

# *Mount Airy Environs Community Comprehensive Plan*

## ***Chapter 5: Growth Management & Land Use Goal***

### **Goals**

- To concentrate development in and around the existing town
- To promote a more compact development design in all new subdivision and site plans

### **Current Conditions**

#### *1 Current Development Regulations*

Development within the Mount Airy environs is governed by Carroll County regulations and ordinances. These acts control the ways in which land is subdivided, prepared for construction, constructed upon, and landscaped. They also address the provision of public facilities such as roadways and the types of land uses that may occur on a particular parcel. They are designed to promote the orderly development of land while limiting impacts to adjacent property owners, natural resources, and public facilities. Among the regulations are:

- Subdivision Regulations
- Landscape Manual
- Zoning Ordinance
- Adequate Public Facilities and Concurrency Management Regulations
- Design Manuals
- Environmental Regulations
- Building Codes

#### *2 Current Development Patterns*

Large-lot residential development is the most prominent pattern for recent growth in the study area. Residential subdivisions are located throughout the Agricultural and Conservation zones mainly along MD 27 and major County roadways. The amount of high-density residential development within the study area is extremely limited. Some of the older neighborhoods within the election district are characterized by housing that is situated on smaller lots along roadways.

Though still rural in character, residential land use makes up a larger portion (3,608 acres) of the landscape than does agricultural/resource land (3,229 acres). Existing agriculture land is generally confined to the eastern and northwestern portions of the study area and along the west side of MD 27 near the center of the study area. There are numerous large tracts of Agricultural-and Conservation-zoned land scattered throughout the study area that could potentially be developed for residential purposes.

What little commercial and industrial land exists in the study area is focused just north of I-70 and between I-70 and MD 144. Some vacant parcels exist on these two sites, but they are predominately occupied by service and retail establishments.

The overall terrain of the area generally slopes away from MD 27 to the east and west.

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Streams, steep slopes, and linear forest stands exist uniformly throughout the study area. These areas are generally not suitable for any type of development or use. It is also important to note that Carroll County owns roughly 1,000 acres for the future construction of the Gillis Falls Reservoir along the eastern edge of the study area.

### *3 Inventory of Existing Use of Land*

During August 2002, planning staff performed a “windshield” survey of current actual use of land throughout the study area. Staff viewed buildings, structures, and vegetation on each property to determine the current use of land. In some cases, residential subdivision plans and site development plans were reviewed to verify the approval status of the development. Property tax map information was reviewed to determine the location of recorded (or platted) subdivision lots.

The existing use of land was inventoried according to the following land use categories: Mixed Use, Single-Family Residential, Multi-Family Residential, Commercial, Industrial, Agricultural/Environmental Resource, Public Use, Public Owned, and Vacant. The following table provides the total acreage of each use of land category as identified in the study area.

### *4 Current Zoning*

Current land use and current zoning on a property do not always coincide. A property may be zoned residential but if the owner does not choose to develop, it might remain in agricultural use indefinitely. Similarly, a property may have a use on it that predated the zoning so it is possible that a commercial use might exist in a residential zone. For this reason, the number of acres ascribed to a particular use of land above may vary from the number of acres for a comparable zoning designation. The following table provides a break down of the study area by current zoning.

<b>Existing Use of Land Acreage Mount Airy Environs Study Area 2002</b>		
<b>Existing Use Category</b>	<b>Election Dist. 13*</b>	<b>Percentage of Study Area</b>
Agriculture/Resource	3,229	38.1
Commercial	100	1.2
Industrial	100	1.2
Public Use	1,246	14.7
Single-Family Residential	3,507	41.4
Multi-Family Residential	101	1.2
Mixed Use	0	0.0
Vacant	114	1.3
Roads	72	0.9
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>8,469</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* excludes Town of Mount Airy

Source: Carroll County Planning Department, 2002

### *5 Current Growth Management Measures*

The Mayor, Town Council, and the Town Planning and Zoning Commission have approval and development control within the Mount Airy corporate limits. The Carroll County Commissioners and the Carroll County Planning Commission have development control outside the town limits. The area outside the town limits and within the Growth Area Boundary is represented by the *Mount Airy Environs Comprehensive Plan*.

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**Current Zoning Acreage  
Mount Airy Environs Study Area  
2002**

Zoning District	Election Dist. 13*	Percentage of Study Area
Agricultural (A)	2,290	27.0
Local Business (BL)	5	0.1
General Business (BG)	20	0.2
Restricted Industrial (IR)	0	0.0
General Industrial (IG)	11	0.1
Conservation (C)	5,340	63.1
R-7,500	0	0.0
R-10,000	0	0.0
R-20,000	46	0.5
R-40,000	685	8.1
Roads	72	0.9
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>8,469</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* excludes Town of Mount Airy

Source: Carroll County Planning Department, 2002

## **A ⇨ Comprehensive Plan**

The comprehensive plan for the Mount Airy environs area is the guiding growth management tool for the County within the study area boundary. The State requires that the plan be updated every six years. The community, County staff, and the County Planning Commission develop the comprehensive plan. The County Commissioners adopt the plan and any associated zoning changes.

Carroll County and the Town of Mount Airy jointly adopted the *Mount Airy and Environs Comprehensive Plan* in 1981.

This plan helped to delineate a future corporate boundary line and addressed appropriate areas for growth and development in and around the town. The community commitment to economic development was renewed with suitable zoning around the CPA and continued revitalization efforts downtown. Areas were also identified and evaluated for future public water and sewer service availability in the plan.

The Town has since conducted two separate comprehensive plan updates for the incorporated area within the town limits, one in 1994 and one in 2004. The 2004 plan update reaffirmed the Town's commitment to concentrating growth in and around existing urban areas and mitigating the impacts of future growth with the natural environment and town character in mind. The plan also called for continued efforts in creating a better balance between the residential, commercial, and industrial tax base. The table below provides a break down of acreages within each land use category at the time of the plan in 1981.

## **B ⇨ Annexation Petitions**

Most of the residentially-zoned properties within the town limits of Mount Airy have been or are currently being developed. To have additional residential development area, other than in-fill and redevelopment, new land must be annexed. The Mayor and Town Council of Mount Airy have the authority to annex properties. This allows the Town to decide when and where new land can be annexed and developed. Where the Town desires to rezone annexed land to allow development that would differ from what is specified in the comprehensive plan, the County would need to grant a waiver of zoning. The Town currently has designated seven potential annexation areas within the *2004 Town of Mount Airy Master Plan*.

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## **C ⇨ Capital Improvement Programming**

The *Capital Improvements Program* (CIP) refers to improvements that are scheduled in the succeeding five-year period, while the budget refers to those facilities that are programmed for the next fiscal year. Capital improvements commonly include new or expanded physical facilities or public improvements that are relatively large in size, expensive, and permanent. These may include such items as streets, libraries, water and sewer lines, or park facilities. Generally, CIP projects are relatively long-term in usefulness and permanence.

<b>Land Use Designation Acreage Mount Airy Environs Study Area 1981</b>		
<b>Land Use Designation</b>	<b>Existing CPA (excluding Town)</b>	<b>Percentage of CPA</b>
Agricultural	0	0.0
Conservation	625	29.5
Commercial	25	1.2
Industrial	131	6.2
R-40,000	740	34.9
R-20,000	53	2.5
R-10,000	452	21.3
R-7,500	94	4.4
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>2,120</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Carroll County Planning Department, 1981

## **D ⇨ Water and Sewer Master Plan**

The Town of Mount Airy supplies public water and sewer service within the town’s limits as well as the areas surrounding the town. New development around the town must connect to the public water and/or sewerage system if the Town makes the service available and the property is planned to be served. Since the Town controls the water and sewer systems, it can decide when and where the facilities will be extended or allocated and if the supply is adequate for any proposed development. The Town also controls the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for the water and sewer systems; the CIP controls the funding and phasing of any expansion or upgrade of the water or sewerage systems. The Town can deny additional connections or expansions, thereby controlling growth. The County, with the assistance of the Town of Mount Airy, develops a triennial *Water and Sewerage Master Plan* for future extensions of the water and sewerage facilities, which serves as a guide for the expansion of these facilities. The triennial plan also re-evaluates the current water and sewerage capacities and projects additional growth along with assessing potential expansion of these facilities.

## **E ⇨ Adequate Public Facilities and Concurrency Management**

The *Adequate Public Facilities and Concurrency Management Chapter* of the Carroll County Code of Public Local Laws is designed to phase and time growth and public facilities through the County’s CIP. Planned residential growth is permitted to proceed at a rate that will not unduly strain public facilities, specifically schools, roads, water and sewer facilities, and police, fire, and emergency medical services. This chapter is designed to establish minimum thresholds for public facilities. Limits and allocations for development are set each year in accordance with growth history and projections. Although development in the adjacent town is not restricted by the County regulations, the development within the town limits is accounted for in the development of the County’s allowable growth standards. The County Commissioners have the authority over this chapter and its provisions. Annually, Available Threshold Capacity (ATC) limits for specific geographic areas are determined by the County Commissioners for each facility/service based on the information contained in the annual *Concurrency Management Report*. The *Concurrency Management Report* tracks development moving through various stages of the approval process, evaluates the fiscal outlook, and provides capacity information

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for each facility.

## F ⇒ 1992 Planning Act and 1997 Smart Growth Initiatives

The Maryland Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992 (the Planning Act) was passed with the intent of encouraging economic growth, limiting sprawl development, and protecting the state's natural resources. The Planning Act amended Article 66B. Most local jurisdictions in the state have established priority areas for resources protection. The Planning Act encourages these jurisdictions to build on that base with consistent development regulations and targeted infrastructure investment by the State.

Under the *Smart Growth* initiatives, counties may designate areas as Priority Funding Areas (PFA) if they meet guidelines for intended use, availability of plans for sewer and water systems, permitted residential density, or fell within the municipal boundary. In addition, areas eligible for County designation are existing communities and areas where industrial or other economic development is desired. Counties may also designate areas planned for new residential communities which will be served by water and sewer systems and meet density standards. The State will not put their funds where new development outside of a PFA is low in density; there must be an average density of 3.5 dwelling units per acre to qualify for State funds. This initiative prohibits the State from funding growth-related projects not located within a PFA.

## Analysis of Community Needs

### 1 Large-Lot Development

The prevailing development pattern in the Mt. Airy environs is the large-lot, residential subdivision. It does not resemble the compact, concentrated development called for in the goals of this chapter. In fact, as the following table indicates, the density of residential development in the town is lower than in comparable communities in Carroll County.

Population Density (based on 2000 Census data)			
Town	Population	Population per sq. mi.	Housing units per sq. mi.
Westminster	16,731	2,929	1,183
Mt. Airy (Frederick County portion)	3,445	2,618	794
Hampstead	5,060	1,887	690
Manchester	3,329	1,713	605
Mt. Airy (Carroll County portion)	2,980	1,186	451

Source: U.S. Census

Moreover, the Carroll County side of Mt. Airy is lower in density than the Frederick County side of Mt. Airy. In the environs, particularly along MD 27, new residential subdivisions with lots larger than one acre continue the trend of low-density development beyond the town's limits. Rather than concentrating development in and around Mt. Airy, approval of such subdivisions spreads the population evenly, leaving less distinction between the town and the surrounding land.

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## *2 Mixed-Use Development*

The survey of existing land use indicates that there is no mixed-use development in the planning area. The alternative, and what currently exists, is a pattern of large areas each dedicated to a single use of land, such as houses or offices. Single land use developments require people to drive more to get between destinations and require that more land be dedicated for roads and parking to accommodate the cars. The resulting pattern is less compact than what might be achieved where residential and commercial uses exist side by side.

## *3 Zoning that Reinforces Land Use Planning*

Current zoning does not support the goals of this chapter as well as it could. In particular, the Conservation (C) District, as it is currently used, allows development that is low density and dispersed throughout the agricultural lands outside of town. Looking ahead in 1981, the *Mount Airy and Environs Comprehensive Plan* designated 625 acres, or what was at the time about 30 percent of land in the environs, for use as C Districts. Now, a little more than 20 years later, the amount of land zoned C far exceeds what was intended in 1981; under 2003 zoning, 5,340 acres, or about 63 percent of land in the environs, was zoned C. A lot of the C-zoned land is located outside of town and even outside of the environs, that is, outside of the study area for this plan. In fact, of all the districts in the zoning code, the C District (along with the Agricultural, or A, District) tends to be situated farthest from the center of town. Yet most new development is occurring within these zones. This is due in large part to the tremendous growth around Mt. Airy that has exceeded the amount of land designated for residential, commercial and industrial uses in the zoning code. In fact, 80 percent of existing residential use of land is on land that is not zoned R, 75 percent of commercial use is on land that is not zoned BL or BG, and 89 percent of industrial use is on land that is not zoned IR or IG. The C District acts as a catchall for growth that exceeds the amount of land allocated in the intended zoning districts. Since many of the C-zoned parcels are located outside of the Growth Area Boundary, residential development in them disperses growth beyond the planned growth areas and into agricultural areas. Unfortunately, the C District was never designed to bear the large part of a town's growth and does not guide the type of development called for in the goals of this plan.

## *4 A Balance of Land Uses*

Most of the growth, and most of the spillover into C Districts, has come in the form of residential subdivisions. Industrial uses do not exist to the extent envisioned in the 1981 plan. Commercial uses do, but according to current thinking at the state and local levels, Mt. Airy needs more of both. The 6<sup>th</sup> vision of the *Planning Act* calls for encouraging economic growth, and the community input for this plan indicated a desire for a tax base more balanced between residential, commercial and industrial taxpayers. Currently one percent of the existing use of land in the environs is industrial and one percent is commercial: too little to provide much economic growth and certainly not balanced compared with the 42 percent that is residential. By way of comparison, the *2000 Carroll County Master Plan* sets 5 percent as the minimum threshold for the portion of land in a CPA to be zoned Business (i.e. commercial). Mount Airy has not attracted major employers despite location advantages such as access to I-70 and proximity to the Washington, D.C. and Baltimore metropolitan areas. Disadvantages include the lack of suitable large parcels for industrial development and the encroachment of commercial

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uses in industrially-zoned areas.

## *5 Adequate Facilities Standards*

Both the State and the County call for adequate public facilities and infrastructure to be available or planned in areas where growth is to occur. During the 1990's, the 13<sup>th</sup> Election District experienced moderate growth (1.6 times the national population growth rate), but more recently the area has experienced rapid growth (greater than twice the national population growth rate between 2000 and 2001). If continued at accelerated rates, growth will outstrip the availability of parks, schools, roads, water supply, and sewer infrastructure.

## *6 Rural Scenic Character*

During the input for this plan, community members expressed value for the area's rural scenery. Nevertheless, the rural scenic quality of the land around Mt. Airy diminishes each time farm properties undergo subdivision and homes are built. To preserve farmland the County conducts an agricultural preservation easement program, but more landowners apply for subdivisions than sell easements on their properties. High land values, driven up by subdivisions on comparable properties nearby, dissuade farmland owners from participating in the easement programs. Furthermore, as the County reviews and approves subdivisions, it does not directly address impacts to scenery. Where possible, the development review process does preserve farming as a land use – for example, by recommending that subdivided lots on an A-zoned property be kept to one acre to leave more land in the remaining portion of the property for continued farming -- but existing guidelines do not address the massing, design, or placement of buildings with regard to their impacts on rural scenic character.

## *7 Variety of Housing Types*

Housing stock in a wide range of prices, with a variety of types and configurations, offers community members choice in location, type, and affordability. In the Mt. Airy environs, a mix of factors, including zoning and subdivision regulations, market forces, and availability of services like roads and water, is yielding the large-lot, residential subdivision pattern of development that can be seen along MD 27 and major County roads. The new housing follows one predominant pattern and the lack of variety limits the choices available to community members. Larger houses and lot sizes command higher prices, leaving a portion of the community out of the market for available housing.

## **Recommended Actions**

*Based on Town Plan recommendations with additional County recommendations in bold.*

- Comply with the requirements of the 1992 Planning Act and the 1997 Smart Growth Legislation for Priority Funding Areas.
- Take a leading role in discussions with all four counties regarding growth management in the Mount Airy region. Adhere to the principles of the State mandated “Smart Growth” legislation.

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- Advocate support for County policies that concentrate growth around existing centers, and therefore, plan for growth.
- Maintain the current Growth Area Boundary and ultimate water and sewer service areas as approved in the *1994 Water and Sewerage Master Plan* with adjustments made for recent annexations.
- Continue to assign transitional zoning categories between residential uses and more intensive commercial and industrial classifications.
- Continue to require buffer areas between residential uses and more intensive commercial and industrial uses.
- Work with Mount Airy and Frederick County to establish a Growth Area Boundary and ultimate population growth limits for the town that are beneficial to the town and match future infrastructure improvements.
- Continue to require 10 percent open space dedications on useable ground as part of the subdivision approval process.
- Plan for additional commercial growth only where planned or existing infrastructure can support it.
- Provide comprehensive adequate public facilities analysis at the concept plan stage in order to completely evaluate new development proposals for residential, commercial, or industrial development.
- Encourage the “master planning” of large parcels of ground at the development stage to ensure maximum efficiency of land density, open space, and adequate infrastructure improvements.
- **Identify appropriate locations for future employment campus use.**

In the past, commercially and industrially zoned land has generally been developed or utilized by retail and/or service related business. Setting aside key areas for professional office use and clean industry may be a useful economic tool in eventually helping to provide living wage employment to an area in such close proximity to the I-70 corridor.

- **Implement subdivision and site design guidelines that promote a more compact style of development, give greater emphasis to preserving open spaces, and environmental and agricultural resources.**

Providing adequate open space, recreational areas, and preserving the natural environment and viewscape will become increasingly more difficult as the area continues to grow. Demand for both passive and active recreational areas is on the rise as people are increasingly aware of the value of these amenities within a community. Steps should be taken to minimize grading and disturbance in future development as much as possible

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and to provide more functional open spaces beyond what is usually set aside, such as steep slopes and drainage areas.

## **Fiscal Implications**

*The recommendations contained in this plan may be policy-oriented or action-oriented, and their implications may be the responsibility of the County, other public agencies, private landowners and developers, or a combination of these. This section is designed to identify the potential fiscal impacts to the County of each of the recommendations. There could be “No Fiscal Impact” meaning the County would not incur direct or predictable expenses as a result of implementing the recommendation, an “Undetermined Impact”. Meaning there likely would be a cost associated with implementing the recommendations, but that cost can not be determined at this time for various reasons, or a “Fiscal Impact,” which likely would be incurred by the County if the recommendation were implemented. For recommendations that have an identified fiscal impact, the cost of implementing that recommendation is estimated to the best degree possible.*

- Comply with the requirements of the 1992 Planning Act and the 1997 Smart Growth Legislation for Priority Funding Areas.

*No Fiscal Impact*

- Take a leading role in discussions with all four counties regarding growth management in the Mount Airy region. Adhere to the principles of the State mandated “Smart Growth” legislation.

*No Fiscal Impact*

- Advocate support for County policies that concentrate growth around existing centers, and therefore, plan for growth.

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- Maintain the current Growth Area Boundary and ultimate water and sewer service areas as approved in the 1994 *Water and Sewerage Master Plan* with adjustments made for recent annexations.

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- Continue to assign transitional zoning categories between residential uses and more intensive commercial and industrial classifications.

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- Work with Mount Airy and Frederick County to establish a Growth Area Boundary and ultimate population growth limits for the town that are beneficial to the town and match future infrastructure improvements.

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- Continue to require 10 percent open space dedications on useable ground as part of the subdivision approval process.

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- Plan for additional commercial growth only where planned or existing infrastructure can support it.

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- Provide comprehensive adequate public facilities analysis at the concept plan stage in order to completely evaluate new development proposals for residential, commercial, or industrial development.

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- Encourage the “master planning” of large parcels of ground at the development stage to ensure maximum efficiency of land density, open space, and adequate infrastructure improvements.

*No Fiscal Impact*

- **Identify appropriate locations for future employment campus use.**

*No Fiscal Impact*

- **Implement subdivision and site design guidelines that promote a more compact style of development, give greater emphasis to preserving open spaces, and environmental and agricultural resources.**

*No Fiscal Impact*

## **Anticipated CIP Projects**

No CIP projects are anticipated.

## **Maps**

Existing Use of Land

Current Zoning

Proposed Land Use

Priority Funding Areas

Town of Mount Airy Future Annexation Areas