

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE SUSSEX COUNTY LANDSCAPE

Sussex County is the southernmost county in Delaware and is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the east, Kent County, Delaware, to the north, and Caroline, Dorchester, Wicomico, and Worcester Counties, Maryland, to the west and south (Figure 1.3-1). The County is within a 100-mile drive of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.

Sussex County has the largest land area of Delaware’s three counties, spanning 938 square miles of land area, and has long been the State’s leading agricultural producer (Sussex County, 2016). Sussex County’s diverse landscape also encompasses small towns and growing population centers. The County contains 25 incorporated municipalities (Table 1.3-1).

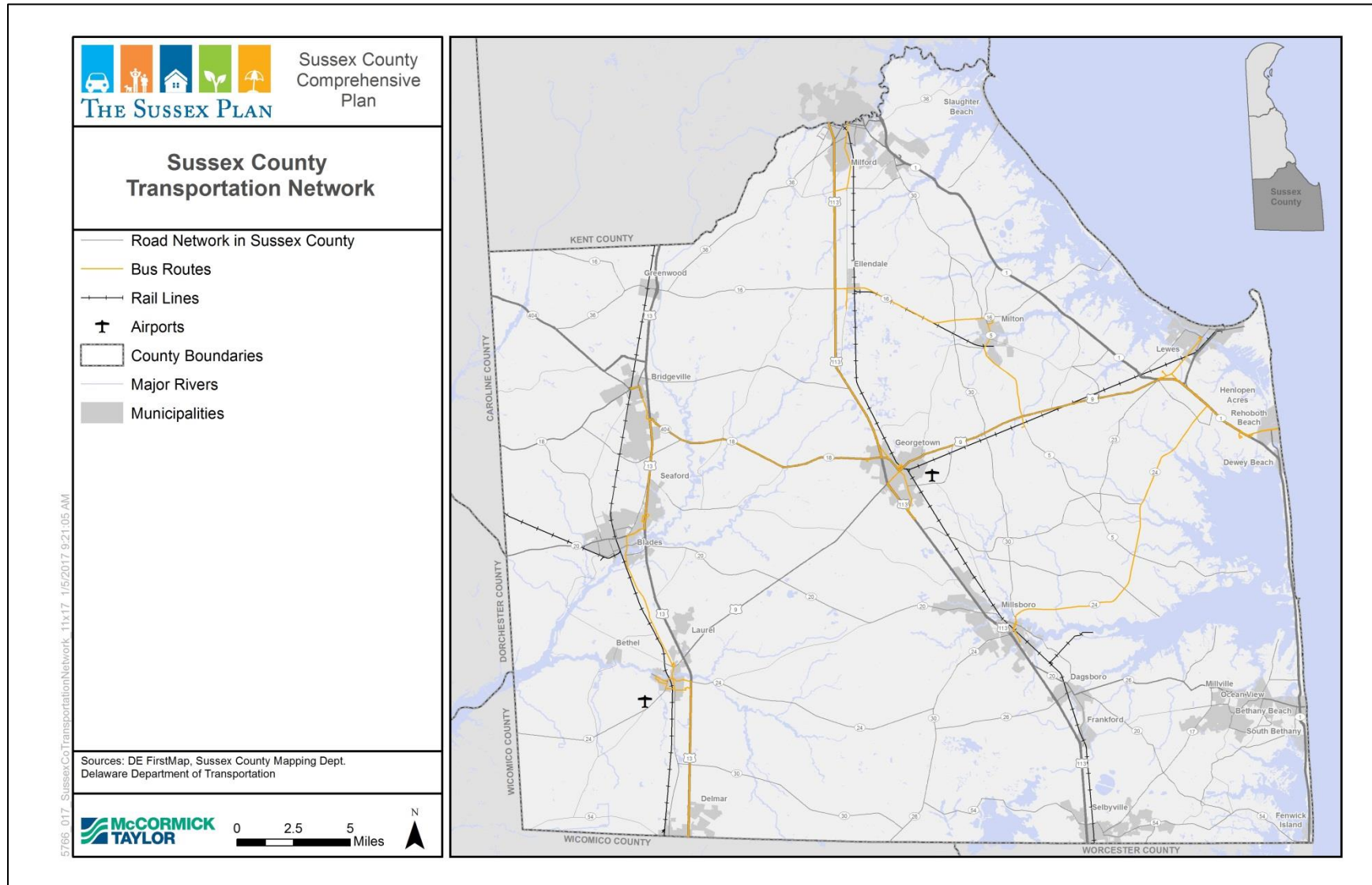
Table 1.1-1 Sussex County Incorporated Municipalities		
Bethany Beach	Frankford	Millville
Bethel	Georgetown	Milton
Blades	Greenwood	Ocean View
Bridgeville	Henlopen Acres	Rehoboth Beach
Dagsboro	Laurel	Seaford
Delmar	Lewes	Selbyville
Dewey Beach	Milford	Slaughter Beach
Ellendale	Millsboro	South Bethany
Fenwick Island		

The eastern portion of Sussex County is characterized by popular, ocean-side seasonal vacation towns, fueling the booming tourism industry in the County. The western portion of Sussex County is the backbone of Delaware’s agriculture industry, and includes a greater number of acres of arable land under cultivation than anywhere else in the state.

Transportation routes in the County range from country roads to major highways (Figure 1.3-2). Major roads include US routes 113, 13, and 9, and State Routes 1, 30, 23, 24, 26, 54, 404, and 16. Nearly all public roads in Sussex County are administered by the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT), with the exception of roads within subdivisions. Bus service in the County is provided through DART First State and the Delaware Transit Corporation, an operating division of the DelDOT. Local rail lines in the County connect to the Norfolk Southern Rail Network. Sussex County is also home to the Delaware Coastal Airport and the privately-owned Laurel Airport. Additional information on the transportation network of Sussex County is provided in Chapter 14, Mobility.

Sussex County also shares almost 25 miles of coast with the Atlantic Ocean and 19 miles of coast with the Delaware Bay. Major waterways in Sussex County include the Nanticoke River. More information on the water resources of Sussex County is included in Chapter 6, Conservation.

Figure 1.1-2 Sussex County Transportation Network





Today, Sussex is the fastest growing County in Delaware due to its popularity as both a primary and secondary home destination. This new residential development, along with Sussex's strong agricultural industry and booming tourism industries, are generating substantial economic activity. The County's active economy and cost-conscious public sector management continue to permit the low real estate tax rates for which Sussex County is also known.

This Comprehensive Plan strives to set a foundation for decision-making and provide a roadmap to the future of the County to maintain the quality of life that residents enjoy. The following sections provide an overview of the Comprehensive Plan.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Sussex County 2045 Comprehensive Plan (The Sussex Plan) is the statutorily-authorized comprehensive plan for the unincorporated portions of the County. This plan will guide the future direction of planning and decision-making in the County.

Sussex County, Delaware, has statutory authority to prepare and implement a comprehensive plan under Delaware Code, Title 9, Chapter 69 which requires Delaware counties and municipalities to update their comprehensive plans every ten years. This plan will cover a 27-year planning period to the year 2045. It contains the following chapters:

- Introduction
- Population and Demographics
- Planning Process
- Vision, Goals, and Objectives
- Future Land Use
- Conservation
- Recreation and Open Space
- Utilities
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Historic Preservation
- Intergovernmental Coordination
- Community Design
- Mobility

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Sussex Plan is the County's official policy guide for future development-related decisions. The Sussex Plan is long-range in nature, and provides a framework for the County's residents and decision-makers to conceptualize how the County should look and function over the next 27

years. Implementation strategies are identified within each chapter of the Plan, all or a portion of which may be utilized to accomplish the goals and objectives for topic areas addressed in the Sussex Plan.

The major purposes of the Sussex Plan are to:

- Serve as a guide for future development, redevelopment, and preservation in the County;
- Enhance the quality of life for residents by planning for the future;
- Provide a snapshot of existing conditions;
- Determine an overall vision of the County and what it aspires to be in the future;
- Set a realistic action plan; and
- Promote a collaboration of stakeholders and residents in the planning process.
- Fulfill the legal requirement of Title 9, Chapter 69 of the Delaware Code.

1.4 THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND COUNTY CODE

While the Comprehensive Plan acts as a policy guide for future development and decision-making, County Code regulates the use of land and creation of lots and associated improvements. There are two primary ordinances in County Code that do this.

1.4.1 The Zoning Ordinance

The Zoning Ordinance is the primary legal tool to regulate the uses of land and buildings. The Zoning Ordinance includes a Zoning Map that divides the unincorporated areas of the County into different zoning districts. Each district permits a set of activities and establishes a maximum density of development. In addition to regulating land uses and densities, zoning also controls the following:

- The heights of buildings,
- The percentage of a lot that may be covered by buildings and paving,
- The minimum distances that buildings may be placed from streets and property lines,
- The minimum size of lots,
- The maximum sizes and heights of signs, and
- The protection of important natural features.

This Comprehensive Plan Update recommends several zoning revisions. Updating the County's Zoning Ordinance will be Sussex County's first step towards implementing this plan.

1.4.2 The Subdivision Ordinance

The County's Subdivision Code mainly regulates the creation of new lots, the construction of new streets by developers, and related improvements associated with new development. This



Comprehensive Plan Update will lead to the revision of selected regulations in Sussex County's Subdivision Code.