

2019

TOWN OF LA PLATA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



**DRAFT FOR INTERNAL &  
STEERING COMMITTEE REVIEW**

8/16/2019



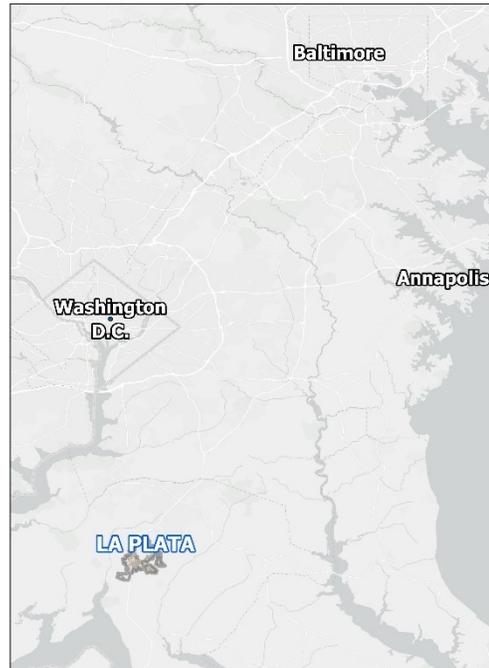
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## Section 1. Introduction

The Town of La Plata, located in Charles County in southern Maryland, was founded in 1873 as a train stop along the Pope's Branch of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad. La Plata replaced Port Tobacco as the county seat for Charles County in 1892 when fire destroyed the Port Tobacco courthouse. Expansion of the transportation system again stoked the growth of La Plata in 1940 with the opening of the then Potomac River Bridge (later, the Governor Harry W. Nice Memorial Bridge), which carries US Route 301 over the Potomac River. The bridge, which provided a link to King George, Virginia, brought long-distance east coast traffic through the town as an alternative to US 1 and, later, Interstate 95. US 301 bisects La Plata with rural and residential communities to the west and the historic downtown, county courthouse and office buildings, and the Charles Regional Medical Center to the east. Being located approximately 35 miles south of Washington DC, 50 miles south of Annapolis and 65 miles south of Baltimore, the Town has largely become a bedroom community for the metropolitan areas and for two military installations: Naval Air Station Patuxent River approximately 35 miles to the south and Indian Head Naval Surface Warfare Center approximately 10 miles to the west.



La Plata has been through several downtown fires and two major tornadoes, the most recent of which was in 2002 cutting a wide swath through residential and commercial areas alike. La Plata has rebuilt from each natural disaster and the seeds of this comprehensive plan update were sown from planning and visioning activities between the 2002 and the 2009 comprehensive plans. Since the last comprehensive plan, La Plata has grown from 8,753 residents just under 9,500 according to the most recent census bureau estimates.

### 2019 Comprehensive Plan Policies and Background

Section 3-101 of the Land Use Article in the Annotated Code of Maryland provides broad planning and zoning enabling legislation to counties and municipalities. The Land Use Article tasks the Planning Commission of each municipality that has independent planning and zoning authority to develop (or revise) a Comprehensive Plan every ten years and then forward that Plan to the legislative body for review and approval.

The Town of La Plata has enjoyed a long history of effective planning. Over the years, the elected body, the Mayor and Council, and the appointed planning body, the Planning Commission, have taken the process very seriously. The Comprehensive Plans written for La Plata in the past have been the principal means by which the community has set priorities and measured its success. When adopted, this document will replace the 2009 Town of La Plata Comprehensive Plan and extend the planning horizon year to 2040.

The Plan is a policy guide for both groups as they access the location, character and extent of proposed public and private development within La Plata. The Plan's goals and objectives are implemented over time through the decisions related to annexations, rezoning, subdivision of land, and the location and construction of public improvements.

The Comprehensive Plan for municipal governments must include the following elements:

- Goals and Objectives
- Community Facilities
- Areas of Critical State Concern
- Land Use
- Development Regulations
- Sensitive Areas
- Transportation
- Water Resources

In addition, the plan for a municipal corporation that exercises zoning authority (such as La Plata) shall include a municipal growth element. Municipalities may elect to include elements relating to community renewal, housing, natural resources and resource conservation, flood control, pollution control, and other topics as it deems appropriate.

Finally, a Comprehensive Plan must address the "twelve visions" established in Article 1-202

- **Quality of life and sustainability:** a high quality of life is achieved through universal stewardship of the land, water, and air resulting in sustainable communities and protection of the environment;
- **Public participation:** citizens are active partners in the planning and implementation of community initiatives and are sensitive to their responsibilities in achieving community goals;
- **Growth areas:** growth is concentrated in existing population and business centers, growth areas adjacent to these centers, or strategically selected new centers;
- **Community design:** compact, mixed-use, walkable design consistent with existing community character and located near available or planned transit options is encouraged to ensure efficient use of land and transportation resources and preservation and enhancement of natural systems, open spaces, recreational areas, and historical, cultural, and archaeological resources;
- **Infrastructure:** growth areas have the water resources and infrastructure to accommodate population and business expansion in an orderly, efficient, and environmentally sustainable manner;
- **Transportation:** a well-maintained, multimodal transportation system facilitates the safe, convenient, affordable, and efficient movement of people, goods, and services within and between population and business centers;
- **Housing:** a range of housing densities, types, and sizes provides residential options for citizens of all ages and incomes;
- **Economic development:** economic development and natural resource-based businesses that promote employment opportunities for all income levels within the capacity of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities are encouraged;

- **Environmental protection:** land and water resources, including the Chesapeake and coastal bays, are carefully managed to restore and maintain healthy air and water, natural systems, and living resources;
- **Resource conservation:** waterways, forests, agricultural areas, open space, natural systems, and scenic areas are conserved;
- **Stewardship:** government, business entities, and residents are responsible for the creation of sustainable communities by collaborating to balance efficient growth with resource protection; and
- **Implementation:** strategies, policies, programs, and funding for growth and development, resource conservation, infrastructure, and transportation are integrated across the local, regional, state, and interstate levels to achieve these visions.

While given broad latitude on how to develop and implement the Comprehensive Plan, state law does require consultation with county and state government agencies and opportunities for public participation throughout the plan development process.

### Plan Process & Public Participation

The Town of La Plata’s Planning Department and Planning Commission began the process of updating the Town’s Comprehensive Plan in 2018 with a series of public outreach activities to identify the topics most important to the public in the next Comprehensive Plan. Town staff facilitated several exercises including the following:

- **Branding Exercise:** to choose the name and tagline community members envisioned for La Plata;
- **Live/ Work Map:** to identify where participants work and live in and around the Town of La Plata;
- **Opportunities versus Challenges Exercise:** to summarize what the opportunities and challenges of La Plata are. The small-town atmosphere and sense of community, the downtown potential and diverse community were some of the opportunities and the traffic on main corridors, walkability and lack of businesses were a few of the challenges;
- **Objectives and Principles Exercise:** to evaluate if the 2009 objectives were still relevant in 2018;
- **Community Survey:** To document community member's concerns and involvement in the comprehensive plan process

In addition, the Town held focus groups to fill in some gaps not otherwise addressed in the 2018 public outreach activities or another planning effort. These focus groups related to:

- **Environmental Planning and Policy** which discussed natural resources and conservation efforts and development regulations;
- **Housing and Community Development** which focused on the diversity of housing needs in La Plata such as housing for the elderly and disabled, low to moderate income families and other targeted groups; and,
- **Economic Development** which reviewed how to advance specific economic development projects long sought by the Town.

Finally, a steering committee including Town and County agency representatives, local business owners, non-profit organization members, Planning Commission members and La Plata residents was created as a result of these efforts and has played an active role in the comprehensive study update process.

## Plan Organization

The Comprehensive Plan is organized by element as identified in the state code; however, for ease of public understanding, some of the elements have been renamed and/or regrouped. Appropriate references are made to the state code so that the reviewing governmental agencies can more readily identify them.

Each element identifies relevant issues and trends facing the Town, accomplishments since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan and a series of goals and action items which comprise the 2019 Comprehensive Plan. Each element also reflects goals, actions or other information which relate back to the municipal growth element.

**Goals are the long term, general statement that describe La Plata’s desired future condition.** These goals are typically to be achieved over the life of the plan, or 20 years. **Actions are specific activities which should be undertaken to advance or achieve the Plan’s goals.** Additional actions may be pursued as conditions and capacities warrant. Actions are typically implemented through ordinances and regulations, planning and zoning documents, capital investments, and cooperative efforts with citizens, businesses, local, state and federal agencies and other stakeholders.

Several technical documents are appended to the comprehensive plan in order to maintain readability to the typical reader.

## Previous Studies

Since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan, many studies and reports have addressed La Plata’s physical environment and provided guidelines for future planning of the town. The studies are important points of reference for understanding some of the key issues in this Comprehensive Plan and are summarized below.

### *The La Plata Town Centre Corporation Assessment Report La Plata, Maryland, 2012*

In 2011, the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Main Street Center to apply their “Main Street Four Point Approach” to downtown revitalization beginning in 2011. The assessment of opportunities for La Plata is summarized below:

- The La Plata Town Centre Corporation (LPTCC) was a good start to downtown revitalization efforts.
- Successful businesses located in downtown La Plata and can help create a more thriving downtown and an even better business district.
- Charles Street is a big concern. Improvements such as streetscaping, traffic signals or roundabouts, will help unify the street and make a pleasant pedestrian environment.
- Promote downtown businesses with wayfinding signs and maps.
- Create developments with more density to differentiate the downtown from the residential neighborhoods throughout the rest of La Plata.

- Support small business owners to go through the review process for architectural cohesion. LPTCC can help fill the gaps between what the small business owners can provide and what the Design Review Board requires.

Based on these assessments the report provided recommendations to guide LPTCC and the town of La Plata to revive the downtown area.

*Connections and Community: Knitting Together La Plata's Center, Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel Report, 2016*

The La Plata Town Center Corporation strives for downtown development of the Town of La Plata. The Urban Land Institute's Technical Assistance Panel report was sponsored by LPTCC to highlight the Town's challenges and strengths. The study looks at the redevelopment readiness for the downtown area (approximately 15 acres on the north side of La Plata's downtown) and the challenges to implement change for the town. Recommendations include issues such as transportation, connectivity, circulation and prioritization development and implementation.

Several recommendations from the report are the following:

- Create an internal street grid to improve circulation, prioritize redevelopment parcels, and balance the needs for through and local traffic.
- Storefronts need to become more pedestrian friendly and access to retail should be oriented to the street, not the rear surface parking lots.
- Coca Cola and Southern Maryland Oil relocate nearer to US 301.
- Rezone parcels to allow for mixed-use redevelopment to move forward.

*Sustainable Communities Program-Application for Designation Renewal, 2017*

Maryland's Sustainable Communities Act of 2010 established a framework to reinvest in the state's existing communities and encouraged jurisdictions to create designated geographic focus area. La Plata had a 15-acre area (La Plata Town Center) designated as Sustainable Community and in 2017 applied to expand the area to 192 acres, incorporating most of the downtown core area. During the 2012-2016 designation, the Town completed several projects identified in its application including adoption of a new sign code, establishment of a new mixed-use zoning designation, and implementation of storm water management regulations.

*Charles County Public Library La Plata Branch Site Analysis, 2018*

OrangeBoy, Inc., a market research firm, reviewed the current La Plata Branch location of the Charles County Public Library system and reviewed the potential sites for library relocation within the Town of La Plata.

The study covers the Area of Dominant Influence (ADI) of La Plata's Library, the customer characteristics and analyzes future needs for the La Plata Library. The two potential sites are both near Downtown La Plata, one north of Route 6 and one south.

The study concluded both sites would be good locations to support the new library. Due to a projected population growth of 5 percent from 2018 to 2023, the report concludes the library should be equipped to serve this expanding community.

### *Other Documents Reviewed*

The consultant team also reviewed several documents for the Comprehensive Plan development. These documents include the following:

- Town of La Plata Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Master Plan, 2011
- Charles County Comprehensive Plan, 2016
- Town of La Plata Stormwater Capacity Management Plan, 2012
- Town of La Plata Wastewater Capacity Management Plan, 2013
- Town of La Plata Water Supply Capacity Management Plan, 2013
- South County Water Transmission Main Alternatives Evaluation, 2015
- Charles County Water Source Feasibility Study – Phase A-2, 2018
- Educational Facilities Master Plan FY 2019, Charles County Public Schools
- University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center Strategic Plan Update FY 2018 – FY 2022
- Maryland Department of Planning. Models & Guidance #26. “Water Resources Element of the Comprehensive Plan: Planning for Water Supply, Wastewater Management and Stormwater Management”. Publication No. 2007-003. June 2007.
- “Water for Maryland’s Future - What We Must Do Today: Final Report of the Advisory Committee on the Management and Protection of the State’s Water Resources”, Maryland Department of the Environment, July 1, 2008.
- “Water Supply Capacity Management Plan”, Town of La Plata, MD. January 1, 2013.
- “Charles County Water Source Feasibility Study – Phase A-2 Technical Memorandum”; Hazen & Sawyer; Charles County Department of Planning & Growth Management; October 31, 2018.
- “Guidelines for Use of Class IV Reclaimed Water: High Potential for Human Contact”; Maryland Department of the Environment; MDE-WMA MDE-WMA-002-07/15; Revised 07/2016.
- "Maryland Consolidated Transportation Program: FY20 – 25 DRAFT"; Maryland Department of Transportation.

## Summary of 2019 Comprehensive Plan Goals & Actions

Based on review of prior plans and studies, public meetings held over the course of a year and other research and analysis, the Town of La Plata establishes the goals and actions described below.

### *Land Use Goals and Actions*

**GOAL: La Plata will maintain and enforce its plans and policies to strengthen the downtown core and maintain its small-town character.**

**ACTIONS:**

- The 2018 comprehensive rezoning ordinance establishes the regulatory structure to encourage infill development and encourage mixed use development at the La Plata Town Center. Town staff and the Planning Commission should be mindful of their extraordinary efforts to complete the rezoning process over the course of eight years when considering proposed site plans, reviewing special exceptions and variances, signage plans, and negotiating mixed use and planned use development plans.
- When Commission and staff workload in reviewing projects and plans become strained, priority should be given to review of downtown mixed-use and infill projects and necessary efforts to advance creation of the La Plata Town Center. Following a predictable yet flexible development review process will be key to gathering momentum for the project.
- The Town should give additional review to its urban design guidelines, maximum setbacks from the curb or property line, and parking requirements to ensure that an active street frontage is gained with each new development project.

**GOAL: New development areas will reflect the principles of walkability, sustainability and environmental protection.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Several new policy and planning concepts are contained in this comprehensive plan which are specifically intended to guide development in any areas seeking annexation into La Plata. The Planning Commission should conduct a thorough review and update of codes and standards to reflect concepts and standards contained in the comprehensive plan.
- As each annexation area is proposed, the Town should clearly establish its expectation that new development will meet or exceed code requirements and integrate into the Town as a cohesive part of the community. The Planning Commission should conduct a thorough review of proposed site plans *prior to* initiating the annexation process and enter into binding agreements on urban design, walkability, sustainability and environmental protection.

**GOAL: La Plata will plan develop flexible planning requirements to support anchor institutions *and* new/micro economy business opportunities.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Establish a “Community and Campus Zone for Hospitals and Health Care Facilities”
- Ensure that zoning definitions include the concepts of “micro-manufacturing” and “makerspaces” to be permitted in commercial and mixed-use areas. The Town should

recognize that a rapidly changing economy does not neatly classify such business opportunities and that their integration into commercial and mixed-use areas brings investment and vitality to targeted sites.

#### *Municipal Growth Goals and Actions*

**GOAL: La Plata will expand its boundaries when and where there is a clear net economic and/or environmental benefit to doing so and only when supported by adequate public facilities.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Require that all new growth areas are connected to water and sewer service and provide or support adequate multimodal transportation capacity.
- Support annexation of existing residential and commercial properties when there is a clear plan and identified funding for water and sewer connections and capacity.
- Review Town ordinances requiring that properties connected to the water and sewer system must be within the town’s corporate limits.

**GOAL: Improve intergovernmental coordination with respect to annexation, development processes and public facilities.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Review and revise the town’s school capacity policies in coordination with Charles County and the Board of Education with respect to available seats at the elementary school level.
- Identify opportunities within growth areas to support new town or county public facilities such as schools, libraries, police and fire stations, and other municipal services infrastructure.
- Provide for reciprocal review of major development projects that may have impacts to the town or county when constructed in the other jurisdiction.

#### *Environmental Sensitive Areas Goals and Actions*

**GOAL: Protect sensitive environmental areas through resource conservation and other natural resource management tools.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Continue to coordinate with Charles County on areas designated as habitat of rare, threatened and endangered species for priority retention area under the County’s Forest Conservation Ordinance.
- Close gaps in the local greenway network through direct acquisition, easements and exactions during the development process. Make regular application for funding from MD DNR Program Open Space to secure priority greenway areas where new development is not planned.
- Maximize opportunities for forest conservation subdivision requirements to be met through retention of natural wooded areas and wildlife corridors on site pursuant to Ordinance No. 18-05.

**GOAL: Require a high standard of environmental protection in new subdivisions through regulations that protect forest stands and mature trees, stream valleys, steep slopes and waterways.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Develop and enact an ordinance which protects steep slopes from development.
- Create a greenways checklist to be used as part of the development review process to include existing and proposed conditions and a construction management plan that addresses riverbank stabilization and slope treatment; trail and pedestrian connections; greenway plantings; existing retention areas and mitigation measures.
- Prepare an environmental protection ordinance comprehensively integrates all existing and new development review requirements, including both high standards and flexibility for creative environmental protections.

**GOAL: Meet or exceed regulatory goals for protecting the Port Tobacco River and Zekiah Swamp watersheds.**

[Please see the Water Resources Element for actions related to this goal.](#)

**GOAL: Encourage programs and projects that connect residents to the town's natural resources.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Build relationships with non-profit conservation organizations who can assist individual landowners in preserving the important natural features on their properties
- Create environmental stewardship activities led by the Town or non-profit organizations.
- Include public access easements to parks and greenways in development reviews and approvals process. This might also include providing bicycle and pedestrian facilities, habitat viewing areas and interpretive signage highlighting natural features.

*Water Resources Infrastructure Goals and Actions*

**GOAL: Plan upgrades and enhancements to the Town's wastewater infrastructure to ensure that growth and development can be accommodated within the Chesapeake Bay Restoration framework.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Continue to carefully monitor usage through regular updates of its Wastewater Capacity Management Plan and control allocations through its development and building permit approval processes.
- Incrementally expand wastewater plant from its current rated capacity of 1.5 MGD to 2.0 MGD by 2030 to meet projected demands from growth and development.
- When considering annexation of potential municipal growth areas that have failing septic systems, require that the County and property owners agree to a financial plan that will support connections to the wastewater treatment system at no capital expense to the Town.
- If determined to be prudent and feasible based on an ongoing evaluation, install flow equalization capacity at the wastewater treatment plant to mitigate the impact of high peak flows. processes and enhance the plant's overall reliability, especially during periods of heavy rain.

- As WWTP capacity is expanded at 2.0 MGD, the Town should begin to investigate new opportunities for mitigation, nutrient offset, level-of-treatment improvement, or alternative disposal regime, including the State’s new nutrient trading program.
- Consider alternative disposal, through spray irrigation, reuse, “purple pipe” or other means is also a potential long-term strategy that the Town is considering addressing wastewater capacity limitations.

**GOAL: Ensure that the future water supply needs of the Town can be met while preserving the long-term sustainability of shared groundwater resources.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Implement water allocation and development approval policies that ensure that adequate production and distribution capacity exists prior to project approval.
- Sunset pending allocations of water for developments that do not move forward within three years of approval.
- Continue promotion of water conservation to reduce per capita water usage by 5% from 2012 usage levels.
- Perform regular comprehensive water system audits to minimize water losses from the system.
- Develop infrastructure to support the use of reclaimed, highly treated effluent for cooling water, irrigation, lawn watering, fire suppression, or other non-potable water uses.
- Develop alternative sources of water supply, including expanded development of groundwater and surface water sources.
- Connect with other water supply systems, such as the Town of Waldorf, to create greater opportunities for resource balancing and enhancing system redundancy.

**GOAL: Protect local watersheds by implementing protective development and stormwater management practices that minimize and mitigate the impact of additional runoff from new development.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Completing the Town’s MS4 restoration plan and identify stormwater retrofit and watershed restoration projects that will contribute to the overall Chesapeake Bay TMDL effort.
- Implement the projects included in the MS4 restoration plan.
- Maximize opportunities to create new open space and green space within the downtown areas to reduce overall imperviousness and minimize stormwater runoff.
- Continue to track stormwater management facilities and impervious areas through its Stormwater Capacity Management Plan and NPDES MS4 permit annual reports.
- Target fee-in-lieu revenue to stormwater mitigation projects that support the Town’s overall watershed restoration program.

**GOAL: Preserve and enhance high-quality and sensitive water resources impacted by growth and development.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Limit waivers of stormwater management requirements in newly developed areas, particularly within sensitive and high-quality watersheds, to ensure that higher levels of treatment will be achieved in areas that are redeveloped and stormwater will be treated to the maximum extent practicable in newly developed areas.
- Reduce the total potential growth area from the 2009 Comprehensive Plan for La Plata as indicated in the Municipal Growth Plan of this 2019 Comprehensive Plan
- Focus reforestation efforts within watersheds that will benefit the most from the investment, particularly in the Jennie Run and Zekiah Swamp watersheds.

**GOAL: Meet or exceed stormwater management goals as expressed in TMDL requirements.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Identify a sustainable source of funding for the Town's MS4 restoration plan, including funds needed for long-term maintenance, capital replacement, and MS4 permit compliance.
- Continue to work with Charles County to implement the Port Tobacco WRAS.
- Work with MDE and Charles County to explore nutrient trading and large-scale restoration projects as a long-term approach to managing stormwater waste load allocations.

*Transportation Goals and Actions*

**GOAL: Make strategic, proactive connections in the street grid to support economic and community development projects and better manage through traffic.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Conduct and present to CSXT an at-grade crossing study for potential new crossings. Use this study to establish the necessary mitigation measures that will be required at-grade crossings to be built.
- Advance concept development and preliminary engineering for key transportation investments so that they are ready to go as development and redevelopment investment becomes possible.
- Acquire real estate options for future right-of-way acquisition necessary to construct road, establish right-of-way for preferred alignments in record plats.
- To accommodate through east-west through traffic as well as improve access to University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center from MD 301, be an additional crossing of CSXT south of Charles Street.

**GOAL: Continue to make La Plata a very walkable community.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Fill remaining gaps in the sidewalk network
- Work with property owners along Charles Street and Washington Avenues to delineate parking spaces from pedestrian areas.

- In its annual list of priority transportation projects to the Maryland Department of Transportation, the Town and Charles County should make a high priority request for sidewalks to be built on the east side of Crain Highway (US 301).

**GOAL: Better manage the supply of existing parking and limit new off-street parking.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Improve signage for off-street parking areas
- Implement a parking meter program to improve turnover of key parking spaces.
- Encourage shared parking spaces and reduce or eliminate minimum parking requirements on a *per development* basis.

**GOAL: Support regionally-significant transportation improvements**

**ACTIONS:**

- Support the Southern Maryland Rapid Transit project connecting the Branch Avenue Metro Station to White Plains
- Request further study of the Southern Maryland Rapid Transit Project to extend south to downtown La Plata

*Municipal and Community Services & Facilities Element*

**GOAL: Promote a culture of civic activism and community ownership.**

- The town should continue to invest in community activities that bring residents together and create strong civic bonds.
- The town should work to identify a diverse and growing group of residents to serve on its boards and commissions and to lead other beneficial programs to the community.

**GOAL: Strengthen town services and programs with adequate staffing and technical expertise.**

- The town should consider adding program management staff to support implementation of capital projects as the Capital Improvement Program develops.
- The town should consider hiring a community/economic development manager to help bring specific development projects to fruition.

**GOAL: Establish a capital improvement program to guide town's infrastructure investment.**

- A formal infrastructure assessment should occur and be used to guide capital replacement or rehabilitation of roads, buildings, water and sewer systems.
- The Town Council should adopt policies regarding the types of projects which may be considered for funding under the capital program.
- The Town Council should establish five-year budget targets for a capital improvement program to provide certainty that capital projects can move forward and establish a debt affordability goal which will guide PAYGO vs. bond-funded project spending.

**GOAL: Identify and develop municipal services which can be self-sustaining as a resource to other unincorporated areas of municipalities in the region.**

- The Town has enough sewer capacity to absorb significant new development; however, such development is expected to be slow in the next decade absent some disruptive economic shift. The Town should consider allowing residential properties with failing septic systems to connect to the sewer system without being annexed into the town.
- The town should consider allowing its solid waste transfer station to be used by other municipalities

*Housing and Community Development Goals and Actions*

**GOAL: Encourage mixed-use development in new subdivisions and in downtown redevelopment projects.**

- The 2018 comprehensive rezoning ordinance establishes the regulatory structure to encourage infill development and encourage mixed use development at the La Plata Town Center. Town staff and the Planning Commission should continue to promote a mix housing types when considering development plans.
- Encourage relocation of uses that do not conform with neighboring zoning to decrease fragmented and uncoordinated uses.
- Staff and Planning Commission should review the plans with the infill and downtown development projects as priorities. This will help the Town from having multiple nodes and taking opportunities away from the Downtown area.
- The Town should support development proposals and programs that integrate various populations in order to successfully implement mixed-use development in and around the Downtown Core.

**GOAL: Encourage a range of housing density, type, cost and size in new subdivisions to welcome a diverse population.**

- The Town should continue to support development proposals and programs that address the needs of senior and physically challenged population, to provide flexibility for the needs of such populations.
- La Plata should address the housing needs of those who are currently living in hotels and are underserved in the regular housing market.
- Planning Commission and Town staff should clearly outline the need for diverse housing and incentivize/ prioritize subdivisions being planned to meet the housing needs of the Town.

**GOAL: Support “aging in place” initiatives to attract and retain La Plata’s senior citizens.**

- Encourage the use of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as defined in the ordinance; this will allow development of ADUs in association with single family detached homes. These will help provide affordable housing options for low to moderate income workers, seniors, and recent college graduates as recommended in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan.
- Work with non-profit and local organizations that provide services for the seniors to increase the ability to “age in place” for community members.
- Plan for mixed-use developments that provide attractive amenities for seniors.

### *Economic Development Goals and Actions*

**GOAL: Focus the town’s community and economic development efforts on the downtown core; demonstrate public investment to attract private capital.**

- Ensure the availability of infrastructure and services that are essential to grown and sustain businesses by advancing actions in the Transportation Element.
- Harness redevelopment potential in downtown industrial sites, including proactive efforts and investments to relocate active businesses to more appropriate properties in the Town.
- Explore town-sponsored tax and financial incentives for downtown growth and development, including tax increment financing for infrastructure projects.
- Establish a “Sunny Day” Fund to encourage small business development for destination retail and a location-specific brand experience; support arts and entertainment district activities and their spin-off benefits.
- Develop a destination marketing strategy to bring retail customers off US 301 and into the downtown core, with a focus on commuters living south of La Plata and in Virginia.

**GOAL: Support entrepreneurialism, workers in the “gig economy” and telecommuting.**

- Ensure that zoning ordinances permit home-based businesses, telecommuting and micro-manufacturing opportunities with appropriate safeguards for residential quality of life.

**GOAL: Build on the town’s economic strengths.**

- Maximize the potential of the planned La Plata Library to provide a range of services with hours of operation well into the evening hours.
- Establish a “Community and Campus Zone for Hospitals and Health Care Facilities” which provides a predictable development environment for this sector.
- Closely monitor activities of County and state government to ensure that facilities master plans and office siting decisions for public agencies give preference to the downtown core.

### *Recreation and Parks Goals and Actions*

**GOAL: Create strategically located, community and neighborhood parks.**

- Use the 2011 La Plata Parks and Recreation Master Plan to determine the types of facilities needed in the Town.
- Create a 20-25 acre community park within Heritage Green that is accessible to residents of the entire town. The park should have indoor and outdoor amenities; paths and trails connecting the park to areas that are underserved and need a connection to a park.
- Create a community park in the downtown area.
- Add two neighborhood parks, one west of US 301 (10 to 15 acres) and one east of US 301 (20 to 30 acres).
- Add a natural resource area/ greenway that connects Rosewick Road south to the existing Clark Run natural area. This will serve as the north-south spine through the town.
- Plan for a town-wide walking/biking trail system which will be approximately 15 miles.
- Enhance existing parks and recreation areas.

**GOAL: Meet identified facilities needs especially for indoor recreation and sports fitness, walking and swimming, and programming for youth, elderly and disabled residents.**

- Review the 2011 La Plata Parks and Recreation Master Plan to prioritize the types of indoor facilities needed in the Town of La Plata. Basketball, sports fitness and swimming pools are the highest future demand indoor facilities.
- Continue to work with Charles County to ensure adequate senior trips and tours, special Olympic programs and youth programs are provided and are advertised to La Plata residents
- Work with local organizations and Charles County to provide programs for the disabled.
- Incorporate multi-generational playgrounds to provide options for those who may not be as mobile and need the physical activity.

**GOAL: Ensure that new development in Town provides on-site recreation and open space, but also contributes its fair share to the public PROS system.**

- When approving new development, the Town should consider the public PROS system needs and the recreation and open space needs internal and private to the development. The town should prioritize the public PROS system first.
- The Town Planning Commission should use the needs analysis from the 2011 Parks and Recreation Plan to identify needs as related to the new development under the Town's development regulations.
- The Town should consider impact fees as a potential funding source for recreational facilities.

**GOAL: Create a town-wide walking/biking trail system as recommended by the *2011 La Plata Parks and Recreation Master Plan*.**

- Review the 2011 Parks and Recreation Plan to add trails and paths in recommended locations. Ensure trail and path recommendations do not have conflict with transportation plans for the Town.
- Connect Heritage Green, Clark Run greenway, Agricopia Park, Redwood Lake, East Patuxent Drive and future planned parks with one another.
- Create a natural resource area/ greenway along Clark Run as a spine through the heart of Town.

## Section 2: The Comprehensive Plan

## Part 1: Growth, Infrastructure and the Environment

The regulation of land development through the planning and zoning ordinances, investments in public infrastructure (water, sewer, roads, etc.) and measures to protect the natural environment is the foundation of the comprehensive planning process. Among many other outcomes, decisions in the areas of land use, municipal growth, infrastructure and environmental policy areas drive the Town's financial ability to provide municipal services, the quality and availability of clean and safe drinking water, the ability of residents and workers to circulate through the town by car or on foot to local and transit to regional destinations. Part 1 of the 2019 Comprehensive Plan addresses these issues and more.

## Land Use Element

Maryland's delegation of land use planning to local governments is framed in the 1992 Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act which articulates the State's growth policy through seven (now 12) visions centered on concentrating development in suitable areas, protecting sensitive areas, and establishing funding mechanisms to achieve the visions. Subsequent legislation directed state funding for growth-related infrastructure (roads, water/sewer, public buildings, etc.) to Priority Funding Areas (PFAs), providing a geographic focus for state investment in growth; and, created requirements for local governments to control septic sewers in the land development process.

### Significant Updates Since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan

On July 30, 2018, the Town Council adopted Ordinance 18-05, a comprehensive zoning ordinance updated for the first time since 1979. The zoning code became effective on August 15, 2018 and can be downloaded [here](#).

### Existing Conditions

The Town of La Plata has developed along two main corridors, Crain Highway (US 301) and Charles Street (MD 6) The commercial land uses are concentrated along these two corridors with residential land uses dispersed throughout the fringes of these axis roads. The majority of residential land uses are low density with the medium and higher density residential adjacent to the commercial land uses.

La Plata is approximately 7.42 square miles or 4,750 acres. There have been no major annexations or other changes to the town boundaries since the 2009 comprehensive plan. A few technical corrections to the boundary had minimal effect on the overall acreage. The lack of current municipal growth is an about-face since the 1990s when approximately 800 acres were annexed into the town (Heritage Green's) followed by approximately 160 acres from period 2002 – 2009<sup>1</sup> (Stagecoach, Steeplechase and Agricopia subdivisions.) Since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan the pace of development has been far less than expected owing to national economic conditions and the rapid pace of development in northern parts of Charles County. Only a few subdivision phases have broken ground; high and medium density residential units in the town have been built.

The current land use of La Plata is split into the following categories:

- **Low Density Residential Areas:** These are primarily single-family detached homes at densities of approximately 2 to 3 units per acre or less and include some community service and institutional uses. These areas comprise of 1150 acres or 26 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Medium Density Residential Areas:** These are mostly detached and attached single family houses at densities of no more than 4 to 6 units per acre. This category, like low density residential areas also includes some community service and institutional uses. These areas comprise of 401 acres or 9 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **High Density Residential Areas:** These areas generally include apartments and condominiums as well as community services and institutional uses. The density does not exceed more than 20 unit per acre. These areas comprise of 361 acres or 8 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Commercial Areas:** Comprises business, institutional and service establishments. These areas comprise of 548 acres or 12 percent of the total acreage in Town.

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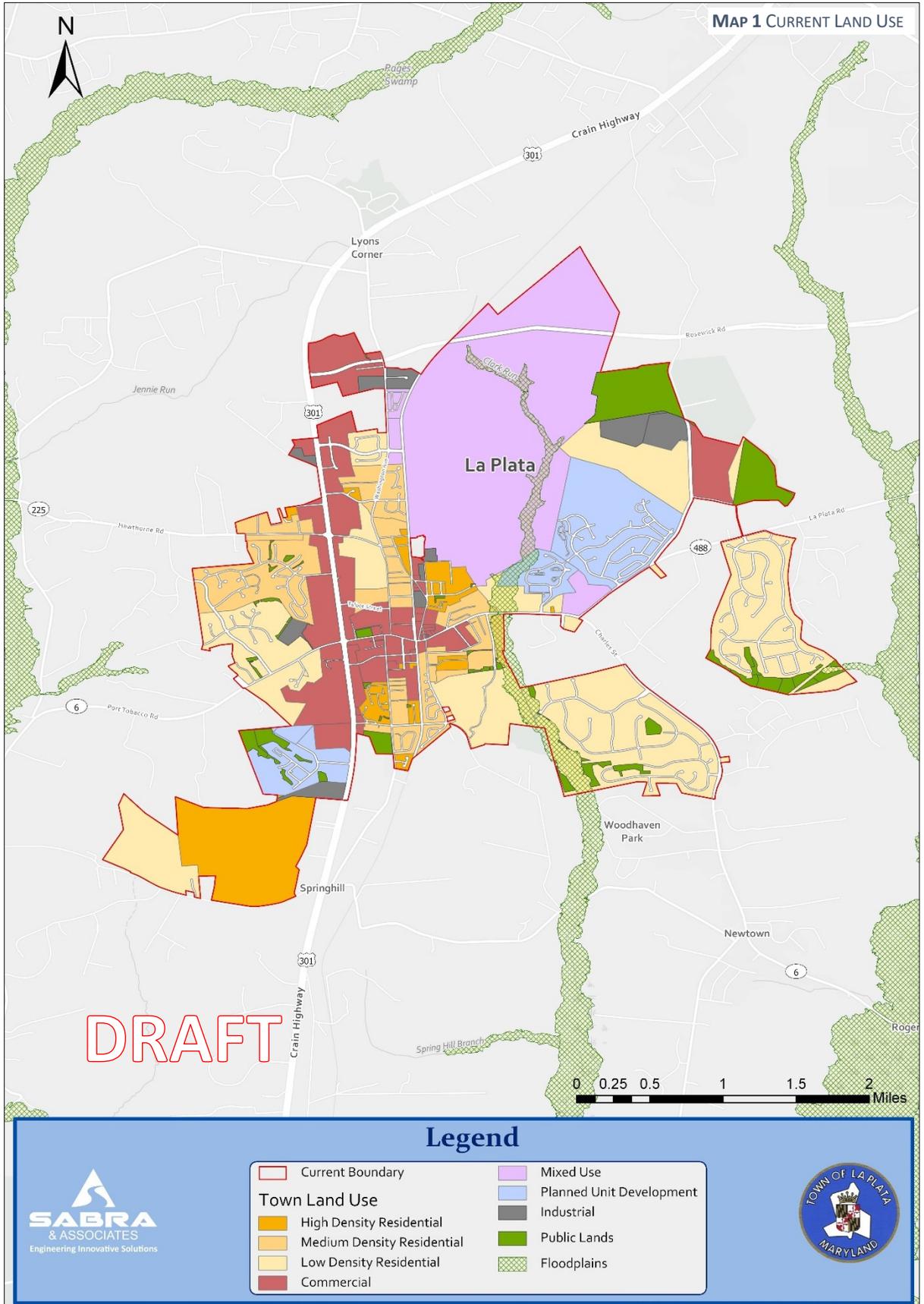
<sup>1</sup> 2009 Comp Plan, p.3

- **Mixed-use Areas:** A combination of residential, commercial, office, and institutional uses. These areas comprise of 1026 acres or 23 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Planned Unit Development Areas:** These areas comprise of 356 acres or 8 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Industrial Areas:** Accommodates manufacturing, warehouse, distribution centers, industrial parks and similar uses. These areas comprise of 122 acres or 3 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Public Lands:** Areas including forest conservation act easement areas, parks, recreation facilities, and large land areas specifically preserved as open spaces. These areas comprise of 247 acres or 6 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Flood Plains:** Areas of low-lying ground subject to flooding. These areas comprise of 245 acres or 5 percent of the total acreage in Town.

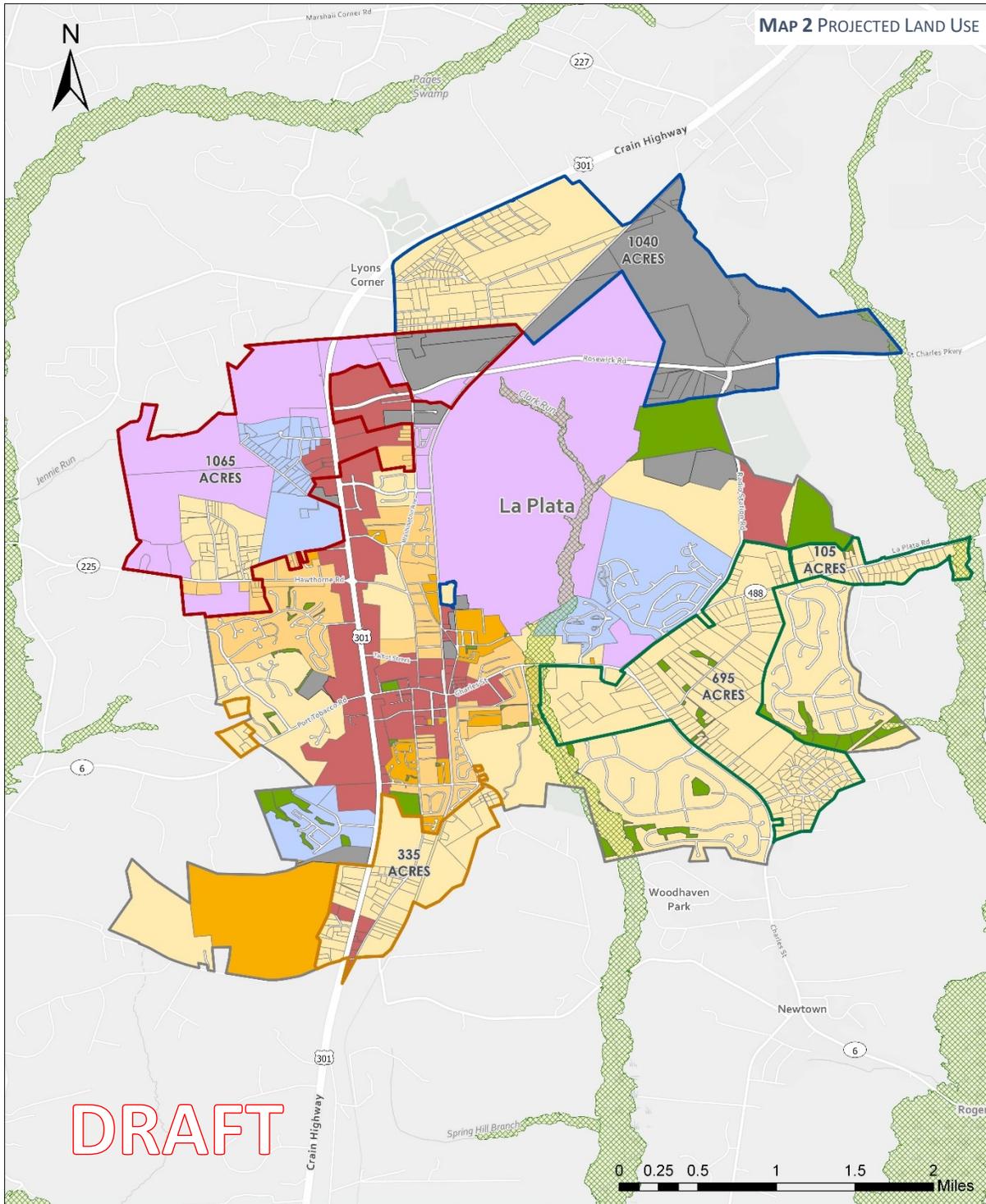
**Map 1: Current Land Use** and **Map 2: Projected Land Use** depict the Current and Future Land Use in the Town of La Plata, respectively. The Future Land Use map shows projected municipal growth areas which are discussed in the [Municipal Growth Element](#). Including all potential annexation areas, the total acreage of the town would be approximately 7,900 acres.

The future land use of La Plata is split into the following categories:

- **Low Density Residential Areas:** These areas comprise of 2716 acres or 36 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Medium Density Residential Areas:** These areas comprise of 451 acres or 6 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **High Density Residential Areas:** These areas comprise of 401 acres or 5 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Commercial Areas:** These areas comprise of 620 acres or 8 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Mixed-use Areas:** These areas comprise of 1561 acres or 21 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Planned Unit Development Areas:** These areas comprise of 518 acres or 7 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Industrial Areas:** These areas comprise of 777 acres or 10 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Public Lands:** These areas comprise of 260 acres or 3 percent of the total acreage in Town.
- **Flood Plains:** These areas comprise of 295 acres or 4 percent of the total acreage in Town.



MAP 2 PROJECTED LAND USE



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Legend

- |                               |                            |                          |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Future Boundary               | Southeast Quadrant         | Mixed Use                |
| <b>Municipal Growth Areas</b> | <b>Town Land Use</b>       | Planned Unit Development |
| Northeast Quadrant            | High Density Residential   | Industrial               |
| Southwest Quadrant            | Medium Density Residential | Public Lands             |
| Northwest Quadrant            | Low Density Residential    | Floodplains              |
|                               | Commercial                 |                          |



## Goals and Actions

**In general, the Town's current land use and development capacity should support a stable, if not growing and diverse population and economy.** The ability to leverage its land use powers and its flexibilities is key to spurring future growth within existing town boundaries, as is a development review process that is fair, transparent and predictable. Additional issues related to land use planning include how to best support the Town's anchor institutions and businesses, strengthen the downtown core and character, manage potential growth of the Town's municipal boundaries and diversify the Town's economic base.

**GOAL: La Plata will maintain and enforce its plans and policies to strengthen the downtown core and maintain its small-town character.**

### **ACTIONS:**

- The 2018 comprehensive rezoning ordinance establishes the regulatory structure to encourage infill development and encourage mixed use development at the La Plata Town Center. Town staff and the Planning Commission should be mindful of their extraordinary efforts to complete the rezoning process over the course of eight years when considering proposed site plans, reviewing special exceptions and variances, signage plans, and negotiating mixed use and planned use development plans.
- When Commission and staff workload in reviewing projects and plans become strained, priority should be given to review of downtown mixed-use and infill projects and necessary efforts to advance creation of the La Plata Town Center. Following a predictable yet flexible development review process will be key to gathering momentum for the project.
- The Town should give additional review to its urban design guidelines, maximum setbacks from the curb or property line, and parking requirements to ensure that an active street frontage is gained with each new development project.

**GOAL: New development areas will reflect the principles of walkability, sustainability and environmental protection.**

### **ACTIONS:**

- Several new policy and planning concepts are contained in this comprehensive plan which are specifically intended to guide development in any areas seeking annexation into La Plata. The Planning Commission should conduct a thorough review and update of codes and standards to reflect concepts and standards contained in the comprehensive plan.
- As each annexation area is proposed, the Town should clearly establish its expectation that new development will meet or exceed code requirements and integrate into the Town as a cohesive part of the community. The Planning Commission should conduct a thorough review of proposed site plans *prior to* initiating the annexation process and enter into binding agreements on urban design, walkability, sustainability and environmental protection.

**GOAL: La Plata will plan develop flexible planning requirements to support anchor institutions and new/micro economy business opportunities.**

The University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center (Hospital) is a large and important public facility in La Plata. It is the only hospital and the fourth largest employer (and the largest *private* employer) in Charles County. One way to support anchor institutions is through fair, transparent and predictable land use, design and entitlement processes. The Town must also be cognizant of rapid nationwide changes in the health care industry which are resulting in fewer and shorter hospital stays and more outpatient treatment; “health care” versus “sick care”, as well as pressure to reduce costs. The result will be fewer large hospitals and hospital expansions and more, diverse, and scattered outpatient facilities.<sup>2</sup> Flexibility in land use and entitlement plans and processes are important to maintain and grow the Hospital’s presence in La Plata.

On the other end of the spectrum are entrepreneurs and micro-businesses who require “maker-spaces,” collaborative working environments, informal or drop-in offices, home-based workspaces or pop-up locations. The recently adopted zoning ordinance addresses zoning for many emerging business types (food trucks, microbreweries, medical marijuana dispensaries), but may unnecessarily restrict or burden small collaborative workspaces. For example, a home-based business is defined as being less than 10% of the dwelling unit used for a variety of professional services which may require occasional client consultation. The “light manufacturing” and “custom manufacturing” zoning definitions addresses some of the “micro-manufacturing” and “makerspace” concept but is prohibited within most commercial areas, all residential areas and the mixed-use areas that the Town seeks to encourage.

**ACTIONS:**

- Establish a “Community and Campus Zone for Hospitals and Health Care Facilities”

The goal of this zone would be to ensure integration of hospitals and associated health care facilities into the community in which they are located and may allow the zone to “float” to cover the main campus and nearby associated facilities; however, the applicant would be required to show a public benefit of doing so. For example, within certain proximities the zoning ordinance might consolidate the parking requirements of a hospital and nearby medical offices, diagnostic centers, etc., if the applicant provides for active street frontages, enhanced landscaping, off-site urban greenspace, etc. See Appendix \_\_ for additional information regarding a proposed “Community and Campus Zone for Hospitals and Health Care Facilities”
- Ensure that zoning definitions include the concepts of “micro-manufacturing” and “makerspaces” to be permitted in commercial and mixed-use areas. The Town should recognize that a rapidly changing economy does not neatly classify such business opportunities and that their integration into commercial and mixed-use areas brings investment and vitality to targeted sites. A approach to this issue can be found [here](#).

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<sup>2</sup> University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center Strategic Plan.

## Municipal Growth Element

The comprehensive plan’s municipal growth element (MGE) requirements are identified [§3-112 of the Land Use Article](#). The MGE must identify past growth patterns, potential municipal growth areas outside the existing corporate limits, and the capacity of land areas available for development, redevelopment, and in-fill development. The MGE must describe the relationship of the long-term development policy to a vision of the municipal corporation's future character, including the protection of sensitive areas. Changes to public services and infrastructure needed to accommodate growth within the proposed municipal growth area are also to be documented relative to population growth estimates.

Inclusion of potential growth areas in a comprehensive plan does not by itself bring the areas into the town’s corporate limits; however, for an area to be annexed into the town the area must be consistent with the municipal growth element of the comprehensive plan. Annexation must occur in accordance with [Local Government Article §4-401, et seq.](#)

### Significant Updates Since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan

Other than minor technical corrections, there has been no change to the corporate boundaries of the Town of La Plata since adoption of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan.

### Development Considerations

The Town faces a difficult balancing act the desire for growth and providing the public infrastructure and services to support the growth. New developments proposed for areas just outside of the town boundaries seek access to the municipal water and sewer system; however, extending the water and sewer system to a larger geographic area may further dilute the market potential for commercial and mixed-use development in downtown La Plata. There are environmental benefits to extending water and sewer in certain areas allowing for the removal of septic systems; growth areas that bring primarily residential development are typically a “break-even” proposition for municipal governments when considering the totality of municipal services provided. Commercial and industrial development is far more needed to grow the town’s tax base to support those services; however, enough population growth is necessary to justify private investment in those areas.

### Population Forecast

The Town’s estimated population in 2017 was 9,365 out of the total Charles County population of 159,700. From 1980 to 1990, the population of La Plata increased at an annual rate of just under 10% although this mostly owes to the expansion of the Town’s corporate boundaries and new development therein. However, since 1990, the annual rate of increase has been only of 1.39% -- less than the County’s growth rate of approximately 2%. **Table 1** compares the Charles County and La Plata Growth Rates between 1970 and 2015.

Year	Charles County		La Plata	
	Population	Annual Growth Rate	Population	Annual Growth Rate
1970	47,678	4.32%	1,561	4.76%
1980	72,751	3.35%	2,484	9.21%
1990	101,154	1.77%	5,993	1.08%
2000	120,546	1.97%	6,671	2.75%
2010	146,551	0.61%	8,753	0.89%
2015	155,793	1.41%	9,151	1.40%

**TABLE 1** ANNUAL GROWTH RATE BY DECADE FROM 1970 AND 2010

Absent some major positive economic disruption, it cannot be reasonably forecasted that the town’s population will grow at a much faster rate over the next decade or two than it has in the past decade. As such, the population of La Plata is projected to increase by 3,500 through 2040 as shown in **Table 2**<sup>3</sup> which includes new residents gained through annexation and development of the potential municipal growth areas.

Population Projection	
Year	Population
2000	6,671
2010	8,753
2012	8,982
2017	9,365
projected 2020	9,812
projected 2025	10,470
projected 2030	11,433
projected 2035	12,188
projected 2040	12,837

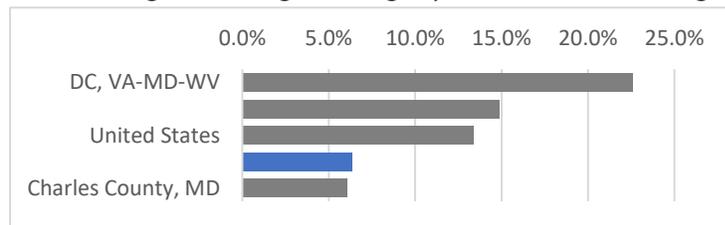
Among the many economic, environmental and societal factors that will affect the Town’s rate of growth over the next two decades, a few may have specific implications for La Plata:

- A considerable amount of development capacity exists in northern Charles County, especially in St. Charles and White Plains which are closer to major employment centers in the Washington, DC suburbs. Thus, development may occur there instead of in La Plata.
- Road improvements such as the MD 5 interchange reconstruction at US 301 are planned to mitigate traffic congestion to the east of La Plata making the areas somewhat more desirable from a commuting perspective.
- The strength of downtown housing markets and campaigns to attract and retain younger families in highly urbanized areas is reducing demand for suburban multi-family housing.
- The evolution of employment patterns in the federal civilian agencies, and the relocation of nearby agencies to areas outside of the Washington, DC metropolitan area will adversely affect La Plata’s growth. In the defense sector, growing federal investments in air and naval systems may lead to population growth in the region.

**TABLE 2** POPULATION PROJECTION IN THE TOWN OF LA PLATA

Finally, a further brake on population growth may be the relative homogeneity of the town’s population. While Charles County has become more diverse and became a majority-minority community according to the 2018 American Community Survey, the racial and ethnic composition of La Plata is 62.4% “white alone” and approximately 25.6% Black or African American. People of two or more races, Asians and Hispanics account for approximately 12% of the population.

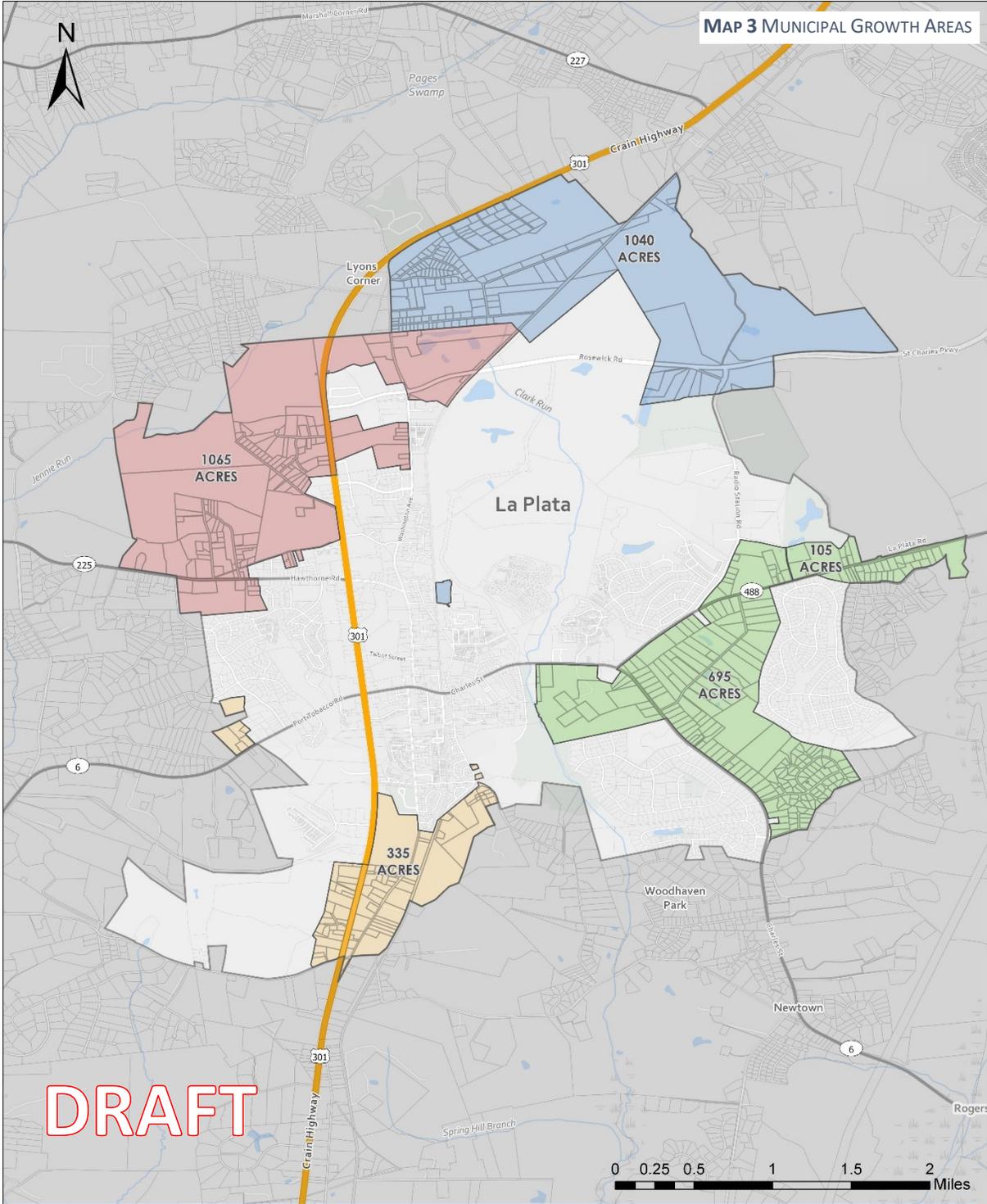
As shown in **Figure 1**, fewer than 6.4% percent of La Plata residents were born outside the United States, which is slightly higher than the percentage of foreign-born residents of Charles County; however, the state and national average population of foreign-born residents is approaching 14% and the Washington, DC region is slightly more than 22% foreign born. The lower-than-average share of



foreign-born residents in La Plata and Charles County may serve as a brake on population growth as immigrant populations tend to cluster.

**FIGURE 1** FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION COMPARISON

<sup>3</sup> Population projection takes into consideration birth and death rates, number of building permits rewarded in the Town of La Plata, development projects, Maryland population projection numbers and number of persons in a household.



**DRAFT**

		<b>Legend</b>		
Highway Roads Streams Parcels Ponds	Northeast Quadrant Northwest Quadrant Southeast Quadrant Southwest Quadrant			

### *Potential Growth Areas & Vision of Future Character*

**Map 3** shows the Town's potential growth areas including approximate acreages and the future land use as the Town envisions. Combined, these areas total approximately 3,100 acres and could accommodate approximately 2,151 residentially-zoned acres and 934 acres of commercially- and industrially-zoned development.

- The Northwest Quadrant, (referred to as Growth Area 1) is approximately 1,065 acres mostly west of US 301 and north of MD 225. Some of this area is developed including a sand and gravel mine north of Rosewick Road, the W & W Industrial Park west of US 301 on Industrial Parkway, and, to its west, homes in the Parkway subdivision. The Town envisions a mix of land uses for growth area 1: heavy industrial west of the railroad north of Rosewick Road; commercial along US 301 and Rosewick Road; business park west of US 301; and mixed use and residential further west towards future Quailwood Parkway. Growth Area 1 includes two areas with conceptual site plans. The Hub at La Plata is an approximately 505 acre mixed use development along future Quailwood Parkway with a long-term build out of approximately five million square feet<sup>4</sup> in a traditional neighborhood design. Hawthorne Yards is an approximately 45 acre mixed residential and retail area south of MD 225 east of existing Quailwood Parkway.
- The Northeast Quadrant, (referred to as Growth Area 2) is approximately 1,040 acres east of US 301 and mostly north of Rosewick Road along Jaybee Lane. This area is split between existing residential uses west of the railroad tracks and largely undeveloped to the east. The Town envisions the western portion as industrial/employment-focused and the eastern portion as large-lot residential.
- The Southeast Quadrant (referred to as Growth Area 3) is approximately 800 acres on the east side of Town mostly south of MD 488 and east of MD 6 including Prospect Hill Road, La Plata Park, and Ellenwood. The Town envisions the future land use to remain large-lot, 0.5 acre minimum, residential. Connection to the Town's sewer system appears possible but would be costly due to the size of the lots and their scattered pattern.
- The Southwest Quadrant, (referred to as Growth Area 4) is approximately 350 acres on the south side of Town east and west of US 301 and along St. Mary's Avenue. The area is partially developed in residential lots with some scattered commercial businesses, but there are some larger undeveloped tracts including a farm with frontage on US 301. The Town envisions the future land use to be large lot, 0.5 acre minimum, residential, with the commercial businesses to remain. Growth Area 4 also includes the two smaller areas on/near Walnut Hill Road that have development potential and orient geographically more to the Town than to the more large-lot suburban areas to the west.

### *Development Potential and Impact on Public Services and Infrastructure*

The five proposed growth areas, as described above, are partially developed but have considerable residential development potential. An estimated 4,361<sup>5</sup> dwelling units could be constructed at full build-out under future zoning character as show in **Map 2**. These estimates are for the purpose of understanding the public services and infrastructure needed to accommodate growth including any future burden on services and infrastructure that the Town would be responsible for.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://thehubatlaplata.com>

<sup>5</sup> According to Maryland Department of Planning's Development Capacity Summary Report, 5/29/2019

Future development in growth areas will have varying impacts on public services and infrastructure. Impact fees, water allocation permits, and limitations on development where schools are overcrowded is mechanisms already place Adequate Public Facilities Ordinances provide mechanisms to ensure that development in the potential growth areas can be supported by the County schools and the Town's water and wastewater system; however, it is generally expected that the concomitant growth in property taxes and other ongoing revenue sources will pay for increases and/or improvements in other public services such as libraries, parks and recreation, solid waste, public safety, civic promotion and community development. A "gray area" exists with respect to the transportation network, as the County and State governments require traffic impact studies and access permits for certain roadways, requirement for development projects to mitigate traffic on the larger road network are less clear and typically rely on negotiated agreements rather than a fee structure.

The Town's tax base is largely residential which raises questions about the Town's ability to provide the expected level of municipal services as residential growth occurs. A growing body of empirical evidence shows that while commercial and industrial development can indeed improve the financial well-being of a local government, residential development worsens it. While residential development brings with it new tax (and fee) revenue, it also brings demand for local government services which often exceeds the revenue generated by the new houses.<sup>6</sup> Ensuring that municipal growth yields diverse land uses will be a critical evaluation point when considering potential growth areas. The specific impacts of the potential growth areas is discussed further in the Community Facilities and Services element.

As annexation opportunities come into focus, the implications for environmentally sensitive areas must also be considered:

#### Rural buffers and transition areas

Charles County's 2016 Comprehensive Plan designates most of the land outside the Town's proposed growth areas as Suburban Large Lot or Major Stream Valley, with some Rural Residential to the south Buffers of the Town<sup>7</sup>. The Town's envisioned land uses for the proposed growth areas are mostly consistent with the County's designations; these are large lot residential or mixed use adjacent to County-designated residential.

For new development in potential growth areas buffer yards to existing or potential future development would be provided pursuant to the Town's buffer yards standards (Section 191-48 of

#### Growth Areas Removed from 2009 Plan

The potential municipal growth areas in this 2019 Comprehensive Plan are a reduction of approximately 750 acres compared to the growth areas in the 2009 Plan. The areas that were proposed as Town growth areas in 2009 but are not proposed in this 2020 Plan are in four main areas:

- Area on the west side of Town between MD 6 and MD 225. This area is largely subdivided or developed and is not an area identified with failing septic systems.
- Area on the west side of Town north of MD 225 including the Hawthorne Country Club and land adjacent to the north up to the College of Southern Maryland. This area north of the Country Club is undeveloped and is in the environmentally sensitive Jennie Run watershed.
- Laurel Springs Regional Park on the east side of Town.
- Area on the east side of Town south of MD 488 along and east of Grant Chapman Drive. This area is largely subdivided or developed and is not an area identified with failing septic systems.

<sup>6</sup> <https://landuse.uga.edu/Documents/cocsrep.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Charles County Comprehensive Plan, 2016. Figure 3-1 (Land Use Map)

the Town’s Zoning Ordinance). These are intended to minimize conflicts between potentially incompatible but otherwise permitted uses on adjoining lots.

The areas with the highest potential for conflict are in growth areas 1 and 2 where the Town envisions heavy industrial land use and the County’s adjacent designation is Suburban Large Lot. Under the Zoning Ordinance a buffer yard “G” would be required that would minimize conflict.

#### Protection of sensitive areas

The proposed growth areas include some sensitive environmental areas. Growth areas 1, 2 and 3 are partially in state-designated Tier 2 watersheds that drain either west to the Port Tobacco River or east towards Zekiah Swamp Run. Jennie Run, which runs through growth area 1 is a designated Tier 2 stream.

New development in the growth areas would be subject to Town’s sensitive area requirements for protection of sensitive areas such as floodplains, streams, steep slopes, and areas with erodible soils (see [Sensitive Areas Element](#) of this Comprehensive Plan). New development affecting Tier 2 waters and needing certain State permits and approvals, would also be subject to Maryland’s antidegradation regulations that are intended to maintain the condition of high-quality waters.<sup>8</sup>

#### Goals and Actions

**GOAL: La Plata will expand its boundaries when and where there is a clear net economic and/or environmental benefit to doing so and only when supported by adequate public facilities.**

##### **ACTIONS:**

- Require that all new growth areas are connected to water and sewer service and provide or support adequate multimodal transportation capacity.
- Support annexation of existing residential and commercial properties when there is a clear plan and identified funding for water and sewer connections and capacity.
- Review Town ordinances requiring that properties connected to the water and sewer system must be within the town’s corporate limits.

**GOAL: Improve intergovernmental coordination with respect to annexation, development processes and public facilities.**

##### **ACTIONS:**

- Review and revise the town’s school capacity policies in coordination with Charles County and the Board of Education with respect to available seats at the elementary school level.
- Identify opportunities within growth areas to support new town or county public facilities such as schools, libraries, police and fire stations, and other municipal services infrastructure.
- Provide for reciprocal review of major development projects that may have impacts to the town or county when constructed in the other jurisdiction.

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<sup>8</sup> (COMAR) 26.08.02.04-1.

## Environmentally Sensitive Areas Element

Section 3-106 of the Maryland Land Use Article requires that an element shall be included in the comprehensive plan which include the goals, objectives, principles, policies, and standards designed to protect sensitive areas from the adverse effects of development. Sensitive areas include streams, wetlands, and its buffers, a 100-year flood plain, a habitat of a threatened or endangered species, a steep slope, agricultural or forest land intended for resource protection or conservation, any other area in need of special protection, as determined by the Planning Commission. This element is also intended to satisfy [§3-109](#) regarding Areas of Critical State Concern.

### Significant Updates Since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan

Since the adoption of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan, La Plata has adopted an extensive system of environmental protection regulations and policies. Two significant environmental policies include:

- Ordinance No. 10-3 amended the Town's stormwater management requirements to be consistent with updated state requirements. The ordinance requires water quality treatment of runoff and requires that site plans must establish an upland vegetative buffer of at least 50 feet from adjacent to wetlands and surface waters including streams, creeks, springs lakes and ponds. The ordinance also limits proposed development that will encroach into a designated 100-year floodplain. It requires the applicant to submit an evaluation of alternatives to such encroachment, including different uses of the site or the portion of the site within the floodway, and minimization of such encroachment. Additional conditions must also be met for a waiver to be granted.
- Ordinance No. 18-05 allows clustering of development for residential projects to maintain specific density maximums while reducing lot minimum sizes, and in so doing preserve natural areas in community open space which are not conducive to the construction of homes. This allows forest conservation subdivision requirements can be met on site through retention of natural wooded areas and wildlife corridors through Forest Conservation Act Easement Long Term Protection Agreements.

### Existing Conditions

La Plata has within its boundaries and the potential municipal growth areas several environmentally sensitive resources which make the community unique, create economic value, provide opportunities for active and passive recreation, and should be conserved and protected. Each resource in its current condition is described below. There are no active agricultural sites or threatened or endangered species living within Town limits and potential municipal growth areas.

#### *Streams and Buffers*

Buffers are protection areas or zones placed around streams to preserve some of the biological and hydrologic integrity of the stream basin. Stream buffers act as run-off and groundwater pollution control systems by filtering pollutants through the soil. Buffers also provide habitat for wetland and upland plants, which are in turn used by a variety of animals as a corridor for food and shelter. Wetlands and wetland buffers are regulated by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE).

The Town of La Plata and surrounding potential municipal growth areas lie within the Port Tobacco River and Zekiah Swamp watersheds, which are both classified as Tier II watersheds – high quality watersheds

that have an existing water quality that is significantly better than the minimum requirements, as specified in MDE's water quality standards. Tier II streams are designated based on biological community scores for benthic macroinvertebrates (aquatic insects), and fish (see **Map 4**).

Streams and tributaries within the Port Tobacco watershed are designated as Class I waters in MDE's latest assessment of water quality. Class I designated use waters should support water contact recreational activities and protect non-tidal warm water aquatic life. The Port Tobacco watershed is impaired by nitrogen and phosphorus, bacteria, sediment, and sulfates. Streams and tributaries of the Zekiah Swamp watershed, which lies to the east of the Town of La Plata, are also designated as Class I waters. The Zekiah Swamp watershed generally meets or exceeds the water quality standards for Class I waters. For a more detailed discussion of the watersheds, streams and tributaries within and surrounding the Town of La Plata, please refer to the Water Resources discussion later in this chapter.

#### *Floodplains*

Floodplains moderate and store floodwaters and reduce erosion and sedimentation. Wetlands found within floodplains help maintain water quality, recharge groundwater, protect fisheries, and provide habitat and natural corridors for wildlife. Stream buffers found within floodplains also help to maintain water quality. Safeguarding the natural functions performed by floodplains benefits adjoining and downstream communities by minimizing the risks and costs associated with the loss of life and property; by contributing to the maintenance of water quality and quantity which may directly affect drinking water supplies and by providing recreational opportunities.

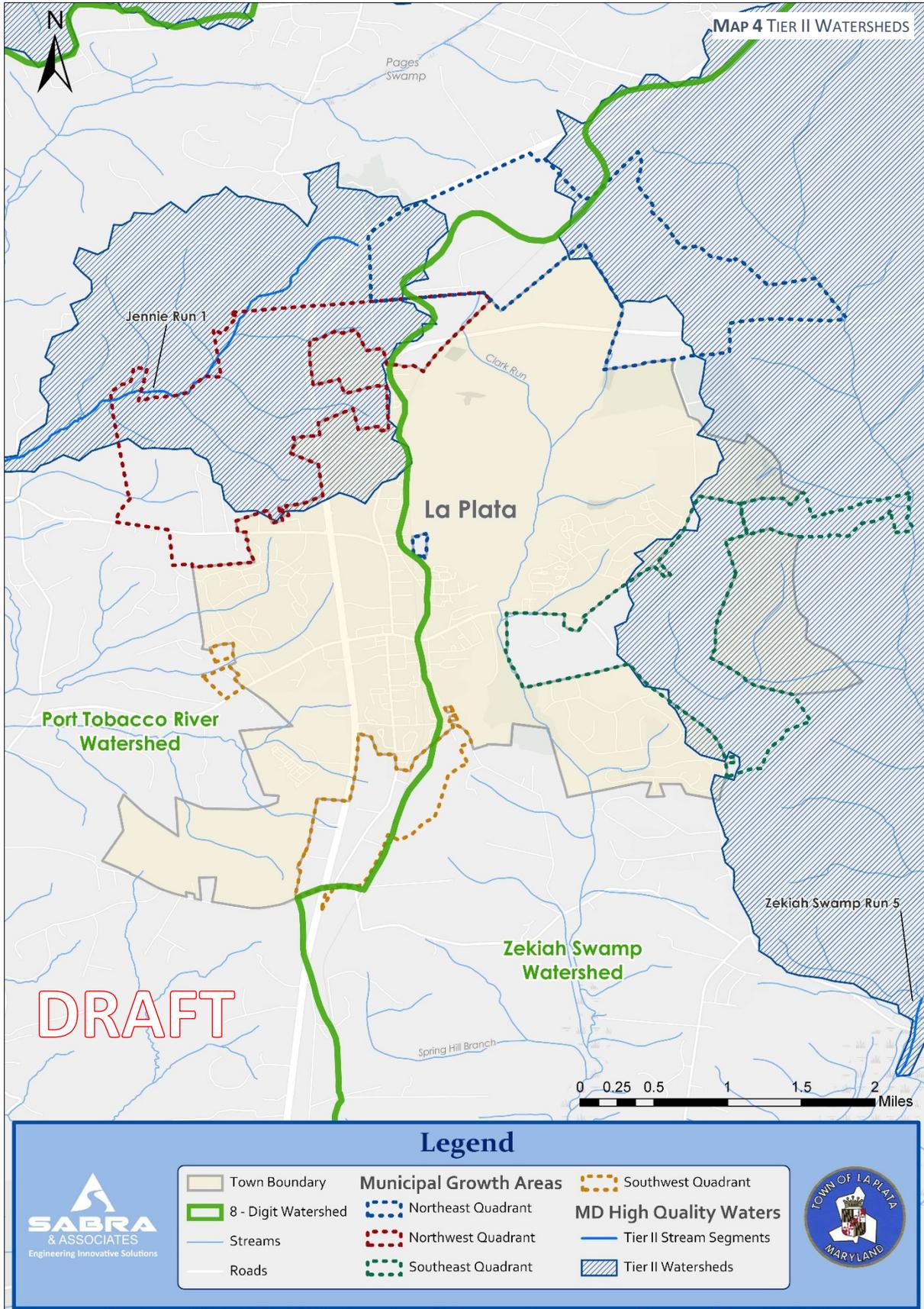
The Town of La Plata contains 100-year floodplains primarily associated with Clark Run and its tributaries, which run north and south approximately through the center of the Town. Additional floodplains are also located in some locations of the potential municipal growth areas (see **Map 5**.)

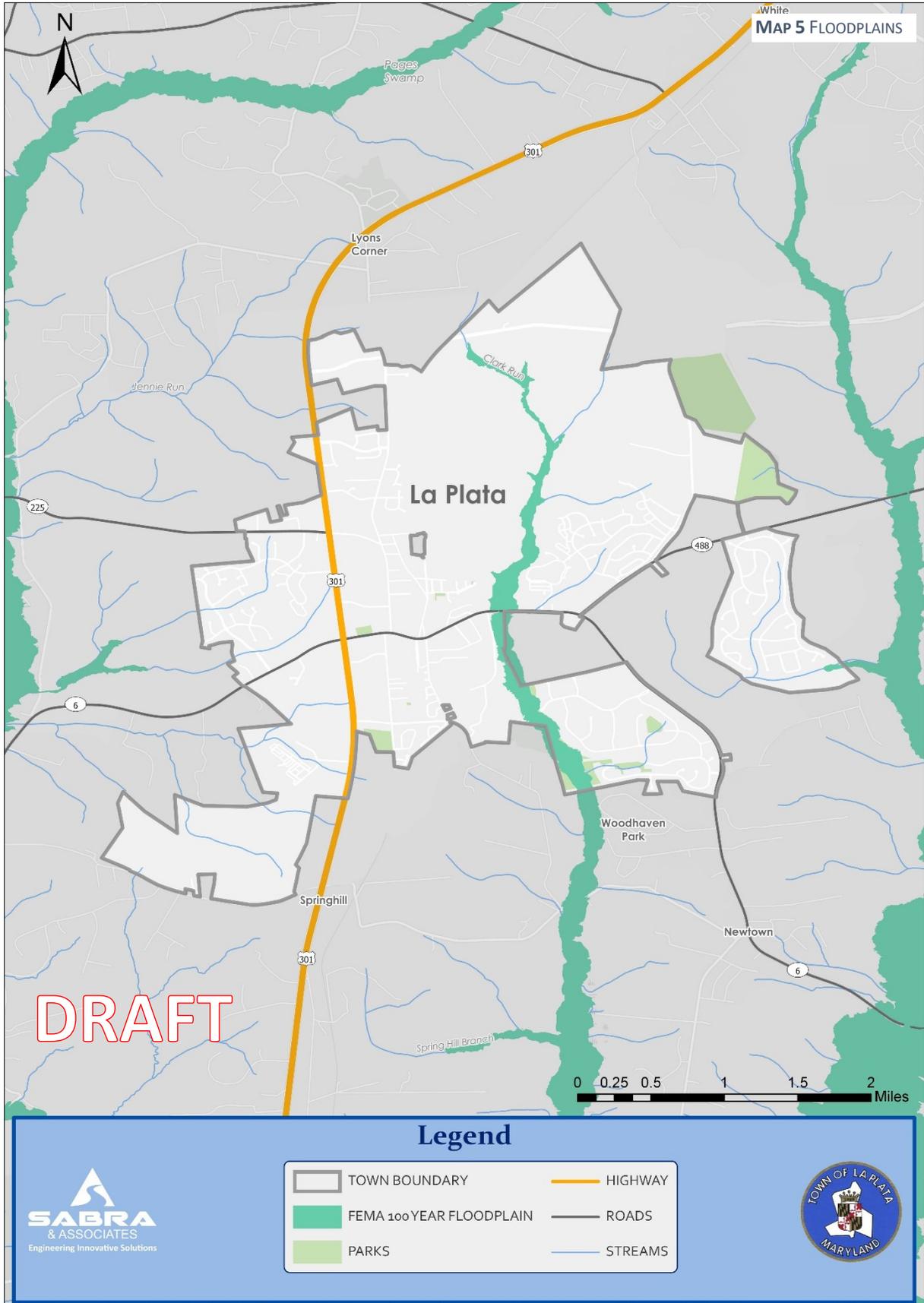
#### *Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species Habitat*

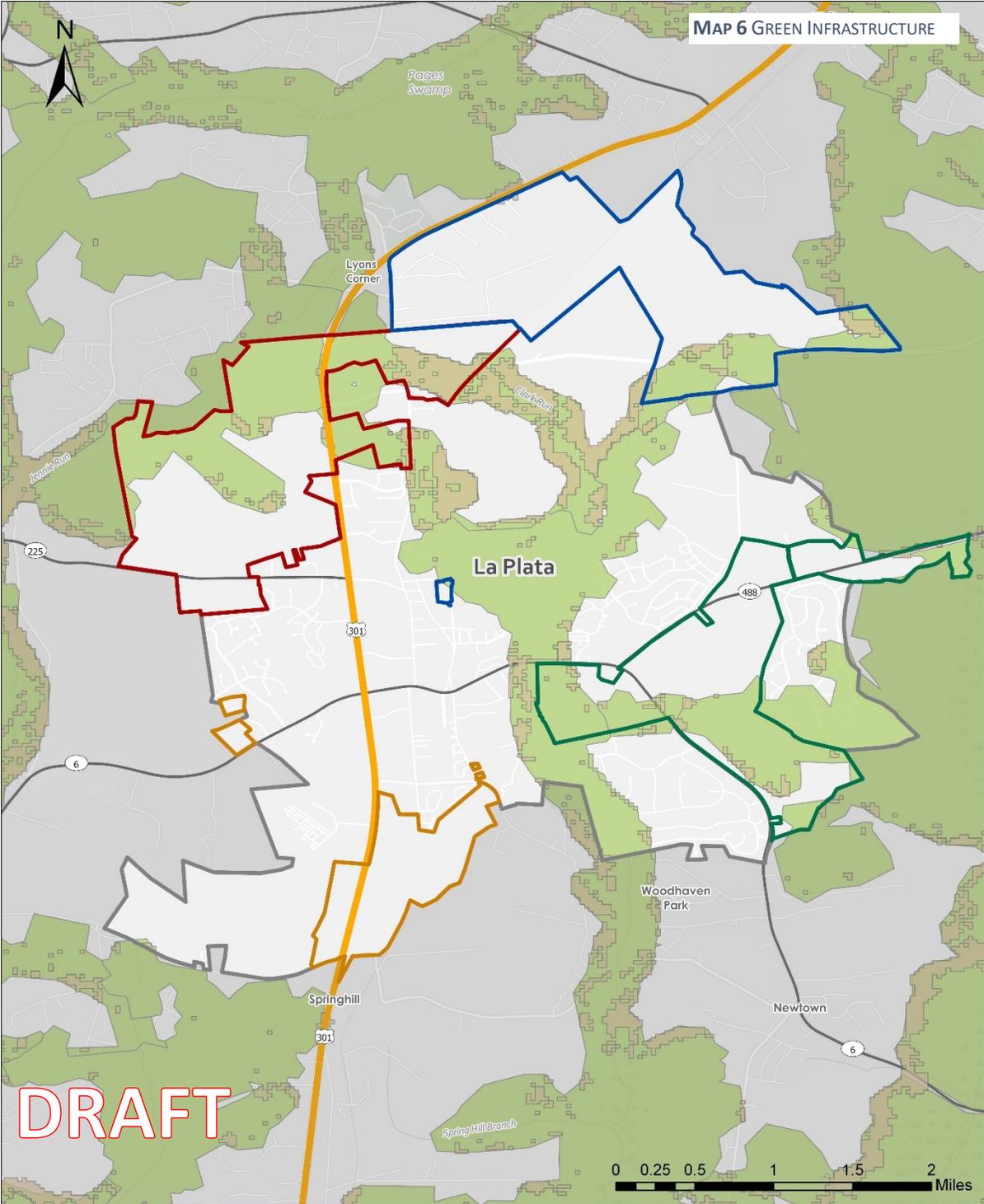
Habitat Protection Areas (HPAs) are designated for the protection of significant ecological areas. Outside of the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, HPAs include habitat of rare, threatened and endangered species, anadromous fish spawning areas, submerged aquatic vegetation, forest interior dwelling bird habitat, colonial waterbird nesting sites and Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) Natural Heritage Areas. While no HPAs are designated in the Town of La Plata's current municipal boundaries, HPAs are designated in the potential municipal growth areas.

#### *Greenways, Forested Areas and Open Space*

Greenways are large areas of open and natural space that are protected from development. They provide multiple benefits including preservation of wildlife habitat, reduced forest fragmentation, pollution reduction, aesthetic quality, and protection of important natural areas. They can also provide open space and outdoor recreation opportunities. The Town of La Plata and surrounding areas include a system of Greenways, but also some gaps in the system especially near the north and northwest areas as shown on **Map 6**.



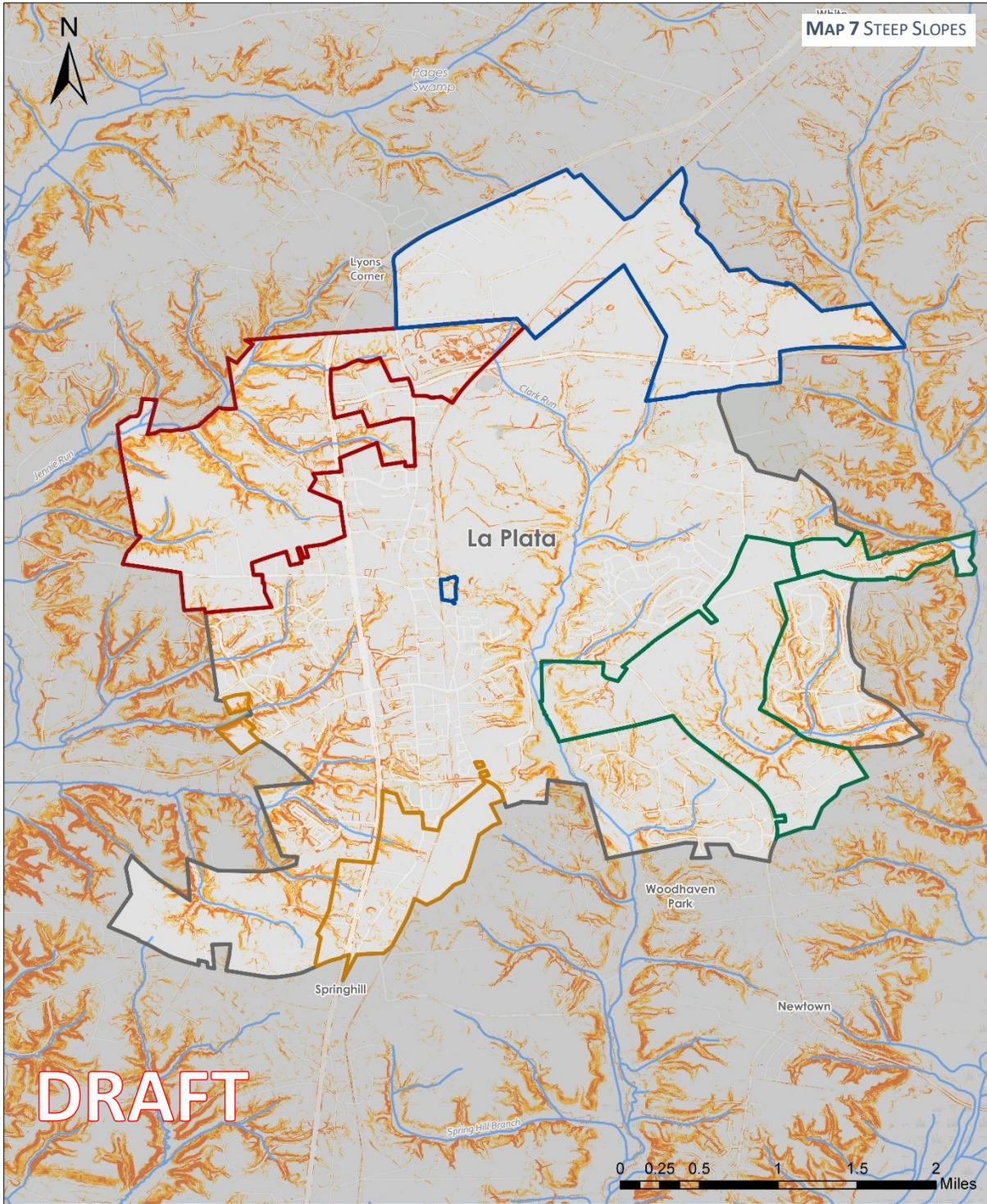




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<b>Legend</b>	
Highway	<b>Municipal Growth</b>
Roads	Northeast Quadrant
<b>Green Infrastructure</b>	Northwest Quadrant
Hubs And Corridors	Southeast Quadrant
Gaps	Southwest Quadrant

**SABRA**  
& ASSOCIATES  
Engineering Innovative Solutions



MAP 7 STEEP SLOPES

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Legend	
STREAMS	SOUTHEAST QUADRANT
ROADS	SOUTHWEST QUADRANT
<b>MUNICIPAL GROWTH AREA</b>	<b>SLOPE (PERCENTAGE)</b>
NORTHEAST QUADRANT	LOW ( $\leq 15\%$ )
NORTHWEST QUADRANT	MODERATE ( $15\% \leq 25\%$ )
	STEEP ( $25\% \leq$ )



### *Steep Slopes*

Areas of steep slopes over 15% are located within the potential municipal growth areas and present challenges that should be addressed as part of land use and development considerations. When steep slopes are disturbed by removing vegetation and developing the hillside, significant issues can arise. Potential consequences of development on steep slopes can include increased erosion and landslide damage to homes and property. Increased runoff and sediment can also contribute to stream instability, resulting in streambank erosion damage and sedimentation as well as increased transport of polluted runoff due to fewer opportunities for pollutants to settle or be filtered by vegetation. It is also more difficult to control fires on sloped land, and it may be difficult for emergency vehicles to access development and roadways on steep hillsides (see **Map 7.**)

These consequences may result in increased costs for residents and taxpayers. The costs that local governments can incur due to steep slope development include repairs of washed out roads, increased culvert and ditch maintenance caused by stormwater runoff, increased stream maintenance costs, and high costs associated with extending infrastructure to new development at these locations. Sewer and water systems are especially difficult and expensive to engineer on steep slopes. Protecting steep slopes also preserves the natural scenic beauty of a hillside area, which also can protect property values. Currently, Charles County Soil Conservation District requires vegetative stabilization of steep slopes as part of the erosion and sediment control regulations.

In the 2009 Comprehensive Plan, the Town of LaPlata identified steep slopes as those with grades of 15% or greater. Defining what constitutes “steep” for the purposes of slope regulation is at the discretion of the Town. Throughout Maryland, some communities regulate slopes starting at 10%, while others start at 15-25%, depending on the land use of the proposed development. Excellent resource information can be found [here](#).

### *Goals & Actions*

**GOAL: Protect sensitive environmental areas through resource conservation and other natural resource management tools.**

#### **ACTIONS:**

- Continue to coordinate with Charles County on areas designated as habitat of rare, threatened and endangered species for priority retention area under the County’s Forest Conservation Ordinance.
- Close gaps in the local greenway network through direct acquisition, easements and exactions during the development process. Make regular application for funding from MD DNR Program Open Space to secure priority greenway areas where new development is not planned.
- Maximize opportunities for forest conservation subdivision requirements to be met through retention of natural wooded areas and wildlife corridors on site pursuant to Ordinance No. 18-05.

**GOAL: Require a high standard of environmental protection in new subdivisions through regulations that protect forest stands and mature trees, stream valleys, steep slopes and waterways.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Develop and enact an ordinance which protects steep slopes from development.
- Create a greenways checklist to be used as part of the development review process to include existing and proposed conditions and a construction management plan that addresses riverbank stabilization and slope treatment; trail and pedestrian connections; greenway plantings; existing retention areas and mitigation measures.
- Prepare an environmental protection ordinance comprehensively integrates all existing and new development review requirements, including both high standards and flexibility for creative environmental protections.

**GOAL: Meet or exceed regulatory goals for protecting the Port Tobacco River and Zekiah Swamp watersheds.**

[Please see the Water Resources Element for actions related to this goal.](#)

**GOAL: Encourage programs and projects that connect residents to the town's natural resources.**

Building essential public infrastructure no longer is limited to just roads and sewers. It is important to recognize the investments being made into the public realm – and that greenways and trails not only support connection to the Town's natural resources, but also encourage and sustain economic growth and development. Greenways and open space that are both privately and publicly owned can work together to provide recreational and social opportunities and benefits and engage communities in environmental stewardship activities.

**ACTIONS:**

- Build relationships with non-profit conservation organizations who can assist individual landowners in preserving the important natural features on their properties
- Create environmental stewardship activities led by the Town or non-profit organizations.
- Include public access easements to parks and greenways in development reviews and approvals process. This might also include providing bicycle and pedestrian facilities, habitat viewing areas and interpretive signage highlighting natural features.

## Water Resources Element

Section 3-106 of the Maryland Land Use Article requires that a comprehensive plan consider available data provided by the Department of the Environment, the water resources element shall identify: drinking water and other water resources that will be adequate for the needs of existing and future development proposed in the land use [and municipal growth] element of the plan; and suitable receiving waters and land areas to meet stormwater management and wastewater treatment and disposal needs of existing and future development proposed in the land use [and municipal growth] element of the plan.

### Significant Actions Since 2009

Since 2009 the finalization of the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL's) for nutrients and sediment has dramatically changed the planning and regulatory landscape for local jurisdictions across Maryland. Major legislative changes have:

- Prohibited the installation of the new septic system in the Critical Area that and requires the use of “Best Available Technology” for nitrogen removal. Expanded the use of the Bay Restoration Fund to pay for a portion of the cost to connect a community with failing septic systems to a municipal wastewater plant.
- Doubled the Bay Restoration fee to \$5.00/month per EDU.
- Required local jurisdictions to establish “growth tiers” to limit major residential sub-divisions served by septic systems.
- Required jurisdictions with Phase I MS4 Stormwater Permits to establish a stormwater remediation fee to pay for watershed restoration projects. This requirement was subsequently repealed and *authorized* jurisdictions to establish the fee and/or to appropriate enough resources for the implementation of watershed restoration projects.
- Authorized the State or a local jurisdiction to count nitrogen load reductions from pumping out septic systems towards its WIP goal.

The Town of La Plata has implemented many of the recommendations that were identified in its 2009 Water Resources Element related to stormwater management requirement, forest conservation, and preservation of greenspace. These changes are designed to ensure that development can occur without compromising water quality in the surrounding watersheds, rivers and tributaries. Changes since 2009 that the Town has enacted or are under current consideration, include:

- The Town of La Plata updated and revised its stormwater management ordinances in 2013 to meet the State's new standards, which promote low-impact site development (LID) and environmental site design (ESD) practices to preserve hydrology and protect water quality. For greenfield development, these standards, if fully implemented, are designed to achieve runoff characteristics of “woods in good condition”.
- The Town had enhanced its zoning ordinances to increase open space and greenspace within the community, reducing stormwater runoff as the town grows and redevelops. Current requirements include a 20% -30% green space requirement for commercial development within the Central Business District, Central Business Transition, and Commercial Highway development zones.

- The Town has adopted a comprehensive forest conservation ordinance consistent with the State’s Forest Conservation Act. These regulations will ensure that any loss of forested lands are avoided, minimized, and mitigated through reforestation efforts funded by developers. The Town’s forest conservation ordinance also describes special protections for resources in sensitive areas, including the one-hundred-year floodplain, intermittent and perennial streams and their buffers, steep slopes, non-tidal wetlands, and critical habitats.
- The Town incorporating resource protection standards into its development approval process to ensure that protection of the floodplain, forested areas, wetlands, and sensitive areas are addressed in site development plans prior to the approval of any new sub-division.

As a Phase II MS4 permittee<sup>9</sup>, the Town of La Plata is required to “develop and implement a watershed restoration plan to “to perform watershed assessments, identify water quality improvement opportunities, secure appropriate funding, and develop an implementation schedule to show the twenty percent impervious area restoration requirement will be achieved by 2025”. La Plata has taken proactive measures in support of Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan:

- Developed a Stormwater Capacity Management Plan including much of the watershed system characterization, BMP inventory, and impervious area assessment
- Established a stormwater fee of \$13.25 per ERU in to fund a portion Stormwater Capacity Management Plan

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<sup>9</sup> The Town of La Plata is regulated entity subject to the requirements of MDE’s National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit for Discharges from Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (Phase II MS4 Permit), which became effective on October 31, 2018.

## Existing Conditions and Important Considerations

There are several important water resource considerations that will influence development in and around the Town of La Plata over the next twenty years. Many of the issues identified in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan remain of interest, particularly with respect to water supply.

### Water Supply

The Town of La Plata, like much of the southern Maryland region, relies exclusively on groundwater aquifers as a source of supply for its public drinking water system. This region of Maryland lies within a hydrogeological area known as the Atlantic Coastal Plain, an area that is characterized by a stratified system of underground aquifers separated by confining layers of unconsolidated sediments. The Coastal Plain Aquifer System is widely utilized as a primary source of water that supports private wells, public water suppliers, agricultural irrigation, and industrial uses for much of the Eastern and Southern regions of the State.

Most of the wells in La Plata draw from the Lower Patapsco aquifer. Although these wells can produce up to 3.6 million gallons of water per day on average, the Town is only permitted to withdraw 1.144 million gallons per day on an average daily basis and 1.716 million gallons per day in the month of maximum use.

Although these groundwater resources have historically provided a robust supply of high-quality water to support public and non-public uses throughout the region, they are a limited and shared resource that must be carefully managed to ensure their viability as a long-term, sustainable source of supply. Over pumping and over-appropriation of these aquifers has, in the past, caused problems with declining water levels, excessive drawdown, poor water quality, and reduced well production. As a result,

MDE has limited withdrawals from Coastal Plain aquifers that have shown a historical pattern of decline and are approaching an 80% management level. Although the Town has been in discussions with MDE for over a decade to increase the Town's appropriation permit, MDE has been unwilling to approve any pending withdrawal increases and has opted for a regional water management approach that encouraged conservation, resource sharing, reuse, and cooperation between jurisdictions in lieu of appropriation increases.

### Drinking Water Demand Projections

As of 2018, the Town of La Plata's water system was at 75.8% of capacity, based on current permit limitations, and had 277,000 gallons per day of capacity available for new development. This translates into approximately 1,248 EDUs that could be added to the system without an increase in appropriation.

#### **La Plata's Municipal Water System**

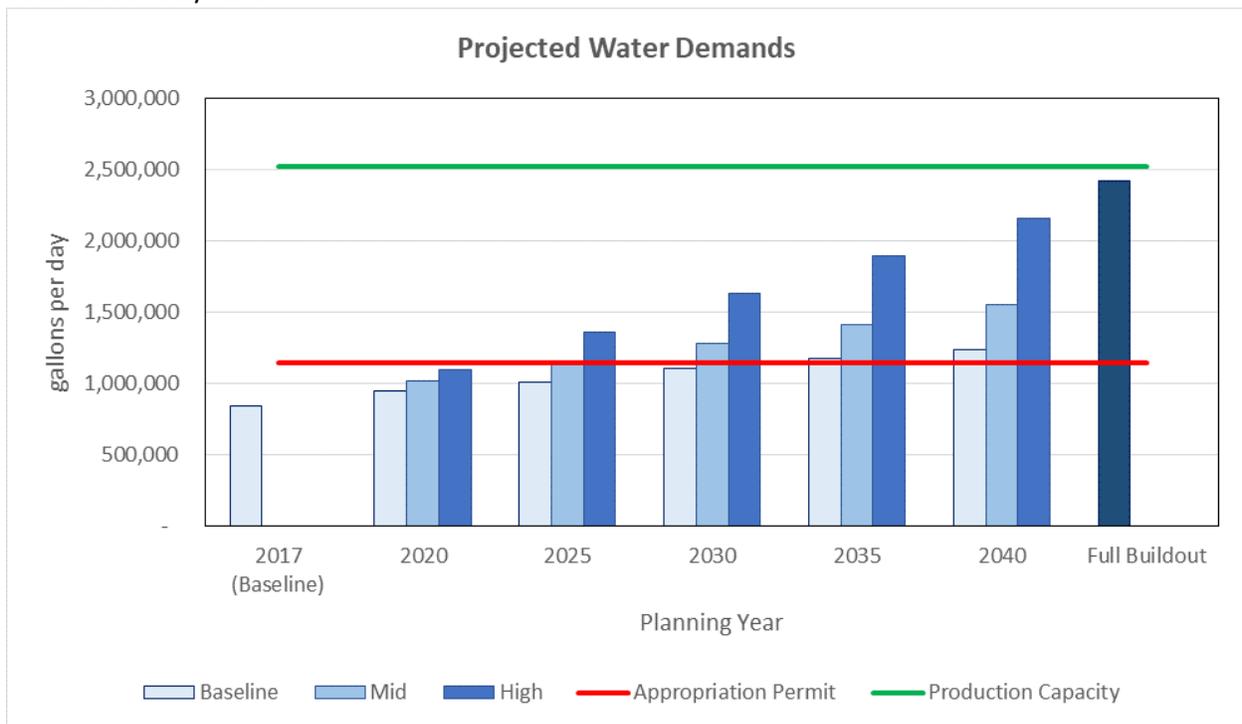
The Town of La Plata owns and operates a municipal water supply system that provides potable drinking water to the majority of the town's residents and businesses. This system is comprised of a series of interconnected wells, pumping stations, water storage facilities and water distribution facilities.

Residents within the Town of La Plata are required to be connected to the public water supply per Town Ordinance and there are no current properties within town limits who are on private wells. The Town does not provide water to entities outside of town limits and extension of water service is only done as part of an annexation agreement.

The source of supply for the La Plata water system, comes exclusively from groundwater sources, primarily from the Lower Patuxent aquifer. The town operates five (5) wells that can produce 3.672 million gallons of water per day (2.520 million gallons per day with the best producing well out of service).

Although the Town’s existing wells can produce enough water to support a significant amount of new development, the capacity management summary clearly shows that La Plata’s water supply is constrained by the limitations in their current WAUP.

The 2020-2040 demand projections for the Town’s water supply are presented in **FIGURE 2** below. Baseline estimates were based on population projections described in the Municipal Growth Element. Separate “Mid-Range”, and “High” drinking water demand projections were developed using estimates of residential building permits issued over the 20-year period. The “Full Buildout” estimate was based on a development capacity analysis of the Town’s planned growth areas, which projected the full residential build-out potential of all future annexations and infill, based on current and future zoning classifications by 2040.



**FIGURE 2** PROJECTED WATER DEMANDS

### Water Quality

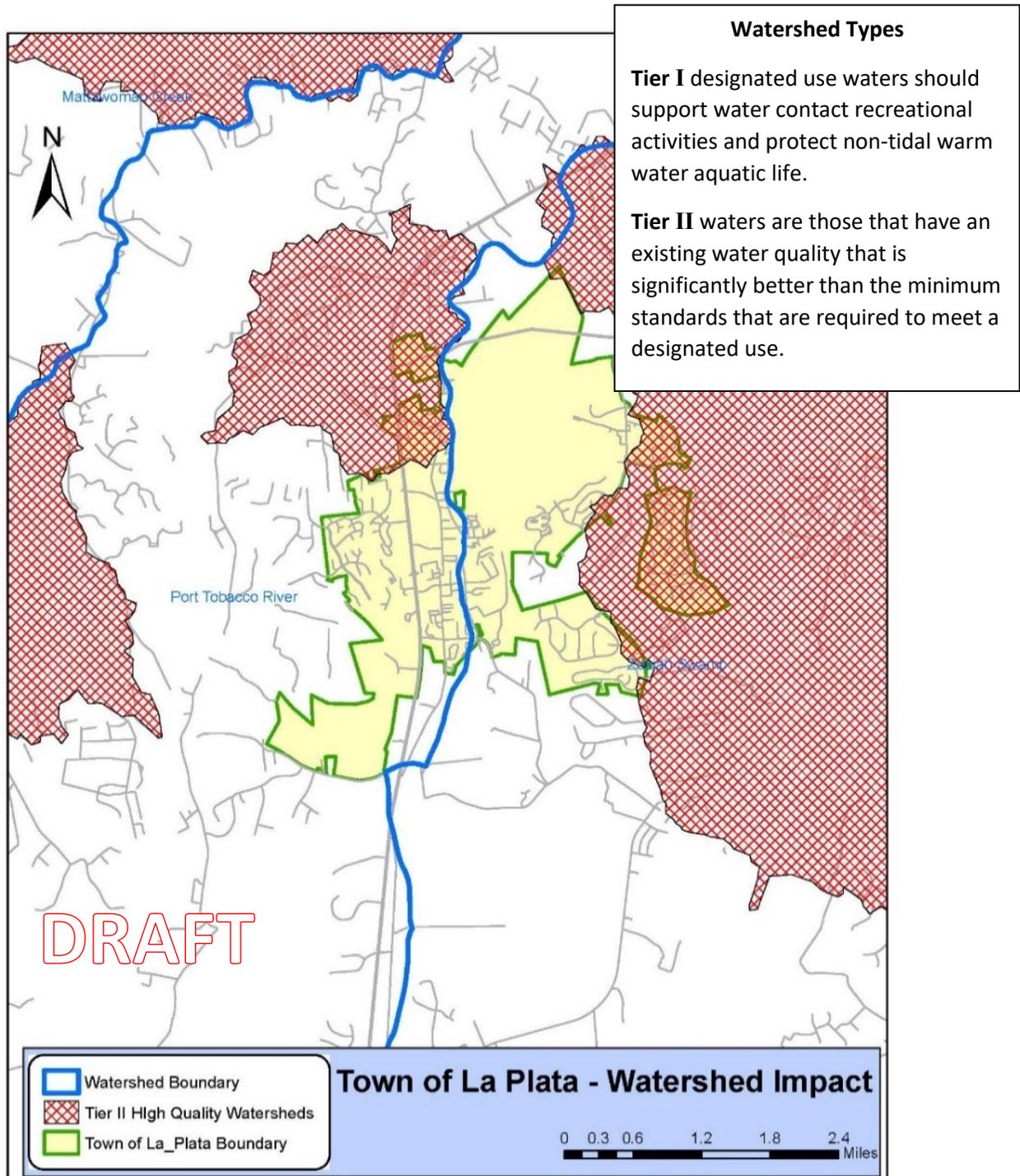
The Town of La Plata lies within the Port Tobacco River and Zekiah Swamp watersheds. Growth and development within the Town of La Plata and potential municipal growth areas will have several direct and indirect impacts to these watersheds. Direct impacts include increases in wastewater discharges from the La Plata Wastewater Treatment facility, increases in stormwater runoff from existing and new development, and construction related discharges. Indirect impacts include water quality degradation due to loss of forest cover, changes in hydrology, and changes in land use.

MDE’s latest Integrated Report (2018) indicates that:

- the Port Tobacco watershed is impaired by nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus), bacteria, sediment, and sulfates. Accordingly, TMDLs are assigned to this watershed.

- The Zekiah Swamp watershed generally meets or exceeds the water quality standards for Class I waters. TMDLs are not assigned to this watershed.

It should be noted that the Town of La Plata represents only relatively small part (less than 10%) of the drainage areas within the Port Tobacco and Zekiah Swamp watershed so the water quality impacts of the municipality have never been independently assessed (see **FIGURE 3 WATERSHED IMPACT** **Figure 3.**)



**FIGURE 3 WATERSHED IMPACT**

*Wastewater & Stormwater*

The approval of Chesapeake Bay TMDL in 2010 and subsequent development of Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs), creates a new, overarching regulatory framework that changes many of the assumptions that were used in La Plata’s first Water Resources Element. The Chesapeake Bay TMDL establishes clear pollution reduction targets (shown in **Table 3** below) for nutrient and sediment pollution reductions for all Bay watersheds, including the Port Tobacco and Zekiah watersheds.

Maryland’s Phase II WIP, which was approved in October of 2012, identifies specific pollution reduction targets for wastewater treatment plants, agriculture, septic systems, urban stormwater, and other non-point sources. Maryland’s WIP went a further step by assigning non-agricultural nutrient and sediment targets to every county within the Bay Watershed.

**Maryland's Phase II Watershed Implementation Plan  
Target Load Reductions to be Achieved by 2025**

Pollutant	2010 Load (Million Lbs/Yr)	2025 Target (Million Lbs/yr)	Percent Reduction
<b>Nitrogen</b>	52.76	41.17	22%
<b>Phosphorous</b>	3.3	2.81	15%
<b>Suspended Solids</b>	1,376	1,350	2%

**TABLE 3** TARGET LOAD REDUCTIONS IN MARYLAND

**La Plata’s Wastewater Treatment Plant**

The Town of La Plata owns and operates a sewer system and Enhanced Nutrient Removal (ENR) wastewater treatment facility that serves most of the Town’s properties and discharges to a tributary of the Port Tobacco River at up to 1.5 million gallons per day (MGD). The collection system consists of a network of sewer lines totaling approximately 46 miles supported by eighteen (18) pumping stations. Inflow and infiltration are major problems in the La Plata sewer system and there have been frequent sanitary sewer overflows the collection system during periods of heavy rain and the Town has entered a consent decree with MDE to eliminate overflows.

The La Plata plant was designed to be upgraded incrementally, so the Town will increase the plant’s rating to 2.0 MGD as increases in demand warrants a capacity increase. Certain elements of the current plant design can handle up to 2.5 MGD of flow but some form of offset or mitigation would be necessary under the TMDL requirement.

The current NPDES discharge permit for the plant incorporates TMDL limits (“Bay Caps”) of 18,273 pounds per year for nitrogen, 1,370 pounds per year for phosphorus, and 137,050 pounds per year for total suspended solids.

*Projected Wastewater Demand*

The Town’s projected wastewater demands over the next 20 years are shown in **FIGURE 4** below. The analysis of projected wastewater demand indicates that the La Plata Wastewater Plant has adequate capacity to meet baseline and mid-range growth needs to 2040 but will exceed its design capacity of 2.0 MGD sometime after 2030 under a high growth scenario. Additional detail can be found in Appendix \_\_\_\_\_.

*On-Site Sewage Disposal Systems*

The Town of La Plata has only 15 residential properties that use on-site sewage disposal systems (OSDS) for wastewater treatment. These properties are within existing sewer service area but predate the construction of the collection system and were not required to hook up to public sewer. The Town has

and continues to seek grants from the Bay Restoration Fund and others to help the 15 property homeowners with failing OSDS systems to pay for the cost of connection. In the potential growth areas, it is estimated that there are approximately 492 existing septic systems – 94% of which are single family residences.

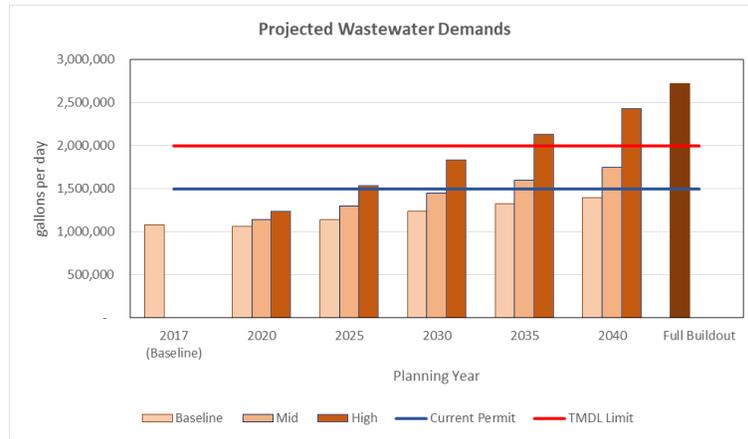


FIGURE 4 PROJECTED WASTEWATER DEMANDS

## Goals & Actions

**GOAL: Plan upgrades and enhancements to the Town's wastewater infrastructure to ensure that growth and development can be accommodated within the Chesapeake Bay Restoration framework.**

### ACTIONS:

- Continue to carefully monitor usage through regular updates of its Wastewater Capacity Management Plan and control allocations through its development and building permit approval processes.
- Incrementally expand wastewater plant from its current rated capacity of 1.5 MGD to 2.0 MGD by 2030 to meet projected demands from growth and development. Because the plant is designed to treat flows at this higher level and has a permit that will allow expansion under the
- When considering annexation of potential municipal growth areas that have failing septic systems, require that the County and property owners agree to a financial plan that will support connections to the wastewater treatment system at no capital expense to the Town. It is noted that planning consistency between the county and town is required to apply to the Bay Restoration Fund for this purpose.
- If determined to be prudent and feasible based on an ongoing evaluation, the Town will install flow equalization capacity at the wastewater treatment plant to mitigate the impact of high peak annexflows. Such improvements would increase the performance of key treatment processes and enhance the plant's overall reliability, especially during periods of heavy rain.

- As WWTP capacity is expanded at 2.0 MGD, the Town should begin to investigate new opportunities for mitigation, nutrient offset, level-of-treatment improvement, or alternative disposal regime, including the State’s new nutrient trading program.
- Because of the limitations imposed on the La Plata Wastewater Treatment Plant by the Chesapeake Bay TMDL, any increase of wastewater treatment capacity over 2.0 MGD will require some form of meet the ultimate treatment demand of 2.434 MGD, the Town will have to identify alternatives to offset almost 4,000 pounds of nitrogen and 340 pounds of phosphorus per year.
- The State of Maryland’s new nutrient trading regulation provide a framework for the buying and selling of nutrient credits to offset growth under the Bay TMDL. Purchasing credits may be a viable long-term solution to expand the wastewater treatment plant beyond 2.0 MGD.
- Alternative disposal, through spray irrigation, reuse, “purple pipe” or other means is also a potential long-term strategy that the Town is considering addressing wastewater capacity limitations.

**GOAL: Ensure that the future water supply needs of the Town can be met while preserving the long-term sustainability of shared groundwater resources.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Implement water allocation and development approval policies that ensure that adequate production and distribution capacity exists prior to project approval.
- Sunset pending allocations of water for developments that do not move forward within three years of approval.
- Continue promotion of water conservation to reduce per capita water usage by 5% from 2012 usage levels.
- Perform regular comprehensive water system audits to minimize water losses from the system.
- Develop infrastructure to support the use of reclaimed, highly treated effluent for cooling water, irrigation, lawn watering, fire suppression, or other non-potable water uses.
- Develop alternative sources of water supply, including expanded development of groundwater and surface water sources.
- Connect with other water supply systems, such as the Town of Waldorf, to create greater opportunities for resource balancing and enhancing system redundancy.

**GOAL: Protect local watersheds by implementing protective development and stormwater management practices that minimize and mitigate the impact of additional runoff from new development.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Completing the Town’s MS4 restoration plan, mandated under the current Phase II MS4 General Permit and identify stormwater retrofit and watershed restoration projects that will contribute to the overall Chesapeake Bay TMDL effort.
- Implement the projects included in the MS4 restoration plan.
- Maximize opportunities to create new open space and green space within the downtown areas to reduce overall imperviousness and minimize stormwater runoff.

- Continue to track stormwater management facilities and impervious areas through its Stormwater Capacity Management Plan and NPDES MS4 permit annual reports.
- Target fee-in-lieu revenue to stormwater mitigation projects that support the Town's overall watershed restoration program.

**GOAL: Preserve and enhance high-quality and sensitive water resources impacted by growth and development.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Limit waivers of stormwater management requirements in newly developed areas, particularly within sensitive and high-quality watersheds, to ensure that higher levels of treatment will be achieved in areas that are redeveloped and stormwater will be treated to the maximum extent practicable in newly developed areas.
- Reduce the total potential growth area from the 2009 Comprehensive Plan for La Plata as indicated in the Municipal Growth Element of this 2019 Comprehensive Plan
- Focus reforestation efforts within watersheds that will benefit the most from the investment, particularly in the Jennie Run and Zekiah Swamp watersheds.

**GOAL: Meet or exceed stormwater management goals as expressed in TMDL requirements.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Identify a sustainable source of funding for the Town's MS4 restoration plan, including funds needed for long-term maintenance, capital replacement, and MS4 permit compliance.
- Continue to work with Charles County to implement the Port Tobacco WRAS.
- Work with MDE and Charles County to explore nutrient trading and large-scale restoration projects as a long-term approach to managing stormwater waste load allocations.

## Transportation Element

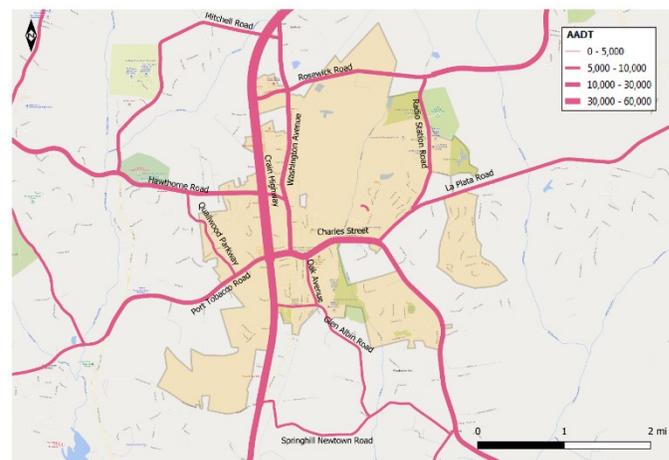
The comprehensive plan's transportation element requirements are identified § 3-105 of the Land Use Article and relate to all forms of surface transportation as may apply to the jurisdiction. The transportation element must propose, on a schedule that extends as far into the future as is reasonable, the most appropriate and desirable patterns for the general location, character, and extent of channels, routes, and terminals for transportation facilities; the circulation of individuals and goods; and provide for bicycle and pedestrian access and travelways.

### Significant Actions Since 2009 Comprehensive Plan

The town has made significant progress in constructing new sidewalks on local roads, having completed approximately two linear miles since 2009.

### Existing Conditions

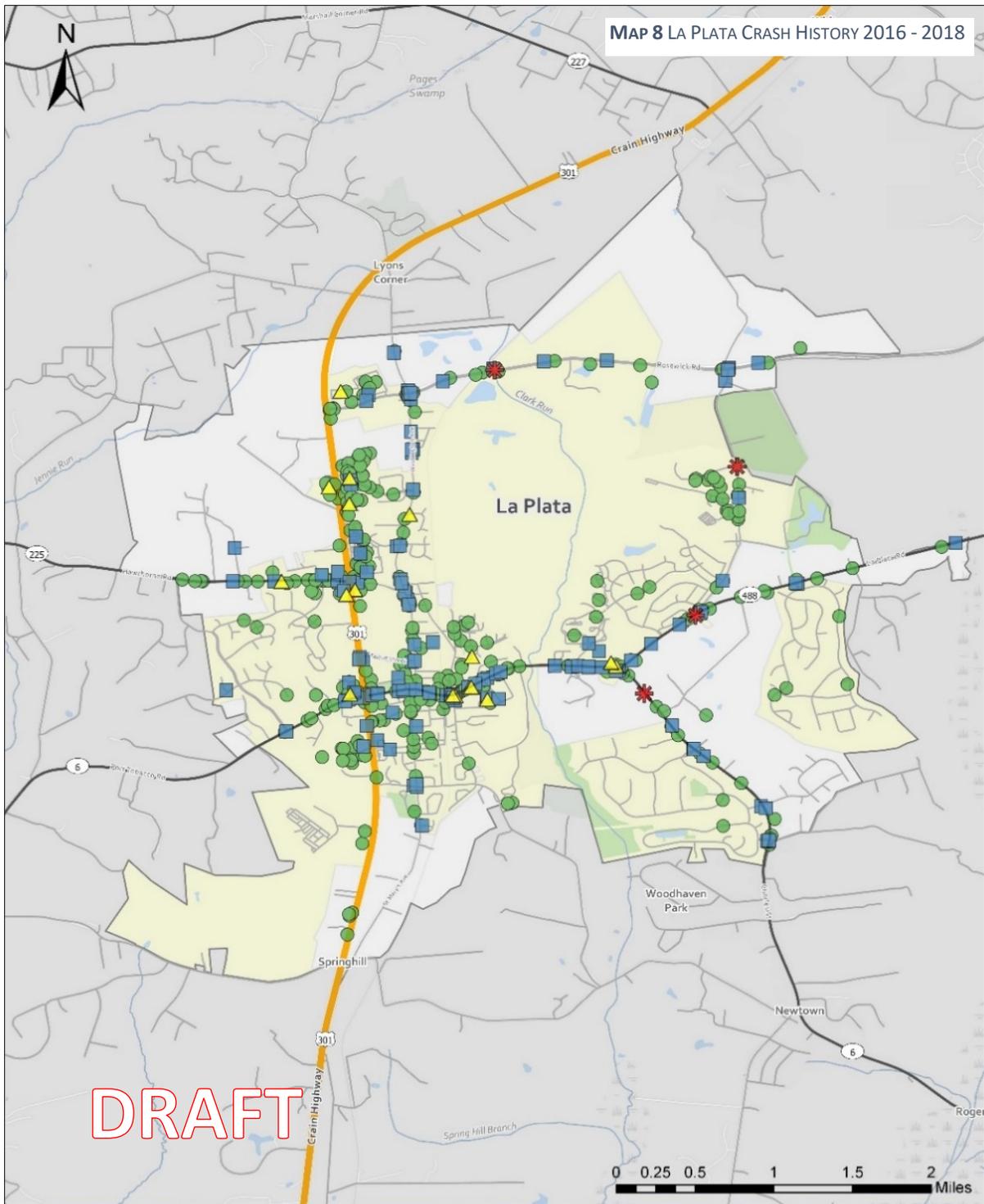
La Plata's transportation system is dominated by the automobile with the primary north-south arterial (US 301 Crain Highway) carrying 40,000 vehicles per day and the primary east-west arterial (MD 6 Charles Street) carrying approximately 20,000 trips per day. Washington Avenue also travels north-south through La Plata and generally serves local traffic travelling to county offices, the University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center and other downtown locations. St. Charles Parkway, Radio Station Road and La Plata Road (MD 488) carry traffic from the north and east, respectively. Hawthorne Road and Port Tobacco Road carry traffic from west. The heavy traffic volume is not unexpected given its location with the region and as the county seat and given the lack of practical transportation choices for commuting trips. **Figure 5** shows the AADT of major roads near La Plata.



**FIGURE 5** AADT OF MAJOR ROADS

Between 2016 and 2018, there were 1,003 reported traffic crashes within La Plata (**Map 8**). More than 300 of these crashes resulted in involved injuries and nine were fatal. A significant number of bicycle/pedestrian injury crashes were reported on Charles Street between Kent Street and Willow Lane near the hospital and library. **Map 9** shows the location of injury crashes on Crain Highway.

MAP 8 LA PLATA CRASH HISTORY 2016 - 2018

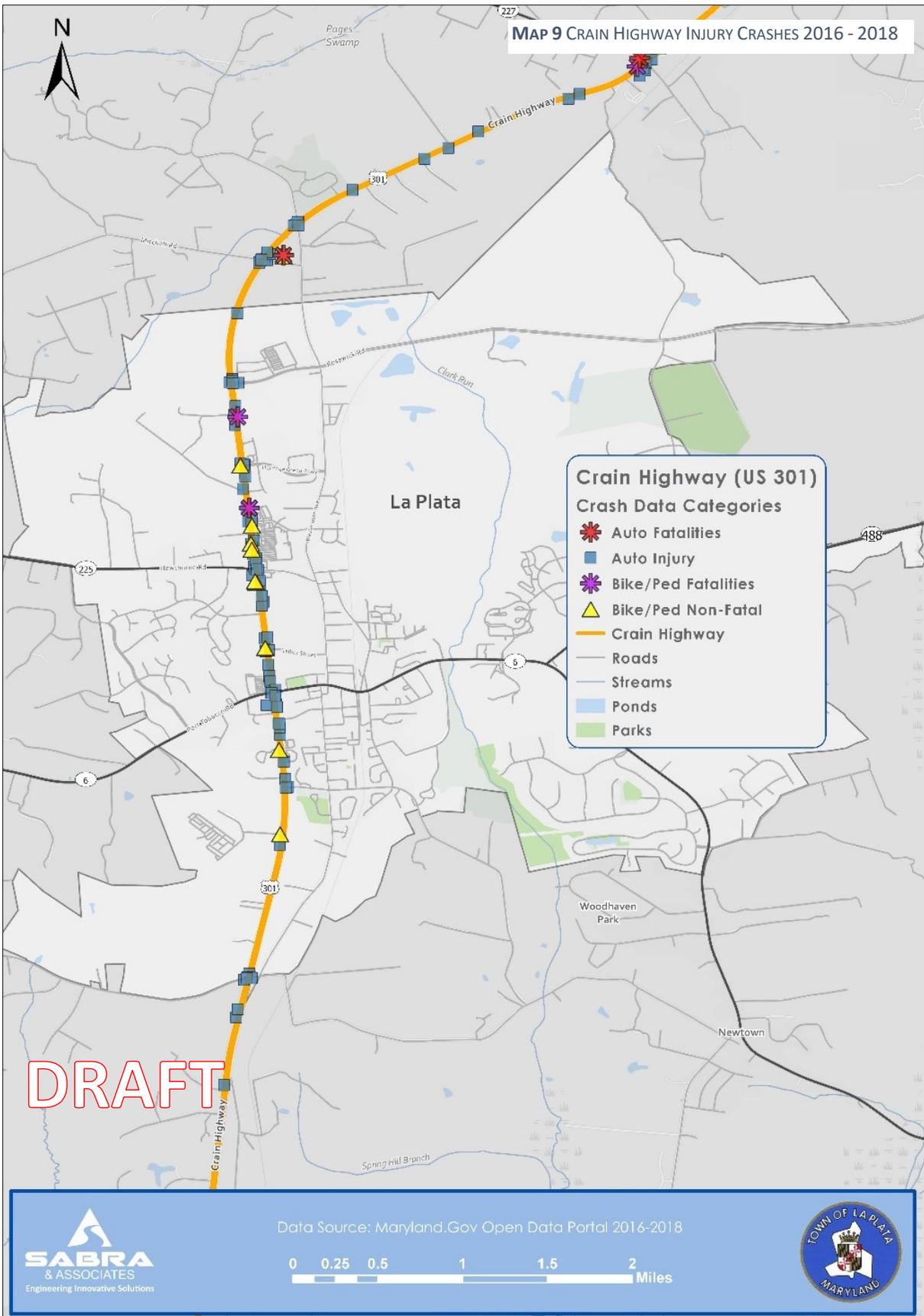


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### Legend

- Crain Highway (US 301)
  - Roads
  - Town Boundary
- Town Crashes**
- Auto Fatalities
  - Auto Injury
  - Auto Property Damage
  - Bike/Ped - Injury or Property





### *Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities*

The town has made significant progress in constructing new sidewalks on local roads having completed approximately two linear miles since 2009. Less than three miles of town-owned roads remain without sidewalk with the most notable sections being along Washington Avenue from Baltimore Street to Talbot Street and from Shining Willow Road to Heritage Green Parkway. In the downtown core, St. Mary's Ave from Charles Street (MD 6) to the first commercial entrance and along Oak, Kent and North Avenues north of Charles Street (MD 6) do not have sidewalks.

MDOT SHA roads have significant gaps in the sidewalk infrastructure including places where worn patches of dirt demonstrate that pedestrians do traverse the area. These include Radio Station Road (MD 488) between Charles Street (MD 6) and Agricopia Drive and on the east side of Crain Highway (US 301) from La Plata Plaza North to Rosewick Road (approx. 3700') and from 6620 Crain Highway to Talbot Street (approx. 810').

A separated shared-use path along Rosewick Road is the sole bicycle facility currently in La Plata. The shared use path is approximately two miles south of the Indian Head Rail Trail, a 13.4-mile paved bikeway that runs east-west from White Plains to Indian Head although outside the corporate limits of La Plata.

### *Parking*

Notwithstanding the public perception of a lack of parking in the downtown core, a windshield survey indicates ample available on-street and rear of building parking throughout the town during regular business hours. A lack of clear marking and wayfinding signage may contribute to the perception. Parking lots at the county courthouse and office building and at the University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center appear to be mostly full albeit with some capacity at the outer edges of the lots.

### *Transit Services*

La Plata is served by five Charles County *VanGo!* Service routes including a circulator route wholly within town boundaries stopping at 37 locations operating every 60 minutes between 7:00 AM and 9:30 PM. Four other *VanGo!* services connect the town to Waldorf, Bryans Road, Nanejemoy, and Newburg. La Plata residents have access to additional *VanGo!* routes that reach other parts of Charles County via the 301 Connector, which runs every 30 minutes during workday hours.

La Plata is also served by two Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) commuter bus routes. Route 650 makes nine daily round trips to Washington, DC via Benville and carries an average of 721 people per day. Route 630 makes eight daily round trips to Washington, DC via Waldorf and carries an average of 409 people per day. Commuter bus riders are served at the Washington Avenue park-and-ride which is owned by MTA. MDOT SHA has a small park-and-ride facility near the intersection of MD 225 and Crain Highway with 20 parking spaces.

There is no intercity bus service to or from La Plata. **Figure 6** highlights the local and regional bus service in La Plata.

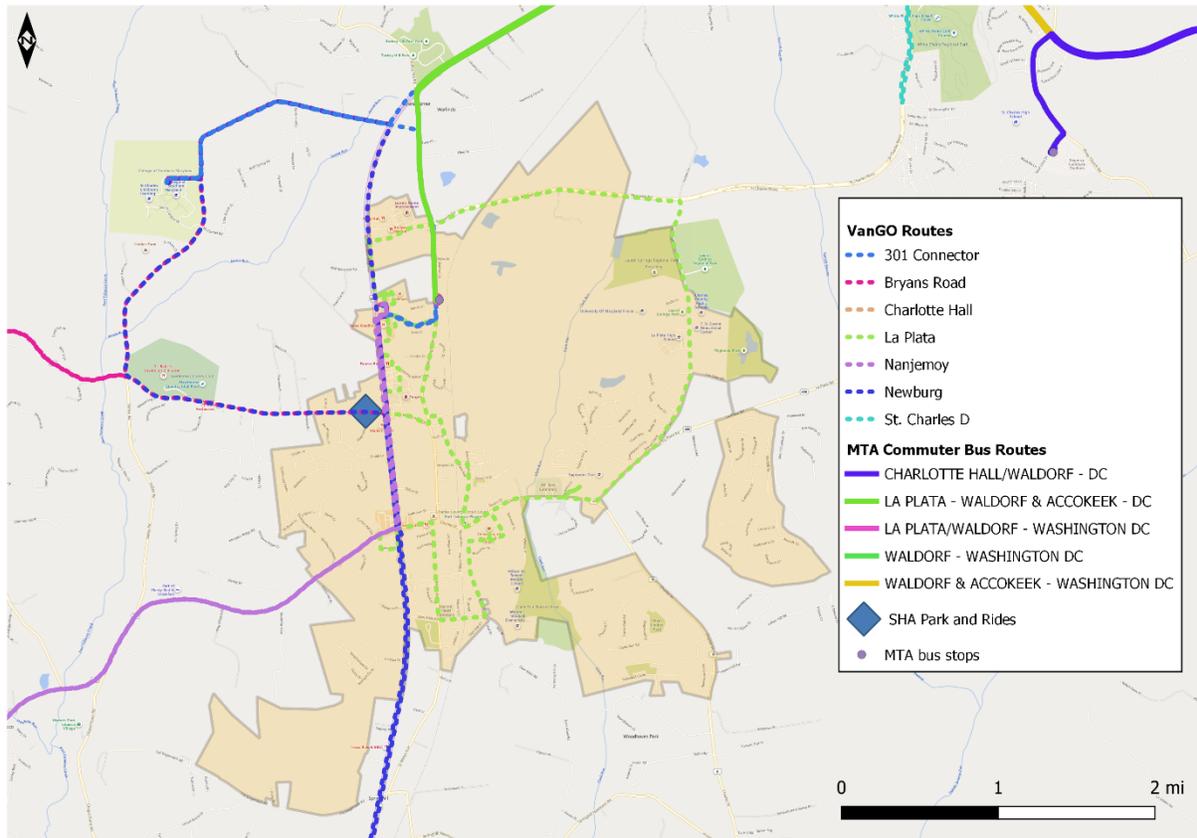


FIGURE 6 EXISTING LOCAL AND REGIONAL TRANSIT IN LA PLATA

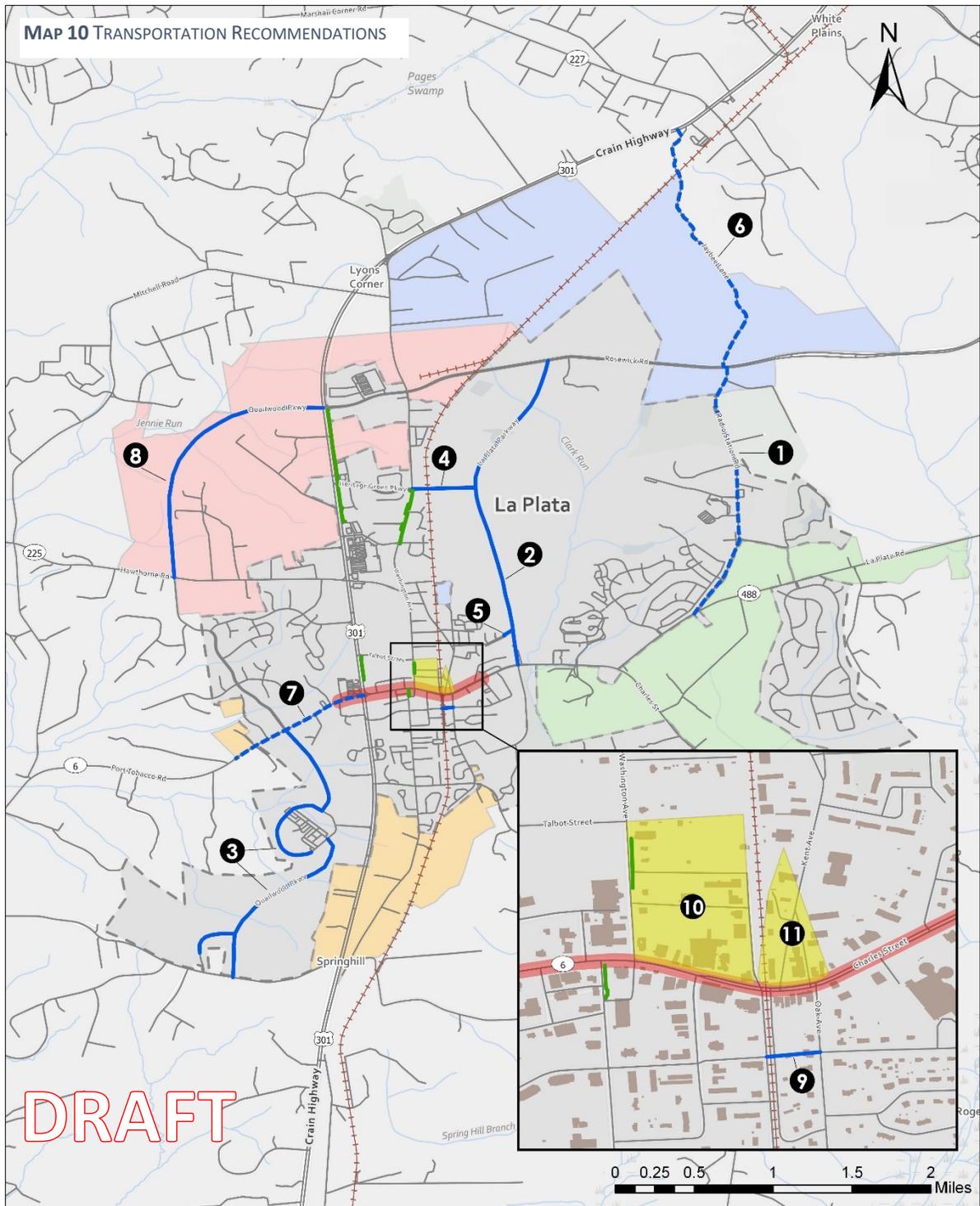
#### *Local and Regional Plans and Priorities*

The transportation element of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan included goals and strategies related to greater connectivity between existing communities, improving the bicycle and pedestrian network for local trips, a complete streets approach to new and retrofitted roadways, and access management along US 301. The 2009 plan also emphasized the need to separate local commuters and residents from the congestion of Crain Highway with bypass roads to mitigate congestion along Rosewick Road and Washington Avenue.

The **Charles County Comprehensive Plan (2016)** shows several transportation improvements are currently outside of the corporate limits of La Plata but in some ways relate to the municipal growth areas identified in the 2009 plan ( Map 10):

- Upgrade Jaybee Lane between Rosewick Road and US 301 provide an alternative north-south route from US 301 into La Plata.
- Reconstruct Mitchell Road from US 301 to MD 225 to provide auxiliary lanes, shoulders and drainage improvements prior to design and construction
- Extend Quailwood Parkway between Hawthorne Road (MD 225) and Rosewick Road.
- Construct new road between MD 6 and US 301 (Willow Lane to Heritage Green Pkwy.), with branch up to Rosewick Rd.
- Extend Quailwood Parkway south of MD 6 to Old Stagecoach Road.

**MAP 10 TRANSPORTATION RECOMMENDATIONS**



**DRAFT**

**Legend**



- |                       |                                   |  |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Town Boundary         | Roads                             | Municipal Growth Areas<br>Southeast Quadrant |
| "Main Street"         | Streams                           | Southwest Quadrant                           |
| Improvement Area      | <b>Proposed Road Improvements</b> | Northwest Quadrant                           |
| Recommended Sidewalks | New Road                          | Northeast Quadrant                           |
| Railroad (CSXT)       | Existing Road                     |  |



ID #	Project Description	Planning	Engineering	Construction
1	Radio Station Road: Reconstruct from MD 488 to Rosewick Road. Phase 1: Reconstruct as 4-lane boulevard; create 4-way intersection at Jaybee Lane Phase 2: Reconstruct as 4-lane parkway	C	C	C
2	La Plata Parkway: Extend La Plata Parkway through Heritage Green	D	D	D
3	Quailwood Parkway South (NOTE: this project has been removed from the MGE)	D	D	D
4	Heritage Green Parkway	T	D	D
5	Caroline Drive East: extend to La Plata Parkway	T	T	T
6	Jaybee Lane: Rosewick Road to US 301. Upgrade to provide an alternative north-south route from US 301 into La Plata.	T/ C	C	C
7	Charles Street Streetscape, Traffic and Pedestrian Safety Improvements	T	S	S
8	Quinwood Parkway North: Extend from MD 225 to US301 and Rosewick Road.	T/ D	D	D
9	Centennial Street Connector: New crossing of Pope’s Creek Branch to create full downtown loop and improve access from US 301 to Medical Center	T	T	T
10	Talbot Street Grid (La Plata Town Centre Development)	T	D/T	D/T
11	Kent & Oak Avenues: Realign to create safe pedestrian path north of Charles Street, create developable parcels and improve the view of the area from Charles Street	T	T	T

*C = County      D =Developer  
T = Town        S = State Highway Administration*

**Table 4** Transportation Recommendations

At a regional level, the Southern Maryland counties (through Tri-County Council) continue to advocate for a rapid transit service connecting Charles County residents along US 301 to the DC Metrorail system at the Branch Avenue station. After years of study, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) identifies bus rapid transit service as the preferred alternative for future implementation, although no funds have been allocated for further planning, engineering or construction.

The Maryland Department of Transportation does not have any planned road projects in or around La Plata in the FY2019 – 2024 capital program; however, north and south of La Plata are projects which may have a long-term impact on traffic and growth in the area. At US 301 and Mattawoman-Beantown Road (MD 5) a flyover is being constructed to mitigate traffic congestion; to the south, the Harry Nice-Thomas “Mac” Middleton Bridge over the Patuxent River to King George, Virginia is being reconstructed from two to four lanes. It has been posited that widening of the bridge will induce traffic along US 301 as an eastern bypass for I-95, especially during periods of long-term construction such as the Rappahannock Bridge reconstruction north of Fredericksburg beginning in 2022.

### *CSXT Pope's Creek Branch as a Constraint on the Transportation Network*

Crossing of railroad rights-of-way is a problem encountered by barge urban and small rural communities across the country. In certain parts of the La Plata, development and redevelopment are made more difficult because of CSX's Pope's Creek Branch through commercial areas and by separating large tracts of land where residential developments are intended. There are three locations of interest to the town for crossing the Pope's Creek Branch.

- In the downtown area where existing streets end at the railroad tracks to create a full street grid.
- Access to the proposed Heritage Green development from Washington Avenue.
- In the potential growth area at the north end of La Plata where Jaybee Lane could be extended to meet Rosewick Road.

Even though only two trains pass through La Plata each week, CSXT appropriately guards the safety of their infrastructure and desire to remain flexible for future business opportunities. The communities most successful in working with railroads acknowledge that the railroad and community interests don't necessarily align; they stake out a proactive approach with the railroad owner to abide by the railroad's engineering requirements when seeking new railroad crossings.

### *Pedestrian Safety*

Along US 301, there is a worn path in the grass where pedestrian activity is clearly indicated despite the lack of sidewalk. These improvements would make for continuous sidewalk in the mostly densely developed portion of Crain Highway which also has a high rate of traffic crashes. There have been at least six pedestrian or bicycle injuries in this stretch of Crain Highway.

To make Charles Street more walkable and feel like a "Main Street" there needs to be a greater nod to pedestrian safety by more clearly defining pedestrian spaces, improving pedestrian crossings and street lighting, and slowing traffic during off-peak periods. The ULI TAP report suggests a roadway cross-section that may meet these needs; further design development is necessary to understand how the cross-section would be applied from Washington Avenue to Somerset Street.

## Goals and Actions

**GOAL: Make strategic, proactive connections in the street grid to support economic and community development projects and better manage through traffic.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Conduct and present to CSXT an at-grade crossing study for potential new crossings identified as shown in **MAP 10**.
- Use this study to establish the necessary mitigation measures that will be required at-grade crossings to be built.
- Advance concept development and preliminary engineering for key transportation investments so that they are ready to go as development and redevelopment investment becomes possible (see **MAP 10**.)
- Acquire real estate options for future right-of-way acquisition necessary to construct road, establish right-of-way for preferred alignments in record plats.
- To accommodate through east-west through traffic as well as improve access to University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center from MD 301, be an additional crossing of CSXT south of Charles Street.

**GOAL: Continue to make La Plata a very walkable community.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Construct new sidewalks as follows:
  - Washington Avenue from Baltimore Street to Talbot Street and from Shining Willow Road to Heritage Green Parkway;
  - St. Mary's Ave from Charles Street (MD 6) to the first commercial entrance; and,
  - Kent and N. Oak Streets between Charles Street and the Department of Social Services, however, there is first a need to reconsider the street connections to make for more logical flow of traffic within this area.
- Work with property owners along Charles Street and Washington Avenues to place planters or other attractive delineators of parking spaces from the sidewalk where such delineation does not clearly exist (see **Figure 7**.)
- In its annual list of priority transportation projects to the Maryland Department of Transportation, the Town and Charles County should make a high priority request for sidewalks to be built on the east side of Crain Highway (US 301):
  - from La Plata Plaza North to Rosewick Road (approximately 3700'); and,
  - from 6620 Crain Highway to Talbot Street (approx. 810').

***Working with CSXT to Advance Key Projects***

The viability of the several development projects is uncertain because of the difficulty in gaining CSXT approval. From the town's perspective, it is preferable to have each of these locations served by an at-grade crossing because the cost of doing so is significantly less than a grade separated crossing; however, before agreeing to the establishment of a new crossing, CSXT expects communities to engage in a study with the purpose of identifying existing redundant public crossings for closure. To comply with and in support of the federal initiative to reduce grade crossings, CSXT requires that the community identify the closure of three or more comparable active public at-grade crossings. The Federal Railroad Administration's grade crossing inventory indicates that there are nine at-grade crossings in the town of which two are private crossings, none of which are obvious candidates for closure but still CSXT expects that some study will be made.

**GOAL: Better manage the supply of existing parking and limit new off-street parking.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Improve signage for off-street parking areas
- Implement a parking meter program to improve turnover of key parking spaces.
- Encourage shared parking spaces and reduce or eliminate minimum parking requirements on a *per development* basis.

**GOAL: Support regionally-significant transportation improvements**

**ACTIONS:**

- Support the Southern Maryland Rapid Transit project connecting the Branch Avenue Metro Station to White Plains
- Request further study of the Southern Maryland Rapid Transit Project to extend south to downtown La Plata



**FIGURE 7** RENDERING OF CHARLES STREET WITH PLANTERS

## Part 2: Live, Work and Play

### Community/Municipal Services & Facilities Element

Section 3-102(b)(1) of the Maryland Land Use Article provides that “the planning commission for a local jurisdiction may include in the plan additional elements to advance the purposes of the plan.” Although the Land Use Article is not restrictive as to the additional plan elements, this provision allows municipalities to identify other areas of priority in planning and development. This Municipal Services & Facilities Element articulates the Town’s plan for fiscal stability and the relationship of the Town’s finances to providing and improving services to the Town’s residents, businesses and visitors. This element also satisfies requirements of [§3-112 of the Land Use Article](#) (Municipal Growth Element) to document changes to public services and infrastructure needed to accommodate growth within the proposed municipal growth areas and relative to population growth estimates.

#### Significant Actions Since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan

- In 2018, the Town Treasurer initiated discussion with the Town Council regarding the need for a capital improvement plan (CIP); the FY 2019 Town budget includes the early stages of capital budgeting.
- The Planning Department built a geographic information systems (GIS) platform for sharing information such as the jurisdictional boundary, existing zoning, existing infrastructure, natural resources, priority funding areas, growth elements, demographic statistics, etc. This platform assists Town staff, the Planning Commission and the public to review development plans and proposed annexation plans and for other purposes.
- The Town established a Beautification Commission to administer a small grant program for activities by civic and homeowners’ associations, individuals, businesses and others to improve the Town’s appearance.
- In 2011, the Town established a partnership with the Charles County Public Library to provide a free public WiFi system that covers much of downtown La Plata.
- The Police Department initiated several community policing programs.
- The Town maintained its tradition of providing a robust schedule of community events such as celebration of the Town founding in April, an annual Chili Cook-Off, Fourth of July celebration, summer concert series.
- The Department of Public Works expanded its recycling and conservation programs.

#### Existing Conditions

The Town of La Plata’s governance structure is Council-Manager; Town Manager is appointed by the Town Council and is responsible for administering the policies as established by the Town Council. The Manager serves as the chief administrative officer and head of the administrative branch of the Town government. The Town Clerk, Town Treasurer, Operations Manager and three agency heads: Chief of Police, Planning Director and Public Works Director make up the core executive team of the government. The town employs a total of \_\_\_\_ people.

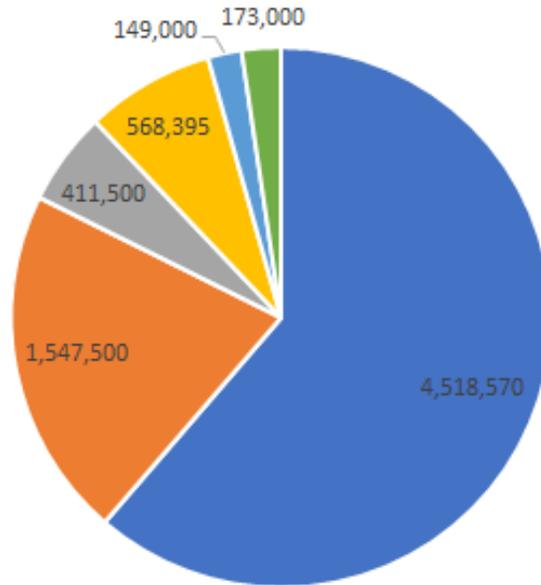
#### Operating Budget

The Town general fund budget for FY 2020 is \$9.53 million across all funds – 54% greater than the budget in FY 2010; discounting for a one-time drawdown against the Town’s ample general fund balance, the FY20 budget would have been only 20 – 25% greater than FY10. This low budget growth is

a function of conservative budgeting by the Town Council and modest growth in property taxes which comprise nearly 60% of general fund revenues. The Town maintains a very healthy operating fund balance of approximately \$6 million as of the end of FY 19.

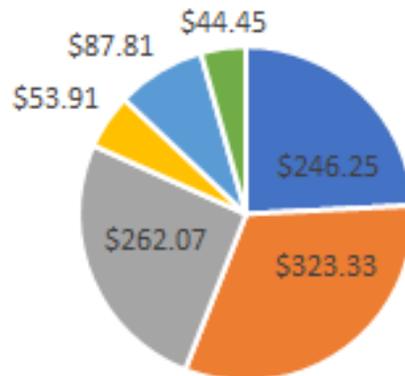
Town of La Plata Budget History: FY10 - FY20								
	FY 10 Budget	FY16 Actual	FY 17 Actual	FY 18 Actual	FY 19 Budget	FY 20 Budget	\$ Change FY 16-20	% Change Since 2010
General Fund	6,184,751	7,749,738	7,669,745	8,317,471	8,135,130	9,531,870	3,347,119	54.1%
Enterprise Funds	8,840,039	6,108,296	6,374,817	6,440,256	9,414,170	9,556,654	716,615	8.1%
Sanitation	1,162,460	1,129,949	1,129,488	1,099,572	1,121,900	1,157,515	-4,945	-0.4%
Water	1,224,764	899,393	901,810	981,397	1,103,095	1,121,190	-103,574	-8.5%
Sewer	6,372,815	3,689,531	3,947,932	3,955,386	6,794,395	6,519,504	146,689	2.3%
Storm Water	80,000	389,423	395,587	403,901	394,780	758,443	678,443	848.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,864,829</b>	<b>19,966,330</b>	<b>20,419,379</b>	<b>21,197,983</b>	<b>26,963,470</b>	<b>28,645,176</b>	<b>4,780,347</b>	<b>20.0%</b>

### Fiscal Year 2020 General Fund Budget Revenues



- Property Taxes
- Local Taxes -- All Other
- Licenses & Permits
- Other Governmental
- Service Charges, Fines & Forfeitures
- Miscellaneous

### Town Spending Per Capita - FY 2020



- General Government
- Public Safety
- Public Works & Streets
- Parks & Civic Activities
- Planning & Code Enforcement
- Other

### *Capital Budget*

A capital improvement plan (CIP) provides a long-term view of the physical and technological improvements needed by the Town to ensure that resources are utilized to the best degree possible. Historically, the Town has approached capital investments on a case-by-case basis. That is, on a fiscal year basis, projects were designed and completed as necessary. In FY2020, the Town adopted its first-ever capital budget and will begin the process of adopting a multiyear capital improvement program.

### *Civic Participation*

The Town greatly benefits from an active citizenry and widescale participation in public events. Eight boards and commissions support the work of the Town Council: beautification, planning, design review, ethics, board of appeals, historic preservation, parks and recreation and elections supervisors. In addition, there is a La Plata Community Foundation which exists to

- Enhance the health, welfare and well-being of the citizens of the Town of La Plata, Maryland;
- Initiate new, and support existing programs to enhance the cultural, social, and educational lives of the citizens of La Plata, Maryland;
- Encourage, support and facilitate philanthropy in La Plata through donor services and community partnerships;
- Enhance the quality of life for all citizens by building a community endowment, grant-making and providing leadership on key community issues.

### *Effects of Municipal Growth on Town Resources*

The pace of development over the past decade has not placed a significant strain on town services and resources; however, any growth outside of the current town boundaries over the next decade must be considered for its benefits and costs. While it is generally expected that the concomitant growth in property taxes and other ongoing revenue sources will pay for increases and/or improvements in other town-provided services parks and recreation, public safety, civic promotion and community development, this is by no means certain. By way of example and of the greatest concern, adding a small subdivision of twenty to thirty homes on the west side of US 301 would create a new area in need of coverage by the Police Department. One small subdivision can hardly be expected to cover the increased costs, although buildout of several subdivisions would likely do so.

### *Goals and Actions*

**GOAL: Promote a culture of civic activism and community ownership.**

#### **ACTIONS:**

- The town should continue to invest in community activities that bring residents together and create strong civic bonds.
- The town should work to identify a diverse and growing group of residents to serve on its boards and commissions and to lead other beneficial programs to the community.

**GOAL: Strengthen town services and programs with adequate staffing and technical expertise.**

#### **ACTIONS:**

- The town should consider adding program management staff to support implementation of capital projects as the Capital Improvement Program develops.

- The town should consider hiring a community/economic development manager to help bring specific development projects to fruition.
- The town should consider establishing a coordinator of parks, environment and recreation programs.

**GOAL: Establish a capital improvement program to guide town's infrastructure investment.**

**ACTIONS:**

- A formal infrastructure assessment should occur and be used to guide capital replacement or rehabilitation of roads, buildings, water and sewer systems.
- The Town Council should adopt policies regarding the types of projects which may be considered for funding under the capital program.
- The Town Council should establish five-year budget targets for a capital improvement program to provide certainty that capital projects can move forward and establish a debt affordability goal which will guide PAYGO vs. bond-funded project spending.

**GOAL: Identify and develop municipal services which can be self-sustaining as a resource to other unincorporated areas of municipalities in the region.**

**ACTIONS:**

- The Town has enough sewer capacity to absorb significant new development; however, such development is expected to be slow in the next decade absent some disruptive economic shift. The Town should consider allowing residential properties with failing septic systems to connect to the sewer system without being annexed into the town.
- The town should consider allowing its solid waste transfer station to be used by other municipalities.

## Housing and Community Development Element

Section 3-102(b)(1) of the Maryland Land Use Article provides that “the planning commission for a local jurisdiction may include in the plan additional elements to advance the purposes of the plan.” Although the Land Use Article is not restrictive as to the additional plan elements, a “community renewal element” provides a catch-all opportunity for the Town to articulate its goals related to housing and community development.

### Significant Actions Since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan

- The Town of La Plata has revised the density maximums and lot size reductions in accordance with the goals identified in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan. These include promoting development and combining a variety of residential and commercial interests. The Ordinance was updated to allow mixed-use buildings in the downtown and the TND village centers.
- An ordinance was adopted allowing for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to be permitted with special conditions.
- The Town expanded its Sustainable Community Area from only the town center development area to include all 192 acres of the downtown area. The designation offers a comprehensive package of state tools and resources that support holistic strategies for community development, revitalization and sustainability.
- The Town of La Plata and the La Plata Town Center Corporation (LPTCC) which was formed in 2011, worked with the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to form a Technical Assistance Panel. The panel focused on redevelopment and development opportunities that would include improved pedestrian access and streetscape improvements. The Town is focused on strategizing development to improve the existing fragmented and uncoordinated zoning.



### Existing Conditions

#### *Housing Stock & Development Capacity*

The Town of La Plata has a supply of approximately 3,150 housing units of which more than 50 percent are single family attached units. More than sixty percent of the housing stock is three to four bedrooms and less than a quarter of the houses are two or less bedrooms. The vacancy rate is approximately five percent. Since 2009, the Town has issued 376 housing permits all of which are single family structures indicating that while the Town’s planning goal is to develop in a more compact form, development projects have not yet assimilated this goal.

Several development projects are planned and have varying levels of entitlement already approved. These include Agricopia, Steeplechase, Hawthorne Greene II, Heritage Green, Willow Woods and Willow Woods Section 2, Townhomes Potomac Square and Stagecoach Crossing. These subdivision

developments have a total of 5,202 maximum density and 4,716 remaining lots. Agricopia and Steeplechase have been partially built and Willow Woods has been completed. The rest of the subdivision developments have not been built. Since the adoption of the last Comprehensive Plan, La Plata has not developed much in these planned communities although these do promise a more diverse housing stock trend to continue in the Town.

### *Community Development*

The Town of La Plata includes an approved Sustainable Community Area of 192 acres by Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development in 2017. This provides the town with an enhanced opportunity to access state resources to support housing and community development, local transportation enhancements, tax credit programs and programs to support a healthier environment.

Overall Challenges of Housing and Community Development include:

- Mix of development projects within town boundary and areas being considered for annexation
- Location of light industrial uses at the edge of Downtown La Plata which could be more efficiently used for mixed-use and commercial development.
- There is a lack of diversity in the town's existing housing stock; having only few multifamily properties makes it difficult to attract younger residents who don't have a need for large properties but may otherwise have a desire to live in town.
- Lack of movement on downtown development projects, which encourages annexation prematurely.

### *Goals and Actions*

**GOAL: Encourage mixed-use development in new subdivisions and in downtown redevelopment projects.**

#### **ACTIONS:**

- The 2018 comprehensive rezoning ordinance establishes the regulatory structure to encourage infill development and encourage mixed use development at the La Plata Town Center. Town staff and the Planning Commission should continue to promote a mix housing types when considering development plans.
- Encourage relocation of uses that do not conform with neighboring zoning to decrease fragmented and uncoordinated uses.
- Staff and Planning Commission should review the plans with the infill and downtown development projects as priorities. This will help the Town from having multiple nodes and taking opportunities away from the Downtown area.
- The Town should support development proposals and programs that integrate various populations in order to successfully implement mixed-use development in and around the Downtown Core.

**GOAL: Encourage a range of housing density, type, cost and size in new subdivisions to welcome a diverse population.**

**ACTIONS:**

- The Town should continue to support development proposals and programs that address the needs of senior and physically challenged population, to provide flexibility for the needs of such populations.
- La Plata should address the housing needs of those who are currently living in hotels and are underserved in the regular housing market.
- Planning Commission and Town staff should clearly outline the need for diverse housing and incentivize/ prioritize subdivisions being planned to meet the housing needs of the Town.

**GOAL: Support “aging in place” initiatives to attract and retain La Plata’s senior citizens.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Encourage the use of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as defined in the ordinance; this will allow development of ADUs in association with single family detached homes. These will help provide affordable housing options for low to moderate income workers, seniors, and recent college graduates as recommended in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan.
- Work with non-profit and local organizations that provide services for the seniors to increase the ability to “age in place” for community members.
- Plan for mixed-use developments that provide attractive amenities for seniors.

## Economic Development Element

Section 3-102(b)(1) of the Maryland Land Use Article provides that “the planning commission for a local jurisdiction may include in the plan additional elements to advance the purposes of the plan.” Although the Land Use Article is not restrictive as to the additional plan elements, a “community renewal element” provides a catch-all opportunity for the Town to articulate its goals related to economic development.

### Significant Actions Since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan

- The La Plata Business Association has reorganized and become an active participant in town affairs. The LPBA has established or supported a number of events that bring people to the downtown core.

### Existing Conditions

La Plata’s economy is dominated by three sectors which have provided for a stable economic base; however, their cumulative growth has and will continue to be modest unless harnessed and nurtured.

- **Government Services** – Just more than half of the County’s 1,220 budgeted positions are based in La Plata as are several hundred employees of the state and federal agencies and the Board of Education. Supporting professional services such as lawyers and engineers are also concentrated near the County government building and courthouse.
- **University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center** employs \_\_\_\_ people across the medical professions and allied services. Some off-site medical suites, urgent care facilities and medical suppliers are also present although at relatively small scale.
- Like many small towns, regional and national retailers have come to dominate the **retail base** of La Plata. Lowe’s, Walmart, restaurants and fast food outlets, and service providers are the most prominent among them. La Plata is the first major retail, services, and employment destination for many of the areas to the south. While the national and regional chains have thrived, small, community-oriented retail, boutique shops, and locally-owned and operated services and restaurants are have struggled against much larger competitors.

Challenges to economic growth include:

- Light industrial businesses such as a Coca-Cola bottling facility and Southern Maryland Oil provide for some diversification but are located on the edge of downtown and occupy what might otherwise be valuable land for mixed use redevelopment.
- The downtown street network is disconnected due to the CSX Pope’s Creek Branch resulting in traffic back-ups on MD 6 for periods extending beyond the traditional morning and evening rush hour. The road infrastructure itself needs a refresh to improve the pedestrian environment and traffic safety.
- Policy decisions to disperse government facilities (and employees) outside of the County seat and facility siting decisions that do not support the downtown such as the siting of College of Southern Maryland along Rosewick Road west of US 301 and the long-delayed decision on siting of a new library in La Plata.

The economic challenges of the next decade are to maintain the core sectors, build from their strength, establish a presence in new sectors of the economy. Most of Town’s development-related activities have been responsive to private-sector proposals or oriented towards establishing the right regulatory

environment to grow such as comprehensive rezoning, improved sign ordinances and permitting processes. The goals and actions described below can only be brought to life with a forward-leaning public sector; and waiting for County or state government to take the lead will bear little fruit.

#### Goals and Actions

**GOAL: Focus the town’s community and economic development efforts on the downtown core; demonstrate public investment to attract private capital.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Ensure the availability of infrastructure and services that are essential to grown and sustain businesses by advancing actions in the Transportation Element.
- Harness redevelopment potential in downtown industrial sites, including proactive efforts and investments to relocate active businesses to more appropriate properties in the Town.
- Explore town-sponsored tax and financial incentives for downtown growth and development, including tax increment financing for infrastructure projects.
- Establish a “Sunny Day” Fund to encourage small business development for destination retail and a location-specific brand experience; support arts and entertainment district activities and their spin-off benefits.
- Develop a destination marketing strategy to bring retail customers off US 301 and into the downtown core, with a focus on commuters living south of La Plata and in Virginia.

**GOAL: Support entrepreneurialism, workers in the “gig economy” and telecommuting.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Ensure that zoning ordinances permit home-based businesses, telecommuting and micro-manufacturing opportunities with appropriate safeguards for residential quality of life.

**GOAL: Build on the town’s economic strengths.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Maximize the potential of the planned La Plata Library to provide a range of services with hours of operation well into the evening hours.
- Establish a “Community and Campus Zone for Hospitals and Health Care Facilities” which provides a predictable development environment for this sector.
- Closely monitor activities of County and state government to ensure that facilities master plans and office siting decisions for public agencies give preference to the downtown core.

## Recreation and Parks Element

Section 3-102(b)(1) of the Maryland Land Use Article provides that “the planning commission for a local jurisdiction may include in the plan additional elements to advance the purposes of the plan.” Although the Land Use Article is not restrictive as to the additional plan elements, a “community renewal element” provides a catch-all opportunity for the Town to articulate its goals related to recreation and parks. This element summarizes the *Town of La Plata Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Master Plan* adopted in 2011.

### Significant Actions Since the 2009 Comprehensive Plan

The Town of La Plata adopted a comprehensive parks and recreation master plan in 2011. The Plan provides an inventory of La Plata’s public parks, recreation and open spaces (PROS). The plan provides improvement recommendations; however, the Town has not made significant improvements.

### Existing Conditions

La Plata has a number of community, neighborhood, mini, school recreation and natural resource areas and private, commercial, and non-profit PROS. A list of La Plata’s PROS are in **Table #**. Residents of the town take great pride in the parks and open spaces.

The Town does not run recreation programs. Charles County Parks and Recreation, the College of Southern Maryland and non-profit youth leagues run several programs and host leagues and classes.

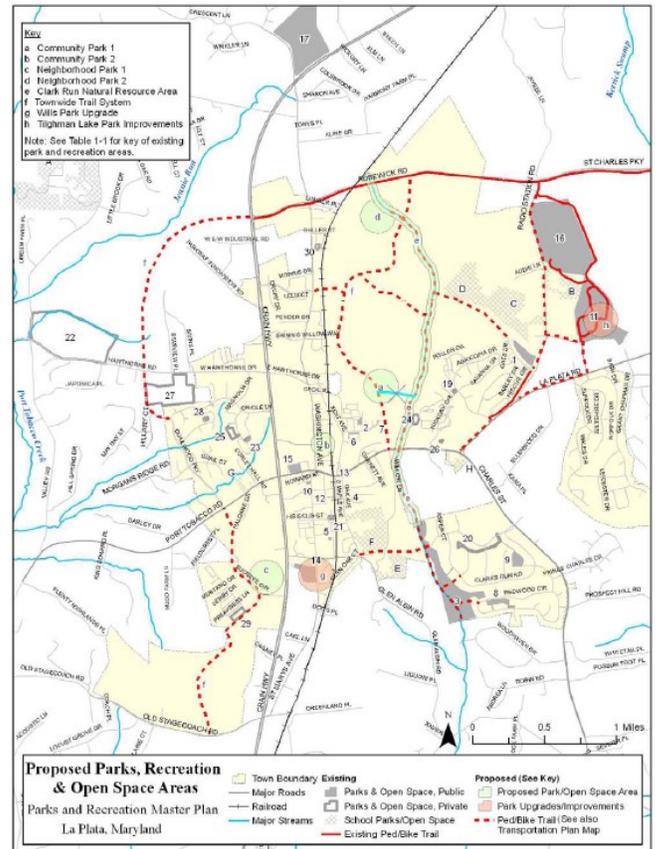
PROS Type	Name	Size (acres)
Community Park	Tilghman Lake Park	62
	Town Hall Park	2
Neighborhood Park	Wills Memorial Park	14
	Silver Linden Park	5
	Redwood Lake Park	5
	Agricopia Park	6
Mini Park	Carroll La Plata Village	1
	Hemlock Court	0.1
	Patuxent Court	0.3
	Phoenix Run Park I & II	0.9
	Train Station	0.7
	Star Memorial Park	0.1
School Recreation Park	La Plata High School	54
	Matula Elementary School	
	Gwynn Education Center	7
	Somers Middle School	38
	Mitchell Elementary School	9
	Courthouse Soccer Field	2
Natural Resource Area	Clark Run Natural Area	42
	Four natural recourse areas, associated with school recreation parks	56+
Private, commercial, and non-profit PROS	13 sites that include mini parks, tot lots and playgrounds managed by HOAs, community centers and recreation areas part of private school facility	20

## Goals and Actions

### GOAL: Create strategically located, community and neighborhood parks.

#### ACTIONS:

- Use the *2011 La Plata Parks and Recreation Master Plan* to determine the types of facilities needed in the Town.
- Create a 20-25 acre community park within Heritage Green that is accessible to residents of the entire town. The park should have indoor and outdoor amenities; paths and trails connecting the park to areas that are underserved and need a connection to a park.
- Create a community park in the downtown area.
- Add two neighborhood parks, one west of US 301 (10 to 15 acres) and one east of US 301 (20 to 30 acres).
- Add a natural resource area/ greenway that connects Rosewick Road south to the existing Clark Run natural area. This will serve as the north-south spine through the town.
- Plan for a town-wide walking/biking trail system which will be approximately 15 miles.
- Enhance existing parks and recreation areas.



### GOAL: Meet identified facilities needs especially for indoor recreation and sports fitness, walking and swimming, and programming for youth, elderly and disabled residents.

#### ACTIONS:

- Review the *2011 La Plata Parks and Recreation Master Plan* to prioritize the types of indoor facilities needed in the Town of La Plata. Basketball, sports fitness and swimming pools are the highest future demand indoor facilities.
- Continue to work with Charles County to ensure adequate senior trips and tours, special Olympic programs and youth programs are provided and are advertised to La Plata residents
- Work with local organizations and Charles County to provide programs for the disabled.
- Incorporate multi-generational playgrounds to provide options for those who may not be as mobile and need the physical activity.

**GOAL: Ensure that new development in Town provides on-site recreation and open space, but also contributes its fair share to the public PROS system.**

**ACTIONS:**

- When approving new development, the Town should consider the public PROS system needs and the recreation and open space needs internal and private to the development. The town should prioritize the public PROS system first.
- The Town Planning Commission should use the needs analysis from the 2011 Parks and Recreation Plan to identify needs as related to the new development under the Town's development regulations.
- The Town should consider impact fees as a potential funding source for recreational facilities.

**GOAL: Create a town-wide walking/biking trail system as recommended by the *2011 La Plata Parks and Recreation Master Plan*.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Review the 2011 Parks and Recreation Plan to add trails and paths in recommended locations. Ensure trail and path recommendations do not have conflict with transportation plans for the Town.
- Connect Heritage Green, Clark Run greenway, Agricopia Park, Redwood Lake, East Patuxent Drive and future planned parks with one another.
- Create a natural resource area/ greenway along Clark Run as a spine through the heart of Town.

Part 3: Implementation Plan & Capital Improvements

*To be completed prior to final adoption*

## Part 4: Appendix

*To be completed prior to final adoption*

Appendix 1 – Policy Considerations, re: Charles Regional Medical Center

Appendix 2 – Water Resources