



MEMORANDUM

TO: EASTON PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

FROM: LYNN B. THOMAS, JR., AICP, LONG RANGE PLANNER

DATE: DECEMBER 15, 2009

SUBJECT: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISIONS

As a follow-up to the two joint meetings you had with the Easton Town Council, I have revised the Comprehensive Plan based on comments/agreements made in those meetings, in order to produce the version of the Plan on which the Town Council will hold their public hearing. Rather than have you read this entire document for your approval, I thought it might be more beneficial if I listed each change that I made from the version of the document you originally approved back in October. These changes are:

- The 4th objective on page 44 in the Land Use Element concerning “incentive annexations” has been deleted.
- The following language has been added to the Municipal Growth Element (page 66) under the section discussing Fire and Rescue Service:

One of the consequences of uncontrolled growth, either in terms of rate or location, is the increased potential that Easton would have to move from an all-Volunteer Fire Department to a paid department in order to continue to provide acceptable coverage. This would have negative impacts both in terms of the loss of the community spirit that is engendered by the Volunteer Fire Department as well financial implications, including possible (if not probable) tax increases.

- The following language was added to the Municipal Growth Element (page 80) under the section on Burdens on Services for Areas Outside of Town But Under Town’s Responsibility:

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, the form and rate of future development is critical with regards to impacts on fire and rescue service. If left totally uncontrolled, it is believed that the likelihood of having to switch from a volunteer fire department to a paid department is significantly greater than is the case if we follow a strategy of controlled growth in a traditional, relatively urban-scale development pattern.

- The following language was added to the Municipal Growth Element of the Plan (page 83) describing the intent of the 1% Growth Target:

The Planning Commission envisions actual growth to occur somewhere between 1% and 3%. The most “appropriate” growth rate for Easton is one which insures that infrastructure is able to keep up with the demands generated by that growth and does not create adverse impacts greater than can be ameliorated. What this rate or level might be is unknown, but it is believed that the recent rate of 3% is too high and our target should be closer to the longer-term average of 1% annually.

- Table 12 in the Parks, Recreation & Open Spaces Element was updated and a note was added to the Table to indicate that although they are listed, the amenities provided at the Talbot County Public Schools are not generally available to the public.
- The following language was added to the Parks Element (page 147) to describe the work that has occurred so far with regard to planning for the use of the RTC property:

The RTC Park has been owned by the Town since 1995. It still remains undeveloped although its possible use was studied in 2003. This study was conducted by a consultant working closely with a Council member and a citizens committee. It presented two possible development scenarios for the park, with the favored one being what it described as “A Central Park for Easton”, which was characterized as a “modern Olmstead Park.” Although never officially approved by the Town, this Plan was valuable in establishing some parameters for the development of the site and for illustrating the wide array of possibilities for that development.

- The following language was added to the Parks Element (page 147) referring the reader to the Transportation Element to read more about future plans for the Rail Trail and generally summarizing that discussion:

The development (and future planned development) of the Rail-Trail is described further in the Transportation Element of this Plan. In short, it calls for the gradual continued expansion of this trail in as many directions as possible. It is hoped that it will eventually connect to a wider-scale County-initiated Trail System.

- The Transportation Map was updated to show Rail-Trail crossings or potential crossings of MD 322 as well as Port Street. A box was added to the map in the vicinity of the Parkway and Port Street and a description of the options available

(a crossing at the Port Street Intersection, a crosswalk at the location of the former rail line, and/or a crossing at the St. Michaels Road Intersection) was added to the text.

- The language on page 206 describing Airport-Neighborhood Issues was revised as follows:

This calls for sacrifice on the part of both parties. Residents of these areas must realize that they live in the proximity of an airport and that this does in fact create a certain amount of nuisance, *including noise, fumes, and vibrations*. On the other hand, the airport should do its part to minimize such impacts on these areas by channeling its growth and the associated nuisances towards the industrial and undeveloped neighboring properties as much as possible. The airport does not always have a say in terms of where it is going to grow as evidenced by the continuing struggle to find land for an extended or longer runway. *The Airport does, however, have some decisions under its control, for example the length of the runway, and these decisions should be made with an eye toward minimizing impacts on residents as much as possible.*

- Added a Map of the recommended pedestrian/bicycle improvements and description or reference to each on page 210 of the Transportation Element.
- Added the following language to the description of the East Side Residential Collector Grid (page 212):

For all of these reasons and others specified throughout this Plan, the grid system should be established for new development on the eastern side of Town. However, it should be implemented with sensitivity to existing neighborhoods. Given this and the fact that little, if any, development is expected to occur during this Planning period on the east side of Town (except possibly for some portion of the Brooks Farm), this issue should be further developed through the preparation of a Small Area or Specialty Plan that focuses on the issue of connectivity and traffic and circulation on the east side of Town.

- Added the following objective to the Transportation Element:

Develop a Small Area Design/Transportation Plan to better understand and describe the options available for creating the most efficient transportation system (for automobiles, bicycles, and pedestrians) on the east side of the Town and the Town's future Growth Area.

- Added the following language to the Economic Development Element addressing the Downtown Plan in general and parking in particular and directing the reader to the AKRF Study for more information:

The Easton Downtown Plan for Infill Development is essentially an extension of this Comprehensive Plan. It simply plans for a smaller area and as such can do so in more detail and look into issues more specifically relevant to that area.

One such issue is parking. Parking has been raised as a concern in Easton probably since shortly after the introduction of the automobile to our Town streets. Through the years, numerous studies have been conducted on this issue. They have generally and fairly consistently found that Downtown overall has a more than adequate supply of parking, but that it could potentially be utilized more efficiently by changes to the management of the spaces. These include things like changes to the mix and/or location of metered/free/permit parking, policies regarding maximum length of parking, etc.

While the need for structured parking (i.e. a garage) has never been established, the most recent AKRF study anticipates a significant amount of new parking demand and therefore the likelihood of needing a garage increases. Their study identifies two locations for potential parking garages, one to the east of Talbottown and one on the Town-owned parking lot across the street from Town Hall.

- Added the following objective to the Economic Development Element of the Plan to address Pete Lesher’s concern about broadband internet service:

Provide the infrastructure necessary to attract desirable businesses and enable our existing businesses to grow and prosper. This should include the wide-scale availability of broadband internet service which is in the process of being made available throughout the Eastern Shore. Town/EUC officials should do whatever is necessary to ensure that this project is completed to fruition here in Easton.

- Revised language in the Implementation Chapter concerning the 1% Growth Rate under the subsection “Restrict the Rate of Growth” (page 246) as follows:

Restrict the Rate of Growth

*~~A new component of Easton’s comprehensive growth management strategy is a call to restrict or slow down Easton’s rate of growth. This~~ **The issue of actively and purposely controlling Easton’s rate of growth** has been the subject of a great deal of debate for each of the last three Comprehensive Plan Updates, including this one. Up to this point the Planning Commission and Town Council have elected to allow the free market to determine Easton’s growth rate. This was actually the case again in the earliest draft of this Plan. However, after hearing much testimony on the subject, the Planning Commission decided that indeed the dominant theme of this Plan to retain and/or return to an older way of doing things in Easton is endangered by a continued rate of growth in the range that we have experienced in the last 20 years or so. The fear is that at 3% growth (or more) development pressures are so great that it becomes more and more difficult to achieve all the goals relative to the type and form of development we want to see. Furthermore, growth at such a rate makes some of our most challenging problems, such as improving traffic conditions, or lessening our impact on the environment, even more difficult, to the point where it borders on the impossible.*

*The Commission recognizes that by merely stating that we want to achieve a 1% growth rate absolutely nothing changes to make that happen. **The Commission and Town Council discussed this issue at great length and ultimately decided that, for now at least, this issue should most appropriately be addressed by adhering to an Annexation Policy that does not allow for an exceedingly high rate of growth. The Priority Growth Areas are ideally suited to do this. The***

*only potential shortcoming of this policy is the rate at which infill/build-out occurs. That is why the goals and objectives portion of this Element contain recommendations for exploring and implementing policies and tools to achieve this targeted growth rate. For this reason, the staff is directed to explore policies and tools which could achieve a specified targeted growth rate, in the event that growth gets out of control. ~~They~~ **The** Commission also recognizes that it will take time to develop such policies, possibly until the enactment of the next Plan in 2015, but ~~they~~ ~~Commission~~ also realizes that the longer this task is delayed, the more difficult it will be to achieve the vision of this Plan.*

- Deleted the last sentence in the paragraph describing the future development of “Area 4” (on page 254) which references specific possible uses for this site.
- Revised a Goal on page 260 as follows:

*GOAL: To ~~develop~~ **research and where appropriate enact** policies and measures which implement the Vision and spirit of this Comprehensive Plan.*