

Chapter 3:

Community Planning Issues and Concerns

The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) appointed to update the Chester and Stevensville Community Plans held several initial strategy sessions to discuss community Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOTS). A SWOT analysis is an effective way of gaining insights from the citizens of a community. The analysis is used to assist the community in identifying assets and liabilities, which serves as the basis of planning strategy to address them. The purpose of a SWOT analysis is to isolate key issues and to facilitate a strategic approach. Each item in the SWOT list is a short but evocative descriptor of an issue, with the list organized into the following four categories:

- Strengths**, which are *positive* aspects *internal* to the community;
- Weaknesses**, which are *negative* aspects *internal* to the community;
- Opportunities**, which are *positive* aspects *external* to the community; and
- Threats**, which are *negative* aspects *external* to the community.

The members of the CAC identified each issue on the SWOT lists. Then the issues on each SWOT list were ranked in order of importance through a voting process where each member identified their top five priorities. This ranking process provided an indication of issues to be considered as most relevant to the future direction of the communities. The issues contained in each of the SWOT lists reflect the concerns as articulated by the residents appointed to serve on the CAC.

The Planning Commission acknowledged the importance of the insight provided by the SWOT analysis. While the Planning Commission does not necessarily agree with the priorities assigned to each strength, weakness, opportunity or threat by members of the CAC, they do offer an important guidepost for citizens' concerns about the future of their community. Chapter 3 outlines the CAC's conclusions arising from its SWOT analysis. It is included here because the CAC's efforts were informative to the Planning Commission's formulation of this Plan. The CAC's conclusions, though, are those of the CAC. The Planning Commission has reached its own conclusions which are reflected in other sections of this Plan and the proposed Land Use Map.

Community Strengths

These strengths include the community's proximity to the Chesapeake Bay and the waterfront lifestyle this affords, an abundance of natural resources, waterfowl, and wildlife, the bucolic island landscape and culture, the gateway to something unique that is defined as the Eastern Shore and its rural lifestyle, vast areas of undeveloped rural land adjacent to settlements, a central location between metropolitan areas, the tidewater region, and coastal Atlantic beaches, and well-established community facilities and organizations including volunteer fire departments, churches, and civic groups.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS RANKING

12	The Bay
9	Wildlife/Waterfowl
8	Waterfront Community
8	Natural Resources (Crabs, Oysters, Fishing)
6	Unique (Environmentally, Geographically, and Historically)
5	Character/Eastern Shore Way of Life
5	Large Areas of Rural Undeveloped Land adjacent to Settlements
5	Volunteer Fire Department
4	Depth of Citizen Concern and Care
4	Gateway to Something Unique (The Eastern Shore and Rural Lifestyle)
4	Cross-Island Trail– Walkable Communities
4	Political Commitment to Responsible Growth
3	Bucolic Setting
3	Central location -- access to work destinations
3	Economic Value of Community and Properties
3	Sewer System
3	1631- First Settlement in Maryland
3	Community/Civic Organization Involvement (Lions Club, Rotary, Character Counts, Churches and Fire Department)
3	Event Potential

(Note: Numbers shown in left column represent the number of CAC members prioritizing a particular strength to support efforts to prioritize strengths and rank their relative importance. See Appendix A for the CAC's detailed listing of Chester and Stevensville's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.)

Community Weaknesses

The CAC also catalogued and ranked community weaknesses that need to be addressed in discussions of future growth and planning for Chester and Stevensville. These included an excessive amount of existing or planned development, a lack of affordable housing, a limited water supply, a shortage of medical facilities, an absence of implementation mechanisms to prevent sprawl and poorly planned development, and the problems caused by Route 50/301, including high traffic volume and congestion, safety, noise, pollution, and lack of aesthetic guidelines for development located along the highway.

COMMUNITY WEAKNESSES RANKING

- 13 **Too much high density growth already approved**
- 9 **Affordable Housing**
- 8 **Traffic/Gridlock**
- 7 **Bay Bridge/Route 50**
 - Ugly
 - Pollution
 - Truck Traffic
 - Cuts Communities in half
 - Noisy
 - Safety Hazard
 - Gridlock/Congestion
- 6 **Too Much Discretion left to the Planning Commission**
- 6 **Limited Water Supply**
- 5 **Limited Medical Facilities**
- 5 **No Growth Management Ordinance that affects Rate of Growth**
- 4 **Health of Bay Resources/ Condition of Bay is Deteriorating**
- 4 **Lack of Code Enforcement**
 - Signage
 - Beautification
 - Building Guidelines
 - Setbacks
 - Incentives for Property Maintenance (Local or State Programs to support)
- 3 **SPRAWL**
- 3 **Not enough facilities to support youth activities**
 - movie theaters
 - YMCA
 - Bowling
 - Public Pool
- 3 **Infrastructure (Roads and Electric Power)**
- 3 **Southside Connector over Cox Creek needed**

While a number of these issues or weaknesses are common in growing communities subject to growth pressure, a significant proportion of them stem from the fact that a major transportation corridor runs right through what was once essentially the middle of both communities. When Route 50/301 was reconstructed as a six lane, controlled-access highway in the late 1980s, the resulting improvements inadvertently caused problems for many of the communities located along it. Chester and Stevensville were effectively severed into two communities with distinct parts north and south of the highway and only one connecting overpass each, creating a situation

where there was no way to get from south Stevensville to south Chester without accessing Route 50/301 or through a circuitous route that entails going to the north side of the highway and using Routes 8 and 18 to cross back over to the south side at the next overpass.

While Stevensville's historic downtown area has long provided a community center to its residents, Chester has maintained a different, yet functional existence as a loose-knit collection of residential and commercial neighborhoods lacking a traditional center. The radical changes brought about by the reconstruction of Route 50/301 served to heighten the sense that Chester was a disjointed community, and also began to erode the interconnected feeling of the Stevensville community. These considerations, combined with the weaknesses identified by the CAC, provide a clear indication of the major concerns and issues foremost in the minds of the CAC members.

The issues that have arisen in both communities as a result of development have been discussed in previous community and County planning documents. The leading question being considered by both Chester and Stevensville continue to be "how much and what type of growth should there be in our communities?" To fully address that issue, several other decisive factors were considered, including development objectives for creating and strengthening village centers, long-range objectives for large, existing undeveloped or underdeveloped sites at key locations outside but connected to the village centers, the fragmented nature and pattern of some existing subdivisions, and the aesthetic appearance of the built environment.

Equally important are considerations for protecting the environment and natural landscape, including sensitive areas, shorelines, forests, recreation and open space land, and the rural character of the surrounding countryside.

Community Opportunities

The Citizen Advisory Committee exploration of SWOT's revealed a number of opportunities available to Chester and Stevensville to capitalize on existing strengths and overcome weaknesses. In its assessment of opportunities for Chester and Stevensville, the CAC determined that foremost should be a halt of major new development in both communities so that growth management issues could be addressed and appropriate planning tools and implementation strategies could be developed.

The process of preparing this plan was also identified as an opportunity to review and redefine land areas targeted for development and to establish reforms to improve measures for better management of growth and to establish design guidelines to improve the man-built environment. Updating the plan was also viewed as presenting opportunities to establish greenways, improve the park system, and better protect or utilize historical sites.

A shift in focus from residential to commercial development in the way of gateway enhancements, recreational tourism and heritage tourism business incentives, and strategies to diversify the region's retail industry base would steer Chester and Stevensville to a future of balanced growth.

COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES RANKING

- 14 **Freeze on any New Development**
- 10 **Establish Greenways, Parks, Open Spaces, and Historical Sites**
- 10 **Review and redefine growth areas**
- 9 **To establish an effective Growth management ordinance**
- 8 **Pier One Marina District Expansion to Enhance Gateway**
 - **Evaluate and Protect Airport for Future Use**
 - **Use of Land Adjacent to Route 50**
- 7 **Develop Better Design Guidelines/Stricter Standards**
- 7 **To establish Building Permit Cap on Kent Island**
- 7 **To improve Route 8 corridor**
- 6 **Develop Community Design Themes for Chester and Stevensville**
- 5 **Shift the focus of the Planning Areas from Residential to non-residential development**
- 4 **To be Pro-active regarding a future Bay Bridge Span**
- 4 **Four Seasons—strengthens market for bookstores, boutiques, more diversity in retail services.**
- 3 **To develop Incentives to Draw Businesses into Business Park**
- 3 **Public Support for Funding of:**
 - **Blue Heron Golf Course Improvements**
 - **Indoor Tennis**
 - **Equestrian Park**
 - **Indoor Pool**

The County's growth management ordinance and other implementation tools such as improved transportation plans, community design standards and guidelines, and best management practices were also identified as representing opportunities to support the planning effort and help ensure the form and function of both communities are enhanced over time.

Community Threats

Critical issues identified by the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) also exposed certain threats that both communities need to address in the context of planning. The overwhelming rate and pace of development was by far the leading threat identified by members of the CAC.

Noteworthy was concern that the pending Four Seasons development project together with the proposed "Ellendale" and "Gibson's Grant" plans represent large-scale building projects that would overwhelm the communities' infrastructure and street systems. These projects were also viewed as inimical to environmental resources located in the County's Chesapeake Bay Critical Area.

COMMUNITY THREATS RANKING

- 16 **Four Seasons**
 - 2700 Cars to Circle
 - 4 lanes through Cross-Island Trail
 - 970 houses located 10 feet apart in the Critical Area
 - could cost taxpayers \$40 million
- 9 **Unintended Consequences:**
 - Stopped Walmart to get Airport Expansion and Stopped Gibson's Grant to get Truck Station
- 8 **Sewer Lines**
- 8 **1,300 to 1,600 homes on existing Vacant Lots South on Route 8.**
- 8 **Lack of detailed Island-Wide Plan**
- 7 **No Immediate Plans for 3rd Bay Bridge Crossing**
- 7 **Traffic prompted by Four Seasons, Ellendale, and Regional Traffic impacts**
- 6 **Unending and growing economic pressure for growth on Kent Island**
- 5 **Tax Increases**
- 5 **Chesapeake Bay Deterioration and Threat to Eco-Tourism**
- 5 **Widespread Septic System failures in older communities**
- 5 **Lack of adequate policy tools to enforce an island-wide plan**
- 4 **Route 8 South: Additional Development impacts to existing backups down Route 8 external to Queen Anne's County**
- 4 **Too much growth outside growth areas**
- 4 **Other jurisdictions create more attractive liveable quality communities through responsible development practices that enhance their tax base and shift investment away from the Island.**
- 3 **Potable Water Supply**
- 3 **Deforestation**

Threats also included the impacts of growing traffic external to the county on the Route 50 corridor and its impact on added congestion along the Route 8 and Route 18 corridors. Concerns regarding the provision of sewer service to over 1,000 homes on the undeveloped lots of record in the communities on the southern part of Kent Island outside of the planning area were also cited as threats, since such service would accommodate additional development impacting both the Chester/Stevensville planning areas as well as the Island as a whole.

The CAC's SOT analysis was instrumental to its development of a vision for Chester and Stevensville in 2025. The CAC's vision is contained in Foreword I of this document.