



CAPE CHARLES COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

DRAFT LAND USE POLICY FRAMEWORK

November 8, 2006



RENAISSANCE PLANNING GROUP

DRAFT – November 8, 2006

LAND USE POLICY FRAMEWORK: GUIDING DECISIONS FOR THE COMING DECADES

A. INTRODUCTION

As Cape Charles grows, Town residents face numerous issues relating to community character. These issues range from infill development in the historic residential area to the character of large-scale new development on the Town's periphery. In the historic residential area, one issue is whether proposed infill development fits into the existing neighborhood's character or whether it will alter or adversely impact it. On Cape Charles' periphery, the major land use decisions concern the relationship of the character of new development to Cape Charles' historic, small town character. The most desirable future development will respond conscientiously to the Town's historical character and natural setting. Future development in Cape Charles should be based on fairly simple principles. Physical, cultural and aesthetic features that most define the local character of the Town are of critical value to the community and should be identified and preserved. – Cape Charles Comprehensive Plan 1999

The following Land Use Policy Framework is a draft document intended for review at the Second Public Workshop, November 9, 2006, as part of the update process for the Cape Charles Comprehensive Plan. It lays out a proposed set of basic land use and design policies as a foundation for revising the Land Use element of the Town's 1999 Comprehensive Plan. Details of proposed policies will be further developed as the update process progresses. Additional feedback on the framework is welcomed and can be provided to the Town Planner, Jason Pruitt. He can be contacted at (757) 331-3259 x 15.

Throughout the meetings and discussions during the Comprehensive Plan update process, a number of common threads or themes have emerged. These themes form the cornerstone of the planning process and the source of the fundamental policy direction promoted in the Plan. Many of these themes are directly concerned with basic land use and Town design issues, such as preserving historic character, maintaining the integrity of views and entrance corridors and ensuring compatible economic development in the future. Others are less tangible but equally important and relevant to planning, such as the preservation of open space and maintain effective transportation networks.

The following policy recommendations are intended to establish a positive vision for the future development, preservation and sense of community in Cape Charles, and to implement the townspeople's desires, as expressed in public meetings, to protect the Town's special design character through new land use and design policies.



B. LAND USE AND DESIGN

1. Preserve and enhance the integrity of the historic district.

The general layout of the Town, in terms of scale, grid network, the central park, and streetscape amenities (such as sidewalks, alleys, planted medians and street edges, and large canopy trees) greatly contribute to the character of the historic district. The integrity of this district should be preserved and enhanced through streetscape improvements along Mason Avenue, median restoration and landscaping, and sidewalk improvements. In addition, the Town's central park should be developed as an urban/civic amenity that provides a multipurpose space for town events and individual recreation.

2. Promote compatible infill development and renovation within established neighborhoods.

Infill development or renovation within established neighborhoods should be compatible with adjacent structures and the neighborhood as a whole. Accessory dwelling units should be promoted as a way to add diversity of housing types, while maintaining the character and providing affordable options.

New development in undeveloped areas should match the prevailing style and character of traditional buildings in Cape Charles. The scale, massing, colors and materials of new buildings should be traditional and compatible with the Town's historic architectural fabric.

4. Create new centers of activity to address the commercial, civic and recreational needs of residents and visitors.

New centers of activity should be created to serve the commercial, recreational and civic needs of both residents and visitors. Potential new activity centers include new commercial nodes in Bay Creek, the Harbor area and the area around the Rosenwald School, the STIP, and a new pedestrian plaza on Strawberry Street. These areas have the potential to become vibrant pedestrian, mixed-use centers that provide a range of recreational, commercial and civic uses to the Town. It is also important to ensure future vehicular and pedestrian connections between these centers. The form and design character of these activity centers should be based on the scale and character of existing centers (i.e. Mason Avenue District).

5. Promote mixed-use as the preferred form of development.



The principle of incorporating a fine grain of mixed land uses, similar to the current land use pattern in the Town shall be encouraged, such as allowing residential and retail/commercial uses within the same building, and promoting residences within close proximity to commercial and retail centers. In addition, combined live-work structures should be encouraged in new development and in the Mason Avenue districts to better integrate housing with the shops and businesses of the new and existing “Centers”.

6. Target improvements of Town facilities and Town-owned parcels to serve as economic development catalysts for the surrounding area.

The development of Town-owned land and facilities should serve as both a catalyst and amenity for surrounding neighboring development. For example, the proposed new community center, the land around the Rosenwald School, the Town beach, and various Town-owned infill parcels)

C. OPEN SPACE

Open spaces and scenic views, both in and around the Town enhance the quality of life for all townspeople and visitors in Cape Charles. The Town should take steps to preserve its valued natural assets and environmental resources, such as woodlands, shorelines, tributary creeks, marsh grasses. In addition, protection and enhancement of both scenic and recreational open space should be of primary importance in planning for the future of the Town. Specific natural resource policies are addressed in other portions of the Comprehensive Plan. The policies below are intended to address those aspects of the natural and open space features that are part of the overall land use and Town design framework.

1. Preserve the integrity and accessibility of the water’s edge.

Public waterfront access should be an important amenity and identifying feature for the Town. Waterfront areas include including the Harbor, Cape Charles beach, the municipal pier and the Coastal Dune Natural Area Preserve. King’s Creek Marina and future areas in Bay Creek will also provide waterfront access. Preserving the integrity and accessibility of the water’s edge is critical to maintaining the quality of life within the town and should include measures to integrate the Harbor walkway with the historic core and control shoreline erosion, as well as enhance the beach as an amenity for residents and visitors by providing improved links to Town.

2. Protect the viewsheds along Town entrance corridors.



Views along entrance roadways have a significant impact on how the community is perceived. Attractive entryways help entice tourists into the community and leave a positive impression to encourage future visits. Route 184, which serves as the entry road into Cape Charles, has a rural identity characterized by open farm fields and a relatively narrow road width. The current Town overlay corridor for route 184, and the proposed County overlay corridor for the same road are important steps toward protecting these viewsheds.

The Town should continue to protect the scenic viewsheds along the Route 184 corridor through land use regulations, setback requirements, design standards and landscaping requirements. Because a significant portion of the Corridor is governed by County regulations, the Town should work cooperatively with the County to plan for the future character of the corridor. The Town should encourage the County adoption of the overlay district, and pursue the ability to jointly review proposals for properties within the County that influence the Town's entry corridor.

3. Strengthen and enhance the Town's green infrastructure.

The Town contains a number of passive and active recreational facilities that serve as an attraction for residents and visitors alike, as well as important environmental functions. The town should strengthen the existing "Green" focal points, such as the Town Park, Coastal Dune Natural Area, and various landscaped open spaces in Bay Creek. The Town should create new focal points within the STIP site, as well as developing a regional recreational center. The town should also promote greenway connections between these focal points that incorporate environmental features such as wetlands and drainage ways, and urban streetscapes with landscaping and street trees. Connections can either be built in as part of specific revitalization programs or as part of the approval of new development proposals in critical areas.

4. Protect the Town's scenic, recreational and open space resources.

The Town's location along the Chesapeake Bay and its abundant natural resources are a critical part of the Town's identity and way of life. The Town should protect its scenic, recreational and open space resources by using environmentally sensitive design techniques in new development, preserving existing features during the site plan review process, incorporating low impact development techniques, and restoring and re-vegetating natural areas. In addition, the town should continue to support efforts to restore and enhance critical habitat and promote the use of native plants in the Town.

5. Encourage support for landscape enhancements in and around Town.



The Town should enhance its current infrastructure of landscaping and green amenities, by promoting a Town-wide street tree program, buffer standards, and specific landscape enhancements for sites such as the Lift Station and Central Park.

D. TRANSPORTATION

Transportation networks shape how people can move about in the community and are an important factor affecting growth and development and overall quality of life within Cape Charles. The town's predominant street system is anchored by a primary East-West access into and out of Town (Route 184), a secondary and rural road (Old Cape Charles Road, or Route 642), as well as the historic street grid in the downtown area. The Town's transportation plans and policies can build on this framework and, to a large extent, guide the quality and direction of development in the future.

1. Improve North-South connections.

The downtown area is separated from the harbor by the railroad yard, and pedestrian access between the harbor area and downtown Mason Avenue is currently limited. The lack of North-South connections is further reinforced by separated land uses and the pattern of ownership in the area. The Town should enhance the North-South network by planning for additional future connections in order to provide better access to all parts of the Town for current and future populations.

2. Promote easy access between the Town and Route 13.

Route 184 currently serves as the primary corridor into and out of Cape Charles. With the potential for increased development in and around the STIP and Bay Creek, additional capacity and alternate corridors may be needed to travel to and from Route 13. Old Cape Charles Road functions as an additional access road, but is rural and indirect, and subject to elimination under the current Bay Creek PUD. The Town should consider alternate connections to Route 13, including reinforcing the Old Cape Charles Road corridor to serve as a parallel corridor to Route 184.

3. Create an integrated system of pedestrian, bicycle and multi-use networks.

With the expected increase in visitors from the redevelopment of the Harbor and residential populations from the Bay Creek and STIP development, it is important to consider alternative means of transportation, including walking, golf carts and bicycling.



A Town-wide, integrated system of bike routes, sidewalks, and multi-use paths is needed to connect existing and emerging commercial and residential centers.

4. Incorporate traffic calming and access management techniques at Town “Gateways”

Traffic calming and management improvements that are designed to be compatible with the Town’s traditional streetscape should be incorporated into each of the Town’s vehicular entrances or “Gateways” into town, such as the intersection of Fig Street and Randolph Avenue.

In addition, the Town should work with the County to establish an appropriate ‘Gateway’ at the Route 13/184 intersection through access management, landscape and frontage improvements and overall quality of site and building design in the area.

The Town should also work with VDOT and the County to ensure that the Old Cape Charles Road/Parson’s Lane connection to Route 13 is redesigned to provide more capacity, safer widths and turning radii, and managed access along its frontage.

5. Extend the concept of the historic grid network to new development.

The historic grid network of the street system is a valuable asset for the Town and provides ample connections between residential and commercial uses for both the automobile and the pedestrian. This concept not only works well in the historic core of the Town, but should also be extended into new development.

Designing roads that serve new development in a system of interconnected blocks as a ‘grid’ will improve overall network connectivity, promote greater accessibility for both traffic and emergency access, and foster compatibility of streetscape design for the whole Town.

6. Continue to maintain on-street parking downtown and add off-street parking areas to meet parking demand.

The existing historic street network provides a significant number of on-street parking spaces to support the commercial uses on Mason Avenue and the number of residential buildings without on-site parking. This pattern should be continued and improved through enhanced parking space delineations, especially on streets such as Mason and Bay Avenue, Peach Street and Strawberry Street. Based on further study, potential opportunities for new public off-street parking lots should be identified as well.

In addition, streetscape enhancements should be incorporated where feasible to protect pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle safety. In commercial areas, this can be done by



providing wide sidewalks and marked crosswalks at key intersections. In residential areas, this can be accomplished by providing planting strips that act as buffers between vehicular travel ways and pedestrian sidewalks.

E. PUBLIC FACILITIES AND UTILITIES

The Town is facing a number of significant capital expenses to provide services for existing and planned growth, and will need to plan carefully to ensure that current and future residents and businesses obtain adequate public services with reasonable tax rates and obligations.

1. Ensure a fair policy for paying for capital facility expansion needs over time.

The Town should reexamine its facility and connection fees for new construction and potentially revise them to insure that new development, not existing customers, pay the majority of the costs of the required expansions of the water and wastewater treatment plants.

2. Develop proffer policies so that future development helps pay for the additional impacts and public facility costs that it generates.

The Town should examine the feasibility and develop a proffer policy that requires rezoning applicants to proffer to pay the full cost required to create additional water and wastewater treatment capacity to serve any additional density created by any Town rezoning approval. The proffers should be a legally binding recorded agreement and should run with the land.

3. Ensure that development proceeds in an orderly pattern that is consistent with the Town's ability to provide services and facilities to support it.

The Town should conduct a capacity analysis of the proposed Future Land Use Plan to determine if it sufficiently accommodates the amount of expected growth during the next 10, 20 and 50 year periods. Following a comprehensive Buildout and capacity analysis, the Plan should potentially be adjusted and new growth areas added or removed if needed.

The Town should also create phases within the growth areas if appropriate, in accord with growth forecasts for the 10, 20 and 50 year periods, and link each of the defined



expansion areas to specific new land use and infrastructure policies in the Plan which in turn would later be linked to the County's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and to the Zoning Ordinance. Critical infrastructure elements are roads and sewer and water lines.

