



City of Annapolis

Planning Commission
Department of Planning & Zoning
145 Gorman Street, 3rd Floor
Annapolis, MD 21401-2535

410-260-2200 • Fax 410-263-1129 • TDD use MD Relay or 711 • www.annapolis.gov

Resolution City of Annapolis Planning Commission Approving the Comprehensive Plan

WHEREAS: it is the duty of the Planning Commission, pursuant to the Land Use Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, to make and approve a plan to guide the physical development of the City; and

WHEREAS: the Planning Commission has delegated to the City Department of Planning and Zoning Staff the development a new comprehensive plan to update the current plan, which was adopted by the Annapolis City Council on October 5, 2009; and

WHEREAS: the work of the Planning and Zoning Staff in preparing the new plan has included:

1. An assessment of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan including its level implementation; changes to the city since the plans's adoption; and new opportunities and challenges facing Annapolis today;
2. The collection and analyses of current information on demographic and market trends; municipal growth and economic development; land use; housing; transportation; community facilities; arts, culture, and historic preservation; environmental sustainability; water resources, and other aspects of the City and its surroundings;
3. A fiscal impact analysis;
4. A forecast for household growth and future development;
5. The formulation of a plan vision and planning priorities,;
6. Desired characteristics for future development reflective of the Plan's goals;
7. The design of goals, performance measures, and recommended actions for each of the Plan's elements to guide development, conservation, and the provision of public facilities; A detailed implementation approach including targeted strategies and regulatory policies; and
8. Various small area or special topic plans which informed the development of the Comprehensive Plan including the West Annapolis Master Plan; the Military Installation Resilience Review; the Maritime Task Force Strategy; the Forest Drive Eastport Sector Study Task Force Report; the Housing Affordability Task Force Report; the Outdoor Dining Pilot Study; the Blue Technology Business Study and Strategy; and the 2020 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in the Baltimore Region;

WHEREAS: the Planning Commission was intimately involved in the development of the plan and provided feedback to Planning and Zoning Staff at multiple stages in the plan development; and

WHEREAS: the draft Comprehensive Plan was released for public review and comment on June 15, 2023 with print copies of the draft Plan available at the Michael E. Busch Library, the Eastport Annapolis Neck Library, City Hall, and the Department of Planning and Zoning, and digital copies available through a dedicated website at <https://www.annapolisahead2040.com>; and

WHEREAS: the Planning Commission conducted a series of public hearings on the draft Plan between June 15, 2023 and September 21, 2023, and over the course of those hearings considered the comments received including from members of the public, civic associations, the City's other Boards and Commissions, and written comments from the Maryland Department of Planning, and deliberated on revisions to the draft Plan in response to those comments; and

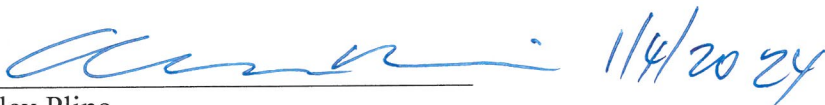
WHEREAS: Planning and Zoning Staff made numerous changes to the draft Plan to address the revisions approved by the Planning Commission;

WHEREAS: the Plan and its supporting findings and recommendations are set forth in text, maps, charts, and figures in a document entitled *Annapolis Ahead Comprehensive Plan 2040*; and

WHEREAS: the Planning Commission considers the plan to be a necessary guide to the future development of the City of Annapolis.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED, that the Planning Commission on this day, January 4, 2024, hereby adopts the *Annapolis Ahead Comprehensive Plan 2040* and recommends the Plan to the Annapolis City Council for adoption; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Planning Commission Chair hereby transmits a signed copy of this resolution to the Annapolis City Council.



Alex Pline

Chair, City of Annapolis Planning Commission

Annapolis Ahead Comprehensive Plan 2040
Review and Recommendation
January 4, 2024

BACKGROUND

The Comprehensive Plan’s guiding principles encompass a range of critical issues of our time—from housing affordability to transportation to economic and climate resilience. The Plan reflects a balanced approach to meeting the needs of the city. It acknowledges Annapolis is a popular place that has the associated pressures that go hand in hand with being a desirable location. Moreover, the Plan’s dedication to improving public realms, enhancing neighborhood character, and offering inclusive access to waterfront opportunities envision a city that is aesthetically pleasing and harmonious, providing spaces of leisure and enjoyment for all its residents.

The Plan is well organized. State statute requires certain elements; the Plan exceeds the requirements and, furthermore, organizes the whole into themes: The Thriving City, The Functional City and the Adaptive City. But perhaps most importantly, the Introduction sets the stage for how to read and understand the structure, the principles, and explains what the Plan is and how to use it. It is organized to walk the reader though from a high level perspective down to specific goals, suggested actions, and implementation. Interspersed with these goals and recommendations are concrete, contextual and well illustrated examples of what is intended. The Plan leverages performance metrics and recommended actions, providing a clear roadmap for all stakeholders, including city residents, property owners, and business entrepreneurs, aligning all toward a common goal. Finally, the addition of the Action Plan addendum provides a shorter, concise version of the Plan intended for broad consumption while the full document remains a comprehensive discussion on the themes, goals and actions of the Plan.

The Planning Commission has been intimately involved in the development of the Plan since its inception. While the Department staff researched and prepared the Plan, the Commission over many meetings provided input on the strategic direction as well as on many details; this has altered the Plan’s course at every step in the process. The Commission’s feedback, as well as the extensive input from the public through community meetings, online, and other feedback mechanisms, have been considered and incorporated into the Plan. As a result, the Commission is aligned with the content, goals and suggested actions of the final Plan. The Commission recommends the City pursue the strategic directions enunciated in the Plan.

MAJOR THRUSTS

The Plan addresses the major issues facing the city. However, several thrusts in these themes are prominent and are addressed differently from past Plans. These are land use, housing, transportation and resilience. They are interconnected and must be viewed within the contexts of current and future demographic trends.

Annapolis is changing economically, by age, and ethnically. Growth must be inclusive and there must be community solidarity. Annapolis faces a stark socioeconomic disparity and an affordability crisis. That urges a meticulous blueprint that ensures equitable development across neighborhoods.

By way of example of the interconnectedness of land use, housing and transportation, land use policy is essentially transportation policy. When one makes a land use decision, for all intents and purposes a transportation decision is made due to geography and subsequently transportation determines the viable housing options.

Additionally, the land area of the City is more or less fixed with limited room to expand; this adds a further constraint. As a result, the City must address the need for additional housing within the existing boundaries to meet the demographic demand; it cannot just build more neighborhoods on the edge of town.

The City has become increasingly bifurcated into lower and upper income residents and has become increasingly unaffordable for single persons and families — the classic middle class that earns around the median income. People who work in Annapolis, either in education, government or service industries, cannot afford to live here, which of course adds to transportation woes. What is needed is affordable housing and transportation for this middle segment of the population.

The housing section presents a candid and detailed examination of the housing challenges in Annapolis. The Plan identifies restrictive zoning policies and lack of flexibility as root causes of the existing housing affordability crisis. Prior to the introduction of single-use-based zones, Annapolis was filled with structures housing multiple units. Many are grandfathered in the older, revered sections of town as depicted on pages 144-145¹. Also, in mixed use zones, missing middle housing has been successfully built, a fact which supports the mixed use strategy suggested by the Plan.

The Plan proposes several solutions, both non-market-rate methodologies such as the MPDU and tax credit programs and also, non-subsidized, market-rate housing types referred to as the “missing middle.” These are duplexes, triplexes and quadplexes. The Plan suggests starting with zoning changes in certain selected places where the often currently exist and always suggests zoning and design changes carefully crafted so as not to upset community character.

The Plan does not recommend a generalized or radical upzoning and it recognizes that rapid growth at a large scale is undesirable. The recommended changes can be done to have little effect on much of the single family residential parts of the city. This type of infill development utilizes existing infrastructure and promotes walkability, which reduces automobile traffic. It also supports mixed use, which supports small businesses which support employment and keep money in the local economy.

Additionally, the Plan recommends simplifying the plethora of commercial, professional and mixed use zones into a smaller set of mixed use zones to support retail, residential, and institutional uses in close proximity. This strategy has been historically successful as noted in the “Why Mixed Use?” inset on page 98. Providing flexibility for the mix of uses to change over time will make those areas resilient to economic and preferential trends. Flexibility breeds resilience.

Infill redevelopment is another key idea outlined in the plan because it makes better use of parcels that are either functionally obsolete or don’t serve their surrounding communities very well. The inset on page 104 “Why Infill Redevelopment?” describes this perfectly:

“While many cities grow outward to address their changing goals, Annapolis is located on a peninsula and otherwise bordered by some of the most developed areas of Anne Arundel County within the Parole area. The City’s only option is to therefore more efficiently use the land already within its limits. This Plan prioritizes the infill redevelopment of many large sites dominated by single uses. Allowing flexibility will better address the city’s housing and environmental goals and help to change the prevailing land use pattern from one that is designed for cars to one that is designed for people. In general, these sites are located on major corridors, adjacent to transit, and sometimes in close proximity to higher densities of residents. Converting them into more dynamic, walkable and flexible mixed use places that might combine retail, residential, and institutional uses with updated stormwater

¹Page number references in this recommendation refer to the Final Draft Plan dated 12/29/2023

management, public open space, and more strategic use of parking is a signature strategy for implementing the vision of this Plan.”

A close study of the map of large sites anticipated for infill mixed-use redevelopment on pages 106-107 will reveal there are few large, but targeted sites, all along major thoroughfares. Smaller sites, with more generalized mixed-use zoning would also promote surgical infill redevelopment.

A major tactic for implementing the aforementioned land use changes is the concept of form based codes. The Plan spends considerable length on this topic; it explains what it is and provides a concrete example of a city quite similar to Annapolis. Applying form-based codes to certain areas would depart from the City’s long standing zoning practice. Currently, there are too many highly specific zones; they are complicated to implement, resulting in loopholes and unintended consequences. Additional enumeration of the details of form based codes is beyond the scope of this (or even the Plan’s scope), but suffice it to say that form based codes respond to the visceral responses people have to proposed changes: What will it look like and will it be similar to existing character and scale? These are questions that can be answered in the future development of form based codes specific to neighborhoods. This is something that our current use-based code and related standards fail miserably to accomplish, often resulting in complaints about “how the City could approve *that?*”

Our zoning map, especially the commercial and professional zones, should be simplified. Any alterations to the residential zones must be done carefully so as to maintain neighborhood characters. The historic and maritime zones should be maintained rigorously.

The city streets are for the most part as “built out” as possible; there remains little opportunity to expand the right of way and any small changes would not yield any significant changes in perceived auto congestion. As a result, the Plan does not devote any significant discussion on enhancing auto-based capacity. Rather, by promoting missing middle housing connected with improved forms of transportation, the Plan aims to reduce auto congestion and provide other lower cost and more efficient options.

Much of the transportation section emphasizes improved infrastructure for other modes such as active transportation (walking, bikes, scooters), and micro transit (electric cars or shuttles for short trips) and on-demand services. While some of these have been experimental, it is forward looking to advocate to see what works for Annapolis to reduce the short trips that often cause local congestion. The Plan speaks in terms of “networks” which are the key to enabling active modes to be pleasant, safe and effective for all ages. A local network can interface with the wider area network of active transportation facilities, sometimes reaching deep into the rest of Anne Arundel County. The Plan does acknowledge the low use of the Annapolis Transit system and points out that higher densities are needed to make high frequency fixed route transit a preferred mode. Hence, more flexible and micro solutions. Integration with county and state regional services is an avenue to pursue in the future.

The Plan for community facilities is a structured approach toward enhancing equitable access to parks and recreational amenities for all residents. The focus on equitable access to parks and recreational amenities for all demographic groups is a significant strength of the Plan. Addressing the issue of limited public access to the city’s waterfront is critical. The suggestion to link parks with the network of natural resources, bikeways, and trails through a comprehensive greenways effort is a strategic move that promises to enhance ecological and recreational connectivity for all residents.

The Plan is grounded in comprehensive research and analysis, including detailed mapping and forecasting. It guides the community toward a future capable of withstanding the multi-faceted challenges posed by climate change. Bolstering existing initiatives, such as concerted efforts in stormwater management and protecting and

expanding our tree canopy, with forward-looking strategies provides a robust roadmap towards an environmentally resilient community. Nurturing natural habitats, promoting greenways, and incorporating nature-based solutions to flooding mitigation are commendable. These approaches not only preserve the environment but also enrich the community.

Furthermore, the city’s commitment to protecting its cherished waterways signals an understanding of their central role in Annapolis’s cultural and environmental health. The Creekshed Framework is a technique that will “better calibrate the environmental effect of policy decisions so that residents, property owners, and business owners will become more aware of the impact of their own land use decisions on the city’s waterways” (page 118).

Other topics are addressed in depth: community facilities, arts & culture, environmental sustainability, water resources. The facts, analyses and recommendations are rich and deserve attention. However, because municipal growth, land use, housing, and transportation are more central to the Planning Commission’s focus, they are emphasized here.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

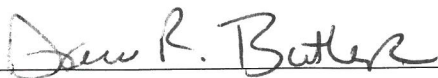
The Plan puts forth goals and suggests actions that can be taken to achieve these goals. It indicates in a simple way the degrees of difficulty and costs of the actions. These goals and recommended actions are just that — goals and recommendations. They are not automatically made into law by the adoption of the Plan by the City Council; rather they are guidance for our legislative branch to develop specific laws to implement these goals. Furthermore, the Plan provides an excellent framework and specific guidance for residents, developers and staff as they consider development proposals that require “consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.”

On this day January 4, 2024 by a vote of 4-0 the Planning Commission recommends adoption of the *Annapolis Ahead Comprehensive Plan 2040* and strongly encourages the City government to begin and to persist in the difficult work of implementing the goals in this Comprehensive Plan as soon as reasonably possible.

While they are not signatories to this recommendation, the Planning Commission wishes to recognize the significant contributions made during their terms by David Iams, Teresa Pico, and Ben Sale.



Chair, Alex Pline



Member, Diane Butler



Member, Stephen Reilly

[Not Present]

Member, Thomas Sfakiyanudis



Member, Robert H. Waldman