

# WATERFRONT VISION AND GOALS

Preserving and maintaining the waterfront assets that make Oxford a unique place requires community-based collaboration among those who work, use, live along and otherwise enjoy the waterfront on a daily basis. While the Town has clearly stated that it intends to support the preservation and enhancement of its working waterfront—especially considering its long history of boat building and marine-related commerce – the actual nuts and bolts of making it happen requires continual collaboration and support of its residents, employers and waterfront users and visitors. Oxford has and will likely continue to be a model for collaborative planning and implementation efforts that rural communities everywhere would do well to emulate. The following vision and goals are intended to build upon the ongoing successful and collaborative efforts addressing issues of stormwater and flooding and historic commercial area revitalization

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The plan was developed through a series of informal community meetings – working meetings – asking participants to brainstorm ideas, delve more deeply into those ideas that appear to have the most traction and then using the plan to advance Oxford’s vision for its waterfront and its strategic priorities through the community-based planning process. In addition to the community meetings, a community survey/questionnaire was distributed to reach out to those who do not often participate in community meetings, but have a strong interest nevertheless.

### Community Meetings

The following informal community meetings were conducted to provide an opportunity for those stakeholders with an interest in the waterfront – either as a business owner, a property owner, a user or a neighbor – to contribute the development of the plan.

- May 25, 2017 – The purpose of the first meeting was to introduce the planning process, identify issues, and generate ideas for consideration in the strategic plan.
- July 27, 2017 – The purpose of the second meeting was to review the results of the community survey and to discuss a preliminary list of ideas organized around three proposed goals based upon the results of the survey and the first community meeting
- September 20, 2017 – A third meeting [forthcoming] was held to review the recommended vision, goals and strategies.

In addition, the draft plan [forthcoming] was presented to the Town of Oxford Commission for their review.

## Community Survey

Throughout June of 2017, the Town of Oxford conducted a survey of residents regarding their most pressing concerns and recommendations for improvements associated with Oxford's waterfront areas. Thirty-six residents participated in the community survey. The results and recommendations are documented in Appendix 1 and are incorporated directly into the recommendations for the plan.

## COMMUNITY PLANNING ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Based upon the results of the community meetings and community survey, as well as a review of related planning efforts for the historic commercial area and for stormwater and floodplain management, the following issues emerged as the primary focus of the strategic plan.



Figure 22 Town of Oxford supports and maintains waterman access at the Town Docks



Figure 23 The Ferry is a collaborative effort among the Town, Maryland State Highway Administration and the Oxford-Bellevue Ferry



Figure 24 Oxford's cluster of boatyards and marinas are unique to the Chesapeake Bay, especially for a community of its size

- There is a need to develop strategies that will sustain and grow Oxford's maritime industries that have built up around the boat building industry.
- There is a need for a "succession" plan that cultivates the next generation of marine businesses, waterfront users and waterfront visitors.
- There is a need for creating a springboard for new and expanding water-dependent businesses to develop and locate in Oxford through aggressive mentoring, partnership building, and business support services.
- There is a need to address the changing recreational habits that shape Oxford's maritime industries and water-dependent land uses and identify new ways to position Oxford to help capture an appropriate share of the markets associated with these new and emerging trends in the recreational boating market.
- What are the new and emerging trends in heritage- and nature-based tourism and how can Oxford position itself to use its known assets to better capture an appropriate share of this important segment of the tourism industry?
- Given that Oxford does not have a large number of hotel rooms (and likely will not into the future), how can Oxford develop and promote appropriately scaled events, educational activities, and other means of attracting small groups beyond the strong summer season, especially through the spring and fall?
- How can water-dependent land uses be balanced with the need to preserve and maintain Oxford's historic qualities, its unique sense of place and its natural setting – the reasons that people are attracted to Oxford in the first place?
- There is a need to consider the importance of the Oxford-Bellevue Ferry to the businesses, residents and visitors and how

to ensure that the longest operating private ferry in the United States continues long into the future.

**WATERFRONT ASSETS AND CHALLENGES**

Talbot County’s Department of Economic Development conducted a series of listening sessions around the County, including Oxford, at which participants listed each community’s strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). Of particular importance to the strategic plan for the waterfront areas are the following identified strengths and perceived weaknesses:

**Strengths**

- History and Community Character – Oxford is one of the oldest port towns in Maryland and it still retains many of the character defining features from its formative years that give it a unique and identifiable sense of place.
- Boatbuilding and Maritime Heritage – Oxford is well known for the quality of workmanship found in its many boatyards and boat building businesses.
- Water and Access – Oxford is home to more than 600 commercial boat slips serving transient, weekend and seasonal users throughout the mid-Atlantic region.
- Quiet Destination – Oxford is known for its serene and peaceful environment providing a strong identity as a getaway for seasonal and weekend travelers as well as attracting a specific segment of the transient boating market looking for a place that is out of the ordinary. For example:

*“OXFORD is a quiet town on the Eastern Shore that was the first port of entry into the colonial states. It sits on the mighty Choptank River and is known for its boatbuilding, quaint shops, waterfront parks, excellent restaurants, and many full-service marinas with swimming pools.”*

- Sense of Community – Oxford has a strong fabric of neighborhoods, an active community center, and is well known for its local museum and for its hospitality (small inns/bed and breakfast, quality restaurants, community organizations and public history).
- Active Citizenry – its residents are philanthropic, community minded, have a wealth of experiences that they share with others in support of the local community organizations and institutions.
- Seasonal Residents – Oxford has a strong and stable base of part-time residents who contribute to the economy and give back to the community by supporting local community organizations and institutions.



Figure 25 Yacht sales and service are also an integral part of Oxford’s boatyards



Figure 26 Oxford is known as a quiet community with character



Figure 27 One of Oxford’s fifteen dedicated slips for watermen

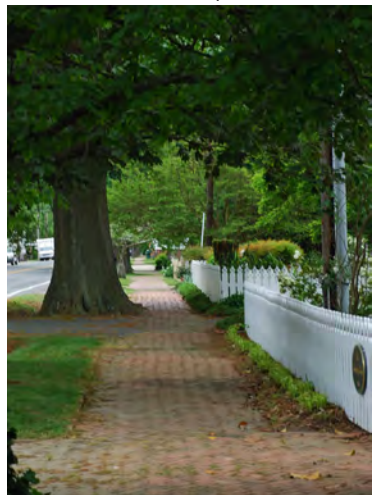


Figure 28 Oxford’s brick walkways and picket fences define its character

- The Town Staff – are dedicated and hardworking and put their efforts towards finding solutions to the Town’s problems and its ongoing maintenance needs.
- Public landscape – Oxford has preserved waterfront access through its community parks and by preserving the public right-of-ways as public access to the waterfront.
- Cooperative Oxford Laboratory – NOAA and NCCOS - US Coast Guard Station brings the benefits of ongoing nationally significant research and marine sciences to the community and the potential for building partnerships that benefit Oxford’s waterfront environs

### Challenges

- Seasonality – business development in Oxford is limited by the extent of the summer boating and tourism season and the proportion of year-round residents to seasonal or part time residents (estimated to be over 40 percent). This affects business revenues and the ability of some businesses (especially restaurants) to remain open year-round.
- Affordability – Oxford’s workforce, especially its commercial watermen, cannot afford to live in town, nor can new businesses find and lease affordable rental properties to start new businesses.
- Regulatory Environment – water-dependent businesses struggle with state regulations to keep their operation going.
- Preserving Oxford’s Unique Character – the perception among business owners is that it is difficult to balance the preservation ethic in Oxford with the need to help local businesses survive.
- Aging population – few young families are moving in to Oxford affecting retail spending patterns and employment opportunities.
- Education/Mentoring/Apprenticeships – difficult to find employees that have the requisite skills or those that want to learn through apprenticeships, which is a perceived barrier for existing employers in the marine trades.
- Sense of Community - although Oxford is generally a welcoming place, it takes a while for new businesses and residents to get plugged in.
- Community Organizations – often rely upon local businesses for support, especially events, but it is a strain on small businesses to be continually asked for donations.
- Changing Economics and Market Demand for Recreational Boating – the next generation of recreational boaters has yet to emerge, resulting in less demand for low and middle end



Figure 29 Hardened shorelines along the more exposed Tred Avon River waterfront



Figure 30 More recent "living shoreline" accomplishes the same goals with less impact



recreational boating sales, repairs, and related marine services including slip rentals and transient docking (with the exception of the very large boats).

- Changing Travel Patterns - the next generation of travelers are seeking out experience-based travel rather than attractions or points of interest (including historic sites)

## A VISION FOR OXFORD'S WATERFRONT AREAS

The following statements help to focus the strategic planning effort on those collaborative opportunities that build upon the Oxford's assets while addressing the inherent challenges:

- Facilitate the next generation of maritime businesses and economic activity while preserving and maintaining the distinct historic character and quality of the Town of Oxford
- Build upon Oxford's distinct character and quality to build a brand and identity
- Combine Oxford's twin strengths of recreational marinas and boatyards with experience-based travel and tourism opportunities
- Attract a new generation of recreational boating and boat building

## GOALS

- GOAL 1: Working Waterfront and Land Use:  
Support existing working waterfront uses and increase opportunities for new enterprises as a means of attracting the next generation of maritime uses and activities.
- GOAL 2: Heritage and Nature-based Tourism  
Expand Oxford's visitor and educational/research infrastructure to capture the next generation of visitors.
- GOAL 3: Community Development Goal  
Retain Oxford's community character and quality of life while attracting new investments in working waterfront and heritage- and nature-based tourism.

The following recommended strategies are organized by goal and outline the rationale for the goal, recommended objectives for measuring how well the goal is being achieved, and recommended strategies for achieving the goal.



Figure 31 Oxford's picket fence fund raiser provides inspiration for the Town's branding and identity

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# WORKING WATERFRONT AND LAND USE

**GOAL 1: Support existing working waterfront uses and increase opportunities for new enterprises as a means of attracting the next generation of maritime uses and activities.**

## RATIONALE

- The Town of Oxford's Comprehensive Plan calls for the continued economic viability of its downtown merchants and its boating and marine uses that have been in existence since the 1600's and for its maritime and water-based history to be preserved
- The Town of Oxford's Historic Commercial Area Strategic Plan recognizes the relationship between its commercial area businesses and its marinas and marine businesses
- Oxford's marina and marine commercial uses are dependent upon their location along the waterfront and are more easily adaptable to changing conditions associated with climate change and sea level rise
- Oxford's water dependent businesses are widely recognized for their high quality of workmanship and level of customer service

## Objectives

- Maintain existing working waterfront land uses
- Maintain and consider increasing public waterfront access
- Increase the number of slips dedicated to working watermen
- Increase the number of apprenticeship and mentoring opportunities
- Reduce permitting time and complexity for existing water-dependent business seeking to expand, or new businesses looking to locate in Oxford
- Increase opportunities for new business development in aquaculture and sea-to-table enterprises

## STRATEGIES

1-1. Consider adopting as part of the Comprehensive Plan an official map that recognizes existing working waterfront assets and a specific policy that documents the Town of Oxford's commitment to maintaining working waterfront assets.

Assets to be included on the map:

- Rental/leased slips with direct access for loading and unloading, that are spatially and seasonally appropriate for watermen seafood operations

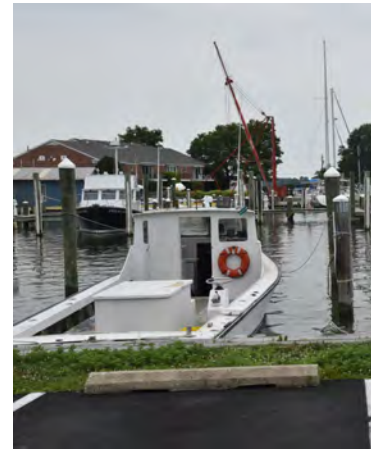


Figure 32 Supporting waterman continues to be a broadly supported goal of the Town of Oxford through dedicated slips and dockside access at its public marina

### **Rural Business Development Grants in Maryland**

According to its website, this competitive grant program is “designed to support targeted technical assistance, training and other activities leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas which will employ 50 or fewer new employees and has less than \$1 million in gross revenue. Programmatic activities are separated into enterprise or opportunity type grant activities.” Generally, grants range from \$10,000 to \$500,000 with no cost sharing requirement. Enterprise grants must be used on projects to benefit small and emerging businesses in rural areas such as:

- Training and technical assistance including project planning, business counseling/training, market research, feasibility studies, etc.
- Distance adult learning for job training and advancement
- Rural transportation improvement
- Community economic development
- Technology-based economic development
- Feasibility studies and business plans
- Leadership and entrepreneur training

More information can be found at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-business-development-grants/md>

- Boatyards and marine commercial uses
- Public and private marinas
- Public waterfront parks and access (including fire access at ends of public right-of-way)
- Ferry landing and related facilities
- Waterfront hospitality businesses (including inns, bed and breakfasts, and restaurants)
- Private fishing and yachting charters and sales

**Funding Strategy:** Use map from this report and incorporate into next revision of the Town of Oxford Comprehensive Plan

#### *1-2. Adopt additional measures to adapt existing working waterfront assets to sea-level rise*

- Bachelor’s Point – low lying areas are already protected as RCA and very large lot residential.
- South Morris Street –the lowest of the low lying areas are protected as community park, while the Causeway remains vulnerable but must be addressed through cooperation with MDOT/SHA. Adjoining residential areas south of the Community Park are vulnerable longer term to a 2-3 foot rise in sea level. Residential streets south of the community park and east of South Morris Street are already located within the 100-year floodplain and will continue face risks associated with nuisance flooding and sea level rise. The 100-year floodplain would likely expand under most sea level rise scenarios.
- Historic District (east side) – the low area along The Strand, Mill Street, Tilghman Street, Bank Street, Factory Street and Market Street is within the 100-year floodplain and is most vulnerable to nuisance flooding and sea level rise. The marine uses are less vulnerable and more easily adapted. Stormwater and flooding issues in this area are being addressed in other studies. A strategy for adapting residential uses within the historic district is needed, and although outside the scope of this work, will be identified as a potential need and worthy of pursuing current funding for vulnerable historic districts through state programs as a high priority. Organize waterfront business and property owners in order to advocate for maintaining the current town creek navigation channel (federal funding source) and for coordinating public and private investments in the maintenance of existing waterfront infrastructure

**Funding Strategy:** State case for coordinated strategies through ongoing state programs (Sustainable Communities, Working Waterfront, Maryland Heritage Area/Scenic Byway, National Register/Local Historic District flood protection, and use Stormwater Management and Shoreline Protection Fund, etc. (see Appendix Two for description of funding programs)



1-3. *Organize waterfront business and property owners in order to advocate for maintaining the current Town Creek navigation channel (federal funding source) and for coordinating public and private investments in the maintenance of existing waterfront infrastructure*

- Develop annual statements of harbor and shoreline maintenance needs and responsibilities, including dredging; and coordinate funding applications for maintenance and repair of public wharves, piers, landings and bulkheads with Talbot County (Waterway Improvement Grants)
- Annually track total usage by boaters (both commercial and recreational) to enable better scores in grant applications
- Use statement to seek additional funding and resources to implement maintenance program

**Funding Strategy:** Town coordinate volunteer waterfront property owners that would benefit from maintenance of navigation channels and Waterway Improvement Grants

1-4. *Consistent with land use and water quality and environmental considerations, seek out and encourage new waterfront commercial enterprises including aquaculture, boating and boat repair instruction schools, restaurants accessible to boaters, seafood retail stores or Sea-to-Table distribution sites, boat sharing operations, charter fishing operations, etc.*

- Develop and pursue designation of aquaculture opportunity zone(s) as a financial incentive to promote aquaculture and encourage investment. Adopt applicable local incentives and taxation options to promote aquaculture. Note that potential aquaculture businesses would only benefit if the price of land was less expensive (or subsidized) in Oxford and the distribution channels already used by watermen could be harnessed for the aquaculture distribution

**Funding Strategy:** Pursue Rural Business Development Grants (<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-business-development-grants>)

1-5. *Support water-dependent businesses' efforts to expand existing business or create new business through permitting assistance*

- Consider exempting certain working waterfront uses from the "Non-conforming Use" clause by adding maritime water-dependent uses to the exceptions in SECTION 9. NON-CONFORMITIES §9.00 Non-conformities  
 "B. It is the intent of this ordinance to permit these non-conformities to continue until they are removed, but not to encourage their survival, except in the case of historic structures, maritime water-dependent commercial uses, or casualty loss or

### **Waterway Improvement Grants**

According to the DNR website:

"The Waterway Improvement Fund was established in 1966 (Annotated Code of Maryland Sec. 8-707 of the State Boat Act) for the purpose of funding projects which improve and promote the recreational and commercial capabilities, conditions and safety of Maryland's waterways for the benefit of the general boating public."

The Fund provides financial support in the form of grants and/or loans for capital projects and services that serve the boating public including the following selected project types directly relevant to Rock Hall:

- Marking of channels and harbors and establishing aids to navigation.
- Clearing of debris and obstructions from navigable waters of the state.
- Dredging channels and harbors, and constructing jetties and breakwaters, including those projects in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- Construction of marine facilities beneficial to the general boating public.
- Installation of marine sewage pump-out stations.
- Evaluation of water oriented recreation needs and capacities of Maryland waterways and the development of comprehensive plans for waterway improvement projects.

voluntary demolition of structures as provided for in this Section.”

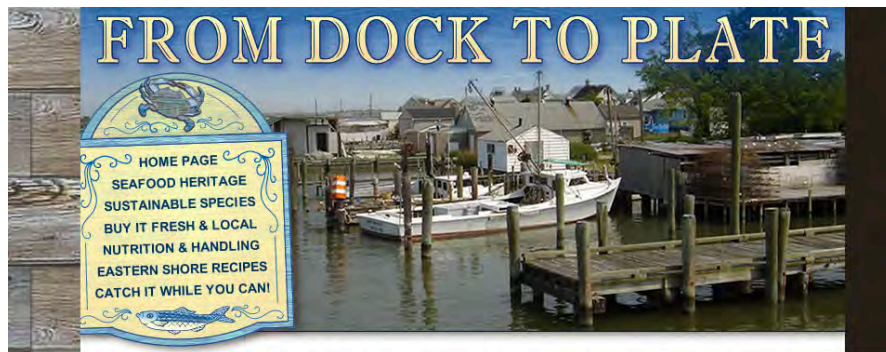
- Consider establishing a working waterfront overlay district that is coupled with incentives for maintaining or expanding existing maritime businesses including expedited permit review and/or lower development fees for desirable uses

**Funding Strategy:** Implement as part of Comprehensive Plan update and resulting zoning code revisions.

1-6. *Establish initial set aside funding for social media marketing of activities that support water-dependent businesses.*

- This could include marketing of any program that engages water-dependent businesses, such as marinas, boatyard tours via the Oxford museum, or annual festivals. Social media could include marketing strategies for sites serving the needs of the transient boating community such as Active Captain and other similar sites.

**Funding Strategy:** Work with Talbot County to pursue funding from Maryland Office of Tourism Development County Cooperative Grant Program, working under the direction of the Maryland Tourism Development Board and the Department of Business and Economic Development (cooperative with other working waterfront communities in Talbot County).



The Eastern Shore is seafood country. Surrounded by both the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, fish and shellfish have been part of the regions culinary culture for centuries. For the tens of thousands of visitors who come to the shore each year, eating seafood is an important part of their travel experience. And for those who are fortunate to live on the Eastern Shore, enjoying seafood is just part of the quality of life of here.

Regardless of whether you live here or are just visiting, buying, preparing and eating seafood should be fun, engaging, and a healthy part of living. Consumers have a lot of seafood products to choose from, literally from around the world. You want to make the smartest purchase to insure a healthy and happy dining experience. The more you know about seafood, the better buyer you will become.

This site is a consumer guide to Eastern Shore seafood whether it comes directly from a boat, dock or local fish market. We have some of the best fish and shellfish in the world right here in this region, with lots of seafood product choices. Sourcing, buying and preparing locally harvested Eastern Shore seafood should be part of the adventure of eating it!



Seafood peddlers once sold seafood in many Eastern Shore town via horse drawn carts and later by trucks. These "fish mongers" travelled the streets of Ocean City, Salisbury, Berlin, Snow Hill, and many other Eastern Shore towns. Some mongers used a small tin horn to announce their arrival in the neighborhood.

Figure 33 Seafood marketing through Maryland DNR program "from Doctk to Plate" (<http://docktoplate.us/>)

# HERITAGE AND NATURE-BASED TOURISM

**GOAL 2: Expand Oxford's visitor and educational/research infrastructure to capture the next generation of visitors.**

## RATIONALE

- Oxford, as a distinctive destination with high quality marinas, restaurants, and supporting public visitor infrastructure (its inns, public spaces, historic commercial area, community center, the ferry, and unique events and activities) is strongly positioned to capture market trends that value place-based travel experiences, rather than just a collection of unrelated visitor attractions.
- Hospitality-and service-based businesses are an integral part of Oxford's maritime heritage and their success is dependent upon increasing their access to new markets in a manner that will not detract from Oxford's distinct community character and quality.
- Oxford's current visitors include boaters (both cruising and weekend trips), bicyclists, weekend escapes from the greater Baltimore/DC region, and local residents looking for a meal on the waterfront.
- Businesses centered on heritage and nature-based tourism, whether for recreation, education or leisure, can have a lower impact on Oxford's limited infrastructure and capacity. These types of businesses and organizations can build upon Oxford's distinct character and quality to lengthen the stay of Oxford's visitors and extend the season through carefully targeted programming and marketing aimed at those who appreciate Oxford for what it is today.
- The National Trust for Historic Preservation uses the term "cultural heritage tourism" to describe the act of "traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present [including] historic, cultural and natural resources."
- The Cultural and Heritage Traveler 2013 edition, found that cultural heritage travelers spent an average of \$1,319 (up from \$994 in 2009) per trip compared to \$820 for non-cultural heritage travelers, making this a highly desirable travel industry segment. Cultural heritage travelers take an average of five trips per year, whereas other travelers take less than four.
- Oxford, through its extensive efforts to preserve and maintain its character defining features and through its participation in the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area and the Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway, is well positioned to capture an increased share in the cultural heritage traveler market.



Figure 34 Oxford Museum provides a destination for the recreational boating audiences seeking out small town travel experiences



Figure 35 Waterfront dining destinations attract both recreational boaters and visitors from around the region



### **Maryland Certified Local Governments**

The Town of Oxford Historic District overlaps with its waterfront on the west side of Town Creek and along Tred Avon River north of the Causeway. The Town can leverage this designation for additional funding opportunities by gaining designation as a Certified Local Government (CLG). According to the Maryland Historic Trust, "the Certified Local Government program recognizes counties and municipalities that have made a special commitment to preservation. This commitment includes, but is not limited to, establishing a qualified historic preservation commission to designate and review historic properties." The Town already has an historic preservation commission that appears to meet the qualifications.

Maryland's CLG program is administered by the National Park Service and the Maryland Historical Trust. CLG programs are supported through the federal Historic Preservation Fund. MHT awards 10% of its annual allocation from the Historic Preservation Fund to CLG projects and educational opportunities each year, with applications available in January or February.

[https://mht.maryland.gov/grants\\_clg.shtml](https://mht.maryland.gov/grants_clg.shtml)

### **Objectives**

- Increase the number of cultural heritage travelers visiting Oxford
- Increase the number of overnight stays (or the length of average visits in Oxford)
- Increase visitation in the shoulder seasons (late fall and spring)
- Maintain or increase the number of programs and events focused on cultural heritage travelers
- Increase the operating hours (weekday and seasonal) of existing cultural heritage traveler oriented businesses
- Increase Oxford's participation in County and State marketing efforts for cultural heritage tourism, including regional and foreign visitors

### **STRATEGIES**

The following strategies should be considered to address and work towards meeting heritage tourism objectives

#### *2-1. Identify innovative means to help preserve the heritage and folklore associated with Oxford's working waterfront as a valuable and inherent part of the working and recreational landscape of the Chesapeake Bay*

- Seek National Register listing for the Oxford-Bellevue Ferry under Criteria A (landing is located within Oxford National Register Historic District, however, at the time of review the structures or themselves were not more than 50-years old)
- Seek greater recognition and stronger identity for the boat building and repair yards associated with Town Creek (e.g. establishing a "boat building" cultural district, or similar)

**Funding Strategy:** Pursue funding through Maryland Historic Trust grant program. Expand range of grant program funding by gaining designation as a Certified Local Government so it could be eligible for additional preservation funding programs ([https://mht.maryland.gov/grants\\_clg.shtml](https://mht.maryland.gov/grants_clg.shtml)).

#### *2-2. Define and target the next generation of visitors (e.g. better understand their interests, travel needs, and how travel decisions are made)*

Those visiting Oxford by boat, whether a regular summer visitor or a more transient cruiser, tend to be looking for a quiet and unique place and are willing to go out of the way for that experience. The benefit of targeting boating visitors is that they would not impact Oxford's limited road capacity. This ties in with the same types of visitors that are coming to Oxford by land (automobile or bicycle) – those who come to visit because they like it the way it is (not the same visitor that goes to St. Michaels, for example). Draws to Oxford for both audiences include

the restaurants, the bed and breakfasts and small inns, the character of the place and the small-town experience.

- Develop specific marketing approaches to Oxford's three distinct marina and boating markets
  - Transient visitors stopping for a weekend or a couple of days are interested in knowing that they can find a place to either moor or dock their boat, that they can get into town and enjoy a good meal or enjoy a special event or occasion and otherwise be a part of the community that they are visiting, and that they will be able to enjoy a good night's sleep afterwards.
  - Loopers or other long-distance cruising associations are interested in similar experiences as weekenders, except that they may also be interested in marine services in support of their long distance travel and they may have a larger boat with deeper draft
  - Summer boaters (keeping their boat at a local marina) are more interested in fitting into the community through participating directly in community activities. They may also be interested in educational opportunities and other weekday activities.
- Work with marine-oriented social media to promote the experience of Oxford from the transient boater's perspective, such as the museum and dining opportunities through Active Captain and other similar sites (<https://activecaptain.com/index.php>)
- Work with existing boat sharing and home sharing businesses to identify Oxford as a distinct destination that is easy to get to from DC and Baltimore, and work with individuals wanting to participate in the sharing economy to establish a high quality experience.

**Funding Strategy:** Pursue grant funding for developing and implementing a coordinated marketing strategy with potential funding sources to include:

- Rural economic development programs
- Maryland Office of Tourism Development (MOTD) with Talbot County Tourism and Economic Development
- Maryland Heritage Areas Authority/Stories of the Chesapeake HA

### 2-3. *Expand opportunities for season-extending business enterprises through programming*

- Build upon the role that the ferry plays as a destination for motorcycles and bicyclists (the longest continuously operating private ferry in the country) as part of a larger touring activity and coordinate with other communities on the touring routes to cross-market.
- Focus on smaller and appropriately scaled events (suitable for the

Town of Oxford, Maryland

### **Maryland Heritage Areas Financial Assistance Programs (MHT):**

*The Maryland Heritage Areas Program provides dollar-for-dollar matching grants to nonprofit organizations and government entities for capital and non-capital projects located within a Maryland Certified Heritage Area (CHA). Oxford is located within the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area. Grants can support projects involving historical, cultural or natural resources, sites, events or facilities. Eligible projects must have a heritage tourism component.*

*Non-Capital. Grants of up to \$50,000 are available for non-capital projects, which can include Planning (research, field investigation, data recovery, feasibility and planning studies, design documents and other planning activities that support the heritage area); Interpretation (exhibits, signage, pedestrian wayfinding signage, interpretive brochures, educational programs and materials, other interpretive activities that support the heritage area); and Programming (seminars, conferences, performances, reenactments, commemorations, festivals).*

*Capital. Grants of up to \$100,000 are available for Acquisition (fee title of real property, interest other than fee title (i.e. easement) of real property); Development (repair or alteration of an existing building, structure or site, new construction for heritage tourism purposes) among other purposes. For more information:*

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Program Assistant  
Administrator*

DRAFT: 15 September 2017



capacity of the town and volunteers to both plan and manage) and experience-based itineraries designed to extend the season built upon available food and lodging resources. Resources noted for extending the seasons include:

- Culinary events building on existing events at Robert Morris Inn
- Inn to Inn itineraries for bicycling and water trails – work with nearby smaller communities with working waterfronts (especially Tilghman or smaller Choptank River communities) to extend visitor stays using similarly scaled regional destinations
- Storytelling weekend – offer Oxford as a stage, in partnership with regional theater enthusiasts capable of providing event organization and management (example from Akron, Ohio’s Summit Stagefest, five stages of public theater in an historic neighborhood) with Oxford working to provide venues and local/regional theater interests to provide organizational structure and volunteers
- Develop partnerships with secondary and higher education institutions to offer opportunities for marine oriented educational programs and teacher training that build upon Oxford’s waterfront assets including fisheries, marine biology, adapting to sea level rise, boat building, and historic preservation as a long-term investment in building a future visitor base.

**Funding Strategy:** Pursue grant funding for developing and implementing a coordinated marketing strategy (linked with Strategy 2.3) and consider pursuing cooperative marketing programs with similar working waterfront towns and villages in Talbot County

The Cooperative Oxford Laboratory is not primarily an academic institution. They do maintain partnerships with several universities, and offer opportunities for students and postgraduates at all levels to participate in their research programs. Examples of other institutions that may offer additional opportunities for higher education outreach include:

- National Aquarium in Baltimore
- Horn Point Laboratory
- University of Maryland Eastern Shore
- University of Maryland College Park

*2-4. Continue to pursue funding for the physical improvements that are needed to make Oxford more attractive to future visitors (e.g. water trail, outdoor classrooms/facilities, expanded hospitality services)*

- Continue to seek funding for the self guided interpretive trail to tell the story of Oxford’s long traditions of maritime heritage building upon expertise of Oxford Museum and local storytellers

- Water trail infrastructure - develop 2nd soft landing or dinghy dock at Pier Street marina and tie in with Captain John Smith water trail including the potential to develop interpretive buoys or similar as part of the self-guided interpretive trail system
- Increase access to recreational boating for younger generation through boat sharing programs by increasing access to visitor infrastructure at public piers and marinas

**Funding Strategy:** Seek funding for development of self-guided interpretive trail through Maryland Heritage Areas Authority/Stories of the Chesapeake HA

Seek funding for waterfront access through Maryland DNR programs and Captain John Smith Water Trail (NPS); Boating Infrastructure Grant Program (USFWS) at <https://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/GrantPrograms/BIG/BIG.htm>;

Seek rural economic development and recreational boating industry support for boat sharing programs

*2-5. Update Oxford's branding and identity to better position the Town to gain access to younger markets and broaden the range of potential target audiences.*

- Focus on marketing active experiences - doing something, rather than seeing something (boating, bicycling, fishing, etc.)
- Work cooperatively with neighboring working waterfront communities along the Tred Avon and Choptank Rivers to market Oxford as part of a larger regional experience

**Funding Strategy:** Pursue grant funding for developing and implementing a coordinated marketing strategy (linked with Strategy 2.3)

*2-6. Development of group packages that link lodging options with experience-based adventure tours*

Group ticket purchases help create a draw for group ticket sales. Active Millennials often choose experience based options that link several unique characteristics.

- Bicycle touring (bicycles provided) with providing tickets to ferry, and meal afterwards.
- Seasonal seafood cooking demonstrations tied to kayaking along Tred/Avon from Town Creek for day-trippers or marketed along with a bicycling tour to St. Michael's or other local community.

**Funding Strategy:** Pursue grant funding for developing and implementing a coordinated marketing strategy (linked with Strategy 2.3)



Figure 36 Oxford's small inn's are an important asset for community-based heritage tourism

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**GOAL 3: Retain Oxford's community character and quality of life while attracting new investments in working waterfront and heritage- and nature-based tourism.**

## RATIONALE

The sustainability of Oxford's water-dependent businesses (especially its marinas and boatyards) is highly dependent on the economic viability of the Town as a whole. At the same time, the quality of life and sustainability of Oxford's local economy is dependent on a new generation of investments in its water-dependent business and marine infrastructure. Based upon input from the community meetings and survey, there are six specific investments in infrastructure needed to support the next generation of maritime-based community development in Oxford:

- The need to maintain and advocate for Oxford's federally-designated navigation channel as well as access to its marinas and boatyards
- The need to continue to invest in and support both public and private efforts to maintain Oxford's marine infrastructure including existing slips, docks, bulkheads, boat ramps, and other public access
- The need to continue to invest in and support the use of living shorelines to help preserve and restore aquatic habitats
- The need to continue to work with SHA and other partners to preserve and enhance the Oxford-Bellevue Ferry as the oldest continuously operated private ferry in the United States
- The need to preserve and enhance those portions of Oxford's historic district that are most vulnerable to sea level rise, while at the same time recognizing the need for more affordable housing opportunities to attract the next generation of residents and visitors
- The need to continue to invest in and support Oxford's community open spaces for both residents and visitors

## Objectives

- Maintain or increase public investments in public spaces and waterfront access
- Maintain or increase private investments in waterfront infrastructure
- Increase the amount of local, state and/or federal funding used to address stormwater, flooding, and sea-level rise issues in Oxford
- Increase the amount to of private investment in adapting water-dependent businesses and uses to increased flooding risks associated with sea level rise and climate change



Figure 37 Ongoing cooperation with SHA is needed to ensure that the longest continuously operating private ferry service is maintained



Figure 38 Both public and private investments are needed to keep Oxford's maritime infrastructure in good working order



Figure 39 Maritime infrastructure within the Oxford Historic District may be eligible for funding programs designed to address sea-level rise through the Maryland Historic Trust

## STRATEGIES

The following strategies should be considered to address and work towards meeting heritage tourism objectives

### 3.1 *Consider innovative financial tools to support the maintenance of working waterfront assets and the adaptation of those assets to future sea-level rise*

Projects and priorities that will be funded through the Town of Oxford's Stormwater Management and Shoreline Protection Fund will have some direct benefit in addressing issues related to nuisance flooding on working waterfront infrastructure. However, longer term impacts of sea-level rise are not likely to be addressed with the available and anticipated funds. Additional options need to be considered to finance sea-level rise adaptation for existing working waterfront businesses (such as modifications to existing bulkeads, adaptation of piers and boatyards).

- Consider a modest expansion of the existing Stormwater Management and Shoreline Protection Fund to support additional shoreline protection projects and/or channel maintenance projects
- Consider establishing a specific waterfront improvement TIF district to capture value created by investments in waterfront infrastructure to directly support maintenance dredging operations and enhancements to waterfront infrastructure. (NOTE: This fund should be viewed as limited and likely only to supplement WIF grant applications, such as for matching fund requirements)
- Consider issuance of green bonds to finance the cost differential between working waterfront infrastructure designed for current FEMA floodplain elevations and storm surge models and infrastructure designed to address anticipated sea-level rise

**Funding Strategy:** State case for coordinated strategies through ongoing state programs in conjunction with Strategy 1.2

### 3.2 *Continue to support public investments in working waterfront related economic development to sustain Oxford's maritime heritage and its contributions to overall quality of life*

- Support long-term lease positions for watermen's slips to preserve commercial boat slips in both public and privately owned working waterfronts (public and private marinas, individual dock owners) that are spatially and seasonally correct are needed
- Consider potential for property tax abatements (as recommended in the 2008 Maryland Working Waterfront Commission Report) to private marina operators that lease slips to watermen with minimum five year lease periods
- Work with state and local governments and non-governmental organizations to provide needed tools for business legacy planning and transition planning (with potential tieback to mentoring programs)

#### **Green Bonds**

Green bonds are debt securities issued by public and private organizations to raise capital specifically to support climate-related or environmental projects, to encourage sustainability, or to facilitate the development of high-impact sites. Green bonds simultaneously achieve financial returns and have a positive impact on society. More specifically, green bonds finance projects aimed at energy efficiency, pollution prevention, sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry, the protection of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, clean transportation, sustainable water management, and the cultivation of environmentally friendly technologies.

**Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) and Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF)**

According to its website, the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) "offers financial support to rural-serving nonprofit organizations that promote statewide and regional planning, economic and community development, and agricultural and forestry education efforts. The Fund also provides targeted financial assistance to community colleges that support small and agricultural businesses through enhanced training and technical assistance offerings.

The Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) supports the Rural Maryland Council's activities and the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF), which provides capacity-building funds to rural nonprofit service providers. It also supports the states' five regional councils, regional infrastructure projects, rural entrepreneurship development, rural community development, and rural health care organizations.

Grant applications were due in July and August of 2016, respectively for FY 2017 funding. For more information visit <http://rural.maryland.gov/maerdaf/>

**Funding Strategy:** Consider rural economic development business development grants through USDA (typically due in December)

**3.3** *Continue to work cooperatively to increase Oxford's competitiveness for state and federal funding to meet ongoing working waterfront needs*

- Continue to support and document Oxford's coordinated public investments in community infrastructure (e.g. SMSP Fund, dedicated dock space for watermen, public access to waterfront areas, public investments in Oxford's commercial area, participation in Maryland Heritage Areas, etc) as a means of increasing competitiveness in related state funding programs
- Continue to document Oxford's leadership capacity on addressing environmental issues associated with sea-level rise, climate change resiliency, shoreline management, and public access to Oxford's waterfront areas through media releases, presentations at state conferences, and cooperation and partnership with Talbot County and neighboring communities on common issues
- Continue cross-marketing partnerships with Talbot County and Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area and establish new partnerships with neighboring Tred Avon and Choptank river towns as a means of increasing visitor spending (see goal 2)

**Funding Strategy:** Consider Rural Capacity Building for Community Development (HUD)

**3.4** *Build upon Oxford's boat building and repair industry as a maritime heritage asset and seek educational and workforce development tools and resources to support the boat building and repair enterprises*

- Partner with other educational, marine heritage, restoration and apprentice programs to create a network of like minded organizations and communities that could work together and expand opportunities such as:
  - Sultana Educational Foundation, Chestertown (<http://sultanaeducation.org>)
  - Richardson Maritime Museum Boatworks Programs (<http://www.richardsonmuseum.org/programs.htm>)
  - Rock Hall Marine Heritage and Restoration Center (<http://www.rockhallheritage.com>)
  - Phillips Wharf Environmental Center, Tilghman (<http://phillipswharf.org>)
  - Upper Bay Museum Boat Builders School, Northeast, MD (<https://www.upperbaymuseum.org/boat-school/>)
- Continue to proactively reach out to Chesapeake College and University of Maryland faculty with an interest in utilizing Oxford



as a community laboratory for research, training, mentoring, apprenticeships, and public/private partnerships and establish new relationships and partnerships with faculty that focus on applied training as a means of expanding their student base.

- Example of Adventure Sports Institute. (<http://www.adventuresportsi.org>), a two-year Garrett College program for outdoor leadership that was linked to the 4-year recreation program at Frostburg. The potential exists for forming a similar partnership with Chesapeake College (as a maritime institute) using the resources associated with the boat building and repair businesses, the ferry, the camp, and others as assets for training and apprenticeships in maritime-related careers.

**Funding Strategy:** Coordinate with Strategy 2.3. At the two-year college level, Chesapeake College’s Division of Education and Workforce Training specializes in meeting the training needs of employers throughout the region and should be approached about offering training programs related to the marine industries (see <http://www.chesapeake.edu/continuing-education> for a list of current offerings). Establishing a cooperative effort among Talbot County watermen, marina operators, boat building and repair, and other technical training opportunities, including offering of apprenticeships may be needed to establish a critical level of demand.

**Marine and Maritime Career Fair**

Annapolis-based Eastport Yacht Club Foundation, (EYCF) Marine & Maritime Scholarship Program, formerly known as MAST (Maritime Skills Training) program was initiated to enhance efforts to revitalize, restore and preserve and restore the vitality in marine trades and the maritime industry. Through its Annual Marine and Maritime Career Fair, its Outstanding Marine Wizard biennial awards, its annual Marine & Maritime Scholarships and its education outreach, EYCF seeks to raise awareness of the breadth of the maritime industry, increase career opportunity understanding, and provide assistance for those seeking maritime skills. To this end, EYCF has partnered with the Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS), the Center for Applied Technology (CAT South), and local maritime businesses.

**7<sup>th</sup> Annual Marine and Maritime Career Fair**  
 Saturday, February 25, 2017  
 Noon – 3 PM Annapolis High School-Riva Rd

**STUDENT INVITATION To Pre-Register**  
[eycfoundation.org](http://eycfoundation.org)  
 Pre-Registration is limited to 500 students  
**FREE** for ALL Students in Grades 6 – 12+ (Public, Private, Home-Schooled)  
 From Maryland & the Chesapeake Bay Region

[Watch the VIDEO \(YouTube\): 2015 Career Fair Experience!!!](#)

**MARINE & MARITIME PROFESSIONS**

- Network with Professionals, Entrepreneurs, Student Peers, Colleges, Training Programs, Internship Opportunities!
- Hands-on Experiences!
- Learn about Marine & Maritime Scholarships, the MTAM Pre-Apprenticeship-Summer Internship Training Program & more!
- Attend Special Sessions on the vast array of marine & maritime career pathways including STEM –focused professions & Marine Trades!
- Win Grand Door Prizes (Pre-Registration & Completion of On-site “Career Challenge” required for eligibility). Many Door Prize Opportunities for All Pre-Registered Students.

**Pre-Register Today: [eycfoundation.org](http://eycfoundation.org)**  
 Contact: Tim Wilbricht, Chairman / Pam Ray, EYCF , [eycfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:eycfoundation@gmail.com)



# IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the Oxford Working Waterfront Strategic Plan is directly tied to the implementation of ongoing Town initiatives related to the Stormwater Management and Shoreline Protection Fund and the revitalization of Oxford's Historic Commercial Area. However, in Oxford, a fairly small town of less than 700 residents, everyone involved with the Town in some capacity wears many hats. Those that are actively involved stated at the beginning of the process to take care to avoid counting on the same people to implement the plan. Efforts need to be made to reach out beyond the limited number of actively involved citizens to find ways engage a broader sector of the community and region. To that extent, three implementation programs focused on each of the three goals are recommended that are described below.

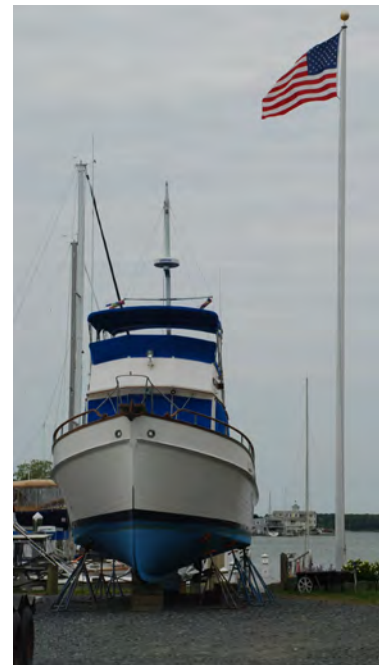
## OXFORD BOATYARD DISTRICT

From the meetings and survey it is clear that the boatyards, inns, restaurants and the ferry are Oxford's strongest community-based waterfront assets from which to build, and that Oxford needs to use those assets to find a way to help bring more economic activity to the Town as well as the next generation of visitors – preferably extending the season, and staying longer.

One way to bring together many of the strategies that are included in this plan, would be to establish the "Oxford Boatyard District" The Boatyard District would be drawn to include the Town Creek boatyards and waterfront inns and restaurants, and then potentially a second area inclusive of the Tred Avon boatyards, waterfront inns and restaurants and the Ferry, and possibly the Yacht Club.

The purpose of the district would be to build a brand and identity for Oxford's marine businesses and maritime heritage. At first it would serve primarily as a way for the boatyards and water dependent businesses to work together on various marketing, outreach and advocacy efforts. The boatyard district could offer:

- Coordinated events aimed toward younger audiences by focusing on the "experience" associated with the boatyards (the building and repair of boats, rather than a boat show)
- Providing boating opportunities to introduce new audiences to the experience, grouped with Oxford's restaurants and inns to bring food and entertainment as part of the experience
- Tours/open houses on a monthly or seasonal basis organized to attract new (and younger) customers to marinas and/or boat sales
- Work to develop ideas related to "boat sharing"
- Coordinate the more traditional waterfront/boatyard events – spring boat checkups/recommissioning workshops, holiday lighting, 4th of July etc. labor day (mutts and boats show), winterizing workshops -



### **Fisheries Innovation Fund**

*The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) awards grants to foster innovation and support effective participation of fishermen and fishing communities in the implementation of sustainable fisheries in the U.S.*

*The Port of Ilwaco, WA received funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Fisheries Innovation Fund to facilitate the creation of new organizational capacity for the commercial fishing sector that will strengthen the asset and infrastructure base of community-based fleets and businesses including;*

- *purchase, holding, and leasing of Pacific groundfish quota shares and limited entry trawl permits;*
- *development of new dockside infrastructure in support of individual, independent fishing businesses and;*
- *explore resource stewardship measures such as risk pool participation, electronic reporting tools, and gear innovations.*

*The project was a collaboration of the Port of Ilwaco, the Ilwaco Fish Company, the Columbia River Crab Fishermen's Association, the Nature Conservancy of Washington, Ilwaco Landing Cooperative LLC, and other interested parties such as Collaborative Fisheries Associates LLC.*

"how to" workshops on boat maintenance, piloting/navigation, fishing, etc.

- Potential to incorporate "sea-to-table" concepts for watermen at the Causeway
- The boatyard district could also be a way that Oxford's water dependent businesses could organize themselves to advocate for things that they need (channel maintenance/waterway and harbor improvements, etc.)

### **COOPERATIVE HERITAGE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING**

Considering Heritage Tourism in its broadest sense to also include both nature-based and recreation-based maritime tourism, Oxford is in a position to benefit from cooperative efforts among Talbot County's working waterfront communities, especially Tilghman, Easton, and Cambridge. Many of the strategies noted in this plan call for cooperative efforts among these related working waterfront communities along the Choptank and Tred Avon Rivers. While Talbot County's working waterfront communities can partner through Talbot County's Department of Economic Development, regional partnerships with Dorchester County would benefit all of the mid-shore working waterfront communities. The Mid-Shore Regional Council may be one organization that could provide a launching pad for further cooperation among working waterfront communities.

### **RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES**

Rural economic development efforts would also benefit from cooperation through the Talbot County Department of Economic Development. Oxford (as well as Talbot County) at one time, played a significant role in bringing Chesapeake Bay fisheries to market. The few remaining watermen in Oxford and Talbot County continue to bring fresh seafood to market. The Talbot County Waterman's Association is the main venue for cooperative action that allows watermen to speak with one voice and gain leverage. The Town of Oxford and Talbot County can support community-based economic development strategies that build upon the watermen's efforts as well as its boatyards and marinas by applying for rural economic development funding programs that continue to be funded through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Ideas for bring small groups to Oxford for training programs that build upon the assets associated with its unique cluster of boatyards would help to meet the objectives of bringing more visitors to Oxford, especially in the spring and fall. Chesapeake College should continue to be approached as a partner for providing the structure for such a program combined with the expert knowledge of Oxford's boat yard owners and employees that could offer the classes and apprenticeships through Chesapeake College.