

**DRAFT**  
**April 2009**

**BALTIMORE COUNTY, MARYLAND**

**MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT:**

***RURAL AREAS***



**April 2009**

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BALTIMORE COUNTY, MARYLAND  
OFFICE OF PLANNING

AMENDMENT TO RURAL AREAS of  
*Master Plan 2010*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**INTRODUCTION**

This amendment to the “Rural Areas” section of Baltimore County *Master Plan 2010* complies with two mandates. First, the County Charter requires the Plan be amended at least every ten years. The last revision, adopted in 2000, is being updated to propose changes necessary to ensure the sustainability and continued prosperity of the rural areas. Second, the *Agricultural Stewardship Act of 2006*, (a.k.a. House Bill 2, or HB 2) passed by the Maryland General Assembly, provides for a “priority preservation element”, and associated protective strategies, to be included in the Master Plan. These mandates will be addressed through adoption and implementation of the actions proposed in this amendment. The Office of Planning convened a committee with the Department of Environmental Protection and Resource Management (DEPRM) to develop this document.

**Master Plan 2010**

Since 1974, when the first agricultural lands were placed in a permanent protected easement, Baltimore County has been in the forefront of agricultural protection. More than 53,000 acres are in perpetual easements, over halfway to the goal of permanently protecting 80,000 acres. *Master Plan 2010* did its part in encouraging preservation, promoting agricultural uses and industries, identifying the needs for refining the preservation area boundaries and suggesting the development of standards for rural roads.

**The New Master Plan**

The basic concepts set forth in *Master Plan 2010*, and precedent plans, are continued with this latest amendment. However, preservation, protection and promotion of agriculture are strengthened by actions to be implemented. In response to HB 2, the land preservation programs will be closely monitored, and an evaluation of these programs will be completed each time the Master Plan is updated. Any shortcomings identified by these analyses will be addressed.

The County will investigate policies and regulations to promote and stabilize the agricultural and forestland base so that development does not convert or compromise these resources. Effects of encroaching development on the agricultural industry will be carefully examined and mitigated, and denied if necessary, to assist farmers in maintaining their livelihoods.

This amendment introduces the concept of “sustainable” agriculture. Through education, economic support, flexibility in regulations and policies, and discussions with the agricultural industry and communities, the County will promote the sustainability of agriculture. A farm that cannot make a profit is destined for failure. There are many reasons that affect profitability, including costs associated with transportation, processing and competition with larger operations. Actions listed that enable local production, processing and sale of farm products will help the industry to continue and flourish.

Negative impacts of storm water runoff from farms on the natural environment are well documented. Sediments, fertilizers and pesticides in this runoff can be reduced substantially by “best management practices” being employed by farmers. The Actions described in this Master Plan amendment require soil conservation, water quality and nutrient management plans be adhered to by the agricultural industry. Additionally, new innovations and incentives will be investigated to further mitigate environmental impacts of farming.

In 2008, the County adopted a new manual into the Department of Public Works’ *Design Manual*, entitled *Rural Road Standards*. The increasing population resulting in more traffic, along with the need for maintenance, requires repairs and often redesign of travel ways. State and Federal funding may require certain safety improvements on bridges and roads that often include widening and straightening. The *Rural Roads Standards*, which was developed with significant public input, provides specific designs to minimize disturbances, reduce widths and amounts of paving. The historic nature and the “country feel” of roads in the rural area will be saved, to the extent possible, subject to public safety requirements. The new Master Plan will require these rural road standards to be implemented.

Preservation of drinking water, agricultural forestland and natural resources will continue, and be strengthened with the new *Master Plan*. Sustainable agricultural practices, encouraged and promoted by the County, will help the industry face economic challenges well into the future. Actions for the protection of the scenic and historic nature of rural areas are included. Continuous monitoring of the progress of implementing the Actions listed, and resultant revisions and updating will ensure success of these efforts. The citizens of Baltimore County will enjoy the valuable attributes of the rural areas for many years.

**COMPARISON OF PRESENT AND PROPOSED RURAL AREAS SECTION OF  
THE MASTER PLAN**

<i>Master Plan 2010</i>	<i>PROPOSED Master Plan 2020</i>
Identifies need to refine agricultural preservation areas' boundaries.	Refines agricultural preservation areas' boundaries to meet the requirements of House Bill 2.
Preserves agricultural lands through various programs.	Maintains the goal of preserving 80,000 acres through land preservation programs.
Encourages preservation and protection of agricultural lands and uses.	Continues the protection of agricultural lands and uses through growth management tools, and adds monitoring of development.
Supports growth management plans and regulations.	Supports the continuation of growth management plans and regulations.
Encourages activities to promote and protect agricultural industries.	Provides focus on and emphasizes <i>sustainable agricultural activities</i> to promote and protect agricultural industries.
Requires creation of rural road standards.	Provides for implementation of the <i>Rural Roads Standards</i> manual.
Evaluation of the Land Preservation Program not directly addressed.	Provides for evaluation of the Land Preservation Program as part of any Master Plan update.

## **RURAL AREAS**

One major goal of the Master Plan is to protect agricultural and sensitive environmental areas of the rural county for future generations. This objective is achieved through use of the following comprehensive growth management measures: the urban-rural demarcation line, zoning classifications, land use regulations, the purchase and donation of permanent conservation easements on the land, and the implementation of recommended actions of the Master Plan.

The urban-rural demarcation line (URDL), adopted in 1967, is the boundary between urban and rural areas. Approximately 2/3 of the County is located outside the URDL and is thus classified as rural. Public water and sewer serve properties inside this area, while outside the URDL private water wells and sewage disposal systems are utilized. These private systems are constrained by environmental factors and therefore restrict development due to design criteria and physical limitations. Approximately 97,000 persons reside in the rural areas, representing about 12% of the total County population.

Resource conservation (RC) zones restrict the number, configuration, size and location of new building lots to enable agriculture. These zones also protect natural resources while permitting growth at levels that will not compromise the resource values of the land. County land development regulations and policies require, among other things, minimum setbacks from new residences to existing farms, and notification of future homeowners regarding various characteristics of living next to a working farm: odors, dust, pesticide use and long working hours.

The protection of land for agriculture has been a key component of the rural growth management of the County for over 40 years. Significant public funds have been invested in the permanent protection of cropland, pasture and woodland to maintain and foster a viable agricultural industry. This forward-looking effort by the County has become more important with the national attention on issues such as energy conservation, sustainability, and national security. Promotion of local farms can improve the quality and security of our food supply and play a role in solving other environmental problems including climate change.

Historic and scenic resources are valuable attributes also warranting preservation. These properties and areas are very important to the quality of life. Saving historic and scenic settings is accomplished in partnerships with State and Federal agencies, private organizations, and property owners.

Rural areas should continue to receive only those levels of services necessary to address basic public health, safety and welfare. Schools serve larger areas. Infrastructure is carefully planned to address limited population growth and to maintain rural character. In a rural area, roads are narrower and, combined with reduced design speed, traffic is slower. Medical facilities, stores, and other public services are concentrated in urban areas. The County does not provide increased levels of service where population density does not justify them.

Development of large institutions such as places of worship, private schools, retreats and other similar uses present a variety of concerns when located in rural areas. The size of a facility, increased traffic, well and septic systems, impervious surfaces and other environmental issues, and the impact on the existing rural character are important factors to consider if institutional uses

are proposed. A study may be appropriate to determine if and where these uses should be permitted.

Actions to limit growth in the rural portion of the County resulted in a fairly low rate of residential growth in recent years. In the entire rural area, an average of 227 residential occupancy permits was issued annually since 1980. An annual average of 128 residential occupancy permits were approved in the Agricultural Priority Preservation Areas (APPA's), while an average of 2604 permits were issued each year inside the URDL (Table 1). This limited development and the protection of rural lands through easements and public ownership demonstrate the effectiveness of these efforts. The County's programs will continue to control growth at a level that meets the objectives of this Master Plan.

**Table 1  
Occupancy Permits Issued From 1980 Through 2007**

	<b>AREA (Acres)</b>	<b>PERMITS</b>	<b>AVG. ANNUAL PERMITS</b>
<b>INSIDE URDL</b>	130,660	72,923	2,604
<b>OUTSIDE URDL</b>	258,617	6,359	227
<b>INSIDE APPA</b>	141,480	3,584	128
<b>TOTAL COUNTY</b>	389,277	79,282	2,832

Protecting rural resources has involved cooperative efforts by the County, the State and citizen groups. The most significant milestones are listed below.

- 1963: Plan for the Valleys written by Wallace-McHarg Associates for citizens of Greenspring and Worthington valleys concerned with the impact of development in the 1950s.
- 1967: Adoption of the URDL as a limit for the "Master Water and Sewer Plan".
- 1974: Donation of first easement to Maryland Environmental Trust.
- 1975: Adoption of resource conservation zones that include protection of agricultural areas.
- 1979: Adoption of the "Master Plan" that describes the importance of protecting natural resources including agriculture, watersheds and the rural landscape.
- 1979: Significant reduction of permitted density in the agricultural zone through a change in the zoning regulations.
- 1980: Adoption and County funding of the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation that seeks to purchase development rights, which provides an equitable tool for landowners to permanently protect rural lands.
- 1989: Adoption of the 1989-2000 Master Plan that reinforced the earlier planning and regulatory goals to protect agricultural land and rural landscapes and include designated rural Land Management Areas.
- 1989: Adoption of a development regulation to protect prime and productive soils.
- 1992: Adoption of the "Smart Growth Policies".
- 1994: Adoption of a local "Purchase of Development Rights" program to supplement the state program.

- 1996: Comprehensive Zoning: approximately 9,000 acres of rural land changed from RC 4 to RC 2.
- 1997: Adoption and County funding of the State Rural Legacy Program.
- 2000: Comprehensive Zoning: approximately 18,700 acres of rural land changed from RC 4 to RC 2.
- 2000: Adoption of Master Plan 2010 sets goal to preserve 80,000 acres of agricultural land through permanent easements.
- 2000: Creation of RC6 and RC7 resource protection zones.
- 2004: Creation of RC8 resource protection zone.
- 2004: Comprehensive Zoning: approximately 48,000 acres of rural land changed from RC 4 to RC 2.
- 2006: The *Agricultural Stewardship Act of 2006* (House Bill 2) passed by the State General Assembly requires a “Priority Preservation Element” in the Master Plan, preserving agricultural lands.
- 2006 House Bill 1141, *Land Use – Local Government Planning*, also passed by the State General Assembly, requires a “Water Resources Element” which should evaluate and recommend changes in rural zoning and development controls to improve protection of surface and groundwaters.
- 2008: The *Rural Roads Standards* manual was adopted to provide design standards that emphasize public safety and maintenance, while retaining existing character of the roads.

## **PROTECTING RURAL RESOURCES AND MANAGING GROWTH**

The rural portion of the County provides high quality drinking water, agricultural products, timber, scenic open space, wildlife habitat, fisheries, recreation, water sports and cultural and historic resources. New development changes the character of the countryside and has detrimental impacts on these resources. Baltimore County’s *Rural Land Management Areas* protect resources and rural economies while permitting limited development. Since 1989, rural resources have been managed by growth policies for each Land Management Area. These areas include: agricultural priority preservation, resource preservation, rural residential areas, and rural commercial centers (See map).

The County’s rural natural environment has a wide variety of resources including wetlands, streams, reservoirs, forests, mineral deposits, groundwater, and the Chesapeake Bay. The land management approach, which concentrates development and infrastructure in the urban area, strives to protect these natural resources by limiting development in the remaining rural area. The emphasis in the rural area is on conservation of natural resources, in contrast to the focus on restoration of natural resources in the urban area. The *Urban Areas* section of this Master Plan has a more complete discussion of resource restoration techniques.

The United States Department of Agriculture states, “Agricultural land preservation constitutes sensible resource management for sustainable agriculture”. Baltimore County agrees, and further defines land preservation as an effective management tool for protecting and preserving natural and cultural resources. The County’s land preservation efforts are among the most successful in the Nation. This success is in part due to the strategy of protecting land in the short term through restrictive resource zoning, and conserving land for the long term through preservation easements. Perpetual easements are the only way that preservation of the rural landscapes can be



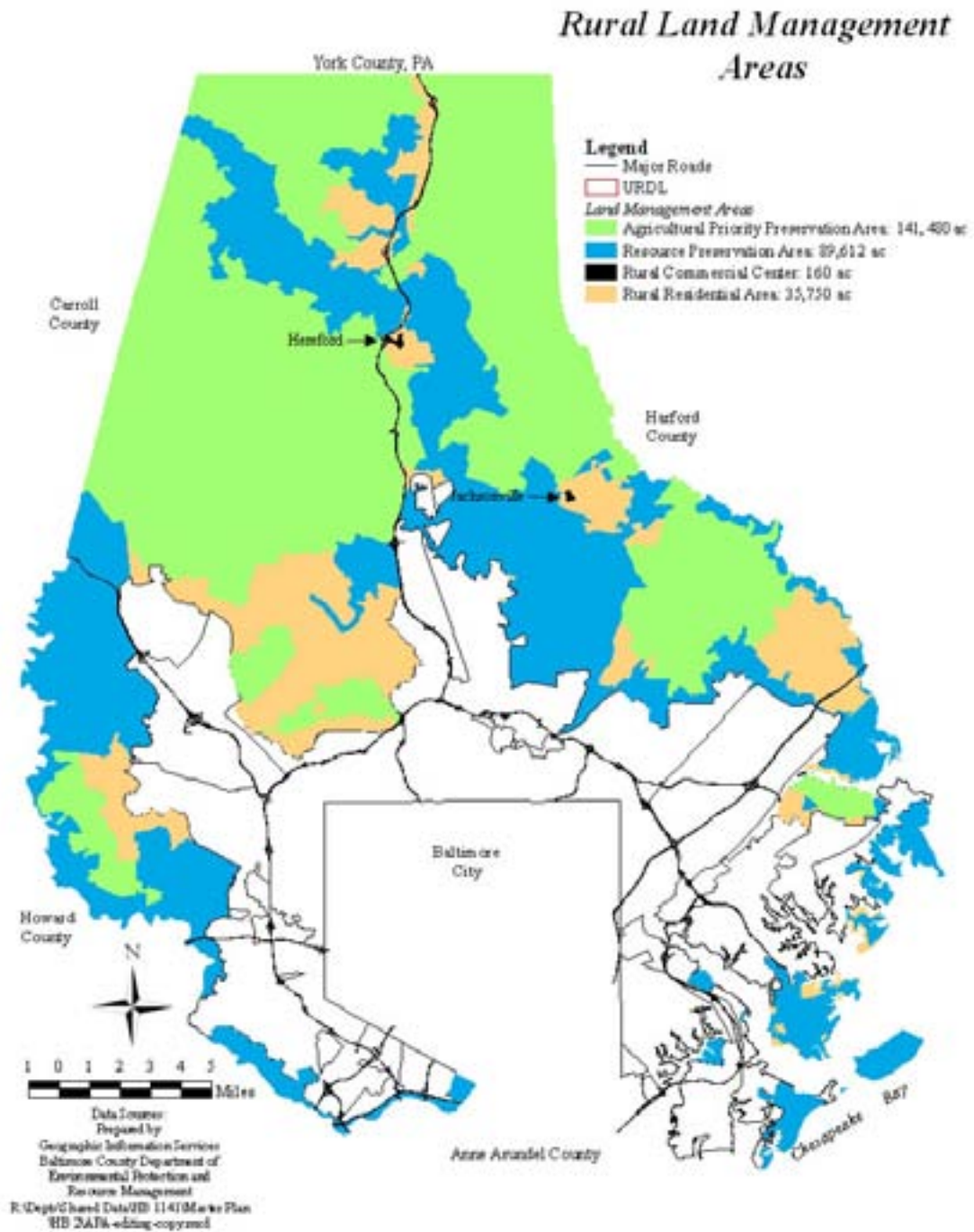
guaranteed. Fair compensation to landowners is provided to maintain the land in private ownership. Additionally, preserved privately owned lands stay on the tax roll.

In 2007 the County reached a milestone of having preserved over 53,000 acres: more than sixty percent of the way to the goal of 80,000 acres. Since 2003, when 40,000 acres had been preserved, in excess of 13,000 acres have been added (Table 2). To achieve the ultimate 80,000-acre goal, the County must seek adequate funding, explore innovative purchase techniques, refine programs, and dramatically increase the amount of donated easements.

**Table 2**  
**Accomplishments of Easement Programs Through January 1, 2008**

<b>PRESERVATION PROGRAM</b>	<b>ACRES</b>
Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation	21,474
Baltimore County Agricultural Program	3,798
Maryland Environmental Trust, Local Land Trusts and Rural Legacy	23,972
Cluster	3,785
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53,029</b>

The first conservation easement in Baltimore County was donated to the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) in 1974. In 1981, landowners' options for preservation were greatly expanded with adoption of the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF). Now, landowners can choose between MET, MALPF, the County's Agricultural Land Preservation Program, Rural Legacy (State or County), Federal Scenic Highways, Federal Farm and Ranch Protection Program, private land trust easements and cluster easements.



### **AGRICULTURAL PRIORITY PRESERVATION AREAS**

The 1989 Master Plan first designated “Agricultural Preservation Area” boundaries. These areas, listed in the following table, were reconfirmed in subsequent plans. The areas are based on their capability for agricultural production and the existence of agricultural operations and preserved lands.

In 2006, the County hired The Conservation Fund to analyze the agricultural land preservation goal of 80,000-acres to determine if the goal was feasible, and to verify the boundaries of the Agricultural Preservation Areas (APA's). At the time, 49,120 acres of rural lands were in preservation. The consultant looked at all parcels outside the URDL, eliminated all developed parcels, and determined a refined set of priority unprotected parcels equaling 50,274 acres (See Table 3). Of that number, 7,500 acres were outside the 1989 Master Plan designated APA's. These results indicated there is sufficient land remaining to meet the 80,000-acre goal, and minor adjustments should be made to the APA's to include additional land.

**Table 3  
Status of Rural Land Preservation – 2006 Analysis**

<b>RURAL LAND</b>	<b>ACRES</b>
<b>Total Land outside of URDL</b>	231,161
<b>Total Land in Preservation</b>	49,120
<b>Total unprotected Land outside URDL</b>	157,319
<b>Unprotected/undeveloped Land that meets Agricultural Program Criteria</b>	50,274
<b>Area Required to meet 80,000 acre goal</b>	30,880

*Source: The Conservation Fund, 2006 Report*

This plan adjusts these areas to include the additional lands, and renames the areas as "Agricultural Priority Preservation Areas" (APPA's). The areas were renamed to conform to HB2.

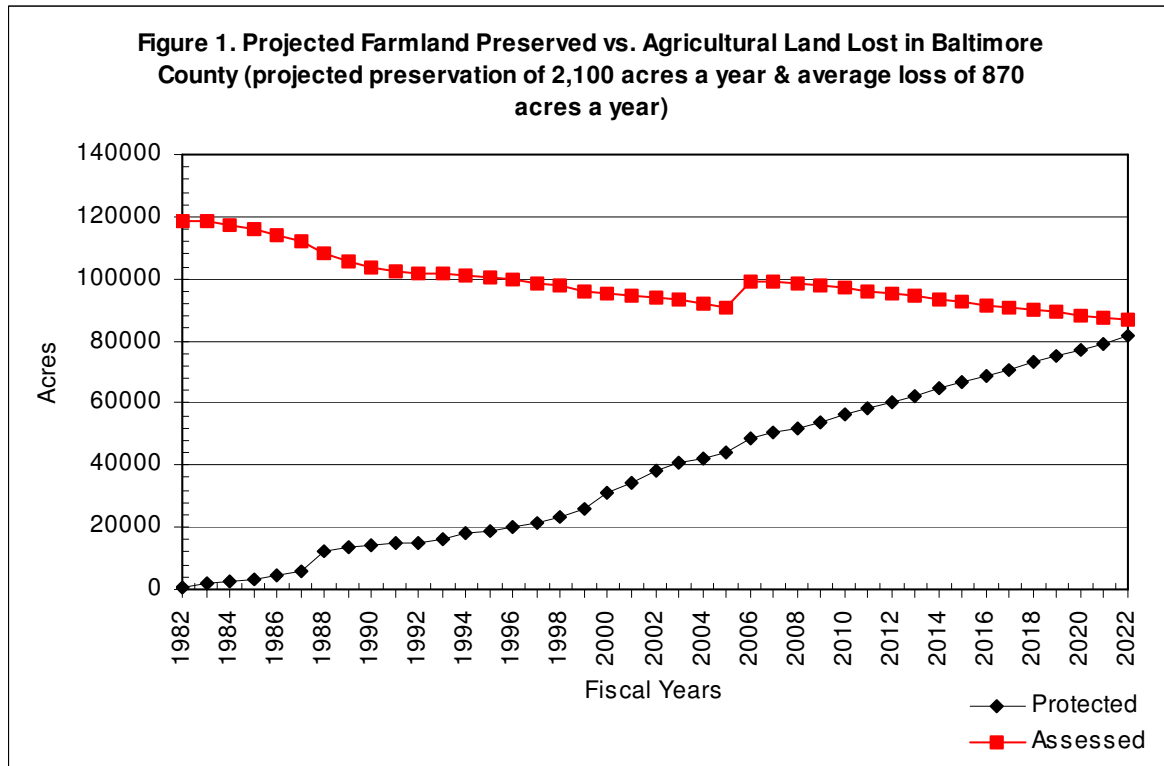
<b>AGRICULTURAL PRIORITY PRESERVATION AREAS</b>		
• Freeland	• Whitehall & Manor	• Upperco/Worthington & Sparks
• Long Green	• Caves Valley	• Greenspring Valley
• Ebenezer Road	• Granite	

**GENERAL POLICIES**

- Permanently preserve lands for agriculture and natural resources to achieve the goal of 80,000 acres within 10 years.
- Recognize and promote sustainable agriculture as a vital economic, commercial, and industrial activity that requires permanent protection.
- Manage development to protect agricultural lands and prevent conflicts between agricultural operations and incompatible uses.
- Ensure the proper management of agricultural lands to protect water quality and natural resources.

**Specific Policy: Permanently preserve agricultural and natural resource lands through Conservation Easements and other similar legal instruments**

Baltimore County has been in the top ten nationally for agricultural land preservation for the past ten years. The rate of preservation has been plotted against the rate of loss based upon acreage converted through development (Figure 1).



**Actions**

1. Continue to seek and encourage the donation and sale of easements through the various land preservation programs.
2. Identify and protect parcels large enough to support normal agricultural and forestry activities from the limited development permitted in the APPA.
3. Fairly compensate farmers for loss of development rights.
4. Monitor the Agricultural Priority Preservation Areas to ensure that at least 80% of the remaining undeveloped land is either under easement or temporarily protected by restrictive zoning (such as RC 2).
5. As part of any update to this section of the Master Plan the County will:
  - Determine progress towards meeting the goals of the MALPF;
  - Evaluate any shortcomings in the County's ability to achieve the goals of MALPF;
  - Determine and implement actions to correct identified shortcomings.

**Specific Policy: Foster a sustainable agricultural industry**

The policy to foster a sustainable agricultural industry has gained a new level of significance with the success of preserving over 50,000 acres of rural land. The County's agricultural industry is diverse and robust with an annual economic production estimated to be \$300 million (See Table 5). There is an opportunity now with the land preservation accomplishments and momentum to build an even stronger and more *sustainable* agricultural economy. Without diminishing the support for commodity production, the mainstay of the county's agricultural industry, there clearly is an opportunity for increasing local food production. The benefits of local food production are enormous and include energy conservation, sustainability, food security, and the potential for green jobs for the young people of our County.

The majority of land in agricultural production is in grain and livestock production. Large farms must survive on large volumes and low profits per item: to do this they must be efficient and able to get their products to competitive markets. The County can address the local issues of transportation, right-to-farm laws, and local tax benefits to support these operations.

The horse industry is one of the largest economic agricultural industries in the County. Nationally, the thoroughbred horse industry is very strong, with sales and breeding fees up. These increases are typically linked to the quality of the track facilities, promotion, and wagering handles (purses). However, Maryland's thoroughbred industry is at a crossroads. The County should support state efforts to improve racing facilities and the overall health of the industry.

The County has significant nursery and greenhouse production. Several of its growers are nationally recognized for the quality of their plant production. This industry is constantly changing in order to be successful. Laws, regulations and policies need to be constantly reviewed to promote the success of this industry while protecting the rural character of the surrounding communities.

The County, like the State, is seeing a strong interest in consumers who desire both local agricultural production and an experience relating to agricultural production. Operations such as wineries, pumpkin festivals, community supported agriculture, and direct market business operations are all part of the emerging agricultural economy. As with the nursery and greenhouse production, zoning laws, county regulations, and health department regulations need to be reviewed to remove unattainable burdens from these industries while still protecting public health and community character.

**Table 4**  
**Baltimore County Agriculture**  
**Maryland Agricultural Statistics**  
**(2006)**

<b>Number of Farms</b>	784
<b>Average Farm Size</b>	91 acres
<b>Total Farmland</b>	71,227 acres
<b>Total Cropland</b>	48,525 acres

**Table 5**  
**Total Value Agricultural Sales**  
**(2006)**

<b>Crop Products</b>	62,160,000
<b>Nurseries &amp; Greenhouses</b>	124,000,000
<b>Equine</b>	121,800,000
<b>Vegetables</b>	6,398,000

*Source: The Conservation Fund, 2006 Report*

**Actions:**

1. The County Economic Development Office will continue to offer loans and economic support for sustainable agricultural operations.
2. Complete an Agricultural Profitability Study and update it to provide for actions that enhance the sustainability of existing agriculture and promote the expansion of production and processing of local products.
3. Review County Zoning and Development regulations to provide for legitimate farm production and processing.
4. Finish construction of the Baltimore County Center for Maryland Agriculture, which will promote a sustainable agricultural industry, provide for educational opportunities for the public and other activities, including recreation.
5. Facilitate discussions with the agricultural community and surrounding neighbors regarding the new agricultural economies (i.e. sell what you grow, farm markets) and potential impacts on quality of life..
6. Permit ancillary activities that allow farmers to sell products grown on the farm directly to customers, and promote certain farms as a destination stop for tourists and visitors.
7. Ensure that County regulations provide flexibility in agricultural operations and enable them to adapt to changing economic conditions.
8. Work with the Maryland Department of Agriculture, the University of Maryland Extension Service, and the County Department of Economic Development to assist farm businesses in marketing to new local, national, and international consumers.
9. Support Farm Bureau educational activities such as the “Agriculture in the Classroom” program at Hereford Middle and High Schools, and a new mobile agricultural classroom.
10. Support the Farm Bureau program that identifies agricultural products produced in the County, which assists in the marketing of locally produced goods.
11. Establish a program to assist young farmers in accessing capital to purchase farmland.
12. Continue to foster and monitor the relationship between large-scale producers and landowners that lease land.
13. Investigate what other counties have done to solicit new agricultural operations.
14. Encourage sustainable practices in the individual farm, and by sector countywide.

**Specific Policy: Manage Development to Limit Conflicts with the Agricultural Industry**

While the County is a leader in the Country with its restrictive agricultural zoning and planning for agriculture, there are threats to its continued success. Despite the diligent efforts of

successive County Councils and Administrations to maintain and expand the agricultural zoning, incremental development continues to threaten the protection of resources and the viability of the agricultural industry. This is the result of development of existing parcels, ability to subdivide parcels as small as two acres, the grandfathering of parcels subdivided between 1976 and 1979, and to some extent, those rezoned since 1979. The zoning and development controls need to be reviewed and strengthened to assure that the goals and objectives of the Master Plan and the Baltimore County Zoning Regulations are being achieved.

## **Actions**

1. Continue to enforce local policies, ordinances, regulations and procedures that stabilize the agricultural and forest land base.
2. Revise zoning and development standards to promote conditions suitable for production, processing and sale of agricultural products.
3. Include prime and productive soil standards and a maximum lot size to ensure that large parcels are not split to create large residential lots.
4. Evaluate increasing the minimum acreage for subdivisions in the RC2 zone to reduce environmental impacts and development pressure on agricultural resources.
5. Evaluate regulations to eliminate resubdivision of lots created between 1975 and 1979 in the RC2 zone.
6. Explore innovative methods to compensate landowners if the underlying zoning allows higher density through various easement or density transfers, provided there is no adverse effect on agriculture.
7. Monitor development within the APPA's to ensure that residential and non-agricultural uses protect the resources and do not overwhelm the operation of agricultural businesses.
8. In general, zoning changes made in the agricultural priority preservation areas should protect the County's agricultural industry.
9. Add criteria to the Baltimore County Zoning Regulations (BCZR) to require the evaluation of proposed development impacts on agricultural uses located on prime and productive soils.
10. Assure that development will have limited impact on active agricultural operations by reviewing and changing setback requirements.
11. Investigate additional standards to limit zoning variances that promote excessive and incremental growth.
12. Enact "Right to Farm" legislation and institute a nuisance mediation board for farm operations.

## **Specific Policy: Implement Best Management Practices**

To reduce the potential for soil erosion and pollution of the County's drinking water reservoirs, groundwater, streams and the Chesapeake Bay, farmers must implement best management practices on all the lands they farm, whether owned or leased. Well-managed agricultural and natural lands provide significant quality of life benefits. The County is one of the few major metropolitan counties where rural lands can be found in close proximity to the urban and suburban cores.

## **Actions**

1. Require landowners' participation in land preservation programs to have and to implement soil conservation, water quality, and nutrient management plans.
2. Continue to work closely with the Department of Agriculture and the Soil Conservation District to ensure that farmers are employing best management practices. Investigate developing a reporting system to monitor these efforts.
3. Investigate other innovative strategies, approaches and incentives to encourage landowners to protect resources.

## **RURAL LEGACY PROGRAM**

In 1997, the Maryland General Assembly adopted the Rural Legacy Program to combat the continuing loss of natural resources and productive agricultural lands to development. Not only were significant resources being lost, but also what remained was fragmented by development, thus reducing its economic and environmental values. The Rural Legacy Program provides for local jurisdictions and private organizations such as Land Trusts to apply for designation of significant areas as "Rural Legacy Areas". The County and its Land Trusts have received designation and funding for these five Rural Legacy Areas:

- Coastal
- Piney Run
- Gunpowder
- Long Green
- Manor

## **GENERAL POLICIES**

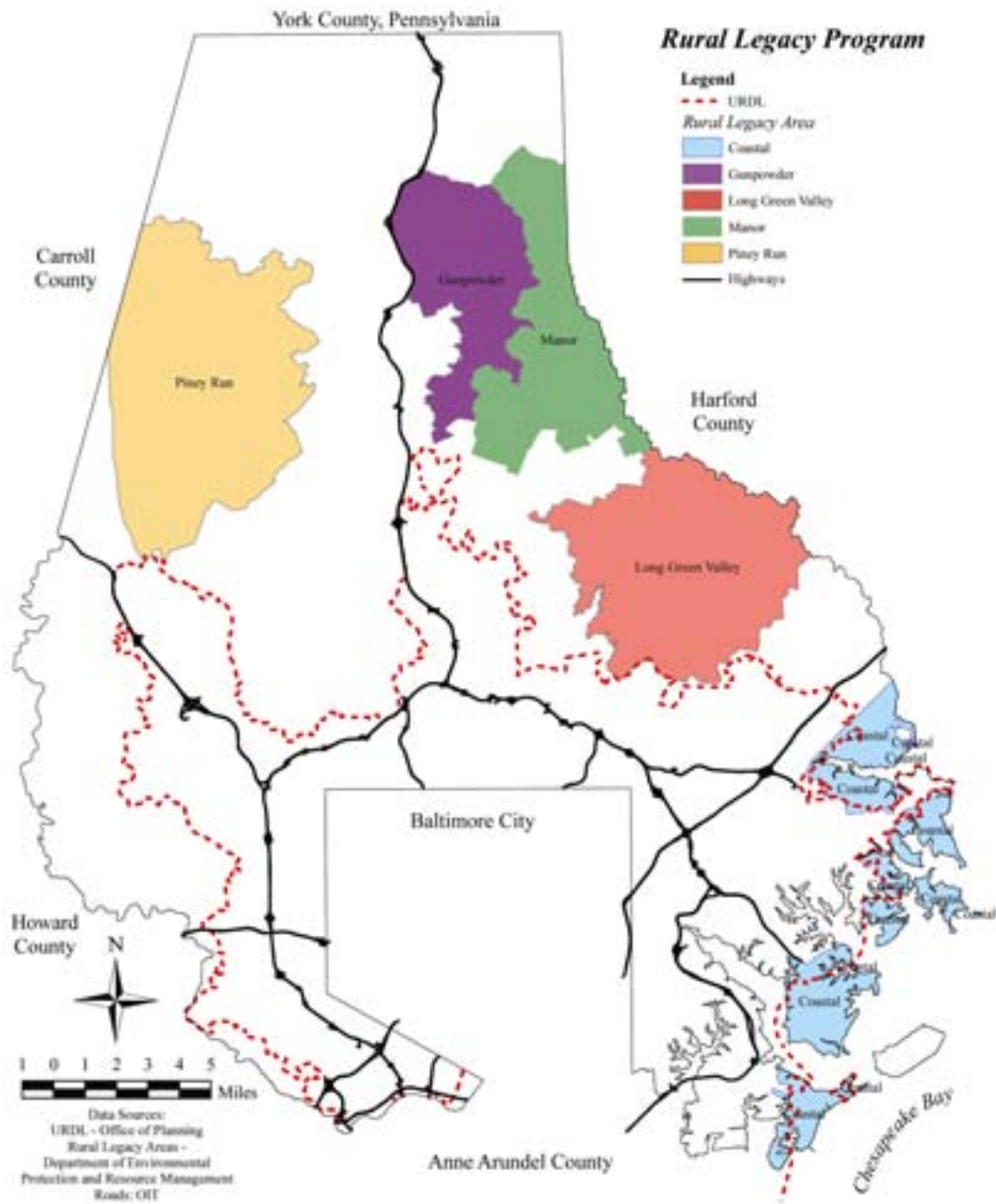
- Limit new residential growth in these areas.
- Protect and maintain the area's rural character.
- Permanently preserve land through easement programs.

**Specific Policy: Manage growth within the designated Rural Legacy Areas and seek permanent preservation of undeveloped properties through easement programs.**

### **Actions:**

1. Work with local land trusts to monitor goals and accomplishments of Rural Legacy Areas to maintain the level of commitment by landowners.
2. Develop partnerships with local land trusts to integrate into proposals all aspects of the County's resource protection elements such as forest buffer, Chesapeake Bay shoreline, forest habitat, endangered species, and the aspects of the County's planning, growth management and zoning elements that reduce sprawl.
3. Continue financial partnership with the State for preserving properties within Rural Legacy areas.





## **RESOURCE PRESERVATION AREAS**

The Resource Preservation Areas are intended to preserve and protect the historic, cultural, recreational and environmental resources in the rural areas, while providing for a limited amount of residential development. Designated resource preservation areas include:

- Patapsco/Granite
- Soldiers Delight
- Loch Raven Reservoir
- Gunpowder
- Prettyboy Reservoir
- Chesapeake Bay
- Liberty Reservoir

## **GENERAL POLICY**

- Preserve the County's valuable cultural, historic, recreational, and environmental resources by limiting residential development and acquiring available land for public benefit.

### **Specific Policy: Preserve Land Designated for Resource Preservation**

In general, resource preservation areas are intended to support a limited amount of residential development while still protecting the ground and surface water quality, forest resources, and significant plant and wildlife habitats. Large portions of these publicly owned areas, such as Soldiers Delight Natural Environment Area, Gunpowder Falls State Park, Patapsco Valley State Park, North Point State Park and the Prettyboy, Liberty and Loch Raven Reservoirs also provide benefits to the urban portion of the County. Opportunities to protect properties within resource preservation areas are given priority by the County and State.

## **Actions**

1. Use the following guidelines in evaluating rezoning requests:
  - Outside of the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area (CBCA), the current combination of RC 7 and RC 8 is the best zoning mechanism for achieving the management goals of this classification. Zoning changes that would permit additional residential density or increased commercial development should not be granted. It is especially important to avoid setting precedents that could lead to future upzoning by producing a change in the area's rural character.
  - The RC 20 and RC 50 zones in the CBCA provide the best protection for these environmentally sensitive areas. Changes in zoning that would adversely affect the natural resources of the bay would be subject to possible disapproval by the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Commission and should not be granted. All zoning in the CBCA should provide the most appropriate land use, ensure that impacts of development activity are minimized, and should preserve quality of life in surrounding communities.

- Requests for zoning changes that increase development densities in the Loch Raven, Prettyboy, and Liberty drainage areas should not be granted, in accordance with the County’s commitments in 1984, 1990 and 2006 to the regional Reservoir Watershed Management Agreement. Additionally, any zoning changes should be consistent with any applicable watershed study.
2. Complete detailed studies to determine the existing and potential residential densities in resource preservation areas.
  3. Limit residential densities to one dwelling unit per 25-50 acres. Limit density calculation to net density for resource zones.
  4. Establish resource preservation area watershed priorities to upgrade environmental systems that have become degraded.
  5. Delineate and coordinate the public use of resource preservation areas for recreational benefits.
  6. Develop and assist private organizations that enhance the public nature and care of resource preservation areas.
  7. Preserve critical forest and sensitive water supplies through land preservation.
  8. Do not support rezoning that would increase residential density.

## **RURAL RESIDENTIAL AREAS**

The rural residential areas are a mix of single-family residential development and woodlands, farm fields, stream valleys and areas of significant historic and cultural value. They have accommodated the bulk of new residential development in the rural areas. Included in the rural residential land management areas are:

• Freeland	• Chestnut Ridge	• Hereford
• Jacksonville	• Kingsville	• Patapsco/Granite

## **GENERAL POLICIES**

- Limit new residential growth.
- Protect and maintain the area’s rural character.

### **Specific Policy: Limit Suburban Development in Rural Areas**

The 1979 growth management program designated rural residential areas as suitable for development. The 1989 Master Plan recognized some of the issues created by this choice. The 2000 Master Plan recommended limiting rural residential development. The majority of the land within these areas is zoned RC 5.

The intensity of this development is a suburban residential pattern with densities equal to one dwelling unit per 1-1/2 to 2 acres. Because this rural-suburban residential development is dependent upon well and septic services, the development pattern takes on a haphazard appearance and consumes large quantities of land. This type of development comes at a tremendous cost in terms of traffic, increased infrastructure demands, and disruption of the rural character.

## **Actions**

1. Conduct detailed land use studies to determine: 1) buildable areas, 2) agricultural areas, and 3) environmentally sensitive areas.
2. Deny rezoning requests for additional office, business or industrial zoning in rural residential areas, unless recommended in an approved plan.
3. Adopt County standards appropriate for rural residential areas that include roads, open space, architecture, site layout, lighting, bicycles, and pedestrians.
4. Adapt cluster principles to maintain adjacent forests and open space, which help retain rural character.
5. Provide effective buffers between development projects to maintain rural character.
6. Preserve and connect open spaces through cluster development and open space acquisition.

## **RURAL COMMERCIAL CENTERS**

Only two designated rural commercial centers will continue to provide local services and facilities for the surrounding rural area. They are:

- Hereford
- Jacksonville

## **GENERAL POLICY**

- The nature, size, and scale of rural commercial centers should remain geographically small, rural in character, and be regulated through a master plan process.

### **Specific Policy:      Manage growth in rural commercial centers**

The two rural commercial centers contain a certain mass of retail and office service uses that should not be spread or repeated throughout the rural areas. These areas will continue to be the only locations within the rural area where such services will be concentrated. The size, scale, and quality of development have been a continuing issue in these centers. In addition, the ultimate build out limits of these areas needs to be considered.

## **Actions**

1. Manage development through specific rural commercial center master plans that are regularly updated. The master planning process should determine the ultimate boundaries and build out of these areas.
2. Develop overlay districts or specific zoning classifications with design performance criteria unique to each of the centers so issues of use, size, scale and design are addressed. Each center has unique characteristics that should be enhanced by new development.
3. Adopt development performance guidelines and standards to ensure design quality, scale of uses, natural resource protection, buffers to agricultural uses, adequate open space close to homes, and pedestrian accessibility.

4. Provide infrastructure support such as stormwater management.
5. Provide adequate buffers and transitions between commercial projects and differing adjacent land uses to maintain rural character.

## **HISTORIC RESOURCES**

Rural agricultural areas present unique opportunities for conserving historic resources. Historic structures in the countryside tend to derive part of their historic significance from their bucolic setting, which is frequently tied to its economic function. Typically, the historic resource is composed of the primary structure along with a cluster of functionally and visually related outbuildings, such as barns, springhouses, and stables, set in a pastoral landscape of fields, streams and woodlands.

Conscious of this interplay between historic resources and their setting, local communities have established four rural County Historic Districts - Monkton, Corbett, Glyndon and Franklinville and nine National Register Districts - Worthington Valley, My Lady's Manor, Caves Valley, Granite, Greenspring Valley, Long Green Valley, Western Run – Belfast Road, Corbett and Glyndon (note: Glyndon and Corbett are both County Historic Districts and National Register Districts). The County Historic Districts are compact rural villages, ranging in size from 17 acres (Franklinville) to 164 acres (Glyndon). They are governed by the County Code, which makes any exterior change within its bounds subject to Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) approval. National Register Districts, in contrast, tend to be large, ranging from 1,500 acres (Caves Valley) to nearly 10,000 acres (Western Run-Belfast). This designation entails no regulatory limitations on property owners – unless they apply for a tax credit, in which case the owner voluntarily subjects him/herself to LPC approval.

There are also individual rural properties that are on the Landmarks List. Being placed on this list affords a property the same protection as structures located within a County Historic District. Since October 2005, the LPC also delineates an “historic environmental setting” along with the structure(s). The setting protects the portion of the lot that is historically, architecturally and culturally connected to the historic significance of the landmarks structure.

## **GENERAL POLICY**

- Protect historic resources along with their historic environmental setting so that residents can appreciate the rural landscape, while allowing the reasonable use of privately owned land.

### **Specific Policy: Coordinate historic preservation with the County's rural strategy**

Rural areas, which have retained their historic character, such as Worthington Valley, My Lady's Manor, Green Spring Valley, and Long Green Valley, continue to be among the County's most desirable places of residence. Historic structures tend to be more compatible in design, scale and massing with the rural landscape than modern housing. However, because maintaining a historic home can be expensive and many property owners equate bigger with better, sustaining the bucolic beauty of the rural landscape is challenging. Rural subdivisions, with their oversized dwellings, in a denuded, flatly graded landscape, can be visible for miles. Even a single inappropriately designed or poorly sited new dwelling can dramatically alter the rural character.

Historic preservation goals coincide with the agricultural preservation strategy and environmental protection objectives of the Master Plan in several ways. Historic properties tend to be smaller and thus create less impervious surface. Preservationists support the retention of a property's traditional agricultural use, thereby preserving scenic resources. Finally, saving and restoring structures, instead of replacing them with new structures, is in itself an act of sustainability that preserves historic resources.

### **Actions**

1. Work with owners of historic resources desiring to place their property on the Landmarks List – particularly properties which are important to the agricultural history of Baltimore County and which are located along scenic routes.
2. Protect designated “view sheds” of historic resources by preventing new development within view of the historic resource, or by buffering new development from the view of such resource. Amend the development regulations to reflect this recommendation.
3. Develop scenic route designation and design standards in coordination with rural historic preservation goals.

## **SCENIC RESOURCES**

The County's scenic resources consist of scenic corridors, scenic views, and gateways. Most of the scenic corridors and views are located in rural areas. Gateways can occur within either urban or rural areas, and, in fact, frequently occur at the boundary between urban and rural areas (Scenic Resources Map).

### **GENERAL POLICY**

- Preserve and enhance the significant scenic resources designated on the scenic resources map, including scenic corridors, views and gateways, as essential components contributing to the quality of life.

#### **Specific Policy:      Preserve Scenic Corridors and Views**

The scenic views depicted on the map below do not represent a comprehensive inventory, but rather a beginning of a list that can be built upon. Following the adoption of the 1989 master plan, the County produced a series of scenic route maps for each Councilmanic district that combined the significant visual and historical elements into self-guided scenic tours. In 1991, a set of development guidelines was adopted to begin the process of protecting scenic resources. These guidelines have helped to raise awareness and have recommended development alternatives that are sensitive to scenic issues.

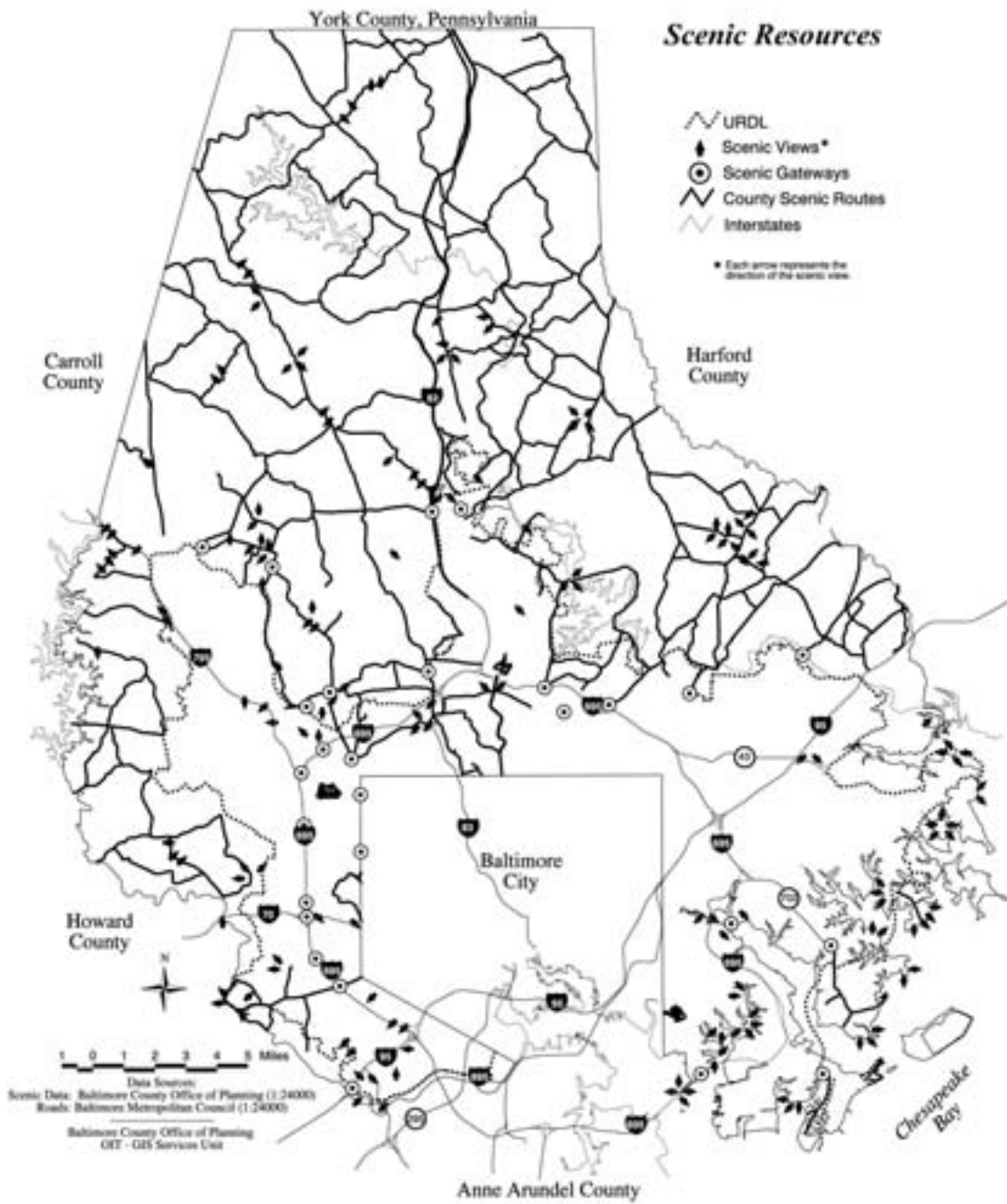
One area that the County has concentrated its efforts on preserving scenic quality is the Interstate 83 (I-83) corridor. The goal is to protect the scenic view shed of I-83 as it extends through the northern portion of Baltimore County from the Thornton Mill overpass to the Pennsylvania line. This portion of I-83 runs through one of the most scenic portions of Baltimore County's piedmont area. Farms, forests, streams and rural homesteads line both sides of I-83. Many properties adjacent to I-83 have been protected either as parkland or through various easement programs. The programs include donations and purchase of development rights. There has been significant

progress in the effort: between Belfast Road and the Gunpowder River, more than half of the scenic corridor has been protected.

This endeavor should persist with the emphasis on lands zoned for resource protection such as RC 2, RC 4 and RC 7. The County must maintain coordination with the State Highway Administration and continue to seek State and Federal funds as they become available.

### **Actions**

1. Coordinate scenic resource management practices with the Maryland State Scenic Byways Program, and the National Program.
2. Continue to preserve properties within the I-83 view shed through easement purchases and RC4 clustering.
3. Evaluate proposed improvements to state and County roads, bridges, and other infrastructure for their impact on scenic resources. Where public safety allows, the narrow and/or winding character of the road is part of the scenic experience and should be preserved. In 2008, the County Council adopted *Rural Roads Standards* to be included in the *Department of Public Works Design Manual*.





## **RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES**

Within the rural area, the dispersed nature of the population makes it cost-prohibitive to provide the same level of community services and infrastructure as in the urban area. Among some residents who have moved out of urban areas, there is often an expectation that they should receive the same level of service. The County will continue to provide public safety and other services in rural areas, but these services and infrastructures will be scaled appropriately. Some social and cultural benefits will only be provided in urban areas.

The protection and management of both surface and groundwaters in Rural Areas is of utmost importance for public health. The surface water supply system for the Baltimore Metropolitan District serves more than 1.8 million people in Baltimore County, Baltimore City and portions of Anne Arundel, Harford and Howard Counties. The drainage area for these reservoirs (Liberty, Loch Raven and Prettyboy) is split between Baltimore County and Carroll County, with smaller portions in Harford County and York County, Pennsylvania. The reservoirs are located in the Rural Areas of Baltimore County. An additional concern that primarily affects rural areas is groundwater protection, due to the reliance on well water and septic systems.

### **GENERAL POLICIES**

- Protect all natural resources
- Provide basic educational and public safety services; governmental services will not be provided at an urban or suburban scale.

#### **Specific Policy:           Manage and Protect Surface Waters**

The protection of the source water supply system was formalized through the Reservoir Watershed Management Agreement in 1984, with a resigning in 2005. This Agreement, among other things, mandates a Reservoir Technical Group that coordinates and reports on the implementation of strategies for reservoir protection and water quality improvement. A more detailed description of this issue and corresponding actions can be found in the *Urban Areas* section of this Master Plan.

In addition to the critically important use of the surface waters for the public drinking water system of the Region, the wetlands, streams, rivers, and ponds of the Rural Areas provide for important wildlife and fisheries habitat. For example, the Gunpowder Falls is considered a premier cold-water fishery in the region. The protection of these waters is a requirement of the Clean Water Act. Furthermore, the State is in the process of setting legal thresholds for water quality. These thresholds establish Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for nutrients, sediment, and bacteria. The TMDLs for nutrients has been determined for Prettyboy and Loch Raven reservoirs. These limits require a 54% reduction of phosphorus in the Prettyboy watershed and a 50% reduction of phosphorus in the Loch Raven watershed to meet water quality standards. Agricultural operations were identified as a significant source of phosphorus.

#### **Actions:**

1. Use the agricultural preservation-ranking model developed by Baltimore County, which includes water quality parameters to preserve those properties that provide the most water quality benefit.
2. Continue to encourage the agricultural industry to incorporate agricultural best management practices into their daily operations.
3. Work with the Baltimore County Soil Conservation District to develop an agriculture best management practice tracking system that preserves privacy and measures progress toward meeting any TMDLs.
4. Continue to monitor impervious surface issues relating to development impacts on high quality streams
5. Continue to provide homeowner education on proper septic tank maintenance and appropriate nutrient application.
6. Continue Rural Residential Stewardship Program and similar efforts to increase the tree cover.
7. Continue to work with rural watershed and conservation organizations.
8. Continue monitoring programs to assess the water quality in rural areas.
9. Continue to seek funding for water quality improvement projects.
10. Continue small watershed action plans within rural areas.
11. Continue to implement rural reforestation projects and to encourage sustainable forest management.

**Specific Policy:           Manage and Protect Groundwater**

In Baltimore County, favorable geological conditions and plentiful precipitation combine to provide a valuable supply of quality groundwater that is used for agricultural, residential, commercial, and industrial uses. About 10% of the County's population relies on groundwater as the primary source of drinking water. Approximately 28,000 wells are used to withdraw water for these uses. In addition, there are currently 8 community well supplies in the County that each serves 25 or more users. The agricultural community also relies heavily on groundwater for domestic, livestock, and irrigation purposes. Industrial and commercial uses depend on groundwater to a lesser degree.

Demand for groundwater by well users occurs mainly in the northern half of the County in areas beyond the service area of the metropolitan water supply system. To protect the public health, it is essential to protect groundwater quality from all sources of contamination including development, impervious surfaces, petroleum products, septic systems, fertilizers, pesticides, road salts, and industrial wastes. Under state regulations, the County is responsible for review of all well permits for residential, commercial and institutional construction. Standards exist to assure that all proposed drinking water wells provide a sufficient quantity of water and are below thresholds for bacterial and nitrate contamination. Proposed on-site sewage disposal systems are regulated to assure that wastes will be adequately remediated in the soil and that they are located at appropriate distances from wells.

The current standards for drinking water wells and on-site sewage disposal systems are considered effective in protecting public health and ground water resources. Failing septic systems occur primarily in areas that were developed prior to the establishment of these standards. In such cases, the County conducts sanitary surveys; if community health threats are documented in areas that are accessible to the metropolitan district, extension of public water

and/or sewerage is provided on a long-term financing basis. In areas that cannot access the water and sewer service area, problems with private water and sewage disposal in small communities are difficult to correct. Many rural areas, including the commercial centers of Hereford and Jacksonville, may have certain site-specific limitations: marginal soil conditions, small property sizes, area requirements for stormwater management, and zoning issues that impede improvements of sanitary facilities. To address these issues comprehensively, a mechanism such as a rural sanitary district can be established. Other groundwater contamination problems involve specific point sources of contamination, for example, petroleum spills from gas stations. Federal regulations resulted in a program whereby all service stations replaced older tanks with new tanks that enhance protection and containment.

In 1998, Baltimore County, in cooperation with the Maryland and U.S. Geological Surveys, completed the first comprehensive study of Piedmont groundwater quality. Groundwater in the rural area of the County was found to be of excellent quality for human consumption. No pesticides were detected above maximum contaminant levels, and 98% of all pesticides detected were at trace levels. Chloride levels in drinking water wells were found to be elevated above background levels in many wells, but were below the secondary maximum contaminant level. Road salt appears to be the primary source of elevated chloride in wells, as evidenced by higher chloride levels in wells located closer to paved roads. Most of the trace elements with known adverse health effects (arsenic, antimony, cadmium, and cyanide) were not detected. No adverse impacts to water quality were observed from waste discharges from residential septic systems.

### **Actions**

1. Evaluate the concept of a rural sanitary district, with appropriate legal authority, financing, and design standards, to provide a mechanism for addressing rural water supply and sewage disposal problems.
2. Continue to review development proposals to assure the proper siting of drinking water wells and the location of on-site sewage disposal systems in accordance with the *Code of Maryland Regulations* and the *Baltimore County Code*.
3. Continue implementation of the 1993 *Ground Water Management and Protection Strategy*.
4. Continue to educate homeowners concerning the proper use of septic systems, residential fertilizers and pesticides.

## **FIRE PROTECTION**

### **GENERAL POLICY**

- Assure adequate fire protection appropriate for rural areas.

### **Specific Policy: Strengthen Volunteer Fire Service**

Rural volunteer fire stations are confronted with challenges that are usually not experienced in urban areas. The new, more affluent urban-oriented population moving into the rural areas brings

high expectations for service, yet frequently these residents are unable to contribute time to assist in providing the service.

### **Actions**

1. Continue to support volunteer fire companies through financial contributions, training, and technical assistance.
2. Assist volunteer fire companies with outreach and fundraising.

### **Specific Policy: Provide Water for Fire Suppression**

In the rural areas of Baltimore County, communities depend on “static” water sources for fire fighting activities. The ability to quickly establish and maintain effective fire streams for fire suppression has always been problematic in areas without fire hydrants. Several in-ground water storage tanks have been located within rural communities, and specialized trucks that transport water have been purchased. In addition, several planning committees comprised of citizens and Fire Department personnel periodically update maps showing the location of useable water sources. Requiring new residential communities to provide either fire sprinkler systems or an approved water source would afford citizens a greater level of protection from property loss in the event of fire.

### **Actions**

1. Work cooperatively with residents of established communities to locate or improve fire fighting water sources.
2. Ensure that new residential communities comply with appropriate requirements for rural fire protection.
3. Pursue new technology to transport and use water more efficiently in rural fire fighting efforts.
4. Encourage the agricultural community to work with the Fire Department to locate and improve water sources on farmland.
5. Continue to work with developers and builders to place large capacity (30,000 gallon) tanks strategically in rural areas. The Baltimore County Fire Code requires these tanks or alternatives.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

The transportation system within the rural areas largely consists of a road network that was developed at a time when all of Baltimore County was rural. In keeping with the rural tradition, these roads are usually narrow two lane roads without shoulders. They have not been engineered to improve sight distance or capacity, but rather conform to the natural terrain. The rural quality of the road network reinforces and contributes to the rural character of the landscape. Newer residential development has resulted in the creation of subdivision roads, which are frequently

wider than the rural road they feed into. In addition, commuters living in neighboring jurisdictions overburden roads that were never designed for such intensive use.

To achieve the objectives of preserving the scenic and historic nature of rural roads, the County adopted the *Rural Roads Standards* to be included within the *Department of Public Works Design Manual*. This guide provides design standards for roads in the rural areas, with emphasis on public safety and maintenance, while retaining the existing character and basic design of these roads. The full replacement of a bridge or a road project (i.e. repaving, widening or new construction) requires a process of community involvement, as stated in the Manual. This will allow input from any interested parties on the ultimate design of the rural infrastructure.

## **GENERAL POLICY**

- Assure adequate roads appropriate for rural areas.

### **Actions**

1. Ensure practice of the Rural Roads Standards Manual.
2. Provide adequate public notification and participation in capital improvement projects.
3. Classify roads according to rural standards.

## **RECREATION AND PARKS**

The rural areas provide vital recreational opportunities and resources for County residents. Many of the major park systems are located within the rural County. State parks and facilities, including Soldiers Delight, Patapsco Valley State Park, the Torrey Brown/North Central Railroad Trail, Gunpowder Falls, and North Point provide vast tracts of land, consist primarily of natural areas of truly unique value. County recreation and park facilities (other than those associated with school sites) include Oregon Ridge, Northwest Regional Park, Meadowood Park, Reisterstown Regional Park, Eastern Regional Park, Rocky Point, and the Marshy Point Park and Nature Center. These parks provide a wide range of recreational opportunities for County residents. In addition, the reservoirs, including Liberty, Prettyboy, and Loch Raven and the forested buffers around them, owned by Baltimore City, provide both land and water recreational use that is governed by city regulations designed to protect drinking water quality.

## **GENERAL POLICY**

- Maintain and preserve open space for recreation that also protects watersheds and sensitive environmental areas and resources.

**Specific Policy:** Provide region-serving recreation at appropriate locations while maintaining and preserving open space that protects watersheds and sensitive environmental areas.

### **Actions**

1. Acquire land within resource preservation areas for the development of compatible recreational facilities.
2. Strategically site compatible region serving and special parks, in order to meet the recreational needs of citizens in all areas of the County.
3. Continue to work with the state in partnership projects and to expand and make better use of state parks.
4. Incorporate in-fee or easement acquisitions into rural legacy proposals to provide appropriate recreational benefit especially adjacent to reservoirs and the Chesapeake Bay.
5. Support and protect the cold water fisheries of Baltimore County.
6. Continue coordination with regulatory agencies to ensure development of recreational areas enhances and protects all natural resources.

**Specific Policy: Provide Greenways**

Greenways include 1) passive natural greenways that serve primarily as wildlife corridors and open spaces, and 2) active greenways that may include hiking, bicycling, or other recreational uses.

**Actions**

1. Identify potential trails, such as old railroad beds and suitable stream valleys, and acquire in fee or obtain easements for recreational use.

**Specific Policy: Include bicycle accommodations on the rural road network and in recreational greenways.**

The rural county is a popular area for recreational bicyclists. Bicyclists are frequently seen on the county's rural roads, and on the popular Torrey Brown Trail that traverses the north part of the county from Pennsylvania to Hunt Valley. Use of bicycle facilities in the rural areas will be primarily for recreational purposes, although utilitarian purposes should also be considered.

**Actions**

1. Examine rural areas for the suitability of providing County or multi-jurisdictional bicycle facilities along greenways, abandoned rail rights-of-way, or widened road lanes/shoulders.
2. Work with bicycle clubs and other groups to identify major bicycle routes and make improvements to increase the safety and enjoyment of riding.
3. Coordinate bicycle and pedestrian facilities with the State and County scenic route network and seek to enhance pedestrian and bicycle access where possible.
4. Adopt consistent rural design standards to ensure safety and provide a pleasurable and convenient bicycle environment.