

## Chapter 3. PLANNING PROCESS

### 3.1 OVERVIEW

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In accordance with Delaware law, under Delaware Code, Title 9, Chapter 69, the three counties of Delaware are required to update their comprehensive plan every ten years. Sussex County adopted the last comprehensive plan in 2008 and began the update process in 2016 with a goal of adopting the update in June 2018. The following description provides an overview of the process followed to draft and adopt the Sussex County Comprehensive Plan. It represents a thoroughly-tested process of data collection and interpretation, assessment of trends, development of growth projections, exploration of alternative futures, and the preparation of all appropriate and required plan elements.

The comprehensive planning process involves the whole community, including the Sussex County staff, Sussex County Council, Sussex County Planning and Zoning Commission, stakeholders, and citizens. The Planning and Zoning Commission took a hands-on role in developing the Draft Comprehensive Plan in advance of handing it off to the County Council for review and adoption.

The Sussex County Comprehensive Plan process began with an existing conditions analysis in order to have sound understanding of recent market trends, current economic conditions, demographics, housing stock, and land uses. Based on the existing conditions analysis, significant planning issues, such as development, water supply, storm water management, and conservation, were determined. From here, the public helped to identify goals and opportunities. The community also explored alternative futures in order to develop a consensus-driven, common future for the County. The Draft Comprehensive Plan was then built on the above framework.

Public outreach was the driving force for the direction of the Comprehensive Plan Update. The public's involvement was weaved throughout each stage of the planning process, drawing on stakeholders to represent their community's concerns, and enlisting the community at-large to inform the process.

### 3.2 WORK PROGRAM SCHEDULE

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The work program schedule is the approach to preparing a comprehensive plan. The Sussex County Comprehensive Plan work schedule was developed at the start of the planning process to guide four phases of the planning process. The four phases are Identifying Opportunities, Visioning/Development Framework, Draft County Comprehensive Plan, and Prepare Final Comprehensive Plan. The work plan schedule allotted 22 months for the entire planning process.

#### 3.2.1 Phase A: Identifying Opportunities

Vital to the Sussex County Comprehensive Plan Update, a current snapshot of the County was created in order to understand how recent trends would impact the County in the future. Included in this phase was exhaustive research into a broad inventory of existing conditions and an analysis

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of market trends. From this assessment, County Staff, the Commission, stakeholders, and the public identified goals and opportunities for the future that could shape the County's vision. Phase A was a six month process.

### Public and Stakeholder Input

- **Planning and Zoning Commission Meetings** – The Sussex County Planning Zoning and Commission held frequent workshops on the Sussex County Comprehensive Plan Update. The workshops, held from November 2016 through June 2017, were deep dives into the elements of the Comprehensive Plan to ensure they are aligned with the community's vision for Sussex County. The public was welcome to attend and could submit comments at the beginning, but not during the workshop.
- **Stakeholder Focus Groups** – Four focus groups were convened between June 2016 and September 2016. Topics included housing; utilities, natural resources, open space and recreation; and agriculture and forestry. Invitations were sent to people identified with important knowledge to share. Questions about the discussion topics were sent in advance. The purpose was to identify short-term (5 years), mid-term (5-15 years), and long-term (15-25 years) considerations for each topic.
- **Public Meetings** – A round of five public meetings, in an open house format, were held at the culmination of Phase A to provide input on and review the data gathered as part of this phase. Comment cards and a survey captured the public's input on the major planning issues facing the County, goals for the future, and the identified trends. The Phase A. See Fall 2016 Public Meetings in Section 3.3 for more information.
- **County Leader Interviews** – Individual interviews of the Sussex County Planning and Zoning Commission and Sussex County Council were conducted in July 2016 to help inform the current snapshot of Sussex County. Topics included transportation, housing, development, economy, environment, and socioeconomic issues.

### 3.2.2 Phase B: Visioning/Development Framework

During this phase, those involved dove into the question – *What do we want our County to look like in 2045?* This was an opportunity to be visionary about what land use would look like and which transportation and mobility elements need improvement. To achieve this, the work in this phase focused on the systematic exploration of selected planning issues and alternative futures for both development and conservation. This phase provided the opportunity to analyze the transportation implications of these alternative futures and to consider opportunities to develop a transportation system that supports the goals of Sussex County identified in Phase A. County. Phase B was a five month process.

### Public and Stakeholder Input

- **Planning and Zoning Commission Meetings** – The Sussex County Planning Zoning and Commission workshops continued during this phase, which included ongoing opportunities for public and stakeholder input.

- **Public Meetings** – A round of five public meetings, held throughout the County, were hosted at the culmination of Phase B to provide input on the alternative development themes and concepts as well as the future land use plan. See Spring 2017 Public Meetings in Section 3.3 for more information.

### 3.2.3 Phase C: Draft County Comprehensive Plan

Drawing on the issues and goals identified in the previous two phases, this is when the pen was put to paper. Each element of the Plan was prepared first as preliminary drafts with accompanying action and associated implementation strategies. The consultant team then assembled each chapter element into the overall Draft Comprehensive Plan. This phase took seven months to complete.

#### Public and Stakeholder Input

- **Planning and Zoning Commission Meetings** – The Sussex County Planning Zoning and Commission workshops continued during this phase, which included ongoing opportunities for public and stakeholder input.
- **Public Meeting** – One public meeting was hosted at the culmination of Phase C to provide input on the elements of the Draft Plan. See Fall 2017 Public Meeting in Section 3.3 for more information.
- **Public Hearing** – The County Planning and Zoning Commission held one public hearing was held where stakeholders and the general public will be able to submit verbal and written testimony about the Draft Comprehensive Plan. See Fall 2017 Public Hearing in Section 3.3 for more information.

### 3.2.4 Phase D: Prepare Final Draft and Final Comprehensive Plan

Following the public presentation of the Draft Comprehensive Plan during Phase C, revisions to the Draft are to be made in coordination with County Council, County staff, and the public into a Final Draft Comprehensive Plan document. This document will be submitted to the Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination for review and comment as part of its Preliminary Land Use Service (PLUS) approval process. More information on the PLUS process is described in section 3.4.1.

The Final Draft Comprehensive Plan will then be presented to County Council, key stakeholders, and the general public during a formal Public Hearing. Further changes to the Plan will be discussed, and a Summary Plan will be prepared to produce the Final Comprehensive Plan. At this point in the plan development process, it is anticipated the County Council will take formal action to adopt the Final Comprehensive Plan. Printed and electronic copies of the adopted Final Comprehensive Plan would be delivered to Sussex County.

#### Public and Stakeholder Input

- **County Council Workshop Meetings** – The Sussex County Council workshops continued during this phase, which included ongoing opportunities for public and stakeholder input.
- **Public Hearing** – The County Council will hold one public hearing where stakeholders and the general public are able to submit verbal and written testimony about the Final Draft Comprehensive Plan. See Summer 2018 Public Hearing in Section 3.3 for more information.

### 3.3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

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Public involvement has been a critical component in the development of the Plan. Various methods were used for collecting feedback and providing opportunities to ask questions about the Plan and the process. These opportunities occurred through public meetings, the project website, social media and commission meetings. Three sets of public meetings were held throughout the County for a total of 11 public meetings. There was one public hearing.

#### 3.3.1 Public Meetings

Three (3) rounds of open houses were hosted throughout the County.

##### **Fall 2016 Public Meetings**

The purpose of the open house style public meetings was to foster discussion that informed the Plan. At these meetings members of the public shared their perspectives on the County's assets and challenges, identified issues and areas that may need special attention, reviewed previously identified issues and opportunities, and learned about the comprehensive plan process. Attendees could comment on each of the elements of the Plan as well as the capital improvements plan. A total of 868 written comments were received. A majority of the comments were focused on transportation, land use, conservation, and economic development. Additionally, a public survey on the future of Sussex County was released. The open houses were held at the following locations in an attempt to reach as many residents as possible throughout the County.

1. Monday, September 26, 2016  
Lewes Fire Station No. 2 – Lewes, Delaware
2. Tuesday, September 27, 2016  
Millsboro Town Center – Millsboro, Delaware
3. Thursday, September 29, 2106  
Seaford Fire Hall – Seaford, Delaware
4. Tuesday, October 4, 2016  
Georgetown Fire Hall – Georgetown, Delaware
5. Wednesday, October 5, 2016  
Millville Fire Hall – Millville, Delaware

##### **Spring 2017 Public Meetings**

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At this point in the process, the public was invited to explore land use and transportation alternative development themes as well as to and to provide feedback on the vision; identified trends, data, and community information received; and draft goals, objectives, and strategies. The public meetings included a presentation on the future land use element, a question and answer session, and a land use element survey and exercise. Feedback gathered during this second round of Public Meetings was used to improve and shape the Draft Comprehensive Plan. The public meetings were held at the following locations in an attempt to reach as many residents as possible throughout the County.

1. May 1, 2017  
Laurel Fire Department – Laurel, Delaware
2. Tuesday, May 2, 2017  
Cheer Center Georgetown – Georgetown, Delaware
3. Wednesday, May 3, 2017  
Frankford Fire Department – Frankford, Delaware
4. Wednesday, May 10, 2017  
Milford Senior Center – Milford, Delaware
5. Tuesday May 16, 2017  
Beacon Middle School – Lewes, Delaware

### Fall 2017 Public Meeting

The purpose of this public meeting was to present the Draft Comprehensive Plan and draft future land use map to stakeholders and the public. It was an opportunity to review a presentation on the elements of the Draft Comprehensive Plan, ask questions, and submit comments.

**Date:** Wednesday October 11, 2017  
**Times:** Open House – 12 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.  
Presentations – 12:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.  
**Location:** Cheer Center  
20520 Sand Hill Road, Georgetown, DE 19947

### Fall 2017 Public Hearing

The purpose of the public hearing is for the Planning and Zoning Commission to review and receive comments from key stakeholders and the general public on the County's Final Draft Comprehensive Plan. Interested persons were able to provide verbal and written testimony during the hearing.

**Date:** Thursday, November 2, 2017  
**Time:** 6:00 p.m.

**Location:** Council Chambers  
2 The Circle, Georgetown, DE 19947

### Summer 2018 Public Hearing

The purpose of the public hearing is for the County Council to review and receive comments from State planning officials, key stakeholders and the general public on the County's Final Draft Comprehensive Plan.

**Date:** TBD  
**Time:** TBD  
**Location:** Council Chambers  
2 The Circle, Georgetown, DE 19947

### 3.3.2 Online Collection of Feedback

The dedicated Plan website ([www.sussexplan.com](http://www.sussexplan.com)) was created as a resource and storing house for any information related to the Sussex Comprehensive Plan Update and as tool for public input. The website allowed Sussex County residents with internet access to familiarize themselves the planning process, read draft chapters, find planning resources, learn about news and upcoming public meetings, provide input on the Plan, and read feedback from others. On the website, users could subscribe for email notifications of upcoming meetings. Users could submit comments via a contact form. The public survey conducted during Phase A was also available to take online. All comments were made part of the public record.

A Facebook page and Twitter account also were created for the Sussex County Comprehensive Plan. Here, followers could receive notices about upcoming meetings, view video of the County Planning and Zoning Commission workshops, and receive direction on how to provide input.

## 3.4 PLAN REVIEW, APPROVAL AND ADOPTION

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Under Chapter 92 of Title 29 of the Delaware Code, comprehensive plans are subject to review by the Preliminary Land Use Service (PLUS). PLUS ensures that local land use decisions are compatible and consistent with plans and policies at all levels of the government. The PLUS process involves reviews by all applicable state agencies, adding value and knowledge to the process without taking over the authority of local governments to make land use decisions. Typical state agency contributors are:

- Department of Transportation
- Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
- State Housing Authority
- State Fire Marshall
- Department of Agriculture

- Public Service Commission
- Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health
- Economic Development Office
- Department of Education

### 3.4.1 PLUS Approval Process

General PLUS approval process for Comprehensive Plans is as follows:

- Step 1:** Draft Comprehensive Plan prepared by local government
- Step 2:** Planning Commission and/or Legislative Body approves Draft Plan to send to PLUS
- Step 3:** PLUS meeting, application submitted by first business day of the month for that month's meeting
- Step 4:** State comments submitted to local government within 20 business days of meeting
- Step 5:** Local government replies to state comments in writing and submits revised plan (if necessary) to the Office of State Planning Coordination (OSPC) for review
- Step 6:** OSPC requires 20 working days to reply to revised plan. State sends a letter accepting changes or noting discussion items or if no changes are necessary see step 7
- Step 7:** Certification letter will be sent within 10 business days of final submission to OSPC

Following PLUS certification, Sussex County Council is anticipated to take formal action to adopt the Final Comprehensive Plan. Upon adoption, a copy of the final document and written notification of adoption would be sent to OSPC.