

# CHAPTER 3

## Land Use

This Chapter supports the following visions of the Maryland Annotated Code:

- Development is concentrated in suitable areas;
- Sensitive areas are protected;
- In rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected;
- Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic;
- Adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the Town are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur; and
- Conservation of resources, including, a reduction in resource consumption is practiced.

Oxford has established goals and objectives for its community, its character, and its economic vitality. Oxford wants to ensure that it will meet the needs of its residents, both present and future, in ways that allows the Town to sustain a high quality of life for all, and also ensure that our built environment does not conflict with the preservation of a healthy natural environment.

### 3.1 Existing Land Use Characteristics

Oxford's present land use has evolved since European settlement in the 1600's as described in Chapter 1. The Town's character has been dominated by four primary factors in the Town's history:

- Oxford has an excellent harbor and good access to deep water and water oriented transportation;
- Oxford's extensive shoreline peninsula geography creates aesthetically attractive residential settings and confines growth and new development to the south side of Town;
- Building lots were first platted in the 1600's, initiating a long town history that has been accompanied by architecture of past eras.
- Oxford has been a commercial and trade center in a rural county with an agricultural heritage which, until recently, has been somewhat isolated from urban growth centers (and development pressures) of Washington and Baltimore.

The Bay and its tributaries were the principal routes of transportation and commerce for early European settlers in the Eastern Shore and Chesapeake Bay region. Oxford developed due to its deep water access and inland road access.

Much of Oxford's shoreline has been devoted to, and remains, in marine related commercial and industrial uses. Attractive views provided by the long shorelines have resulted in extensive development of waterfront housing. Early development of the Town resulted in a traditional, pedestrian-oriented, small town grid development pattern dominated by small lots with commercial uses along Morris Street. In the center of town is a park, which provides open space as a "town green." The agricultural nature of Talbot County allowed Oxford to develop with a fairly distinctive edge, characteristic of towns in rural areas, where the town ends and adjacent farmland begins. This edge remains intact today.

Due to the shoreline and location of historic development, new development in Town has been confined to infill of vacant lots, subdivision of larger properties for infill development, and expansion to the south and east.

The tax map for Oxford reveals there are various lot sizes throughout town. Residential lots range in size from small lots of less than 4,000 square feet, and a few larger lots of approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre (32,000 square feet). Most parcels in the older portions of Town are less than 10,000 square feet. Newer subdivisions have larger lots as required by modern zoning ordinances and annexation agreements. For example, in Jack's Point, the minimum lot is 10,000 square feet. Lots in Bachelor's Point are unlike the rest of Oxford and are 1-2 acres in size. Commercial lots in Oxford are typically larger due to their unique history and the needs of commercial sites.

It is worth noting that only 47% of the existing residential lots meet the minimum lot area for the district in which they are located. In the Historic District, 76% of existing lots of record do not meet the current minimum requirements. Many of these smaller, non-conforming lots (those created before June 20, 1953) are grandfathered under the Town's zoning ordinance, allowing Oxford to retain its historic character in the Town's most central areas. Oxford's zoning, subdivision and land development regulations and policies should encourage and facilitate the use, restoration and development of such lots in a manner consistent with historic development patterns and, as applicable, the guidance of the Historic District Commission. For example, while the merger of historic, nonconforming lots may be appropriate in some areas of Town, within the Historic District it may lead to redevelopment that is not compatible with desired development patterns.

In recent years, there have been various figures reported as to the number of vacant properties in the Town available for dwelling construction. In April 2003, a Baltimore-based planning company completed the Town of Oxford Vacant Land Available for Construction ("infill") study. It used data made available by the Maryland Department of Assessment and Taxation noting available vacant land. Vacant lots, as well as lots large enough to allow subdivision, were counted in the study. Also counted were lots with a structure (possible teardowns) that had not been occupied for some time. Based on the number of vacant lots and allowing for subdivision of lots to a minimum of 10,000 square feet, a total of 51 currently

unoccupied properties could theoretically be subdivided or redeveloped into 79 buildable lots. 79 new residences would represent a 15% growth potential from infill. As set forth in the Municipal Growth Element, the Town has concluded that this figure is higher than practical, and believes that the number of potential buildable infill lots is less than 64, after taking into account site conditions, lot reconfiguration, and institutional knowledge.

In July 2001, an eleven lot subdivision plat for Plimhimmon Farm was formally approved by Talbot County and recorded in the land records. This 245 acre farm was formerly in Oxford's proposed growth area (1997 Oxford Comprehensive Plan). The approval of the subdivision and the removal of this large farm from Oxford's growth area was supported by the Commissioners of Oxford and the Oxford Planning Commission. It is anticipated that there will be continued pressure to develop the areas outside the Town's incorporated area.

Prior to the adoption of the 2005 Talbot County Comprehensive Plan, the Talbot County planning staff met with the Commissioners of Oxford and the Oxford Planning Commission to discuss the growth boundaries for Oxford that were being proposed for the 2005 Talbot County Comprehensive Plan. The Oxford Commissioners and Planning Commission agreed with the growth area contemplated by Talbot County, which was ultimately set forth at Map 3-4 of the Talbot County Comprehensive Plan titled "Oxford Growth Area Plan". The Town has accepted this growth area boundary, established in 2005 cooperatively with Talbot County and Oxford planners, recognizing the following principles:

- A definitive urban/rural demarcation of a "greenbelt" at the outer perimeter of the growth areas will reflect the total build-out line as well as provide a clear edge and sense of arrival into the Town.
- Rural agricultural areas immediately adjacent to the Town should be preserved, together with associated sensitive areas.
- The designated growth area, to the extent undeveloped, may not be developed for 20, 30, even 50 years.

### **3.2 Land Use Map**

To put the land use Goal and Objectives in perspective, a future Land Use Map, has been added to this Plan. This map is consistent with Oxford's last two comprehensive plans.

The map delineates five geographic areas for Oxford and its environs.

Area A includes most of "old Oxford," the "Historic District," and includes the land west of Town Creek and north of the "Pincushion" intersection at South Morris Street and Route 333. The residential area in this part of Town has been designated as primarily single-family residential.

Area B is the eastern part of Oxford including Jack's Point and other land north of Route 333 and between Town Creek and the Oxford Cemetery. Area B has a number of vacant platted

lots and paper streets which could accommodate some future growth, and have been counted in the “infill development” analysis.

Area C is land from Route 333 south to the Cooperative Oxford Lab and east to Bonfield Manor Road. A substantial number of people now live in Area C and this is another area for future residential growth in Oxford. Land near the municipal wastewater treatment facilities has been used for a modest sized business/industrial park.

Area D consists of the area from the NOAA research lab south to Bachelors Point. A significant portion of Area D is already located within the Town. Some large tracts of undeveloped land in Area D are wetlands and are only suited for wildlife habitat. It is anticipated that little new development will occur in this area, but future annexation of existing residences could increase the Town’s population. This area includes a 12+/- acre parcel immediately south of Oxford’s wastewater treatment plant that bears a critical area classification of LDA.

Area E includes Hel’s Half Acre, the Oxford cemetery, agricultural land to the north of Route 333, and a large agricultural field to the south of Route 333. This area is part of Oxford’s growth area as defined in the Talbot County Comprehensive Plan. While this area has been identified in the past as part of Oxford’s growth area, the Town does not anticipate any significant development in this area. The Town hopes to work with the landowners to maintain the scenic agricultural and conservation-related vistas along the important entrance to the Town.

### ***3.2.1 Maritime***

The term maritime is used to indicate areas in Town which will accommodate the boat building and repair operations in Oxford.

### ***3.2.2 Commercial***

There are different types of commercial activity in Oxford. A significant activity consists of marinas, which are not unlike the boat repair and boat building businesses in character, but which also accommodate slip rentals.

Other commercial uses in Oxford are highway oriented businesses along Route 333, which consist for the most part of automobile service, restaurants, and various shops and stores in the historic district.

### ***3.2.3 Institutional***

The activities which fall under the classification of “Institutional” include such things as churches, government buildings, and community facilities of various types. The land use plan map designates all existing church sites and the present town office site for long range institutional use.

### ***3.2.4 Residential***

Town residential areas constitute a very important element of the land use plan, since residential uses affect directly the make-up of town population, the need of additional town services, and even the patterns of both pedestrian and automobile traffic. The bulk of Oxford's land will continue to be occupied by residential uses.

### ***3.2.5 Parks and Open Space***

In accordance with the public services recommendations of this Plan, the Land Use Map shows the present Town Park on Morris Street as a continued use, and also the property at the intersection of South Morris Street and Route 333 (the "Causeway Park"). In addition, the site of the Oxford Community Center, classified as "Institutional", will serve some open space functions, together with street ends, the Strand Beach, and other community areas.

### ***3.2.6 Industrial Park***

The Town has developed the land immediately north of the sewage treatment lagoons as a small "light" industrial park.

### ***3.2.7 Wildlife/Wetland - Wildlife Sanctuary/Wildlife Corridor***

Areas with this designation must be preserved as natural areas.

### ***3.2.8 Annexation and growth area***

The Town's growth area or planning area is identified on the Oxford Growth Area Map. It is consistent with the Oxford growth area identified on the land use map incorporated in the Talbot County Comprehensive Plan, effective April 16, 2005. In order for development to occur in the Town's growth area, the Town will require that any such properties be annexed, subject to appropriate agreements, and be served by Town utilities. Town policy is that our public water and sewer facilities will not be extended beyond town limits. Annexation will be a condition of extension of these services and the cost of extending water and sewer mains and force mains will be borne by developers seeking the extension. Additionally, all petitions for annexation should include an analysis of available system capacity at the time annexation is proposed to assist our town engineer, town officials, and residents to evaluate the feasibility of providing services to existing in-town properties and the new areas proposed for annexation. The Town may consider annexation, at the petitioner's expense, to address failing existing septic systems on properties contiguous to the Town, or to facilitate new development consistent with this plan.

Oxford intends to maintain its traditional identity and location with a reasonably compact development pattern which retains the village crossroads character. Portions of the Town's growth area are appropriate for future expansion and accomplishing any projected growth; other areas within the designated growth area are most appropriate as buffers and mitigation areas.