

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The Annapolis Comprehensive Plan serves two purposes. First, it articulates a vision for the city's next decade and beyond, identifying and addressing issues important to the city and its citizens. As such, it seeks to guide decision-makers and citizens as they face the myriad of decisions in the years to come. The Comprehensive Plan formulates goals and a series of policy recommendations to enact those goals, and proposes a land use vision to guide development and redevelopment. The 2009



Sunset Masts against Capital Dome

The 2009 Comprehensive Plan builds on, but replaces the prior Comprehensive Plan adopted in 1998 (A report on the City's accomplishments since the adoption of the 1998 Plan are documented in Appendix C of this document).

Second, the Comprehensive Plan responds to Maryland statutes that govern local land use planning under the authority of Article 66B of the Maryland Annotated Code:

- ▶ The 1992 Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act, amended in 2000, requires local jurisdictions to prepare comprehensive plans to address the following eight visions:
 1. Development is concentrated in suitable areas.
 2. Sensitive areas are protected.
 3. In rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected.
 4. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic.
 5. Conservation of resources, including a reducing in resource consumption, is practiced.
 6. To assure the achievement of 1 through 5 above, economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined.
 7. Adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the municipality are available or planned where growth is to occur.
 8. Funding mechanisms are addressed to achieve these Visions.



- ▶ The 1997 Priority Funding Areas Act directs State funding for growth-related infrastructure to designated priority areas such as Annapolis.
- ▶ The 2006 State Legislation (HB 1141) requires two new elements to be incorporated into municipal comprehensive plans - a Municipal Growth Element and a Water Resources Element.

Approach

Three main ideas define the approach to the 2009 Comprehensive Plan. These ideas emerged over the course of the planning process and became central ideas in planning for Annapolis' next decade and beyond. These three ideas weave throughout the Comprehensive Plan and are articulated in various ways in all of the chapters. The three ideas are:

- ▶ Preserve and Enhance Community Character
- ▶ Maintain a Vibrant Economy
- ▶ Promote a "Green" Annapolis

Community Character

Annapolitans are proud of their city and their neighborhoods and recognize that each of the neighborhoods in Annapolis has a distinct character created by the mixture of land uses, the built environment, and public spaces. Over the course of its 300 years, the City of Annapolis has established a character and heritage that is most recognizable in the historic downtown and adjacent neighborhoods and through our maritime heritage, but also reinforced throughout the diverse neighborhoods that make up the city and along the waterfront. These unique areas offer a distinct and unique character. They are all great places that locals and visitors alike appreciate.



Main Street July 4th

Most comprehensive plans, including the 1998 Plan, had a major focus on land use. The primary recommendations were to preserve existing residential zoning in established areas and promote commercial, office, and residential "mixed-use" centers. The zoning decisions that followed promoted these goals. Zoning hearings and comments received during meetings in development of this plan have demonstrated that this traditional approach has failed to meet the community's expectations. Despite the intent of previous planning efforts and existing

development regulations, citizens remain fearful that new development and overall growth will erode those traits that make the community special. Most established neighborhoods do not have a character-based zoning mechanism for the review of new construction and struggle to keep integrity intact against new homes that appear out of context. Commuters fear the impact of additional density or commercial activity along already congested roadways. Annapolis continues to struggle with these controversies, even though new projects follow the recommendations of the 1998 Comprehensive Plan. Unfortunately, a plan for land use alone simply does not adequately address the complex issues facing Annapolis' residents and businesses, because it does not provide strong and direct linkages between land use, design and functionality. Such a plan may not, for example, differentiate between an urban commercial environment and a commercial strip development.



Historic District

The 2009 Comprehensive Plan takes an approach to planning focused on “community character.” The concept of community character provides a means to understand a community’s physical, functional, and design attributes as a whole and further understand how they work together to create or strengthen a sense of place. Rather than relying on only land use or density, character is based on retaining or creating those traits that make Annapolis’ neighborhoods, commercial districts, and other places unique. Residents and local leaders alike struggle to place values on terms such as “low density residential” or “light industry.” However, most have a clear image of “urban” or “suburban” character development. These are not terms defined by land use alone. They are concepts of character, complete with values associated with natural resources, transportation systems, mix of uses, relationship between buildings and the street, location of gathering places, and a myriad of other traits. With character, cultural and economic aspects are closely linked to those physical attributes.

Creating this plan with a focus on community character offers a holistic approach that will allow the city to focus on:

- ▶ Preservation of the features, values, and places that make Annapolis a unique community.
- ▶ Future development based on the role that each designated area is intended to play in the community, including its appearance and function.
- ▶ Protection of natural resources.
- ▶ Increased connectivity between and within places.

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- ▶ Enhanced ability to anticipate needs associated with new development or redevelopment, including traffic demand, infrastructure, community facilities, services, and other critical features.
- ▶ A stronger understanding of traffic congestion or similar negative impacts on sense of character and quality of life.
- ▶ Ability to preserve the important qualities of Annapolis while achieving higher density in strategic locations, specifically in an effort to create transit supportive development.
- ▶ Anticipation of the relationship between places and the need for design features such as buffering or architectural relief between areas of different character.

Economic Vitality



Downtown Annapolis

Economic vitality is critical to the economic well-being of our business community, the employment opportunities for our residents, the fiscal well-being of the city, and the quality of life of our residents. A healthy economy provides nearby employment opportunities and makes Annapolis an enjoyable place to live, work, and visit. Annapolis must maintain its competitiveness in a challenging market environment that recognizes the hyper-commercial development beyond Annapolis' borders. Annapolis aspires to accommodate jobs-producing uses and extend economic opportunities to all residents while also protecting its character,

respecting its cultural heritage, and safeguarding its neighborhoods. To maintain a vibrant local economy the City aims to:

- ▶ Provide sufficient opportunities for diverse commercial and industrial development and redevelopment;
- ▶ Encourage development that responds to local market needs and induces desirable land use patterns that advance other civic goals;
- ▶ Recommend development decisions that add to the convenience of residents;
- ▶ Maintain municipal financial stability by balancing residential and non-residential uses, acknowledging that a healthy tax base supports City investments that contribute to quality of life; and
- ▶ Encourage local businesses that provide employment opportunities for local residents.

The “Greening” of Annapolis

The Comprehensive Plan approaches the “greening” of Annapolis as the third imperative. “Greening” refers to a variety of City actions and policies that recognize the serious environmental challenges that we face as a society. This builds on Annapolis’ already notable achievements in the area of environmental stewardship, for which Annapolis has been recognized as a leader and a model. The City will continue to espouse environmental stewardship of its shorelines, forested areas, creeks, and other natural areas, and is also moving towards an aggressive stance on minimizing stormwater impacts on the Chesapeake Bay and reducing our carbon footprint to respond to the threat of climate change.



Thomas Point Lighthouse

In addition to protection of the city’s natural resources, “greening” means creating a healthy living environment for Annapolis’ residents. This takes the form of boosting parks and recreational opportunities as well as cultural offerings that enhance the community’s quality of life. It refers to expanding transportation options so walking, biking, and taking transit are viable alternatives to driving. Actions that enable people to live and work in the city are included in this stance, along with locating commercial services in proximity to neighborhoods.

Finally, the “greening” of Annapolis affirms the principles of directing development and growth to existing urban centers where the infrastructure to support it already exists, thus avoiding sprawl and unsustainable development patterns. Other principles affirmed by this stance are development patterns that mix land uses, promote compact building design, create walkable communities with a variety of transportation options, and foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.

Plan Structure

The Comprehensive Plan consists of seven topical chapters and an Implementation chapter, corresponding with the elements required by State Statute. The elements are contained in chapters 3 to 10:

- ▶ Land Use & Economic Development (Chapter 3)
- ▶ Transportation (Chapter 4)
- ▶ Municipal Growth & Community Facilities (Chapter 5)
- ▶ Parks (Chapter 6)
- ▶ Environment (Sensitive Resources) (Chapter 7)
- ▶ Housing (Chapter 8)
- ▶ Water Resources (Chapter 9)
- ▶ Implementation (Chapter 10)

Each chapter identifies primary challenges facing the community for that topic area, followed by goals to address those challenges. Existing conditions are summarized in two categories. First, the nature of planning for that topic is identified – the legislative, regulatory, and historical context. Second, relevant data describing existing conditions is presented in summary fashion. Policy recommendations to enact the goals form the remainder of the chapter.

In two chapters – Land Use and Transportation – guiding principles have also been developed, recognizing their inherently complex and inter-related nature and acknowledging that the Comprehensive Plan cannot anticipate every situation or decision the City will face in those arenas in the years to come. Recommendations include some specific projects, also geographic or topical areas requiring more focused study or planning.



Main Street

Planning Process

Let's Talk Annapolis

In January, 2006, the City initiated *Let's Talk Annapolis*, a program to involve numerous citizens in small group conversations. *Let's Talk Annapolis* was intended to allow broad citizen input into the comprehensive planning process that would follow, but also to inject ideas and perspectives into public life generally. The hallmark of *Let's Talk* was for citizen participation to be accessible, comfortable, and engaging.

Each conversation group began with the same four questions:

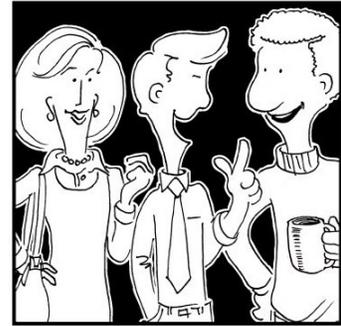
How do we protect and improve our quality of life?

How do we build a unified community?

What should Annapolis become over the next 10 to 20 years?

What should we do to address one specific priority?

All told, 30 groups met for a total of 57 conversations between January and July of 2006. This amounted to approximately 460 people participating in at least one conversation. Each group submitted a conversation report at the end of its session. These reports were compiled and summarized in a report: "Let's Talk Annapolis: a report on six months of conversations, January – July 2006."



let's talk
ANNAPOLIS

Comprehensive Planning



Citizens' Advisory Committee Meeting

In the fall of 2006, Mayor Ellen Moyer appointed a 35-member Citizens Advisory Committee. This Committee, representing all areas of town and many viewpoints, met between once and three times a month over the course of the planning study. The Citizens Advisory Committee received the *Let's Talk Annapolis* report at the outset of their work. The Committee was instrumental in identifying the key challenges facing the community and formulating the policy positions and actions the City should adopt.

In the fall of 2006, consultants conducted interviews with approximately 50 individuals and groups from throughout the community, seeking additional viewpoints and perspectives on a range of topics relevant to the Comprehensive Plan.

In March, 2007, a Public Forum was held at Bates Middle School that was attended by approximately 80 individuals from Annapolis and its surrounding neighborhoods. Participants were asked to identify areas of concern, and in smaller discussion groups, prioritize them according to importance.

Throughout the process, notice of all meetings and events was posted on the City web site and sent to a My Annapolis Email List dedicated to the 2009 Comprehensive Plan. Meeting notes and presentation materials were also posted on the City web site.

Two newsletters and a progress report brochure were distributed to community associations, business associations, elected officials, and a variety of other interested individuals during the planning process in December 2006, April 2007 and June 2008. These aimed to document key milestones, highlights and directions emerging in the Plan.

In the fall of 2008, a preliminary draft of the complete Comprehensive Plan was released. The committee invited interested individuals and groups to comment on the preliminary draft as it conducted its review and prepared to release a Draft Comprehensive Plan for a 60-day review period before public hearings at the Planning Commission and City Council. Following the public review process, the 2009 Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the Annapolis City Council on October 5, 2009.