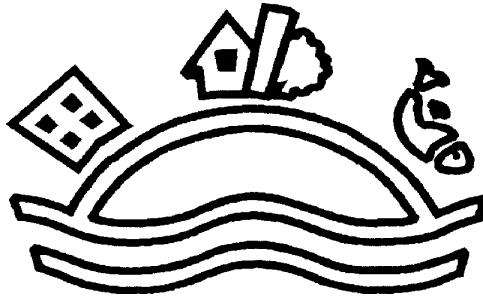


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Chapter 6

Future Land Use Plan



Future Land Use Plan

Introduction: This section describes the kinds, locations and intensities of land uses recommended for Accomack County. The purpose of the land use plan is to act as a guide for the Accomack County Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission and other governmental bodies which make decisions that affect the county's physical pattern of development. The plan rests in principle upon the goals, objectives and policies stated in Chapter Five. Capabilities of the county's natural environment and the capacity of the public services system to support development are reflected in the plan.

This section contains three parts; the first is a review of the population projections found in Chapter Two and identification of growth areas. The second is a written narrative describing important planning issues and the concept of the plan. The third is a future land use map for the county.

Population Projections/Growth Indicators: A profile of past population trends and future population projections for Accomack county is found in Chapter Three, Inventory - The Developed Environment. This population profile indicates that Accomack County's population is increasing slowly (2.9% over five years). Population projections predict that this trend of slow growth will continue through the year 2030.

Accomack County's estimated population in 1996 was 32,400. The Virginia Employment Commission's population projections for the county predict a population of 33,600 in the year 2000, 34,600 in 2010, 35,600 in 2020, and 36,600 in 2030. Accomack County's growth can be attributed to an in-migration of population which offsets the fact that mortalities annually exceed the rate of natural increase. This in-migration of new residents to the county and an aging existing housing stock (47% built prior to 1960) are probably responsible for an annual increase in new housing that is about three times that of the population increase (2% annual housing increase, 0.6% annual population increase). Based on this trend, it can be expected that the demand for new housing will exceed what would be expected based on population projections alone. The majority of residential subdivision activity and new home construction over the last six years has occurred in the southern bayside (Ocohanock to Onancock Creek) and northern seaside (Wachapreague north) portions of the county. Commercial activity over the last six years has been mostly concentrated in the Accomac-Onley-Onancock area, the industrial park, and scattered along Route 13. Two recent developments that can be expected to influence future commercial activity are the designation of the portion of Accomack County south of Onley as an Enterprise Zone and progress towards the development of the Space Port at Wallops island. The Enterprise Zone designation and development of the Space Port can be expected to lead to increased commercial and industrial development in the southern portion of the county (including the industrial park) and the Wallops Island/Wattsville areas respectively.

Land Use Planning Issues: Several key issues directly affect planning for Accomack County land use. These issues address the relationship between land development and the county's resources. These issues include Agricultural and Forestry land preservation, groundwater protection, natural resource preservation, physical constraints to development, and the Route 13 highway corridor.

Agricultural and Forestal Land Preservation: Agriculture and forestry are important parts of Accomack County's economy and identity. The county has 82,560 acres of land in 22 agricultural and forestal districts. The land in these districts is protected by state "right-to-farm" legislation which prohibits local governments from restricting agricultural uses within the district, but these districts offer no protection from conversion to other uses or interference from surrounding uses.

The pattern of development within the county can directly impact the viability of agricultural operations. Some of the most productive agricultural soils are also the most suitable for installation of septic systems. Therefore, agriculture is often in direct competition with residential development for land with prime soils. Much of the county's farm land also occupies land that would be desirable locations for waterfront home sites. Accomack County currently offers land use taxation on agricultural land which bases taxes an actual use of the land, rather than the "highest and best use." This removes some of the pressure for land owners to develop agricultural land, although a certain amount of farm land continues to be subdivided and converted to residential use annually. This division of land results in pockets of residential development located in primarily agricultural areas. Fragmentation of farm land can affect a farm's viability, leaving tracts of land too small or segmented to farm efficiently and conflicts often arise between home owners and farm operators over noise, dust, smell, chemical use, and hours of operation.

Groundwater Protection: Groundwater is the only drinking water source for Accomack County. In 1976 the Virginia State Water Control Board designated the Eastern Shore as a Ground Water Management Area due to findings of groundwater level declines, well interference and localized groundwater contamination. Groundwater is supplied by the Columbia and the Yorktown-Eastover aquifers. The Columbia is a shallow unconfined aquifer of which the water quality is not suitable for drinking but is suitable for irrigation and some manufacturing uses. The deeper, confined, Yorktown-Eastover aquifer is the county's drinking water source. This aquifer is recharged by rainwater infiltration. The 1992 Ground Water Supply Protection and Management Plan for the Eastern Shore of Virginia identified the area that recharges the deep aquifer as strip of land that runs along the central portion of the peninsula. The Plan calls for protection of this groundwater recharge spine from contamination threats and decrease in recharge rate due to creation of imperious surfaces.

Natural Resource Preservation: The county's natural resources base, including forests, fields, marsh, creeks, bays, and barrier islands, has economic, aesthetic, and recreational value, as well as being valuable habitat for a variety of wildlife. High quality surface water is important to the seafood industry and recreational users. The marshes and bays support aquatic life that is important to the development of fisheries. Good soils are essential for productive agriculture. The barrier islands provide important habitat for shorebirds and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. These resources, in combination, compose a natural system which is a unique asset to the Eastern Shore. Care must be taken to insure that use of these resources does not degrade their value. Land that is not suitable for development, such as marsh land and the barrier islands, should be maintained in a natural state. Important habitat areas should be identified and the conservation of those areas encouraged. Best Management Practices should be used

to lessen the impact of various land uses on natural resources.

Physical Constraints to Development: Certain conditions of the physical landscape affect the suitability, safety and desirability of parts of the county for development. The main physical constraints to development in Accomack County are soil suitability for septic systems, flood hazard, and shoreline erosion. The distribution of soils types has profound impact on the pattern of development in Accomack County. The Town of Onancock is the only area in the county that is served by a sewage treatment system and the remainder of development in the county uses septic systems for waste disposal. Less than half of the soil in Accomack County is suitable for septic system use. This creates a demand for areas with prime soils and leaves large sections of the county virtually undevelopable.

Some areas of Accomack County experience significant amounts of shoreline erosion. Faced with an eroding shoreline that moves closer to their home each year, homeowners often resort to shoreline hardening structures such as bulkheads, riprap, breakwaters, and jetties. These structures are seldom permanent solutions to the problem and can actually increase the problem. The areas of Accomack County with the highest erosion rates are bayside marshland and the barrier islands, both of which are unsuitable for development anyway. The impact in areas with moderate to low erosion rates can be lessened through limited allowable development densities and shoreline setback requirements.

The Route 13 Corridor: The Route 13 Highway corridor is a significant feature of the county's landscape. The highway runs north-south along a ridge of high land in the center of the peninsula, dividing the Shore into "bayside" and "seaside" segments. The highway carries traffic through the county, supporting businesses along the highway, and it carries local citizens up and down the Shore to employment, shopping and services, many of which are located within the corridor. This mix of local and through traffic creates a dangerous situation. Traffic lights added on developed sections of the road to increase safety decrease the efficiency of the road for through traffic. Route 13 is a major thoroughfare and part of the National Highway System. If signals increase to the point that highway no longer functions effectively for through traffic, bypass and limited access alternatives may be sought. The Route 13 corridor should be managed to maintain its capacity to handle through traffic in order to avoid construction of bypasses or a limited access highway which would further bisect the county and isolate existing businesses.

Minimum setbacks from Route 13 should be expanded for all land uses. Increased setbacks will promote safety by improving site lines, allow room for shared entrances, reduce traffic noise, and ensure the availability of vacant land if future access roads are needed. In order to maintain the existing high speed sections of Route 13, future development should be limited to existing commercial centers such as T's Corner, Temperanceville, Nelsonia, Four Corners, Melfa, Painter, and Belle Haven. These areas already have traffic signals and reduced speed limits to handle local traffic. Site plan review for development along Route 13 should be used to develop plans that minimize curb cuts, make use of joint entrances, and direct traffic to alternative entrances on collector roads when possible.

Future Land Use Plan Concept: The following narrative is a description of the concept for Accomack County's land use plan. The Plan is illustrated through the Accomack County Future Land Use Map. Components of the future land use plan are based on population projections,

growth and change indicators identified in the inventory section of this plan and the policies set forth in Chapter Five. Overall guidelines for the plan recommendations are as follows:

- Because Accomack County has adopted Agricultural and Forestal Districts which recognize that land as, “land which requires conservation and protection of food and other agricultural and forestal products and as such is a valuable natural and ecological resource,” land in Agricultural and Forestal Districts should be designated as AGRICULTURAL on the Future Land Use Map;
- Because most development occurring in Accomack County is dependent on septic systems for waste disposal and because the Health Department has identified Bojac soils as the soil type which will best support septic systems, areas which are not located in Agricultural and Forestal Districts and in which BOJAC is the predominant soil type should be considered for future development;
- In order to encourage development which is in character with historic and existing development patterns, location and density of development should be in keeping with the pattern of development around villages and towns and should conform to the comprehensive plans of incorporated towns where applicable.

Proposed Land Use Categories: Proposed land use categories have been developed to promote a balanced, safe and orderly pattern of development. These categories reflect traditional land uses as well as the goals, objectives and policies of this plan. These categories will be used in the development of any revisions to the Accomack County Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance. However, these categories are not intended to be an all inclusive list of districts for zoning ordinance revisions. Any additional categories or sub-categories that promote the stated goals, objectives and policies of this plan may be developed and proposed. The general location of use categories proposed by this section are depicted on the future land use map.

The future land use map designates the most desirable locations for various types of future development. A good deal of development has occurred over time in areas that have been determined to be undesirable for future development based on the criteria provided above. It is recognized that this existing development shall continue to exist in these areas and it is not proposed that areas currently zoned for a particular use be rezoned to a lesser use category. However, in areas where the existing zoning or pattern of use is inconsistent with that designated in the future land use plan, further extension of that use should be discouraged and development in surrounding areas should be consistent with that proposed in this plan.

Conservation District: The purpose of this district is to preserve and protect areas of Accomack County of ecological importance on which development of any intensity would be damaging or unsafe. Areas that should be in the conservation district include marshland and the undeveloped barrier islands. Allowable uses in this district would include docks and piers, duck blinds and wildlife observation platforms constructed in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and the Accomack County Wetlands Board.

Agricultural District: The purpose of this district is to provide an area for the production of agricultural and forestry products. Regulation of this area should minimize obstructions to the

efficient and economical production of these products. Examples of the types of primary uses allowed in this district are agricultural and horticultural uses such as raising of crops, nurseries, orchards, vineyards, raising of livestock, forestry, poultry houses, saw mills, game preserves, and aquaculture operations. Residential uses would be limited to housing for property owners, family of property owners, and those employed full-time on the property. Examples of secondary uses allowed in this district are single family dwellings and seasonal farm labor housing.

Rural Residential District: The purpose of this district is to allow for low density, rural residential development to provide home sites for those who chose to live on relatively large tracts of land outside of the county's villages and towns. Clustering options could be provided to allow smaller individual lot sizes if a portion of the development site is set aside as open space.

Village Development District: The purpose of this district is to allow for a mix of residential and commercial uses in keeping with the traditional development pattern of Accomack County's villages and towns. Primary uses in this district would be single family residential structures, churches and parks. Allowable secondary uses would include multi-family structures, retail businesses, restaurants, and professional services.

Commercial District: The purpose of this district is to provide appropriate locations for a broad range of business activities which may be characterized by heavy traffic, noise, or other factors that could be considered a nuisance to residential uses. Examples of primary uses allowed in this district would include offices, banks, dry cleaners, laundromats, restaurants, theaters, retail stores, gas stations, service garages, recreational centers, warehouses, funeral homes, hotels, and motels. Examples of secondary uses allowed in this district would include shopping centers and other high volume business.

Industrial District: This district is created to provide a suitable location for industrial activities with minimized interference from or impact to adjacent land uses. Examples of allowable uses would include light manufacturing, food preparation and processing, bottling plants, electronics production, metal fabrication, garment manufacturing, inter-modal transportation of goods, and warehousing facilities.

Future Land Use Maps: The following future land use maps depicts the general location of uses proposed in this section. For ease of display, the maps have been divided by hydrologic unit boundaries. The first map in the series shows these division lines.

