-- DRAFT FEBRUARY 2019 --

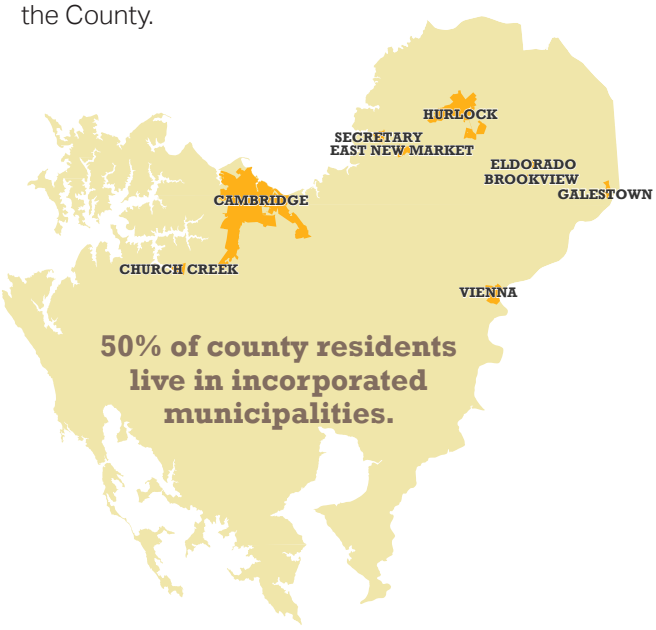
3 | LAND USE

The Land Use Plan describes the existing land uses and past trends in Dorchester County, and then sets forth the proposed land use strategies to implement the visions for future growth and conservation. Generally, this pattern is strongly influenced by existing land use patterns of incorporated municipalities, villages, farmland, forests and wetlands. This plan also incorporates the municipalities growth areas identified in their land use plans and Municipal Growth Elements (MGE), where available. It also contains County designated growth areas that extend beyond the municipal growth areas. The ongoing coordination between County and municipal planning efforts should facilitate future proposals for annexation.

OVERVIEW

As development and population continues to grow throughout other areas of the State, Dorchester County continues to be defined by its rural and agricultural setting, its natural resources, and its small towns and villages, as well as the City of Cambridge. The County's rich natural and cultural landscape consists of bay and river coastlines on the western and eastern borders; marshes, forests and maritime villages in the south; and agriculture and rural villages in the north. As the County seat, Cambridge is Dorchester's social, cultural, and economic hub. The future of Dorchester County depends on the general trend to conserve rural and natural areas and to maximize efficient use of public investments by strongly encouraging moderate infill development and redevelopment within the municipalities and other designated growth areas.

There are nine incorporated municipalities in Dorchester County that maintain their own planning and zoning authority: Brookview, Cambridge, Church Creek, East New Market, Eldorado, Galestown, Hurlock, Secretary, and Vienna. Dorchester County ranks second only to Talbot County in the number of people who reside within a municipality as a percentage of the total County population. In 2016, 50% percent of Dorchester County's population lived within a municipality.[1] This reliance on concentrating growth in and around the municipalities and the preservation of agricultural, forests and wetland areas form the foundation of the intended future growth patterns of the County.



EXISTING LAND USE

The 2010 Land Use/Land Cover data (LULC) by the Maryland Department of Planning provides a view of where people, jobs and industries in Dorchester County are located. It shows a number of significant trends when compared to data from earlier years, including the rate at which land is being consumed and the dispersion of development across the County. According to the 2010 LULC, over one-third of the physical geography of the County is forested, approximately one-third is agricultural, and approximately one-quarter is wetland.[2] Just over 23,000 acres in Dorchester County was developed land in 2010, which was about 6.5% of the County's total land area. Seventy-percent of these developed lands are low-density and very low-density residential uses, which are areas defined by MDP as lot sizes between one-half acre and 20 acres. See **Map 3.1 Existing Land Use and Table 3.1** for the breakdown of land use / land cover types.

Table 3.1 Existing Land Use / Land Cover, 2010

Existing Land Use / Land Cover	Acres	% of County
Agriculture	114,887	32%
Very Low Residential	6,233	2%
Low Density Residential	9,975	3%
Medium Density Residential	1,904	1%
High Density Residential	431	0.1%
Commercial	1,244	0.4%
Institutional	1,082	0.3%
Industrial	993	0.3%
Open Urban Land	772	0.2%
Bare Ground	228	0.1%
Extractive	346	0.1%
Transportation	175	0.0%
Forest	126,706	36%
Wetland	90,267	25%
Total Land Area	**355,243**	100%
Water	258,791	-
Total	614,034	

Source: Maryland Department of Planning, Land Use Land Cover dataset, 2010
Note: The acreage shown includes land uses within the incorporated municipalities.

[1] U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates 2012-2016.
[2] Per the MDP 2010 Land Use Land Cover dataset, wetlands are about 90,000 acres. Per the National Wetlands Inventory, wetlands are 144,000, which is about 40% of the County land area.

MAP 3.1 - EXISTING LAND USE, 2010

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

DORCHESTER COUNTY, MARYLAND

Source: 2010 Land Use/Land Cover, MD Department of Planning

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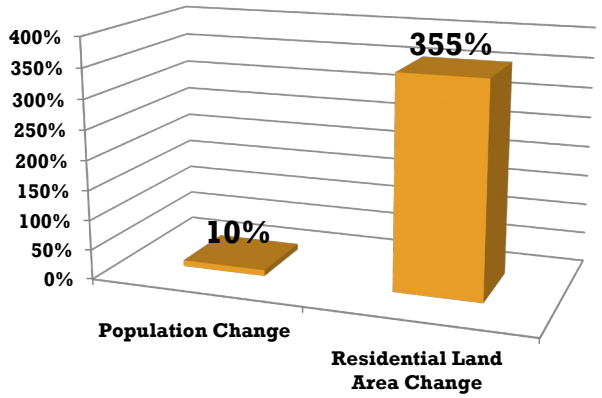
Land Use Change (1973 – 2010)

Using aerial photography and satellite imagery, the Maryland Department of Planning has prepared Land Use/Land Cover datasets for the years 1973, 2002, and 2010. Using these datasets, the County is able to analyze the changes in land use over this time period. As shown in **Map 3.2 - Land Use Change 1973 - 2010, Figure 3.2 and Table 3.2 on page 3-4,** Dorchester County's land use distribution has remained generally the same over the years in that forest, agriculture and wetlands continue to dominate the landscape. However, the acres of residential land use have more than quadrupled (+355%) since 1973, which has significantly outpaced the County's population growth of 11%. **See Figure 3.1.** The majority of this development has been low to very low-density residential development.

Figure 3.1 Change in Population and Residential Developed Land (1973-2010)



The County saw its greatest development between 1973 and 2002. Much of this development was low-density residential in the Neck District and along Route 16 from the northernmost County boundary to Cambridge to Taylors Island. In 1973, there were about 6,300 acres of developed land and a population of approximately 29,400, which equals about 0.2 acres of developed land per person. As of 2002, the developed area more than tripled to 15,000 of acres at rate of about 500 acres a year. However, the County's population only increased to 30,700 and the developed area per person increased to 0.7 acres. Between 2002 and 2010, this outward land consumption slowed significantly to 250 acres per year and held at approximately 0.7 acres per person. While the developed land increased approximately 75% between 1973 and 2010, only 10% of this growth occurred since 2002.

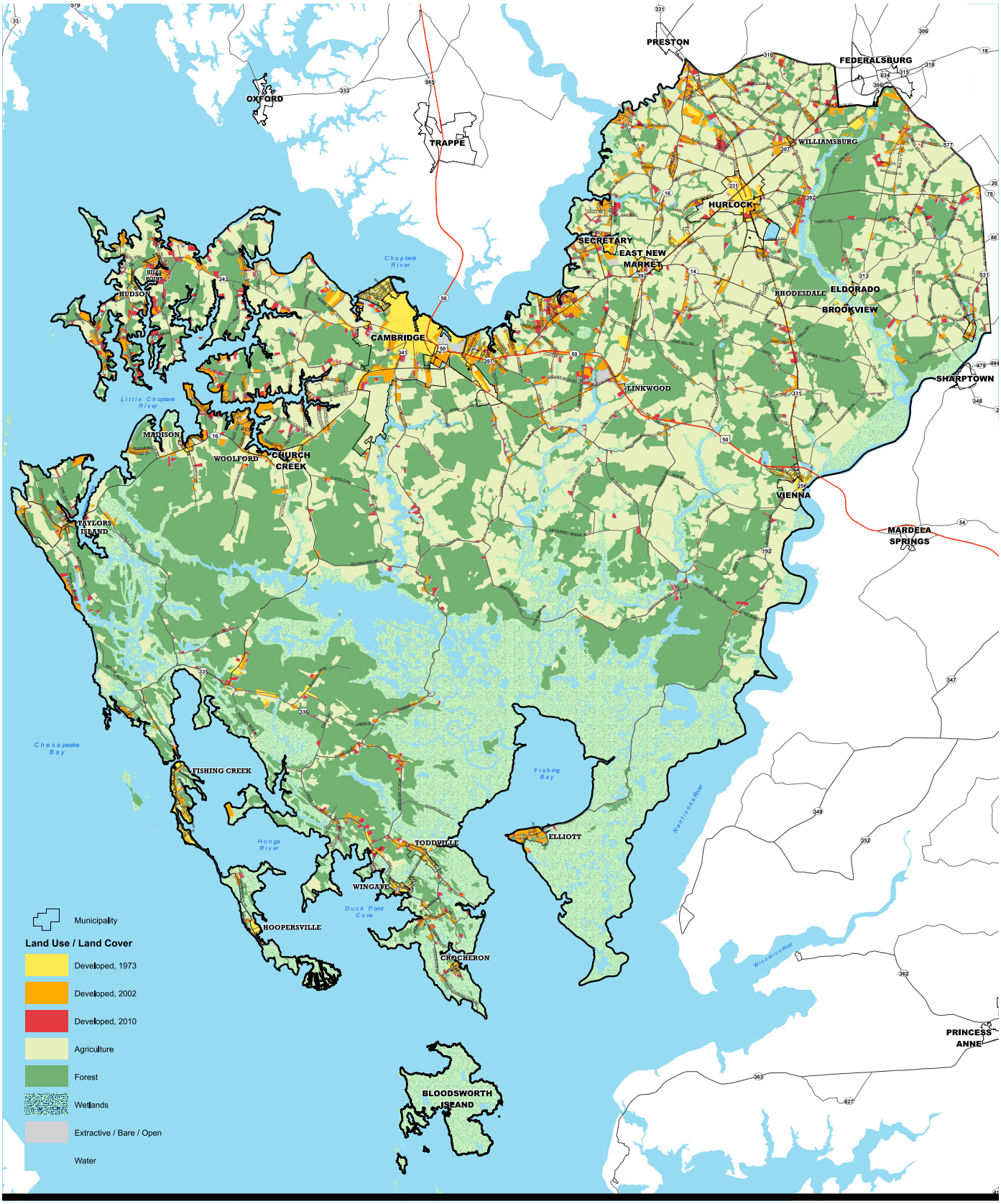
The loss of agricultural and forest lands is directly related to this low-density, sprawl development. Between 1973 and 2010, Dorchester had lost a total of 17,000 acres of agricultural and forest lands. Between this same period developed lands increased by approximately 17,000 acres. In direct correlation with the increase of developed land, the rate of the loss of agricultural and forest land had significantly slowed 2002. Between 1973 and 2002, Dorchester has lost a total of 15,000 acres of these resources. It has lost 2,000 acres between 2002 and 2010. While the County has lost some of these resources, it continues to be defined by its rural and agricultural setting, the water, and its natural habitats, which are among the most important in the nation.

Protected Lands

Of the Dorchester County's 355,00 acres of total land area, approximately 260,000 acres (about 3/4) are protected public lands or wetlands. About 187,000 acres of the protected lands are areas that are permanently protected through conservation easements on agricultural or forested lands or as parks, open space, other public lands. About 144,000 acres are regulated wetlands, including tidal and freshwater wetlands. **See Map 3.3 - Protected Lands.** The protected lands are anticipated to expand through Maryland's Rural Legacy Program, which targets investments and public-private partnerships to protect the most ecologically valuable properties that most directly impact Chesapeake Bay and local waterway health.

Summary of Land Use Trends

- The rate of development is outpacing population growth, but has become more aligned in recent years.
- Large lot development continues to be the predominant type of development, comprising 70% of developed lands.
- While the County has lost resource lands over the years, the rate of loss has decreased in recent years
- 3/4 of the County's total land area are protected lands or wetlands.



MAP 3.2 - LAND USE CHANGE, 1973-2010

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

DORCHESTER COUNTY, MARYLAND

Source: 2010 Land Use/Land Cover, MD Department of Planning

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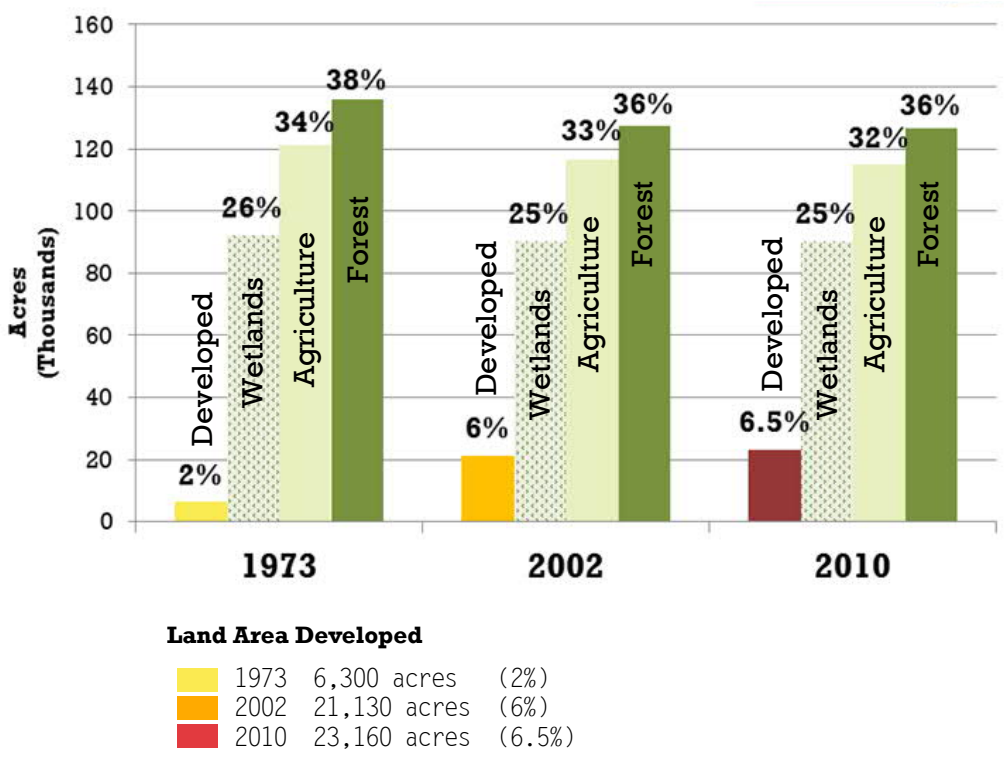
Table 3.2. Land Use Change, 1973-2010

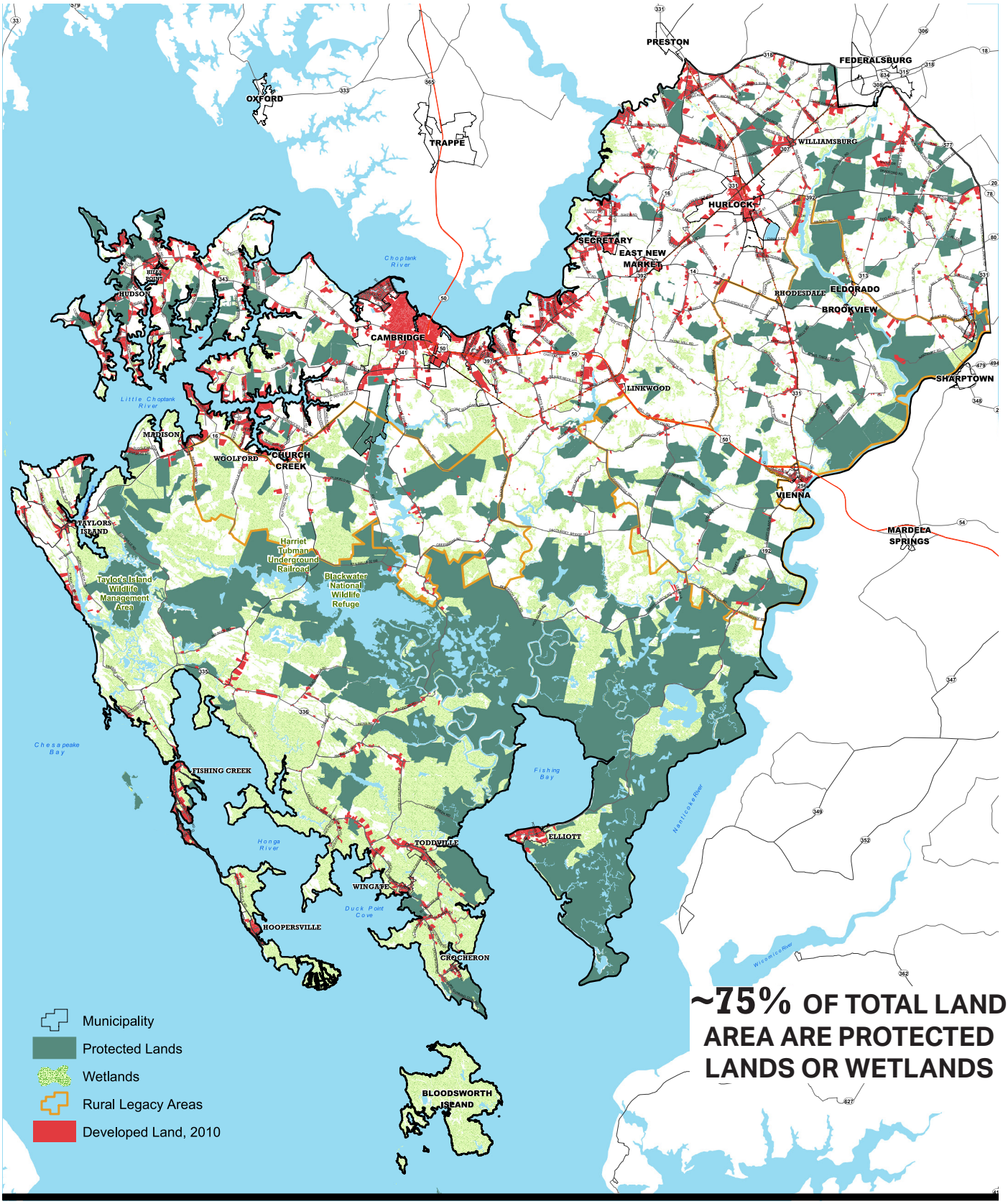
	1973		2002		2010		CHANGE 1973-2002		CHANGE 2002-2010		CHANGE 1973-2010	
	ACRES	% OF TOTAL LAND	ACRES	% OF TOTAL LAND	ACRES	% OF TOTAL LAND	ACRES	% CHANGE	ACRES	% CHANGE	ACRES	% CHANGE
VERY LOW TO LOW-DENSITY RESIDENTIAL[1]	4,076	1%	14,706	4%	16,208	5%	12,796	314%	1,502	10%	14,467	355%
MEDIUM TO HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL[1]			2,166	1%	2,335	1%			169	8%		
NON-RESIDENTIAL	2,215	1%	4,257	1%	4,612	1%	2,042	92%	355	8%	2,397	108%
TOTAL DEVELOPED	**6,291**	**2%**	**21,129**	**6%**	**23,155**	**7%**	**14,838**	**236%**	**2,026**	**10%**	**16,864**	**268%**
AGRICULTURE	121,178	34%	116,426	33%	114,886	32%	-4,752	-4%	-1,540	-1%	-6,292	-5%
FOREST	135,748	38%	127,209	36%	126,705	36%	-8,539	-6%	-504	-0%	-9,043	-7%
WETLAND	92,118	26%	90,325	25%	90,267	25%	-1,793	-2%	-58	-0%	-1,851	-2%
BARE GROUND / OTHER	26	0%	151	0%	228	0%	125	481%	77	51%	202	777%
TOTAL RESOURCE	**349,070**	**98%**	**334,111**	**94%**	**332,086**	**93%**	**-14,959**	**-4%**	**-2,025**	**-1%**	**-16,984**	**-5%**
TOTAL LAND	**355,361**	**100%**	**355,240**	**100%**	**355,240**	**100%**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**

Source: Maryland Department of Planning Land Use / Land Cover datasets summary for Dorchester County.

Notes:
1. MDP created the first Land Use/Land Cover map in 1973, however new land use categories were added in 2010 and associated adjustments were made to 2002 data. Similar adjustments were not made to 1973 data. These changes redefined low and moderate development. For this reason, this Plan Update combines each type of residential land use for 1973.

Figure 3.2 Land Use Change, 1973-2010





MAP 3.3 - PROTECTED LANDS

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

DORCHESTER COUNTY, MARYLAND

Sources:
Developed Lands: 2010 Land Use Land Cover, MD Department of Planning
Protected Lands:
-MD DNR Owned Lands and Conservation (Public Open Space and Forest Conservation Easements)
-MD Environmental Trust Easements
-MD Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation Easements (MALPF)
-Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP)
-Local and Privately Protected Lands

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LAND USE PLAN

Development on large lots consumes land at a significantly faster rate than other more concentrated land use types. With much of the County's land area identified for resource protection, coupled with the anticipated continued loss of physical land to coastal erosion[3], how we use the land is critically important for the social, economic and environmental well-being of present and future generations. Per the Maryland State Data Center,[4] Dorchester's population is projected to grow to 39,500 (over 20%) between 2016 and 2040, adding an estimated 7,000 people and 3,500 households. If large lot, low-density development were to consume the limited developable land, the County will become increasingly decentralized, having many social, environmental and economic impacts. Some of these specific impacts include:[5]

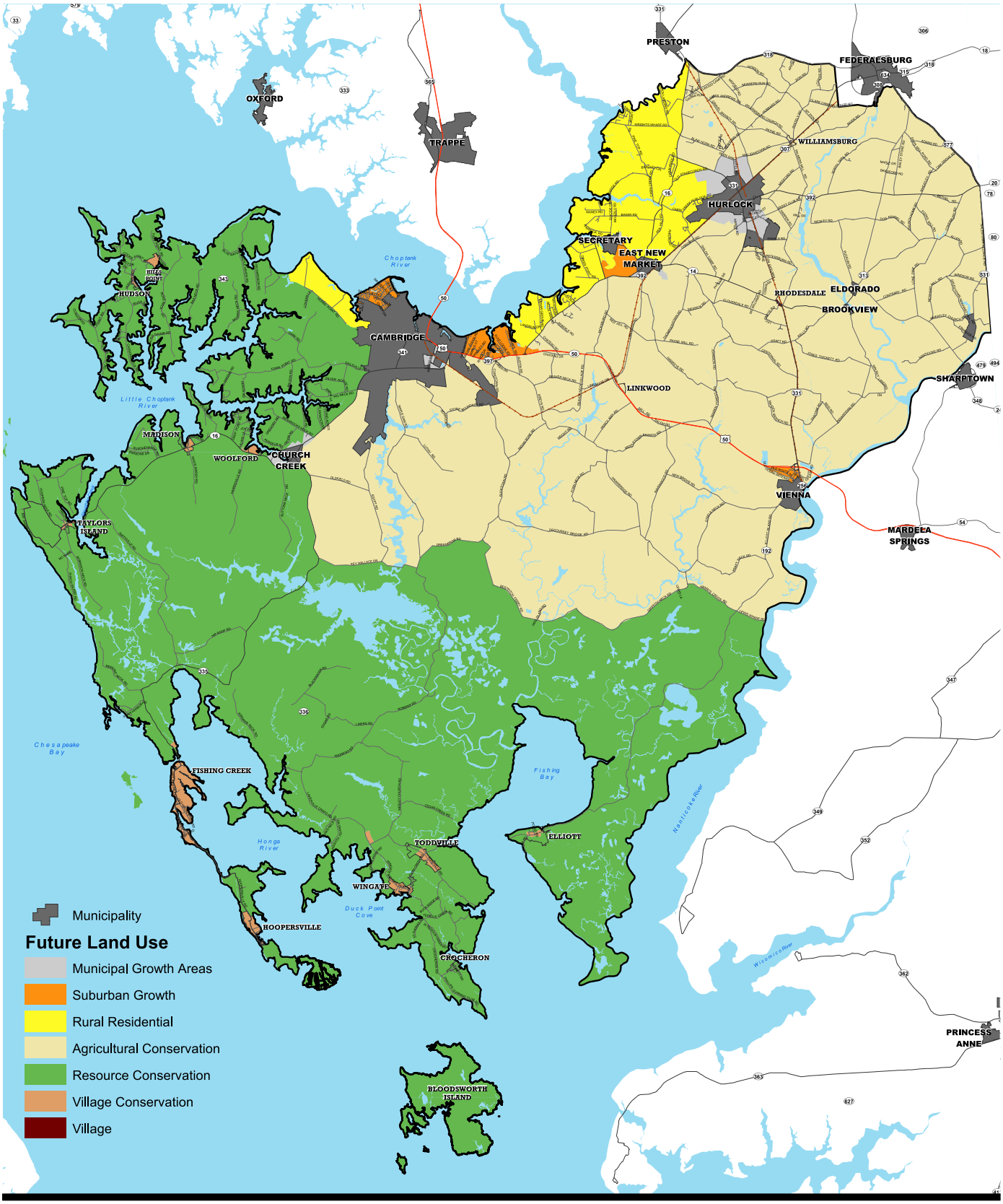
- Increases the need for infrastructure investment to reach areas further from development centers.
    - Infrastructure costs to serve are higher than to serve high-density residential development per unit.
    - Increases vehicle miles traveled, congestion, air pollution and demand for new roads.
    - The proliferation of septic systems from low-density development reduces water quality and threatens biodiversity.
- Results in the loss of natural environment and our natural resource based economies.
    - Results in the loss and fragmentation of forest land which decreases ecological diversity, economic benefits and recreational value.
    - Converts agricultural land and diminishes the viability of operating agricultural uses by inserting incompatible uses nearby.
    - Water quality and biodiversity decrease as impervious surface increases with the conversion of resource lands.

This Land Use Plan provides for development to locate in designated growth areas, and establishes the policy basis for more compact development that uses the land efficiently and that will help reduce the long-term impacts of unmanaged growth on infrastructure investment and on a natural resource-based economy. This Plan divides the County into different land use areas for purposes of establishing public policies and for recommending implementation strategies to achieve the desired land use goals. **See Map 3.4 - Future Land Use**. These areas are generally classified as "Growth Areas" and "Conservation Areas". The designated Growth Areas comprise approximately 6% of the County's total land area and the Conservation Areas encompass approximately 94% of the County's land area. **See Table 3.3.**

Table 3.3 Future Land Use

FUTURE LAND USE		
GROWTH AREA	ACRES	% OF COUNTY
MUNICIPAL GROWTH AREAS	1,990	0.6%
SUBURBAN GROWTH	1,970	0.5%
RURAL RESIDENTIAL	16,415	5%
VILLAGE	20	0.01%
TOTAL GROWTH AREAS	**20,395**	**5.7%**
CONSERVATION AREA		
AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION	158,043	44%
RESOURCE CONSERVATION	179,175	50%
COASTAL VILLAGE	1,945	0.5%
TOTAL CONSERVATION AREAS	**339,162**	**94.3%**
TOTAL	359,557	

[3] Dorchester County Inundation Study, June 15, 2006
[4] Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) State Data Center, July 2017.
[5] "A Summary of Land Use Trends in Maryland; The Maryland Department of Planning 2010 Land Use/Land Cover product"; https://planning.maryland.gov/Pages/OurWork/landuse.aspx



MAP 3.4 - FUTURE LAND USE

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

DORCHESTER COUNTY, MARYLAND

Source: 2010 Land Use/Land Cover, MD Department of Planning

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The Land Use areas considered to be **"Growth Areas"** include the following:

- **Municipal Growth** - Areas where municipal annexation is expected. Municipal Growth Areas are ultimately expected to be connected to municipal public water and sewer.
- **Suburban Growth** – Areas of medium-density residential, low to moderate intensity non-residential, and mixed-use development. Suburban Growth Areas are near municipalities and development corridors where public infrastructure can be extended and where public services can be efficiently provided. These areas may ultimately be served by public water and sewer systems.
- **Rural Residential** – Areas of low to medium-density residential development near municipalities and development corridors where public services can be efficiently provided. The County does not anticipate extensions of public water or sewer systems for these areas.
- **Village** - Existing villages in the northern part of the County where the predominant land use will primarily consist of existing low-density residential and limited low intensity infill and redevelopment.

The **"Conservation Areas"** include:

- **Agricultural Conservation** – Areas in the northern portion of the County where agricultural and forest lands dominate. The preferred land uses are continued agriculture, forestry, and agribusiness.
- **Resource Conservation** – Areas in the southern and western portion of the County generally dominated by forest and wetland areas ,maritime industries, and very low-density residential development.
- **Coastal Village** – Existing villages along the coastal areas of the County where the County desires to protect the maritime heritage from coastal hazards. The predominant land use will primarily be existing low-density residential and limited low intensity infill and redevelopment.

Growth Areas

Municipal Growth Areas

Goals:

- Concentrate growth in and around the County's municipalities.
- Help the municipalities grow to increase their tax base.
- Reduce costs of supplying government services.
- Ensure efficient use of existing and planned infrastructure.
- Coordinate growth management policies and implementation strategies.

The County's Comprehensive Plan covers the entire county, but does not address specific issues within the incorporated municipalities since they exercise their own planning and zoning authority. The incorporated municipalities of Cambridge, Hurlock, East New Market, Secretary, Vienna and Church Creek have adopted a comprehensive plan. Each municipality may designate growth areas within their comprehensive plans where they anticipate annexation in currently unincorporated areas.

Municipalities offer opportunities for redevelopment and infill development. Municipal Growth Areas are areas that are designated for annexation in the respective municipality's comprehensive plan. Hurlock, East New Market, and Secretary each have designated growth areas in their respective comprehensive plans. The Church Creek Comprehensive Plan includes a "Planning Area", which is intended for annexation in the long term.

The County anticipates that future zoning should be of density and character consistent with the respective town to facilitate annexation, such that the town would not need to seek a rezoning "waiver" as part of the annexation process.[6] The designation of the Municipal Growth Area is consistent with Resolution 515 adopted by the Dorchester County Council on January 17, 2012, which officially recognized these Municipal Growth Areas.

[6] County zoning varies in Town Growth Areas. Hurlock: RR, I-1. East New Market: B-2, AC. Secretary: SR, SR-RCA

These areas are most prepared for growth, as they provide the most efficient investment for infrastructure, public safety, and schools. They offer logical extensions of roads, sidewalks, infrastructure and public services, and are ultimately expected to be connected to municipal public water and sewer. Maryland state investments, policies and growth management encourage new development and reinvestment in these municipalities and growth areas.

Typically, the main barriers to growth in the municipalities are lack of public water and sewer and the increased cost of developing housing in municipalities versus the County. To attract development, the municipalities must also offer amenities and attractions so that they become places where people wish to live. Although rural subdivisions have become attractive to many people, many others would like to live in a small town environment where they can be part of a more established community. Dorchester's municipalities offer an excellent opportunity for attractive small town development.

Inter-jurisdictional coordination between the municipalities and the County is extremely important for the mutual success in effectively managing growth and resources. House Bill 1141 establishes minimum requirements for interjurisdictional coordination. While the legislation places much of the impetus for planning coordination on the municipalities it also encourages municipalities and counties to participate in joint planning processes and agreements to address topics of mutual interest. Coordination issues include development impacts (e.g., traffic, schools, police and emergency services, etc.), zoning, resource protection, economic development. For example, the County needs assurances that the municipality is prepared to implement its municipal growth plans within a reasonable planning period. The municipalities need assurances that their planned future expansion will not be pre-empted by low-density development at their borders, such as may occur under current County zoning.

Strategies:

- Zone Municipal Growth Areas consistent with the adjacent municipal zoning to facilitate annexation.
- The County and municipalities should consider establishing forums for regular meetings (e.g. a Council of Governments) to facilitate communications and understanding among the jurisdictions. Where important policy agreements regarding capacity and services are reached, they should be adopted in formal agreements such as memorandums of understanding or intergovernmental agreements.
- Encourage coordination between county and town staffs to ensure coordinated interjurisdictional land use planning and capital needs programming.
- Enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with municipalities for reciprocal notification and coordination on land use and development activities within the Municipal Growth Areas and lands adjacent to town boundaries.
- The County and municipalities should establish appropriate policies and procedures for the use of Critical Areas Growth Allocation for those municipalities that are within the Critical Area. These policies should insure that Growth Allocation is allotted proportionately to the Municipalities and used efficiently, and when awarded results in a substantial public benefit. For example, awarding growth allocation may be contingent on purchasing development rights from designated rural areas in the County. The value of the benefits to the public should reflect the value added to development projects by the growth allocation award.

Suburban Growth

Goals:

- Encourage and concentrate medium density residential and mixed-use development near municipalities and development corridors where public infrastructure can be extended and where public services can be efficiently provided.
- Encourage a range of housing types and densities to accommodate a diverse population of ages and incomes.
- Zoning should extend and mimic the built environment of municipalities to greatest extent feasible.
- Encourage appropriate infill and redevelopment near the towns and development corridors.
- Ensure efficient use of existing and planned infrastructure.

- Ensure coordinated growth management policies and implementation strategies.

Suburban Growth Areas encompass areas adjacent to the Cambridge, Hurlock and Vienna, as well as some development corridors that connect the municipalities. Developments in these areas are anticipated to be medium-density residential and low to moderate intensity non-residential, as well as mixed-use development.

New developments in these growth areas should provide a mix of housing options and densities to accommodate a diverse population of age groups and income levels, as well as neighborhood scale retail and civic uses, where applicable. Additional development standards and review criteria may be necessary to achieve the desired mixed uses and mixed housing types as well as to extend and emulate the built environment of the municipalities. Development standards may include requirements for open space, environmental protection, recreation/community amenities, and street and sidewalk connections, among other things. Development standards should be flexible and support innovative, mixed use projects that make use of the land efficiently while protecting the natural resources. Areas within the Suburban Growth Area may ultimately be served by public water and/or sewer systems.

This Plan envisions development to extend the character of municipalities with orderly growth, and has the following objectives and design principles for these areas:

- Be compact with density and bulk standards similar to municipal standards;
- Make a positive contribution to the existing municipal character.
- Accommodate a mix of residential housing types;
- Extend the existing grid street and pedestrian pattern, if applicable.

Strategies:

- Evaluate development standards, review criteria, and or incentives to achieve the desired mixed uses and mixed housing types.
- Evaluate development standards in the Zoning Ordinance to ensure new developments extend and emulate the built environment of the municipalities.

Rural Residential Growth

Goals:

- Allow low to medium-density residential development near municipalities and development corridors where public services can be efficiently provided.
- Encourage a range of housing types to accommodate a diverse population of age groups and income levels.

Rural Residential Growth Areas are areas of the County that will accommodate rural-residential development at low to medium densities. These areas are generally north of Route 16 between the City of Cambridge and the Towns of East New Market and Secretary where a pattern of low-density development already exists. To reduce sprawl, preserve agricultural or natural resource conservation areas, and meet other Comprehensive Plan goals, the County plans to limit rural-residential development to areas best suited to accommodate it. Existing agricultural uses in these areas will not be discouraged, but could convert to residential use. The County does not anticipate extensions of public water or sewer systems for these areas. Due to concerns of adverse environmental impacts and maintenance issues, private or shared water and sewer systems are not recommended. Therefore, future zoning should not permit the cluster option that would allow for lot sizes that would need shared water and/or sewer facilities.

Strategy:

- Remove the cluster option from future zoning.
- Continue to recognize the right-to-farm for those land owners that wish to remain in agriculture.

Village

Goals:

- Encourage appropriate infill and redevelopment in the Villages.

Villages are unincorporated communities without public water and sewer in the northern part of the County. These villages include Linkwood, Rhodedale, and Williamsburg. The predominant land use will primarily consist of existing low-density residential and limited low intensity infill and redevelopment. Portions of these villages are zoned "Village" and permit higher density development than the surrounding areas. The Village zoning district currently allows for a mix of residential at medium to high residential density and commercial and maritime/agricultural service uses at low to moderate non-residential intensity. They are also designated Maryland Priority Funding Areas. Other portions of the villages are zoned AR and RR, and it is the intent of this Plan to maintain the existing zoning.

Strategies:

- Permit infill development and redevelopment on existing lots of record, as allowed under the current zoning regulations.

Conservation Areas

Agricultural Conservation

Goals:

- Preserve agriculture as a viable industry.
- Increase farm values.
- Minimize conflicts between agricultural and residential uses.
- Accommodate appropriate non-agricultural uses.
- Prevent sprawl development.

Agricultural Uses

Agriculture is a key industry for Dorchester County (see Chapter # - Agriculture). Agriculture's importance to the County goes beyond the monetary: it represents tradition and a way of life, and is key to the image of the County held by residents and non-residents. The agricultural character contributes to the County's natural, open landscape and makes the County attractive to employers, residents, and visitors. Approximately one-third of the County's land is in farmland, of which 75% is cropland. As the mid-Atlantic region continues to develop, Dorchester's wide open spaces will become an increasingly valuable economic and social asset. Protecting agricultural land is, therefore, an important economic goal for the County.

The key to preserving agriculture is maintaining an adequate land base to support the industry and related businesses, such as machinery dealers, agriculture inputs (seed, fertilizers), etc. There are a number of existing programs the objective of which is to preserve agriculture land. These programs, discussed more fully in Chapter #, include the Maryland Rural Legacy Program and the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation Program (MALPF). In addition, programs administered by other non-government organizations such as the Maryland Environmental Trust, Nature Conservancy, Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage and the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy can play an important role in land conservation.

Over the past 20 years, the County has taken steps to conserve farmland and to encourage agricultural activities, thereby ensuring that commercial agriculture will continue as a long-term land use and viable economic activity within the County. The County's Right-To-Farm ordinance, adopted in 1998, limits the circumstances under which agriculture operations may be deemed to constitute a nuisance.

The intent of the Agricultural Conservation Area is to conserve farmland and to encourage agricultural activities thereby ensuring that commercial agriculture will continue as a long-term viable land use. Agricultural uses are the preferred use, and protected from development that might adversely affect them. A wide range of uses related to agriculture are permitted, including agriculture-related commercial and industrial uses. Very low-density residential development is permitted where it is located and designed to minimize impacts on natural environments and the rural landscape. Residential densities should be compatible with agricultural uses and minimize impacts on natural environments and the rural landscape. Future zoning should continue with similar densities and other protective measures to encourage and promote agriculture and associated agri-businesses.

The Agricultural Conservation Area comprises approximately 160,000 acres. Although extensive residential development is not envisioned in the Agricultural Conservation Area, even at the residential densities proposed in this Plan, vacant and developable lands in this area alone could yield an estimated 3,200 additional residential lots at build out.[8]

In setting land use policy for Dorchester's Agricultural Conservation Area, the value of farmland as an economic asset to the landowner is a prime concern. Farmland has an agricultural value, but also, potentially, a residential development value. The residential development value of most farmland in Dorchester County is low. One of the County's goals is to increase farm values. The value of land in Dorchester's agricultural areas will increase over the long term by creating predictability for the farmer with respect to development around existing farmland. Incentivizing the use of a transfer of development rights (TDR) program should be considered that would allow a landowner to transfer development rights at a higher density than would be permitted if developed. No rezoning of land in the agricultural area that would permit higher density residential development than is contemplated in this plan should be permitted.

Non-Agricultural Uses

Agriculture, agri-business, forestry and other compatible non-residential uses should be permitted in this area. Other non-residential land uses may be compatible with the agricultural or natural resource area goals provided appropriate site development performance standards are met. An example would be the Delmarva Power and Light power plant. More problematic, because of smaller site size, might be economic development opportunities afforded by uses such as a large warehouse, trucking company, or mineral extraction operation. Such uses have been attracted to North Dorchester, particularly to the Hurlock area, because of location and land availability. To the degree the County desires to accommodate or encourage such uses, the County may utilize the Economic and Employment District (EE) floating zone.

Recently the County has also received several proposals for large-scale solar power generation projects (i.e. solar farms) that would be located on land used for agriculture. It is noted that the County generally supports renewable energy sources to lessen dependence on fossil fuels or to reduce energy costs. However, during the public outreach process many residents expressed the need for a balanced, positive approach to renewable energy as they were concerned about the loss of productive farmland and conflicts with adjacent properties arising for the placement of solar farms. When reviewing proposals for these developments, it is recommended that the County guide their location to less productive agricultural soils or other lands as well as minimize potential visual and noise impacts to surrounding uses.

Strategies:

- Maximize use of agriculture preservation programs.
- Continue the existing Agricultural zoning.
- Explore implementation of a transfer of development rights (TDR) program with bonus density incentives as long-term strategy for agriculture preservation.
- Develop requirements and approval process that would guide solar farms to less productive agricultural lands and that minimize potential visual and noise impacts to surrounding uses, such as perimeter landscaped screening and buffers.

Resource Conservation

Goal:

- Preserve the Resource Conservation Area's open, natural, unspoiled character. Resource Areas are portions of the County where the preferred uses are:
  - Conservation of natural resources such as tidal and non-tidal wetlands and forests as well as agriculture.
  - Natural resource based industries (farming, forestry, fishing, hunting, trapping and tourism)
  - Low-density residential development on lands that are not environmentally sensitive or permanently protected.

[8] Based on the current permitted density of 1 dwelling unit per15 acres in the Agricultural Conservation zoning district. The estimated 49,000 developable acres in the Agricultural Conservation Area nets out protected lands, wetlands, and lands that are already developed.

The Resource Conservation Area totals about 179,000 acres, which is over 50% of the County's land area. These areas are located mostly in South Dorchester County, with additional areas along the Choptank, Marshyhope and Nanticoke Rivers.

The intent of the Resource Conservation Area is to conserve natural environments (wetlands and forests) and to encourage resource development activities (agriculture, forestry and fisheries), thereby helping to ensure that resource development continues as a long-term land use and a viable economic activity in the County. Residential development at very low density should be permitted where it is located and designed to respect existing features of the natural landscape. Due to its coastal characteristics and its abundant inland waterways, the "Neck District" is included in the Resource Conservation Area even though it includes numerous residential developments. These residential developments are served by on-lot or community sewage disposal systems that may be failing. As will be seen in the Water Resources Element, this Plan recommends a comprehensives evaluation of these sewage disposal systems and the feasibility of extending public sewer.

Strategies:

- Continue to pursue economic development and tourism strategies to promote ecotourism activities.
- Perform a comprehensive evaluation of the on-lot and shared community sewage systems in the Neck District to determine the need for public sewer extensions.
- Encourage voluntary land conservation programs to protect sensitive areas and/or prime natural resources.
- Explore transfer of development rights programs so that property owners can realize their property value while developing in less vulnerable areas.
- Additional strategies for protecting natural resources are discussed in **Chapter # - Environment.**

Coastal Village Conservation

Goals:

- Protect the County's maritime heritage and historic resources.
- Allow infill development while recognizing high-risk. hazard areas and encourage risk mitigation.

Coastal Villages are unincorporated communities without public water and sewer in the Resource Conservation Areas. The Coastal Villages include Crapo, Crocheron, Elliot, Fishing Creek, Hills Point, Hoopersville, Hudson, Madison, Taylor's Island, Toddville, Wingate, and Woolford. These areas contain many of the County's seafood's industries and thus contribute to the County's rich maritime economy and culture. In some cases they also contain important community services such as a church, post office, fire hall or country store. Some villages also contain important historic resources. Due to their inherent locations, Coastal Villages are also areas most vulnerable to coastal change and other flooding hazards.

While parts of these Villages currently have zoning that encourages growth and development, they are not suitable for higher density development because of environmental sensitive areas, including soil constraints, surrounding wetlands, flood hazards, coastal erosion and subsidence. Increasing the number of homes would exacerbate the issues and put more people and property in high hazard risk areas. Soil and wetland conditions already preclude higher densities. As such, it is the objective of this plan to limit growth in the Coastal Village areas, primarily through infill and redevelopment on lots of record. Such development should be consistent with the unique maritime and coastal character of the particular village, and should recognize the environmentally sensitive and high hazard risk area.

Strategies:

- Limit development to existing lots of record.
- Ensure compatibility of infill development with the unique character of the particular village.
- Explore transfer of development rights programs so that property owners can realize their property value while developing in less vulnerable areas.

- Partner with FEMA and MEMA to participate in the voluntary "buy-out" program.
- Tighten existing Village zoning boundaries to the built environment and outside areas that face environmental constraints, such as periodic flooding and coastal erosion and subsidence.
- Ensure that the village's waterfront are reserved for low-impact maritime businesses and associated uses.
- Encourage development that conserves and enhances the area's maritime and recreational character and connection to the Bay.
- Recognize the vulnerabilities and sensitivities of the unique coastal environment and reinforce appropriate safeguards to minimize risks to flood hazards and coastal changes.

Other Land Use Recommendations

Critical Area

The County Zoning Ordinance imbeds the Critical Area land use designations as "base zones". These include the AC-RCA, RR-RCA and SR-RCA zoning districts. This factor complicates on-going implementation of the County zoning regulations by having to revise each zoning category when the Critical Area requirements are revised at the State level. It is recommended that the Critical Area designations be severed from the base zoning designations and re-created as overlay zones.

Growth Tier Maps

As of the writing of this Plan, the County has not adopted Growth Tier Maps as required by SB 236. As such, new development is only permitted in areas currently served with public sewer and only as minor subdivisions (maximum of 7 lots) with on-lot sewage systems in areas currently not served. Some of the recommendations of this Plan, particularly as they relate to new growth in the Rural Residential and Suburban Growth Areas, cannot be realized unless and until Growth Tier Maps are approved by the State. It is recommended that the County work with the Maryland Department of Planning to finalize and submit acceptable Growth Tier Maps.

Non-Residential Uses

There are numberous non-residential uses dispersed throughout each Land Use Area. These non-residential uses are on parcels currently zoned for commercial business, institutional and industrial purposes. Given the broad nature of the Land Use Areas and the dispersed nature of the non-residential uses, individually classifying these uses is not warranted in this Plan. However, it is not the intent of this Plan to render these uses as non-conforming resulting from future zoning ordinance or map amendments to implement the recommendations of this Plan.