

PRELIMINARY GOALS, CONCEPTS, AND GUIDELINES  
AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS  
FOR THE COUNTYWIDE RESOURCE CONSERVATION FUNCTIONAL MASTER PLAN

## INTRODUCTION

The Countywide Resource Conservation Functional Master Plan (“the Resource Conservation Plan” or RCP) will combine the related elements of green infrastructure planning and rural and agricultural conservation into one functional master plan in order to streamline the process, meet state requirements for planning elements, and more efficiently update existing plans and maps. The RCP will address four state-mandated planning elements: the Natural Resources Element (in the form of the updated Green Infrastructure Plan), the Priority Preservation Area (PPA) element (in the form of an Agricultural Plan that includes urban and rural agricultural policies and applies to all agricultural land, not just those areas within the PPA), a Forestry Element (in the form of policies and strategies to address the state’s No Net Loss of Forests policy in the Forest Preservation Act of 2013 and Plan 2035’s recommendation for a strategic plan for forest and tree canopy), and technical corrections to the Sustainable Growth Act map update. This plan will be written by in-house staff with a consultant providing support for the public participation process and providing input on the final staff draft.

### *Countywide Green Infrastructure Functional Master Plan*

The Countywide Green Infrastructure Plan (“GI Plan”) was approved on June 14, 2005. Since that time, 80 of the 92 strategies contained in the plan have either been completed or are ongoing. A full report of this assessment is available on the project website. In 2010, the environmental regulations in the County Code were updated comprehensively to implement many of the plan’s strategies. This has, in turn, resulted in a need to update the “Regulated Areas” portion of the 2005 GI Plan network map.

Water quality is a serious issue facing all counties within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Green infrastructure methods and tools, of all types and sizes, from rain barrels to ecological corridors, can improve water quality countywide. To support the efforts required to meet the standards of the Prince George’s County Watershed Implementation Plan, and to support the associated policies and strategies contained in Plan 2035, the updated GI Plan will contain policies and strategies to address the full spectrum of green infrastructure types and sizes.

This plan will also address forest and tree canopy coverage, climate change and sea level rise, and other ecologically-related topics that can impact land use decision-making. Green buildings and energy conservation will not be covered in the RCP, but are expected to be addressed in the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations Re-Write project.

### *Countywide Agriculture Functional Master Plan*

The Priority Preservation Area (PPA) Plan was approved in 2012, and while it may seem as if this plan does not need to be updated, several actions have been taken since its approval that warrant an update.

- The Maryland Agricultural and Land Preservation Foundation has certified Prince George’s County’s preservation program which was one of the plan’s main goals.
- The Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012 resulted in 95 percent of the land area outside the public water and sewer envelope being designated as an area where conservation of agricultural land and practices should be focused and where major subdivisions are prohibited.

- A new General Plan is now in place that designates areas outside the public water and sewer envelope as “Rural and Agricultural Areas” with a new set of broad policies and strategies for implementation.

These three actions result in the need to prepare a comprehensive agricultural policy plan to support the long-term sustainability of both rural and urban agriculture in the County.

This plan will support the desired development pattern of Plan 2035. It is not anticipated that the boundaries of the 2012 designated PPA will change with this update. This plan will include technical corrections to the Sustainable Growth Act map approved by the County Council in 2012.

### *Countywide Rural Character Functional Master Plan*

The Master Plan of Transportation calls for the development of “guidelines for the design of activities adjacent to designated roadways to include building setbacks, landscaping, scenic easements, and utility clearing.” The recent master plans for Subregions 5 and 6 contain various policies and strategies that generally address rural conservation, but the plans do not contain the necessary guidelines for implementation. The Historic Sites and Districts Plan also addresses the need for rural character conservation.

There have been three studies that have discussed the need for rural character protections and have provided guidance for the development of future policies and strategies:

- *Croom and Aquasco Roads Scenic Byway Plan Elements* (May 2012),
- *Rural Villages Study* (September 2012), and
- *Conserving Significant Cultural Landscapes, Protecting the Piscataway and Accokeek Historic Communities and the Mount Vernon Viewshed* (March 2013).

As part of the RCP, these documents will be reviewed and combined into Rural Character Conservation policies and strategies that support rural character conservation and the desired development pattern of Plan 2035. Rural Character Conservation Guidelines will also be prepared as part of this project. These guidelines are being prepared so that they can be considered for adoption either within or by reference in the re-written zoning ordinance.

## GOALS, CONCEPTS, AND GUIDELINES

### *Project Goals*

The project team will evaluate the research, studies, and reports prepared as part of the pre-planning work and those relevant planning studies and reports related to the subject matter as noted above. All prior functional, master, and sector plans will be reviewed for applicable recommendations as part of this planning process. Particular attention will be paid to the related policies and strategies of Plan 2035.

The project goals are to:

1. Conduct an inclusive public participation process that builds on recent efforts,

2. Coordinate with County agencies to gain input on policies and strategies as well as implementation actions to be shared by all agencies,
3. Use scientific and planning research to formulate the proposed policies and strategies, and
4. Ensure that the policies and strategies contained in the plan support all communities in the County.

### *Project Concepts and Guidelines*

During the pre-planning stage of this project, considerable attention was paid to researching current topics relevant to land use decision-making such as climate change adaptation, forest fragmentation, and water quality assessment. Several important planning studies have been completed that have contributed greatly to the volume of knowledge, particularly around rural and urban agriculture, and rural character conservation. This research, and the completed reports and studies, will provide a valuable base for the work to be done as part of the Resource Conservation Plan project.

Project concepts and guidelines include:

1. Ensuring that all communities contain green infrastructure resources that are considered to be of “countywide significance” so that water quality and air quality issues can be addressed.
2. Focusing on improved human health conditions through improving the environment
3. Supporting the desired development pattern of Plan 2035 and the economic strategies being implemented countywide.

### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

The public participation process for this new, combined functional master plan will build on the considerable input received in the past few years, primarily during the preparation and approval of Plan 2035. Various other studies and reports will also contribute including input received during the Sustainable Growth Act mapping process, the report on urban agriculture, and the scenic byway plan elements.

The usual methods of public outreach will also be engaged, such as a robust and consistently updated website, email blasts, and posts on social media. Staff will also be available for community events to talk about and distribute information on the RCP.

A consultant has been hired to assist staff in conducting the public participation process and compile feedback for use in plan preparation. The contract also includes a review of the final staff draft of the document.

Three rounds of public participation are envisioned:

1. Coordination with and engaging of staff from County agencies,
2. Completing direct contacts with groups and organizations for input on specific areas of interest, and
3. Conducting an open forum to facilitate a dialog about the recommendations being considered.

The three rounds are discussed in more detail below.

### ***Round 1: Engage County Agencies***

All County agencies play some role in conserving the environment, agriculture, and rural character. The purpose of round 1 is to coordinate with and engage the Prince George’s County Department of the Environment, the Department of Permitting, Inspections, and Enforcement, the Department of Public Works and Transportation, the Board of Education, the Health Department, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Prince George’s County Soil Conservation District regarding environmental and agricultural issues to be addressed in the future contents of the RCP. Coordination is needed to discuss on-going green programs and priorities.

Round 1 is envisioned to be completed using some sort of “forum” or other agreed-to format for coordinating with and engaging County agencies. It is anticipated that this will be a half-day event at an off-site location (away from the staff’s normal office location).

### ***Round 2: Direct Contacts***

The purpose of round 2 is to reach out to County groups and organizations for input on current environmental and agricultural issues facing the County through direct solicitation at each group’s regularly scheduled meetings. The organizations will include civic groups, professional groups such as the building industry, environmental groups, agriculture groups, faith-based organizations, and/or County-designated task forces. Requests for organizations to contact will be solicited and groups who request more information or a presentation will be accommodated.

### ***Round 3: Open Forum***

The purpose of round 3 is to bring together countywide stakeholders for a half-day event to provide input on concepts to be addressed in the overall plan. All who have participated in the project to this point will be invited. Others are also welcome to participate.

### **Project Schedule (as of 6/5/15)**

This schedule includes the use of a consultant to conduct and manage tasks specific to the public participation program and to review and comment on the staff draft of the entire document.

<b>WORK COMPONENT</b>	<b>TIME FRAME</b>
<b>RCP Preparation and Approval</b>	January 2015 – December 2016
<b>Project Start-up</b>	January – September 2015
Project initiation	Project initiation PB: July 2015 Project initiation DC: Sept. 8, 14 or 15
<b>Public Participation Process</b>	July 2015 – March 2016
Round 1: Engage County Agencies	July – October 2015
Round 2: Direct-contact input	September – December 2015
Round 3: Open Forum	January – March 2016
<b>Drafting the RCP</b>	July 2015–March 2016
Focused writing tasks and coordination of the plans	March – June 2016
<b>Approval Process</b>	
Joint Public Hearing	July 2016
Planning Board Work Sessions Complete	September 2016
PB transmits adopted plan to Council	October 2016
Additional Council hearings (optional)	(not considered)
Council Work Sessions complete	November 2016
Council adopts updated plan	December 2016