

February 2020 Update

Southern New Castle County Master Plan

Addressing many important growth issues in Southern New Castle County is a priority for New Castle County Department of Land Use and its partners. The following is an update on this effort.

The Rough Draft Plan

The [rough draft Southern New Castle County Master Plan](#) was published in early November 2019 and contained more than a year's worth of collaborative effort, including five public meetings and online opportunities for engagement, land use modeling, link-level transportation analysis, and public input. The November rough draft covered topics including quality of life and health issues, the environment, community facilities and character, transportation, and the economy, and those were woven through the following major elements of the document:

- Background on the plan and process;
- A characterization of the existing conditions in the study area;
- Plan goals and objectives derived through the engagement process;
- Depiction and explanation of alternative future land use scenarios and both quantitative and qualitative impact analysis of associated with plan objectives;
- Recommendations, including a proposed land use plan; and
- An appendix of methodologies, supporting details, and references.

The proposed land use plan and recommendations included in the November draft, were based on the clear direction that had emerged in the planning process to that point in time:

- There is a lack of consistent land use planning and sewer service provisions have led to current land use challenges
- There needs to be better intergovernmental coordination, which could help achieve better outcomes
- Growth needs to be more sustainable.

The resounding feedback indicated that “business as usual” is not working, does not support sustainable growth, and is not desirable. Findings from scenario evaluation, approaches from Scenarios 2 and 3¹-- which include fostering corridor hubs and promoting infill in municipalities—and stakeholder comments received were combined to develop a proposed land use plan (found on page 105 of the rough draft

¹ All scenarios were developed using methods that used the officially adopted population forecasts of the Delaware Population Consortium, as required by the State.

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plan, provided for reference on page 5 of this document). The Plan includes elements such as directing growth to areas planned for development; preserving rural lands and agricultural industry; addressing the desire for more diverse local jobs and economic development; targeting growth into the municipalities; and improving transportation options.

Feedback

Since the November rough draft plan was published, 13 individuals submitted comments, which ranged from broad policy-oriented ideas to specific recommendations and other line item edits. An additional meeting was held with the town of Townsend to discuss concerns, make clarifications, and consider further municipal coordination recommendations, which are being factored into plan refinements. (More extensive highlights of all comments received are found on page 6-8 of this document; many offer additional perspective to be considered in refinement of plan recommendations and implementation strategies.)

Results from the most recent phase reflect support for the plan and associated sustainable growth strategies including emphasis on infill in the existing towns, a more precise and clear policy for sewer service, some targeted growth in unincorporated areas where it is coordinated with infrastructure, and preservation of environmentally sensitive areas, natural resources, and open space.

The next round of refinements to the plan includes specifying the preferred plan, running a detailed transportation analysis on the plan, and refining plan recommendations and implementation steps.

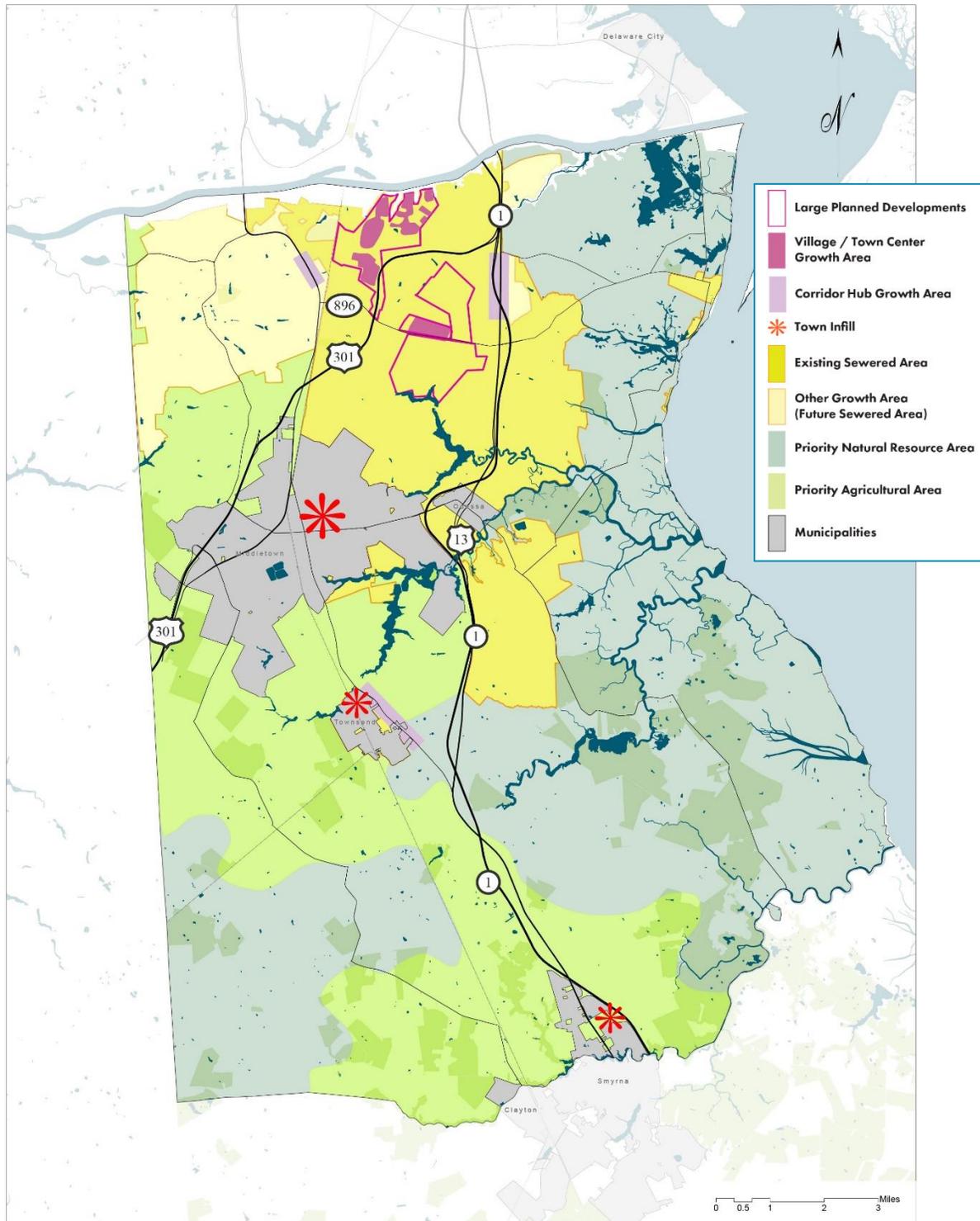
Preferred Plan

Based on comments received, the preferred plan (page 3) reflects adjustments from the “proposed plan” as presented in the November 2019 rough draft (shown on page 5 of this document). Refinements include the addition of a “corridor hub growth area” designation along SR71 near Townsend. For purposes of the detailed transportation analysis, population and employment numbers (i.e. TAZ data) will be based on those used for Scenario 3 with some additional employment allocated to reflect and explore the potential impact of infill and potential for additional commercial growth along SR71 in/near Townsend.

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Preferred Plan, February 2020



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Next Steps

Final components of the plan are being organized, and the target for completion of the final draft is spring 2020. Remaining steps include:

- Conduct detailed transportation analysis on preferred land use plan (January through May 2020).
- Hold plan update briefings – share updates with the public, answer questions, and get feedback on key refinements to the draft plan (March 2020).
- Final Public Workshop to share results of detailed transportation analysis and final draft plan (May 2020).
- Complete plan draft and begin the formal adoption process, which includes state Preliminary Land Use Service, Planning Board, and County Council (June/July 2020).
- Formal endorsement of final plan through WILMAPCO Council (June/July 2020).

Spring 2020 Plan Update Briefings:

We are currently scheduling briefings during March or April 2020.

For further information please contact:

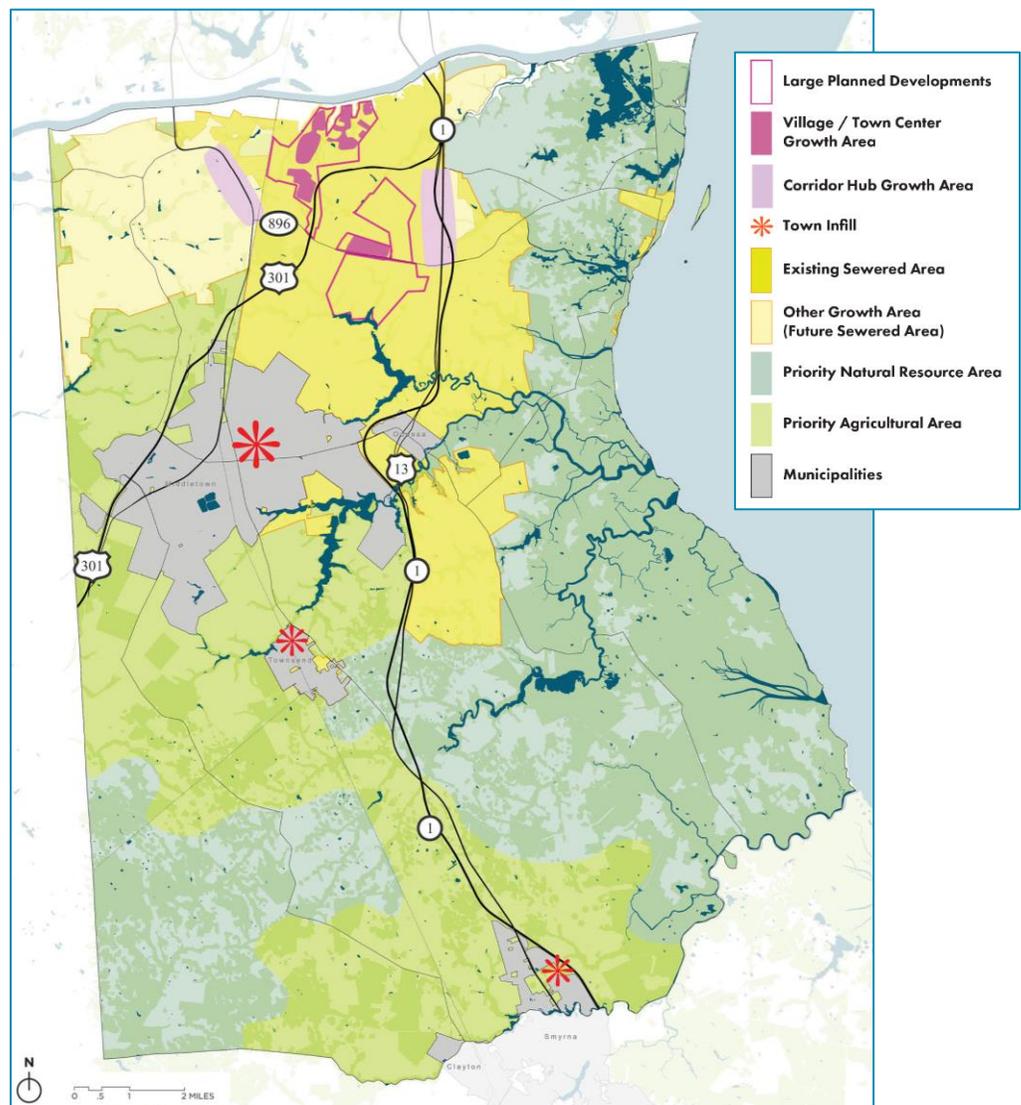
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Background

The planning process has included five public workshops, three advisory committee meetings and online participation options, beginning with a kickoff meeting in October 2018 to introduce the community to the planning study and share/gather preliminary information. More information about current conditions and growth trends were gathered both through technical analysis and through public engagement activities about goals, challenges, and assets. Much of the information, analysis, and input came together initially in the rough draft scenarios, which were shared with the advisory committee and public in June 2019.

Feedback was received, compiled and shared with the public in a summary document in early September 2019. Refined scenarios and preliminary findings and recommendations were presented and discussed at a public workshop on October 7, 2019, as well as through the online project story map. An Advisory Committee meeting was held two weeks later to review and discuss plan progress to date, including public feedback, which were factored into the development of the rough draft plan, including the Proposed Land Use Plan, shown at right.

Map of Proposed Land Use Plan (from page 105 of November 2019 Rough Draft Southern New Castle County Master Plan)



Comments on the November 2019 rough draft plan

The comment period for the rough draft plan closed December 16, 2019. Thirteen individuals submitted comments, which are summarized below according to general topic.

Results from the most recent phase reflect support for the plan and associated sustainable growth strategies including emphasis on infill in the existing towns, a more precise and clear policy for sewer service, some targeted growth in unincorporated areas where it is coordinated with infrastructure, and preservation of environmentally sensitive areas, natural resources, and open space.

Many comments offer additional perspective to be considered in refinement of plan recommendations and implementation strategies.

Scenarios

- Support for development along SR1/Rt13, where major regional highways can support such development, but not in environmentally sensitive areas or areas susceptible to sea level rise.
- Scenarios focus too much on growth in Middletown.
- Does not focus enough on needs of farmers.
- Limiting growth around Townsend restricts town's ability to grow as they desire; request for a fourth scenario that shows additional growth outside of the existing municipal boundaries.
- Not sure there is economic demand for "dense villages" outside of existing towns.

Transportation

- Need transportation options for older residents who may no longer be able to drive.
- Concern that traffic has increased in Townsend due to area growth, not sure adequately captured in preliminary transportation analysis.
- Some updates needed to transit information, such as DART Route 120.
- Work with DeIDOT to identify potential areas for wildlife crossings or underpasses (e.g. associated for "new road link" project #20, which crosses Back Creek and associated forest corridors (page 55 of draft plan).
- Additional infrastructure improvements related to public transit needed for expansion of transit service to be successful, including: bus pads, sidewalks and improved ADA compliance in municipalities, and coordination of enhancements with new/re-development.
- To address the ever-growing senior population, 55+ communities should be sited at, or near, existing DART services. Developers should be encouraged to reach out to DART's Planning staff for input on where to best locate these communities to maximize multi-modal usage (auto, transit, pedestrian, bicycling).

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- I-95 corridor and route 1 traffic jams at Newark, Christiana. Rush hour. From Wilmington to Middletown.

Environment

- Concern about limiting sewer in/around Townsend and the ramifications
- Look further at alternatives to managing wastewater and a broader look at sources of watershed pollutant loads.
- Refine discussion of sea-level rise—pointing out wetlands already preserved, existing places like Port Penn, Augustine Beach and Bayview Beach are most at risk; make sure language is not “alarmist”.
- Need to take into account farmer’s desire to sell their land and their financial needs/motivations.
- Concerns about underlaying data and sources used to justify septic policy/proposed Sewer Service Area
- Water quality section should be expanded as existing environmental safeguards are very important. Include more detailed explanation of point and non-point monitoring and modeling, Total Maximum Daily Loads, watershed stewardship programs, groundwater monitoring, and Delaware Source Water Protection Program.
- Supportive of limiting major planned development to the sewer service areas; details of sewer expansion and timelines must be clearly defined for landowners through a transparent and predictable process.
- Support the work of the land preservation task force to develop strategies to protect and preserve farmland and ecologically sensitive areas, and funds for landowner compensation/assistance.
- Open space preservation by NCC need not all be for active recreation with associated acquisition and maintenance costs.
- Incorporate discussion of green infrastructure or nature-based solutions, and recommend additional design strategies/policies that expand existing protections for natural resources.
- Incorporate discussion of climate change impacts of heavy rain events and expand existing content on floodplains and flooding.
- Discussion of State Resource Area information needs to be updated to reflect current policy; refer to Delaware Wildlife Action Plan.
- Include recommendations for specific environmentally friendly best management practices to reduce quantity and improve quality of runoff, including low-impact development practices (LID) like bio-retention basins, raingardens, and pervious pavers.
- Consider strategies such as incentives to implement further protection and conservation of natural resources on private property, including improved forest and wetland habitat protections.

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- We suggest highlighting listed brownfields (map) that exist in the study area and municipalities within the study area; DNREC Brownfields Program can help redirect development from undeveloped areas toward redevelopment and cleanup of these sites by assisting developers.
- Work with DNREC Office of Nature Preserves for updates to natural areas inventory.

Other

- Continued growth in Townsend anticipated/desired; there is a desire for more commercial/industrial uses in the Townsend area.
- a more regional and integrated approach to planning is necessary.
- County needs to develop robust land preservation program (which takes into account different situations such as environmentally sensitive areas vs active farms) and conduct appropriate market analysis to identify the feasibility of a TDR program. If agricultural zoning is considered, this should be further discussed as part of the public process. Support for farmers should include the removal of barriers to supplemental income (agricultural support uses, roadside stands, etc.) and clarify the permitting process for agricultural buildings.
- Need greater emphasis/prioritize funding for ag land/open space preservation. Plan should acknowledge that for many families' life savings are held in the equity of their farms; also point out that equity in farms often serves as federally insured collateral and that the lender's right to this collateral is typically in the first position.
- "Legacy zoning" should be reevaluated specifically split zoned parcels, isolated rural NC21 parcels, provide predictability in S zoning (too many development options).
- General concern that needs of southern part of the study area are not being met nor issues fully taken into account
- concepts of "sprawl" and "sprawling development" should be defined based on density, service costs, etc.
- Concern about economic feasibility and character of compact growth focused in villages.
- Concern that relevant groups not adequately engaged.
- Avoid using buzz words like "smart growth" and "sprawl".
- Concerned about Townsend fiscal/economic sustainability; need ability to grow/extend beyond current geographic area of town.
- Concern about the effect on areas that were designated for growth and are being changed to preservation; impacts especially on farmers.