

Executive Summary

The shores of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries are proving to be an important factor in attracting people to live and play in this County. This quote from the County's first Comprehensive Land Use Plan in 1965 and its supporting analysis of the County at that time indicated there was evidence of the population "clustering" at many locations along the County's extensive shorelines. Among the County's most prominent physical features are the tidewater bays and estuaries that indent the land and divide the western portion of the County into a series of peninsulas and islands.

Almost 400 years ago Captain John Smith sailed up the Chesapeake in 1608 and landed on Kent Island, however, it was almost another 100 years before the County was officially "founded" in 1706 and named for the reigning British monarch, Queen Anne. Kent Island has continued to serve as a gateway onto Maryland's Eastern Shore, at first bringing passengers by steamboat and ferry service where they would make rail connections to the Bay-side and Ocean-side resorts, and continuing with the construction of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge so Western Shore vacationers can reach the beach.

Development pressure was increasing in the County in the 1960's as a result of the opening of the first Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1952. The completion of the second span of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1973 was long awaited by the many travelers anxious to "reach the beach." The second span also played an important role in the development of Kent Island as the commute became easier to employment centers on the Western Shore in Annapolis, Baltimore and Washington, D.C. As a result, Kent Island became much more of an attractive bedroom community and provided the catalyst for additional development pressures.

Growth and change have been a way of life in Kent Island communities of both Chester and Stevensville since the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. Stevensville today is the most heavily populated area in the County. Chester and Stevensville historically have been the fastest growing communities in Queen Anne's County, largely due to their proximity to more metropolitan area markets and availability of public water and sewer.

In 2003, the Queen Anne's County Commissioners requested that the Queen Anne's County Planning Commission update the Community Plans for Chester and Stevensville adopted in 1997 and 1998, respectively. The County Commissioners appointed a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) to review the 1997 / 1998 Community Plans and make recommendations for revising them to the Planning Commission. In 2004, the CAC decided to combine the Chester and Stevensville planning areas. The CAC acknowledged that the 1992 Maryland Planning Act directed the county to "concentrate development in suitable areas" and that, in the opinion of the CAC, Kent Island was not a "suitable area" for high density/high impact growth. In October 2004, the CAC finalized its version of a

Chester / Stevensville Community Plan, which included a revised Community Area Map that defined the boundaries of the Chester / Stevensville Planning Area, and forwarded their recommendation to the Planning Commission.

After the Planning Commission conducted multiple work-sessions throughout the next year, on November 23, 2005, the Draft of the update to the Chester / Stevensville Community Plan was issued by the Queen Anne's County Planning Commission for the 60-day review pursuant to Article 66B, Section 3.07 (c) of the Annotated Code of Maryland. The Planning Commission's Public Hearing was held on January 25, 2006. During March and April of 2006 the Planning Commission conducted multiple work-sessions to review and address the State agencies and public comments. Changes were incorporated into the draft as a result of these work-sessions. The table in Appendix F contains a brief summary of each of the public hearing comments, and the Planning Commission's decision with respect to each comment. This document is the Planning Commission's recommendation to the Queen Anne's County Commissioners for adoption of an updated Chester / Stevensville Community Plan.

Background

Kent Island's 2000 population of 16,812 represented a 31 percent increase from the 1990 population of 12,829, a lesser proportional gain than the 55.7 percent recorded between 1980 and 1990, but still reflective of steady growth. Between 1980 and 1990, a total of 1,941 new residential subdivision lots were created in Queen Anne's County, and 36 percent (703) of those were created on Kent Island. However, since then, subdivision activity has significantly slowed on the Island, and although residential building permit trends continue to show strong demand, the Queen Anne's County 2002 Comprehensive Plan is focused on limiting development on the Island to a slower pace, and directing new residential development toward incorporated municipalities in accordance with statewide growth management standards.

As part of the process to develop this Community Plan update, a wide variety of issues and concerns regarding past plans were expressed by the CAC, but in large part this range of concerns centered on two central and related themes. First was the concern that the volume, rate, and planned location of development within and adjacent to both communities exceeded the county's capacity to provide infrastructure in the form of highways, sewer and water facilities and other services and facilities. Second was the concern that the rate and pace of development taxed the natural environment and was detrimental to water quality, wildlife habitat and Chesapeake Bay Critical Areas resources that are sensitive to development disturbances. Concern regarding the need to protect these environmental resources also extended to the role they play in also defining the Island's "rural character." A wider range of issues integral to both of these themes was perceived by Committee members as threatening to their quality of life and therefore prompted them to recommend a number of changes in planning direction.

This Plan acknowledges the strong development pressure facing the Chester and Stevensville communities and the impact it can have on both communities, the natural environment and the character of Kent Island over time. The primary goal of this plan is to direct a limited amount of growth to appropriate areas in Chester and Stevensville, which will have a positive impact on, and add value to, both communities as they presently exist.

Proposed Community Planning Area Boundary

Key areas currently designated within the Community Planning Area boundary established with the 1997 /1998 Plans for Chester and Stevensville that are proposed for removal from the Community Planning Area boundary are reflected in the following Table, and discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Table 5-1 Key areas proposed for removal from the Community Planning Area Boundary	
Location	Acreage
South Route 8 Corridor	
Parcel 279 ó òThe Cloisterøö (Kent Island, LLC)	105
Parcel 21 ó òKent Manorö (Kent Manor Inn, LLC)	227
Parcel 179 ó Dixon Holding Company	21
Parcel 269 ó Breeding Property	6
Parcel 35 ó QAC County Commissioners	11
300 foot shore buffer along Parcel 20 ó Ellendale	14
Upper Cox Creek Corridor	~ 93
North Chester Area (Chester Haven Beach)	103
Southeast Chester	120
Total	~700

Proposed Land Use Concepts

Specific recommendations for land use and/or development treatment have been identified for key locations, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 and identified on Map 5-2. In order to implement the goals and recommendations of these

proposed land use concepts the Planning Commission will consider rezoning of property as appropriate, as well as any necessary text amendments to the County Code. These locations include:

1. Bay Bridge/Island Gateway
2. Wastewater and Water Treatment Plant site.
3. Kent Island High School Expansion and Park Site.
4. Davidson Farm Park Site
5. Chester/Stevensville Separation Greenbelt
6. Chester Village Center Extension

The Land Conservation Plan

Conservation of natural resources and protection of environmental features on Kent Island is a key objective of this Community Plan. Concerns regarding the development that has taken place in recent years have highlighted the need to protect environmental resources, which has also extended to the role these resources play in also defining the Island's rural character. As undeveloped lands dwindle, the need to identify those remaining sites and institute measures to insure they remain rural and that environmental resources are protected has become paramount in the minds of Citizen Advisory Committee members. Map 5-3 identifies three categories and their respective locations where conservation of lands is recommended. They include:

- A three hundred foot buffer from tidal waters within the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area.
- Lands designated as Greenbelt.
- Existing and proposed parklands to provide public waterfront access and interpretive facilities to support environmental education.

Rural areas essentially border all of the existing developed and planned growth areas in Chester and Stevensville. Waterways naturally separate the two communities. The views and access afforded by the water are important if both Chester and Stevensville are to maintain their unique identity within the greater Kent Island area. Without this separation, development will eventually form a continuous strip from the Bay Bridge to Grasonville with few, if any, dominant views of the natural setting remaining as reminders of the Islands sense of place.

The Transportation Plan

Investments in transportation system infrastructure will be required through the planning period to better manage traffic, improve safety, and reduce congestion to the extent

possible and facilitate the movement of people and goods. Most of the recommended transportation and pedestrian system improvements, as addressed in Chapter 6, are designed to foster greater connectivity between existing developed communities adjacent to, or in proximity to, the MD Route 50/301 corridor.

The Community Facilities and Public Services Plan

The planned pattern of land use and the characteristics of growth and development in past years prompt a number of needs and demands for public service improvements, new public facilities, and a series of public services that are not typically publicly provided but have nevertheless been identified as desirable by residents in the Chester and Stevensville planning areas. Public improvements that are currently planned or will need to be planned to serve both communities over the next twenty years are outlined in Chapter 6, and include public water and sewer facilities to support planned growth.

Summation

The “contained-growth” philosophy established in this Plan has resulted in reductions in the size of the designated Community Planning Areas, placed greater emphasis on redevelopment rather than new development, and proposes limitations on growth both within and outside the reduced Community Planning Areas to protect environmentally sensitive areas. These changes should support the provision of more efficient and fiscally responsible delivery of public services for Kent Island. This plan has been designed to contain growth so that the distribution of infrastructure and facilities can be provided in a more cost-effective manner.

Recommendations in this Plan are designed to move in the direction of achieving the CAC’s Vision, as articulated in the Foreword, for the Chester and Stevensville communities over time. These recommendations include that clear and objective methodologies are used to assess the transportation, environmental and fiscal impacts of development proposals. Many of these recommendations require steps be taken to institute new programs, modify existing County regulations to assure they better achieve intended results, and establish new regulations or standards against which future development proposals can be properly judged.

It should be noted that this is a long-range plan and many of the recommendations contained in this Plan will require more detailed study and may take many years to implement as funding and priorities warrant. Implementation of recommendations for physical improvements will ultimately be evaluated in the context of the County’s long-range capital improvements programming and may require public/private partnerships for future development, and/or innovative finance mechanisms in order to be realized.