



County Commissioners:

- James J. Moran, At Large
- Jack N. Wilson, Jr., District 1
- J. Patrick McLaughlin, District 2
- Philip L. Dumenil, District 3
- Christopher M. Corchiarino, District 4

- Telephone Planning: (410) 758-1255
- Email Planning: PlanningApplications@qac.org
- Telephone Permits: (410) 758-4088
- Email Permits: PermitApplications@qac.org

Long Range and Critical Area FAQs

Comprehensive Planning

Q: What is a Comprehensive Plan and its purpose?

A The comprehensive plan is a State required policy document that outlines and provides details for the community's vision and goals to guide future growth, development, and preservation. The Comprehensive Plan also provides guidance regarding long-term public policy, and the need to prioritize infrastructure, residential needs, environmental resources, along with the interrelationships of all within the community. It is a document that changes overtime relative to the data that has been found in an effort to provide the appropriate general guidance for decision making while contemplating all aspects of government and the municipality. The comprehensive plan is generally looked at from what is known as the countywide view or the 1,000' level and not specific to particular properties.

Q. What information/data is used in the drafting of a Comprehensive Plan?

A The previously approved comprehensive plan, public surveys, SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats) analysis, studies and plans completed in the last decade, existing conditions and trends, as well as Census data, and town, state, and other federal data. An extensive list of resources used in the existing comprehensive plan can be found in Appendix AB-4, Resources.

Q: Who has what role during the drafting of a comprehensive plan?



A The County stakeholders or County citizens, local and state governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, community groups, Planning Commission and the County Commissioners all have specific roles in the drafting of a comprehensive plan. County stakeholders, local and state governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community groups provide a broad array of perspectives, data, information as well as represent the interests of affiliated organizations and agencies. The Planning Commission is the lead in the comprehensive plan development, works with the project team, which may include a consultant, in drafting the plan, maps and implementation strategies, and endorses the plan for County Commissioner approval. While the County Commissioners provide guidance at key points in the process, reviews and adopts the plan, and oversees its implementation.

Q: What is the role of county citizens? How can I participate?

A The role of the county citizen is to provide knowledgeable information, concerns, and comments. This role begins with providing input during public workshops or meetings during the data collection phase. As the Planning Commission drafts the document, citizens should review drafts and provide input and address concerns during this process with the Planning Commission. As well, the Planning Commission is required to hold a public hearing and 60-day review of the draft document for the public, county citizens, other county and state agencies, to provide comments. Prior to adopting, the County Commissioners shall hold a public hearing. Citizens are welcome and encouraged to attend all public meetings and public hearings and provide valid and meaningful input to the Planning Commission, County staff, consultants, and the County Commissioners.

Q: Are there specific requirements when it comes to drafting a comprehensive plan?

A The State of Maryland requires each County and municipality to update its Comprehensive Plan every ten years. The State also requires that the Comprehensive Plan address specific components (elements) in the Comprehensive Plan including Goals and Objectives, Land Use, Housing, Transportation, Growth and Development, Sensitive Areas, Mineral Resources, Fisheries, and Water Resources.

Q: What is a comprehensive rezoning?

A A comprehensive rezoning is a public process initiated by the County to update the County's zoning map on a County-wide basis to align with the comprehensive plan future land use map. This is typically done in conjunction with the Comprehensive Plan update. As well, county citizens can request a comprehensive rezoning request through the comprehensive plan process.

Q: What is the difference between the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance?

A The Comprehensive Plan is a long-term policy document outlining the community's vision and goals to guide future growth, development and preservation in Queen Anne's County. The zoning ordinance is part of the Queen Anne's County Code that regulates the physical development of land within a specific zoning district. Generally, the comprehensive plan is looked at from a collective larger countywide or 1,000' view while the zoning code is to provide analysis at the parcel level.

Q: How does the Comprehensive Plan impact the remainder of the county, outside of zoning?

A In addition to the Comprehensive Plan serving as Queen Anne's County document that outlines the community's vision and goals to guide future growth, development, and preservation, the Comprehensive Plan also provides guidance regarding long-term public policy, the need to prioritize infrastructure, residents, environmental resources, and along with the interrelationships of all within the community. Many other required county documents and applications for development review are required to be found consistent, or what is known as findings of consistency, with the Comprehensive Plan in order to be approved.

Q: The comprehensive plan includes goals, strategies, and recommendations. What is the purpose and why are they included?

A In the Comprehensive Plan, the goals, strategies and recommendations work together to address the long-range vision for Queen Anne's County. Goals are the broad, long-term outcomes, strategies are the methods to achieve these goals, and recommendations are the specific actions for implementation. The Queen Anne's County Comprehensive Plan includes a set of goals, strategies and recommendations at the end of each subject chapter and a full matrix in Chapter 12, Implementation.

Q: How often and when will the next comprehensive plan update occur?

A Maryland requires that the Comprehensive Plan be updated every ten years. The Queen Anne's current County Comprehensive Plan was adopted on May 24, 2022, so the next update will be due in May 2032.

Q: What is zoning?

A Zoning is the division of land into multiple classifications called zoning districts that have individual regulations based on the purpose and intent of the district. Queen Anne’s County has a total of 24 mapped zoning districts.

Q: What is the purpose of the zoning map and where can I find it?

A A zoning map, whether it be paper or electronic, is a colorful visual tool that includes mapped parcels within specific zoning districts. Using a zoning map one can confirm the zoning of their parcel and then refer to a zoning code to determine items like permitted uses, required setbacks, and development standards. You can find the zoning of your property within the QAC Property Viewer, https://gis.qac.org/qac272/index.html?viewer=QAC_Property_Viewer.QAC_Property_Viewer. Navigate to your property through the search tool or by zooming, select the Planning tab and click your parcel.

Q: What is the purpose to the zoning code and where can I find it?

A The purpose of the zoning code is to set local regulations and standards specific to how land can be used whether it is commercial, residential, agricultural, industrial or mixed use. It may also address specific design standards and natural resource standards. The Queen Anne’s County Zoning Code, Chapter 18:1 Zoning and Subdivision Regulations can be found at <https://ecode360.com/7137102>.

Q: How can the zoning map be changed, also known as a map amendment?

A The zoning map may be changed through an ordinance approved by the County Commissioners through a process known as a map amendment. This process can be initiated by the County Commissioners, Planning Commission, or a property owner. This application is to change the zoning district of a specific parcel. In order to approve a map amendment, the State of Maryland requires that a mapping mistake or substantial change in the neighborhood to be found.

Q: How can the zoning code be changed, also known as a text amendment?

A The zoning code, Chapter 18:1, may be changed through an ordinance approved by the County Commissioners through a process known as a text amendment. This process can be initiated by the County Commissioners, Planning Commission, or a property owner. The application is to change a specific standard of a zoning district, or portion of the code that generally impacts multiple parcels. The County Commissioners approve or deny text amendments based on public hearing(s), State regulations including the Annotated Code, the Planning Commission recommendations and consistency compliance with the Queen Anne’s County Comprehensive Plan.

Q: Can county citizens submit applications for text and map amendments?

A Yes, a county citizen can submit an application for a text or map amendment. Applications may only be submitted during the first 10 business days in the month of February of each calendar year. Specific findings are required to be made by the County Commissioners, as found in Chapter 18:1.

Q: Can the Planning Commission and County Commissioners propose amendments to the zoning map and zoning code?

A Yes, the Planning Commission and the County Commissioners can propose amendments to the zoning map and zoning code.

Q: How long does amendment process take?

A The process generally takes about six months. It involves a review by Planning staff, a recommendation by the Planning Commission to the County Commissioners (if amending the subdivision regulations a

public hearing is required), and a public hearing by the County Commissioners. A public notice is required for all public hearings, and the meetings are open to the public.

Q: Who officially approves the changes?

A The County Commissioners approve or deny the changes through an ordinance based on the public hearing, State regulations including the Annotated Code, the Planning Commission recommendations, and consistency with the Queen Anne’s County Comprehensive Plan.

Q: What role do county citizens have in the amendment process?

A The role of county citizen is to provide input and testimony to boards reviewing the potential changes to the zoning code or map amendment. The Planning Commission and County Commissioner public hearing and meetings are public meetings, and open to the public, so the public is encouraged to attend these meetings and have their voices be heard. Citizens are held to 3 minutes when providing public comment. Written comments are also welcome. Be sure to visit the Queen Anne’s County Agenda Center for meeting details.

Q: Are there other codes besides the zoning code?

A Yes, there are additional Codes in the Queen Anne’s County Code as well as State and Federal Regulations that impact land use. These include, but are not limited to: the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Act, Floodplain and Stormwater Management, the Forest Conservation Act, as well as the International Code Council Building Code.

Critical Area

Q: What is the Critical Area and why is it important?

A The Critical Area is 1,000’ beyond the landward boundaries of state or private wetlands, which established a resource protection program for the Chesapeake Bay and their tributaries, utilizing more sensitive development activities to minimize impacts to water quality and natural habitats.

Q: Are Critical Area regulations only applicable to QAC?

A No, within the State of Maryland Critical Area regulations are subject to all land and water areas within 1,000’ beyond the landward boundaries of state or private wetlands as designated by the State of Maryland. The local jurisdiction, or Queen Anne’s County, is responsible for applying and enforcing the state regulations, which were originally adopted by the County in 1989 and as amended.

Q: How do I know if my property is in the Critical Area and where can I find a map?

A To know if your property is within the Critical Area please visit the QAC Property Viewer at https://gis.qac.org/qac272/index.html?viewer=QAC_Property_Viewer.QAC_Property_Viewer. Enter the address in the Search box at the top right. Then, in the Layers (bottom left), click the Environmental tab, followed by the Queen Anne’s County tab, and finally the Critical Area option. The Critical Area development areas will populate: red Intensely Developed Area (IDA), yellow Limited Developed Area (LDA), and green Resource Conservation Area (RCA).

Q: What is the Buffer?

A The protected area immediately landward of mean high water of tidal waters and generally at least 100’ in width. The buffer may be expanded if it is adjacent to steep slopes, hydric soil, highly erodible soil, and nontidal wetlands.

Q: What are the Critical Area land development areas and how do I know what I can do on my property?

- A The Critical Area consist of three development areas. To understand what you can do on your property please view Chapter 14:1 Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Act of the Queen Anne’s County Code.
- Intensely Developed Area (IDA) – An area where residential, commercial, institutional, or industrial land uses are predominant and where relatively little natural habitat, if any, occurs.
 - Limited Developed Area (LDA) - An area that is currently developed with low- or moderate intensity uses, which contains areas of natural plant and animal habitats and where the quality of runoff has not been substantially altered or impaired
 - Resource Conservation Area (RCA) – An area characterized by nature-dominated environments, including wetlands, forests, abandoned fields, and resource-utilization activities

Q: Are the Critical Area land development areas the same as local zoning districts?

- A No, the Critical Area land designations or development areas, also known as the RCA, LDA, and IDA, were established by state law to provide specific regulatory protection for land and water resources located within the first 1,000’ of mean high water. Local zoning is established and mapped by the local jurisdiction, Queen Anne’s County. However, because local governments are required to implement the Critical Area program locally, local zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, policies and related measures are used to help implement these regulations at the local level.

Q: What are habitat protection areas (HPA) and how are they regulated?

- A Habitat protection areas are areas within the Critical Area that include the critical area buffer, non-tidal wetlands, habitats of threatened and endangered species, species in need of conservation, specific plant and wildlife habitats, and fish that migrate from saltwater to freshwater to spawn and reproduce. Habitat protection areas are regulated through Critical Area regulations.

Q: What is the Critical Area Commission and what do they approve?

- A The 29-member, governor appointed, state-wide Critical Area Commission was created by the 1984 Chesapeake Bay Protection Act to protect and conserve tidal waters, aquatic habitat, and wildlife in the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Coastal Bays by providing oversight for local land use programs with the designated Critical Area. The Critical Area Commission meets monthly and must review and approve program amendments to Chapter 14:1, and particular project applications, such as growth allocation.

Q: When is a buffer management plan required?

- A Any building activity or human action that results in disturbance to land or natural vegetation on land that has frontage on a tidal waterway, a tidal wetland, or a stream, or any disturbance to the buffer or expanded buffer, will require a buffer management plan. A buffer management plan must be submitted to and approved by the Queen Anne’s County Planning and Zoning Office.

Q: What is lot coverage?

- A Lot coverage is the percentage of a lot or parcel that is developed with a structure, accessory structure, parking area, driveway, walkway, or roadway. Lot coverage includes areas covered with gravel, stone, shell, impermeable decking, pavers, permeable pavement, or any other man-made material. Lot coverage does not include a less than one-foot-wide fence or wall constructed without a footer, a walkway to a pier, a wood mulch pathway, or a permeable deck. All parcels within the RCA and LDA are subject to the lot coverage limit, as set by the State of Maryland.

Q: Growth allocation, what is it?

- A Growth allocation is a process whereby local jurisdictions are allowed to approve a finite amount of additional growth and development in certain parts of the critical area by changing the critical area

development area. Growth allocation is used to accommodate more intense land use development than what would have been permitted based on the existing Critical Area development area, whether based on the proposed land use or lot coverage limit Growth allocation must be approved at both the local level and state level through the Critical Area Commission.

Q: Can I remove trees from my property if it is in the Critical Area?

A Trees that are located within the Buffer cannot be removed unless they are dead, dying, diseased, or creating a hazard to people or property. A Buffer Management Plan is required for all removal of vegetation within the Buffer, except for mowing an existing lawn. A Buffer Management Plan must be submitted to and approved by the Queen Anne’s County Planning and Zoning Department. Outside of the buffer, vegetation may be removed but requires a Tree Removal Application to be submitted and approved by Queen Anne’s County Planning and Zoning Department. Mitigation is generally required for both a Buffer Management Plan and a Tree Removal Application. All applications can be found at <https://www.qac.org/392/Forms>.