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# I ntroduction

The purpose of the General Plan is to provide broad guidance for the future growth and development of Prince George's County while providing for environmental protection and preservation of important lands. This guidance is expressed as goals, objectives, policies, and strategies that, taken together, determine the preferred development pattern and the transportation system, public facilities and environmental features needed to accommodate that pattern.

This General Plan is divided into five parts that produce a framework for future development in the county.

- **Part I: Overview** provides background information concerning the history of the General Plan in Prince George's County, the relationship between the plan and state initiatives, and countywide goals, guiding principles, and priorities.
- **Part II: Development Pattern Element** designates three growth policy Tiers, Developed, Developing and Rural, and the characteristics, opportunities and constraints unique to each. Within the Developed and Developing Tiers, a Corridors and Centers overlay is created to focus public investment in specific areas of the county where intensive development is envisioned.
- **Part III: Infrastructure Elements** provides broad policy guidance for environmental protection and the provision of transportation and public facilities.
- **Part IV: Economic Development, Housing, and Community Character Elements** includes policies for urban design, provision of housing opportunities, historic preservation, revitalization, and economic development.
- **Part V: Implementation** lays out a series of actions that should be taken in order to bring about the vision established by this General Plan.

This General Plan embraces and, in some instances, modifies the goals, policies and strategies of the *Biennial Growth Policy Plan*, which was adopted by the County Council in November 2000.

The General Plan establishes a hierarchy of goals, objectives, policies and strategies that addresses specific issues facing the county over the next 25 years.

- A **goal** is a statement of a desirable future condition. It is the end state toward which actions are aimed.
- An **objective** is a specific, measurable activity or target to be accomplished in pursuing a goal.
- A **policy** is a statement of intent upon which individual government decisions are evaluated.
- A **strategy** is a specific course of action to follow that states how to do something to achieve a goal.

The General Plan provides the basis and guiding policies for future planning and development in Prince George's County.

# Why Amend the General Plan?

The Prince George's County *General Plan* sets broad, long-range policies for the future growth and development of Prince George's County and serves as a guide for providing county infrastructure and investment. It is implemented through more detailed levels of planning contained in the area master plans and in specialized plans such as the transit district development plans, functional plans, and sector plans. Implementation of *General Plan* policies is also accomplished through ordinances and regulations governing the amount, location and character of future development.

This General Plan has been prepared to address countywide land use planning and development issues and concerns. It takes into account changes in policy direction since the last countywide *General Plan* was adopted in 1982, as well as changes in the character, location, and pace of development.

## Prior General Plans

Prior to the approval of this General Plan, Prince George's County has adopted three countywide General Plans: one in 1964; another in 1982; and as an interim General Plan, the *Biennial Growth Policy Plan*, adopted in November 2000. The 1964 *General Plan* made general recommendations for the location, type and intensities of different land uses (residential, commercial and employment). The 1982 *General Plan*, on the other hand, concentrated on development policies (instead of delineating specific land uses) with decisions about the location and intensity of development being left to area master plans. The *Biennial Growth Policy Plan*, established as the interim General Plan by CB-97-2000, set development policies for different parts of the county including Developed, Developing and Rural Tiers, as well as Centers and Corridors. All of these plans intended that future planning and regulatory efforts would implement and refine their broader recommendations. In addition, the *Biennial Growth Policy Plan* recommended that a new countywide General Plan be prepared to provide fuller, more comprehensive policy guidance.

The **1964 General Plan** recommended that development in Prince George's County be concentrated in the urban ring within the Capital Beltway or in one of three development corridors radiating out from the urban ring. The three corridors were: (1) the urbanized area along US 1, extending to Laurel and beyond to Baltimore; (2) the area along US 50, extending to Bowie and beyond to Annapolis; and (3) the area between Indian Head Highway and Branch Avenue (centering around a proposed Southeast Freeway), extending to the Charles County line. Each corridor was planned to be served for its entire length by high-speed rail transit. Between these urban development corridors, large wedges of open space would be preserved.

The **1982 General Plan** focused primarily on the interrelationship of future development with other elements, such as economic development, environment, transportation, housing, and public facilities. For the most part, the plan set forth policies without recommendations for the location and intensity of specific land uses. The 1982 *General Plan* did make more specific recommendations for transportation facilities; the transportation element of the *General Plan* served as the Master Plan for Transportation. The 1982 *General Plan* has been subject to piecemeal amendment by subsequent area plans.

## **A New Direction—The *Biennial Growth Policy Plan***

In 1998, the Prince George's County Council produced a report entitled *Managing Growth in the 21st Century: A Smart Growth Proposal for Prince George's County*. The Council found that the 1982 *General Plan* was no longer adequate to guide future county growth and development. In particular, the Council cited the lack of effective plan implementation, the loss of countywide perspective, and the emphasis on new development as opposed to the protection and revitalization of older, established areas.

In order to address these and other development-related issues, the Council established a 53-member, broad-based advisory group, Commission 2000, to make recommendations concerning the county's future growth and development. After 18 months of study and deliberations over the course of nearly 40 meetings, Commission 2000 published a draft report of its consensus recommendations. The County Council held a public hearing, reviewed testimony, made amendments and, in November 2000, adopted the *Biennial Growth Policy Plan* and, in addition, established the adopted *Biennial Growth Policy Plan* as an interim General Plan pending the preparation of a new General Plan.

A key part of Commission 2000's efforts was the identification of a Preferred Alternative for the future development of the county. This process included an analysis of four possible alternative growth patterns for the county:

- **Current Trends:** The first alternative pattern assumed no change in county policies as reflected in the county's adopted and approved master plans.
- **Growth Tiers:** The second alternative pattern assumed the same buildout used in the first but changed the staging and some geographic assumptions about when and where the growth and development in the approved master plans would take place.
- **Tiers with Corridors and Nodes:** The third alternative pattern concentrated future growth and development in identified growth Centers and along specified development Corridors in the county, and assumed appreciable effort to contain further development outside these targeted growth areas.
- **Rate of Growth Limit:** The fourth alternative pattern assumed an overall growth rate in residential development for the county that was approximately 70 percent of the current rate and assumed that policy criteria would be used to determine which development projects would be approved, and where, in the county.

Prince George's County Planning Department staff modeled the impacts of the four alternative growth patterns on critical county infrastructure, particularly the transportation and water and sewer service networks and the public schools. After review of the analyses, Commission 2000 decided to base its deliberations on a variation of the Tiers with Corridors and Nodes alternative.

In subsequent deliberations, the Commission refined the Tiers with Corridors and Nodes alternative by defining three broad Tiers within which growth management priorities and policies would be roughly similar, and by identifying policies for each of these Tiers. Policy overlays were also established for environmentally sensitive areas and for areas of the county that require revitalization or redevelopment. Targeted growth areas were then identified as either Centers or within identified transportation Corridors in the county. Growth Centers were further classified as being metropolitan, regional, or community, and growth objectives and policies were defined for each type of Center.

The *Biennial Growth Policy Plan's* fundamental recommendation represented a comprehensive Smart Growth initiative that utilized a system of growth Tiers, Corridors, and Centers to guide future land use and development in Prince George's County. The three Tiers encompassed the Developed, Developing, and Rural areas of the county. The plan also recommended policy overlays to encourage revitalization of older communities and to protect environmental resources. These Tiers, Centers, Corridors, and overlays provide the basis for both managing the pace of development and for the type of development that is planned for the future.

While serving as an interim General Plan, the *Biennial Growth Policy Plan* also recognized the need to prepare more detailed, countywide policy guidance for future development. Therefore, the plan recommended that the county's *General Plan* be updated to more fully reflect the policies set forth in the *Biennial Growth Policy Plan*.

# Maryland's Planning Act and Smart Growth Initiatives

Prince George's County is the second most populated county in Maryland. Therefore, the county's policies are influenced by, and help reinforce, an overall vision for growth statewide. There have been two major initiatives taken by the state to guide future development in the county: the 1992 Planning Act and the Smart Growth initiatives adopted in 1997.

## 1992 Planning Act

In 1992, the Maryland General Assembly adopted the Economic Development, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992 (the 1992 Planning Act). The 1992 Planning Act was intended to establish consistent general land use policies to be locally implemented throughout the state. The Planning Act established eight visions that all jurisdictions in Maryland are to follow as they plan for future development. The eight visions are:

1. Development is concentrated in suitable areas.
2. Sensitive areas are protected.
3. In rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected.
4. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic.
5. Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption, is practiced.
6. To ensure the achievement of 1 through 5 above, economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined.
7. Adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the county or municipal corporation are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur.
8. Funding mechanisms are addressed to achieve these visions.

This Prince George's County General Plan is in conformance with the eight visions. The recommendations described later in this plan—the establishment of and policies for Developed, Developing and Rural Tiers; the designation and policies for Centers and Corridors; and the recommendations for a green infrastructure and other environmental policies—directly respond to the eight visions.

**Vision 1** (concentrating growth in suitable areas) is reinforced by policies that encourage infill and redevelopment in the Developed Tier and limit noncontiguous development in the Developing Tier. Further, the emphasis on mixed use, higher density, and intensity development within Centers and Corridors also speaks to this vision.

**Vision 2** (protecting sensitive areas) is directly addressed through the green infrastructure recommendations of the plan. The green infrastructure concept recognizes the relationships between the environment and development. The Environmental Infrastructure Element makes recommendations to protect significant natural features while providing for future growth and development.

**Vision 3** (protecting rural areas) is addressed by the policies for the Rural Tier. Higher density growth is directed away from the county's rural area, and recommendations are made to protect rural character and preserve resource land through programs such as transfer and/or purchase of development rights and granting tax incentives for land preservation.

**Vision 4** (stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay) is an underlying principle guiding the green infrastructure recommendations of this plan, as well as recommendations for the county's stream valley park system. The land preservation policies within the Rural Tier also address the need for protection of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. The objectives, policies and strategies contained in this General Plan seek to assist in the achievement of the Chesapeake 2000 Bay Agreement goals that relate to land development activities.

**Vision 5** (conserving resources) is addressed through the energy conservation and green building recommendations of this General Plan. Further, by emphasizing an increased role for transit in the county's transportation system, energy resources can be further conserved. Also, the emphasis on Center development, infill and redevelopment in the Developed Tier, contiguous development in the Developing Tier, and protection of land within the Rural Tier helps to conserve land resources throughout the county.

**Vision 6** (encouraging economic growth and streamlining regulations) is provided for in this General Plan. This plan recognizes that the county needs further sustainable development. Infill and redevelopment in the Developed Tier are needed to strengthen existing neighborhoods and provide support for businesses that are already located there. New development should strengthen neighborhoods for existing and future residents. Economic development provides jobs and increases the tax base for future residents. This plan recognizes that economic development, including new development and redevelopment in the county's Centers, Corridors and employment areas, is essential to help balance the county's tax base, thereby shifting the burden of providing facilities and services from residential taxpayers. This plan also makes recommendations to improve the county's development regulations; the current regulations have evolved in a piecemeal fashion over time and can present unnecessary obstacles to the type of development desired by the county. It should be recognized, however, that any streamlining of regulations should not be at the expense of reasonable and effective public review.

**Vision 7** (the availability of adequate public facilities and infrastructure) is provided for in this plan through recommendations concerning priorities for county capital expenditures in Centers, Corridors, and the Developed Tier, as well as placing a greater burden on the private sector in providing needed public facilities in the Developing and Rural Tiers.

**Vision 8** (addressing funding mechanisms) is also addressed in this plan. Strategies include priorities for the provision of public facilities and services. This plan also provides a basis for future infrastructure and capital investment decisions.

## **Maryland Smart Growth Initiatives**

In 1997, the Maryland General Assembly enacted a package of legislation collectively referred to as the Neighborhood Conservation and Smart Growth initiative. The Maryland Smart Growth program has three basic goals: to save valuable remaining natural resources; to support existing communities and neighborhoods; and to save taxpayers millions of dollars in the unnecessary cost of building infrastructure to support sprawl. Probably the most significant aspect of this initiative is the Smart Growth Areas legislation that requires that state funding for projects in Maryland municipalities, other existing communities, industrial areas and planned growth areas designated by counties will receive priority funding over other projects. These Smart Growth Areas are called Priority Funding Areas (PFA).

This General Plan is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Prince George's County Priority Funding Area program. Priority for funding is given to the Developed Tier, and a higher priority for county funding is given to Priority Funding Areas (as opposed to other areas) within the Developing Tier. Other programs that are considered as part of the state's Smart Growth initiative, such as the Rural Legacy Program and the Community Legacy Program, are examples that can be used to reinforce and implement the recommendations of this General Plan.

# Plan Guidance

This General Plan conforms to, and builds on, the policies included as part of the *Biennial Growth Policy Plan* adopted by the Prince George's County Council in November 2000 (also adopted as the interim General Plan for Prince George's County). The following parts of this plan will identify goals, objectives, policies and strategies for specific plan elements. However, there are overall countywide policy statements, established by the Council's approval of the *Biennial Growth Policy Plan*, that are used to evaluate all future planning and development decisions. These goals, guiding principles, and priorities are described below.

## Countywide Goals

The following countywide goals were originally established by Council Resolution (CR-62-1998) that initiated both the *Biennial Growth Policy Plan* and General Plan processes. These goals were reinforced by the adoption of the *Biennial Growth Policy Plan*.

- Encourage quality economic development;
- Make efficient use of existing and proposed local, state and federal infrastructure and investment;
- Enhance quality and character of communities and neighborhoods;
- Preserve rural, agricultural and scenic areas; and
- Protect environmentally sensitive lands.

## Guiding Principles

The goals listed above describe what is important to create, preserve and protect in planning for the future of Prince George's County. Guiding principles, as established in the *Biennial Growth Policy Plan*, provide an underlying basis for interpreting the policies of this and future plans. The following guiding principles have been established as part of the county's General Plan:

- **Public Health, Safety and Welfare:** The county's primary purpose is to protect the present and long-term health, safety and welfare of all its residents. Although the county will neither attempt nor be able to eliminate all risks, it will consider these factors when taking any public action.
- **Sustainability:** Sustainable development "meets the needs of those present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."<sup>1</sup> The concept of sustainability considers the following factors:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bruntland Commission Report of 1987, *Our Common Ground*.

<sup>2</sup> Based on *Exploring Sustainable Communities*, a teachers' guide by World Resources Institute for secondary education.

Priorities describe how objectives should be balanced to make decisions more predictable to the public and private interests.

1. *Environment*—a healthful, livable environment, where decision making takes into account long-term impacts and consequences, and efforts are made to prevent problems before they occur.
2. *Economy*—sustainable jobs and businesses, where decision making takes into account the interdependence of economic, environmental and social well-being.
3. *Equity*—promotion of fair and equal treatment across generations and among different groups in society and reduction in disparities in risks and access to benefits, where decision making is inclusive and participatory.
4. *Efficiency*—efficient use of energy and resources with little or no waste.

- **Quality:** Each decision made by Prince George’s County should be made in the context of enhancing residents’ pride in their county and neighborhood. Residents seek enhancements to their quality of life through protection of the natural environment, an emphasis on good design, provision of quality shopping, and the pursuit of high-quality public services. By protecting and reinforcing individuals’ investments in their neighborhoods, the county’s emphasis on quality will result in ongoing enhancement in all of its neighborhoods and communities.
- **Meaningful Public Participation:** The county will reach out to its diversified citizens, workers and businesses as it plans for the future and as it seeks to implement those plans. The county will seek innovative ways to involve its citizens in the decision-making process.

## Priorities

Public decision making will frequently require balancing competing objectives. Priorities describe how objectives should be balanced to make decisions more predictable to the public and private interests. The *Biennial Growth Policy Plan* established the following county priorities:

- High-quality schools
- Quality economic development
- Infill and revitalization
- Existing neighborhood integrity
- Adequate public facilities
- Environmental protection
- Transit support
- Socio-economic diversity
- Farmland preservation
- High-quality housing

Taken together, these countywide goals, guiding principles and priorities have provided the basis for creating more specific goals and policy options for the future of Prince George’s County.