the Town Council and public hearing from the review process. This created opposition, despite the fact that the standards themselves reflected the community’s vision.

At present, creating these types of neighborhoods requires use of the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process, which developers tend to avoid due to its complexity, cost, and unpredictability. Instead, the easier path—conventional subdivision and site plan review—too often yields suburban-style sprawl.

This mismatch has led to a system where the easiest projects to approve are those the community least desires, while more thoughtful, desirable development faces the highest barriers.

[insert TND chart]

4.4.1.4 A Chance to Recalibrate

In the wake of the TND District’s defeat, some elements were integrated into Easton’s base zoning and subdivision regulations—such as anti-monotony standards and greater lot design flexibility. Still, nearly two decades later, the limitations of the current approach remain apparent.

The Planning Commission now recommends revisiting this issue and reintroducing a TND District or alternative “by-right” option with clear design standards. The goal is to reverse the regulatory imbalance, making it easier—not harder—for developers to build the types of neighborhoods Easton wants.

The next section will outline recommended zoning and subdivision reforms to implement this approach, starting with a proposed Traditional Neighborhood Development model code.

4.5 ROLE OF INFILL AND REDEVELOPMENT IN EASTON’S GROWTH STRATEGY

4.5.1 Infill and Redevelopment as Growth Strategies

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan estimated that Easton could accommodate approximately 2,500 new housing units through infill development and redevelopment—growth that would occur without annexing additional land. This strategy offers several key advantages:

- Reduces pressure to develop greenfields, preserving open land.
- Improves mobility for residents who do not or cannot drive.
- Lowers infrastructure costs, as in-town service extensions are typically more affordable than new infrastructure for outlying areas.
- Increases housing variety, particularly smaller, lower-maintenance units that appeal to small households and lower-income residents.
- Enhances quality of life for existing residents by bringing reinvestment and new amenities.
- Supports energy conservation and environmental goals.

- Aligns with Maryland Smart Growth policies, promoting sustainable development within existing town boundaries.

4.5.2 Compatibility Considerations for Infill

While infill and redevelopment bring clear benefits, they must be managed carefully. These projects are typically surrounded by existing neighborhoods and must be designed to complement them. The following principles should guide infill and redevelopment:

- Ensure compatible housing types with the surrounding neighborhood.
- Incorporate traffic calming measures where appropriate.
- Adopt design guidelines to promote visual and functional compatibility.
- Maintain a continuous pedestrian network for walkability.
- Support neighborhood-scale commercial uses, where appropriate, to provide walkable access to basic services.
- Address parking creatively, considering nearby on-street spaces, public lots, and shared-parking arrangements instead of relying solely on private lots.

4.5.3 Realistic Limits and Strategic Focus

During the public engagement process for this Plan update, many residents expressed strong support for infill and redevelopment as preferred growth strategies. While this is consistent with sustainability goals, the supply of vacant land within the built-up areas of Easton is limited. Achieving significant new growth solely through infill would require a level of intensity that could fundamentally alter the character of established neighborhoods.

A more realistic approach is to:

- Promote targeted infill and redevelopment in and around Easton’s historic core.
- Support adaptive reuse of existing buildings where feasible.
- Encourage denser, walkable development in suitable infill areas outside the historic core but within the 2055 Town Boundary.

This strategy balances growth, preservation, and community character while maximizing Easton’s capacity to grow without unnecessary outward expansion.

4.6 THE ROLE OF MAJOR RETAIL IN EASTON IN 2025

[cross reference here to where else discussed in Plan?]

Easton has a long and complex history with major retail development. In 2000, the Town imposed a temporary moratorium after receiving applications for over 766,000 square feet of proposed major retail space. This pause led to amendments to the 1997 Comprehensive Plan and significant changes to the Zoning Ordinance. The Ordinance defined “Major Retail” as any single-use retail establishment with 25,000 square feet or more of gross floor area, and created a new Planned Major Retail floating zone to regulate such uses. Projects over 65,000 square feet were prohibited. Stringent design standards were also added for major retail and shopping centers.

The 65,000-square-foot cap was a compromise. Some residents and stakeholders argued it was too restrictive, while others believed it was too permissive. At the time, the Giant grocery store and the original Lowe’s (now Kohl’s) were roughly this size, helping to define the threshold.

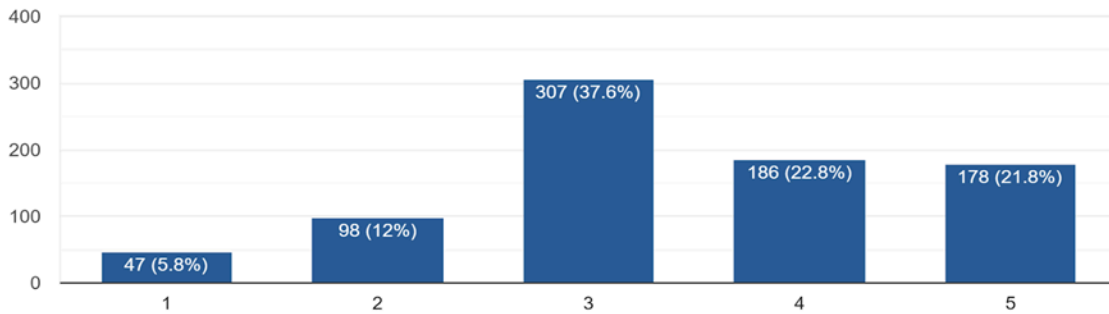
The role of large-scale retail continued to generate debate through the 2004 and 2010 Comprehensive Plans. Public input collected during these updates revealed a consistent preference for limiting major retail in Easton. In a 2000–2001 survey, nearly half of respondents said such uses should “never” be added. In 2010, more than a third felt the Town already had too many shopping centers, and over 65% supported holding firm on design standards, even if it meant losing a preferred retailer.

Based on this sustained feedback, the 2004 Plan removed the hard cap on square footage but maintained a regulatory threshold at 25,000 square feet, requiring all larger projects to undergo case-by-case review through the Planned Major Retail process. The intent was to retain flexibility while emphasizing design, compatibility, and the broader land use context.

The 2025 Plan again solicited public input, and responses were largely consistent with previous surveys. A strong majority said Easton has “about the right amount” of regional-scale retail, with twice as many respondents saying there is too much rather than too little. Support remains high for prioritizing Downtown Easton over other commercial areas, and for maintaining high design standards.

Please select one

816 responses



Given these findings, the Planning Commission recommends no major changes to the Town’s retail policies. Major retail uses will continue to play a limited role, and new or expanded projects will only be encouraged under specific conditions:

- Priority should be given to redevelopment or redesign of existing shopping centers, especially where projects result in improved site design, circulation, or conversion to mixed-use.
- Regional retail should serve primarily Talbot County, and secondarily nearby areas in Caroline, Dorchester, and Queen Anne’s Counties. Easton does not aim to become a regional shopping hub for a wider area.
- Applicants proposing relocation or replacement of an existing major retail store must submit a detailed reuse plan for the vacated site.

Easton’s approach to major retail has consistently reflected community values: a desire for design quality, modest scale, and economic alignment with the Town’s role as a local, not regional, retail center.

4.7 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal: Encourage mixed-use, traditional neighborhoods over single-use subdivisions

Objectives:

- ✓ Reintroduce the proposed Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) Zoning District as the default zoning for undeveloped and annexed land in Easton.

- ✓ Continue reviewing and updating the design and anti-monotony standards first adopted in 2006.
- ✓ Restructure the development review process to streamline approvals for traditional neighborhood developments while increasing scrutiny and difficulty for conventional suburban subdivisions.

Goal: Improve the appearance of existing development

Objectives:

- ✓ Partner with the State Highway Administration to enhance landscaping along state highways, especially the Route 50 corridor.
- ✓ Use the Forest Conservation Account to retrofit landscaping in older streetscapes where plantings are sparse or missing.
- ✓ Require any renovation or change-of-use project needing site plan approval, a PUD amendment, special exception, or variance to fully comply with current design standards—no grandfathering of outdated designs.
- ✓ Require new landscaping or improvements along U.S. Route 50 for all adjacent new development or redevelopment.

Goal: Raise the design quality of all new development

Objectives:

- ✓ Fully apply Easton's recommended Design Principles to all new development.
- ✓ Prohibit new construction that relies on corporate franchise architecture.
- ✓ Adopt comprehensive design standards for all new development, including residential projects and infill/redevelopment.

- ✓ Review and update the Design Guidelines for New Construction outside the Historic District.
- ✓ Strengthen landscape standards, emphasizing native species and improved screening of unattractive site features.

Goal: Promote infill and redevelopment

Objectives:

- ✓ Evaluate the effectiveness of the Zoning Code’s Planned Redevelopment Overlay District—including its boundaries, standards, and process—to determine whether it offers sufficient incentives.
- ✓ Identify and pursue non-zoning-based incentives, in partnership with relevant agencies, to support infill and redevelopment.
- ✓ Prepare Small Area Plans for Easton neighborhoods to tailor redevelopment strategies to local needs and conditions.

5 MINERAL RESOURCES

The purpose of this plan element is basically three-fold. First it is to identify undeveloped land that should remain undeveloped until the land can be used to provide or assist in providing a continuous supply of minerals (as defined by another state law). Second, this element should identify appropriate uses for such lands following the extraction of the identified minerals. Finally, this element should incorporate land use policies and recommendations for regulations to balance mineral extraction with other land uses and, to the extent feasible, to prevent the preemption of mineral resources extraction by other uses.

5.1 BACKGROUND

Previous Comprehensive Plans in Easton have devoted little attention to mineral resources. The 1989 Comprehensive Plan included a single paragraph that stated, among other things, that surface mining of mineral resources does not take place within the Town of Easton and that no potential mineral resources have been identified within Easton. While the former half of this sentence may be true, the latter is not.

There is, in fact, at least one, and possibly two, mineral resources located within Easton. Map 8-1 of the 2005 Talbot County Comprehensive Plan identified Sand and Gravel bearing units. A large portion of eastern Talbot County is identified as having such deposits. The western boundary of the identified area runs directly through the Town of Easton. Based on this map, approximately the eastern one-third to one-half of the Town is located on potential sand and gravel bearing units. Furthermore, all of the future growth areas to the east of the current Town boundary are similarly located over such units.

Clearly it will not be a policy of the Town to allow for the extraction of sand or gravel within the already developed portions of the Town. However, it may be wise to allow for the extraction of such resources in future growth areas, both those presently located in Talbot County and those already within the Town limits, but as yet undeveloped. Such extraction should be conducted in conjunction with the development of the site as one of the very first steps. There should be no continuous sand and gravel extraction operations within the Town. The identification and use of sand and gravel prior to the development of a given site represents wise use of available resources. To go beyond that to the establishment of

ongoing sand and gravel operations would be an unwise promotion or encouragement of incompatible land uses.

A related issue that occurs from time to time in Easton concerns the practice employed by some developers/land-owners whereby the topsoil on a development site is stripped and sold, then the land is developed. If the removed topsoil is not replaced, future homeowners buy into a situation whereby they have very hard, often compacted soil. It is difficult to grow in and hard to work.

In order to mitigate this situation, developers are required to finish all building lots with topsoil of a depth sufficient to satisfy growing needs for lawns, gardens, and landscaping. If the cost of replacing the topsoil becomes too prohibitive, then the hope is that it is not removed in the first place.

5.2 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL: Enable the use of identified mineral resources in appropriate locations as a prerequisite to the eventual development of those sites.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Identify mineral resources on a given site as early as possible in the development review process.
- ✓ Examine Town regulations to ensure that mineral extraction is permitted in limited circumstances with appropriate safeguards against undue neighborhood impacts.

GOAL: Ensure that home sites contain topsoil of a quantity and quality necessary to support lawns, gardens, and/or landscaping.

OBJECTIVE:

- ✓ Review the Town's adopted Standard Details to ensure that the standard for topsoil on newly developed lots is appropriate and adequate to support the growth of healthy plant life.

6 HOUSING

Providing safe, decent, and sanitary housing for all residents is essential. When a community neglects this, housing conditions deteriorate, businesses may close, and the overall appearance of communities can fuel a growing sense of despair. Easton offers a wide range of housing types, from colonial era to nineteenth-century homes near Downtown to public housing such as Graham's Place and the recently rebuilt Doverbrook apartments, as well as subdivisions such as Cooke's Hope, Easton Village, Hunters Mill and Mulberry Station. Today, even more than housing quality, the rapidly rising cost of housing has become a hot button issue for both residents, employers and commuters.

Housing first became an element of the Easton's Comprehensive Plan in 2004. It is now a mandatory element of Maryland comprehensive plans rather than an optional element. Many of the issues, other than rapidly rising housing costs, associated with this Element remain essentially the same today in 2025 as they were in 2004.

State law now specifies what this element must address:

(a)

(1) In this section the following words have the meanings indicated.

(2) "Affirmatively further fair housing" has the meaning stated in § 2-401 of the Housing and Community Development Article.

(3) "Area median income" has the meaning stated in § 4-1801 of the Housing and Community Development Article

(4) "Low-income housing" means housing that is affordable for a household with an aggregate annual income that is below 60% of the area median income.

(5) "Workforce housing" has the meaning stated in § 4-1801 of the Housing and Community Development Article.

(b) A housing element may include goals, objectives, policies, plans, and standards.

(c) A housing element shall address the need for affordable housing within the local jurisdiction, including:

(1) workforce housing; and

(2) *low-income housing. (d)*

(1) *Local jurisdictions have a duty to affirmatively further fair housing through their housing and urban development programs.*

(2) *The housing element of a comprehensive plan that is enacted or amended on or after January 1, 2023, shall include an assessment of fair housing to ensure that the local jurisdiction is affirmatively furthering fair housing.*

(3) *On request of a local jurisdiction, the Department of Planning, in consultation with the Department of Housing and Community Development, shall provide technical assistance for the purpose of developing the housing element of the comprehensive plan.*

(4) *This subsection does not require a local jurisdiction to take, or prohibit a local jurisdiction from taking, a specific action to affirmatively further fair housing.*

(Md. Code, LU § 3-114)

6.1 HOUSING ISSUES

Easton has many housing issues, but they can all be generally categorized as one of three problems: housing cost, housing quality, and housing availability. To some extent these problems are interrelated.

Housing affordability has become so significant an issue that the Town formed an ad hoc Attainable Housing Task Force to examine the problem and make recommendations to address it. The Task Force worked on the issues during this Comp Plan update process and produced a draft report in May of 2024. **The Full Final Report can be accessed on the Town's website at: eastonmd.gov/xxxxxxxxx.** The Draft Report's Executive Summary includes the following:

The Housing Task Force Final Report provides an analysis of Easton's housing landscape, demographic shifts, economic trends, and affordability challenges. The report also expands on the demographic, market, and workforce overview briefly provided to the Task Force at their May 23, 2024 meeting. Any data-driven insights provided herein are intended to inform housing policies and initiatives recommended

by the Attainable Housing Task Force. aimed at ensuring equitable and sustainable housing opportunities.

Key Findings

1. Population Growth & Demographics

- Easton experienced rapid population growth between 1980 and 2010, but growth rates have slowed significantly since 2010.*
- The town's population is aging, with a 42% increase in residents aged 55+ since 2000, while the percentage of younger adults (25-44) has declined by 40%.*
- The Hispanic population has grown significantly, increasing from 3.5% of the total population in 2000 to 14% in 2020, while the Black population's share has declined.*

2. Housing Market Trends

- Since 2000, single-family detached homes have dominated new housing developments, limiting the availability of more affordable housing types such as townhomes and multi-family units.*
- Home prices have risen sharply, with Easton's median home value increasing by 131% since 2000.*
- Rental costs have also increased, with median rents in 2025 exceeding the affordability threshold for households earning less than 100% of Easton's Area Median Income (AMI).*

3. Affordability Challenges

- Homeownership is increasingly out of reach for middle-income families, with the home price-to-income ratio rising from 3.03 in 2000 to 4.4 in 2024, indicating a decline in affordability.*
- Over 50% of renters in Easton are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing.*
- Racial disparities persist, with Hispanic and Black households facing the greatest housing cost burdens and lowest homeownership rates.*

4. Economic & Employment Factors

- *Job growth in Talbot County has remained stagnant since 2000, increasing at an annual rate of just 0.18%.*
- *The local economy has shifted toward lower-paying service jobs, making it harder for workers to afford housing in Easton.*
- *A significant portion (42%) of the workforce commutes from neighboring counties, highlighting the disconnect between housing costs and local wages.*

Easton faces significant housing challenges, particularly in affordability, supply diversity, and demographic shifts. Without strategic interventions, rising housing costs and demographic imbalances could threaten the town's long-term economic sustainability and community inclusivity. This report serves as a foundation for developing policies that ensure a balanced, affordable, and thriving housing market for all residents.

Easton risks becoming a place where those who work here can no longer afford to live. This challenge will only grow if the Town's tourism and hospitality sectors expand as expected. A lack of affordable housing already affects essential workers — cashiers, restaurant staff, government employees, teachers, nurses, emergency responders, elder care aides — who increasingly find Easton out of reach.

This has broad implications for Easton's future. Economically segregated communities weaken social and cultural cohesion. They also burden the transportation system. As workers seek housing in neighboring counties like Dorchester and Caroline, they become commuters, adding to traffic congestion. The Town also faces economic and workforce risks if these workers eventually take jobs closer to home.

Easton has long recognized the importance of housing quality. The Town enforces the International Building Code and staffs a Building Department that includes a Building Official (who conducts plan reviews), two field inspectors, a rental housing/property maintenance inspector, and a secretary.

To maintain livability in rental housing—especially older units—Easton launched its Rental Housing Inspection Program in 1995. The program requires landlords to obtain licenses and submit to regular inspections. It was comprehensively reviewed and updated in 2008 to strengthen its effectiveness.

6.2 EXISTING HOUSING PROGRAMS

In Easton, housing is primarily provided by the private sector. However, a few public and nonprofit programs offer limited affordable housing, including efforts by the Housing Commission of Talbot County, subsidized private developments like Chatham Village Apartments, and homes built by Habitat for Humanity of Choptank, Inc.

The Housing Commission of Talbot County (Formerly the Easton Housing Authority) maintains and manages all public housing in the Town of Easton. Today, they manage more than [redacted] units of public housing in Town. Habitat for Humanity of Choptank, Inc. has built more than 25 homes in Easton using its volunteer-driven model. Future homeowners contribute substantial "sweat equity" during construction and later assist other Habitat families. With donated or discounted land and no labor costs, overall housing costs are kept low. And, the Town Council has expanded affordable housing by requiring developers of discretionary projects—like annexations or PUDs—to include on- or off-site affordable units or contribute to the Town's Affordable Housing fund as a condition of approval.

A key step in addressing housing issues was the creation of the Easton Affordable Housing Board in [redacted]. Appointed by the Town, the Board develops policies and criteria for affordable housing and oversees units acquired by the Town through development approvals. Early efforts focused on establishing guidelines and a selection process for purchasing these units.

6.2.1 Local Housing Costs and Issues

Appendix [redacted] contains detailed information on local and regional housing costs and affordability data. Highlights are presented in sections which follow.

The Zillow Home Value Index (ZHVI) for Talbot County reflects the general direction of home values in our community since the year 2000. Nationally, home prices peaked in September 2006, then began to decline later that year and into 2007. By 2008, the housing market had collapsed, triggering a broader financial crisis known as the Great Recession (2007–2009). The market

Figure 33: Talbot County ZHVI, 2000 - 2024



hit bottom in 2012, followed by a slow recovery through 2016.

Talbot County followed a similar trend. As shown in Figure 33, the Zillow Home Value Index (ZHVI) peaked at \$420,000 in September 2006, then fell 21% by 2009. It bottomed out at \$280,000 in September 2012. From there, values steadily rose, reaching \$334,000 by the end of 2019—a 19% increase. Between 2015 and 2019, the ZHVI grew at an average annual rate of 2.4%. Beginning in 2020, home values surged 43%, reaching \$478,000 by the end of 2024 — an average yearly increase of about 9%. It is important to note that while the ZHVI offers a helpful snapshot of housing trends in Talbot County, it is not a replacement for professional appraisals.

This report analyzed median home sale prices in Talbot County for 2000, 2010, 2020, and

Figure 34: Talbot County ZVHI versus MLS



2024 using Bright MLS data from the Mid-Shore Board of Realtors. Figure 34 compares these values with the ZHVI, showing both followed similar trends over time. Percentage differences between the two sources, ranging from 13% in 2000 to just 2% in 2024, with an average gap of 7%. Both

ZHVI and MLS offer reliable insights into long-term housing trends.

In summary, the high cost of single-family detached homes in Easton poses significant affordability challenges — particularly for first-time buyers and workers in lower-wage professions with limited income growth potential.

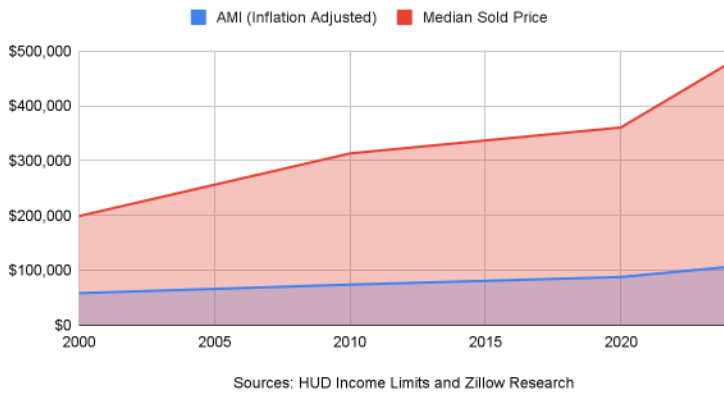
6.2.2 Housing Costs and Income

In 2024, Talbot County’s Annual Median Income (AMI) was \$106,500. The Easton Affordable Housing Board adjusts this figure annually to better reflect local incomes; in 2020, Easton’s AMI was \$98,065. Given the small gap between the two, Talbot County’s home price-to-income ratio serves as a useful affordability metric for Easton. Based on MSBR data, the 2024 ratio was 4.4, meaning it takes 4.4 years of median income to purchase a median-priced home. This marks a sharp decline in affordability from 2000, when the ratio

was 3.03. Even after the Great Recession, the ratio climbed to 4.12, showing a continued trend toward less affordable housing.

Another key measure of affordability is how income growth compares to rising home prices

Figure 38: Talbot County AMI (Inflation Adjusted) and ZHVI



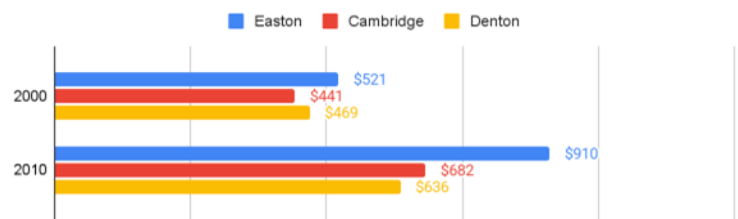
over time. In Talbot County between 2000 and 2010, home prices grew much faster than incomes, leading to a sharp decline in affordability, likely driven by the housing boom before the Great Recession. From 2010 to 2020, growth slowed, and income slightly outpaced

home prices, reflecting post-recession recovery and a cooler housing market. However, from 2000 to 2024 overall, home prices once again outpaced income growth, signaling a renewed affordability gap similar to the early 2000s.

6.2.3 Rental Market

In Easton, 40% of households are renters, a five-point drop since 2010. The current rental vacancy rate is 5.3%, significantly higher than the 1.4% homeowner vacancy rate. In 2010, those rates were 4.8% and 5.2%, respectively. The sharp decline in homeowner vacancies reflects a tight housing market, likely driven by strong demand for higher-end homes and a limited supply of affordable, diverse options. Demographic shifts may also play a role: older adults—more likely to own homes—are staying in place, while younger adults face growing barriers to homeownership, contributing to reduced turnover and tighter supply.

Figure 39: Median Gross Rent, 2000 - 2023

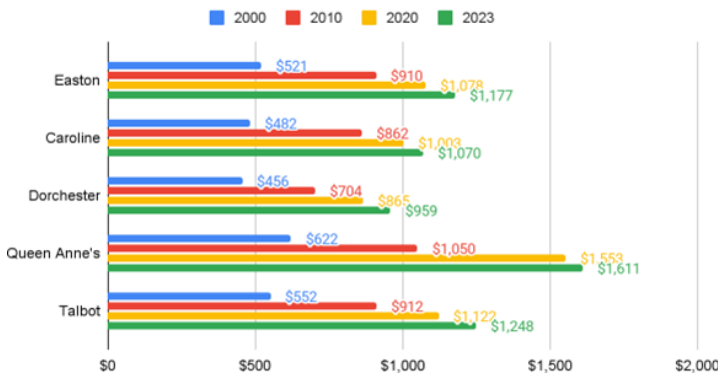


The rental vacancy rate, at 5.3%, falls within the healthy range of 5–7%, suggesting a balanced rental market with more unit availability compared to the much tighter for-sale housing market.

The recent uptick in planned multi-family residential development may help counter rising prices in both the ownership and rental markets. Contributing factors include slower housing absorption since 2010, a tight ownership market, and a shift toward higher-priced inventory. Multi-family units offer more affordable alternatives for households priced out of homeownership and expand the rental supply—helping to stabilize or even reduce rents and improve affordability for renters.

Since 2000, Easton’s median gross rent has consistently exceeded those of nearby Denton and Cambridge, reflecting its status as a more premium rental market. The most significant

Figure 40: Median Gross Rent, Easton Versus Counties, 2023

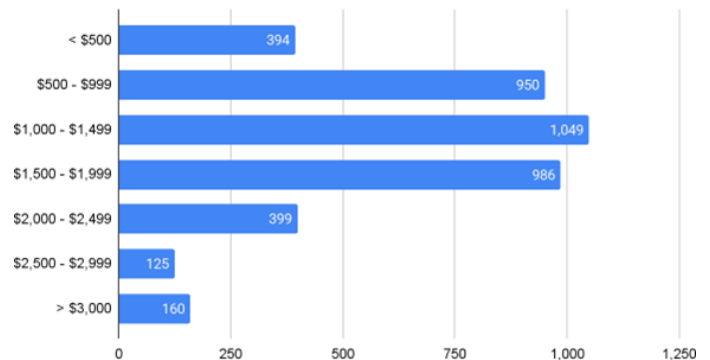


increase occurred between 2000 and 2010, when median rents rose by 74%. During that time, 92% of new housing construction was single-family detached or attached units—limiting rental supply amid growing demand. Although

the sharpest rise happened in that decade, rents have continued to climb steadily through 2023.

Compared to surrounding counties, Easton’s median rent is 94% of Talbot County’s but only 73% of Queen Anne’s. When rents are broken down by price range, there's a clear shortage of units affordable to extremely low-income households—those earning under \$25,000 annually. This gap particularly affects individuals at risk of homelessness or in need of transitional housing. However, there is a relatively strong supply of units in the \$500–\$999 range, which remain affordable for households earning up to about \$45,000 per year.

Figure 41: Easton Gross Rent and Number of Units, 2023



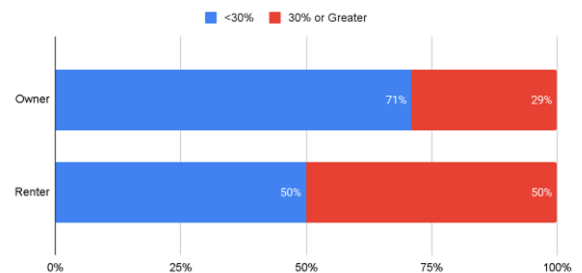
6.3 HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

6.3.1 Cost Burdened Households

Cost-burdened households are those spending more than 30% of their gross income on housing. This strain often forces families to choose between housing and essentials like food, healthcare, transportation, or savings—undermining their overall well-being.

According to 2023 ACS data, half of Easton homeowners with a mortgage pay \$2,000 or more per month in housing costs. Yet only 29% are considered cost-burdened—spending over 30% of their income on housing. This indicates a relatively high income level or greater affordability tolerance among homeowners in Easton.

Figure 42: Easton Cost Burdened Households by Tenure, 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates



This also highlights that housing costs in Easton are relatively high, even for middle-income households. At 80% of Easton’s 2024 AMI (\$98,065), a household should spend no more than \$1,961 per month on housing to stay below the cost-burdened threshold. Many homeowners exceed this amount yet still fall just under the 30% limit, indicating that even middle-income families are feeling pressure. In fact, ACS data shows that 62% of owner-occupied households earning under \$75,000 are cost-burdened, compared to just 9% of those earning \$75,000 or more—underscoring the growing affordability gap.

While middle-income homeowners face growing pressure in Easton’s housing market, the situation is even more severe for renters — particularly those with lower incomes. In 2023, 50% of renters were cost-burdened, compared to 29% of homeowners. This sharp disparity underscores the greater affordability challenges renters face by spending a disproportionate share of their income on housing. The result is increased financial instability, housing insecurity, and strain on overall well-being.

6.3.2 Affordable Home Price

According to HUD’s FY 2024 Income Limits Summary, Talbot County’s Median Family Income (MFI) for a family of four is \$106,500—11% above the average for Maryland’s Eastern Shore (excluding Cecil County) and the third highest in the region, following Queen Anne’s and Kent counties.

Talbot County's MFI has grown steadily since 1990, reflecting long-term economic progress. The sharpest increase occurred between 1990 and 2000, with a 65% gain. Overall, from 1990 to 2024, the MFI has risen by 203%. The current MFI is based on the 2018–2022 ACS 5-year estimate of \$100,321, adjusted for inflation using Congressional Budget Office projections and rounded to the nearest \$100.

HUD uses MFI to establish income thresholds by household size, categorizing households as Extremely Low, Very Low, or Low Income. These thresholds determine eligibility for a range of housing assistance programs, including Public Housing, Section 8 vouchers and project-based assistance, Section 202 housing for older adults, and Section 811 housing for people with disabilities.

In Easton, the Affordable Housing Board adjusts the County's MFI to better reflect local economic conditions. For FY 2024, Easton's adjusted MFI is \$98,065. This figure is used to set eligibility and affordability standards for Town housing programs.

Based on this adjusted MFI, a four-person household earning \$98,065 per year can afford a home priced at approximately \$277,000—assuming 35% of gross income is spent on housing costs. This estimate factors in mortgage principal and interest, property taxes, homeowners insurance, private mortgage insurance (PMI), and HOA dues, based on a 5% down payment and a 6.95% 30-year fixed interest rate. The calculation assumes \$200 monthly for both HOA dues and property insurance, and applies a property tax rate of 1.29% per \$100 of assessed value, based on a 3-year trailing average ZHVI of \$419,647.

In contrast, the median home price in Easton in 2024 was \$450,000, according to MarketStats by Showing Time (Mid-Shore Board of Realtors)—38% above what a median-income household can afford. Even the average price for an attached home, such as a townhome, exceeds affordability by 21%. A household would need to earn approximately \$137,000, or 140% of Easton's adjusted AMI, to afford a home priced at \$420,000.

These figures highlight the growing gap between incomes and home prices—and the pressing need for more affordable housing options in Easton.

6.3.3 Affordable Rental Price

HUD calculates Fair Market Rents (FMRs) to establish payment standards for rental assistance programs such as the Housing Choice Voucher Program. For FY 2025 in Talbot County, FMRs are based on average gross rents from the 2018–2022 ACS, adjusted for

inflation and local market conditions. If the calculated value falls below the Maryland state minimum, HUD raises it accordingly. Bedroom-specific ratios are then applied to the adjusted two-bedroom rent to determine FMRs for other unit sizes. These figures are listed in [Table 7](#).

A renter household is considered cost-burdened if it spends more than 30% of gross income on rent. For a four-person household earning 60% of Easton's adjusted AMI (\$58,839), affordable rent—net of a \$100 monthly utility allowance—is approximately \$1,371 for a three-bedroom unit.

As of March 2025, Zumper reports the average rent for a three-bedroom in Easton is \$2,400, a 10% increase over the previous year. About 75% of rents fall between \$1,501 and \$3,000. The median rent for a two-bedroom is \$2,499, and across all unit types, the median monthly rent is \$2,549—27% higher than the national average. For apartments specifically, the average rent is \$2,699, with two-bedroom apartments averaging \$2,044.

As shown in [Table 9](#), a four-person household earning 60% of Easton's AMI cannot afford a one-, two-, or three-bedroom rental in Easton without being cost-burdened. To afford the median rent of \$2,525, a household would require a significantly higher income.

6.3.4 Exclusionary Zoning and Its Impact on Housing Choice and Affordability

Exclusionary zoning refers to land-use regulations that limit the types of housing allowed in certain areas—often under the guise of preserving neighborhood character or managing growth. Common tools include minimum lot sizes, building height limits, and restrictions on multi-family housing. While these regulations may be well-intentioned, their effect is often to increase housing costs and limit access for lower-income individuals and families.

Consider a half-acre lot zoned for single-family homes with minimum lot size requirements. A developer purchasing this lot might theoretically choose among three options:

- A modest 1,200 sq. ft. starter home suited for first-time buyers or downsizing retirees;
- Seven attached townhomes that could offer more affordable ownership options; or
- A large, upscale single-family home marketed to affluent buyers.

However, existing zoning likely prohibits higher-density development—such as townhomes—through restrictions on lot coverage, density, or allowed housing types. As a result, the developer, constrained by regulations and seeking to maximize profit, will almost

certainly choose to build a large luxury home. Although each townhome would yield a smaller individual profit, the combined revenue from multiple units would exceed that of a single high-end home. But zoning doesn't allow this option.

This disconnect highlights a broader issue: the housing a community builds isn't always the housing it needs. While there is demand for large homes in Easton and Talbot County, there is also unmet demand from essential workers, young professionals, growing families, and older adults seeking more manageable living spaces. These groups benefit from a mix of housing types—if zoning allows them. The challenge lies in enabling diverse housing choices that still respect the character and scale of existing neighborhoods.

In unincorporated Talbot County, the situation is more restrictive. The County's Comprehensive Plan prioritizes preserving shoreline, waterways, and farmland—important goals—but pursues them in part by limiting the extension of sewer systems outside designated growth areas and by maintaining exclusionary land-use policies.

County zoning regulations prohibit most housing types other than single-family detached homes, often on large lots with low height and coverage limits. These low-density rules restrict supply, inflate land and construction costs, and make development of affordable units unfeasible.

The result is a development pattern that supports only high-end housing, effectively pricing out lower- and middle-income residents. This drives housing segregation based on income—and, as shown in [Figures 47, 48, and 49](#), such segregation often correlates with racial, generational, and workforce disparities.

6.4 FAIR HOUSING

In 2021, the Maryland Land Use Article was amended to require that all comprehensive plans include a "Fair Housing Assessment" to ensure they "affirmatively further fair housing." This refers to the obligation to prevent housing discrimination and proactively address segregation and other barriers that limit housing access based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, familial status, or disability. As defined in Section 2-401 of the Housing and Community Development Article, this includes taking active steps to create inclusive communities where housing opportunity is not restricted by these characteristics.

The Housing Goals and Objectives at the end of this chapter include recommended actions to meet this requirement. These focus on preserving Easton’s existing affordable housing, increasing the supply of new housing, and preventing the displacement of low- and moderate-income households.

The Town of Easton is committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable community where all residents have fair access to housing opportunities. This commitment is central to our vision of a vibrant, diverse, and thriving town.

In line with the Federal Fair Housing Act, the Maryland Fair Housing Act, and applicable local ordinances, Easton prohibits housing discrimination based on:

- Race (including associated traits like hair texture and protective hairstyles)
- Color
- Religion
- Sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity)
- Familial status (including families with children, pregnant individuals, and legal custodians of children under 18)
- National origin
- Disability (physical or mental)
- Marital status
- Source of income
- Military status

The Town will actively work to eliminate discriminatory practices, support diverse neighborhoods, and ensure that all residents can find housing that meets their needs. Fair and equal treatment will continue to be integrated into our planning, policymaking, and community development efforts.

6.5 POTENTIAL NEW HOUSING PROGRAMS / POLICIES

Easton faces two distinct housing challenges. The first is a shortage of housing for low- and extremely low-income individuals and families. These housing needs often intersect with broader social and familial challenges, making them persistent. Despite this, the Town must continue—and expand—efforts to provide housing for this group. The Easton Housing Authority remains the primary provider, but the Town should also support groups like

Habitat for Humanity of Choptank and similar organizations that offer safe, decent, affordable homes.

One approach worth revisiting is a local Self-Help Housing Program, modeled after a successful initiative on the lower Eastern Shore led by former Delegate Rudy Cane. Similar to Habitat’s model, the USDA-supported program enables very low- and low-income families to build their own homes together under supervision, contributing a set share of labor (typically 65%). This reduces costs and makes homeownership feasible. Easton previously sought funding for this program through the Community Legacy Program, but the request was denied. Renewed efforts could help bring it to fruition.

The second housing issue is the lack of inventory for first-time and move-up homebuyers. Easton’s recent residential developments increasingly target high-income buyers, leaving fewer options for moderate-income households. This growing gap in the market reduces opportunities for economic mobility and long-term community diversity.

Worsening this situation is the geographic segregation of housing by income. Easton is evolving into a town of income-stratified neighborhoods—very low-income households in one area, working-class residents in another, and wealthier residents elsewhere. This kind of separation undermines community cohesion, as discussed in the Community Character Element.

One solution is to require all new residential developments to include a set percentage of homes at varied price points. A notable precedent was set in the Easton Village on the Tred Avon project, which originally committed 10% of both attached and detached units as affordable housing. These units were to be integrated into the community, indistinguishable from market-rate homes, and subject to resale restrictions to maintain affordability. However, the financial burden of real estate taxes and HOA fees eventually led the developer to substitute in-lieu contributions to the Town’s Affordable Housing Fund.

Developers have also met affordable housing obligations by building units off-site or contributing to the Fund. While this has provided some affordable homes, it has diluted the original goal of integrating housing types within neighborhoods.

To create a more consistent and equitable approach, the Town’s Affordable Housing Board proposed an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance, an idea first supported in the 2010 Plan. Since

then, the concept has been studied by the Board and the Attainable Housing Task Force, leading to a proposed ordinance now pending before the Town Council (as of 2/12/25).

Additional housing policy options under consideration include:

- Expanding “Missing Middle” housing types to offer more varied and affordable units.
- Creating Traditional Neighborhood Zoning that allows smaller lots, mixed uses, and compact, walkable development by-right.
- Modifying the development review process to streamline approvals for projects that align with the Town’s affordable housing goals.

These initiatives aim to address both affordability and equity while supporting a more integrated, inclusive housing market in Easton.

6.6 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Ensure that housing in Easton is safe, sanitary, structurally sound, and enhances neighborhood character.

Objectives:

- ✓ Maintain strong funding, staffing, and training for the Town’s Building Inspection Department, and expand the Rental Housing Inspection Program.
- ✓ Collaborate with state, county, and nonprofit partners to direct housing rehabilitation funds to eligible low- and moderate-income households.
- ✓ Implement design standards that promote a mix of housing types and visually integrate affordable housing into the community.
- ✓ Encourage development patterns that support neighborhood identity, walkability, transit access, and efficient use of infrastructure.
- ✓ Preserve natural features and community character through thoughtful open space design, landscaping, and environmental protections.

Goal 2: Expand the supply of low-income housing in Easton.

Objectives:

- ✓ Support the Talbot Housing Authority and Easton Affordable Housing Board in creating both rental and ownership opportunities for low-income households.
- ✓ Amend the Zoning Ordinance to encourage private-sector apartment development and allow flexible reuse of existing or historic structures.
- ✓ Partner with Habitat for Humanity of Choptank and similar groups to identify and secure sites for new affordable homes.
- ✓ Launch a Town-led Self-Help Housing Program to assist low-income families in building their own homes.

7 COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Community Facilities and Services form the backbone of Easton’s infrastructure and quality of life. This chapter addresses the key public services and utilities that support daily living, guide development, and ensure public health and safety. These include water and sewer services, solid waste management, police, fire and rescue, and other essential facilities.

The chapter provides a concise overview of the facilities currently serving Easton, along with a discussion of future needs based on projected growth. It incorporates community input gathered during the Plan Update process and outlines goals and objectives to ensure that Easton’s public services keep pace with development.

While newer elements such as Water Resources and Municipal Growth may overlap with topics in this chapter, the Comprehensive Plan ensures all statutory requirements are addressed—even if they appear in separate chapters. For Community Facilities, the State of Maryland provides the following guidance:

Maryland Statutory Requirements

A Community Facilities Element must:

(a) Project the most appropriate and desirable patterns for the location, character, and extent of public and semi-public buildings, land, and facilities—on a schedule that extends as far into the future as is reasonable.

B. It may also include planning for:

- Places of worship
- Fire stations
- Hospitals
- Institutions
- Jails
- Libraries
- Parks and recreation areas
- Police stations
- Schools and educational facilities
- Cultural facilities

- Social welfare and medical facilities
- Other public offices or administrative buildings

Some of these topics are addressed in this chapter; others appear in separate sections of the Plan. Regardless of where they are discussed, their evaluation is consistent with Easton's population projections, growth policies, and infrastructure strategies.

7.1 BACKGROUND

Easton's public services and utilities play a critical role in the Town's physical, economic, and social development. Continued growth—especially in key economic sectors—depends on the capacity of public and private utility systems to meet the needs of both current and future residents. A core goal of the Town is to maintain and expand community facilities and services that protect public health and safety while enhancing quality of life. This must be done within the Town's fiscal limits and in coordination with its broader growth management goals. As the region's commercial and employment hub, Easton must also account for service demands generated by surrounding communities—not just those of Town residents.

7.2 UTILITIES

Easton's utility systems are primarily managed by Easton Utilities, a municipally owned entity responsible for electricity, water, sewer, natural gas, and broadband services. Established in 1923, Easton remains the only municipality in Maryland to own and operate all its utilities—a structure that continues to offer local control, operational efficiency, and responsive service.

Easton Utilities is governed by a three-member Easton Utilities Commission. Two commissioners must be residents of Easton; the third must reside within the electric service area. All are appointed by the Mayor with the advice and consent of the Town Council. A full-time President/CEO manages day-to-day operations and implements Commission policies.

7.2.1 Electricity

Electric service in Easton is provided by Easton Utilities to over 11,000 customers within a 54-square-mile service territory. Electricity is sourced both from onsite generation facilities

and from the PJM Interconnection, a regional transmission organization. This allows Easton Utilities to choose the most economical and reliable power source on an hourly basis. The Town's installed generation capacity is 66 megawatts—more than sufficient to meet current demand.

Historically, Easton Utilities was the sole electricity provider. However, recent annexations have brought some areas into service territories of Choptank Electric Cooperative and Delmarva Power & Light. As annexation continues, coordination among these providers will become increasingly important. Service area transfers may be necessary to ensure consistent, efficient service and to avoid overlapping service in single developments. These boundary adjustments require mutual agreement among the utilities involved.

7.2.2 Water and Sewer

Easton Utilities also manages the Town's water and wastewater systems. Water is drawn from deep freshwater aquifers via a network of wells, while sewer service is provided through a system first constructed in 1911.

The Town's original wastewater treatment plant was built in 1938 along the Choptank River. A major upgrade occurred in 1988 with the introduction of an Overland Flow Treatment system—then the fifth largest in the country. In 2007, Easton brought online a new enhanced nutrient removal (ENR) facility, with sufficient capacity to meet projected needs through 2051 (as detailed in the Municipal Growth and Water Resources Elements).

All new water and sewer extensions must align with the Talbot County Water and Sewer Plan and are funded entirely by the developer. Service is only extended to properties within Easton's corporate limits. Decisions to annex land should weigh the long-term financial, infrastructure, and planning implications of extending water and sewer services.

7.2.3 Natural Gas

Easton's Gas Department, acquired in 1923, is the only municipally owned gas utility in Maryland. The original coal-based system was replaced in 1966 with a natural gas supply via Eastern Shore Natural Gas Company. Gas is piped in from the Federalsburg area and distributed to over 4,500 customers through 100 miles of steel and plastic mains. The system delivers approximately 525 million cubic feet of gas annually within an 8.5-square-mile service area.

7.2.4 Internet and Broadband

Easton Velocity, a division of Easton Utilities, provides high-speed broadband, cable, and phone service. Its hybrid fiber-coaxial and expanding fiber-to-the-premises network offers advanced connectivity options, including commercial service packages of up to 10 gigabits per second.

Easton Velocity plays a central role in supporting digital equity, remote work, telehealth, education, and economic growth. As a publicly owned service, it offers competitive pricing, reliable local support, and infrastructure investment aligned with Easton’s long-term goals for connectivity and community development.

7.3 MEDICAL AND HOSPITAL FACILITIES

Hospital services in Easton are provided by the University of Maryland Shore Medical Center (UMSMC). As one of the Town’s most critical institutions, the hospital has a twofold impact: it provides essential healthcare services and serves as a major employer and economic engine. However, its physical presence within a residential neighborhood has also created longstanding land use challenges.

As the hospital has expanded over time, it has outgrown its original site and now occupies multiple properties within the Idlewild Avenue and Dutchman’s Lane corridor. This fragmentation has led to conflicts with nearby residents, including increased traffic, parking demand, and the encroachment of institutional uses into residential areas. While coordination with the Town has mitigated some impacts, the fundamental land constraints remain unresolved.

In response, the ****University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS)**** identified a new site for a regional medical facility near the Talbot County Community Center, just outside the current Town boundary and adjacent to the Easton Airport. Originally proposed in 2008, the project was delayed but has now received local and State approvals to move forward.

This long-anticipated facility represents a major investment in the health and wellbeing of Easton and the broader Mid-Shore region. Beyond patient care, it promises to attract additional medical offices, labs, rehabilitation centers, and support services—strengthening Easton’s role as a regional hub for healthcare.

Key planning considerations remain:

- Future of the current hospital site:
 - The existing facility and surrounding medical corridor are strong candidates for a future ****Small Area Plan****, which should guide redevelopment and potential land use changes.
- Relocation of support services:
 - The shift of medical offices and clinics toward the new hospital may leave Idlewild and Dutchman’s Lane with underutilized or outdated facilities.
- Housing for healthcare workers:
 - As noted in the Housing chapter, access to affordable housing is a pressing issue for Easton’s workforce—including those in the healthcare sector. Enabling more workers to live in Town can ease commuting pressures, support recruitment and retention, and improve emergency staffing capacity.
 - As the new regional hospital becomes reality, Easton must plan thoughtfully for the transition—not just for the facility itself, but for the neighborhoods, services, and workforce it affects.

7.4 SOLID WASTE FACILITIES

Solid waste collection in Easton is provided by the Town, which contracts with Talbot County for final disposal. Since 2011, waste has been hauled to the Mid-Shore Regional Landfill in Caroline County, replacing the former site on Barkers Landing Road. To offset disposal costs, Easton implemented a residential disposal fee in 1993 to cover landfill tipping charges.

Recycling services include both curbside collection for residents and drop-off containers ("igloos") located at the former landfill site and other convenient locations around Town. These services are essential to managing Easton’s waste stream and reducing landfill dependency.

7.5 SETTING THE STANDARD WITH PUBLIC BUILDINGS

Public buildings shape a community’s sense of identity and permanence. As noted by Ed McMahon of the Conservation Fund—who spoke in Easton during a past Comprehensive Plan Visioning session—governments should set the tone for quality development through

their own civic architecture. In **Better Models for Development in Virginia**, McMahon wrote:

“Public buildings and spaces create identity and a sense of place. They give communities something to remember and admire... Public buildings with civic stature, quality materials, and prominent settings project a sense of permanence and human scale that expresses the dignity and importance of public institutions.”

Historically, town halls, courthouses, libraries, and schools were among a community’s most attractive and prominent buildings. Over time, however, this standard has too often eroded, with newer public facilities resembling warehouses or being sited along strip corridors outside town centers.

Easton has largely resisted this trend. Most of its key public buildings remain downtown, including some notable examples of quality civic architecture. That said, the Town has come close to losing this pattern. In recent decades, Talbot County has considered bids for new administrative office sites outside the town center, and the U.S. Postal Service nearly relocated its facility before ultimately opting to renovate in place.

A major success story is the Easton Utilities Commission’s Customer Service Center, completed in 2000. This landmark project is a model of context-sensitive, high-quality design that fits seamlessly into the historic fabric of downtown. It exemplifies how civic buildings can reinforce community character and contribute to the vitality of Easton’s core.

[insert image]

Looking ahead, Easton may soon need to expand or replace its Town Office at 14 South Harrison Street. While the current building—a former firehouse and police station—is a strong example of adaptive reuse, it may no longer provide sufficient space for staff and operations. Should a new Town Office be required, the Town should follow the precedent set by the Easton Utilities building: locate it in the downtown core and ensure it reflects a high standard of civic design that instills community pride.

7.6 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Deliver High-Quality Community Facilities and Services. Continue to provide well-maintained, reliable public facilities and services to support health, safety, and quality of life for all who live, work, or visit Easton.

Objectives:

- ✓ Ensure that the cost of facilities and services is shared equitably among the Town, developers, and end users.
- ✓ Require developers to upgrade any deficient facilities serving annexed areas to Town standards, based on proportional impact.
- ✓ Mandate that all users contribute their fair share toward capital improvements through existing and future funding tools.
- ✓ Align the provision of services with the Town's adopted growth management policies.
- ✓ Deliver services and facilities equitably across all neighborhoods and businesses.
- ✓ Require all development to pay for necessary infrastructure extensions, using the Impact Fee Ordinance and any new mechanisms adopted.
- ✓ Promote orderly, staged growth by targeting utility extensions to priority areas and enabling cost recapture from future development.
- ✓ Expand residential access to recycling programs.
- ✓ Encourage the establishment of a general or specialized satellite college campus in Easton.

Goal 2: Coordinate Town Services with Other Agencies. Improve collaboration with county and regional agencies to ensure consistent and efficient delivery of services.

Objectives:

- ✓ Work with Talbot County to update the Master Water and Sewer Plan to reflect service-ready projects within Easton’s growth areas.
- ✓ Support Easton Utilities in coordinating electric service boundaries with Delmarva Power and Choptank Electric to avoid service overlap.
- ✓ Continue using a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to align Town projects with those of partner agencies.

Goal 3: Set a High Standard for Public Buildings. Ensure public facilities reflect the civic identity and long-term investment of the community.

Objectives:

- ✓ Construct buildings using high-quality materials and timeless architectural design.
- ✓ Design public facilities with adequate space and capacity for future expansion.
- ✓ Prioritize siting public buildings in or near downtown Easton, except for small neighborhood-specific facilities.
- ✓ Advocate for Talbot County to also locate its public facilities near the Town Center.
- ✓ Assess the need for a new or expanded Town Office to meet growing operational needs.

8 TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a primary driver of land use—and Easton is no exception. The earliest settlements in Talbot County were located near navigable waters out of necessity. Easton’s industrial buildings, now seemingly out of place, were originally located along a rail line that served the area starting in the mid-1800s. More recently, the Town’s expansion to the east has been shaped by proximity to U.S. Route 50, a major regional highway.

The link between transportation and development is deeply rooted in human history, with communities forming along coasts, rivers, and trade routes. In the modern era, particularly following World War II, American transportation planning has focused overwhelmingly on accommodating private automobiles. This auto-centric approach has brought convenience but also a host of unintended consequences—environmental degradation, social inequities, and inefficient land use patterns.

Easton recognizes the need to rebalance its transportation system by supporting a multimodal network that includes walking, bicycling, transit, air travel, and automobiles. A diverse and well-integrated transportation system allows people of all ages, abilities, and incomes to travel safely and efficiently. It also supports economic development, environmental sustainability, and a high quality of life.

8.1 PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER

The Transportation Chapter aims to:

- Reinforce the Town Council’s strategic commitments to mobility, access, and connectivity.
- Update goals, policies, and strategies to support multimodal improvements across Easton and its growth area.
- Advance a ****Complete Networks**** approach—one that tracks and improves transportation options across all modes, with an emphasis on safety, connectivity, and equity.

8.2 ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The goals and policies in this chapter are organized into five key areas:

- Integration of Land Use and Transportation Planning
- Complete Networks
- Non-Motorized Transportation
- Single-Occupancy Vehicles
- Transportation Planning Requirements

These areas are guided by six core themes that emphasize the interdependence of transportation, land use, the environment, and social equity. These themes build upon and reinforce the broader goals of this Comprehensive Plan:

- Limit sprawl by coordinating land use and transportation planning.
- Provide safe, sustainable, and well-connected mobility options for all users.
- Expand infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists, and shared modes of transportation.
- Reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles.
- Maintain and improve roads, trails, and other key infrastructure.
- Prioritize equity in transportation planning and project implementation.

These themes and their related policy areas will be explored in greater depth in the following sections.

8.3 INTEGRATION OF LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

As the primary population, employment, and service center in Talbot County, Easton serves not only its 18,000 residents but also thousands of county and regional residents who rely on the Town for work, shopping, and daily activities. This results in a transportation network that must accommodate significant regional demand, much of it originating outside the Town's corporate limits.

The affordability of housing in surrounding areas, combined with personal preference and regional employment dynamics, means that many people choose to live outside of Easton but commute in. According to 2020 U.S. Census data, only about 3,200 of the Town's 11,860 workers lived in Easton. More than 8,600 commuted in from elsewhere. At the same time, over 2,400 Easton residents commuted out of town for work. The 2022 update showed that out of 12,232 workers in Easton, 9,190 were inbound commuters and 2,322 were outbound. In total, more than 11,000 people commute into or out of Easton each workday,

underscoring the Town’s regional significance and the burden on its transportation infrastructure.

This level of regional traffic presents clear challenges. Easton’s planning efforts must manage congestion while also promoting land use patterns that support infill development, maintain a compact urban form, and encourage transportation alternatives to the private automobile.

Higher residential densities, such as those already found in parts of Easton, create opportunities for more efficient transportation options—like public transit, walking, and bicycling. These modes become more cost-effective and feasible as density increases. For this reason, Easton must continue to align its land use and transportation policies to:

- Support compact, higher-density development in and near employment and service centers.
- Encourage infill and redevelopment in walkable, connected neighborhoods.
- Incentivize development patterns that reduce reliance on car travel.

A more integrated approach to land use and transportation planning will help Easton accommodate regional demand while preserving the Town’s form, character, and quality of life.

8.4 COMPLETE NETWORKS

Easton’s transportation planning strategy prioritizes a Complete Networks



approach—addressing the needs of all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and transit riders—rather than focusing solely on automobiles. This approach builds on the principles of the Complete Streets movement but expands them with annual progress tracking, system-wide assessments, and a commitment to equity and accessibility across modes.

While transit options in Talbot County remain limited, Easton must plan for future multimodal infrastructure, including the potential expansion of transit services as the Town grows. Complete Networks planning also supports Easton’s

goals for compact, walkable neighborhoods and reduces the demand for continuous road expansion by offering viable alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle (SOV).

The Town aims to produce an annual inventory and performance assessment for each modal system—pedestrian, bicycle, vehicle, and transit—while also reporting on system-wide progress and needs. These assessments help guide investment priorities and align infrastructure improvements with development goals.

8.4.1 Non-Motorized Transportation

A key component of Easton’s Complete Networks strategy is the continued development of safe, convenient infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists. This includes constructing new sidewalks, crosswalks, and bikeways, as well as integrating these elements into all new public and private street projects.

The Easton Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (see Appendix) serves as the blueprint for this effort. It identifies:

- A 266-mile Primary Pedestrian Network and 343 sidewalk and intersection projects prioritized by need and feasibility.
- A 160-mile Primary Bicycle Network and 185 bikeway projects prioritized similarly.

These plans are the result of robust community input and extensive analysis, and are incorporated by reference into this Comprehensive Plan. Their implementation is essential to enhancing non-automotive mobility in Town and promoting active transportation options.

8.4.2 Transit and Single-Occupancy Vehicles

The Town continues to improve conditions for walking, biking, and transit use while encouraging fewer vehicle trips, particularly those made by single occupants. This does not imply eliminating private vehicles—Easton will continue to support a well-functioning road network—but recognizes that auto-centric development is not sustainable for the long term.

Census data shows Easton’s transportation network is heavily impacted by regional inflows and outflows of workers, shoppers, and service users. In this context, the construction of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure serves not only Easton residents but the broader regional community by reducing congestion and expanding travel choices.

Although private vehicles will remain the dominant mode for most regional users over the next two decades, technological shifts—such as car- and ride-sharing, remote work, and autonomous vehicles—are reshaping the transportation landscape. Easton will continue to monitor and adapt to these changes while maintaining a strong emphasis on walkable, connected, and multimodal planning.

Recognizing that congestion during peak periods is unavoidable in certain corridors, Easton is no longer planning to “build its way out” through continuous widening of roads and intersections. Instead, the Town prioritizes improvements that enhance transportation options, increase efficiency, and create safe, comfortable streets for all users.

8.4.3 Maintaining and Improving Infrastructure

Easton integrates transportation planning with infrastructure investment to maximize cost-efficiency. When utilities such as water, sewer, or stormwater systems require upgrades, the Town seeks to coordinate these projects with transportation improvements—such as adding bikeways or sidewalks identified in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.

For example:

- Asphalt resurfacing triggers sidewalk and curb ramp upgrades under the ****Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)****.
- Road repaving can be paired with re-striping to add bike lanes.
- Utility corridor improvements may coincide with placemaking initiatives if funding is aligned.

In many cases, improvements can be funded through non-transportation sources (e.g., utility capital budgets), allowing the Town to expand multimodal infrastructure without drawing exclusively on transportation funds.

Private development also plays a role. All new development and redevelopment projects are required to contribute to the cost and construction of infrastructure needed to support growth. These projects are reviewed for compliance with local and state transportation standards and must address connectivity, safety, and overall network performance.

8.5 TRANSPORTATION IMPACT ANALYSIS (TIA)

Under the Town’s Development Guidelines and Improvement Standards, a Transportation Impact Analysis (TIA) is required for any development project expected to generate significant new p.m. peak hour vehicle trips, or for projects located near signalized intersections where traffic congestion or public safety concerns already exist.

The TIA evaluates the likely impacts of a proposed development on the surrounding transportation network, identifies deficiencies, and recommends mitigation strategies if needed. A project subject to TIA requirements **will not receive a Transportation Concurrency Certificate** until the TIA has been completed, reviewed, and accepted by the Town. Off-site mitigation measures—where necessary—must comply with relevant state regulations, including the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

8.6 MULTIMODAL STREET STANDARDS

To support the Town’s Complete Networks goals, all new development abutting substandard public streets is required to upgrade adjacent street segments to current Easton multimodal street standards.

Requirements vary by street type:

- Residential streets in new subdivisions must include concrete curbs, gutters, and sidewalks, unless a specific exemption is granted.
- Arterial streets adjacent to new development must be improved with curbs, gutters, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes, at a minimum.

These standards ensure that as Easton grows, its transportation infrastructure supports safe, accessible, and multimodal travel options for all users.

8.7 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The Town of Easton is committed to ensuring equitable access to transportation facilities and services for all residents, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, income, or ability. This commitment is formalized through the Title VI Annual Update Accomplishment Report, prepared by the Department of Public Works and submitted to the Mayor each year. The report outlines actions taken to comply with the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (P.L. 100.259).

The Town's Title VI policy affirms that no person shall be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. The report includes a policy statement reaffirming the Town's dedication to non-discrimination and its responsibility to uphold these standards across all departments, programs, and projects.

Environmental justice principles are embedded into the Town's multimodal transportation planning. In particular:

- The Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan weighted social equity factors—including proximity to low-income housing, access to social services, and connectivity to transit—when evaluating and prioritizing projects.
- Transit planning emphasizes improved service for historically underserved and transportation-disadvantaged populations.

Through these practices, Easton ensures that investments in infrastructure contribute to more equitable mobility, safety, and access for all residents.

8.8 ROAD SYSTEM

U.S. Route 50 has been the single most influential force shaping Easton's growth and development patterns over the past several decades—particularly commercial growth. The opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1952 gave millions of Western Shore residents direct access to the Eastern Shore, driving a surge in beach traffic. Entrepreneurs responded by developing fast-food restaurants, gas stations, and other roadside services along Route 50 to attract these pass-through travelers.

Route 50 also fundamentally altered development patterns in Easton. What began as growth along a bypass corridor eventually drew more commercial uses toward it, with residential development filling in between the highway and the historic core. Most of this post-1950s growth was auto-oriented and single-use in nature, diverging from traditional neighborhood design.

A fiscal analysis by Urban3 (see Figure ___) highlights key differences between pre- and post-1952 development. First, relatively little land was developed before the Bay Bridge opened. Second, land developed prior to 1952 consistently generates significantly higher fiscal value per acre than post-bridge development. Together, these trends reinforce the link

between infrastructure and land use patterns, and the higher fiscal return of compact, traditional development over suburban sprawl.

While Route 50 has benefited many businesses, its impacts are mixed. Excessive access points and the highway's attempt to function both as a high-speed regional corridor and as a local service road have created serious traffic congestion, safety concerns, and neighborhood disruption.

8.8.1 Route 50: Fixes and Futures

Easton's residents overwhelmingly oppose rerouting Route 50 onto the Easton Parkway—a position consistently confirmed in every Comprehensive Plan survey since the 1990s. The Parkway was built in the 1960s to serve west Talbot residents by providing north-south mobility around Easton, not through it. Converting it into a new Route 50 would undermine this function, add signalized intersections, and risk significant environmental impacts—particularly near MD 33 and MD 333. The Parkway cannot and should not serve as a high-capacity bypass.

Instead, the most favored long-term solution remains a new, limited-access bypass located well east of Easton—similar in scope to the Salisbury Bypass. This would alleviate congestion within Town, reduce through-traffic delays, and provide an opportunity to repurpose the existing Route 50 corridor as a local “Business 50.” That transformation would allow for street narrowing, improved safety, and redevelopment of the corridor into a more attractive, multi-modal gateway.

Until such a bypass becomes feasible, the Town will continue to work with the State Highway Administration (SHA) to improve the existing Route 50 corridor through landscaping, intersection upgrades, and access management.

8.8.2 East–West Access

A long-standing problem in Easton is the lack of effective east–west connectivity. The Parkway helps bypass downtown for north–south traffic, but offers little help to those moving across Town between neighborhoods on either side of Route 50. As a result, east–west travel often funnels through residential streets, creating congestion, cut-through traffic, and neighborhood complaints.

Some improvements have been made—such as traffic signal synchronization along Route 50—but larger solutions are needed. One promising idea is to relocate MD 309 so it

connects with Route 50 at the point where the former railroad crosses. From there, it could run along the rail corridor before rejoining its existing alignment. This would not only improve east–west connectivity but also eliminate the problematic intersection near the airport, where a grade-separated interchange would conflict with flight paths. The concept, originally proposed by SHA, has support from local and regional officials and should be advanced.

8.8.3 Planning and Coordination

Planning for future road improvements is complex and expensive—especially when multiple jurisdictions are involved. Within Easton’s limits, roads are managed by the Town, Talbot County, and the State of Maryland, each with different objectives. For example, the State’s priority for Route 50 is efficient regional travel, while Easton and the County prioritize local mobility and safety. Effective intergovernmental coordination is essential to reconcile these priorities and deliver meaningful improvements.

It’s also important to recognize that Route 50 is now a major freight corridor. A 2022 State of Maryland report on the Rural Opportunities to Use Traffic Technology Enhancements (ROUTE) initiative noted that Route 50 carries over 10,000 trucks per day and supports \$14 billion in annual commodity flow. Freight delays exceed 107,000 hours annually, costing roughly \$51 million in lost time and fuel. The corridor is critical for agriculture, tourism, supply chains, and national security assets such as Wallops Island.

Going forward, Easton must continue advocating for road improvements that balance local mobility, regional freight needs, and safety—while staying focused on long-term goals to reduce auto dependency and enhance quality of life through better multimodal transportation options.

8.9 COMPLETE STREETS

Easton is in the process of developing a Complete Streets framework to ensure the design and operation of streets safely accommodates all users—pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, motorists—regardless of age or ability. This approach reflects a shift away from traditional car-centric design toward one that balances the needs of all travel modes and emphasizes safety, accessibility, and community character.

Complete Streets prioritize local needs and neighborhood scale, rather than solely focusing on the rapid movement of through-traffic. Features may include sidewalks, bike lanes, bus stops, safe pedestrian crossings, median islands, curb extensions, traffic calming measures, and green stormwater infrastructure. When designed well, Complete Streets promote safer travel, improved mobility, public health, and placemaking—all critical to Easton’s long-term livability.

8.9.1 Complete Streets Planning in Easton

In January 2025, the Town of Easton initiated its formal Complete Streets planning process by contracting with the transportation engineering firm Wallace Montgomery (WM). This first phase of work lays the foundation for a long-term shift in how Easton designs, prioritizes, and evaluates street infrastructure. Key tasks in the scope of work include:

8.9.2 Key Deliverables and Tasks

- Commitment Letter:
 - WM will assist the Town in preparing a formal commitment letter that sets a target date for eliminating serious injuries and fatalities on Town streets. This will articulate the Town’s intent to adopt data-driven safety targets and can be used to support grant applications and communications with the public.
- Default Modal Hierarchy:
 - A core element of the plan is establishing a default modal hierarchy—guidance on which travel modes should be prioritized in different street contexts. This will help align transportation design, maintenance, and operations with community values and planning goals.
- Design Principles and Guidance:
 - Through facilitated stakeholder engagement, WM will develop guiding principles for street design that reflect the Town’s goals for performance, equity, sustainability, and placemaking. These principles will anchor future transportation decisions and help ensure consistency across projects.
- Equity Analysis Tool:
 - WM will deliver a GIS-based tool to identify underserved communities most dependent on safe multimodal options. This tool, based on demographic and socioeconomic data, will inform project prioritization and ensure equitable

transportation investments. The tool builds on similar award-winning work WM conducted for the City of Baltimore.

- Project Prioritization Methodology:
 - WM will design a transparent system for evaluating and ranking future transportation projects based on criteria including safety impact, equity, cost, feasibility, and staff capacity.

8.9.3 Street Typologies and Cross-Sections

WM will define a set of standard street types for Easton, reflecting their context, purpose, and character. Examples may include downtown mixed-use streets, multimodal corridors, residential streets, and industrial arterials. Each street type will include:

- Typical cross-section drawings showing recommended allocations for travel lanes, bike lanes, sidewalks, medians, stormwater features, and curbside space.
 - Discussion of how the modal hierarchy influences right-of-way tradeoffs for each street type.
 - Deliverable: A complete chapter of street typologies and cross-section illustrations to be included in the final Complete Streets Report.
- Design Specifications and Interim Strategies
 - Using state and national best practices (FHWA, NACTO, ITE, and Maryland guidance), WM will develop a suite of design specifications for:
 - Travel lane widths and configurations
 - Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure
 - Green stormwater management
 - Roadway crossings and intersections
 - Corner radii and curb management

The guidelines will include a section on interim or quick-build strategies—low-cost pilot projects or short-term installations that can quickly improve safety and mobility while informing future investment.

Special attention will also be given to managing curbside space in Easton’s downtown core. As demand for curb space grows—from parking, loading, micromobility, and transit—standards for how that space is allocated and designed will be developed.

8.9.4 Performance Tracking and Policy Alignment

WM will help establish performance measures tied to community goals such as safety, mobility, livability, economic development, accessibility, and equity. These metrics will be used to track implementation progress and will be aligned with the Town's existing small area plans and Comprehensive Plan objectives.

****Note:**** The final product of this planning effort will be a transformative shift in Easton's approach to transportation. It will guide coordination with state agencies, establish clear design expectations for developers, and serve as a policy roadmap for creating a safer, more efficient, and more equitable local street system.

Insert Gantt chart of WM project phases here.

8.10 AIRPORT

Easton is uniquely served by a general aviation airport within its town limits. Easton Airport (Newnam Field – ESN), located just west of MD Route 662 and south of Airport Road, is owned and operated by Talbot County. The facility is managed by an Airport Manager under the direction of the County Council, with input from a five-member Airport Advisory Board.

Designated in the FAA's National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), Easton Airport is eligible for federal funding. As a general aviation facility, it supports a range of private, corporate, and public service aviation needs. It features two intersecting paved runways:

- Runway 04/22: 5,500 feet long
- Runway 15/33: 4,000 feet long

Both have full parallel taxiways and instrument approaches. An FAA contract air traffic control tower operates on-site.

The airport supports approximately 220 based aircraft, including single- and multi-engine planes, jets, helicopters, and gliders. Four Fixed Base Operators (FBOs)—Easton Jet Service, Maryland Air, NexGen Flight Solutions, and Trident Aviation—offer a wide array of services, including:

- Aircraft fueling (100LL and Jet A)
- Aircraft parking (tie-downs, T-hangars)
- Air charter services

- Rental cars, hangar space, and catering
- Flight planning tools, weather centers, and a public café
- Meeting space and fitness amenities

Additional aviation-related businesses offer aircraft repair, sales, and unique experiences such as biplane rides through Aloft Biplane Rides. Flight instruction and rentals are provided by Trident Aviation and Easton Aviation.

The airport also plays a key public safety role. The Maryland State Police base a medevac helicopter at the site for emergency medical transport, search and rescue, and law enforcement missions. Talbot County EMS operates five Advanced Life Support units from the airport, improving response times and access to critical care.

8.10.1 Operational Statistics and Land Use Compatibility

Easton Airport (ESN) ranks among the top three busiest general aviation airports in Maryland, reflecting its critical role in the region’s transportation and economic systems. According to the Maryland Aviation Administration and recent reports, ESN supports a high volume of aircraft activity and contributes significantly to the local economy.

Based Aircraft (2023)

- Single-engine aircraft: 143
- Multi-engine aircraft: 24
- Corporate jets: 20
- Helicopters: 3
- Total: 190 based aircraft

Annual Aircraft Operations (2023)

- Local general aviation: 44%
- Transient general aviation: 31%
- Military: 20%
- Air taxi: 5%
- Total operations: 73,543 annually

8.10.2 Economic Impact

A 2023 statewide study of airport economic impacts found that Easton Airport generated:

- 542 total jobs
- \$36.9 million in personal income
- \$11.3 million in state and local tax revenue
- \$91.4 million in total business revenue

These numbers demonstrate that the airport is not only a transportation asset but a major economic driver for Talbot County and the broader Mid-Shore region.

8.10.3 Land Use Compatibility and Community Impacts

As the airport has grown in operations and prominence, conflicts with adjacent residential neighborhoods have also increased—most notably related to noise, traffic, and the perception of encroachment. In response, Talbot County has enacted zoning measures and acquired ****avigation easements**** on surrounding properties to limit incompatible uses and protect aviation operations. The County plans to continue securing such easements to preserve the airport's long-term functionality.

On the Town side, while the land immediately surrounding the airport is zoned for industrial uses—which is generally compatible with aviation—there are currently no special airport-related zoning protections in place. The Town may consider revising its zoning ordinance in the future to incorporate airport overlay or compatibility districts to better manage potential land use conflicts, particularly in areas close to approach and departure paths.

Within Easton's jurisdiction, the primary concern is not safety but nuisance—especially in the North Easton neighborhoods and adjacent unincorporated County lands. Aircraft noise, fumes, and vibrations are ongoing quality-of-life issues for nearby residents. A balanced approach is needed: residents should acknowledge the presence of a long-standing regional airport, while the airport should seek to channel expansion and high-impact operations toward non-residential, industrial, and undeveloped land to mitigate disturbances.

8.10.4 Mission and Outlook

The airport's mission emphasizes service, safety, and community responsibility:

Talbot County's Easton Airport is and will remain the Mid-Shore's premier non-commercial general aviation airport, providing outstanding service and support for private, corporate, and government tenants, transient aircraft users, and the Talbot County community at large. It will be a good neighbor by

being sensitive to environmental concerns and will support education, emergency services, medical evacuation, and law enforcement activities. The airport will prioritize safety and security while aligning with the goals of the County's Comprehensive Plan.

The Town of Easton supports the continued operation and thoughtful growth of Easton Airport and recognizes its importance for economic development, public safety, and regional mobility. However, the Town also emphasizes the importance of equitable land use planning to minimize impacts on residential communities and ensure long-term compatibility between aviation operations and surrounding neighborhoods.

8.11 PORT

Port facilities for the Town of Easton are located at Easton Point, a triangular peninsula bordered on two sides by the Tred Avon River. The area commonly referred to as Easton Point extends inland to the Easton Parkway, although much of the land remains outside the corporate limits of the Town. The only parcels within Town boundaries include the former Public Works yard (now repurposed as a Waterfront Park), the Talbot County Public Works and Emergency Management offices, the Londonderry Retirement Community, and a few small intervening parcels.

The current mix of land uses at Easton Point is varied. At the tip of the peninsula is a small marina, a restaurant, and a heavily used public boat ramp. There are also several industrial users that rely on river access for the delivery of bulk materials. Along the corridor closer to the Parkway are the County's Public Works facility (now in the process of relocating) and the Londonderry senior living complex. Other intervening parcels include low-density residential properties and aging infrastructure, including the old Town Public Works yard.

The long-term future of Easton Point remains uncertain. The area has been widely recognized for its redevelopment potential, given its waterfront access and proximity to downtown. Many stakeholders envision a shift away from heavy industrial use toward a more mixed-use, recreational, and residential vision. This could include expanded marina facilities, improved public waterfront access, parks and open space, and higher-density residential and commercial development.

This vision was further articulated in the Easton Point/Port Street Small Area Plan, referenced in the Implementation Chapter. That plan sets forth a framework for potential annexation, infrastructure improvements, and land use changes, should redevelopment opportunities materialize in the future.

8.12 RAIL

Rail service to Easton and the broader Talbot County area has been discontinued for many years. Most of the former rail rights-of-way have either been retained by the Maryland State Rail Administration or reverted to private ownership. As a result, the restoration of freight or passenger rail service is not anticipated during this planning period.

8.13 PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE PLAN

Too often, transportation planning focuses narrowly on roadways, with minimal attention to non-automobile modes. Walking—our most basic form of transportation—is frequently overlooked, along with the infrastructure that supports it. Easton is actively working to change that. As part of the Town’s broader ****Complete Streets initiative****, pedestrian and bicycle networks are now a central focus of infrastructure planning and investment.

In Easton’s older neighborhoods, sidewalks have long been a defining feature. In recent years, many of these areas have benefited from targeted sidewalk upgrades and streetscape enhancements. Since the early 1980s, the Planning and Zoning Commission has required sidewalks in all new subdivisions. However, some neighborhoods developed in the 1950s through 1970s lack this infrastructure entirely, forcing pedestrians to share roadways with vehicles—a significant safety concern. These areas are now priorities for retroactive sidewalk installation.

8.13.1 Bicycle Infrastructure

Bicycle travel is also receiving greater attention in Easton’s transportation framework. Bicycling offers a low-cost, sustainable transportation option and is increasingly eligible for federal and state infrastructure funding. Projects such as bike lanes and multi-use trails are particularly well-suited to Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) grants and Maryland’s transportation funding programs, which now require comprehensive plans to address pedestrian and bicycle mobility.

As part of this Plan update, the Town collaborated with Talbot Thrive to revise the Easton Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, included in full in the Appendix. This updated plan outlines a comprehensive, long-term approach to building out Easton’s non-motorized transportation network.

Key features include:

- A Primary Pedestrian Network of over 260 miles, including 343 prioritized sidewalk and intersection projects.
- A Primary Bicycle Network of 160 miles, with 185 individual bikeway improvement projects.

Community input played a critical role in identifying gaps, prioritizing projects, and shaping this vision. Highlights include improved intersection safety, new crosswalks, sidewalk extensions, and enhanced bicycle facilities along key corridors.

> *Insert Proposed Bicycle Routes Map Here*

> *Insert Proposed Pedestrian System Map Here*

8.14 PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The Town of Easton currently does not operate its own public transportation system, and no municipal transit services are expected to be introduced during the current planning horizon. However, residents and workers do have access to Delmarva Community Transit (DCT), a regional transit service operated by Delmarva Community Services, to which the Town contributes annually.

DCT provides two fixed routes through Easton—Route C and Route D—operating from 7:15 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. A St. Michaels Shuttle also runs from 6:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Fiscal Year 2023 ridership was:

- Route C: 8,337 riders
- Route D: 5,868 riders
- St. Michaels Shuttle: 6,030 riders

While ridership has declined since 2010 (particularly on Route C), public transit remains a vital service for many residents, including seniors, workers, and individuals without access to a car.

Looking ahead, the Town remains open to exploring expanded transit options, including potential service increases from DCT or other providers. Easton should also begin discussions with State transportation agencies regarding travel demand management strategies, such as official Park-and-Ride facilities. Currently, some residents are informally using business parking lots for commuter parking—an indicator of unmet demand that may justify the creation of designated facilities.

8.15 TRANSPORTATION MAP AND PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

The Transportation Map illustrates key proposed enhancements to Easton’s multimodal transportation network. These improvements, summarized below, are conceptual at this stage—exact designs, funding mechanisms, and construction timelines are largely undefined. Most projects are expected to be completed in conjunction with adjacent property development or funded through the Town’s impact fees or a combination of Town, County, or State resources. These proposals are also subject to revision as the Complete Streets Study is finalized.

1. Grade-Separated Crossing of Route 50

One of Easton’s highest priorities is addressing local traffic delays caused by congestion on US Route 50. A grade-separated crossing would significantly improve east-west connectivity. Several options exist, ranging from complex realignments (such as shifting the northern Route 50/322 intersection to connect with MD 309) to more modest overpasses or underpasses at Chapel Road, Goldsborough Street, Dover Street, or Dutchman’s Lane.

2. East Side Residential Collector Grid

Replacing a single collector route previously proposed in the 2004 Plan, the Town now supports a grid network of local streets on the eastern side of Easton. This approach—mirroring the traditional street grid of the historic town center—supports connectivity and disperses traffic flow. The Complete Streets Study will further evaluate this concept.

3. June Way Extension

This project would extend June Way from Waylands Subdivision south to connect with Fisher Range Road, eventually forming part of the East Side Collector Grid mentioned above.

4. Clifton Road Improvements

Clifton Road would be extended to connect Dover Road and Chesapeake Avenue, offering residents of North, Middle, and South Clifton an alternative route that avoids Route 50.

5. East Side Route 50 Service Road

A new service road behind businesses along the east side of Route 50 (between Matthewstown and Chapel Roads) would allow internal circulation without repeated entries onto Route 50, relieving traffic congestion and improving safety.

6. Chapel Road/Route 50 Intersection Improvements

This busy intersection will require capacity enhancements to accommodate future development, including Easton Commons and surrounding parcels. Recent upgrades have included signal rephasing; further improvements are expected based on evolving traffic conditions.

7. Norris Taylor Drive

This new signalized access road, developed with the Royal Farms and Burger King projects, improves circulation on the west side and enhances access to John F. Ford Park. It may support a future West Side Service Road extending Calvert Street north to Chapel Road through the RTC property.

8. East-West Connector

This long-standing proposal envisions connecting Marlboro Avenue with Creamery Lane, Aurora Park Drive, Magnolia Street, and eventually Route 50 via the RTC property. Portions of the route could continue across Route 50 to Elliott Road and Mulberry Drive. Phased implementation is expected, using impact fees and potentially beginning with pedestrian or bicycle improvements before full street construction.

9. Route 50 Intersection Upgrades (Goldsborough and Dover Streets)

These intersections continue to rank among the worst in Easton in terms of congestion and delay. Improvements are essential even if the East-West Connector is completed. Dedicated turn lanes and expanded capacity should be explored, and additional right-of-way acquisition may be necessary.

10. “Five Corners” Intersection

This unusual convergence of five roads (Washington, Harrison, Idlewild, Peachblossom) near Idlewild Park is a persistent congestion point. A roundabout is under consideration, along with a new smart signal system designed to improve flow and reduce delays in the near term.

11. Tristan Drive to Oxford Road Connector

This proposed route would connect Tristan Drive with MD Route 33 (Oxford Road), creating a new east-west corridor and reducing pressure on the existing Parkway/Oxford Road intersection. Coordination with Talbot County is needed, especially in light of the County’s recent acquisition of the adjacent Poplar Hill Farm property.

12–15. Rails-to-Trails System Extensions

Significant trail system expansions are proposed in all directions:

- 12. Northward, across Route 50, following the historic railbed.
- 13. Southward, across Easton Parkway to link with the Cooke’s Hope trail system.
- 14. East-west, along Chesapeake Avenue and the former Claiborne rail line, with a new bridge over the Tred Avon River funded by Easton Village developers.

Segments of these trail extensions have already been completed in recent years, and the Town intends to continue these enhancements as opportunities arise.

(16) Beechwood Drive Extension

This proposed extension involves the segment of Beechwood Drive located adjacent to the Lakelands project. It would connect the current dead end to Dutchman’s Lane, just east of Easton Club East. Since Easton now has two separate roads named Beechwood Drive, renaming one of them is necessary to avoid confusion, especially as future improvements proceed. Where feasible, this extension should include a multi-use trail to enhance non-motorized mobility.

(17) Hemlock Lane Extension

Hemlock Lane currently terminates within The Woods at Stoney Ridge subdivision. This proposal would extend the roadway eastward to connect with the proposed Beechwood Drive Extension, forming part of the broader East Side Residential Collector Grid. This grid

system, which prioritizes multiple interconnected local streets rather than single large collectors, is intended to improve east side circulation while discouraging excessive cut-through traffic.

(18) Chesapeake Avenue Corridor

A public right-of-way for Chesapeake Avenue already exists and offers a significant opportunity to provide east-west access across a largely undeveloped area between Dutchman's Lane and Chilcutt Road. In the short term, construction of a pedestrian/bike trail along this corridor would benefit nearby neighborhoods. As development occurs, additional right-of-way acquisition should allow for a co-located roadway that could ultimately intersect Route 50 north of Idlewild Avenue. Idlewild could then serve as the vehicular connection, while Chesapeake Avenue would support a grade-separated pedestrian and bicycle crossing.

(19) Bay Street to Marlboro Avenue Connector

This proposal would formalize an existing informal connection currently used by drivers via a network of parking lots and private drives. The connector would provide improved access to Talbot County government offices located in the Bay Street Condominiums. While not a major traffic route, this connector would improve circulation and reduce confusion for local traffic and visitors.

(20) Industrial Park Road Extension

Industrial Park Road currently serves the Clifton Industrial Park, annexed into Easton in 2007. This extension would push the road southward to meet the proposed Chesapeake Avenue alignment. Once built, it would create a valuable north-south connection for residents of Stoney Ridge, Easton Club East, and future neighborhoods, offering an alternate path to Dover Road via a signalized intersection at Teal Drive.

(21) Idlewild Avenue Extension

Idlewild Avenue currently terminates at US Route 50. This proposed extension would continue Idlewild across Route 50, ideally via a grade-separated crossing, to meet the proposed Chesapeake Avenue corridor. Such a connection would relieve pressure on nearby intersections at Dutchman's Lane and Dover Road, improve east-west connectivity for

vehicles, and provide opportunities to separate pedestrian and bicycle movements from highway traffic.

8.16 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal: Provide a Functional and Efficient Road Network

Objectives

- ✓ Work with State and County officials to expedite the relocation of MD 309.
- ✓ Maximize the capacity, safety, and efficiency of the existing street and highway system.
- ✓ Improve access to, and movement within, the Central Business District.
- ✓ Improve the Route 50 circulation system, focusing on separating through and local traffic.
- ✓ Consolidate driveway access points on Route 50 and develop an intersection control plan to reduce left turns.
- ✓ Build a connected network of local roadways to support existing communities and planned development, while reducing local reliance on Route 50.
- ✓ Develop a Small Area Design/Transportation Plan to evaluate optimal street and trail networks on Easton's east side and Growth Area.
- ✓ Discourage strip development and promote clustering of development at designated nodes along Route 50.
- ✓ Improve east-west access throughout the Town, including at Goldsborough and Dover intersections.
- ✓ Require gridded street systems in new development with provisions for pedestrians and bicycles.

- ✓ Where feasible, retrofit existing subdivisions to create new road connections and improve connectivity.
- ✓ Work to reduce the growth of commercial access points on Route 50.
- ✓ Coordinate closely with SHA on improvements to all streets that intersect Route 50.
- ✓ Improve the appearance and function of Route 50 frontage areas; prioritize solutions that enhance the existing corridor rather than shifting traffic to Easton Parkway.
- ✓ Support long-term efforts to construct a Route 50 bypass east of Town, paired with converting the existing Route 50 to a multimodal boulevard.
- ✓ Enhance public transportation options and services.
- ✓ Evaluate feasibility and location of a formal park-and-ride lot in Easton.

Goal: Expand the Town's Trail System and Support Active Transportation

Objectives

- ✓ Collaborate with MDOT to pursue funding and design for a grade-separated pedestrian and bicycle crossing of Route 50 at Chesapeake Avenue.
- ✓ Implement the goals and recommendations of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.
- ✓ Coordinate trail improvements and connectivity with Talbot County and regional partners.
- ✓ Include safe and effective crosswalks as part of all major intersection improvements on Route 50 and Easton Parkway.

Goal: Manage Airport Growth While Minimizing Community Impacts

Objectives

- ✓ Guide land use near the airport to avoid incompatible development that could restrict future airport operations.
- ✓ Coordinate with Easton Airport officials to review and refine policies aimed at mitigating noise and other impacts on adjacent neighborhoods.

Goal: Link Land Use and Transportation to Support Smarter Growth

Objectives

- ✓ Use this Comprehensive Plan, Small Area Plans, and mixed-use districts to incentivize infill and prioritize multimodal transportation.
- ✓ Promote compact land use patterns and higher-density development near transit corridors.
- ✓ Acknowledge that congestion may occur in denser areas, but prioritize safety, connectivity, and multimodal access over capacity expansion.
- ✓ Develop a strategic transit plan linking key destinations such as employment centers, schools, parks, and shopping.
- ✓ Encourage active transportation over driving to improve health and reduce environmental impacts.
- ✓ Support transit-oriented development (TOD) along primary transit routes by:
 - ✓ Identifying zoning, densities, and land use patterns;
 - ✓ Requiring design review for all new development;
 - ✓ Promoting mixed-use development and discouraging auto-oriented uses;
 - ✓ Reducing or waiving on-site parking requirements and encouraging shared parking;
 - ✓ Requiring bicycle parking for new development.

- ✓ Coordinate TOD efforts with transit providers to maintain or enhance service levels.
- ✓ Collaborate with Talbot County on unified multimodal infrastructure standards for the Easton Growth Area.

Goal: Provide Safe, Well-Connected, and Sustainable Transportation Options

Objectives

- ✓ Fill missing gaps in the multimodal transportation network for all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, freight, and private vehicles.
- ✓ Design transportation improvements that prioritize safety for vulnerable users.
- ✓ Ensure mobility options for people with special transportation needs, including children, seniors, low-income populations, and persons with disabilities.

Goal: Increase Infrastructure for Non-SOV Travel

Objectives

- ✓ Integrate Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan recommendations into public street improvements where feasible.
- ✓ Require all new development to build sidewalks along public streets per Town standards, with separation from traffic where possible.
- ✓ Require bike lanes on arterial streets identified in the Master Plan, constructed with permeable materials where feasible.
- ✓ Establish an administrative waiver process for cases where required improvements would serve no clear public purpose.
- ✓ Prioritize Safe Routes to School through coordination with Talbot County Public Schools.

- ✓ Provide incentives for private development to construct sidewalk and bikeway infrastructure.
- ✓ Use Transportation Demand Management (TDM) and Transportation System Management (TSM) strategies to improve efficiency and safety.
 - TDM Actions:
 - Educate the public about walking and biking options.
 - Implement compact, transit-supportive development strategies.
 - Track and report progress toward shifting mode share away from SOVs.
 - Require Commute Trip Reduction programs for large developments.
 - Support carpooling and ridesharing initiatives.
 - Reform parking standards to improve pedestrian environments.
 - TSM Actions:
 - Complete bike and pedestrian networks to improve public health and reduce emissions.
 - Explore bike share programs and local connectivity improvements.
 - Identify and pursue funding sources to implement multimodal improvements.

Goal: Reduce Reliance on Single-Occupancy Vehicles (SOVs)

Objectives

- ✓ Decrease SOV work trips while increasing trips made by walking, biking, transit, and ridesharing.

- ✓ Track transportation mode share using standardized Census data and report five-year averages annually.
- ✓ Work with County and State partners to develop a local Commute Trip Reduction program.
- ✓ Advocate for stronger MDOT support of sidewalk, bikeway, and transit investments—particularly along state highways serving Easton.

Goal: Maintain and Improve Streets, Trails, and Related Infrastructure**

Objectives

- ✓ Use level-of-service (LOS) standards to ensure transportation concurrency for new development, avoiding unnecessary road widening for vehicle traffic.
- ✓ Allocate sufficient funding for maintenance of sidewalk, bikeway, and roadway systems.
- ✓ Design and construct transportation facilities to avoid or mitigate environmental impacts, consistent with Critical Areas Ordinance requirements.
- ✓ Develop improved metrics for analyzing new vehicle traffic impacts on pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit service.
- ✓ Apply multimodal street design standards to all new development.
- ✓ Request County and State highway projects to include pedestrian and bike safety improvements.
- ✓ Retrofit existing streets with green infrastructure and traffic calming where appropriate.

Goal: Address Transportation Equity in All Projects

Objectives

- ✓ Provide equitable access to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure through inclusive public engagement and targeted capital investment.
- ✓ Invest in underserved neighborhoods to expand pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- ✓ Ensure all residents—regardless of age, income, race, or ability—have opportunities to participate in and benefit from transportation investments.
- ✓ Develop outreach materials in multiple formats and languages to engage all segments of the Easton community.

9 HISTORY AND FUTURE OF DESIGN REGULATIONS IN EASTON

The “pre-history” of this most recent interest in design goes quite a long way back. We would not have such a special downtown if it were not first well designed and second preserved. The earliest builders of Easton displayed great foresight and vision when they created what remains the heart of our community. In addition, in order for these buildings to still be standing today, there had to be a great number of thoughtful property-owners and visionary Town leaders. Otherwise, it surely would have been far easier at some point in the past to tear down part of the gem that is downtown and replace it with something unsympathetic and wholly inappropriate.

Fortunately for Easton, there have long been individuals and groups interested in preserving the historic and cultural resources of our community. Historic Preservation groups like the Talbot County Historical Society, and Historic Easton, Inc., worked tirelessly through the years to advocate for the protection of Easton’s historic buildings. The Talbot County Historical Society was founded in 1954 and is headquartered in one of Easton’s charming historic buildings with spectacular grounds. Historic Easton was founded in 1973 and the Town appointed the Easton Historic District Commission and established a district in 1976.

The evolution of design standards in Easton is chronicled in the discussion concerning the Design Principles above. The level of interest in this area has been evidenced in a number of other ways in the past. One example was the very strong community participation in 2000 in a County-wide Quality Community Survey. In June of 2000, the incorporated Municipalities of Talbot County hosted a Quality Community Survey (QCS). This was the 14th in a series of 22 surveys that were conducted statewide by the Maryland Mass Transit Authority. In this process, Tony Nelessen administered a Visual Preference Survey to approximately 140 individuals at Easton High School. Mr. Nelessen is nationally recognized in the use of this planning tool. Talbot’s QCS was composed of 82 slides contrasting options for various aspects of planning and development. It was also accompanied by a 55 question survey.

Many of the results seem obvious, but some are more subtle and the overwhelming theme is that the ideas described previously in this Chapter in the Design Principles section, are, in fact, supported by the general public. This includes support for denser housing, narrower

streets, and a new direction for the development of Route 50. Every Plan Update since the QCS was conducted has reiterated this point. Generally speaking, with few exceptions, regardless of where one falls on the issue of how little or how much growth they would like to see, there is near unanimous support for continuing to improve the quality of design in Easton.

9.1 ZONING AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Much has been written of late about the “sins” of our built environment. In fact, the underlying force behind such movements or concepts as Smart Growth, Sustainable Growth, New Urbanism, and Neo-Traditional Planning, is that somewhere along the way, for whatever reason, we have gotten away from settlement patterns that made sense, to what so many people today decry. The ills have often been repeated: decaying central cities, booming but characterless suburbs, farms and forests disappearing at alarming rates to make way for more growth, subdivisions of monotonous homes and ever increasing traffic congestion. This is frequently also referred to as suburban sprawl, which is characterized by strictly segregated land uses, housing built at an unsustainably (economically and environmentally) low density, and utterly automobile dependent. It is essentially the antithesis of the Smart and Sustainable Growth pattern this Plan advocates.

What are the reasons for this transformation from compact, mixed-use, sustainable settlement patterns to the sprawling mess evident in so much of the country today? Actually, there are several reasons but certainly a large part of it is that the people who created this built environment were simply producing what government regulation required. At the heart of it all is what has come to be the most common and basic of all land use regulatory tools, zoning.

The roots of zoning go back to 1867 when San Francisco, California passed an Ordinance prohibiting development of slaughterhouses, hog storage facilities, and hide curing plants in certain districts of the city. The concept of prohibiting specific uses in specific places continued to grow, culminating in 1916 when New York City adopted the first comprehensive zoning code in America.

As with any new regulatory tool, many legal challenges ensued until the United States Supreme Court heard *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Company*, (272 U.S. 365 (1926)). In this case the Ambler Realty Company challenged the ability of the Village of Euclid, Ohio, to

regulate land use through zoning regulations. In 1926 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Euclid, and thereby established the constitutionality of zoning in America.

There is little doubt that zoning had a legitimate, perhaps even noble, purpose at that time. Developers of that era had no restrictions and thus it was not uncommon to find single-family housing located right next to uses we would consider utterly noxious today. Zoning was created to put an end to that as well as other land use abuses.

However, in the effort to correct such abuses, something went awry. At some point, uses became too segregated and zoning districts too specialized. This, coupled with the explosion in the usage of the automobile, created the situation where we were building houses remote from where we worked or shopped. So remote in many cases that the only way to get from where one lived to these other places was to drive.

So the question is, has zoning outlived its usefulness? In many cases the answer is yes. Certainly it is still necessary to protect the places where people live from noxious and potentially dangerous uses. However, there are fewer such uses today and there are alternate ways to provide this protection. So, the question becomes, should the Town of Easton consider abandoning zoning? Probably not as heavy industrial uses and high-traffic, regional-scale commercial uses still should be separated from the rest of the community. But, there is no reason to exclude commercial uses and places of employment that are of a scale compatible with the residential portion of the neighborhood. In fact there is every reason to include them. That is actually one of the characteristics of the way towns used to be built that so many developers and planners (as well as critics of modern planning) are trying to recreate. We should certainly have an Ordinance that allows this to happen.

A new Zoning Ordinance that encourages traditional neighborhood development would have fewer use restrictions. Obnoxious or potentially hazardous uses should continue to be prohibited or those that are on some level necessary should be restricted to remote parts of the community. Residential minimum lot sizes should be reduced and density increased to achieve a development pattern more like that of the historic parts of Easton. Density should at a minimum satisfy the **State Smart Growth (Priority Funding Area) criteria of 3.5 units per acre (net density)**. This should ordinarily be the minimum density proposed as even at this density, the result is often a suburban form of development that is contrary to the character of the community we seek to create. Perhaps the biggest change of all would be in the way mixed uses are treated. Rather than prohibiting or allowing only via a complicated

and onerous review process, mixed-use should at the very least be permitted and encouraged and projects that include mixed-uses should have a smoother development review and approval process than those that do not.

The 2004 Plan outlined the standards for a new Zoning District that would accomplish this goal. This never became reality due to public opposition. The reasons expressed for this opposition were not focused on the standards being proposed, but rather on the process. Today it is generally only possible to create the types of places described above as desirable via the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process. This is a process that typically involves two (occasionally one, often more) meetings with the Planning Commission and ultimately a Public Hearing before the Town Council. The development community views this process as lengthy, relatively expensive, and, worst of all from their perspective, unpredictable. At least in part because of this, developers tend to avoid the PUD option and instead seek the path of least resistance. This is conventional subdivision review for residential projects and site plan review for non-residential projects. Mixed-use opportunities are limited.

Those opposed to the proposed new Traditional Neighborhood Zoning District (TND) stated that the primary reason they opposed it was because it removed the Town Council and the Public Hearing from the review process even though the point was to create standards to give us the kinds of neighborhoods we described (and thus in theory want) in the Plan through the conventional zoning process, since that was the route most often chosen by developers. The thought process was why make developers jump through extra hoops to give us what we want, and leave the path of least resistance available to proliferate more suburban-style development that we do not want? Why not flip this arrangement so that the most popular and least difficult path gives us the kind of neighborhoods we have said we love, and require the more torturous PUD path to even propose something other than that?

As a result of the TND being defeated, elements of those standards were added to the base zoning districts in the Zoning Ordinance and provisions for greater flexibility in lot design, as well as the previously described anti-monotony standards were added to the Subdivision Regulations and the Zoning Ordinance.

Twenty years have now passed since the TND standards were defeated at the Council level. During this time the Planning Commission has continued to see development proposals that miss the mark in addressing the goals of the community as expressed in the Plan. As a result, we are proposing to revisit this issue again.

The following zoning and/or subdivision changes are recommended to accomplish this:

- Create a TND (Traditional Neighborhood Development) Zone or Development Option. The development standards would be similar to those outlined in the text box below.

[INSERT TND TABLE]

9.2 SITE PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE

Site planning has a significant impact on how a place functions and feels. Development should maintain the fine-grained block structure found in older neighborhoods, with buildings placed near the street and fronted by porches, stoops, or storefronts. Blank walls, excessive setbacks, and large surface parking areas erode community character.

Architectural quality matters. Many of Easton’s most recognizable buildings—including schools, churches, and downtown storefronts—employ brick, pitched roofs, and symmetrical proportions. New development should follow suit. Franchise buildings must be adapted to local context. A notable example is the Easton Utilities Customer Service Center, which was shaped by design review and community standards.

[Insert Image: Compatible infill and commercial architecture examples]

9.3 THE ROLE OF NEIGHBORHOOD STRUCTURE AND INFILL IN EASTON’S GROWTH STRATEGY

Easton’s older neighborhoods, especially those surrounding Downtown, are defined by connected streets, narrow lots, modest setbacks, front porches, and architectural variety. These walkable patterns support interaction and resilience. New development should extend this structure through compatible lot dimensions, public space orientation, and housing diversity.

Infill development must be carefully designed to respect context. This means matching surrounding buildings in height, orientation, and rhythm—particularly in established neighborhoods. Tools such as neighborhood-scale form standards, design guidelines, and context-sensitive zoning will be employed to preserve local character while allowing for reinvestment.

[Insert Map or Diagram: Neighborhood block pattern overlay]

While there are clear advantages to encouraging infill and redevelopment, it should not simply be permitted *carte blanche*. Infill and redevelopment projects are by their very definition generally going to be located such that they will have many neighboring and nearby properties. Thus, extra attention needs to be given to compatibility and neighborhood impact issues. The following are points for consideration with any infill or redevelopment project; design principles for infill development in a sense:

- Ensure Housing Types that are Compatible with Existing Types.
- Employ Appropriate Traffic Calming Measures.
- Adopt Design Standards/Guidelines for Improved Compatibility.
- Provide A Continuous Pedestrian Network.
- Encourage Convenient, Appropriately Scaled Commercial Services to Support Neighborhood Needs.
- Consider parking needs more broadly than for typical developments.

Infill/redevelopment projects should be evaluated in terms of parking by examining parking options more expansively, such as the availability of on-street spaces, public parking lots, and any shared-parking opportunities that may exist within a reasonable distance of the development site.

Infill development remained a popular option as a mechanism for accommodating future growth of the Town throughout our public information gathering phase of this update. Many suggested that most of the growth in the coming Planning Period should be in the form of Infill (and presumably, redevelopment). This Plan will certainly look for ways to further encourage such forms of development, but this may be a case where the expressed desire is not realistically possible, certainly not in the primary built-up areas of Easton where vacant properties are scarce. Thus, if these few parcels are to accommodate the majority of planned growth, it would have to do so in a way that would fundamentally change the character of such areas. A more measured approach would be to encourage infill and to include

redevelopment and adaptive reuse of buildings for property in and around the historic core of Town along with a denser development pattern in infill development projects located outside this core, but within the 2055 Town Boundaries.

9.4 THE ROLE OF MAJOR RETAIL IN EASTON IN 2025

In May of 2000, the Easton Town Council approved an amendment to the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. This unique action was the result of a moratorium on applications for Major Retail projects, instituted upon the receipt of applications for major retail projects and shopping centers totaling approximately 766,000 square feet of new retail space. The result of this moratorium was to add language to the 1997 Plan discussing the role of large scale retailing in Easton and to amend the Town's Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance Amendments defined single use retail establishments of 25,000 square feet of gross floor area or more as "Major Retail". Major Retail projects of up to 65,000 square feet could be considered via a new Planned Major Retail floating zone. Any retail project more than 65,000 square feet was prohibited. Finally, numerous design standards were added for stand-alone Major Retail projects as well as shopping centers.

The issue was very prominent in the Town at the time and the 65,000 square foot cap was a compromise between competing interests. Those who wanted this use in Easton felt the cap was too low or that there should be no limit at all. Those who desired a more limited role for this type of retailing felt that the cap was too high or that the use should be expressly prohibited.

The issue of the appropriate role of major retailing remains a debated topic. As such, it was one of the topics on which the Planning Commission specifically sought community input during the Visioning phase of this Plan update. A question in the opinion survey administered during the "Road Shows" asked when various uses should be added to the Town. For major retail, 45.7% of the 446 respondents answered "Never." This was nearly twice the next most common response, which interestingly was "Now" (26.9%). Another question asked specifically about the respondents' opinion of the retail use size limitation. Out of 446 total responses, there was an absolute tie for the most common answer between those who thought the restrictions were "just right" and those who felt that there should be no restriction at all.

After considering all of these factors in the development of the 2004 Plan, the Easton Planning and Zoning Commission decided that the role of major retailing in Easton remained limited. However, they did not believe that an absolute size cap should be a part of the way that this use was regulated. Rather, the Commission recommended that the Town maintain a split based on the 25,000 square foot threshold, but to also remove the 65,000 square foot cap. In proposing this change, the Commission did not alter its position that big box retailing has only a limited role to play in Easton. Instead this change was about two things: (1) to not completely shut the door to allowing major retail projects in situations and places where they actually work and (2) to ensure that the review of such applications remain focused on land use issues.

As a result of these changes, the Town's view of the role of major retailing in Easton in 2004 was summarized in that Plan as follows:

- Major retail has only a limited role to play in Easton in the planning period 2002 – 2009.
- Preference for new major retail opportunities should be given to expansion of existing establishments, especially if part of the redevelopment of an existing shopping center, followed by the development of new sites identified in this Plan as appropriate for new Regional-scale commercial development.
- The regional market that prospective developers should look to serve if developing a major retail or shopping center in Easton is primarily Talbot County and to a lesser extent portions of Caroline, Dorchester, and Queen Anne's Counties. The Town has no desire to become the regional shopping destination for an area larger than that.
- Existing major retail establishments that seek to build a new store on a new site in Town should couple the new application with detailed plans for the reuse of the existing store.

The 2010 Plan noted that little had changed to alter this perception of major retail. For that Comprehensive Plan Update, the primary source of community input was an online survey. Responses germane to this issue include:

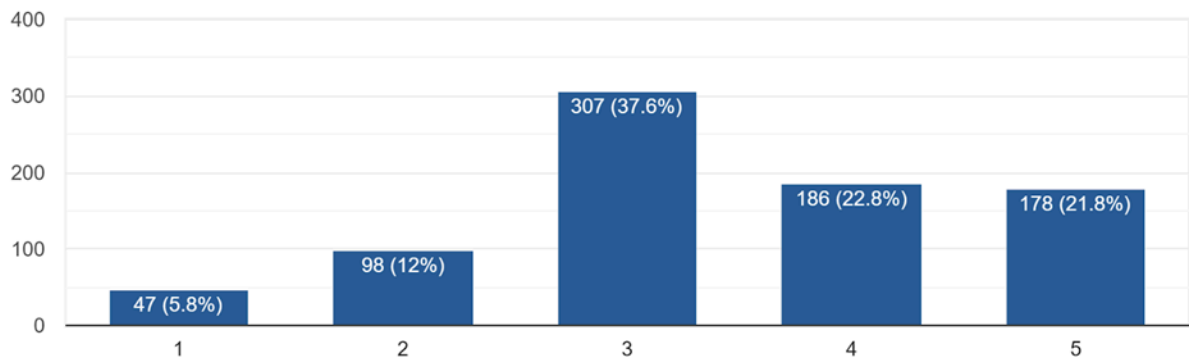
- 47.9% of 791 respondents thought that the Town had about the right number of shopping centers. 36.4% thought there were too many. Only 15.7% thought there were too few.

- 77.8% of 760 respondents thought that the current design standards have created nice additions to the Town or still don't go far enough. Only 18.5% thought that the standards go too far or that the Town should not be regulating design at all.
- 65.4% of 766 respondents thought that the Planning Commission should not concede to developers over design issues even if it ultimately meant that their favorite store would choose not to locate here.
- 69% of 727 respondents either agree or strongly agree that Downtown Easton should receive preferential treatment over other commercial areas from the Town government. 16.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

This 2025 Plan revisited the issue of the role of major retail in Easton. An online survey was again employed and one question asked about the amount of regional scale retail shopping in Easton. Over 800 people responded to this question and the results were as follows (1 indicates much too little and 5 indicates much too much, with 3 indicating “about the right amount”):

Please select one

816 responses



The responses indicate that the prevailing opinion is that Easton has about the right amount of regional-scale retail shopping in Town in 2025, though it is worth noting that there were more than twice as many who thought there is too much or much too much of this use than those who think there is too little or much too little.

Taking all of this into account, the Planning Commission again proposes no change to the Town’s general policies towards Major Retail and again views its role throughout the next (2025 - 2035) Planning Period as very limited. The one exception is cases where it is necessary to redevelop or redesign existing shopping centers. In such cases expansion or addition of major retail should be encouraged, but only in exchange for significant design improvements (and, where possible, circulation/access improvements) or conversion to a mixed-use project.

9.5 TOWN GATEWAYS AND CORRIDORS

Visitors arriving in Easton form impressions of the Town based on its major corridors. These include U.S. Route 50, MD 322, Washington Street, and Port Street. The design and appearance of these areas—buildings, signage, landscaping, and public infrastructure—play a central role in shaping Easton’s identity.

Significant improvements have been made to some corridors through site plan negotiation and design review. **The new _____ and _____, for example**, exhibit revised layouts, upgraded materials, and improved orientation. However, many areas still require reinvestment. The Town will adopt corridor-specific standards and explore overlay zones to guide incremental upgrades.

[Insert Photo or Concept Plan: Example of gateway design or corridor vision]

9.6 CIVIC ARCHITECTURE AND THE PUBLIC REALM

Civic buildings—such as schools, libraries, churches, and public offices—anchor neighborhoods and contribute significantly to Easton’s visual character. These structures should be architecturally prominent and well-integrated into the street network. Design of new civic buildings must reflect their role as public landmarks.

Similarly, the quality of the public realm—sidewalks, plazas, parks, signage, and street trees—greatly affects how the Town is experienced. These spaces must be maintained, connected, and appropriately designed for their surroundings.

[Insert Map: Public and civic space locations]

9.7 DESIGN TOOLS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Easton will continue to improve its zoning and subdivision regulations to align with design expectations. A form-based zoning approach may be adopted in areas where form and context are more important than use alone. Overlay districts will be considered for special areas such as Port Street, Washington Street, and town gateways.

Design standards will be developed or revised to clarify expectations for site layout, architecture, landscaping, signage, and transitions. Public investment, capital improvement planning, and grant funding will also be coordinated with these design priorities.

9.8 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Maintain and enhance the character of Easton's neighborhoods / encourage future development of mixed, integrated-use, old-fashioned neighborhoods rather than single use subdivisions or projects

- ✓ Revisit the proposed TND Zoning District as the primary zoning district on undeveloped parcels in Easton (and for those that are annexed in the future).
- ✓ Continue to evaluate the design and anti-monotony standards first added to the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations in 2006.
- ✓ In conjunction with the first objective above, revise review processes so that traditional neighborhood developments are streamlined and suburban-style subdivisions are difficult to get approved.

Goal 2: Improve the appearance of existing development in Easton and of Easton's gateways and corridors.

- ✓ Work with the State Highway Administration to secure landscaping along the State Highways within the Town, with special attention to the Route 50 corridor.
- ✓ Use the Forest Conservation Account to retroactively landscape streetscapes in areas where it is lacking or deficient.

- ✓ Require renovations to existing buildings and/or changes of use that require Site plans, PUD Amendments, Special Exceptions or Variances, to meet all current design standards as a condition of approval (i.e. no grandfathering on design issues).
- ✓ Encourage additional landscaping for new development and redevelopment of sites adjacent to U.S. Route 50.
- ✓ Establish design guidelines and corridor-specific standards for key roads.
- ✓ Encourage reinvestment through overlay zoning, incentives, and street improvements.
- ✓ Promote civic identity through signage, landscaping, and landmark architecture.

Goal 3: Improve the appearance of all new development / Raise the quality of site and building design across all development types.

- ✓ Vigorously apply the recommended Design Principles for Easton
- ✓ Prohibit construction of new buildings designed with corporate-style franchise architecture.
- ✓ Adopt Design Standards for all new development, including residential and infill/redevelopment
- ✓ Review, update and revise the Design Guidelines for New Development applicable to all projects located outside of the Historic District.
- ✓ Apply Landscaping Standards that use native species to enhance the overall site appearance and more effectively screen objectionable site elements. Apply consistent standards for scale, massing, and materials.
- ✓ Ensure commercial and civic architecture contribute positively to the Town's identity.
- ✓ Avoid formulaic or generic architecture, especially in highly visible areas.

Goal 4: Strengthen the role of public space in shaping community character.

- ✓ Improve access to and design of public spaces and civic facilities.
- ✓ Enhance street trees, sidewalks, and furnishings to reinforce walkability and visual continuity.
- ✓ Encourage small public plazas and green spaces in both residential and mixed-use areas.

Goal 5: Encourage more redevelopment and infill development.

- ✓ Evaluate boundaries, standards, and process associated with the Zoning Code's Planned Redevelopment Overlay District
- ✓ Investigate any non-Zoning incentives that may potentially encourage infill and redevelopment.
- ✓ Develop Small Area Plans for more Easton neighborhoods to determine the scope, scale, and characteristics of future redevelopment and new development as may be unique to those neighborhoods, including new the Hospital zone.

10 MUNICIPAL GROWTH

10.1 PURPOSE OF THE MUNICIPAL GROWTH ELEMENT

The Municipal Growth Element (MGE) outlines how Easton will manage future physical expansion in a coordinated, efficient, and sustainable manner. It identifies areas where annexation and development are likely to occur, explains the rationale for growth, and assesses whether Town infrastructure and services can support that growth. This chapter fulfills the State's requirement under House Bill 1141 (2006) and integrates Easton's growth strategy with the broader land use framework of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Maryland Land Use Article requires this element to address the following:

1. Areas anticipated for future growth outside the current municipal limits;
2. Historic growth patterns of the Town;
3. Development capacity within current Town boundaries, including infill and redevelopment potential;
4. Additional land needed to accommodate projected demand at densities aligned with long-term policy;
5. Infrastructure and services required to support growth in new areas, including:
 - a. Public schools (meeting State-rated capacity standards);
 - b. Libraries;
 - c. Public safety and emergency medical services;
 - d. Water and sewer systems;
 - e. Stormwater management (to protect water quality);
 - f. Recreational facilities;
6. Anticipated financing strategies for public services and infrastructure;
7. Rural buffers and transition zones;
8. Impacts on services and infrastructure that the Town may need to provide for growth just outside its boundaries;
9. Measures to protect sensitive environmental areas affected by new development;
10. Population growth projections; and
11. A vision for Easton's future character and how long-term growth policy supports it.

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan marked the Town’s first inclusion of a Municipal Growth Element. This updated version builds upon that foundation and refines Easton’s approach based on new data, experience, and evolving priorities.

10.2 FUTURE GROWTH AREAS OUTSIDE OF EXISTING CORPORATE LIMITS

10.2.1 The Town’s Policy on Growth and Annexation

Easton’s longstanding policy is that municipal services, including water and sewer, are extended only to properties within the corporate limits. This policy encourages annexation prior to development and reinforces a compact growth pattern. The Town does not support extension of services to development in the County. Growth is to occur at the edges of Easton in a contiguous fashion, coordinated with infrastructure capacity and consistent with community character.

10.2.2 Existing Growth Capacity

The Town has enough developable land within its current boundaries to accommodate a significant share of projected residential and nonresidential growth over the next 20 years. However, future demand, particularly for mixed-use and employment-related development, may exceed internal capacity. Continued growth pressure will require thoughtful annexation decisions that align with the Plan’s land use, infrastructure, and fiscal policies.

[Insert Table: Existing Zoned Capacity by Use Type]

10.2.3 Framework for Future Annexation

The land lying between the Town boundary as of April 2004 and the Growth Boundary became our future growth area(s). The 2004 Plan further partitioned the growth area into future growth areas and assigned a three-level sequential priority system concerning when it might be appropriate for the various parts of the growth area to be annexed into Town.

The first Municipal Growth Element as contained in the 2010 Plan continued this three-tiered partition system. Priority 1 Areas were classified as Boundary Refinement Areas. In most cases they corresponded to areas that were already developed in Talbot County and deemed appropriate for consideration for Annexation. Priority 2 Areas were referred to as Intermediate Growth Areas and Priority 3 Areas were referred to as Long

Range Growth Areas. Neither were envisioned as being necessary to develop to accommodate growth during that Planning period.

Parts of the growth area, particularly much of the Boundary Refinement Area, have already been developed under the rules and regulations of Talbot County. Thus, they will generally not represent new growth. There may be some opportunity for redevelopment of these sites or an intensification of development as a result of moving from the zoning and health department regulations (i.e. septic systems and the limitations thereof) of Talbot County to those of the Town of Easton, but generally little if anything will change when these properties change jurisdictions. Oftentimes the only reason that such properties do come into Town is to take advantage of Town water and/or sewer service. While the Growth Areas Map of the 2010 Plan depicted 1,200 acres of land classified as Boundary Refinement Area, this raw number is misleading as relatively few acres of such areas were actually undeveloped.

After utilizing the tiered future growth areas as part of the previous two Comprehensive Plans, we are proposing a slightly different direction in this Plan. Rather than rely on what can at times appear to be at least arguably arbitrary distinctions in future growth priority classifications, this Plan replaces that system with a series of Annexation Policies to guide future requests to expand Town boundaries. Future annexation decisions will no longer follow a numbered priority area framework. Instead, the Town will assess whether a proposed area is appropriate based on:

- Does it fill a geographic or infrastructure gap in the Town boundary
- Can it be efficiently served with water, sewer, and public services
- To what extent does it supports land use, housing, or public facility needs identified in this Plan
- Is it consistent with the character, scale, and infrastructure pattern of adjacent neighborhoods

[Insert Map: Conceptual annexation zones and service areas]

10.2.4 Coordination with Talbot County

Easton's growth policies are designed to complement Talbot County's efforts to preserve agricultural land, protect water resources, and guide growth to appropriate locations. The Town and County will continue to collaborate on shared planning tools, greenbelt

preservation strategies, and infrastructure coordination to prevent sprawl and leapfrog development.

[Insert Map: Greenbelt and Joint Planning Areas]

10.2.5 Service Capacity and Infrastructure Planning

Growth must align with infrastructure capacity and public investment planning. The Town will use annexation agreements to secure developer-funded infrastructure where needed, and will coordinate with Easton Utilities, the MDE, and other agencies to ensure adequate facilities for new development. Future annexations must demonstrate readiness and fiscal viability.

[Insert Table or Chart: Infrastructure capacity estimates]

10.3 HISTORIC GROWTH PATTERNS OF EASTON

The next characteristic we are required to examine is previous growth patterns of the Town. Here we are fortunate to have a complete record of every annexation to have occurred in Easton and have used that information to produce maps of the Town's boundary at various points in time. The list of annexations is provided in **Error! Reference source not found., Error! Reference source not found.** A map showing Easton's corporate limits at various points in time was shown in **3.1, Existing Land Use Patterns.**

The historic pattern of annexations shows that Easton maintained a small, compact size from its formal incorporation in 1710 until 1917 and beyond. By 1965, while the Town had grown significantly in a north-south direction, it was still completely confined to land between US Route 50 and what would become MD Route 322 (Easton Parkway, which wouldn't open for another year). We did not grow beyond these confines until 1966; growth really took off in these areas in the 1970's through today after the area within the Parkway/Rte. 50 Corridor was totally annexed.

The Map tells the story of the geographic spread of the growth of the Town. What it does not tell is equally, if not more, important. That is the way in which the design and appearance of development changed throughout time. Like much of the country, Easton began to drift away from walkable, compact, traditional urban forms of development to more of a spread-out, suburban pattern. Reversing this trend has been an emphasis of the past few Easton

Comprehensive Plans and is a large part of what this Comprehensive Plan sets out to do. Much more is written about this problem in the Community Character Element of this Plan.

10.4 CAPACITY FOR DEVELOPMENT WITHIN EXISTING TOWN LIMITS

One of the more recent requirements for Comprehensive Plans is to estimate the capacity for development within existing Town boundaries. This requires we look at undeveloped land, land suitable for infill development, and land with potential for redevelopment. In order to complete this exercise, certain assumptions have to be made concerning each of these types of development. For example, we are assuming that future development will occur at a more urban density than has occurred in recent years. At a minimum we will assume that we can achieve a density of 3.5 dwelling units per acre (3.5 du/ac), the minimum required to satisfy the requirements of being designated a Primary Funding Area (PFA). We have also used guidance provided by the MD Department of Planning in their Models and Guidelines Series publication “Estimating Residential Development Capacity.” Finally, some assumptions are based on experience with development review in Easton. The following table walks through the development of our estimate for residential development capacity within the current Town limits:

Estimating Residential Development Potential in Easton

A. Estimate Infill/Redevelopment/Build-out Potential (i.e. what we could get with no additional annexations)

Look back at the "Priority Development Areas" from current (2010) Comp Plan

Area 1 - ~~SSPP - non-residential (institutional)~~

Area 2 - Brooks Farm (in-Town portion)

Area 3 - Hospital-owned Oxford Road site (purchased by Talbot County in 2024, likely removing it from consideration for development)

Area 4 - Ashby Commons (89 du approved)

Area 5 - Easton Commons Site (non-residential)

Area 6 - Waterside Village (non-residential)

Area 7 - Alvin Lapides Property

Area 8 - Easton Point

Area 2 - 252 units approved in 2022

Area 7 - (Approx. 20 ac zoned residential, assumed to be multifamily [assume Londonderry density of 4.0 du/ac] x 4.0 du/ac x .75) = 60 units

Area 8* - 332 units (residential units reflected in the Port Street Small Area Plan. NOTE: This includes lands not within the Town of Easton. For the purpose of this projection, they are treated as being within Town Limits)

Total estimated possible units from Priority Development Areas in 2004 Plan = 644

B. Other Parcels with Infill Potential

Unimproved parcels ≥ 1 acre (using same build-out factors as above) = $(49.9 \text{ ac} \times 3.5 \times .75 = 131)$ units

Unimproved parcels ≥ 1 acre in the PR District (substituting the PR density of a max. 40 du/ac for 3.5 in the equation above) = $(3.3 \text{ ac} \times 40 \times .75) = 99$ units

of unimproved residentially-zoned parcels < 1 ac (assume one triplex middle housing type per parcel) = $94 \text{ parcels} \times 3 \text{ units} = 282$ units

Total estimated possible "other" infill units = 512

C. Completion of Approved or Pending Project

Residential Projects Under Construction = 189 units

Residential Projects Under Review = 415 units (excludes Area 2 (Brooks Farm - Four Seasons) and Area 3 (Poplar Hill) which are already counted above)

Total Units in Approved/Pending Projects = 604

D. Downtown Residential Development Potential (per AKRF study) = 100

E. Redevelopment Potential (Parcels w/ improvements assessed at \leq \$50,000; = 63.7 acres x 3.5 du/ac x 0.75) = 167 - 158 existing units = 9 (net new units) + 875 units from Table ___ below = 884

Total Infill/Redevelopment/Build-out Potential (A+B+C+D+E) = 2,744 units

**** - As of June 11, 2024**

Table _____ Redevelopment Target Areas		
Project/Area	A cres	Potential Residential Units (acres x 30 du/ac x 0.75)
Hospital	14.84	334
Easton Plaza (Parking lot)	12.456	280
Perdue - Brookletts	6.548	147
Brookletts Building	1.787	40
Perdue - Maryland Ave	2.36	53
Safeway	1.46	21 (net, after deducting 12 units already included in the AKRF Study)

Our best estimate is that we can accommodate 2,744 more dwelling units within the Town, without the need to add any additional land for residential development (other than the portions of Easton Point per item A 8 that are currently beyond Town Limits). It is not as simple as saying we do not need to add any land for growth until these units are built. There will be some parcels that have environmental constraints making it difficult to develop. We have accounted for the more obvious such lands, but there is undoubtedly more that will not be as evident until we are reviewing a development proposal for such sites. There will also be the landowner who has no interest in developing, at least for the time being. Finally, supply and demand economics dictate that at some point some of the growth areas will need to be tapped or housing prices will escalate, thereby exacerbating an already serious problem in Easton. This is a problem we will have to grapple with when we reach the limits of the urban growth boundary, but while we have growth areas available, it would seem unwise to artificially inflate housing prices by restricting supply, though, for the current Planning period, we estimate new annexation is not necessary.

The 2,744 represents a slight increase from the 2,492 units projected in the 2010 Plan, despite 14 years of growth. The increase is primarily the result of the addition of Area 8 (Easton Point) as a “Priority Development Area” and a more detailed analysis of redevelopment potential through the inclusion of specific properties believed to possess significant opportunities for redevelopment (Table above). This is offset by the removal of “Area 3” as a potential for development as the result of its purchase by Talbot County.

The point is simply that there should be an adequate supply of potential dwelling units within the existing Town limits to forestall the need to annex significant additional land for some time, at least solely for the sake of accommodating projected residential growth. In fact, 2,744 units should last approximately 18 years at the 1.75% annual growth rate that this Plan targets. Furthermore, this far exceeds the growth in total units we witnessed in the most recent Census Interval (i.e. 2010 – 2020) during which Easton added only 516 dwelling units, thus reinforcing the notion that the existing Town limits can accommodate growth for the next ten years. On the other hand, this is tempered by the fact that not all land that is undeveloped is suitable for development, or at least not at the theoretical maximum density. Likewise, land identified as potential for redevelopment may be constrained from such activity by any number of economic, political or environmental factors. Also, there is clearly an argument that one of the issues (and arguably, the most critical issue) regarding housing affordability in Easton is a simple issue of a lack of a supply of available units. Thus, as Easton tackles housing affordability, one approach involves an effort to increase housing supply.

Finally, none of the foregoing discussion factors in the possibility of large-scale rezoning and/or Zoning text amendments that would allow residential uses in non-residential zoning districts. If, for example, we made it permissible to build multifamily units in the General Commercial and Limited Commercial Zoning Districts, the 155 currently unimproved acres in these two districts could accommodate up to an additional 1,240 units (assuming an allowable density of 8 du/ac). Furthermore, this is without considering redevelopment or further development of improved parcels.

10.5 LAND AREA NEEDED TO SATISFY DEMAND

By enacting an Urban Growth Boundary in the 2004 Plan (and reaffirmed in the 2010 Plan), this subsection essentially becomes unnecessary. Regardless of what the demand might be for development, we now only have a certain, fixed amount of land available. Nevertheless, this is a Plan with a 30-year timeframe and we can project out 30 years to determine whether we will likely be essentially built-out or still have available growth areas at that time. To do so, an exercise similar to that performed to assess the development potential of land within the existing Town boundary will be conducted as follows:

Total acreage of Future Growth Area = 3,880 acres

Less acreage already developed and/or non-residential – 1,300

= 2,580 acres x 3.5 du/ac x 0.75 (underbuild factor) = 6,773 du's

This exercise indicates that the Growth Area has the potential to accommodate 6,773 new residential units. This information can be combined with other calculations already made to give us more useful information, such as:

A. Residential Build-out Potential of Existing Town = 2,744 units

B. Additional Residential Unit Potential in Growth Area = 6,773 units

C. Existing Units in Growth Area = 727 units

D. Potential Residential Capacity of Growth Area (B + C) = 7,500 units

E. Total Potential New Units in Easton (A + B) = 9,517 units

F. Existing Units in Easton = 7,350 units

G. Total Residential Build-out (E + F + C) = 17,594 units

H. Estimated Population at Build-out (17,594 x 2.19) = 38,531 persons

Without the confinement of the Growth Boundary, if we grow at our targeted 1.75% average annual compound rate, in 2070, Easton would, all other things being equal, have reached approximately the 17,594 dwelling units representing our residential build-out capacity. For the purposes of the statutory requirement of projecting a ten-year build-out capacity, Easton certainly has no issues in this regard as, under this scenario, build-out would not occur for another 45-50 years.

10.6 PUBLIC SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

This subsection of the Plan was a new requirement as of the 2010 Plan. As such, that Plan delved into issues that had in the past been addressed in the Community Facilities and Services Element and also included elements that the Town had traditionally not addressed in the past because they were either a County responsibility or more germane to County interests. Beginning with the 2010 Plan Update, we began to update the following

subsections in terms of the impacts of our projected growth upon a variety of public services and infrastructure, and that effort is continued here.

10.6.1 Public Schools

Public Schools in Talbot County are funded and administered by the County government. The Town has two “roles” in this process. First, as the major population center in Talbot County, we are a significant source of students attending public schools. Second, three of the County’s public schools, plus the Board of Education Main Offices, are located within the Town’s jurisdiction.

Although the Town has no role in terms of providing public school service, we work cooperatively with the County to supply them with the most updated demographic information for their use in preparing the Annual Educational Facilities Master Plan. The 2022 version of this document, describes the state of, and outlook for, the Easton schools, including the impact of the The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future and is provided in **Appendix** **1**.

Looking ahead as far as it does (i.e. ten years), the Educational Facilities Master Plan (EFMP) indicates that the Talbot County Public School system can accommodate expected growth in Easton, albeit barely, at the middle and high schools, and the just constructed elementary school would require additional capacity either through a physical addition or through redistricting.. Unanticipated growth would pose even more problems, depending on the nature of any such residential developments. The Educational Master Plan notes that there are a number of residential developments planned in the Easton area, but that these are primarily planned to target the high-end or age-restricted markets. Age-restricted developments obviously impose very little demand on public school systems as there are few, if any, children in these types of projects. High-end projects may very well have children living in the development, but oftentimes these children attend one of Easton’s private schools, thus the impact of these developments on the public school system is also diminished. Enrollment at non-public schools in Talbot County now totals approximately 932 students, which is 17.1% of the total K-12 student enrollment in the County. This takes substantial pressure off of public school utilization but may bear watching as if the economic situation deteriorates these students represent potential new impacts on the public school system if their parents, by choice or necessity, switch from private to public school education for their children.

History suggests that the impact on Easton's public schools may not even be as much as described in the EFMP. This conclusion is arrived at by looking at Easton's change in population and public-school enrollment in the years 2000 and 2020. In 2000, Easton had a total population of 11,708, with a public-school enrollment of 2,892. By 2020, these numbers had grown to 17,101 and 3,072 respectively. That is a difference of 180 additional students enrolled in Easton's public schools from an overall population increase of 5,393. Looking ahead to the total buildout of the 2023 Town boundaries (an estimated 6,752 new people), if the same ratio of student population: total population can be assumed, this increase of 6,752 people would yield just 225 new students in Easton's public schools.

The counterpoint to this though may come from the changing demographics noted in the EFMP. Specifically, it noted the growth of the Hispanic student population in Talbot County's Public Schools. This mirrors the increase in the overall Hispanic population in Easton, which, as noted in the Plan Background Chapter, has grown from 3.5% of Easton's population in 2000, to 14.4% in 2020.

10.6.2 Libraries

Library service in Talbot County is provided by the Talbot County Free Library (TCFL), the main branch of which is in Easton at the corner of Dover and West Streets. In addition to the traditional library resources provided here, the Easton branch is an important community resource, providing a series of community events, study rooms, and a moderately sized meeting room. According to the Library's website, the TCFL receives 76% of its funding from Talbot County and other local governments, 12% from grants and friends support, 6% from the State of Maryland, and the balance from TCFL Foundation and Donations.

The FY 2022 TCFL Annual Report includes the following statistics (NOTE: these figures are for the full system, not just the Easton Branch):

- 23,528 Library Card Holders
- 84,608 physical visits
- 14,179 reference questions answered
- 7,701 computer users
- 13,982 Wi-Fi users
- 383,411 Virtual Library Visits
- 970 Uses of the Meeting and Study Rooms by Outside Organizations
- 125,172 physical volumes

- >1,000,000 virtual volumes
- 405 Adult, Teen & Children's Programs with total attendance of 16,831

The TCFL has developed a Strategic Plan through the year 2025 is provided in Appendix _____. All told, TCFL is a valuable and multifaceted community resource.

10.6.3 Public Safety

Many issues related to public safety fall within the realm of a community's overall quality of life that is the subject of the Community Character Chapter. As a part of this Element, it is appropriate to address issues such as the adequacy of existing police services, the expected future needs of the police force, and the need for new offices, substations, etc. The 1997 Comprehensive Plan quoted the International City Managers Association's recommended ratio of 1.75 police personnel per 1,000 people served. That standard was the subject of criticism from previous Police Chiefs. Therefore the 2004 Plan utilized a different standard, that of the International Center of Prevention of Crime, which finds that the national average across the U.S. is 3.36 officers per thousand people served.

With 51 sworn officers in a Town of approximately 15,200, Easton exceeds the ICMA recommended ratio and is exactly on target with the reported national average. There are some factors in Easton that suggest being towards the upper end of the recommended range is appropriate. First, Easton is a regional center for employment, entertainment and commerce. Thus, the population served is much higher than simply the resident population of the Town. Second, Easton's citizens have repeatedly called for strong and active community policing. Finally, Easton is subject to extremely heavy volumes of seasonal traffic traveling between Ocean City and the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area and Easton itself has a modest tourism industry. Factors such as these place a stronger demand on police resources than may normally be found in another municipality of a similar size.

Considering the above, we believe police staffing is adequate for the present time and growth in the number of sworn officers along the rates that Easton has recently experienced should be adequate for the future.

The Easton Volunteer Fire Department provides fire protection in the Town of Easton and the surrounding County area. The department is an all-volunteer organization with financial support from the Town and County. The Fire Department discontinued providing ambulance service as of December 1, 2002. The ambulance equipment and supplies were

sold to Talbot County. The County is now the primary provider of emergency services throughout the County including the Fire Department's service area. There is a State Fire Marshal responsible for Fire Code enforcement in the Town and County.

Fire Protection services should be expanded throughout the Plan period as the Town and County's population continues to increase. As a result of growth in and around the Town a new fire substation was constructed on Matthewstown Road on the lot of the Town's water tower. This location offers better access to US Route 50 and is located in proximity to development activity. One of the consequences of uncontrolled growth, either in terms of rate or location, is the increased potential that Easton would have to move from an all-volunteer Fire Department to a paid department in order to continue to provide acceptable coverage. This would have negative impacts both in terms of the loss of the community spirit that is engendered by the Volunteer Fire Department as well financial implications, including possible (if not probable) tax increases.

Advanced Life Support (ALS) services have been established in Talbot County. ALS provides 24-hour emergency response by trained paramedics and cardiac rescue technicians. ALS services are provided by volunteer and paid staff. Funding for ALS is derived from the County, fundraising activities and private donations. ALS service has also been experiencing difficulty in securing funds for equipment needs related to an increasing number of calls.

In assessing the adequacy of fire and emergency management services for Easton's future, it is necessary to look at more than just population projections. Traffic projections, particularly for US Route 50, have a great influence on both the number of accidents that on that highway as it traverses our Town as well as the ease (i.e. speed) with which emergency responders can reach their destinations.

The form of development is also extremely important when it comes to emergency response time. Studies show that emergency responders can cover more households within a given response time in neighborhoods with a more traditional style of development (i.e. multiple connections). This means that response time from a given fire/rescue station is lower when the community is predominantly built in this form of development. On a larger scale, it also means that the need for additional substations is lessened when the community is built in the traditional pattern as opposed to a suburban style of development.

10.6.4 Water and Sewerage Facilities

The adequacy of the Town's Water and Sewerage facilities to serve Easton through the Year 2040 is detailed in the Community Facilities and Services and Water Resources Elements of this Plan. In fact, one might logically ask, what type of information belongs in which Element? The Maryland Department of Planning has considered this same question and suggests that, with regards to community facilities, "the Community Facilities Element presents the complete picture for the entire jurisdiction [while] the municipal growth element looks only at those facilities affected or necessitated by future growth." That should make this exercise a fairly straightforward mathematical one for this Municipal Growth Element.

We have already calculated in the Future Land Area Needed to Satisfy Demand subsection of this Element that Easton will likely see approximately 6,800 (6,773 was the figure derived) units in future growth areas outside of the Town and another approximately 3,100 (3,083) units in growth within the existing Town limits. There are also 727 units that already exist outside the Town but within the Growth Area.

A new wastewater treatment facility was brought online in 2007 with a capacity to treat 4 million gallons per day. As of December 31, 2023, the WWTF average daily flow was 2.463 MGD. The Easton Utilities Wastewater Master Plan estimates the WWTF flow will exceed the 4.0 MGD in the year 2054, assuming a 1.75% growth in flow from 2023. The Wastewater Master Plan also finds that the WWTF property is large enough to accommodate expansion of the facility to increase capacity as necessary.

Residential wastewater use is somewhat predictable and consistent, but non-residential uses vary depending on the nature of the business. These can vary to a large degree and do not necessarily equate simply to building size. For example, a large major retail store will likely only contribute to the wastewater system through employee/customer restrooms. On the other hand, relatively small industrial uses might have a large demand if, for example, they use large quantities of water for washing, cooling, etc. The point for the purpose of this Element is that at some point, an expansion of wastewater treatment capacity will be necessary to accommodate the development of our ultimate growth area. The current facility was planned for this expansion to occur in the year 2025. It seems reasonable to assume that the actual need for this expansion will occur within a few years of this date depending on future growth rates and the percentage of future growth that is devoted to

residential growth. It would also seem reasonable to expect that this future expansion need only be of relatively modest size (i.e. capacity).

The same logic applies to water usage. Currently the Town of Easton is served by five production wells, with a new production well planned for FY25, giving a combined maximum daily production capacity of 4.00 MGD, including the new well, with the largest water source out of service. As of December 31, 2023, actual water production was 1.90 MGD average daily flow and an estimated maximum demand day of 3.36 MGD.

Easton Utilities has a Water Master Plan. Currently an update to this Plan is underway and it looks at this Comprehensive Plan Update and evaluates the ability to supply water to the entire Growth Area. The Water Master Plan estimates it will be necessary to increase water production capacity by constructing a new water production well in the year 2043, and a new water storage tank (1.0 million gallons capacity) in the year 2051. In addition to demand within the existing Town limits, most of the additional demand will come from residential and commercial development within the Future Growth Area as defined in this Comprehensive Plan.

Finally, the Water Master Plan recommends Capital Improvements designed to satisfy the water demand generated by growth in the future and maintenance of the system. Easton Utilities updates the Capital Improvement Plan annually as funding and priorities require.

In the matter of wastewater service, Easton Utilities recently evaluated the potential impact of the new regional hospital on the Town's wastewater system. Water and wastewater flow capacity for phase one of the Regional Hospital is 101,250 gallons per day, or 0.10125 MGD. Future phases, when and if constructed, are estimated to bring the total capacity to 0.2 MGD, which equates to five percent of the WWTF's 4.0 MGD capacity. The impact of the hospital in terms of any WWTF future expansion is that, if the hospital is constructed and expanded as currently planned, then the WWTF may reach its 4.0 MGD capacity two years earlier than given above, that is, in the year 2049 in lieu of 2051. Thus upgrades will be necessary to the Town's water and wastewater systems to accommodate planned growth, including that of the Hospital, and that Easton Utilities is planning for such upgrades well in advance of the need for them. The Easton Utilities Tariff requires that each new development project pay a water and wastewater capital charge. The capital charges collected are used to fund construction or to repay loans used to construct the new plants or wells. In addition to the

capital charge, developers are required to construct certain sections of distribution and collection systems.

Like the Water Master Plan referenced in the previous subsection, Easton Utilities also operates with the guidance of a Wastewater Master Plan and that document is also in the process of being updated. However, when assessing the ability of EUC to accommodate the growth anticipated/planned by this Comprehensive Plan, the Wastewater Master Plan concludes “the WWTF’s nutrient removal capacity is adequate to support Easton’s planned 1.75% population growth through 2045 and beyond. However, the following WWTF components are projected to need modifications when average flow exceeds 4.0 MGD, nominally in the year 2045, if average effluent flow increases linearly at 1.75% per year, proportional with the planned population growth: Headworks, Flow Equalization, Secondary Clarifiers, U.V. Disinfection and Post Aeration.”

Charts summarizing Planned Water and Waste Water System Capital Projects are provided in Appendix ____.

10.6.5 Stormwater Management Systems

Much of the discussion concerning Stormwater Management is in the Water Resources Element of this Plan. As might be expected in a Town as old as Easton, the degree of stormwater management varies throughout the community. While the critical importance of stormwater management has now been recognized, this was not necessarily always the case and depending on when a given area was improved, it may have been subject to a wide variety of stormwater management standards.

Development in Easton today is subject to the Town’s Stormwater Management Ordinance regulating both quality and quantity of run-off. The basic requirement is that the amount of run-off leaving a site must be no greater after development than it was prior to being developed. This is a fairly standard requirement. Where Easton raises the bar in comparison to many communities though, is with regards to the quality of runoff. Several years ago the Town adopted the 10% pollutant reduction standards of the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area for ALL land within the Town’s borders. Furthermore, we have increasingly required bio-retention and other “innovative” stormwater management techniques in our major projects. The Lowe’s and Waterside Village projects are examples of this.

The one area where there is the greatest potential to come up short in stormwater management is in the already and long developed parts of Town. Here we have had to retrofit systems and depending on when that occurred, the quality will vary greatly. To that end, the Town is always interested in improving stormwater management in such areas. Sometimes this is accomplished by requiring developers of adjacent land areas to address the problem. Sometimes the Town will initiate a project to do so. **Most recently, the Town has joined together with environmental advocacy organizations and Talbot County, who secured grant funding to upgrade stormwater management on the Tanyard Branch. Much of the proposed improvements will occur within the Town of Easton, including the construction of a sediment pond along and adjacent to the Town-owned RTC Park parcel. This should help improve the quality of runoff entering the headwaters of the Tred Avon River, and also alleviate flooding issues in some areas of Town subject to recurring problems. Stormwater Management should not be a limiting factor in future growth of the Town provided that new development continues to comply with State and Local regulations and redevelopment areas are incorporated with newly developed areas, where possible.**

10.6.6 Recreation

Easton's extensive Park system is examined more closely in the Parks and Recreation Element of this Plan. For the purposes of this Element, the focus is on needs generated by future growth. While the focus of this Municipal Growth Element is on the ability of the Town to accommodate the build-out of existing Town boundaries, it is easy to make additional calculations to consider what is needed in the way of parks not just today and for a build-out of our current Town, but also of what will be needed to accommodate the eventual development of the Growth Area.

The State of Maryland recommends a standard ratio of 30 acres of parkland per 1,000 population (one-half of which should be owned by the Town). This equates to 513 acres to meet the needs of the current (2020 Census) population of 17,101 and an additional 203 (for a total of 716) acres of parkland (358 of which should be Town-owned land) to accommodate the build-out of the existing Town limits. 1,178 acres, total, would be required to accommodate the projected population of the Town including all of the Growth Area.

The estimated total acreage of parks and open spaces, of all types, within the existing Town boundaries (as of 2/14/24) is 910.447 (plus Hyde Park, Elliott Road Apartments and Vickers Park). This suggests that at least from an overall area perspective, we currently

satisfy the parks and open space needs of our current population and would do so without any additional park lands for build-out of the current Town boundaries. The ultimate build-out of the Future Growth Areas would require an addition of approximately 268 acres of parks/open space.

Notably, the Town's standard Subdivision requirements, if unchanged, would yield all of this required land. Easton's current standard requires developers to provide a minimum of 35% of their site as common open space, including land to be dedicated for parks or playgrounds (1,200 sq. ft. per dwelling unit). The 9,400 new units that can potentially ultimately be built within the existing Town and Growth Area equate to 259 acres of parks or playgrounds within subdivisions. This suggests that the Town's typical Subdivision Regulation Park Dedication requirement should be sufficient to meet the State guideline for all our needed parkland.

This does not, however, take into account unique situations, such as the need for a regional-scale park on the east side of Town for equitable geographic distribution of such facilities, or a higher local demand for specific uses or amenities than are accounted for in a standardized per capita ratio. This is likely the case in Easton for organized sports fields/facilities. As the County seat and a regional hub, Easton is looked to as the primary location for such facilities to serve a much larger area than the Town alone.

On the other side of the equation, Easton also benefits from the fact that we have two large recreational sites that are immediately adjacent to our growth boundary such that although not technically within our Future Growth Area, these parcels effectively serve the same function. They are the Seth State Demonstration Forest (124.5 acres) and Hog Neck Golf Course (275.9 acres).

10.7 FINANCING MECHANISMS

Current analysis shows that Easton already has (or is already planning to have) sufficient infrastructure to handle the projected Growth of approximately 2,500 homes that could be accommodated within the Town's current boundaries, as well as at least some of the Future Growth Areas that may be considered for annexation.

New development will always require:

- Water and Sewer lines

- Stormwater Management
- Roads
- Areas for Parks/Playgrounds

The Town should require developers to incur these costs as part of the cost of development in Easton, as is currently the case. Other costs that will be necessary to incur farther down the line to accommodate planned growth include:

- Water System Upgrades
- Wastewater Capacity Upgrade
- New Police Officers
- Additional Parks
- Public Safety Enhancements (new equipment, personnel and facilities)

State and County financial help should be examined to help with updating the existing infrastructure for redevelopment areas. Community Legacy and similar programs can help maintain streets and create streetscapes. Additionally, Neighborhood Conservation programs can help improve the infrastructure to increase redevelopment potential. Program Open Space (working cooperatively with Talbot County) and the Municipal Parks Program can help offset the cost of establishing new parks beyond those that are acquired via the development review process. Parkland (and land for any number of other amenities) can also be acquired during the Annexation Process as part of an Annexation agreement. Since Annexations are a completely discretionary power of the legislative body, this is potentially a particularly powerful tool to use to acquire at least the sites for some of these facilities.

Finally, both Talbot County and the Town of Easton have passed Impact Fee Ordinances since the 2004 Comprehensive Plan was adopted. The Town now collects fees to pay for Parks and Recreation, Municipal Facilities, Transportation, Police, and Fire services necessitated by new growth. Similarly, Talbot County assesses Impact Fees both within and outside of municipalities, which cover the costs associated with new Library, Parks and Recreation, Public School, Community College, General Government and Transportation services/facilities. This funding mechanism should continue to be utilized to ensure that the financial burdens resulting from new development is borne by said development and not by the taxpayers of Easton.

10.8 RURAL BUFFERS AND TRANSITION AREAS

In both the Town's Comprehensive Plan and the Talbot County Comprehensive Plan, the Town of Easton is depicted with a Growth Area surrounding the municipal boundaries and a greenbelt located immediately adjacent to the limits of this Growth Area on the County side of the line. The purpose of this greenbelt is primarily to work in conjunction with the Urban Growth Boundary to limit the geographic spread, or sprawl, of Easton out into rural parts of the County. An Urban Growth Boundary has been referred to as the opposite of sprawl. It also establishes a clear delineation between Town and County such that at build-out, it will be clear whether one is in Town or out in the country, as opposed to some hybridized suburban netherworld.

The Town works with Talbot County and with Agricultural/Forest Preservation Organizations to preserve or permanently protect these areas. A sizeable amount of such land is already protected as is depicted on the following Map.

[Insert Map of Protected Lands in/around Easton's Greenbelt MAP 3]

10.8.1 Burden on Services for Areas Outside of Town but Under Town's Responsibility

Easton does not, at this time, provide any services or infrastructure to any areas outside of its corporate boundaries, with the exception of fire and rescue service, which is technically not a Town service but a service provided by a Volunteer organization. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, the form and rate of future development is critical with regards to impacts on fire and rescue service. If left totally uncontrolled, the likelihood of having to switch from a volunteer fire department to a paid department is significantly greater than is the case if we follow a strategy of controlled growth in a traditional, relatively urban-scale development pattern.

10.8.2 Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012

During the 2012 Legislative Session, the Maryland general Assembly passed the Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012. Among other things, this law required all Maryland jurisdictions to map areas of existing and planned sewerage service and classify areas into various tiers of service. For Easton, this exercise was relatively simple and resulted in a Map (adopted by the Town Council in December of 2012) that included just three tiers; Tier I (Existing Sewer), Tier II (Planned for Sewer, Municipal or Growth Area, and Tier IIA (Not yet in County Water and Sewer Master Plan, Municipal or Growth Area. In

accordance with this law, the Town's adopted Map was incorporated herein in 2016 and is shown below:

Map Town of Easton Tier Designations

10.9 PROTECTION OF SENSITIVE AREAS

The identification of sensitive areas in Easton is encouraged as early in the development review process as possible so that these areas can be avoided, protected, and/or enhanced. No less of a standard should govern the eventual development of the Growth Area. These elements are summarized below:

- **Streams and Buffers:** The Town protects this resource by requiring a 100 foot buffer from perennial streams (50 foot for intermittent).
- **100-year Flood Plain:** There are limited such areas in Easton, but where they do exist they are governed by a Floodplain Ordinance which is consistent with the National Model Floodplain Ordinance and the National Flood Insurance Program. Given the limited areas of floodplain in and around Easton, there is little impact anticipated on this resource as given the size (i.e. width) of the floodplain on a typical lot, there is generally ample room to locate any desired improvements elsewhere on the lot.
- **Habits of Threatened and Endangered Species:** Again, these are identified at the earliest stage of the development review process possible and adjustments to site planning, if necessary, are made then to afford the maximum protection possible to this resource. Given that most of Easton's future growth will occur on land not presently within the Town limits, this identification could be moved up to the very beginning of the process so that it is considered at the Annexation stage.
- **Steep Slopes:** This is one sensitive area that Easton has very little of and virtually all of what we do have will be located in a stream buffer (or the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area) and therefore already protected.
- **Agricultural and Forest Lands Intended for Resource Protection or Conservation:** A more detailed discussion will be found in the Sensitive Areas Element. For this Element, it is mentioned to examine the impact of projected growth on agricultural and forest areas.

There will be a significant impact on agricultural and forest areas as Easton grows since that is predominately what the Growth Area consists of today. Agriculture is not precluded in Easton, but it has long been recognized that as Easton grows, the agricultural fields will yield to development to accommodate that growth. Thus, while we do not take action to prevent agricultural activities from occurring within Easton, neither do we take action to preserve it. The story is a little different with regards to forests.

Easton has long had and administered a Forest Conservation program and the intention is always to identify and protect the most valuable forest land, such as those associated with a non-tidal wetland or located along a stream bank serving as a buffer. Furthermore, it is now a requirement to not allow these protected forests (nor for that matter wetlands and/or buffers) to be located on individual, privately-owned lots. Instead, such areas must now be set aside as their own separate lots to be owned by the Town, an environmental interest group, a homeowner's association, etc. As Easton develops the Future Growth Area, we will continue these policies and protect this important resource. In addition, when possible, we will explore opportunities to expand such areas. One example is the Seth Demonstration Forest, which is a portion of our Greenbelt. It abuts the Easton Club East subdivision as well as land to the north of that development. The Forest Conservation Area for Easton Club East is located adjacent to the Seth Forest to provide more forest areas. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the land to the north of Easton Club East, where Seth (formerly Beechwood) Drive would access the property, has been identified as suitable as a location for a large-scale park. It also offers the opportunity to enhance the Seth Forest by such actions as protecting additional forest land, planting more forest, adding a woodlands garden, etc.

10.10 POPULATION GROWTH PROJECTIONS

Population growth dynamics and projections are provided in the Plan Background Chapter. Also, it should be reemphasized that with the adoption and adherence to the Growth Boundary, we know, roughly, what Easton's ultimate population will be (given certain assumptions about density of development, percentage of residential vs. non-residential development, household size, etc.). We just do not necessarily know when that population might be achieved. The total number of future dwelling units for the Town as a whole has been calculated to be 17,594. At the household size of the most recent (2020) Census of 2.19 persons per household, these dwelling units equate to a total ultimate Town population of 38,531.

When that population is achieved of course depends on how fast we grow. At the 3% figure that Easton experienced for decades prior to the 2010s, we would achieve our “ultimate” population in approximately 28 years (i.e. by the Year 2052). However, in light of community concern over the speed and amount of growth occurring in Easton, the Planning Commission has identified 1.75% as the maximum annual growth rate they would like to see occur in the future. The most “appropriate” growth rate for Easton is one which ensures that infrastructure is able to keep up with the demands generated by that growth and does not create adverse impacts greater than can be ameliorated. What this rate or level might be is unknown, but it is believed that the recent rate of 3% is too high and our target should be closer to, but slightly higher than, the longer-term average of 1%. Hence, 1.75% was selected as the target.

Table 11 below provides Population Projections on a yearly basis using the 3% and 1.75% growth factors. Under the 1.75% scenario, the ultimate population is not achieved for nearly another half-century in approximately 2070. The actual built-out population is likely to actually be slightly less as we will have to accommodate the parkland identified above and there will be some future civic space, institutional uses, and neighborhood level commercial uses, although all are likely to be minimal.

[insert population growth table 11]

10.11 VISION

This Plan’s Vision for the future of Easton can be summarized as “A Return to our Roots.” This suggests that we desire the future growth and development of our Town to occur in a more Traditional sense, not in the modern constructs of suburbia. Furthermore, we envision our Town to continue to function as the main population center of Talbot County and one of the major Towns on the mid-Shore, along with Cambridge, Denton, Salisbury, Centreville, and Chestertown. We will be a significant place of employment, entertainment and shopping, but on our scale, not that of National Retailers. We have no desire to become THE major shopping destination for the region stretching from the Bay Bridge to Chestertown, to Salisbury and the Delaware State line. We are happy to be THE destination for the citizens of Talbot County and one of several options for people in the region described above, but nothing grander than that.

The “Return to our Roots” theme stems from our desire to develop much more like we did from our earliest days until the beginning of the Post World War II era than from the 1940’s through roughly the present. We want the same kind of density, mix of land uses, and general character of the earlier days and we want to move away from homogenous uses, cookie-cutter, mass produced looking subdivisions, strip development along our highways, and the general “looks like anywhere Suburban America”. We want to be urban, not suburban, although urban on an Eastern Shore of Maryland scale. To that end, this chapter is the perfect segue from, and companion to, the previous Element, Community Character, where this whole theme is discussed in greater detail.

This Vision and theme is the same as that set forth in the 2010 Plan. Considering that in terms of the growth of the Town, little changed from 2010 to today, this makes sense. Specifically, in 2025, just as in 2010, Easton finds itself in a period of slow growth, with a housing affordability problem, and with public support for our overall growth strategy. In some ways though, it will be more challenging to implement this strategy, given that there are at least a few factors that are different in 2025 than they were in 2010. These differences include the increased severity of the housing affordability issue, and recent purchases of large parcels of land by the Town of Easton and Talbot County, which while advancing land preservation/parks and open space goals, also remove hundreds of acres of land from consideration of potential new housing.

Lastly, there is the existence of the Lakeside at Trappe subdivision located a mere five minutes from our southernmost Town boundary. In 2010, and really for decades, Easton has been “the only game in town” in terms of residential development. Now, there is significant “competition” in the form of this 2,000 unit subdivision. How that affects the absorption rate of home sales (and prices) in Easton is unknown at this point, but potentially a significant factor in both our growth strategy and housing affordability during this planning period.

10.12 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Support compact, contiguous growth that enhances Easton’s form.

- Use annexation to close gaps and strengthen the Town’s development edge.
- Prevent leapfrog development and low-efficiency infrastructure extensions.

Goal 2: Align growth with available and planned infrastructure.

- Evaluate growth proposals based on infrastructure capacity and fiscal impacts.
- Coordinate annexation with capital improvement planning and utility investments.

Goal 3: Use annexation to advance public benefit.

- Secure open space, greenways, parks, and roads through annexation agreements.
- Require development commitments aligned with Town planning and design policies.

Goal 4: Coordinate with Talbot County to preserve rural lands and guide growth.

- Maintain a growth boundary and greenbelt around the Town.
- Support shared land preservation tools and interjurisdictional coordination.

11 SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The American Society of Landscape Architects makes the following points about sustainable (urban) development:

Urban development should be guided by a sustainable planning and management vision that promotes interconnected green space, a multi-modal transportation system, and mixed-use development. Diverse public and private partnerships should be used to create sustainable and livable communities that protect historic, cultural, and environmental resources. In addition, policymakers, regulators and developers should support sustainable site planning and construction techniques that reduce pollution and create a balance between built and natural systems.

New sustainable urban developments or re-developments should provide a variety of commercial, institutional, educational uses as well as housing styles, sizes and prices. The provision of sidewalks, trails, and private streets, connected to transit stops and an interconnected street network within these mixed-use developments provides mobility options and helps reduce pollution by reducing vehicle trips.

Walking, bicycling, and other mobility options should be encouraged throughout the urban mixed-use core and mixed-use neighborhoods with easily accessed and well-defined centers and edges.

Fortunately the itemized list of characteristics or outcomes of sustainable urban development in the description above are all perfectly consistent with the Vision of the future Easton that this Plan contemplates. Furthermore, while the idea of tackling global climate change may seem daunting, if not impossible, the actions described above are do-able. In fact, in Easton we have been moving in such a direction for the past several decades. This merely presents one more reason to continue to pursue such a vision.

The Brundtland Commission of the United Nations (1987) published the report, “Our Common Future” and defined sustainable development, as repeated in the intro to this chapter, as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Since then, the definition of

sustainability has expanded to include balance and coordination among the “Three E’s” of environment, economy, and equity as well as development that minimizes the negative impact on the environment and other systems.

Many issues or aspects of sustainability are far beyond the scope of the Town of Easton to address. Actions needed to address climate change, for example, have been subject to International Treaties and will require global support and cooperation in order to make meaningful progress. However, there are actions that Easton can take to anticipate and accommodate the effects of climate change and there are a number of other issues besides climate change that determine just how sustainable our future community will be.

During the Public Input phase of this Plan Update, the scope of possible sustainability issues was evident from the feedback we received. In particular, one exercise invited citizens to “use sticky dots to indicate which of the following issues/items are important to you and should be addressed in the Town’s updated Comprehensive Plan under the heading of Climate Change and Sustainability.” Table 13 below summarizes the responses from this exercise.

[insert table 13, see if you can condense it or reformat to take up less space]

The range of responses and level of concurrence with many of the options as expressed via this exercise was impressive and suggests there may well be community support for a more sustainable future Easton. While the responses are varied by subject, there are at least a few general themes that can be summarized as follows:

- Plan for, and mitigate, the impacts of climate change.
- Facilitate a more sustainable built environment.
- Protect the environment.
- Renewable Energy options
- Food Security

The balance of this chapter will discuss Sustainability in each of these five categories.

11.1 CLIMATE CHANGE

In the 2022 Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Report, “Planning for Climate Mitigation and Adaptation,” the authors note that the United States is facing a number of “existential threats” but notes that only one of them - climate change - has the potential to “destroy

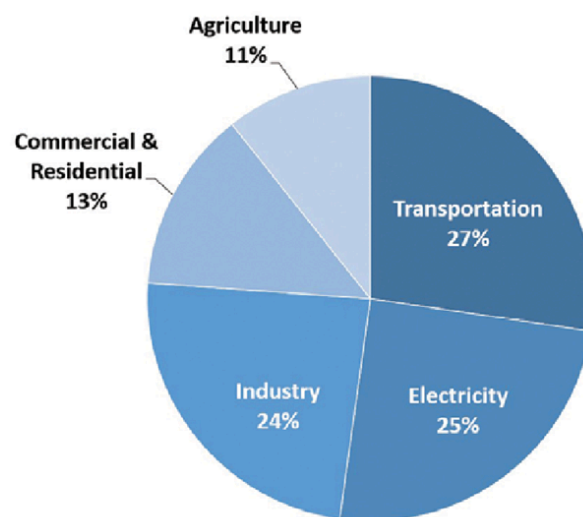
human livability of the entire planet.” According to the former President of the American Planning Association, Leo Asuncion, Jr, in a 2021 statement on the UN Climate Change Conference, “Now is an essential moment where global commitments, national policies, and local planning must all work together to meet the demands of confronting and combating climate change and its impacts on people, places, and our planet.” (emphasis added)

The same PAS Report goes on to state that an effective response to the global challenge that is climate change will require fundamental and systemic changes to the built environment and “inevitably must be addressed policy by policy and project by project in our local communities.” Ultimately, local governments need to shift to, and embrace the concept of, sustainable development in order to make a difference.

In general terms, planning responses to climate change fall into two categories: mitigation planning and adaptation planning. Mitigation planning involves planning for and taking actions that reduce the levels of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in the atmosphere or enhance carbon sinks (i.e. things that absorb more GHGs than they emit). Climate adaptation planning involves actions that reduce the vulnerability of people, places, and ecosystems to the impacts of climate change. The most effective approach will inevitably utilize both mitigation and adaptation techniques and strategies.

11.2 MITIGATION STRATEGIES

The sources of US GHG emissions, by sector, are shown in the following chart:



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2022). Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2020

The largest share is represented by the Transportation Sector, which covers all journeys by road, rail, water and air. This sector generated 29% of US GHG in 2019. Of the total GHG emitted from this sector, 58% of them are generated from the fossil fuels burnt for light-duty vehicles (i.e., cars, pickup trucks, sport utility vehicles (SUVs), vans, and minivans), with an additional 24% from medium and heavy duty trucks. The good news on this front is that there are actions that can be taken from a planning perspective to drive these numbers down. These range from site-specific actions, such as providing adequate infrastructure for charging electric vehicles, to bigger-picture and philosophical changes, such as planning for future growth that is less automobile dependent by incentivizing new growth that occurs in the form of compact, walkable, mixed-use communities that provide a variety of housing choices and offer services within easy walking distance of neighborhoods.

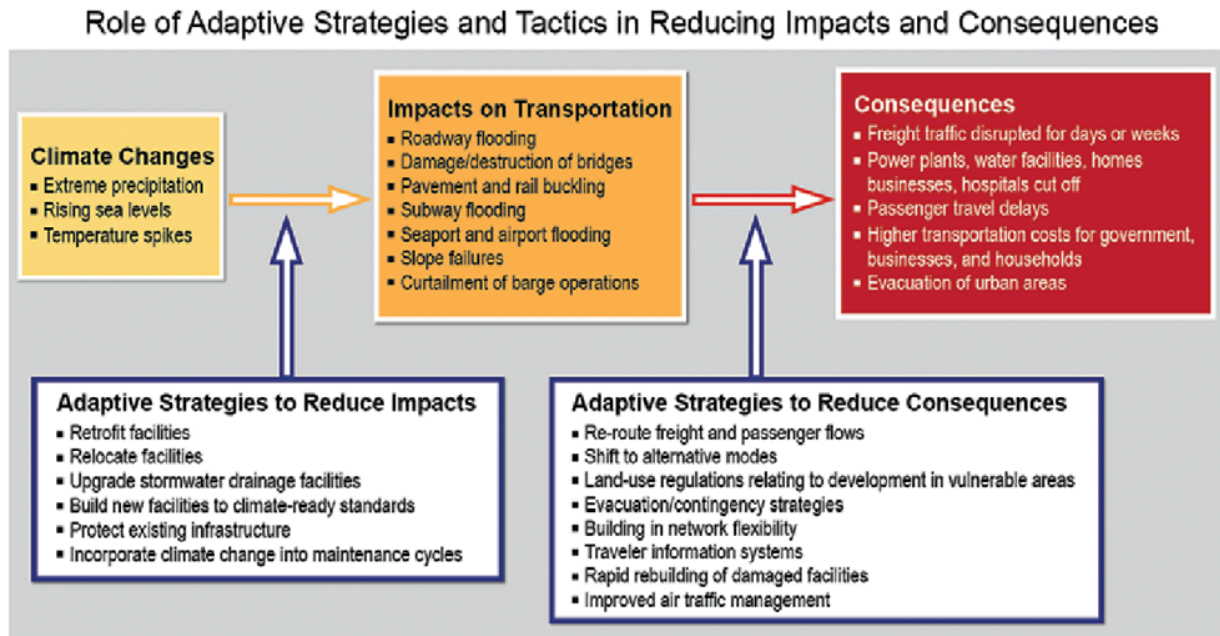
While the Transportation sector is the one most directly related to planning, in terms of the possibility to reduce GHG emissions, it is not the only one. To that point, the following are potential mitigation strategies that communities can implement that more broadly can reduce GHG emissions:

- Increasing the use of renewable energy and access to alternative fuels.
- Providing options for active transportation.
- Designing energy-efficient buildings and resilient infrastructure.
- .Protecting and enhancing natural systems and water resources.
- Maximizing co-benefits of ecosystem services and green infrastructure solutions.
- Purchasing climate-friendly products.
- Educating the public on socioeconomic and public health impacts of climate change.

11.3 ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

The risks posed by climate change include rising sea levels and storm surges, heat stress, extreme precipitation, inland and coastal flooding, drought, increased aridity, water scarcity, and air pollution, all of which will have negative impacts on individual's health, livelihoods, and assets, as well as the community's economy and ecosystems. Adaptation strategies are essential to reducing vulnerability to both the likely everyday, as well as the more extreme or dangerous, outcomes of climate change.

The following flowchart depicts the multiple impacts of climate change on Transportation, the consequences of those impacts, and some adaptation strategies that can be employed (both to reduce impacts and to reduce consequences):



The area where adaptation policies can most directly be impacted by Comprehensive Planning is the general area of land use. This is especially the case when contemplating future growth areas. Preventing future development from occurring in vulnerable locations, such as along waterways, in floodplains, or non-tidal wetlands, is an easy proactive approach to climate change adaptation. It is coincidentally consistent with the essence of this Plan. This is important because as the previously referenced PAS Report notes, comprehensive land use planning that anticipates likely climate impacts can accomplish the following community-wide goals:

- Encouraging coordinated transportation and housing investments, so that people can afford to live in safe conditions with transportation choice in case of emergency.
- Promoting green infrastructure and sound watershed management, which can reduce stormwater runoff, mitigate the urban heat island effect, and improve public health.
- Rehabilitating wetland riparian or estuarine habitats that provide natural ecosystem services, such as flood protection.

- Reducing the long-term cost of development by building in areas that are less vulnerable to climate impacts and costs.

Impacts can also be made at the individual building level. For example, increased frequency and severity of heat waves pose additional risks for occupants of homes without cooling methods. Very young children, the elderly (who represent a high percentage of Easton’s population), and those with infirmities are most susceptible to heat strokes and other health risks associated with extreme heat. High-performance green buildings can have both mitigation and adaptation co-benefits. Adaptation practices are ideally implemented at the time of construction, but mitigation to existing buildings can occur in the form of retrofitting existing homes and buildings with additions such as green roofs or sun shading, water storage space, and smart ventilation.

Finally, it is important to note that although there are specific actions that a community may pursue in the realm of climate adaptation, monitoring and evaluation of adaptation policies and actions can be challenging for a number of reasons. The Planning for Climate Mitigation and Adaptation PAS Report, lists the following cautions with regards to monitoring adaptation:

MEASURING ADAPTATION

Monitoring and evaluating adaptation can be challenging for the following reasons (CAP and ICLEI 2015):

- **Adaptation is not an objective or an endpoint.** Adaptation is a process of continual adjustment, and there is no clear measure or benchmark that signals that an adaptation measure is “successful.” Often adaptation evaluation relies on proxy measures that relate to the achievement of broader societal and environmental aims.
- **Uncertainty is inherent in virtually all monitoring and evaluation processes.** With many climate trends not yet clear, planners need to plan for a range of possible scenarios. For example, uncertainty regarding the rate and extent of sea level rise is critical to adaptation planners in coastal areas, but equally uncertain are issues of population growth and aging infrastructure.
- **Adaptation is evaluated by measuring avoided impacts.** Adaptation efforts are designed to reduce adverse impacts of climate change. In the absence of that impact taking place, it can be challenging to measure how much worse the situation would have been without the intervention.
- **Evaluating adaptation entails tracking towards a “moving target.”** In monitoring climate change, natural and socioecological systems undergo continuous change over time and so the use of a fixed baseline may lose some validity. With this consistent variability, baseline data may not always provide a solid reference point.
- **Adaptation requires long time horizons.** Because adaptation activities tend to have long time frames and unclear endpoints that are liable to change over time, it can be difficult to measure them within traditional five-year government planning cycles or political mandates.
- **Adaptation spans multiple scales and sectors.** Adaptation encompasses diverse programming strategies, populations, and locales. While it is predominantly a local process, progress towards it is often examined at much higher levels, and often at a sector scale. It can be very difficult to compare or aggregate results in an effective way because of the eclectic range of sectors, the varying availability of data, and different site contexts.
- **There is no one set of indicators or monitoring and evaluation approaches.** As adaptation is a process rather than an outcome, individual indicators for climate adaptation may not necessarily exist as “good” climate adaptation indicators. In addition, as adaptation cuts across contexts, scales, and sectors, no universal set of indicators will fit these divergent contexts.
- **Assessing the effectiveness and adequacy of adaptation is both complex and challenging.** It demands a practical, replicable approach that provides meaningful, quantifiable information. Recognizing that building resilience is a moving goal in a changing climate, measuring adaptation effectiveness should also be flexible and adaptable to a wide range of contexts and be able to catalyze learning at a variety of spatial and temporal scales (Craft and Fisher 2016).

11.4 SUSTAINABLE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The aspect of sustainability that is most directly relevant to a Comprehensive Plan, and which is addressed throughout this Plan, is that of the built environment. This includes planning-related areas such as encouraging more energy efficient buildings, to fundamental principles of land use planning such as prescribing a future development pattern that is more sustainable than that which has occurred in the last half-century or so.

With regards to future development patterns, the measure of success will overwhelmingly come from what happens in our Future Growth Area. Accommodating more growth in the form of Infill and Redevelopment of the existing Town boundaries will help achieve this goal, but given the nature of this type of development, the stage has essentially already been set.

Infill/Redevelopment will be more sustainable in that such development is generally more accommodating of active modes of transportation and is closer to the shopping and services that residents need, thus facilitating such active transportation. However, barring a fundamental (and very large) change in the scope and nature of density of development in the vicinity of Downtown, and despite strong public support for focusing future growth on this aspect, there is a limit to how much can be accommodated in this manner. Eventually, and likely sooner rather than later, the overwhelming majority of growth will occur in what are now “greenfields” in our Future Growth Area. Improving sustainability of the development of these areas will largely dictate Easton’s overall success (or lack thereof) in improving the sustainability of the Town as a whole.

The elements that will lead to a more sustainable form of development in the future are covered throughout this Plan, so they will not be discussed in detail here. In particular the Implementation Chapter discusses in detail recommended options for achieving this goal. For the purposes of this chapter, simply listing the options to improve the sustainability of future greenfield development will suffice, and they include:

- Permitting/encouraging/requiring mixed-use development.
- Facilitating residential development at a higher density and with a wider variety of housing options.
- Maximizing connectivity to other future development.
- Providing, where possible, connectivity to existing development.
- Facilitating and accommodating active modes of transportation.

11.4.1 Financial Sustainability

Beyond these environmental and general quality of life aspects of sustainability, future development patterns have even more diverse sustainability implications. One such aspect is the financial sustainability of such development, and ultimately the Town as a whole. In short, there are a multitude of potential development scenarios possible for any given parcel of land in the Growth Area. Some will result in significant revenue for the Town, but might also impose large new costs. Others may not cost that much to serve, but may also contribute very little in the way of new revenue. From the perspective of financial sustainability, development that justifies its cost by providing a net positive fiscal impact to the Town ought to be prioritized over that which will ultimately be a net drain on Town resources.

Although it can certainly vary depending on the local government's tax structure and policies, residential development in general, and specifically single-use, low-density residential development, tends to cost local governments more to serve than it produces in new tax revenue. On the other hand, mixed-use and non-residential development can be cash flow positive for local governments. One way to view/measure such impacts is on a value per acre (VPA) basis. An assessment of Easton's VPA was conducted in 2024 by the firm Urban3 and its results are summarized in the Land Use Chapter of this Plan.

11.4.2 Social / Cultural Equity

Another aspect of equity that can be affected by development patterns is that of social/cultural equity. Social equity in development patterns refers to ensuring fair and just distribution of resources, opportunities, and public services across all segments of a community. It involves addressing disparities in access to things like housing, healthcare, education, transportation, and employment, aiming to prevent certain groups from being left behind.

Consideration of social equity in planning and future land use patterns is important for a number of reasons, including the following:

- **Reduced Poverty and Inequality** - By addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality, social equity contributes to a more just and prosperous community.
- **Increased Social Cohesion** - When people feel that they have equal opportunities and access to resources, it fosters a sense of community and belonging.

- Greater Resilience - Equitable communities are better equipped to withstand economic and environmental shocks.
- Sustainable Development - Social Equity is an essential component of sustainable development, ensuring that progress benefits all members of society, both present and future.

11.5 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Similar to the preceding discussion on the built environment, sustainability issues related to environmental protection are covered elsewhere in this Plan. In this instance, the Sensitive Areas Chapter addresses this topic. In short, the point is that while Easton is indeed the primary growth area for Talbot County, and arguably the Mid and Upper Eastern Shore, that does not translate into the development of every square inch of land within our jurisdiction. There are vital environmental features that are important to preserve and protect for a myriad of reasons, including enhancing the sustainability of the Town.

One example of this is the area of stormwater management. Protecting the non-tidal wetlands within Town is a more sustainable option than filling them in and constructing ponds, swales, bioretention areas and the like, to perform the functions that those natural wetlands would provide (and would do so without the cost to construct the facilities or to maintain them).

11.6 RENEWABLE ENERGY

The energy supplier to the vast majority of Easton properties is the Easton Utilities Commission (EUC). Broadly speaking, EUC is pursuing a number of sustainable goals and objectives. Notably, this includes their “Sustainability Campus.” Of note to the topic of renewable energy, the EUC Sustainability Campus includes a solar array, described by EUC as:

Perhaps the biggest effort to offset greenhouse gas emissions was the installation of the 2MW solar field at Easton’s Sustainability Campus located adjacent to the wastewater treatment facility. The array generates more than enough electricity to power the entire treatment plant. On average, 20% of the electricity generated by the panels is fed back onto the local electric grid. Commissioned in 2017, the nearly 10-acre site was constructed for a total of \$4 million. Through a grant by Maryland

Department of the Environment, 75% of the construction costs were covered, making Easton Utilities' total investment \$1 million. This partnership allowed the project to be both cost and environmentally effective, benefiting the community by avoiding almost 1,672 metric tons of CO₂e emissions per year.

The Town should continue to support EUC's sustainability and renewable energy initiatives. Beyond that, we can and should explore options for additional solar arrays. In the context of a growing town like Easton, this can be a challenge since arrays can consume large amounts of land. However, there may be opportunities to co-locate panels on the roofs of large buildings or in large surface parking lots.

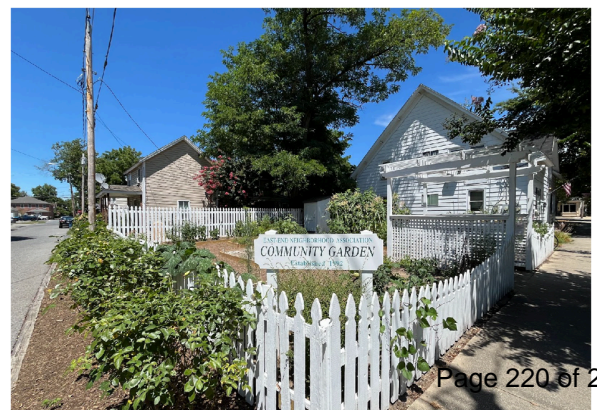
11.7 FOOD SECURITY

The UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) describes a sustainable food system as “a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised. This means that:

- It is profitable throughout (economic sustainability);
- It has broad-based benefits for society (social sustainability); and
- It has a positive or neutral impact on the natural environment (environmental sustainability).”

As a growing and vibrant Town, there is little actual agricultural activity occurring within the corporate limits of Easton. However, land that is annexed into Town is often agricultural and sometimes remains as such for several years. There is certainly nothing wrong with this practice of allowing farming as essentially a temporary or interim use until landowner/developer motivation and/or market forces dictate that it is time for the property to develop. Furthermore, the Town envisions the Talbot County side of our Growth Boundary to consist of farms and forests and supports their efforts to permanently preserve these areas.

On a smaller scale, within the Town limits sustainable food systems can be supported through gardens. These can be located on private property for the use and enjoyment of the resident of the property, or in the



form of a community garden. One such community garden exists in the East End Neighborhood of Easton, just outside of Downtown (see picture below). This option is especially appropriate in the more densely developed sections of Town where land may be too scarce for individual private gardens.

11.8 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL: Create a more livable, sustainable, and equitable built environment.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Enact Land Use Laws which prioritize or incentivize compact, mixed-use development accessible to a wide range of household incomes..
- ✓ Establish a robust active transportation system by requiring it to be built in new developments and retrofitting existing streets to include facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.
- ✓ Work with public transportation agencies to support and augment appropriate forms of public transit into/out of and within Easton.
- ✓ Explore options to expand the electric vehicle charging infrastructure in Easton, including requiring new development to provide such infrastructure.
- ✓ Ensure that new growth is coordinated and balanced with the provision of the infrastructure required to support it and that the cost to do so is borne by the development necessitating such infrastructure.

GOAL: Reduce the vulnerability of current and future Eastonians to the impacts of climate change.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Restrict development in areas most susceptible to the effects of climate change..
- ✓ Continue to pursue watershed restoration projects.
- ✓ Promote the further establishment of a vibrant green infrastructure system.

- ✓ Evaluate the Open Space/Park requirements of the Zoning Code and Subdivision Regulations to determine whether they are at the appropriate levels to achieve Sustainability goals and objectives.
- ✓ Plan for the indirect impacts of climate change on Easton’s residents, such as the influx of residents of parts of Talbot County who are more vulnerable to the consequences of sea-level rise and may travel to, or through, Easton in extreme weather events.
- ✓ Increase Easton’s tree canopy coverage to mitigate the effects of increased heat.

GOAL: Reduce the vulnerability of existing buildings and their occupants to the effects of climate change.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Identify the buildings and structures most at risk to climate change impacts and offer assistance to install retrofit measures to reduce the vulnerability of these structures (through, for example, grants or low-interest loans funded by a future grant).
- ✓ Relocate, where feasible, infrastructure located within areas likely to be impacted by climate change.
- ✓ Explore the feasibility and implications of requiring that new construction meet LEED certification (or the equivalent) standards.

GOAL: Establish and maintain a sustainable food system for Easton’s residents.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Support the agricultural use of vacant land within the Town’s boundaries as well as our Future Growth Area.
- ✓ Support Talbot County’s Agricultural Preservation efforts in general, and specifically to preserve farmland adjacent to the outside (i.e., County side) of our Growth Boundary.
- ✓ Explore options to expand the capacity of the Easton Farmers Market as well as opportunities to make it more accessible and open more hours per week and weeks per year.

- ✓ Look for opportunities to establish more community gardens.

GOAL: Increase renewable energy supply in Easton.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Support efforts of Easton Utilities to build upon the success of their Sustainability Campus.
- ✓ Explore options for contextually-appropriate solar arrays to be established in Easton.

GOAL: Accommodate emerging technology that might improve the sustainability of Easton.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Develop plans to accommodate the needs of growing numbers of electric vehicles (EV) and autonomous vehicles (AV).
- ✓ Evaluate Town development regulations to ensure that provision of EV-charging infrastructure is adequately accommodated.
- ✓ Evaluate the appropriateness of how renewable energy options (e.g., solar, wind) are addressed in Easton's Zoning Code.

12 IMPLEMENTATION

12.1 PURPOSE

12.2 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The following Design Principles serve as a consistent evaluation tool for proposed development. Originally focused on Community Character, they have been expanded to reflect all chapters of the Plan and are now included in the Implementation chapter to guide application review, support policy alignment, and clarify expectations for applicants and decision-makers. These principles are not ranked by priority but organized for coherence.

Principle #1 – Neighborhoods Are Places to Live, Not Just Sleep

Development should reflect Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND), where a mix of residential and non-residential uses are integrated in a walkable, community-oriented layout. This includes:

- Centrally located, neighborhood-serving non-residential uses
- Commercial or civic spaces scaled to fit the neighborhood context
- Third spaces designed to be welcoming, not exclusive
- Meaningful open space that supports active living

Avoid isolated pods of commercial or strip retail disconnected from surrounding neighborhoods. TND supports transportation efficiency, environmental goals, community services access, and Easton's historic development pattern.

Principle #2 – Design for People, Not Cars

Automobile-oriented development degrades community character, safety, and land use efficiency. Design should:

- Prioritize pedestrians and cyclists through Complete Streets
- Limit access points on arterial roads for safety and flow
- Minimize parking impacts by locating lots behind buildings or reducing space

- Use alleys for service and reduce front-facing garages
- Orient development around existing trail systems and support future transit

Avoid disconnected sidewalks, dominant parking lots, and wide neighborhood streets resembling arterials. Prioritize human-scale, multimodal environments.

Principle #3 – Neighborhoods Should Connect

Connectivity is essential to community function, mobility, and resilience. New developments should:

- Include multiple access points for all modes
- Follow grid-style street layouts where feasible
- Provide multimodal links to adjacent and future development
- Connect open spaces as part of a regional green infrastructure system

Connected neighborhoods improve access to jobs and retail, facilitate emergency response, and strengthen community ties.

Principle #4 – Provide Diverse Housing in Every Neighborhood

Housing should accommodate a range of incomes, lifestyles, and life stages within the same development. Evaluate proposals based on:

- Aesthetically integrated affordable housing
- Varied building types, sizes, and prices along visible frontages
- Missing middle options (e.g., duplexes, cottage courts) beyond just townhomes
- Adaptive reuse of non-residential buildings for housing

Avoid repetitive designs, income-segregated layouts, and narrow price ranges that exclude working families.

Principle #5 – Let the Environment Guide Development

Design should respond to both existing and anticipated environmental conditions. Proposals should:

- Justify greenfield development and prioritize infill

- Preserve natural features and integrate them into the site
- Use native landscaping and minimize bird collisions
- Address stormwater, energy efficiency, and climate resilience

Avoid unnecessary environmental degradation. Design should reflect the site's unique ecology and promote sustainable living.

Principle #6 – Ensure Fiscal Sustainability

New development should be fiscally responsible and cost-effective for the Town to maintain over time. This includes:

- Fiscal impact analyses for large or greenfield projects
- Infill and reuse of existing buildings and infrastructure
- Conversion of underutilized parking lots

Avoid sprawl, leapfrog growth, or isolated infrastructure that burdens Town finances without long-term revenue support.

Principle #7 – Celebrate Easton's Unique Identity

New development should respect Easton's architectural heritage and small-town character without replicating it superficially. Key traits include:

- Designs that are modern yet compatible with surrounding context
- Preservation or reuse of historic structures
- Multiple builders or architectural styles in large developments
- Creative, interactive open spaces and sensitive signage

Avoid templated or brand-driven architecture, large-scale commercial formats, or designs that displace existing communities.

Principle #8 – Be a Good Neighbor

Developments must consider the needs and concerns of nearby residents. Strong proposals should:

- Engage surrounding neighborhoods early in the process

- Align with adopted charrettes and small area plans
- Provide infrastructure or amenities that benefit the wider community
- Buffer incompatible uses and mitigate impacts (noise, light, odor)

Good neighbor design is collaborative, transparent, and context-sensitive. It strengthens community trust and produces better outcomes.

12.3

13 APPENIDICES
