FRAMEWORK

The framework for any plan is the characteristics of the community for which the plan is prepared. The framework for the 2027 Land Pres Rec and Park Plan (2027 LPPRP or 2027 Plan) includes information on three important aspects of the County:

- Physical characteristics—Information on the forests and woodlands, streams, wetlands, Critical Areas (associated with the Chesapeake Bay), soils, steep slopes, unique natural areas, and development patterns will help guide future park sites and recreation services. Later, in separate chapters, the 2027 Plan discusses agricultural land and natural resources. The Plan also devotes a discussion about the Green Infrastructure (GI) process that provides some cohesion to the preservation of a variety of valuable natural resources. See Chapter 6;
- Demographic characteristics—Information on the County, such as population, age, gender, and income will help analyze current and future demand for recreation services; and,
- Current planning policies—Information on the County Comprehensive Plan and other plans will help determine current policies to strengthen or change to help meet the leisure service needs of current and future county residents.



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Physical Characteristics

Wicomico County is the heart of the Delmarva Peninsula. Located south of Delaware between the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, and is within easy driving distance of the major cities on the east coast (Map 2.1).

Additional information on the following physical characteristics of the County is presented in this section:

- Critical Areas; Wetlands and Floodplains;
- Woodlands and Natural Areas; and,
- Subdivision Activity / Development Pattern.

Critical Areas, Wetlands, and Floodplains

Water features (Map 2.2) are significant for both major components of the 2027 LPPRP: parks/recreation and agricultural preservation/natural resource conservation. Federal and State law requires that wetlands, both tidal and non-tidal, must be preserved or relocated. Floodplains should also be preserved, wherever possible. Efforts should be made to avoid development within the 1% annual chance floodplain. If development occurs within the 1% annual chance floodplain, efforts should be made to mitigate negative impacts. The County has strong regulations for development within floodplains.
Critical Areas are regulated through the County Critical Areas Chapter of the County Code.

As defined by state law, the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area includes the Chesapeake Bay, all tidal tributaries and wetlands, and all water and land areas within 1,000 feet of the upland boundary of the tidal waters and wetlands. In the County, the major bodies of water impacted are the Wicomico and Nanticoke Rivers, and smaller tidal tributaries. The County program divides land within the state-designated Chesapeake Bay Critical Area into three types of management areas, each permitting various types and intensities of development:

- Intensely Developed Areas;
- Limited Development Areas; and,
- Resource Conservation Areas.

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Woodlands and Natural Areas

Woodlands cover significant parts of the County (Map 2.3), providing wildlife habitat, ecological balance, and, in some cases, recreation opportunities for residents. Natural areas are extremely important to preserve the habitat of native flora and fauna, especially those with a limited niche and need specific localized conditions to flourish.

Development Pattern and Subdivision Activity

Historically, development in Wicomico County has been centered in the Locally Designated Growth Area (Growth Area), identified on the Land Use Map in the Wicomico County 2017 Comprehensive Plan (2017 Comprehensive Plan). This Growth Area encompasses Salisbury, Fruitland, Delmar and the immediate surroundings of each jurisdiction, with some expansion into property outside of municipal limits. The Growth Area includes most of the County's Commercial and Industrial zoned properties, and a significant portion of it is served by either Salisbury or Fruitland's public sewer and water systems.

Growth in the County by new subdivision of land is largely dictated by how large lots need to be to accommodate the use of on-site septic systems and individual wells, as required by the Maryland Department of Environmental Health (MDE). Although individual septic systems are a more cost-effective method of serving an individual lot, the total area required to accommodate individual septic is much larger than what is needed for public or community sewerage access. Access to community sewer and water, whether provided by municipalities or by private community systems, allows for smaller lot sizes, resulting in more densely developed areas. Future annexation of property into municipalities with public sewage systems allows more dense development, with the added advantage of less negative environmental impact on groundwater than individual septic systems.

During Maryland's 2012 Legislative Session, the state enacted Senate Bill-236 (SB-236), entitled "Sustainable Growth & Agricultural Preservation Act", which mandated counties and municipalities to identify, and map SB-236 Tiers, intended to limit the spread of individual, on-site septic systems on large-lot residential development, thereby reducing a major source of nitrogen pollution into Chesapeake Bay and other waterways. In response to this state mandate, the County adopted Tier Map designations [I, II, III, and IV], as identified in the 2017

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Comprehensive Plan whether a property must be served by public or community sewer services, or is eligible for major or minor subdivision served by individual septic systems.

In addition to Maryland's mandated SB-236 Tier Map restrictions, approximately 63,000-acres (38% of the 185,567-acres) within the Agricultural Rural (A-1) zoning district have some level of protection from future development. The A-1 zoning district includes wetlands (tidal and non-tidal), Quantico Creek Rural Legacy Area, Chesapeake Bay Critical Areas, state- and County-owned land, state and County agricultural preservation easements, Maryland Environmental Trust easements, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) easements, Wetland Reserve Program easements, and fee-simple properties owned by The Nature Conservancy. In addition to the parcels noted above, other major factors, such as the septic suitability of soils, limit future development.

Table 2.1
Development within the Unincorporated Portion
Of Wicomico County, 1986—2021

Area	Final Lots		Acres		Average Lot Size (ac.)
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Within Growth Area	2,133	40.5%	2,479	21.6%	1.16
Outside Growth Area	3,139	59.5%	9,017	78.4%	2.87
Total	5,272	100.0%	11,496	100%	2.18

[Source: Wicomico County Department of Planning, Zoning, and Community Development (PZCD)]

The extent of development potential within the County does not constitute an imminent threat to land preservation efforts. The 1998 County Zoning Code amendments to the A-1 Agricultural-Rural Zoning District have increased the amount of land preserved through the development process. From June 1998 through December 2021, 26 new subdivisions (of four or more lots) were approved in the A-1 zoning district. Since the 2022 LPPRP, only two subdivisions have been approved in the A-1 zoning district as of December 2021. The 26 approved subdivisions contain 401 lots on a total of 2,651-acres, of which 1,507-acres are preserved as open space set-aside. Undeveloped areas within the A-1 zoning district on publicly owned land or preserved, and protected areas will likely remain undeveloped.

The Town-Transition and higher density Residential Zoning Districts adjacent to the Cities of Fruitland and Salisbury and the Town of Delmar, MD, have experienced growth as land is annexed

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and subsequently developed. Annexed or County parcels within an Urban Service District (USD) are served by public water and sewer; therefore, development will occur at a higher density than within the County (outside a USD). Development in the unincorporated portion of the County has an average density of approximately 2 equivalent dwelling units per acre. From 2000 through 2021, the City of Salisbury annexed approximately 1,818-acres, which was previously under the County's jurisdiction.

The extent of development in the County does not constitute an imminent threat to land preservation efforts in large part because the 1998 Zoning Code amendments to the A-1 Agricultural-Rural Zoning District have increased the amount of land preserved through the development process. A significant portion of the County's land mass located within the A-1 district has some level of protection preventing future development.

Demographic Characteristics

Demographics describe the people of an area using statistics. The 2027 LPPRP includes information on the County's current and forecasted population, age, gender, and income. The 2027 Plan uses data from the 2020 U.S. Decennial Census,2024 American Community Survey, and Maryland Department of Planning's (MDP) State Data Center.

Population

The difference in growth potential in different areas of the County has led to the identification and analysis of "planning areas" (which cover the entire County) and more specific "growth areas." Planning areas have been included in all of the County's Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation plans since the original plan in 1988. The Central Planning Area is large enough to be divided into three sectors (East, West, and Central). The central subsector of the Central Planning Area contains the City of Salisbury. The West Planning Area has the smallest population of all the planning areas (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2
Population Counts and Projections for Wicomico County Planning Areas, 2020-2055

Planning Area	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050	2055	Change 2020-2045 Number
East	6,734	6,953	7,354	7,668	7,922	8,186	8,438	8,676	1,942

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Central	61,581	63,586	67,248	70,125	72,449	74,863	77,164	79,339	17,758
East Subsector	9,759	10,077	10,657	11,113	11,481	11,864	12,228	12,573	2,814
West Subsector	13,345	13,779	14,573	15,197	15,700	16,223	16,722	17,193	3,848
Central Subsector	38,477	39,730	42,018	43,815	45,268	46,776	48,213	49,573	11,096
West	2,641	2,727	2,884	3,007	3,107	3,211	3,309	3,403	762
Tri-Town	6,802	7,023	7,428	7,746	8,002	8,269	8,523	8,764	1,962
South	17,226	17,787	18,811	19,616	20,266	20,941	21,585	22,194	4,968
North	8,604	8,884	9,396	9,798	10,122	10,460	10,781	11,085	2,481
Total	103,588	106,960	113,120	117,960	121,870	125,930	129,800	133,460	29,872

The estimated 2020 County population was 103,588. According to data from the Maryland State Data Center (MSDC), the County is projected to grow faster than the state as a whole to both the male and female populations. According to data from the MSDC, the County is projected to grow faster than the state as a whole between 2020 and 2055 (Table 2.3), 28.8 and 18.9%, respectively. In addition, MSDC data projects the County will not only grow at the fastest rate among the four Lower Eastern Shore counties (Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester) from 2020 to 2055. It is projected; the County will also be the fastest growing county in the Lower Eastern Shore region between 2020 and 2055 (Table 2.3).

Did You Know?

Females outnumber males in both Wicomico County and Maryland.

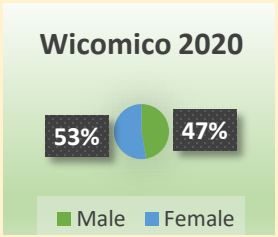


Table 2.3
Population and Projection Totals for the Lower Eastern Shore Region Counties, 2020-2055

urisdiction	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050	2055	Change, 2020-2055	
									Number	Percent
Wicomico	103,588	106,960	113,120	117,960	121,870	125,930	129,800	133,460	29,872	28.8%
Dorchester	32,531	33,200	33,840	34,430	34,850	35,290	35,290	35,910	3,379	3.3%

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Somerset	24,620	25,190	25,720	26,070	26,260	26,440	26,550	26,590	1,970	1.9%
Worcester	52,460	54,910	57,110	59,610	60,770	61,910	61,910	63,770	11,310	10.9%
Maryland	6,177,224	6,300,610	6,492,470	6,687,460	6,863,910	7,029,400	7,191,870	7,341,680	1,164,456	18.9%

Table 2.4 shows the total population and the percentage of the total population by age groups of residents in the County and the state of Maryland. According to the 2024 American Community Survey, the 25 to 34 years old age bracket contained the largest overall proportion of County residents, which consisted of roughly 12.2% or 12,736 County residents. In contrast, seniors 85-years or older included the smallest proportion of the County's population (1.7%t or 1,789 residents). In 2024, the median age of the County residents was 36.2 years old.

The state of Maryland's age structure of its residents is similar to the County. The 25 to 34 years old age bracket had the largest concentration of the state's overall population, which represented 12.9% or 907,590 residents. The 85 years and over bracket comprised the smallest proportion of the population (1.8%or 114,596 residents). In 2024, the median age of the state's population was 40-years old.

Table 2.4
Population by Age, 2024

Age	Wicomico County	Wicomico County	Maryland	Maryland Percentage
Total Population	104,117	100.0%	6,263,220	100.0%
Under 5 years	6,2621	6.0%	350,973	5.6%
5 to 9 years	6,481	6.2%	374,228	6.0%
10 to 14 years	6,711	6.4%	395,317	6.3%
15 to 19 years	8,648	8.3%	401,885	6.4%
20 to 24 years	10,020	9.6%	376,761	6.0%
25 to 34 years	12,736	12.2%	907,590	12.9%
35 to 44 years	11,506	11.1%	876,495	14.0%
45 to 54 years	11,618	11.2%	766,968	12.2%
55 to 59 years	7,006	6.7%	394,649	6.3%
60 to 64 years	6,262	6.0%	418,632	6.7%
65 to 74 years	10,335	9.9%	637,454	10.2%
75 to 84 years	4,744	4.6%	347,702	5.6%
85 years and over	1,789	1.7%	114,596	1.8%
Median Age	36.2	N/A	40	N/A

[Source: 2024 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates, Table DP05]

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Households

Since the 1990 census, the County has had the highest people per household figure of any county in the Lower Eastern Shore. MSDC projections of household size anticipate that Wicomico will continue to have the highest average household size on the Lower Eastern Shore through 2055. (Table 2.5).

Table 2.5
Current and Projected Average Household Size
of Lower Eastern Shore counties, 2020-2055

Jurisdiction	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050	2055	Change, 2020 -	
									Number	Percent
Wicomico	2.50	2.50	2.48	2.47	2.47	2.47	2.47	2.47	-0.03	-1.2%
Dorchester	2.34	2.34	2.33	2.33	2.32	2.32	2.31	2.30	-0.04	-1.7%
Somerset	2.36	2.40	2.40	2.39	2.39	2.38	2.38	2.37	0.01	0.4%
Worcester	2.26	2.32	2.31	2.31	2.30	2.29	2.27	2.27	0.01	0.4%
Maryland	2.61	2.56	2.55	2.54	2.53	2.53	2.52	2.50	-0.11	-4.2%

[Source: Maryland Department of Planning, State Data & Analysis Center, Population Projections]

Income

According to the Small Area Income & Poverty Estimates (SAIPE), the median household income in the County increased 36.0% or $17,945.90 between the years 2020 and the 2024. During the same period of time, the state median household income increased 38.3% or $28,487.34. This 36.0% increase in the County's median household income indicates an increasing need for leisure activities. See Table 2.6.

Table 2.6
Median Household Income, 2020-2024

Jurisdiction	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change, 2020-2055	
						Amount	Percent
Wicomico	$49,840	$53,755	$63,523	$68,614	$67,786		
Maryland	$74,348	$78,336	$87,609	$95,289	$102,835	$28,487.34	38.3%

[Source: Maryland Department of Planning, State Data & Analysis Center, Analysis of Small Area Income & Poverty Estimates (SAIPE)]

[Note: For purposes of comparing SAIPE data, in the table above, the dollar values must be adjusted for inflation. Values were adjusted using the 1982-1984 Consumer Price Index (CPI) rebased to 2024.]

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Current Planning Policies

The Wicomico County 2017 Comprehensive Plan (2017 Comprehensive Plan), adopted March 21, 2017, contains objectives and policies relevant to the issues of land conservation, recreation, agricultural preservation, and natural resource conservation. The following section identifies appropriate county objectives and policies.

Agricultural / Resource District Objectives

- Support the agricultural industry and associated jobs.
- Coordinate policies, programs, regulations, and capital improvement decisions that provide opportunities for new development in the rural areas but encourages new residential development in designated growth areas of the County in an effort to preserve agricultural resources.
- Increase farm-related employment opportunities by exploring emerging trends such as the generation of power from on-farm biomass, as well as promoting agrotourism in the County.
- Ensure ordinances in the designated Agriculture Resources areas of the County are supportive of the agricultural industry.
- Give priority to public improvements directed toward agricultural related uses.
- Afford agricultural uses with maximum protection and freedom from nuisance complaints in zoning regulations and through 'right-to-farm' ordinances.

Natural Resources and Sensitive Areas Protection Objectives

- Identify wetlands and floodplains.
- Discourage new development from locating in 100-year floodplains or on steep slopes, and in other sensitive areas;
- Provide open space, scenic areas, and natural breaks in the landscape.
- Conserve large tracts of land with existing natural resources and natural limitations on development;
- Preserve and conserve fish, wildlife, and plant habitats.
- Enhance public access and use of the local rivers and their tributaries for recreational purposes;
- Conserve forest and woodland resources and utilize tree conservation measures and replanting programs in compliance with the Maryland Forest Conservation Act;
- Maintain and manage the forest canopy in the County;

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- Ensure new development and redevelopment minimizes pollutant loadings and runoff from sites through implementing sediment, stormwater, and erosion control plans and practices;
- Educate property owners about the benefits of placing environmentally sensitive lands under public and private conservation easements;
- Coordinate with County Emergency Services Department to update Hazard Mitigation Plan by continuing to identify areas at risk from flooding, as well as mapping emergency evacuation routes;
- Request assistance from appropriate state agencies to prepare a sea-level rise and climate change study for the County; and,
- Continue to implement the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Ordinance and Forest Conservation Act.

Open Space and Recreation Objectives

- Identify opportunities to increase the availability of active and passive recreational areas in an effort to improve the quality of life within the County; and,
- Provide an array of recreational facilities and programs throughout the County to make them available to all County citizens.

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