

## ENVIRONMENTAL, SENSITIVE, CRITICAL AREAS

### INTRODUCTION

The Maryland Economic Growth Resource Protection and Planning Act of 1992 requires all comprehensive plans in the State to include a Sensitive Areas element that describes goals and polices that will protect steams and their buffers; the 100-year flood plain; habitats of threatened and endangered species; and steep slopes.

This element is extremely important to the citizens of North Beach who live along the western side of the Chesapeake Bay and its adjacent marshes and ecosystem. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay confronts the town on a daily basis as they strive to protect a natural resource that provides them with beauty, recreation, serenity, and a special quality of life. Historically, the Bay's presence has provided the town with a focal point that is appreciated and that cannot be more emphasized or respected.

The Town is bordered on it's east side by the waters of the Chesapeake Bay, on the north by a large tidal wetland system that in the past has been considered to be adjacent to a parcel that had been considered for a Nature and History Center that would accentuate the wetland habit. The proposal which appears to still have some residents interested would consist of a 20,000 square foot building with a viewing platform and boardwalk through the adjacent wetlands. As such, the proposal could be a potential draw for tourists to the area. In addition, rental equipment like canoes, kayaks, and other water related sports equipment would be appropriate to increase revenues for the town near the marshland or bay.

This marsh and swamp wetland system is hydraulically connected to the Chesapeake Bay via several culverts that run under Maryland Route 261. This system should be flushed regularly to keep the ecosystem healthy and to avoid stagnation. A recent letter from the Department of Natural Resources has indicated that one endangered species, the Long-awned Diplachne (*Leptochloa fascicularis*) a plant species near salt ponds with uncertain state status that is considered to be rare, has been found in this area and should be protected. In addition, the forested area on the north side of Town contains Forest Interior Dwelling Bird habitat, the conservation of which is mandated within the Critical Areas.

In addition to the Bay and its' marshes and wetlands, the 100 year flood plain is ever present within the Town. As the Town continues to grow, the floodplain that threatens a large part of town should be considered for parking areas and parkland, especially if any buildings constructed in this area cannot be flood proofed. A buffer area should be placed adjacent to all sensitive areas and development plans should be in compliance with this buffer zone.

The Chesapeake Bay Critical Area 1000 foot boundary extends into town and impacts portions of land adjacent to Erie, Frederick, and Greenwood Avenues, and parts of Second to Eight Streets north of Dayton Avenue. (See Map EN-1.) The Critical Area Buffer is a naturally vegetated area extending 100 feet landward from the tidal waters, wetlands or tributaries. Human activity in the buffer is to be minimized. However, development in North Beach has been in place long before the State enacted the Critical Area law in 1984. The regulations associated with these boundaries can be found in the adopted North Beach Zoning Ordinance.

Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay is definitely acknowledged by the town's residents and a resource that provides fishing, swimming, boating, and beauty. The Town knows they must attain an appropriate balance between development and environmental and sensitive area's preservation and should develop polices to help developers, businesses, and citizens to achieve that balance. Protecting water quality is a goal that is achievable and should always be included in review and approval of development projects and any construction conducted in Town.

North Beach does have a number of existing policies and regulations that are designed to protect the environment and sensitive areas. Town officials have adopted the Chesapeake Bay Critical Areas Program, have practiced the existing Storm Water Management and Flood Plain Management Ordinances that are approved by the State; and, they are in compliance with the Forest Conservation Regulations of the State. In addition there are Federal and State regulations that are incorporated within North Beach's Land Development and Preservation Ordinances that protect tidal wetlands, water quality, and other sensitive components of the Town's environment when reviewing development requests. As the Town grows, it will be more difficult to meet the challenge of providing green areas; however, doing so will provide a most appreciated commodity.

The boardwalk/bike path is a fine example of a recreational greenway in North Beach; It is a one and one quarter miles boardwalk that is 16 feet wide. Although there is a bike path along the boardwalk, it is important to link this feature of the community with the entire town.

Future paths, trails, and observation areas of the natural environment and its wildlife would expand the greenway and provide additional recreational opportunities and attract environmentalists to the area. Passive and Active recreational activities are possible here.

One improvement that was requested by some residents during the citizen survey was providing an improved streetscape. Streetscape improvements that include street trees have many environmental and aesthetic benefits. Trees are capable of up taking storm water, cleaning, and cooling the environment and providing shade during the intense summer heat. The Town should adopt a street tree list that would provide trees that are resistant to high winds, provide several appropriate varieties so that there would be less susceptibility to blight or disease of any one species, and trees that do not have a root system that is characteristic of destruction of sidewalks and streets. A street tree list should be required for trees planted in the public right of way and in public projects. Although there are not many projects greater than 40,000 square feet that require Forest Conservation to be done in Town, there are requirements in the Forest Conservation Program statewide that allows for landscaping and street trees to be planted in certain circumstances when a project must meet the requirement. There are also grants to municipalities for urban planting awarded by the State.

Many of the goals and policies that were featured in the 1998 Comprehensive Plan can be found in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan with new goals and policies that are in conjunction with newly adopted State requirements and the Calvert County Comprehensive Plan.

## ENVIRONMENTAL, SENSITIVE, AND CRITICAL AREA GOALS

1. Establish a comprehensive environmental effort that encourages protection, preservation, and conservation of the Town's sensitive areas and ensures continuance of a healthy and pleasant place for current and future residents to live. Through education and interaction with nature, promote stewardship of the land and water as an ethic that guides public and private actions in Town.

2. Land use regulations must be updated to reflect the adoption of this Comprehensive Plan and minimize impacts to the natural environment.
3. Continue to practice land planning that focuses on good site design and public works operations that protect natural resources and minimizes detrimental effects to the environment.
4. Provide multi-modal options for transportation that are environmental friendly and encourage a reduction of vehicular trips as the Town grows.
5. Continue to encourage resource recovery and techniques to save water inside and outside the homes and encourage practices that reduce erosion in North Beach. Provide educational information on the Town's web page.
6. Encourage regeneration of lost or damaged natural and man-made environmental features.
7. Continue to pursue grants for funding environmentally sound public projects.

## POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

### **Policy EN.1: Encourage protection and minimize adverse impacts of public and privately owned wetlands and the 100 year floodplain.**

#### Implementation Strategies

1. Inventory the privately owned wetlands and land within the 100 year flood plain and establish incentives to preserve them and minimize any negative impacts to them.
2. Purchase property or obtain easements in the vicinity of the wetlands so that the Town can protect the wetlands and eco-safe recreational activities can take place.
3. Plan and redesign the History and Bayside Nature Center to provide historic and environmental education for the citizens and tourists during the twenty year planning period.
4. Promote appreciation of the natural environment by capitalizing on the educational and recreational values and opportunities in the natural area at the north end of Town

### **Policy EN.2: Encourage regeneration of lost or damaged natural and man-made environmental features.**

#### Implementation Strategies

1. Reinstate and promote the Tree City program to enhance streetscapes that provide shade and reduce storm water. A tree list should be used that lists trees that are indigenous to the area.
2. Establish a tree species list for planting within the Town and establish a maintenance schedule for pruning so that trees will not impede the view shed of the Bay.
3. Identify properties within the 100 year flood plain **that could be protected from future development.**
4. Explore sources for availability of excess materials for beach nourishment for erosion abatement purposes.
5. Protect steep slopes and require landscaping and trees to be part of the site planning process.
6. Restore the wetlands between Holland Point and the Town.
7. Identify sites available for tree planting and off-site mitigation.

### **Policy EN.3: Promote and plan educational programs to foster and provide a greater public awareness of the importance for conserving and sustaining natural and man-made resources.**

### Implementation Strategies

1. Encourage citizens to use techniques to save water, properly dispose of pollutants, and to recycle household waste.
2. Establish a public education campaign for recycling solid waste and reduce the waste stream taken to the landfill.
3. Encourage voluntary cooperation by the Town's citizens, businesses, and landowners in conserving as much of the natural vegetation as is feasible.
4. Encourage and educate Town residents to voluntarily use rain barrels to collect water from their roof drains for their yards; and, to compost and mulch their own yard waste such as grass clipping, leaves, and twigs to reduce the waste stream and to improve the saturation rate in their yard.

#### **Policy EN.4: Continue to maintain a sufficient and potable water supply for consumption and fire-protection.**

### Implementation Strategies

1. Provide an educational program to consider placing fluoride in the Town's potable water.

#### **Policy EN.5: Maintain a safe and efficient collection and treatment of sewerage, and continue to provide for efficient and innovative storm water management.**

### Implementation Strategies

1. During development review, establish pocket parks to provide passive recreation and bio-retention (rain gardens) to absorb, clean, and reduce storm water management.

#### **Policy EN. 6: Coordinate implementation of new and existing environment protection programs and regulations in partnership with Calvert County and the State.**

### Implementation Strategies

1. Continue to coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions to ensure the adequacy and efficiency of wastewater treatment in the Town of North Beach.
2. Work with the State Highway Administration to prevent channel clogging in the North Wetland area along Route 261 between the Bay water and the tidal marsh.

#### **Policy EN.7: Resolve unavoidable competitions between economic and environmental policy through the use of flexible regulations and innovative development techniques.**

### Implementation Strategies

1. Periodically review updates to any Environmental regulations and update land use regulations for compliance.
2. Continue to improve and streamline development regulations.
3. During development review, encourage site designs that orient the buildings in the Waterfront Renaissance district to provide for the best view sheds of the Chesapeake Bay.
4. Promote green building and low impact development.

**Policy EN.8: Protect rare, threatened and endangered species.**

**Implementation Strategies**

1. Establish standards in the development review process to require evaluation of the presence of rare, threatened and endangered species on development sites.

**Policy EN.9: Evaluate and seek funding for the Town's storm water facilities and provide for upgrades for the benefits of all citizens.**

**Implementation Strategies**

1. Continue to eliminate or control storm water problems by enforcing the Town's storm water management ordinance and identify any innovative ways to reduce storm water.
2. Require storm filters in new and reconstructed parking lots to treat storm water.
3. Strive to reduce impervious cover and promote best practices for storm water management.
4. Incorporate Low Impact Development (LID) techniques into the Land Use Regulations.