Southern New Castle County Master Plan

Scenario development update

PROCESS

Over the years southern New Castle County has experienced significant growth. The once rural part of the county is transforming into a suburban bedroom community. In addition, the Town of Middletown continues to grow and serves as a center for residents of southern New Castle County. It is the main retail hub to southern New Castle County and provides everyday services such as grocery stores and restaurants. With continued growth, the County intends to establish a long-term vision for land use and infrastructure in southern New Castle County to guide growth while at the same time taking proactive steps to preserve land and natural resources, agricultural land, and the rural “small town” character of the area.

The master plan process for southern New Castle County kicked off in October 2018 with a public meeting that provided a project overview, preliminary baseline information, and some mapping activities. Visioning workshops took place in the winter of 2019 to gain a sense of what the community envisions for the future of the area. With this information, the project team developed three draft scenarios to begin exploring how the community’s goals and objectives could best be achieved. Those preliminary land use scenarios were shared at a community workshop in June 2019 and are now undergoing further evaluation and refinement. We are aiming to have a draft final plan in the spring of 2020 (see plan timeline below), which will set the long-term, publicly-supported vision for land use and infrastructure in southern New Castle County and define policy and recommendations for achieving that vision.

This report summarizes work done to date—emphasizing the preliminary land use scenarios and public feedback—as well as next steps.
THE PRELIMINARY LAND USE SCENARIOS... are the first step of exploring potential futures for the study area. They help us consider where additional population growth and development is best accommodated and/or most desirable. By addressing this issue, through public feedback and technical analysis of the anticipated impacts and tradeoffs, the full plan scenarios can then be created.

The preliminary land use scenarios were developed in the spring of 2019 and shared at an Advisory Committee meeting on June 17, 2019 and public workshop on June 24, 2019. (Meeting materials, including full size maps, are available here)
PARAMETERS OF PRELIMINARY LAND USE SCENARIOS

Community Goals and Objectives (full version available here) were developed with feedback received during the winter 2019 visioning phase. Emphasis includes: preserving farmland and rural/historic character, protecting the natural environment (air and water quality), enhancing multi-modal travel options and east-west mobility through the study area, access to more local cultural/recreational attractions, access to high quality local jobs and employment resources, and improving options to “age in place”.

Existing Conditions and Constraints set guidelines for the scenarios and include:

- **Continued population growth expected, but slowing toward 2050 (plan horizon year); limited employment growth expected.** Currently about 60,600 people (20,200 households) live in the study area. By 2050, about 92,300 people (32,000 households) total and about 3,200 additional jobs are anticipated. Development pressure, though anticipated to ease, will continue to consume agricultural land and open space.

- **Availability of land and recorded, unbuilt development is ample.** Of concern is how to get subdivision growth back in line with population growth so goals like land preservation and agricultural character can be achieved. If southern New Castle County were to be fully developed (per today’s regulations) some 23,000 residential units could be added to what’s already built today. Of those lots, nearly half (11,400) are currently approved but not yet built, and they would accommodate the number of households projected to 2050.

- **Sewer service areas and policy are unclear and not in line with growth projections.** The adopted 2012 Comprehensive Plan includes a map entitled “Sewer Service Areas”, which depicts sewer service areas covering the entire northern half of the study area. Sewer availability is currently only in the central core of this three-part region. The west and east wings, though designated in a sewer service area, do not have a timeline for sewer availability. In the central core area there is clear guidance as to how and when an area would be provided with sewer. However, in the east and west wings the demand and timing for sewer has yet to be studied and results incorporated into a public policy, which is an anticipated element of this sub-area plan.

- **The area to the east is more environmentally sensitive** with the presence of floodplains, wetlands, and sea-level rise. Most growth has occurred within the Central Core, which has generally been provided with sewer. However, development pressure is pushing to the east and west where new development on septic raises concerns about land consumption, water quality, and environmental impact.
What would happen if development proceeds under the status quo? This land use scenario assumes that sewer would continue to be provided where it currently exists today in the Central Core (shown in green). The other areas shown in the “sewer service area” map in the adopted 2012 Comprehensive Plan—the east and west wings—would not receive sewer through the plan horizon. There would be no changes to the current zoning regulations. The anticipated result of this scenario: new development dispersed in a sprawling pattern across the northern portion of the study area; areas not served by sewer would be developed with septic systems.
This scenario focuses new development into specific areas (shown in purple circles). Under this scenario, only a portion of the areas shown in the “sewer service area” map in the adopted 2012 Comprehensive Plan would receive sewer through the plan horizon. Areas served by sewer would include the central core and the northern portion of the west wing. Regulatory tools, such as changes to zoning, would be employed to produce more compact development to support land preservation and other community goals.
This scenario assumes that population and employment growth will be greater than currently projected and assumed for Scenarios I and II. It’s an aspirational “what if?” approach that goes beyond currently established projections. Growth, particularly employment growth, would be assumed within Middletown. As with Scenario II, sewer would be assumed available in the northern west wing and central core, and regulatory tools and incentives would be used to promote compact development within areas served by sewer. As an aspirational scenario, it builds toward understanding the opportunities and challenges to achieving a number of the community goals, particularly those related to jobs and non-residential land uses.
FEEDBACK ON PRELIMINARY LAND USE SCENARIOS:

Overall, members of the public and Advisory Committee felt that Scenario II addressed the most issues. There are additional items identified that will be explored as the land use scenarios are further refined.

Highlights of feedback related to the preliminary land use scenarios include:

- Explore the development capacity within the incorporated towns (Middletown, Odessa, Townsend, Smyrna, and Clayton).
- Other small commercial uses are needed so residents don't all need to drive to Middletown.
- Although job growth is desirable, the market for commercial development has been mostly limited in recent years.
- Further explore capacity of existing infrastructure (water, sewer, roads, etc.).
- Consider a setback of some distance into the east wing from Route 1 that could be sewered or targeted for some growth.
- Examine the potential for employment growth in southern portion of the study area.
- While employment and mixed-use growth is desirable, traffic is concerning; traffic congestion and transportation are especially concerning for Scenario III.

A full summary of comments can be viewed [Here](#).
NEXT STEPS: REFINING AND MORE FULLY DEVELOPING PLAN SCENARIOS

Through the summer, New Castle County Department of Land Use will be:

⇒ Further refining and evaluating the land use scenarios based on feedback from the Advisory Committee and public. Further land use scenarios/analysis include:

  Business as usual — what are the implications if sewer exists where it is today—only in central core—through 2050? What are the implications and likely impacts if the full northern part of the study area (including east and west wings) were to be built with sewer?

  Conservation growth — what are the implications of a “conservation growth” approach where sewer expansion is limited to a portion of the west wing?

  Capacity in the towns — building on the preliminary land use scenario III, the project team will further explore capacity to accommodate growth within the existing municipal boundaries by working with the towns—Odessa, Townsend, Middletown, Smyrna/Clayton.

⇒ Adding the rest of plan scenario elements to arrive at 3 to 4 scenarios and conducting evaluation of tradeoffs (performance metrics) including:

  • Transportation (roads, transit, non-motorized)
  • Parks, trails, and recreational facilities
  • Community spaces/facilities
  • Priority preservation/conservation areas

⇒ Sharing the more fully developed plan scenarios and analysis for review and comment in the fall.

COMMUNITY GOALS:

1. Residents of Southern New Castle County have access to the amenities and services that help them to maintain a HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION and farmland preservation are considered a priority in Southern New Castle County, and residents and visitors alike have access to trails, parks, and other natural spaces.

3. Development and redevelopment in Southern New Castle County are compatible with, and enhance, the existing COMMUNITY CHARACTER, including historic properties and design features, the scale of development, and presence of farmland and open space.

4. People in Southern New Castle County can use a variety of TRANSPORTATION modes (car, public transportation, walking, and bicycling) to reach their destinations in a safe, comfortable, and convenient manner.

5. Southern New Castle County has a strong and diversified ECONOMY.