

FOREWORD I

The Citizen Advisory Committee's Vision for Chester and Stevensville

The following vision statement is the starting point for the creation and implementation of subsequent elements of this community plan. This vision, developed by the Chester/Stevensville Citizens Advisory Committee, provides the overall image of what members hope both communities will be and how they want to look 20 years from now. The vision statement is the formal expression of that vision. It depicts, in words and images, what both communities have become by the year 2025.

*This vision is dedicated to
Dr. Jan Gervin whose
energy and spirit helped
inspire it.*

Background and Purpose

In 2004 the Citizens Advisory Committee (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. It was also acknowledged that the previous Comprehensive and Community plans recommended that 1/3 of the County growth should be on Kent Island and 2/3 of County growth be directed off Kent Island, and that these recommendations had not been followed. The ten year growth average for the entire County had been 424 houses per year. One third of the 424 average was 141 houses on Kent Island per year. Due to projects that were in the plan review process there existed a potential for over 400 houses per year all on Kent Island. The CAC found this growth rate unacceptable.

The citizens of Kent Island, through elections of Commissioners who pledged to maintain the historic growth rate and the circulation of petitions to contain growth, had made their stand on the growth issue very clear.

By 2004 the history of the Queen Anne's County Commissioners, officials and department heads of Queen Anne's County government was one that had ignored the recommendations of previous Comprehensive and Community Plans.

In 2004 the essential "Island Character" of Kent Island was acknowledged. "Island Character" was defined as the Island's fragile natural environment, extensive open spaces, geographic and historic uniqueness, undeveloped reaches of shoreline on the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, forests, farmland, scenic views and rural character. These characteristics were recognized as critical and necessary components in defining the Chester and Stevensville communities.

Adopted May 1, 2007

Chester / Stevensville Community Plan

Forward - The Citizen Advisory Committee's Vision for Chester and Stevensville

In 2004 the Chester and Stevensville CAC identified the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing their communities and the whole of Kent Island, and this vision addressed those hopes and concerns.

With this acknowledgement/recognition, substantial areas of the Island were protected from future development. The rate and pace of development within and outside designated growth areas were reduced. At least 80% of then undeveloped land was protected from future development via large acre zoning and aggressive land preservation outside the growth areas. Moreover, the character and quality of development were key to achieving the vision of the place we wanted Chester, Stevensville and Kent Island to become. Following are the many characteristics that this community has become in the year 2025 as a result of the policies established and actions that have been taken over the past twenty years.

A Place Where Natural Resources, Sensitive Environmental Features, “Extensive” Open Space and Our Island Character Have Been Preserved.

The determination to protect the environment included:

Policies that assure that the life and health of the Chesapeake Bay were the guiding principle in ALL decisions made regarding Kent Island.

Protection of a large percentage of our natural resources and environmental features including forested areas, wetlands, flood plains, shore and stream buffers, extensive open spaces, and lands designated Resource Conservation Areas within the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area. These natural resources and environmental features have been proactively and permanently preserved as part of an island wide land preservation strategy. Zoning designations of Resource Conservation Areas within the Chesapeake Critical Area were not subject to change.

A 4,500-acre increase in forest cover on Kent Island. These acres have increased the forest cover from 17% to over 37% of the island. Half of this forest cover consists of county or state parks of 100 acres or more. As land use changed from agricultural to low density/low impact use existing vegetation was preserved and more native trees were planted especially along stream and shore buffers as a result, nutrient loads to our streams, tidal tributaries, and the Chesapeake Bay have been reduced. County forests emphasizing habitat restoration as well as forest parks ranging in size from 20 to several hundred acres were established. Private landowners received incentives to maintain and expand wooded areas as well as to keep land in agricultural use. Existing county forest areas such as Mattapeake Park were maintained and expanded. Animal habitat and biodiversity have been increased, soil has been replenished, windbreaks have been created and the ecological balance of the island has returned to a closer approximation of what it was in the 19th century

Chester and Stevensville have their distinct character and identity within the Island landscape because, among other things, 300- foot, forested greenbelts were established along the edges of our designated growth areas.

The county resolved any problems created by failing septic systems in southern part of Kent Island without building a sewer line down Route 8 and without creating new incentives for development in this area. A consultant/engineer hired by the County found alternative solutions to the southern Kent Island septic problems that were acceptable to the property owners affected and did not require a sewer line to be run down Route 8. Because the existing sewage treatment plant had sufficient capacity (400 to 500,000 gallons per day) for eight to ten years of growth at the historical rate, no expansion of the KNSG sewer plant was permitted until after 2012. This limited environmental, traffic, and other infrastructure problems on Kent Island. The grant-financed, BNR/ENR upgrades in 2004 accomplished the targeted Nitrogen levels in the plant's effluent to the Bay.

Greenways along our shorelines and rural views in other key locations such as significant scenic vistas along the Route 50 corridor and other Island highways were protected. The wooded areas along Routes 8 and 18 were undisturbed, under a scenic highways designation.

Niche/alternative agriculture in the form of organic farming, nurseries, wineries, aquaculture and vegetable farming and other forms is thriving on the Island and has helped to preserve farmland as a component of our rural character. Corn, wheat and other agricultural products continue to be a viable economic component of Kent Island outside the growth area.

Historic waterways, such as Broad Creek, which had been silted over due to overdevelopment and other barriers, have been opened up and maintained.

A Place Where Location and Rate of Growth Have Been Contained.

The Island is an essential context for more localized planning within the Chester and Stevensville designated growth areas. Growth is contained to locations within or adjacent to both of these communities. This contained-growth philosophy ensures that Chester and Stevensville continue to serve as the primary activity centers that support the Island life. The greenbelts established since 2004 continue to provide clearly defined edges to each of these communities. These greenbelts have also provided the opportunity for both communities to maintain and strengthen their distinct identities in larger Island landscape.

In order to contain growth it was necessary to:

Reduce the size of the designated growth areas that were established in the rezoning process and that were expanded in the 1997/1998 plans for Chester and Stevensville and the 2002 Queen Anne's County Comprehensive Plan.

Establish policy to assure permanent protection for all Island shore-line.

Allow no future award of growth allocation or buffer reductions be granted to any area of Kent Island in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area.

No additional high-density large-scale commercial development was authorized on Kent Island.

Because Kent Island had already absorbed more than its sustainable capacity, growth outside the reduced growth areas were limited to low density lots ranging from one unit per five (5) acres to one unit per twenty (20) acres, in order to protect the environmentally sensitive areas that had not been developed prior to 2004. A Kent Island sending TDR program was adopted to direct growth to acceptable areas off of Kent Island.

Because growth has been located in more compact areas in or adjacent to the Chester and Stevensville Town Centers, less land was needed in the growth areas to accommodate a reasonable percentage of County growth. The County was able to provide the infrastructure and facilities necessary to support growth in a more efficient and fiscally responsible manner. Because low density, low impact growth was determined to be more suitable for, and allowed on, Kent Island, the policies and objectives stated in the 1993 Comprehensive Plan and the 1997 Chester Plan to reduce the growth trends on Kent Island and to avoid strip commercial development have been accomplished.

A Place Where the Communities of Chester and Stevensville Have Become Vibrant “Town Centers.”

Both Chester and Stevensville now provide a quality Eastern Shore small town atmosphere and experience. Both communities have maintained their small town “feel,” yet each has its own unique sense of identity, reinforced by more pedestrian-oriented downtowns and streetscapes, livable and affordable neighborhoods, safe and meaningful street life, and high quality civic architecture. Design guidelines for new development and standards for architecture and the scale of development have provided a better quality appearance and a character that better supports their role as a nexus for a “sense of place” and Eastern Shore heritage. Historic buildings and locations have been preserved and function as useful parts of these communities. These qualities are a direct result of several steps taken including:

Creating more walkable neighborhoods and enhancing pedestrian linkages between various locations within each community, particularly between neighborhoods and activity centers like our downtown areas. A fully developed pedestrian/bicycle network links all parts of the two Town Centers to parks and open space. Pedestrian-bicycle connections over US Route 50/301 connect the northern and southern parts of Chester and Stevensville.

Expanding and Strengthening the identity and role of the Historic Downtown Stevensville district.

Defining an area within which to establish a "Downtown" within the Chester community and developing design guidelines and incentives that encouraged its redevelopment, and preserved its historic buildings and sites.

Utilizing historic structures and vernacular Eastern Shore architecture as the template for development and redevelopment both within the two downtowns and in adjacent neighborhoods.

Incorporating Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) Planning Principles in design standards that reflect the character and heritage of the Eastern Shore in design standards for limited development and redevelopment within the Chester and Stevensville designated growth areas.

Siting public buildings and Civic structures into the fabric of both communities as opposed to locating them at the edges, so they may support downtown functions and better serve as examples of the architectural and design qualities sought in development and redevelopment.

Utilizing both downtown areas to enhance their role as community centers and activity centers that are inviting to walk through and better mix civic, residential, commercial and business uses.

Efforts were made to ensure that "affordable" and "housing" were not mutually exclusive terms, to provide housing opportunities for the children of the citizens of Kent Island.

To help preserve the historical character of Kent Island, a County ordinance was passed that restricted new and/or renovated buildings to less than 45 feet in height.

A Place Where Traffic Congestion Has Been Reduced and More Emphasis Has Been Placed on Local Mobility.

A proposed third Bay Bridge to Kent Island was rejected by the CAC and local and state officials.

Traffic is better managed. Investments in transportation system infrastructure have been made, and the movement of people and goods is facilitated by greater connectivity and an effective multi-modal transportation system and network established prior to further growth.

Although the Route 50 corridor continues to bisect Kent Island and has provided a number of transportation system challenges since the first Bay Bridge crossing was constructed, land use

pattern and road system improvements were planned together, and roads and other necessary infrastructure were in place, under construction, or at least budgeted prior to start of any development(s). Noteworthy improvements included upgrade of Routes 8 and 18 to four lanes from Kent Island High School north of Stevensville, south to Davidson Road. This upgrade has included left turn lanes at key intersections and integrated access controls to minimize conflicting turning movements.

These road improvements have been implemented as development has occurred and have been funded principally by the State and the developers. The added cloverleaf at Route 50 and 8 has dramatically reduced delays there.

A number of new connector road projects north and south of the Route 50 corridor have facilitated movement for Island residents from their homes to jobs, shopping, medical and entertainment facilities in Chester and Stevensville. These improvements now provide a circumferential local road system that loops to facilitate access to all areas of Stevensville and Chester. Essentially, the transportation network now relies on a larger number of small roads rather than a small number of large ones on which island traffic had been dependent in past years.

KI Isle Transit runs the Route 8 shuttles (Romancoke and Love Point lines) and two Cross-Island shuttles on either side of Route 50 (Trail and Narrows lines). All terminate in Park, Pool, Shop, Business Park locations, and Ride stations in Chester and Stevensville.

Only 40% of the workforce now commutes to jobs outside the County as compared to 57% in 2004. This change has been prompted by business park development and job growth on the Island as well as a growing number of residents that work at home given the availability of high speed fiber-optic data lines as well as high quality cell phone and other wireless connections in all parts of the Island. This reduction in dependence on the transportation system has extended the capacity of all road system improvements, particularly for peak hour volumes given the reduction in work trips.

A Place Where Design and Infrastructure in the Form of Trails, Pathways, and Sidewalks Enhance Walkability and Pedestrian Movement, Particularly Within and Between Activity Centers.

A "network of trails" has been created specifically for the use of pedestrians and bicyclists. People are able to travel safely throughout Chester and Stevensville without relying on the automobile. Starting with the Cross-Island Trail, components of the trail system now branch in all directions. Their contribution to the quality of life is greater than imagined since the trail network not only provides pedestrian and bike connections between activity centers, but also enables everyone to find "country landscapes" at their doorsteps. The trails provide a variety of experiences in wooded areas and along shorelines. They link neighborhoods with key destinations including schools, parks, commercial areas, and employment centers.

A Place Where Business Growth Has Provided Jobs, Stabilized Our Tax Base and Provided the Foundation for Providing Desired Public Services to Maintain Our Quality of Life.

Land was reserved for business development, to balance the jobs/housing mix. Businesses are attracted to and choose to locate in these areas, in large part because of the Island's natural beauty, recreational opportunities and the continuing influence of the Island's rich culture and heritage. Light manufacturing and service industry growth, a growing health care industry, niche/alternative agriculture, and a mix of retail activities in appropriate locations support the Island's economic base.

Reservation of land for business development has paid off since only 40% of the workforce now commutes to jobs outside the County as compared to 57% in 2004. As previously noted, this change has been prompted not only by business park and gateway development and job growth on the Island but also by the fact that a growing number of residents now telecommutes from home via computer. Businesses operating on the Island are a mix of large and small companies that provide a mix and balance of jobs needed to buffer the economy in times of economic downturn. Everyone shares a recognition that progressive, well-managed economic development is the foundation for providing desired public services, a stable tax base, and good jobs, all necessary ingredients for maintaining quality of life.

A Place Where Historic Resources Have Been Valued and Preserved.

New commercial and low-density development and rehabilitation projects have been designed to complement historic buildings, rather than clash with them. All Islanders, young and old, are able to see the reminders of our Island heritage, and take pride in it. The county and private landowners invested in preservation, restoration and improved access to previously endangered or neglected historical buildings and sites. A heritage tourism industry has developed along the Kent Island History Trail. The County has taken advantage of state matching funds to appoint a County Archaeologist/historian with review authority over all new development and the larger task of comprehensively surveying and documenting the archaeology and history of the Island. Additionally, this position would assist in identifying structures and sites for preservation, restoration and improved access/recognition, and of leading the efforts to achieve these goals. The Kent Island Museum in Stevensville (with interactive exhibits from pre-history through the 20th century) is a major attraction on the History Trail. A life-sized statue of William Claiborne presides over the enlarged Stevensville Village Green, along with a bandstand where residents enjoy Saturday night concerts in the park. Special recognition of Black history is provided throughout the Island, focused on a Black Heritage Center near the refurbished Ezion Church and cemetery at Batts Neck along the Heritage Trail and bike path.

A Place That Has Utilized Lands near the Bay Bridge Airport to Establish a Quality Visual Image of the Island and the County as the “Gateway to the Eastern Shore.”

Development of the gateway provides a quality statement about Queen Anne’s County and the Eastern Shore. There is a mix of low-density residential and low-impact, local, island commercial uses that evokes the traditions of Kent Island as an eastern shore waterfront community. The development of the Gateway design was achieved through a County appointed Special Study Commission which sponsored a design competition to determine the best mix of uses and aesthetics. The Special Study Commission studied and reported on moving the airport, and the wisdom of expansion of the airport.

A Place Where Development along the Route 50 Corridor Has Been Transformed.

Although it has taken a number of years, the quality and character of development along the Route 50 corridor through the Island has been transformed. The Corridor Overlay Zone District (CO district) established clear standards that have served as the basis for approval of structures to assure compatibility with design guidelines. Buffers and open spaces have been utilized to stop contiguous strip development along route 50. These standards have:

- Required preservation of open spaces and rural vistas, by defining exactly where and exactly how much land is set aside for commercial use.

- Eliminated reliance on or exclusive use of “corporate or franchise” styles of architecture;

- Required a consistent visual identity to be applied to all sides of buildings visible to the general public;

- Required building design to incorporate traditional building materials such as masonry, heavy timbers, brick or other natural appearing materials;

- Required site services to be located on the least visible side of the building or site or within interior building spaces;

- Required materials used for site features such as fences, screen walls, and signs to complement building design through materials, color shape and size.

- The Public Cemetery in Stevensville has been fully screened from Route 50 by water features and dense plantings.

Development along the corridor that might have taken on a "big box" appearance has been thwarted by many of these standards, including requirements that large buildings:

Use modulation (defined as a measured setback or offset in a building face) to reduce overall bulk and mass;

Avoid long, blank uninterrupted roof planes by using height variations to give the appearance of distinct elements or offsets in the roof line;

Utilize fenestration (the placement of windows and doors) to visually break up long flat facades;

Utilize articulation (the giving of emphasis to architectural elements like balconies, porches, canopies and projections that provide building shadows that visually break up long flat building facades) to create a complementary pattern of rhythm, dividing large buildings into smaller identifiable pieces.

A Place Where Clear Standards for Development Provide Certainty in Outcomes, Re-assurance to Residents and Has Eliminated Conflict over Growth and Planning Within Our Community.

Conflict over growth and planning on Kent Island has largely been eliminated for a number of reasons. They include:

Greater predictability and certainty regarding where and when development can be expected to occur as a result of clearly delineating what areas are to be protected as "off-limits" to development and what areas are to be developed.

Greater development process "predictability" due to having established more exacting and predictable standards for development including standards for site design, building architecture and compatibility, height and lighting standards, signage, and landscaping.

The CAC membership assisted the County Planning Department by submitting guidelines on the design standards to be incorporated in the Zoning Ordinances.

Specifics of the Chester and Stevensville Community Plans have been codified in effective, clearly drawn Zoning Ordinances, Growth Ordinances, Critical Area Ordinances and the Queen Anne County Comprehensive Plan.

The development of clear and objective methodologies used to assess the transportation, environmental historical and fiscal impacts of development proposals that can be clearly understood and provide outcomes that can be trusted by developers and residents alike.

A role was established for a citizens' board to advise the Planning Commission and County Commissioners regarding the implementation of the vision.

A Place Where Public Facilities and Services, Emergency Services and Health Care Facilities Meet the Needs of the Citizens.

The "contained-growth" philosophy and the protection of environmentally sensitive areas resulted in reductions in the size of designated growth areas. An emphasis on redevelopment rather than new development, plus limitations on growth both within and without the reduced growth areas, has permitted more efficient and fiscally responsible delivery of public services for Kent Island. Areas to be protected as "off-limits" to development were clearly defined. Areas to be developed were clearly identified. Success in containing growth has permitted the distribution of infrastructure and facilities in a more cost-effective manner.

Re-evaluation and revision of our adequate public facilities ordinance and impact fee programs have assured an equitable portion of the cost of providing facilities and services were borne by the new development that prompted the demand for these facilities and services. Execution and implementation of a mix of ordinances and fee structures have insured that existing levels of public services were maintained and improved when necessary, for all facilities and services including schools at 100% capacity, libraries, roads at least Level of Service "C", public parks and trails, police, fire, emergency medical services, solid waste disposal and stormwater management facilities.

Statutory changes as a result of this section were so important to Queen Anne's County health, safety, and welfare that the commissioners made all changes apply to the existing DRRA.

An increase in the range of medical and health care services and facilities that are now locally available on a twenty-four hour a day seven days a week basis has reduced the need for residents to travel out-of-County to meet many of their health care needs.