

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. Its purpose as stated in §15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia is to guide and accomplish “a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants, including the elderly and persons with disabilities.” 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 specific requirements levied in §15.2-2223, 2224 and 2230 of the Code of Virginia. The requirement to review the plan every five years is a very significant part of the Code.

The remaining chapters of the Comprehensive Plan are organized as follows:

Chapter 2-Suitability of Land for Development. This chapter focuses on the physical factors that influence or constrain development such as those areas that are prone to flooding from storms and tidal surges, and those areas that have poor septic suitability. It also addresses characteristics of the land that may lend themselves to residential and commercial development but merit appropriate protection from such development to achieve a greater public good. Such a characteristic would be that land considered prime for agricultural purposes.

Chapter 3-Protection of Potable Water Supply. In addition to potable water, this chapter also focuses on those surface waters that are connected by tidal flow to the Chesapeake Bay. This is not only to ensure that Lancaster County meets its responsibilities under the Chesapeake Bay Act but also recognizes that sources of pollution such as faulty septic systems can impact not only these tributary waters, but also inland surface waters and the surface ground water supply.

Chapter 4-Shoreline Protection Study and Plan. This chapter reviews the different options for protecting shoreline from erosion in terms of their effectiveness under different conditions and their impact on the environment, especially as it pertains to

shellfish and finfish habitat. It then sets forth a plan for providing effective shoreline protection while respecting the need for such habitat as tidal wetland vegetation and subaquatic vegetation.

Chapter 5-Access to State Waters. This is one of the areas identified as needing the most attention in the Comprehensive Plan. As development pressure on waterfront property has increased substantially without apparent abatement many of those properties that allowed access to the general public have been converted to private use. Those parts of the County where the problem is most acute are identified, types of water access required are discussed, and objectives set for addressing the problem of public access.

Chapter 6-Public Facilities, Infrastructure, and Services. An inventory is provided of public facilities or capability related to transportation, recreation, health, safety, schools and other categories. This chapter also contains a list of historic areas as required by §15.2-2224 (1) with the continuing objective of performing a survey and study of such areas. Finally, problems or shortcomings are identified to guide the establishment of priorities for the Capital Improvement Program.

Chapter 7-Land Use and the Economy (Implementation). With the focus provided by the first six chapters on current physical and environmental conditions, natural and man-made, that may influence or limit the future use of land and the strategic needs of the County’s population, this chapter assesses the applicability of various land use tools to Lancaster County. It also attempts to address the shortcomings of previous versions of the Comprehensive Plan, identified in the introduction, and speaks to those issues identified during public input sessions not previously addressed.

Given that Lancaster County is a Tidewater locality the comprehensive plan must reflect a planning emphasis on the requirements of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. The only exception is the category "redevelopment of intensely developed areas." No areas in Lancaster County meet the Chesapeake Bay criteria for “intensely developed.” Chapters 3 and 7 provide the planning framework through which requirements will be met.

Regulations adopted in accordance with the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act are as follows:

- Physical constraints to development: Address 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.

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.

Native American Indians originally inhabited the area. 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 County seat was moved inland to what is now Lancaster Courthouse. The present courthouse was completed in 2010 and houses basically all records dating from 1652. The prior courthouse, which dates to 1863 was renovated in 2011 and houses the County Administration offices. 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 & Library, 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 employed many watermen. 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 steamboats for transportation of goods to 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 was established and opened in 1947.

Other services and facilities began to appear in response to the changing community needs. The Lancashire Nursing Home, Rappahannock General Hospital, were all established during the 1960's and 1970's. 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. Also, the Commonwealth Assistant Living Facility was established in 2002.

Although the basic industries of manufacturing, agriculture, logging 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.

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. Also, the County has new attractions that were established such as the Compass Entertainment Centre, and the Wal-Mart store.

C. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS

Land development in Lancaster County has been slow since 2008. Most of the recent development has been associated with small or family subdivisions. The majority of the 1,500 or so new housing units approved during the real estate boom of the early 2000's remain unbuilt. Most of the larger approved residential developments are simply waiting for the economy to improve before building. Some have changed ownership and are revising their plans to better accommodate the current economy. Since the Covid pandemic our county has been booming with construction with the large increase in building permits. This can also be attributed to the County's new Short- Term- Rental ordinance.

While much of the future development will continue to be residential, there is also evidence of significant commercial development. This is most evident in Kilmarnock where several local and new businesses are constructing new facilities or remodeling older ones. Also, a new satellite branch of Rappahannock Community College opened in Kilmarnock in 2012.

A motivated county Planning Commission, along with the county Board of Supervisors have been working diligently in providing new and improved amenities for the county citizens. Plans are currently in place for a new Middle/ High school, a building was renovated and designed to facilitate the Early Childhood Study Program, and the previous Middle School is currently being renovated to become the new facility for the Elementary School.

The County has been proactive in search of new and improved public access sites for citizens and visitors to enjoy, such as the renovation of the Greenvale Creek public access site to include a new fishing pier to complement the existing boat ramp, improve the public Canoe & Kayak launch site off of Windmill Point Road, working currently with other State agencies on permits to create a large and modern public beach and fishing pier at the end of Windmill Point Road. Also, the County purchased and has plans in place to design a new park at the Carters Cove public access site which was softly opened to the public in 2022. The county also has one other public access site that is in its early stages of design off of Weems Road. There has been progress with the Tri-Way Trail designs that will connect the three incorporated towns, and site-plans are available. Our Board members have been working together with the Broadband Authority, and plan to have high-speed Internet capability county wide by the end of 2024.

As changes arise Nationwide, we also have to change locally. As you will read throughout other updated Chapters in the Comprehensive Plan, County Staff along with its appointed Officials, and elected Officials have been working together to update County Ordinances, creating & revising codes as changes are needed to assist with citizens' needs and desires.

What then of the future? Clearly the problem of affordable, workforce housing must be addressed by establishing policy that, among other objectives, results in more affordable types of housing than single family being created. The adopted R-4, Residential Community Zoning District and the completed sixteen-unit *Mercer Place*, have evolved from this affordable housing concern. Also, while growth since 1990 has been relatively modest, it has the capability to change the character of the County over time from rural to something else, the greatest concern of those providing input to recent updates of the Comprehensive Plan.

The population of Lancaster County has declined from 11,391 as of the 2010 census to 10,788 as of the 2017 estimated census figures, the 2021 census established an increase of population of 10,928, but expansion of tourism, the recreation industry, and retail trade are still feasible while preserving the natural beauty and rural character of the area. While the 2010 U.S. Census figures show no manufacturers' shipments for Lancaster County

(counties with 500 or fewer employees are excluded), there are several small manufacturing businesses in the county. In addition, 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 the remaining chapters.