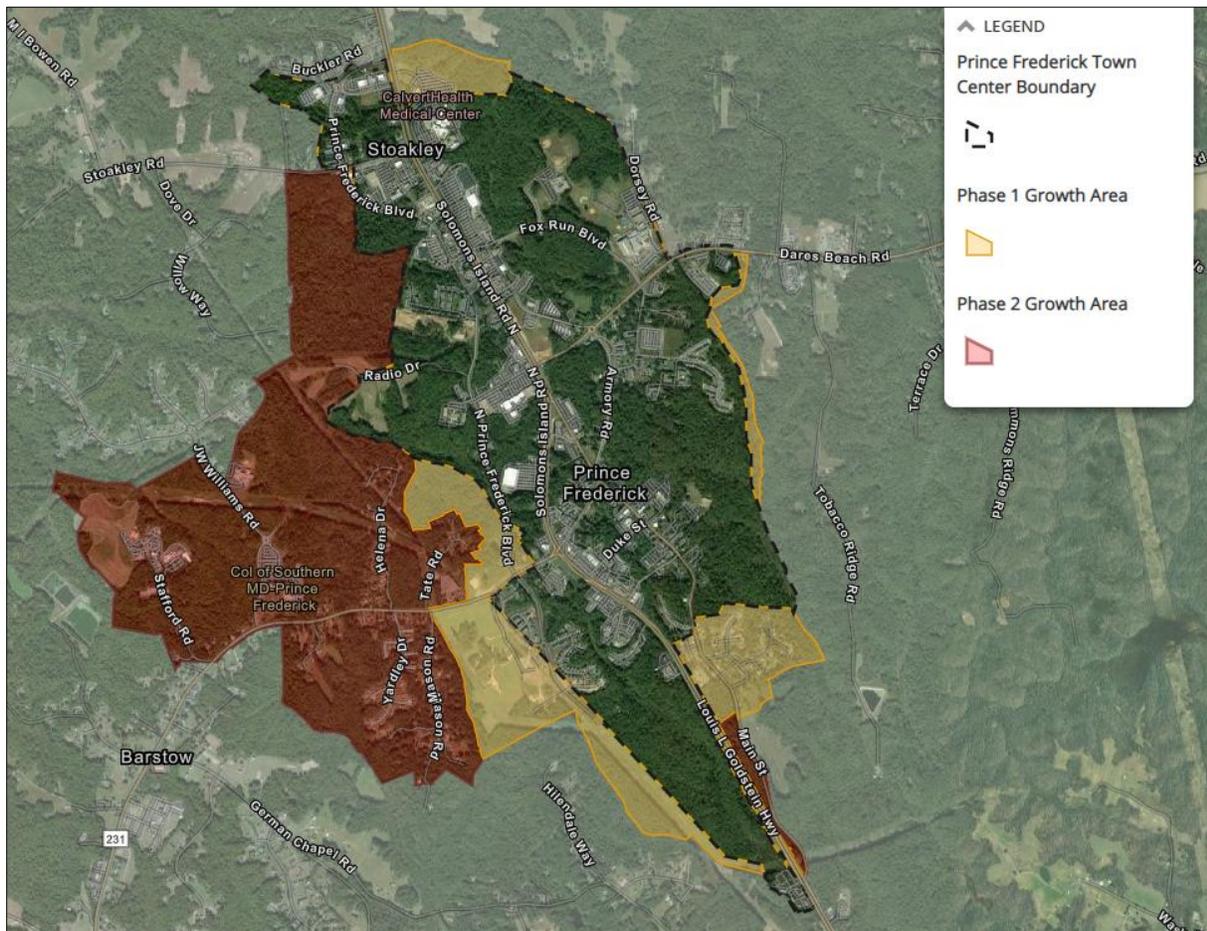


Strategic Choices to Frame the Prince Frederick Town Center Master Plan

Thirty years since the adoption of the first Prince Frederick Town Center Master Plan, the core visions for our community remain largely unchanged. There is broad agreement about what we want for Prince Frederick: preserving rural heritage and environmental quality, while also providing the types of residential communities and economic opportunities desirable to attract and retain families.

The 2019 Calvert County Comprehensive Plan recognizes that the promise of Calvert County’s town centers, including Prince Frederick, as a vital town center, has gone unrealized. A new policy and implementation framework are needed to foster the desired growth patterns, and achieve great community spaces, envisioned in the 2013 Prince Frederick Town Center Charette Report. The four guiding principles, and associated planning approaches, described below, should be viewed as purposeful choices. Not every public space can be “great” but public spaces should all be accessible; not every area can be developed, nor every area preserved; not every intersection can operate without congestion nor every intersection be walkable; not every cost can be borne by the taxpayer, nor by the developer.

Strategic choices are called for in order to fulfill the promise of Prince Frederick.

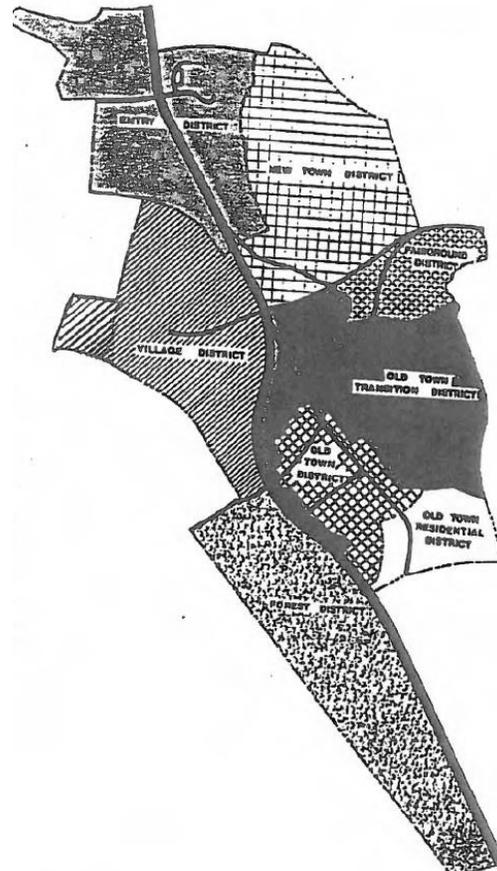


Prince Frederick Town Center boundaries as adopted in the 2019 Comprehensive Plan

Strategic Choice #1: The Town Center Master Plan should target a few specific development areas to achieve a “sense of place.”

Issues:

- The idea of a “town center” implies a singular place. Unlike the other Town Centers in Calvert County, the Prince Frederick Town Center is anything but a singular place. There are currently eight “development districts” in the Town Center; however, there is relatively little distinction between the districts in terms of permitted uses, density, or design character.
- Having so many districts diffuses the focal points within the Town Center and undermines the opportunity to mix uses within the districts. Expanding the Town Center *en masse* through “Phase II,” as described in the Comprehensive Plan, could further disperse potential development energy and make it more difficult to achieve the “sense of place” that is desired in the existing Town Center. A more targeted approach is needed.
- The historic downtown core near the courthouse is only a tiny fraction of the land area and commercial activity in the Prince Frederick Town Center. This area is strategically important as it is the focus of community and civic connections. The energy for commercial and residential development (and redevelopment) along MD 2-4 and Prince Frederick Boulevard is the near- to mid-term opportunity for the Town Center to grow. The longer-term opportunity for strategic growth is to build from the strength of the College of Southern Maryland.



Development districts in the existing Prince Frederick Town Center Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

THE APPROACH: Establishing two or three key areas for high-quality development, public investment and targeted redevelopment should be the focus of Prince Frederick Town Center Master Plan regardless of whether they fall in “Phase I” or “Phase II.” The County should raise the base zoning density¹ in areas where better form, and sense of place, are desired and maintain lower density elsewhere in the Town Center. The zoning regulations should encourage the mix of uses but not set artificial conditions on doing so; focus on the built form rather than the use.

¹ Base density is the number of units allowed without the use of transferable development rights
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Strategic Choice #2: The Master Plan and zoning regulations should take a holistic approach to balance development rights, regulatory and design requirements, taxes, fees, etc. to foster the desired amount, diversity, and pattern of growth in the Town Center.

Issues:

- The 2013 Prince Frederick Town Center Charette encouraged the creation of denser (by Calvert County standards) and mixed-use communities which are rich with amenities. Doing so requires more upfront infrastructure investment, which raises the price point of homes, apartments, and commercial space, when the cost is borne entirely by the developer rather than spread among all future users of the infrastructure.
- In order to develop more densely in the Town Centers, developers are required to buy density credits through the Transferable Development Rights (TDR) program. While the TDR program has been a hallmark of the County’s growth management strategy and has effectively preserved thousands of acres of undeveloped land within the county; it can be argued that the cost to “buy” density in the Town Center through TDRs is one of several disincentives to achieving the amount and pattern of growth in certain parts of the Town Center.
- In 2015, the Board of County Commissioners restructured the TDR program by reducing the number of TDRs needed to build more dense communities by creating a TDR sliding scale based upon housing types. This policy action had the desired effect as more development has occurred in the Town Center with a mix of single-family subdivisions, townhouse and apartment complexes.
- However, the overall cost to develop within the core of the Town Center is still not on par with “greenfield” development on the outside the Town Center. TDR acquisition costs, in conjunction with other development-related costs, transfer and recordation taxes, impact fees, costs for sprinkler systems, infrastructure costs, environmental design requirements and desired amenities, can add \$30,000 to the cost of a dwelling unit in the Town Center².
- The current regulatory approach to traffic mitigation and open space requirements encourages piecemeal solutions relative to desired outcomes and are imposed over and above the excise tax for these purposes.

THE APPROACH: The Prince Frederick Town Center Master Plan and zoning regulations should take steps to lower the cost of development in targeted areas of the Town Center by adjusting excise taxes, recalibrating TDR requirements, restructuring traffic mitigation, open space requirements, etc.

² <https://planning.maryland.gov/Documents/OurWork/envr-planning/TDR-committee-report-2016.pdf>
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Strategic Choice #3: The Master Plan and zoning regulations should assign growth, development rights and responsibilities to the parties best suited to achieve the desired growth pattern.

Issues:

- By design of the comprehensive plan, overall growth in Calvert County is expected to be modest. State, regional and school system projections all forecast countywide population growth of less than 1.5% annually over the next ten to twenty years. According to the County's growth projects and the Calvert County Schools Facilities Master Plan, there is anticipated to be more development activity in the northern part of the county than in the central and southern parts of the county.
- If the past decade is any guide and there are no major structural changes to the county economy such as a major new employer or another growth spurt at NAS Patuxent River, subdivision activity is anticipated to remain slow and likely confined to less than ten new dwelling units per submittal; commercial activity will most likely be reuse of existing buildings and (re)development of pad sites; demand in the medical/health care sector will peak around the end of the planning period according to the American Health Care Association and the National Center for Assisted Living. This may result in the plateau of health care employment in the county.
- In consideration of the above, the Town Center Master Plan needs to be realistic about supply and demand – and what can be achieved as a result. The scale and pace of development in and around Prince Frederick does not lend itself to achieving developer-led implementation of public infrastructure, civic spaces, high quality urban design and environmental protection envisioned by the 2013 charette. The public sector will have to take the lead in creating public spaces that can be the focal point of new development, or strengthening existing areas, and managing externalities such as traffic.
- While much of the land use debate in Prince Frederick over the past two decades has focused on “density” and the pace of growth, few places in the Town Center can achieve the current zoning maximum of 14 units per acre due to topography and environmental constraints. The area immediately along MD 2-4 is the exception. Rather than focusing on “density” beyond the MD 2-4 corridor, the focus of regulation should be on design quality and environmental protection which developers and property owners can best control.

THE APPROACH: Development regulations should be prioritized and focused on design and environmental quality. The Calvert County Government should use public investments to shape desired growth or redevelopment.

Strategic Choice #4: The Master Plan and zoning regulations should prioritize connectivity among and within the targeted development areas over mainline transportation capacity.

Issues:

- A common theme across the public engagement platforms for the Prince Frederick Town Center Master Plan update is that Prince Frederick lacks connectivity. While some of this can be attributed to difficult topography and environmental constraint, the lack of connectivity can also be traced to short-sighted design and construction decisions. Roadways built even within the past twenty years do not have complete sidewalk networks or safe spaces for bicycles; cul-de-sacs have been built which preclude or make future roadway connections more difficult.
- The widening of MD 2-4, from MD 765A to Fox Run Boulevard, has already provided bottleneck relief in the most congested part of Prince Frederick. The widening should be continued to Stoakley Road. However, it should be considered whether further widening is necessary or desirable, or if other road connections can achieve purposes which have a dual local-regional benefit.
- There should be realistic discussion about whether facilitating most pedestrian and bicycle trips across MD 2-4 is practical, necessary, or desirable in most locations.

THE APPROACH: Developments should be required to construct internal roads and paths for future connectivity. These access points should be provided to neighboring developments, schools, shopping areas, etc. Cul-de-sacs should be prohibited; at a minimum, a walking path should be required to the nearest logical destination; gaps in sidewalks should be identified and prioritized for construction, and neighborhood-to-neighborhood connections should be constructed; street designs should include wide buffers for sidewalks and shared use paths. To keep local trips off of MD 2-4 and provide residents with a means of avoiding the arterial roadway, at least an additional portion of the eastern loop road should be constructed.