

(Editor's Note—Version 1/31/07, latest version)

CHAPTER 1—BACKGROUND, HISTORY, RECENT DEVELOPMENTS, AND TRENDS

A. BACKGROUND

This Comprehensive Plan is a series of related documents for use by Lancaster County to anticipate and deal constructively with the many changes occurring in the community and its immediate surroundings. The plan was prepared by the county planning staff in collaboration with the Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors, other County and State officials, and citizens of Lancaster County. The Plan also contains information obtained from many other sources, such as other comprehensive plans, professional papers, periodicals, public documents, environmental and health regulations, and information required by State and Federal statutes to be included in all county comprehensive plans. The Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan has two broad objectives: first, to identify near-term, long-range and strategic needs of the county's population, and second, to provide a planning framework for guiding the physical, social and economic changes occurring in response to future growth and development. This plan also complies with the Commonwealth of Virginia's Title 15.2-2223 of the State Code (See Appendix II), which requires all counties to prepare a comprehensive plan. The requirement to review the plan every five years is a very significant part of the Code.

Chapters 1 through 6 of the Comprehensive Plan focus on current physical and environmental conditions that may influence or limit the future use of land and identify the strategic needs of the County's population. The conditions examined include both natural and man-made conditions that, for purposes of analysis, are grouped into categories. They reflect the planning emphasis of the Chesapeake Bay program, with the exception of the category "redevelopment of intensely developed areas." No areas in Lancaster County meet the Chesapeake Bay criteria for "intensely developed." Chapter 7 then provides the planning framework through which needs will be met.

The Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act mandated further requirements for Tidewater localities. Regulations adopted in accordance with this Act are as follows:

- Physical constraints to development: Addresses those natural geographic qualities that seriously limit the potential for development.
- Protection of Potable Water Supply: Addresses protection of the existing and potential supply of drinkable water within the community to include quality and quantity.
- Shoreline Erosion Control: Focuses on the loss or potential loss of shoreline due to wind and wave erosion.
- Access to Waterfront Areas: Addresses access to state waters and the potential access of areas for private and public use.

- Redevelopment of Intensely Developed Areas and other Areas Targeted for Redevelopment: Focuses on opportunities to reduce pollution through conversions of existing development.

The views indicated above are further illustrated in later chapters. In Chapter 2, environmental issues and assessment of existing conditions are discussed as they relate to suitability of land for development in Lancaster County.

In Chapter 4, the "Water Quality Preservation Plan," a strategy for meeting the requirements of the Chesapeake Bay preservation laws and regulations is set forth.

In Chapter 7, the structural framework of the future land use plan and land use policies will flow from the issues and considerations raised in the preceding chapters.

B. HISTORY

Lancaster County is located at the southeastern end of Virginia's Northern Neck peninsula, between the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers. It was formed in 1651 from portions of Northumberland and York Counties. Over time, other counties were formed from its original area. Creeks and waterways with rolling woodlands and fields characterize the county. It is also known for its quiet rural charm, the retention of which citizens attending input sessions in early 2006 overwhelmingly supported.

Lancaster was settled shortly after 1640, predominantly by people of English descent moving from settlements along the James and York Rivers. The first County seat was established at Queenstown on the west side of the Corrotoman River. In 1742, the courthouse was moved inland to what is now Lancaster Courthouse. The present courthouse dates to 1863 and houses basically all records dating from 1652. On the Courthouse Green, the original clerk's office (1797), and the old jail (dating to the first quarter of the 19th century) still stand. Mary Ball Washington Museum, Incorporated uses these two buildings.

Prior to the Civil War, the economy of the county depended on tobacco and other types of agriculture. After the Civil War, the economy began to rely on the seafood industry. The shared importance of agriculture and seafood was evident by the early 1900's. By 1920, the economy included forestry as well. Fish, crab, and oyster industries were also important to the people. Trucking of tomatoes and potatoes was the prevalent agricultural industry. These industries were aided by inexpensive and easy transportation to market by steamboats. The menhaden industry has been a mainstay since the early 1900's, and remains important today.

During the 1920's, tourism and retail industries began to develop in White Stone and Kilmarnock. The commerce of Kilmarnock offered many shops and services to county residents. White Stone was seen as a thriving community. Irvington was the largest town and the center of the seafood business.

Changes that occurred during the 1930's made great impact on the county's economy. Automobiles became commonplace, and trucks began to replace steamboats as a means to transport marketable goods. After a devastating hurricane in 1933, many docks and wharves were destroyed and were not rebuilt, thus ending reliance on outside markets.

Although employment was good in the 1940's, the economy of the county declined during the 1950's. Lancaster County became relatively unknown and unimportant, because of poor means of travel to any outlying areas.

With the opening of the Robert O. Norris Bridge in 1957, Lancaster County was provided ready access to counties on the Middle Peninsula. This led to several trends. The age distribution of people in the county began to change. Young people were seeking employment elsewhere and the number of senior citizens was increasing. There was quick growth in the trade and service industries, and tourism and recreation industries regained strength. The Tides Inn, Windmill Point Marine Resort, and the Tides Lodge were all established between 1945 and 1970 and began to flourish.

Other services and facilities began to appear in response to the changing community needs. The Lancashire Nursing Home, Rappahannock General Hospital, and Rappahannock Community College were all established during the 1960's and 1970's.

Although the basic industries of manufacturing, agriculture, and fisheries declined slightly in the 1980's, dramatic increases were noted in retail trade, recreational activity, and professional service employment. Kilmarnock has become the hub of retail and service businesses in the Northern Neck. The influx of retirees and outflow of younger people began in the early 1990's and continues today. The Rappahannock Westminster-Canterbury retirement community, opened in 1985, is a multi-million dollar investment, providing services that continue to attract retirees to the county.

Abundant sights and attractions encourage tourism and recreation today. Historic buildings, restaurants, marinas, and resorts all entice tourists interested in the serene, natural beauty of the county as well as the recreational activities available.

C. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS

Land development in Lancaster County has recently accelerated with every indication that the current pace will continue for the foreseeable future. Hill's Quarter, a multi-use development approved in 1997 for construction on tracts of land adjoining Route 200 midway between Irvington and Kilmarnock, is currently building out with over eighty building permits for single family residences issued, mostly within the last two years. An eighteen-hole golf course has also been built within the community and began full operation in the spring of 2005. Development will also include a significant commercial area.

While much of the future development will continue to be residential, as evidenced by major residential developments approved at the Golden Eagle and Windmill Point, there is also evidence of significant commercial development. This is most evident in the Kilmarnock

Technology Park where several local and new businesses are constructing new facilities. Also, the demand for mini-storage units has resulted in the construction and approval of new facilities of this type with several more in the planning stage.____

What of the future? The population of Lancaster County was 11,600 as of the 2000 census, was estimated to be 12,030 as of 2004, and is expected to be in excess of 13,500 by the year 2015 based on current rates of growth. Given that growth is occurring and will likely continue to do so, it must be managed and controlled in a positive manner to preserve the natural beauty and rural character of the area. Expansion of tourism, the recreation industry, and retail trade are still feasible within this context. Support of the basic industries of agriculture and those that are water dependent, as well as those related to the building trades and services, is key to maintaining a self-sufficient economy in Lancaster County. Best management practices designed to protect the natural environment must be mandated where they are critical and encouraged in all other activities. Detail consistent with and in support of these views will be provided in later chapters.____