

## Executive Summary

Charles County's 1997 Comprehensive Plan addresses land use, growth management, and development for the whole county. The Comprehensive Plan noted that detailed plans were needed for parts of the county experiencing rapid growth or facing special issues. These detailed "Sub-Area Plans" would offer an opportunity to examine issues and explore opportunities in greater detail than was possible in the Comprehensive Plan.

This Waldorf Sub-Area Plan (the Plan) has been developed to guide future land use and development in the Waldorf area of Charles County. The Plan addresses land use and development, transportation, environment, open space, and public facilities such as parks and schools. The Plan also establishes a "vision" for the area; an overall image of what the Waldorf area should be and how it should look in the future. The planning horizon for the Plan is 20 years, but the vision elements address a 20 to 50 year horizon.

Located approximately 20 miles south of Washington D.C., the Waldorf Sub-Area covers approximately 35 square miles (22,320 acres), a little under eight percent of Charles County's land area. Waldorf is the major center of population, employment and commerce both in Charles County and in Southern Maryland. As of 2000, the Sub-Area was home to nearly half the population of Charles County, approximately 56,600 people out of a County population of 120,500.

The Sub-Area is part of Charles County's "Development District" which the County has designated as its principal center of population, services, and employment. The incorporated Town of La Plata lies immediately south of the Waldorf Sub-Area. Because the Town has planning authority within the town boundaries, the Plan makes no specific recommendations for land in the Town. Nevertheless, efforts were made to ensure that the Sub-Area Plan's recommendations are compatible with and supportive of the Town of La Plata.

A "vision" for Waldorf emerged from public workshops held early in the planning process. Key components are:

- Create an attractive "place" or "places" in Waldorf that can serve as a town center or activity nodes for the community;
- Make Waldorf a more balanced business community, attracting more economic activity from outside Charles County. Create the environment to attract a broader range of retail/employment uses;
- Keep Waldorf's business/commercial area in the US 301 corridor;
- Create a complete road network, integrated with transit and accessible by pedestrians/cyclists; and
- Create more recreation opportunities.

As of 2003, the Sub-Area is approximately 45 percent developed. The US 301 corridor, which runs through the Sub-Area, is Charles County's and Southern Maryland's major retail, business, and employment corridor. As of 1999, the corridor had an estimated total of 3.2 million square feet of retail space, including the only enclosed shopping mall in Southern Maryland, and over 2.0 million square feet of office space. Included in the Sub-Area is the entire planned community of St. Charles, a large, mixed use Planned Unit Development covering a little over 37 percent of the Sub-Area.

The Sub-Area's population is projected to increase to almost 90,000 people by 2020. Job growth is projected to continue through 2020, though at a slower rate compared to population growth (25 percent versus 58 percent).

The Sub-Area lies in three major subwatersheds of the Lower Potomac River Basin: Zekiah Swamp Run, Mattawoman Creek, and Port Tobacco. All three watersheds contain important environmental resources, and are also on Maryland's list of impaired waters (known as the 303(d)) list.

Transportation and traffic are vital issues for Waldorf, affecting business, employment, and residents' quality of life. The primary focus of attention is US 301, the primary commuting route, the "Main Street" for local businesses, and a thoroughfare for regional traffic. Many of US 301's signalized intersections are projected fail by 2020 due to increasing traffic. After many years of study, in 2002 Charles County adopted a Transportation Strategy that includes a recommendation for a limited US 301 upgrade and the preservation of right-of-way for a western US 301 bypass alternative in the long-term.

Since the Sub-Area is located within the Development District, it is ultimately intended to be fully served by public water and sewer. Most existing development in the Sub-Area has public service. Nine elementary, four middle, and two high schools are located in or adjacent to the Sub-Area. In 2001, taking all nine elementary schools together, elementary enrollment was essentially in balance with capacity (5,046 enrollment versus 5,011 capacity). There are approximately 670 acres of recreation land in and close to the Sub-Area, approximately 30 percent of the state-recommended goal for recreation land per 1,000 population.

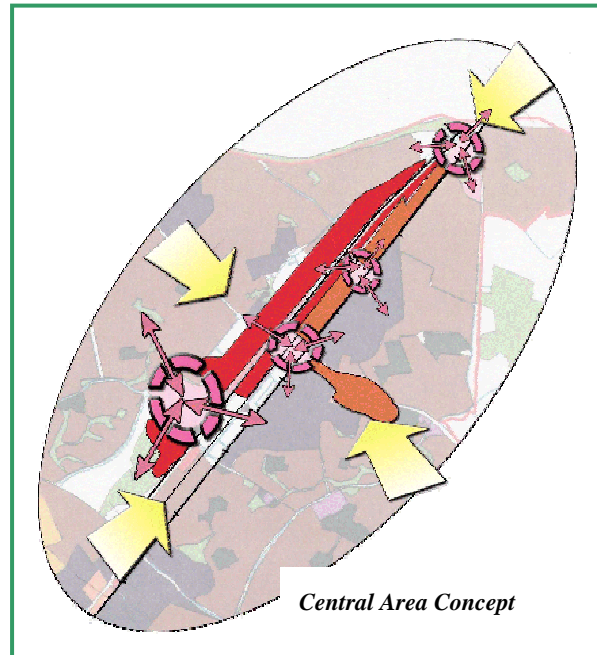
Waldorf is Southern Maryland's premier commercial center, but traffic problems, a lack of sense of place, and the growth of other centers could drain economic activity away from Waldorf and limit its future potential preeminent position. The Plan addresses land use, sense of place, traffic and related issues to achieve a vision for maintaining Waldorf as *the* center for Southern Maryland; more than a place to work and shop, a place for people to reside, build, and celebrate their community. The Plan has the following objectives as land use themes.

- Create activity centers as focal areas for Waldorf with supporting land uses around them.
- Maintain US 301 as a viable business corridor, but limit new areas of strip commercial development.
- Create areas of mixed use in Waldorf's central area (the area between Western Parkway/St. Patricks Drive and MD 5/St. Charles Parkway).
- Encourage mixed use development on large, key, undeveloped tracts.
- Encourage redevelopment of older highway-oriented commercial areas as mixed use areas.
- Allow for redevelopment of community-oriented business areas into mixed use areas.
- Encourage new residential development in Waldorf.
- Promote diverse, well-located employment areas.
- The build-out of residential neighborhoods outside Waldorf's central area at established densities with supporting community facilities, open space, and convenience commercial uses.
- Create an open space and recreation network for the entire Sub-Area.
- Coordinate land use with transportation and facilities planning.

The Plan's organizational concept for Waldorf's Central Area has three main components (see inset, next page):

- Retain Waldorf's major business corridor as the premier regional business center for Southern Maryland (red/dark shade areas).
- Create community mixed use areas (orange/light shade areas) along Waldorf's older commercial and business areas. These areas are envisioned as pedestrian-friendly, local community-oriented mixed use areas emphasizing community-oriented retail, employment, and service uses and residential.

- Create four Activity Centers (the four circles on the inset) as focal areas for the town. They are located off US 301 where they can be pedestrian friendly and be true centers for the community. The centers are spaced apart so that they can develop a unique character, function as transit hubs and serve their surrounding areas.
  - *Waldorf Center* at the intersection of Old Washington Road and MD 5 Business would build on this area's historic and community serving functions.
  - *Acton Center* at Old Washington Road and Acton Lane would provide a focus for surrounding employment and service uses.
  - *Towne Center* is the area around the mall and, being the largest activity center in the area, is envisioned as the center for the entire Waldorf area.
  - *Waldorf Gateway* at US 301 and MD 5 would be the gateway to Waldorf.



Other proposed land use categories for the Sub-Area include: *Opportunity Mixed Use* areas, five large undeveloped or underdeveloped areas east and west of US 301; *Employment areas* accounting for approximately 3,400 acres, or 15 percent of the Sub-Area; *Residential* and *Residential Transition* areas; and eight *Neighborhood Commercial* areas.

The transportation component of the vision for Waldorf is to create a complete road network, integrated with transit and accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists. The following principles guide the Plan's transportation element:

- Provide system capacity enhancements; new roads, interchanges, road connections, sidewalks, and bicycle routes, with particular emphasis on major north-south alternative routes to US 301, and facilitating crossing between Waldorf's east and west sides.
- Separate through and local motor vehicle traffic to the extent possible.
- Provide transportation choices that serve a range of users: cars, transit users, bicyclists and pedestrians. The Plan incorporates the County's 2002 Transit Development Plan and includes a pedestrian and bicycle network plan.
- Increase connectivity (the number of roads and road connections), thereby creating more of a "grid network" in the Sub-Area.
- Encourage mixed use development that changes the pattern of travel demand and makes the best use of system capacity.
- Accept a certain level of congestion in certain places at certain times.
- Create streets that are attractive and that serve multiple users (pedestrians and bicyclists as well as cars). The Plan pays special attention to Old Washington Road as it serves three activity centers and a community mixed use area.
- Careful attention to the design of US 301 in an upgrade.
- Parking strategies to support land use goals.

The Plan's roads network plan incorporates projects from the County's March 2002 Transportation Strategy. One Town of La Plata project, the MD 6 connector, is also included. The Plan also recommends two modifications and three deletions of road projects in the County Comprehensive Plan. The first modification would revise the Comprehensive Plan's Eastern Parkway concept by extending Post Office Road to Acton Lane (as a major collector), with major or perhaps minor

collector connections to White Oak Road and to MD 5. The second modification would revise the Turkey Hill Road upgrade project in the Comprehensive Plan by extending Middletown Road to US 301 via only a portion of Turkey Hill Road.

The Plan's recommendations for the natural environment focus on three objectives:

- Improving stream conditions, water quality and the health of the biological communities.
- Improving stormwater management to reduce to the extent possible the negative environmental impacts of stormwater runoff, and
- Increasing and maintaining a healthy urban forest to improve air quality and aid in absorption of rain run-off.

Major recommendations include: increasing vegetated buffers around streams; replanting buffer areas currently cleared of natural vegetation; in urban areas use preferred best management practices to improve stormwater management; in non-urban areas use low impact site development practices; investigate the potential use of "green" building and architectural techniques; adopt strategies to keep 100 percent of the Sub-Area Forest Conservation requirements in the Sub-Area; and consider adopting urban forest canopy coverage goals.

New schools will be needed in the Sub-Area especially as St. Charles continues to develop to the south. A new high school complex with future elementary and middle schools is currently planned off Mill Hill Road just west of the Sub-Area. The Plan is not expected to result in additional demand for schools over and above what is currently contemplated to meet projected growth. The Plan is also not expected to have any significant impact on other public facilities including water and sewer, public safety, fire and emergency services, or library above and beyond the impacts associated with the growth already envisioned to occur in the area.

With only three true parks in the Sub-Area, all on the east side, and a fourth (Laurel Springs) on the southern edge, the Sub-Area lacks sufficient parkland to serve an area with a projected 2020 population of close to 90,000. The Plan recommends the following: acquire land for a community park and for a multi-purpose regional park west of US 301; continue to plan for major recreational trails; create urban open spaces, plazas, pocket parks, and recreational areas; and continue to pursue a centrally located major countywide indoor recreation facility.

Implementing the Sub-Area Plan will require collaboration among a broad range of interested parties: the citizens and businesses of the Waldorf Sub-Area, Charles County Government, as well as various Federal State and local entities including the Town of La Plata. Key implementation actions include:

- Dedicate planning staff to Waldorf to help implement the plan, and create a Waldorf Center committee or working group to help implement the Activity Center.
- New or amended zoning districts (text and maps) including Activity Centers, Community Mixed Use Areas, and Opportunity Mixed Use Areas. Revisions to Community Commercial (CC) and Central Business (CB) districts, and possible revisions to Residential Office district.
- Identify and acquire sites for transit centers, public spaces, and public parking in Activity Centers.
- Continue to implement projects in the County's Transportation Strategy, and incorporate the Sub-Area Plan road, pedestrian, and bicycle recommendations into transportation planning.
- Acquire land for a community park and a regional park west of US 301. Continue to plan for major recreational trails and to pursue a major countywide indoor recreation facility.
- Consider increasing the width of required vegetated buffers around streams. Incorporate stormwater management best management practice recommendations. Investigate the potential use of "green" building techniques and strategies to keep as much of the forest conservation requirements as possible within the Sub-Area.