

CHAPTER 3: PLAN FOUNDATION

Maryland's Eight Visions

As discussed in Chapter 1, the 1992 Planning Act is based on eight visions. County and municipal plans are required to be amended so that the plans implement an established set of policies, which should be based on the Visions. Chapter 1 describes how this community comprehensive plan meets and is consistent with these Eight Visions. Again, these visions are stated in the Act as follows:

- Vision 1: Development is concentrated in suitable areas
- Vision 2: Sensitive areas are protected
- Vision 3: In rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected
- Vision 4: Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic
- Vision 5: Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption, is practiced
- Vision 6: Economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined
- Vision 7: Adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the County or municipal corporation are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur
- Vision 8: Funding mechanisms are addressed to achieve these visions

Meeting the Eight Visions

The 2004 Westminster Environs Community Comprehensive Plan implements the Eight Visions set forth in the Planning Act. ***Development is concentrated in suitable areas, and, in rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected.***

The suitable areas for development in Carroll County are the Community Planning Areas, or CPA's. The CPA's are areas for which a more detailed plan (than the County Master Plan) is prepared. These areas also are usually designated to accept new growth. Public water and sewer services generally are provided here, along with other services. Most of the CPA's have at their center an incorporated municipality that has been in existence since the turn of the century or earlier. As a result, the CPA centers possess unique historic qualities and tend to have traditional development patterns and higher densities. The surrounding unincorporated areas of the CPA attempt to reinforce this pattern, while at the same time providing a transition from the densely developed towns to the outlying rural areas. In this way, development is directed to existing population centers.

The County actively pursues the preservation of agricultural land as a basic premise on which other planning efforts are focused. Preservation of agricultural land helps to protect the resource lands as well as encourage growth where services are available. Through the use of a Growth Area Boundary, which identifies the limit to which the City plans to grow and the area within which higher density development will occur, this plan and the agricultural and resources preservation efforts reinforce each other.

The plan also demonstrates that ***sensitive areas are protected and stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic.*** In addition to making good use of the land through preserving agriculture and concentrating growth in designated areas, the plan suggests

actions that can be taken to achieve the goal of preserving environmental resources. The plan includes a Natural and Agricultural Resources chapter, which acts as the sensitive areas element of the plan, and identifies the sensitive areas, or “environmental resources,” to be protected. Innovative and resourceful community design, participation in the Rural Legacy Program, and provision of measures to further protect the water supply and support the Reservoir Watershed Agreement are among the many recommendations the community will consider to sue the land efficiently and to reduce and mitigate the impacts of development on environmental resources. These activities, as well as the previously mentioned land preservation efforts, show that ***conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption, is practiced*** in Carroll County.

Economic development is a vital part of Carroll’s economy and tax base. Therefore, the plan also addresses measures to ensure that ***economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined***. The plan seeks to increase industrial growth opportunities and promote the protection of industrial land from preemption by commercial uses. At the same time, industrial land that already is dominated by commercial uses is being designated as commercial land. This will promote the creation of areas that more fully meet the purpose and objectives of the zoning category in which they lie, and will streamline the development process by reducing the number of conditional use requests being submitted.

The plan provides measures to ensure that ***adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the County or municipal corporation are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur***. The County provides many of the facilities and services needed by the residents of this community. The County adopted an Adequate Public Facilities and Concurrency Management Ordinance and prepares an annual Concurrency Management Report. This program is designed to phase and time growth and public facilities through the County’s Community Investment Plan. Any planned residential growth within the County is permitted to proceed at a rate that will not unduly strain public facilities, especially schools, roads, water and sewer facilities, and police, fire, and emergency medical services.

The Carroll County Master Plan also addresses the eighth vision: ***funding mechanisms have been addressed to achieve the visions***. The eighth vision is achieved through the creative use of the annual Community Investment Plan, the City-County Agreement, Concurrency Management, and other implementation recommendations. Allocating adequate funding for land acquisition and preservation, economic development opportunities, and revenue sharing with the County further assures the attainment of this vision.

Carroll County’s Vision

Through the process of developing a County Master Plan, the work teams, representing each municipality and many other diverse interests, supported the following vision statement for the County.

“Carroll County offers a safe environment in which all its citizens may reside, work, shop, learn, and play. The rural character of our county is preserved through measures that protect our natural and cultural resources, minimize residential sprawl, and save farmland. Carroll County is enriched by sustainable agriculture and agribusiness as well as retention and recruitment of responsible, productive business and industry that offer family-wage jobs and employ the existing skilled

workforce in the county. Adequate public facilities will be provided as Community Investment Plan funding is available and concurrent with timed and phased development demand.”

Carroll County’s Goals

The goals developed to help achieve the county vision address multiple aspects of the County-wide community. They are broad enough to be applicable County-wide. All of the functional and small area (detailed) plans developed within the County strive to achieve and to be consistent with these overall goals.

Goal 1 ☞ Direct new development to the designated growth areas to protect and conserve agricultural and environmental resource areas, preserve open space, and provide public facilities and services efficiently and cost effectively.

Goal 2 ☞ Preserve agricultural land for the production of agricultural products and promotion of related agribusiness.

Goal 3 ☞ Protect, maintain, and restore, where practical, the environmental resources and natural ecosystems in the county by promoting land use practices that are in balance with, and minimize the effects on, the natural environment.

Goal 4 ☞ Promote a healthy economy and additional employment opportunities by 1) supporting the retention and expansion of existing businesses including agribusiness through sensible land use policies and 2) providing land appropriately located and zoned for a variety of types and intensities of new economic development activities.

Goal 5 ☞ Phase and time development at a rate consistent with the county’s ability to fund and expand community services and facilities through public and private resources.

Goal 6 ☞ Ensure adequate and appropriate Community Investment Plan and operating budgets to implement the Master Plan and provide public facilities and services.

Goal 7 ☞ Provide a safe and functional transportation system which implements the land use plan while promoting access and mobility for people and goods through a network of roads, rail, transit, and non-motorized opportunities.

Goal 8 ☞ Promote development design that is in harmony with the surrounding built and natural environments, encourages community interaction, and, in rural areas, preserves the county’s rural character.

Goal 9 ☞ Preserve the county’s historic, cultural, scenic, and architectural heritage.

Goal 10 ☞ Provide for a wide range of housing types, density, and affordability that is well maintained and will meet the needs of the entire community.

Goal 11 ☞ Provide a coordinated and comprehensive system of public and private parks, recreational facilities and programs, and open space that will meet the active and passive recreational needs of all citizens of the county and enhance community design, identity,

and vitality.

Goal 12 ☞ Provide community educational opportunities, facilities, and resources, particularly libraries and schools, to meet the needs of a diverse population.

Goal 13 ☞ Ensure communication and coordination between the county and the municipalities on projects and issues of mutual concern. Promote interjurisdictional cooperation in planning and land use decisions.

Goal 14 ☞ Involve the community in implementing the Master Plan.

Westminster Environs Community's Vision

While the community comprehensive plans within Carroll County support and implement the County Master Plan, it is also recognized that each individual community holds different values and cherishes characteristics unique to that community. Each community has its own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. While these characteristics may also be found in other Carroll communities, each area may choose to address these issues in its own way and within its own set of priorities. Therefore, each community also develops its own vision statement.

The following vision statement represents what the participants in the various forms of community involvement (for this community plan update) felt to be the future that they preferred for their community. Future decisions and activities of the community will be consistent with this vision. Members of the community will strive to bring about the changes that will make this vision attainable.

“The Westminster environs is a safe, clean community with a small-town flavor where residents know each other and share a sense of and commitment to community. A balanced mix of land uses is concentrated around Westminster, thereby protecting community features significant to quality of life and heritage. Industrial development provides a wide array of ample employment opportunities for the community’s residents and generates a strong tax base. Citizens are well served by appropriately located and diverse businesses. A range of housing types is available for all income levels and interests. A safe, efficient, and congestion-free transportation system serves the Westminster environs community. Public facilities and services meet the needs of the area’s residents and businesses. A network of parks, recreational facilities, and bicycle and pedestrian paths and trails provide for the population’s recreational needs.”

Westminster Environs Community's Comprehensive Plan Goals

In addition to developing a unique vision statement within the community, a set of goals are also developed that are distinct to the needs of that community and that are more specific than the county-wide goals. The participants in this planning process identified the following priorities for the Westminster environs community. These goals are presented by topic or category.

Growth Management & Land Use Goals

- Concentrate development around the City of Westminster
- Manage the rate of growth so that it keeps pace with the provision of public facilities and services
- Encourage balanced growth that meets the needs of the community's residents, businesses, and employers and that retains the small-town atmosphere of the community

Transportation Goals

- Improve MD 140 and surrounding development to optimize the highway's capacity, operation, and safety and provide pedestrian access
- Provide a variety of transportation options for travel within the County and outside the County for business, employment, shopping, medical, and other purposes
- Reduce traffic congestion by improving the safety and efficiency of the community's existing and future transportation network
- Provide a redundant road network with alternative routes for local trips that will disperse traffic on the roadway network, thereby reducing local traffic congestion on the area's State highways, such as MD 140

Community Facilities Goals

- Continue to provide adequate land for future school facilities based upon projected needs
- Ensure that library facilities in Westminster have adequate resources to service the existing and future population
- Provide facilities and services appropriate for serving the growing numbers and changing needs of the senior population
- Create a range of recreational opportunities accessible to residents of all ages
- Foster a safe environment that encourages crime prevention and meets the needs for criminal prosecution and correction
- Ensure that new development occurs concurrent with the provision of public facilities - including schools, roads, fire/EMS, police, and water and sewer - and pays a fair share of the costs to expand capacities where needed

Natural and Agricultural Resources Goals

- Maintain an ecologically healthy and diverse natural environment
- Preserve farmland, forests, and open spaces outside of the Growth Area Boundary by minimizing residential development within agricultural and rural areas

Economic Development Goals

- Provide sites that are planned and reserved for industrial development
- Provide sites for commercial development which will meet the diverse business needs of the resident population
- Promote commercial development that is clustered in appropriate locations

Historic & Cultural Resources Goals

- Protect important historic resources located within the community
- Support activities and facilities that provide cultural resources

Community Involvement Goal

- Increase citizen awareness of, and participation in, planning issues and processes and

development decisions

Interjurisdictional Coordination Goal

- Foster an environment of cooperation and communication in which County and City planning efforts are undertaken

Housing & Community Design Goals

- Provide a mix of densities and housing types that meet the housing needs of a range of income and age groups
- Encourage efforts to improve the visual impact of development along MD 140

In order to accomplish these goals, the community should be aware of what they are, especially those people in decision-making positions. Decisions and policies should reflect the desire to accomplish these goals. Activities should not be pursued that contradict the goals. A community comprehensive plan does not merely involve elected and appointed officials. All community leaders and residents need to be committed to accomplishing the goals for the Plan to be successful.

Major Concepts and Intended Accomplishments

In the face of growing concerns over traffic congestion, crowded schools, and the loss of open space, this plan contemplated the question “Is there a limit to growth that will provide for the housing and business needs of the community while still retaining a small-town character, protecting a high quality of life, and preserving the rural landscape outside the growth area?” It is a difficult balancing act, with many dynamics at work that will affect housing values and affordability, opportunities for job growth and consumer choices, taxes, and the amount of time spent doing daily activities. It requires that a comprehensive view to the future of the community be taken while at the same time considering the circumstances and situations of individual properties. In the end, the response that this plan makes to the question posed above is: we are nearing our threshold, or in some cases have reached it, in terms of how much growth we can sustain without losing the things we value most. As a result, this plan generally accepts that the 1985 plan established a good vision for the community and continues to be the direction in which we want to go. Rather than acknowledging that growth is inevitable and accommodating it in an ever increasing growth area, this plan attempts to rein it in, directing it to a smaller growth area and focusing on enhancing the features of the community that already exist. Certainly, some conditions have changed over the past 20 years that warrant plan modifications, but for the most part this plan reaffirms the 1985 plan.

This plan establishes a Growth Area Boundary (GAB) for the Westminster environs, as well as a future corporate limits line. The purpose of defining this area is to promote development of land within or adjacent to urbanized areas to the greatest and most suitable degree possible, thereby encouraging compact development and making efficient use of public facilities, services, and resources. Outside of the GAB, land will be retained for agriculture, resource conservation, and open space through agricultural preservation, low-density and low-intensity zoning, and other means unless otherwise noted. With a few exceptions, areas that fall within the GAB and the future corporate limits line will be rezoned to match the land use designation shown on the map when the property is annexed, rather than with the adoption of this plan. Upon annexation, if a property assumes a zoning category consistent with the land use designation identified in the plan, no zoning waiver is required. If the desired zoning category is

substantially different, a waiver of zoning granted by the Board of County Commissioners must be sought.

By and large, the concept established by the 1985 plan for an urban core in the City of Westminster surrounded by increasingly less dense land uses extending outwards from the city has been implemented over time. This plan affirms the logic and value of this pattern of development, and retains it to a substantial degree. At the same time, it recognizes the intensification of growth pressures that has occurred over the past 20 years and the need to provide land for housing and business uses in a manner that makes the most efficient and effective use of infrastructure and land in the face of these pressures. Where changes in use or density have seemed logical and feasible, they have been recommended to address these demands while still adhering to the concepts established in 1985. It is hoped that new residential development will make use of clustering and options allowed by the zoning ordinance for providing a variety of housing types. These techniques can begin to address concerns about preserving open space within subdivisions and providing a range of housing types to suit various needs.

Because Westminster and its surroundings are a focal point for business and industry in Carroll County, this plan addresses some of the disparities between the supply and demand for land devoted to these uses. Areas designated or zoned for industrial use that are primarily commercial in nature and are not deemed suitable for future industrial development are being designated for commercial use to promote better commercial development. At the same time, additional areas for industrial development have been identified with the intent that these areas will be developed without the pressures on industrial land created by a lack of commercial land. It is hoped that this approach will create a better balance between the residential and non-residential sectors of the tax base. The emphasis is on creating commercial and industrial areas that are logical extensions of surrounding land uses, are convenient for the community, and are supported by the existing roadway network and public facilities.

As the Westminster region has grown into a major population and activity center, improvements to and expansion of the transportation network have not kept pace with development. Congestion on state highways and major county roads has increased. Transit service and non-motorized modes of transportation, such as pedestrian and bicycle access, have not been provided in concert with the type, magnitude, and density of development that has occurred in the general Westminster community. This plan endeavors to bring about a comprehensive transportation system that will provide safe and efficient travel choices to motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians for local and regional trips to homes, jobs, shops, schools, parks, and other destinations. Major components of this network will be an interconnected multiple-route roadway network, enhanced access for non-motorist travelers through the provision of bicycle/pedestrian trails and a connected network of sidewalks, and improved transit service for commuters and area residents. At the same time, efforts have been made to preserve the character and function of local and neighborhood streets to limit the impact that they feel from outside traffic.

This plan envisions the creation of a regional park to serve the Westminster community and alleviate the demands for recreational facilities being created by a growing population. This might be accomplished through the creation of an entirely new park or the enhancement of an existing park. Another critical component of the recreational network envisioned in this plan is trails that link the area's parks and residential neighborhoods with schools, businesses, and other activity centers.

While this plan attempts to make adequate provisions for the anticipated growth in residential, commercial, and industrial development, it also recognizes the need to retain historic sites in the face of ever-increasing development pressures. It envisions the blossoming of heritage tourism in Carroll County, with its historic resources and rural landscape being used to attract tourists, increase tourist spending, and promote an appreciation for and preservation of the area's heritage resources to the benefit of the community.

The Comprehensive Plan Map illustrates the major proposals contained in this plan. They include proposed land use designations, proposed transportation improvements, and proposed facilities.

Maps

- 1 2007 Comprehensive Plan Map*