

2026 Comprehensive Plan Public Hearing

Worcester County Planning Commission

July 9, 2026



What We're Covering

Today is the first public hearing on the draft 2026 Comprehensive Plan for Worcester County.

Background

1

The planning process to date.

Highlights of the Plan

2

A summary of significant points in the draft plan.

Next Steps

3

Explaining the next steps in the planning process.

Comments from the public

4

Let us hear your thoughts!

Background



What is a comprehensive plan?

- Blueprint for the future: 20-year horizon
- Establishes a vision for growth, change and preservation
- Guides decisions on land use, transportation, housing, economic development, and environmental issues
- Coordinates local planning efforts by providing a guide, identifying:
 - Needs and Opportunities
 - Goals and Recommendations
 - Outlining Implementation

Public input into planning

- Identifies and prioritizes needs and opportunities of the residents and business owners
- Ensures that growth reflects local priorities from the community at large
- Identifies desired development patterns to be implemented



2023 Public Engagement Report

Key Issues Cited in Public Feedback

- Preserving Community Character
- Loss of Natural Features
- Retention of Local Businesses
- Season Traffic/Congestion
- Too Much Growth/Growth Pressure
- School Facilities/Education
- Loss of Farmland
- Affordability of Housing
- Sea Level Rise

**We want to
hear from
you!**

Visit:

<https://www.worcestermd.gov/comprehensive-plan>

Read: 2026 Comprehensive Plan

Comment: Click on the link to provide feedback

*Names and addresses may be published online.



2026 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Highlights of the Comprehensive Plan

Vision Statement

Worcester County is committed to our diverse rural and coastal heritage and historical roots, as we strive to create an inclusive and secure community that offers ample opportunities for residents and visitors alike. We seek sustainable economic growth by supporting and recognizing the important role of agriculture and tourism in our local economy, while we work to preserve and protect our vital natural resources.

Maryland's Sustainable Growth Planning Principles



Plan Chapters

Chapter 1 – Introduction	• Planning Background • County Vision • Legal Context • Public Outreach
Chapter 2 – County Profile	• Geography • History • Demographic Characteristics
Chapter 3 – Community Facilities	• Community Facilities & Services • Open Space, Parks, & Recreation
Chapter 4 – Land Use	• Existing Land Use • Future Land Use
Chapter 5 – Housing	• Housing Stock & Market • Work Force Housing
Chapter 6 – Economic Development & Tourism	• Workforce & Employment • Economic Centers • Development Regulations
Chapter 7 – Fisheries	• Commerical Fishing • Promoting and Protecting the Seafood Industry
Chapter 8 – Natural Resources & Sensitive Areas	• Natural Resources • Sensitive Areas • Areas of Critical Concern • Mineral Resources
Chapter 9 – Agriculture	• Agricultural Zoning • Priority Preservation Areas
Chapter 10 – Transportation	• Transportation System • Multimodal Facilities • Related Projects
Chapter 11 – Water Resources	• Water & Wastewater Resources
Chapter 12 – Implementation	• Goals, objectives, and strategies

Chapter 3: Community Facilities

Key Plan Points

- Work with the state to plan for future needs as the County grows, including emergency services, schools and community facilities
- Partner with Worcester County Public Schools for essential and requested services by the communities
- Look for opportunities to preserve and enhance the small-town character through an increase in community and cultural activities
- Provide adequate public services, including health, safety, social, recreational and waste disposal to facilitate the County's desired amount and pattern of growth

Applicable Principles



LAND



PLACE

Public Engagement Priorities



Preserving Community Character



School Facilities/Education

Chapter 4: Land Use

Key Plan Points

- Support agricultural and forest industries
- Identifies threats such as off-shore wind and preemptive utility solar energy systems
- Development Capacity Analysis
- Continue to direct new development to existing population centers and planned growth areas
- Future Land Use Map

Applicable Principles



LAND



PLACE

Public Engagement Priorities



Preserving Community Character

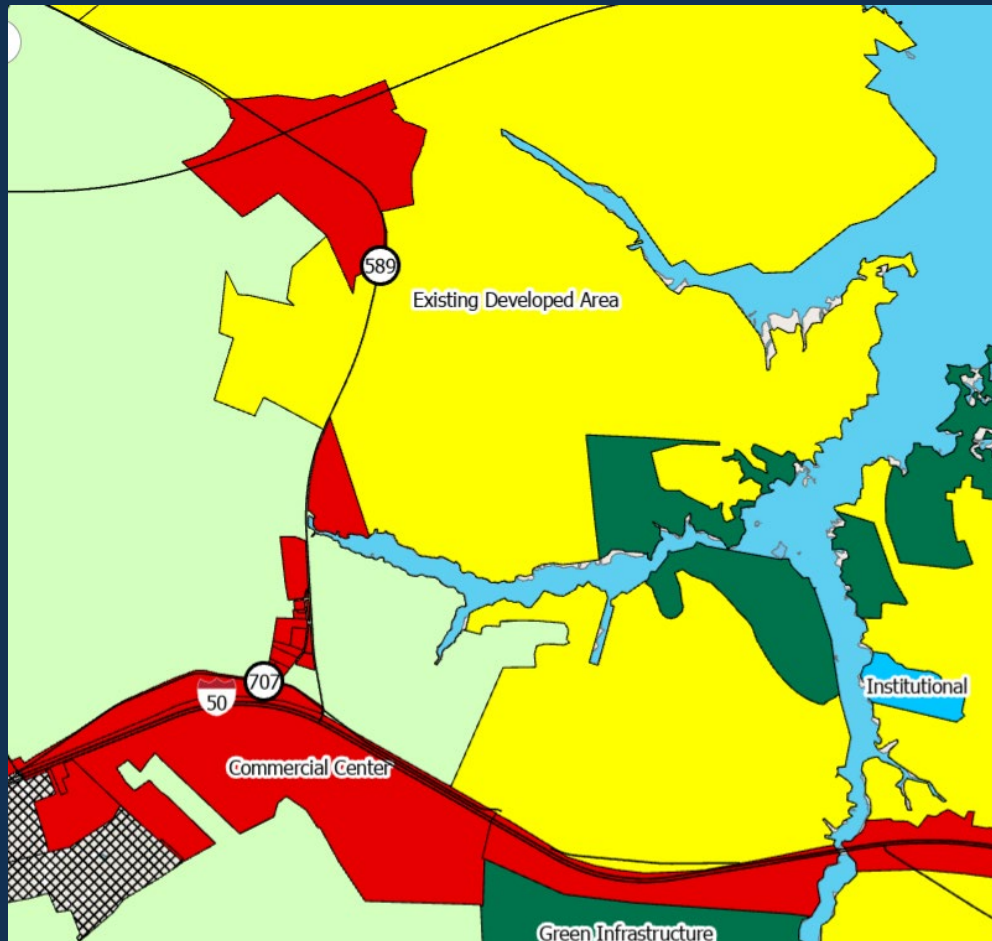


Too Much Growth/Growth Pressure

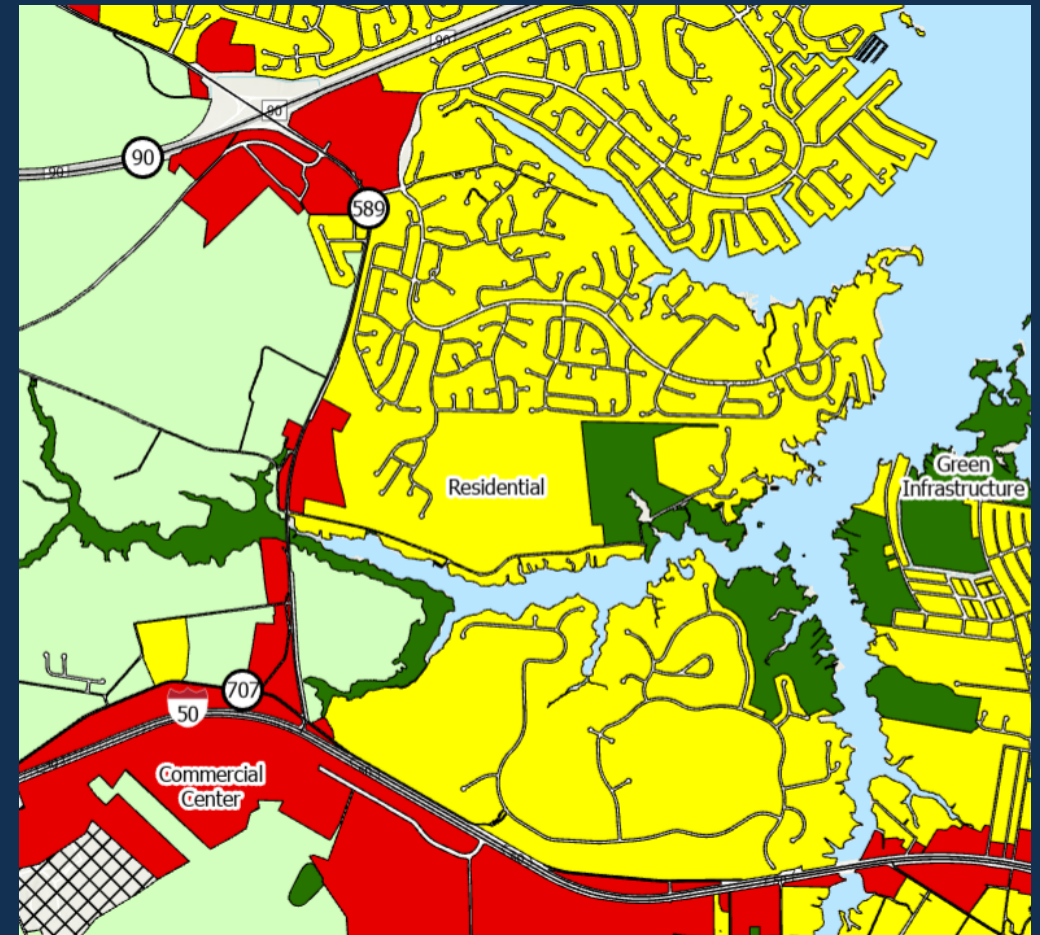
Chapter 4: Land Use

Existing Developed Area (EDA) classification has been modified to Residential or Commercial Center.

2006 Land Use Map



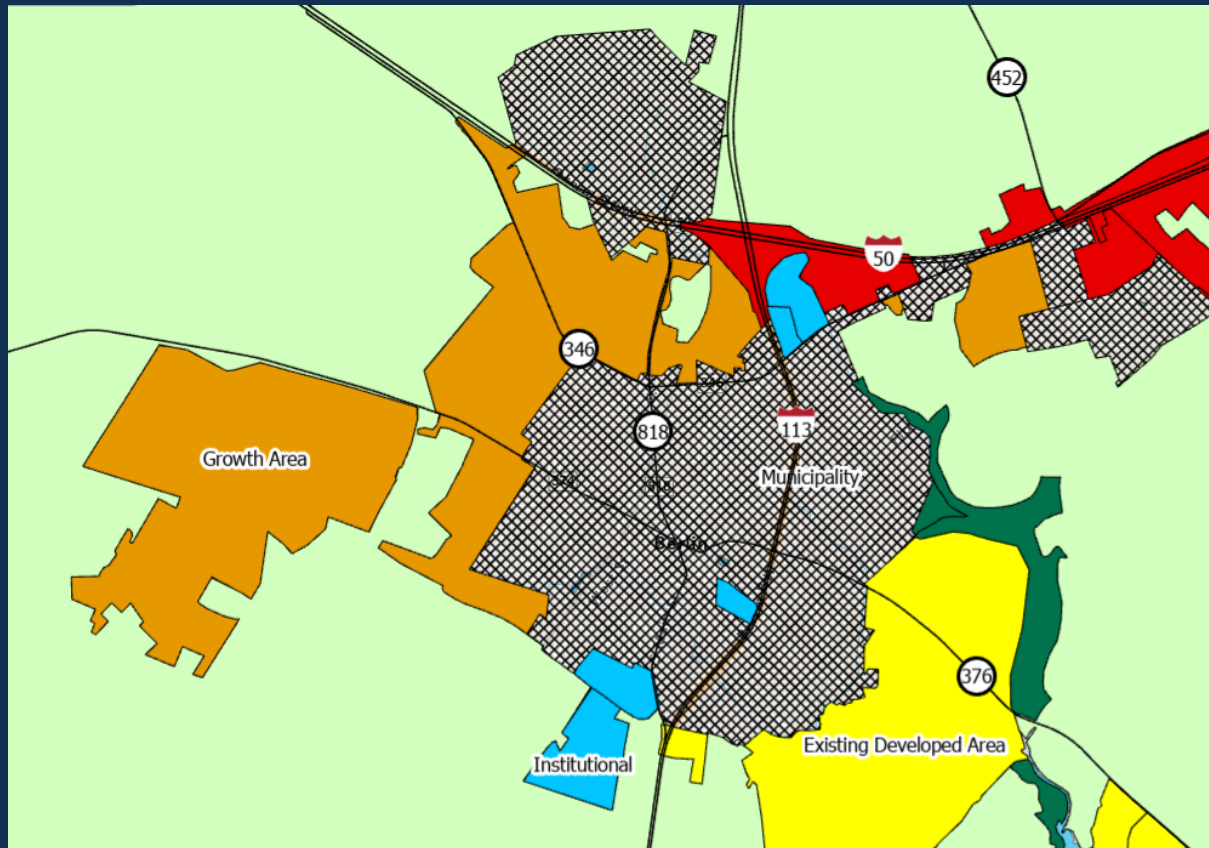
2026 Draft Future Land Use Map



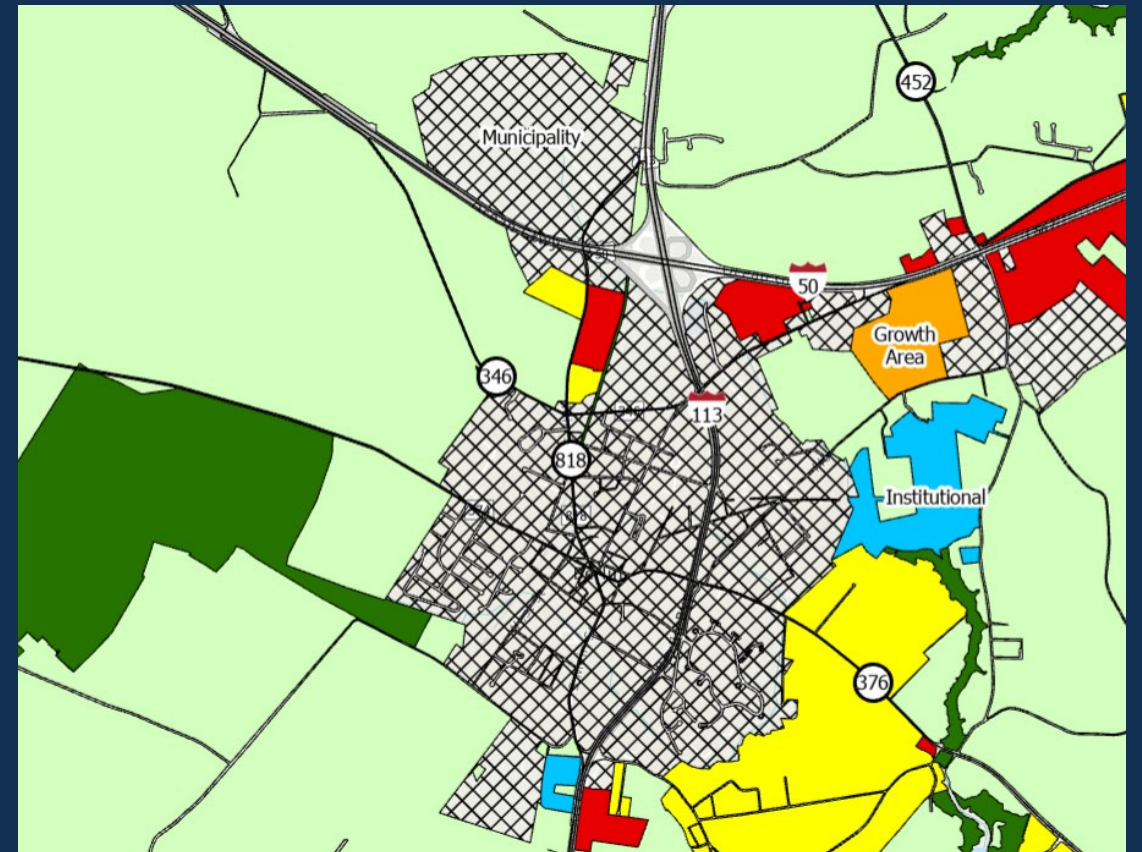
Chapter 4: Land Use

Example Growth Area modifications.

2006 Land Use Map



2026 Draft Future Land Use Map



Chapter 4: Land Use

E-1 Estate District

- 2023 Public Engagement comments included:
 - Revisiting the E-1 Estate District zoning classification as an area of concern
 - Insufficient efforts to eliminate E-1 District zoning
- In 2025, the Planning Commission decided by consensus to carry forward language from the 2006 plan regarding the elimination of the E-1 Estate District
- In 2026, the Planning Commission revisited this decision based upon the outpouring of public comments, particularly in the South Point area, which supported the retention of this zoning district.

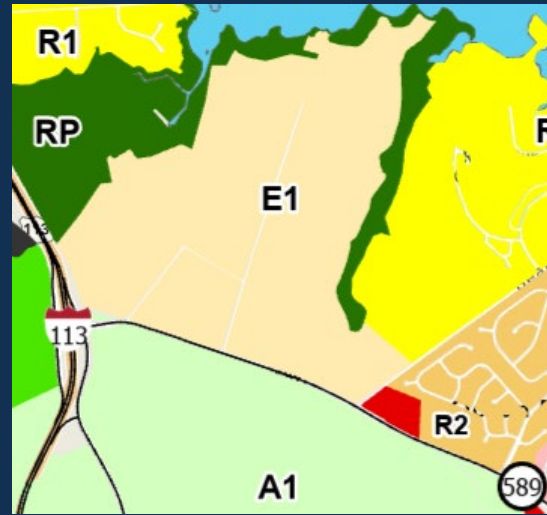
Chapter 4: Land Use

Current E-1 Estate District zoning in South Point, Bishopville, Ocean Pines and Public Landing

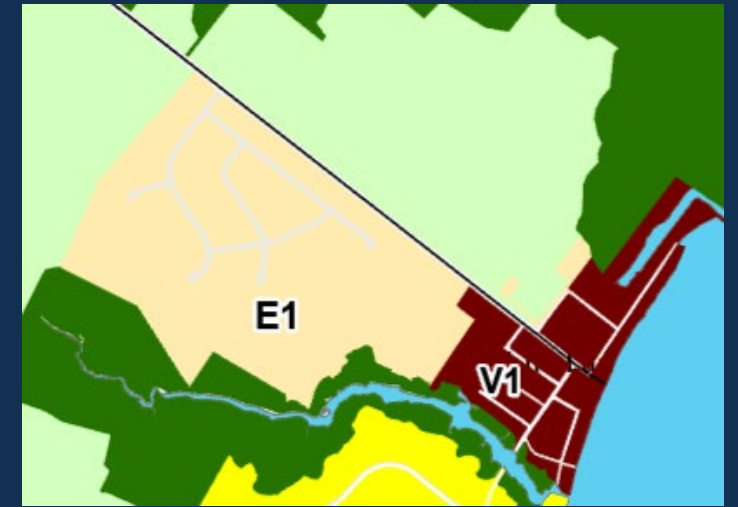
South Point



Ocean Pines vicinity



Public Landing



St. Martins Neck
Road, Bishopville



Chapter 4: Land Use

Original language on the E-1 Estate District

- Action Item 4.4.4: Eliminate the E-1 District zoning classification
- Consistent with the 2006 Comprehensive Plan, this plan continues to recommend the removal of the E-1 Estate District as a future action when zoning changes are considered in the implementation of this plan. Originally designed as a transition zone between urban and suburban development and the rural landscape, this category has consumed excessive amounts of land per housing unit and failed to achieve truly clustered open space development as envisioned. The 2009 Zoning Code states in the E-1 District purpose and intent statement that “[f]or lands zoned E-1 Estate District on the effective date of these regulations it is the intent of these regulations to allow for their orderly development until these regulations are amended to reflect changes in the Comprehensive Plan resulting from its next state-mandated periodic review.”

Revised language on the E-1 Estate District

- Action Item 4.4.4: Retain the E-1 Estate District zoning classification where appropriate but prohibit the expansion of this district beyond the locations as designated on the 2009 Comprehensive Zoning Maps.
- While the 2006 Comprehensive Plan called for the removal of this zoning district primarily due to concerns about sprawl, this reality is tempered by the existing development character of portions of the current E-1 Estate District properties. Areas such as South Point may still benefit from the original concept of this zoning district as a transition zone between urban and suburban development and the rural landscape. It is the intent of this plan to allow the continuation of the E-1 Estate District, while prohibiting its expansion beyond the locations as designated on the 2009 Comprehensive Zoning Maps.

Chapter 5: Housing

Key Plan Points

- Support a variety of safe, quality housing choices for households of all ages and abilities.
- Support affordable, attainable and workforce housing options.
- Identify incentives for the improvement or redevelopment of existing housing stock.
- Identify opportunities to provide equity in housing and affordable housing opportunities.
- Collaborate with local agencies to address homelessness and under-housing.

Applicable Principles



Public Engagement Priorities



Affordability of Housing



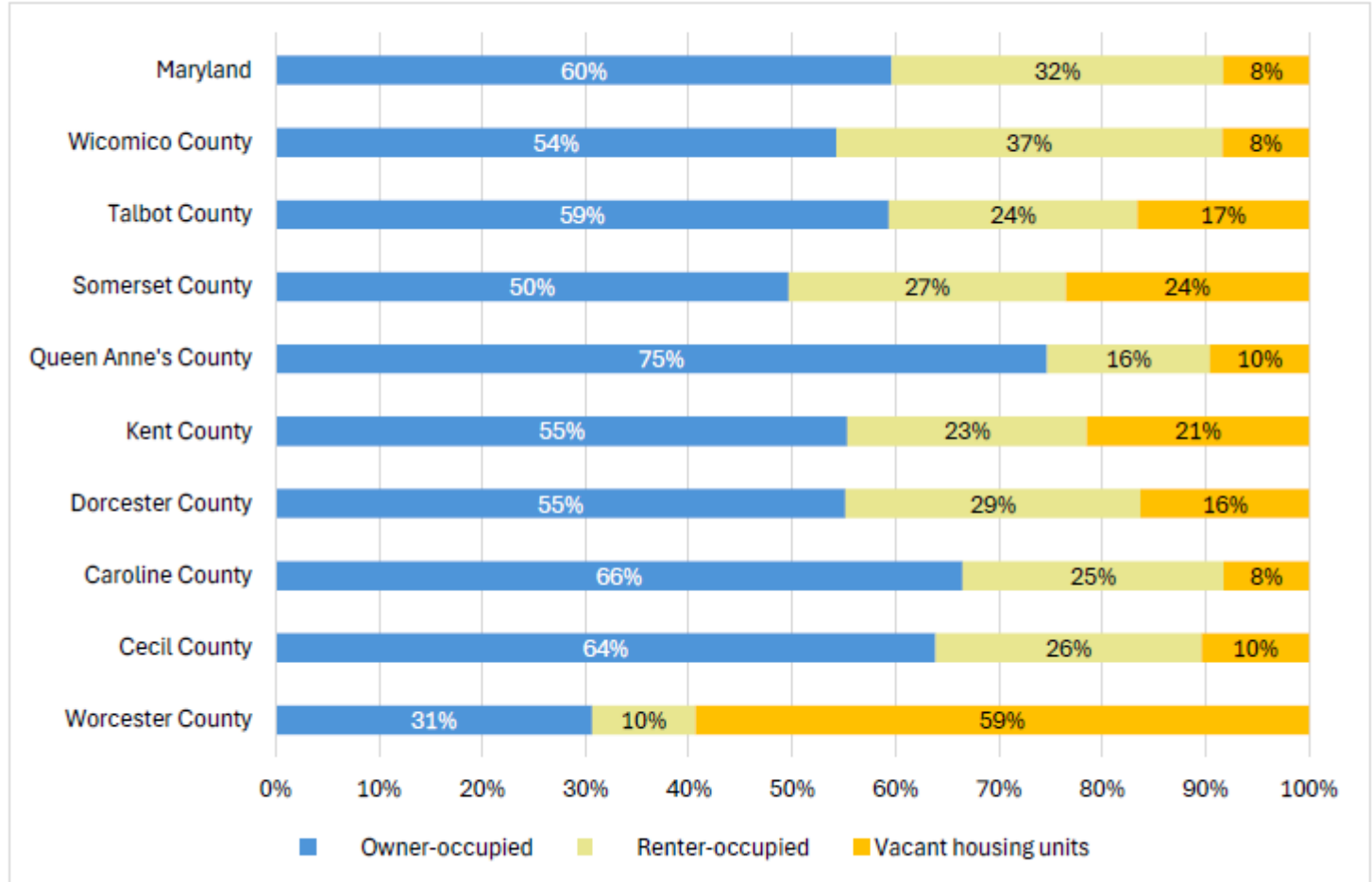
Preserving Community Character

Chapter 5: Housing

Housing Occupancy

- Total Housing Units: 56,585
- Total Occupied Units: 22,661

Figure 5-1: Comparison of Occupancy Rates in Eastern Shore counties



Source: 2020 Decennial Census

Chapter 6: Economic Development

Key Plan Points

- Support business retention and expansion
- Foster economic growth and employment opportunities
- Encourage entrepreneurship and innovation
- Drive sustainable growth in tourism and hospitality
- Create opportunities for engagement and collaborative development
- Invest in community and sustainability

Applicable Principles



Public Engagement Priorities



Retention of Local Businesses



Preserving Community Character

Chapter 7: Fisheries

Key Plan Points

- A statutory requirement for counties located on tidal waters
- Preserve working waterfronts
- Sustain fisheries and recreational fishing
- Support aquaculture to supplement traditional fisheries
- Integrate compatible tourism opportunities

Applicable Principles



ECOLOGY



RESILIENCE



LAND

Public Engagement Priorities



Loss of Natural Features

Chapter 8: Natural Resources

Key Plan Points

- Implement resource protection, conservation and preservation strategies to promote:
 - High water quality
 - Protect aquatic life, ecological function
 - Preserve or expand open spaces and greenways
- Prepare for and protect against impacts to natural resources, people and infrastructure resulting from climate change.

Applicable Principles



ECOLOGY



RESILIENCE



LAND

Public Engagement Priorities



Loss of Natural Features



Too Much Growth/Growth Pressure



Loss of Farmland



Sea Level Rise

Chapter 9: Agriculture

Key Plan Points

- This chapter provides the policy framework for sustaining agricultural land and industry.
- Agriculture is second to tourism as Worcester County's economic engine.
- Goals include protect and promote farming and forestry by properly planning for population growth and other development pressures.
- Establish a Priority Preservation Area to focus on the protection of agricultural lands.
- Prioritize prime farmland for permanent protection.

Applicable Principles



ECOLOGY



RESILIENCE



LAND

Public Engagement Priorities



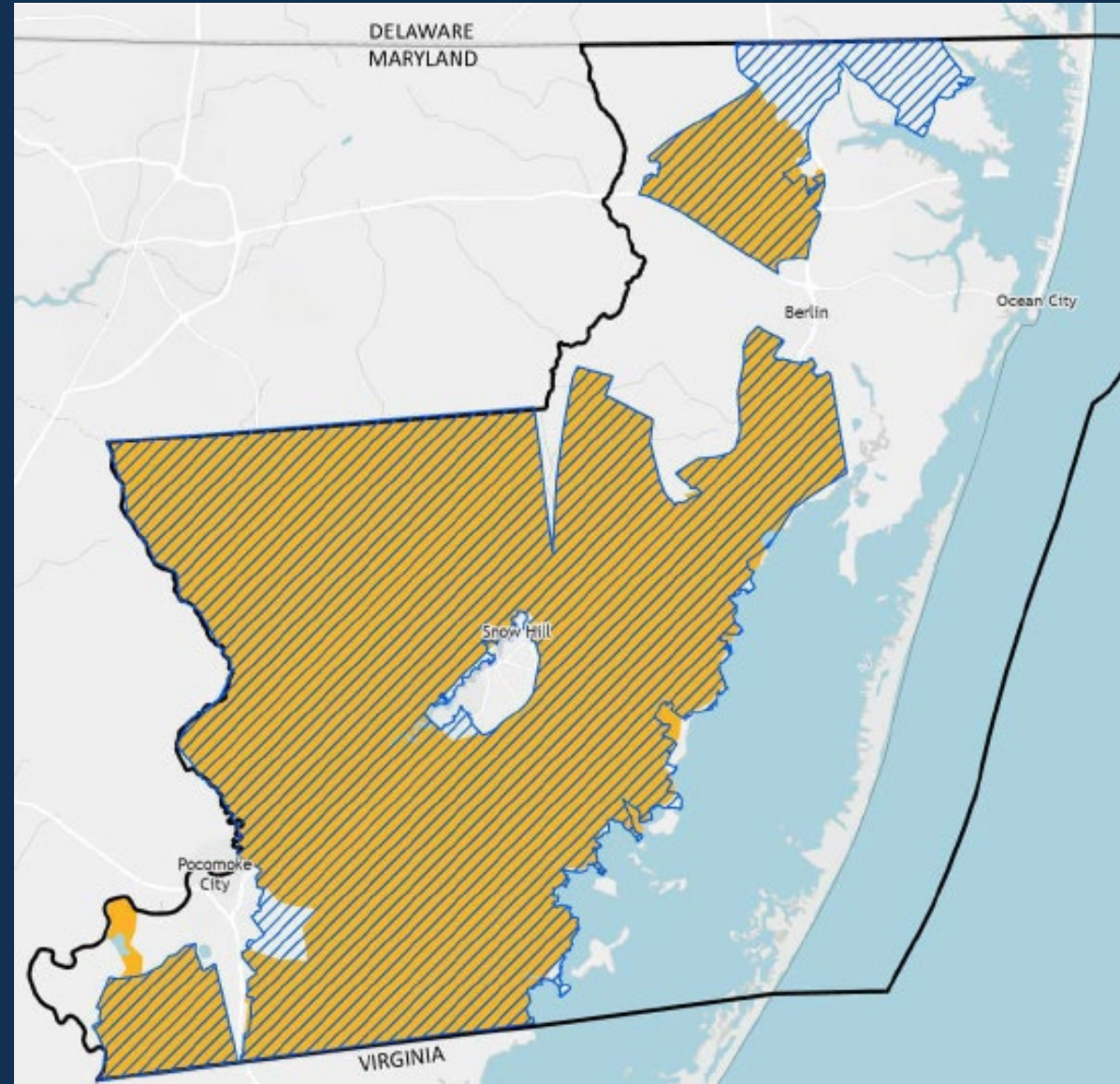
Loss of Natural Features



Loss of Farmland

Chapter 9: Agriculture

Map 9-2 Priority Preservation Areas



Chapter 10: Transportation

Key Plan Points

- Transportation comes in many forms: roads, pedestrian and bicycle routes, water trails, airports, railways, and transit services.
- Goals include supporting transportation infrastructure and future transportation needs.
- Improve safety, mobility, accessibility, and resiliency in the transportation network
- Seek to integrate transportation and land use where feasible, to create more sustainable patterns of development, especially in growth areas.

Applicable Principles



Public Engagement Priorities



Chapter 11: Water Resources Element

Key Plan Points

- Preserve and protect the County's existing water resources for their ecological value and importance to the water supply, while also addressing the impacts of future growth
- Provide adequate public facilities
- Protect drinking water supplies
- Preserve ecological functions
- Accommodate growth through compact development patterns
- Minimize disruption to environmental resources

Applicable Principles



LAND



ECOLOGY

Public Engagement Priorities



Too Much Growth/Growth Pressure



Preserving Community Character



Next Steps



What Happens Next?

Step 1: Plan Adoption

- The Planning Commission will finalize the plan and forward their recommendation for adoption to the Worcester County Commissioners
- The Worcester County Commissioners will schedule their own public hearing on the draft plan.
- Any revisions will be made prior to a Resolution being passed adopting the final plan.

Estimated Adoption Timeframe:

Late Summer to Early Fall

Step 2: Zoning Code and Maps

- The Planning Commission will begin the process of amending the Zoning and Subdivision Control Article and the associated zoning maps.
- Work sessions with the Planning Commission on various planning topics and code sections will occur over the next several years.
- Staff will maintain a public website with information as topics are discussed.
- Public comments on the draft code and maps will be accepted.

Public Comments

