



# Kent County 2022 Land Preservation, Parks & Recreation Plan

May 2022

*DRAFT FOR REVIEW*



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **Chapter I Framework**

Purpose of the Plan	1
Physical Characteristics	2
Network of Parks & Open Space	7
Population & Demographics	8
Comprehensive Planning Framework	6

## **Chapter II Recreation, Parks, and Open Space**

Executive Summary	19
Park Land and Recreation Inventory	21
Accomplishments & Challenges since 2017	28
Measuring User Demand	29
Level of Service Analysis	41
Goals & Objectives	50
County Implementation Program	54
Capital Improvement and Acquisition Priorities	57

## **Chapter III Natural Resources Conservation**

Executive Summary	65
Natural Resource Lands Inventory	66
Natural Resource Land & Conservation Goals	67
Current Implementation Program	69
Evaluation of the Natural Resource Land Conservation Program	73
Program Development Strategy	76

## **Chapter IV Agricultural Land Preservation**

Executive Summary	77
Agricultural Land Preservation Goals	79
Current Implementation Program	80
Evaluation of the Land Preservation Program	85
Program Development Strategy	87

**Appendix A:** Community Engagement

**Appendix B:** 2022 Inventory

**Appendix C:** 2022 Capital Improvement Plan

**Appendix D:** 2022 Kent County LPPRP Maps

**Appendix E:** 2018 Comprehensive Plan & 2017 LPPRP

# Chapter I Framework



Photo credit: Chris Cerino, Kent County Office of Tourism

## 1. Purpose of the Plan

Every five years each county in Maryland is required to submit an updated Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan (LPPRP) to the State of Maryland. The plans are intended to provide a common benchmark to assist the State's evaluation of each county's land preservation and recreation programs and to assist in guiding public investment in land preservation, parks and recreation. LPPRPs qualify local governments for State Program Open Space (POS) grants.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources, in consultation with the Maryland Planning, uses the information gathered through the county LPPRPs to develop a statewide plan, the Land Preservation and Recreation Plan (LPRP). The LPPRP is required for Maryland's participation in the Land & Water Conservation Fund, a critical funding source for land preservation and conservation efforts across the State.

The LPPRP planning process:

- Allows local, county, and municipal jurisdictions to plan for improving natural resource and agricultural preservation as well as planning for parks and recreation in each county.
- Evaluates State and county land preservation goals and objectives for parks, recreation and open space as well as for agricultural land preservation and natural resource conservation and identifies where they are complementary or different;
- Evaluates the ability to implement, programs and funding sources to achieve goals and objectives for each element;

- Recommends changes to policies, plans and funding strategies to better implement goals and leverage return on public investment in the three land preservation elements;
- Identifies the needs and priorities of current and future county residents for recreation as it relates to land development and management; and
- Ensures that public investment in land preservation and recreation supports the County's Comprehensive Plan, State goals, and State and local programs that influence land use and development.

The County's Parks & Recreation department staff also uses the development of this plan to analyze the recreation needs of the County as it relates to program planning and implementation.

Upon adoption by the Board of County Commissioners, the 2022 LPPRP becomes an amendment to the Kent County Comprehensive Plan.

The 2022 LPPRP for Kent County was prepared in accordance with guidelines developed in 2020 by the Maryland Departments of Planning and Natural Resources. Kent County government is responsible for the preparation of the LPPRP. The effort was led by the Department of Parks and Recreation, with assistance from the Department of Planning and Zoning, and the Department of Public Works. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board as well as the Land Preservation Parks and Recreation Plan Work Group, which is made up of representatives from county government, municipal government, and Advisory Board members, provided oversight and direction. Shore Strategies LLC, a Caroline County based consulting firm, was contracted to work with Kent County to develop the plan.



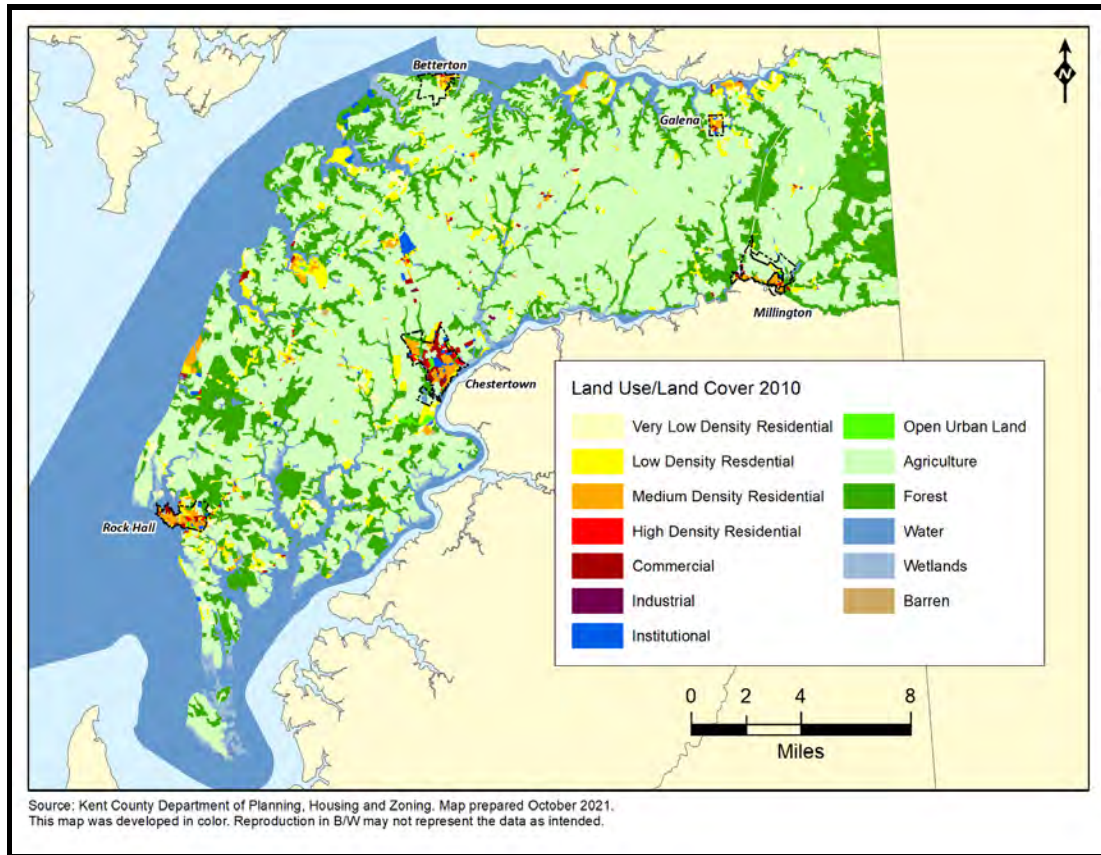
## 2. Physical Characteristics

### A. Location

Kent County is located on the northern portion of the Delmarva Peninsula on the eastern side of the Chesapeake Bay directly opposite Baltimore. The County is bordered on the north by the Sassafras River, which separates it from Cecil County, and on the south by the Chester River,

which separates it from Queen Anne’s County. The western border is formed by the Chesapeake Bay, and the eastern boundary is formed by the Delaware State Line. The County has a total land area of 178,428 acres, or approximately 281 square miles, and has 79,006 acres of water within its boundaries. Five incorporated towns -Betterton, Chestertown, Galena, Millington, and Rock Hall- are located in Kent County. Chestertown is the County seat. (See Map I-1)

**Map I-1 Kent County Land Use/Land Cover**



Founded in 1642, Kent is the second oldest County in Maryland. Prior to European colonization, the area was inhabited by the Tockwoghs and Wicomisses tribes. Early European settlers were drawn to the area for its location on the Chesapeake Bay and the Chester and Sassafras Rivers, where fish were plentiful and the access to the water facilitated travel and transport. Game was plentiful in the forests, and rich soil provided agricultural opportunities. Although much has changed since then, much remains the same. The hallmarks of Kent County continue to be the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, and rich farmland. These resources shaped much of the economy, culture, and character, and they continue to serve as the foundation for much of Kent’s planning efforts.

The early development of Kent County was devoted almost exclusively to the conversion of wooded land to agricultural use. Several early settlements were established on waterways as shipping points for agricultural products. These settlements grew into the towns of Chestertown on the Chester River, Rock Hall on the Bay, and Georgetown and Betterton on

the Sassafras River. Betterton later grew more as a resort center than as a trade center or shipping point. As more land was converted to agriculture, small trading communities formed in the central County at crossroads, or later where roads crossed the Pennsylvania Railroad. Galena, Still Pond, and Fairlee are examples of the former; Massey, Kennedyville and Worton grew up at railroad crossings. Rock Hall with a good harbor off the Bay grew as a center for fishing and boat building. Millington grew around a grain mill near the headwaters of the Chester River. Chestertown developed as the center for the County and later home to Washington College and some agriculture-related industries.

In addition to the residences clustered around the towns, small groups of houses grew in isolated locations originally in strips along existing roads and later in subdivisions. Some of

these were occupied by farm workers, but an increasing number were occupied by families supported by jobs in the towns. The scattered pattern of rural, non-farm residences is supplemented by a substantial number of dwellings along the waterfront. This scattered pattern of development continued as Kent County's population began to increase and the interest in vacation and retirement homes increased. In particular, the number of waterfront and rural subdivisions increased. The desire for large rural lots increased with the desire for second homes. (See Table I-1)

**Table 1-1: Land Use/Land Cover Data**

Land Type	Land Use in Acres		Land Use Change	
	2002*	2010**	2002-2010	
Very Low Density Residential***	3,681	4,184	503	13.7%
Low Density Residential	6,096	6,371	275	4.5%
Medium Density Residential	1,987	2,128	141	7.1%
High Density Residential	165	227	62	37.9%
Commercial	887	994	107	12.1%
Industrial	38	38	0	0.0%
Other Developed Lands/ Institutional/ Transportation***	1,465	1,518	53	3.6%
<b>Total Developed Lands****</b>	<b>14,319</b>	<b>15,460</b>	<b>1,141</b>	<b>8.0%</b>
Agriculture	117,228	116,526	-702	-0.6%
Forest	42,460	41,997	-464	-1.1%
Extractive/Barren/Bare	49	49	0	0.0%
Wetland	4,372	4,397	24	0.6%
<b>Total Resource Lands****</b>	<b>164,109</b>	<b>162,968</b>	<b>-1,141</b>	<b>-0.7%</b>
<b>Total Land</b>		<b>178,428</b>		<b>0.0%</b>
<b>Water</b>		<b>79,006</b>		<b>0.0%</b>

Agriculture remains the County's keystone land use and is the preferred land use for most of the County. It has served as the cultural foundation for the County and is planned to continue its important economic and cultural role. Kent County's economy builds on the traditional livelihoods of farming, fishing, forestry, and hunting

associated with its working landscapes and natural areas. The 2018 Comprehensive Plan identifies economic development strategies which promote and support agriculture, recognizing it as the County's primary land-based industry with substantial potential for additional growth. This policy recognizes agriculture's keystone role in the County's identity and culture and its significant economic contribution. Maintenance and growth of this industry will have significant and ongoing influence on the overall prosperity and identity of Kent County. Additionally, a new generation of farmers is materializing and investing in local agriculture. Agricultural support industries and suppliers are doing likewise. Kent County is committed to preserving the agricultural and natural environment of the County. The County's

total land acreage is 179,840 acres. Approximately 85% of the County is within the Priority Preservation Area and is considered to be outside the County's Designated Growth Areas.

The County considers agriculture to be the preferred and primary use in the Agricultural Zoning District (AZD) and the Resource Conservation District (RCD), and the *Land Use Ordinance* limits the use of these lands for non-agricultural purposes.

Since the 1970's when the first easements were put into place through Maryland Environmental Trust, more than 38,800 acres of private land has been placed under some type of conservation easement. Kent County's agricultural community has had high participation in preservation programs and has placed a total of 38,863 acres under some type of easement. This is an increase of 4,269 acres since the last LPPRP in 2017.

Main elements of the commercial pattern are located in the towns and along the highways on the outskirts of the towns. Other small spots of commerce are located along highways or at crossroads in outlying areas. Most industry is also located near the towns and villages. Larger public and semi-public uses include the country club golf courses near Chestertown and at Great Oak on Fairlee Creek, Worton Park, Betterton Beach, Turners Creek Park, and the four wildlife reserves: the federal area on Eastern Neck Island, the two State areas – Sassafras Natural Resources Management area and the Millington Wildlife Management Area and Chesapeake Farms, a private demonstration area on the west fork of Langford Creek.



## B. Land Use

Land Use/Land Cover data from the Maryland Department of Planning is shown in Table I-1 and Map I-1. There have been no changes since the last LPPRP. Overall, the County has been successful in encouraging development in areas where it is appropriate and out of the countryside.

## C. Natural Resources

Located in the Atlantic Coastal Plain, Kent County is comparatively low-lying, with relief seldom exceeding 80 feet. The eastern and central portions of the County are characterized by a broad, gently rolling plain; the northwestern section is deeply incised by streams. These streams have steep banks along their shorelines and in some cases bluffs are 20 to 80 feet high. The character of the southwestern portion of the County is one of flat plains and terraces sloping toward the water.

Kent County is underlain by deposits of sand, clay, sandy clay and silt, greensand, and marls resting on crystalline rocks. These rocks slope to the south and southeast at the rate of 60-150



feet per mile. The depth of the Coastal Plain sediments ranges from 900 feet in the northeastern portion to 2,200 feet in the southeastern portion.

### 1. Soils

The open, flat expanses of rich fertile soil that blankets the County is a gift of immeasurable value. Approximately 57% of the County is defined as prime farmland as compared with 23% of Maryland as a whole. The County has some of the best farmland in the United States and this combined with the proximity to a variety of markets makes Kent County an ideal location for agribusinesses to thrive.

### 2. Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources

The natural resources important to Kent County are clean air, prime agricultural land, tidal marshes, non-tidal wetlands, woodlands, large forests, ground water, the Chesapeake Bay, the Chester River, the Sassafras River and their tributaries, as well as ponds, mineral resources, landscapes of agriculture, waterfront, open space, historic sites, dark nighttime skies and a peaceful, unhurried atmosphere.

The County also values its diverse ecosystems. Kent has hedgerows, cropped fields, shorelines, meadows, forests, wetlands, submerged aquatic vegetation, and other plants. The varied wildlife includes deer, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians, waterfowl, game birds, songbirds, colonial nesting waterbirds, raptors, fish, crabs, and many species of shellfish.

The Chesapeake Bay, Chester and Sassafras Rivers, and their major tributaries are the most significant water bodies in the County. Kent is in the Upper Eastern Shore Watershed which may be divided into the Sassafras, Still Pond/Fairlee, Langford, Lower Chester, Middle Chester, and Upper Chester sub-watersheds. Each of these sub-watersheds has a diverse assemblage of sensitive species, wetlands, forest, and other significant habitat areas.

Kent County is one of the oldest working landscapes in North America and one of the last intact colonial and early American landscapes anywhere. Archeological sites, historic buildings, old churches, and traditional landscapes are all evidence of Kent County's long and significant history. These historic sites and structures remind Kent Countians of its cultural richness and provide a reassuring sense of time and place. The importance of these resources has been recognized by the State and federal governments through the designation of Maryland Routes 213, 20, and a portion of 445 as a National Scenic Byway and the inclusion of the majority of the County in the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area.

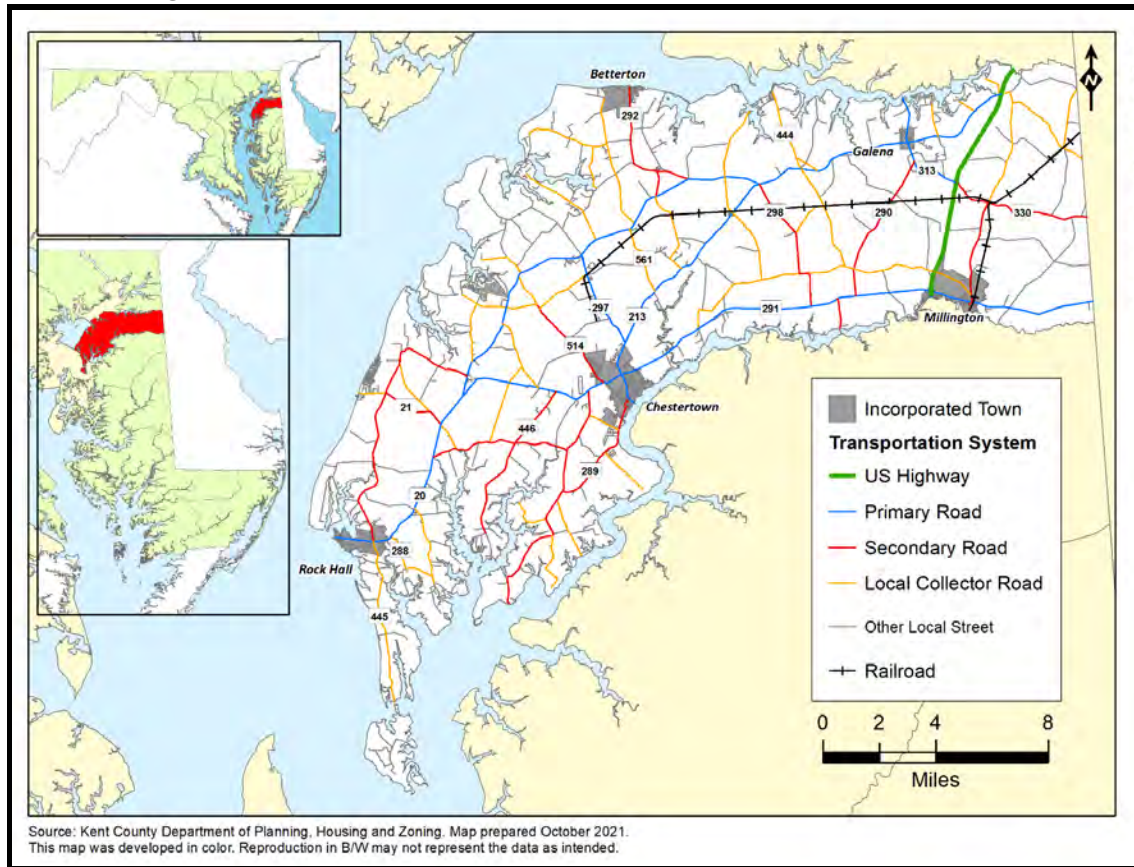


*In 1608 Captain John Smith made two voyages up the Chesapeake Bay. The voyages are now a National Park Service National Historic Water Trail.*

Both Maryland Route 213 (Chesapeake Country National Scenic Byway) and U.S. Route 301 cross the County in a generally north-south direction. These highways are parts of the main

connection to the Baltimore-Washington area by way of the Bay Bridge and U.S. Route 40 and Interstate 95. (See Map I-2).

### Map I-2 Regional Context The Development Pattern



## 3. Kent’s Network of Parks and Open Space

Kent County’s comprehensive network of parks includes federal, state, county and municipal open spaces and parks for residents and visitors to use and enjoy. Kent County and its municipalities provide a total of 449.2 acres of parks and open space for recreational use. Federal and state lands account for 7,441 acres of natural resource lands that are accessible to the public for a variety of passive activities as well as hunting and trapping by permit.

Chestertown is the largest municipality in the County, with 26.1% of the County’s residents living within its limits. It maintains 43.45 acres of parkland distributed throughout the town. It is also home to Kent County’s only Rail to Trail, the Gilcrest Trail. Kent County Middle School, located in Chestertown, provides additional recreational fields and court surfaces. Rock Hall has four parks including a 60 acre ball park. Betterton, and Galena each have two park areas.

The County’s premier recreational facility is located in Worton, at the center of the County and adjacent to Kent County High School. The Worton Park is home to the Kent County Community Center and swimming pool as well as nearly 70 acres of baseball, softball, football and multipurpose fields. The County owns and maintains nine additional community parks that are either within municipal limits or within 3 miles of a municipality. Kent County also has several

unique regional parks and open spaces. The County provides a total of 30 public water access points along the Bay and its tributaries.

## 4. Population & Demographics

Kent County’s population in 2020 was approximately 19,967, a decrease of 2.5% (See Table I-2). Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) projects that by 2045 Kent’s population will grow by 10.2% over the 2010 population. Real population growth since 2010 has differed significantly from original projections and demonstrates an overall downward trend in the total population of the County. The State’s projections, prepared in 2020, do not consider the decrease in populations that have occurred.

**Table I-2 Kent County Population**

Year	Population	Percent Change in Population		
		Since 2010	Since 2015	Since 2020
2010	20,197	NA	NA	NA
2015	19,598	-3.0%	NA	NA
2020	19,697	-2.5%	0.5%	NA
2025*	20,399	1.0%	4.1%	3.6%
2030*	20,903	3.5%	6.7%	6.1%
2035*	21,351	5.7%	8.9%	8.4%
2040*	21,799	7.9%	11.2%	10.7%
2045*	22,249	10.2%	13.5%	13.0%

Source: Maryland Department of Planning (Population Households Total Population Projections)  
 \*Indicates projections published December 2020  
[https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Pages/s3\\_projection.aspx](https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Pages/s3_projection.aspx)

### A. Population Distribution

In 2020, 40.1% of Kent County residents lived in one of the County’s five incorporated municipalities, while 59.9% of County residents lived in unincorporated areas (See Table I-3). Chestertown, with a population of 5,001 is the largest municipality. More than 26.1% of Kent’s population live within its boundaries. Betterton, Galena, Millington and Rock Hall have a combined population of 2,697, a combined 14% of the County’s total population and 35% of the population living within town boundaries.

**Table I-3 Kent County Population by Incorporated Place in Maryland, 2020**

Municipality	Total Population	Percent Population of County
Betterton	311	1.6%
Chestertown	5,001	26.1%
Galena	574	3.0%
Millington	557	2.9%
Rock Hall	1,255	6.5%
Balance of Kent	11,494	59.9%

Source: [https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Pages/pop\\_estimate/bopest\\_muni.aspx](https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Pages/pop_estimate/bopest_muni.aspx)

### B. Age



The County, State, and Upper Eastern Shore region are all experiencing an aging of the population, as demonstrated by growth in the number of Kent residents aged 55 or older and a decline in the number of younger residents (See Table I-4). In 2010, 35.9% of Kent’s population was 55 or older and children 19 and under made up 21.9% of the population. In 2020, 44.8% of the population was 55 or older. Children and youth 19 and under accounted for 19.7% of the population. In real numbers there were

3,889 children and youth in the County, 7,069 between 20 and 54 years old and 8,739 residents 55 and up, including 2,481 residents 75 and above (See Table I-5).

Over the next 25 years, the County’s age distribution is projected to gradually continue this aging trend. By 2045, more than half (51.6%) of the County’s population will be 55 or older, including 23% who will be 75+. Concurrently, the percentage of young people is projected to be 17.4% of the population (0-19) or 3,878 children and youth.

**Table I-4 Kent County Percent Population Estimates and Projections by Age**

	Years of Age										
	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
2010	4.9%	4.8%	4.7%	7.5%	8.2%	9.1%	10.0%	14.6%	14.5%	11.4%	10.0%
2015	3.9%	5.0%	5.0%	6.4%	7.4%	9.7%	9.1%	13.3%	15.4%	14.3%	11.0%
2020	3.5%	4.2%	5.1%	6.9%	6.1%	9.3%	9.2%	11.3%	16.7%	15.1%	13.0%
2025*	3.3%	3.9%	4.2%	7.0%	6.4%	7.5%	10.0%	10.3%	15.8%	16.7%	15.0%
2030*	3.4%	3.8%	4.0%	6.0%	6.6%	7.1%	9.9%	10.5%	13.6%	18.5%	17.0%
2035*	3.5%	3.8%	3.8%	5.9%	5.8%	8.1%	8.1%	11.6%	12.6%	17.6%	19.0%
2040*	3.5%	4.0%	3.9%	5.8%	5.6%	7.8%	7.7%	11.9%	12.8%	15.3%	22.0%
2045*	3.4%	4.1%	4.0%	5.9%	5.6%	7.1%	8.7%	10.0%	14.3%	14.3%	23.0%

Source: US Census Bureau, Maryland Department of Planning

\*Indicates projections published December 2020

[https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Pages/s3\\_projection.aspx](https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Pages/s3_projection.aspx)

**Table I-5 Kent County Population Estimates and Projections by Age**

	Years of Age										
	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
2010	995	978	953	1,505	1,654	1,830	2,019	2,946	2,920	2,300	2,097
2015	764	987	972	1,262	1,446	1,895	1,776	2,614	3,015	2,801	2,066
2020	695	825	1,003	1,366	1,205	1,836	1,809	2,219	3,284	2,974	2,481
2025*	680	804	850	1,435	1,302	1,529	2,037	2,104	3,218	3,404	3,036
2030*	702	786	828	1,264	1,380	1,488	2,065	2,191	2,841	3,866	3,492
2035*	738	819	812	1,251	1,228	1,738	1,734	2,476	2,685	3,750	4,120
2040*	759	865	846	1,254	1,226	1,710	1,670	2,588	2,792	3,343	4,746
2045*	762	909	898	1,309	1,243	1,582	1,943	2,225	3,188	3,182	5,008

Source: US Census Bureau, Maryland Department of Planning

\*Indicates projections published December 2020

[https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Pages/s3\\_projection.aspx](https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Pages/s3_projection.aspx)

## C. Race

Kent County's population is becoming less diverse. In 2010, 79.9% of the population was white (See Table I-6). In 2019, 80.5% of the County's population was white in comparison to the State of Maryland where 55.5% of the population was White and 44.5% were Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). The percent of the population who are Black/African-American has decreased by nearly 1 in 10 (9.6%) from 3,084 in 2010 to 2,787 in 2019 (See Table I-7). There has been a slight increase in the number of residents who identify as Hispanic or Latino, from 4.1% to 4.4%. This represents a 4.5% increase since 2010.

**Table I-6 Population by Race Kent County and State of Maryland**

Race/Ethnicity	Kent County						State of Maryland					
	2010		2015		2019		2010		2015		2019	
<b>Total population</b>	<b>20,018</b>	<b>% Pop</b>	<b>19,923</b>	<b>% Pop</b>	<b>19,536</b>	<b>% Pop</b>	<b>5,696,423</b>	<b>% Pop</b>	<b>5,930,538</b>	<b>% Pop</b>	<b>6,018,848</b>	<b>% Pop</b>
White	15,996	79.9%	16,394	82.3%	15,744	80.6%	3,396,216	59.6%	3,416,107	57.6%	3,343,803	55.5%
Black or African American	3,084	15.4%	3,064	15.4%	2,787	14.3%	1,665,235	29.2%	1,750,916	29.5%	1,799,094	29.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native	68	0.3%	34	0.2%	26	0.1%	16,213	0.3%	15,579	0.3%	16,762	0.3%
Asian	182	0.9%	193	1.0%	228	1.2%	304,574	5.3%	357,616	6.0%	378,126	6.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	0.0%	2,977	0.1%	2,754	0.0%	3,034	0.1%
Some other race	337	1.7%	27	0.1%	266	1.4%	178,952	3.1%	211,914	3.6%	272,137	4.5%
2 or more races	351	1.8%	211	1.1%	449	2.3%	132,256	2.3%	175,652	3.0%	206,692	3.4%
Not Hispanic or Latino	19,196	95.9%	19,065	95.7%	18,677	95.6%	5,266,477	92.5%	5,396,867	91.0%	5,412,366	89.9%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	822	4.1%	858	4.3%	859	4.4%	429,946	7.5%	533,671	9.0%	606,482	10.1%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

<https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/2019/>

**Table I-7 Change in Population by Race Kent County and State of Maryland (2010 - 2019)**

Race/Ethnicity	2010	2015	2019	% Change since 2010
<b>Total population</b>	<b>20,018</b>	<b>19,923</b>	<b>19,536</b>	<b>-2.4%</b>
White	15,996	16,394	15,744	-1.6%
Black or African American	3,084	3,064	2,787	-9.6%
American Indian and Alaska Native	68	34	26	-61.8%
Asian	182	193	228	25.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0	0	6	NA
Some other race	337	27	266	-21.1%
2 or more races	351	211	449	27.9%
Not Hispanic or Latino	19,196	19,065	18,677	-2.7%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	822	858	859	4.5%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

<https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/2019/>

**Table I-8 School Enrollment Disaggregated by Race Kent County Public Schools vs. Kent County Demographics**

Race/Ethnicity	KCPS Student Enrollment		Kent County		Difference %
	2019		2019		
<b>Total population</b>	<b>1,912</b>	<b>% Pop</b>	<b>19,536</b>	<b>% Pop</b>	
White	1,160	60.7%	15,744	80.6%	-24.7%
Black or African American	436	22.8%	2,787	14.3%	59.8%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0	0.0%	26	0.1%	-100.0%
Asian	12	0.63%	228	1.2%	-46.2%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	6	0.0%	0.0%
Some other race	3	0.2%	266	1.4%	-88.5%
2 or more races	135	7.1%	449	2.3%	207.2%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	166	8.7%	859	42.5%	-79.6%

Source: Maryland Report Card

<https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Demographics/Enrollment/3/17/6/14/XXXX/2019>

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

<https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/2019/>

While overall Kent County is predominantly White, the racial demographics for Kent County Public Schools is more diverse than the overall County population (See Table I-8). In 2019, 60.7% of the student population was White as compared to 80.6% of the total County population. Black/African American students made up 22.8% of the student population compared to 14.3% of the total population. Students identifying as Hispanic or Latino accounted for 8.7% of students as compared to 4.2% of the total population. School enrollment data provides additional information about the changing racial demographics of the County.

## D. Household Economics

Kent County is neither the richest nor poorest County in the Mid/Upper Eastern Shore. Table I-9 presents selected income characteristics for Kent County, other Eastern Shore Counties, and the State. The estimated median household income in Kent County in 2019 was \$58,589, a 1% increase over the median household income reported in 2015. Kent County’s household income is significantly lower than the median household income in the State of Maryland, which was \$84,805 in 2019. The County’s median household income is also significantly lower than Queen Anne’s and Talbot Counties and comparable to Caroline County.

Kent County’s mean per capita income of \$36,813 is an increase of 22% since 2015. It is higher than Caroline and Dorchester County by roughly \$7,000, but \$7,000 less than its neighbor Queen Annes’s County, where per capita income is \$44,754, higher than the State’s per capita income of \$42,122. It lags behind Talbot County by more than a 33% difference where per capita income was \$49,136 in 2019.

In 2019, the percent of the people living in Kent County who had income below the poverty level within the past 12 months (See Table I-9) increased slightly from 11.2% to 11.5% after dropping from 13.1% in 2017. The estimated poverty rate of 11.5% is consistent with the household income estimates and is higher than that of Maryland and the other Upper Eastern Shore counties.<sup>1</sup>

**Table I-9 Income Characteristics of the Midshore**

Location	Median Income				Per Capita Income				Percent Below Poverty Level			
	2015	2017	2019	Change	2015	2017	2019	Change	2015	2017	2019	Change
Caroline County	\$52,465	\$52,469	\$58,638	12%	\$24,943	\$25,355	\$29,624	19%	15.8%	16.5%	13.9%	-12.0%
Dorchester County	\$47,093	\$50,532	\$52,917	12%	\$27,870	\$28,911	\$30,293	9%	16.5%	15.4%	15.8%	-4.2%
Kent County	\$58,147	\$56,638	\$58,589	1%	\$30,081	\$32,217	\$36,813	22%	11.2%	13.1%	11.5%	-2.7%
Queen Anne’s County	\$85,963	\$89,241	\$97,034	13%	\$38,733	\$40,553	\$44,754	16%	7.5%	6.4%	5.7%	-24.0%
Talbot County	\$58,228	\$65,595	\$73,547	26%	\$38,317	\$44,785	\$49,136	28%	11.2%	10.0%	8.7%	-22.3%
Maryland	\$74,551	\$78,916	\$84,805	14%	\$36,897	\$39,070	\$42,122	14%	10.0%	9.7%	9.2%	-8.0%

Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey  
[https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=median%20income&q=0400000US24\\_0500000US24011.24019.24029.24035.24041&tid=ACSS5Y2015.S1901](https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=median%20income&q=0400000US24_0500000US24011.24019.24029.24035.24041&tid=ACSS5Y2015.S1901)  
[https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=per%20capita%20income&q=0400000US24\\_0500000US24011.24019.24029.24035.24041&tid=ACSD5Y2015.B19301](https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=per%20capita%20income&q=0400000US24_0500000US24011.24019.24029.24035.24041&tid=ACSD5Y2015.B19301)  
<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=poverty%20level&q=0500000US24011.24019.24029.24035.24041&tid=ACSS5Y2015.S1701>

<sup>1</sup> A Poverty Threshold (PT) is defined by federal agencies as- a specific dollar amount that represents the dividing line between non-poor and poor. There is no single PT that is used for all persons, but rather annually revised sets of poverty threshold tables. Because of the annually changing PT numbers, its rate of change is independent of the rate of change of Per Capita Income.

Another way of evaluating household sufficiency is the Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE) data (See Tables I-10 and I-11). In 2019, 44% of Kent County households were below the ALICE threshold. ALICE households earn above the Federal Poverty Level but less than the cost of living in their County which is calculated using the ALICE Essentials Index, which includes essential household items (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and a smartphone plan). Additionally, while the number of households in poverty in Kent County has stayed relatively flat, the number of ALICE households is growing, meaning that households that had been above the ALICE threshold are losing ground, due to wage stagnation and increased cost of living.

**TABLE I-10 Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE) Mid Shore**

County	Households	% Below ALICE
Caroline	12,081	42%
Dorchester	13,264	45%
Kent	7,910	44%
Queen Anne's	18,148	38%
Talbot	16,627	35%

<https://www.unitedforalice.org/maryland>

**Table I-11 Households by Income, Percentages, Kent County, MD 2010-2018**

Households	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Above ALICE Threshold	55%	56%	52%	57%	56%
ALICE	34%	35%	39%	33%	33%
Poverty	10%	9%	9%	10%	11%

<https://www.unitedforalice.org/maryland>

A similar pattern can be seen among the percent of students who receive Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FaRM) in public schools (See Table I-12). The percentage of students on the FaRM program in Kent County, 66%, is higher than that of the State and the Mid/Upper Eastern Shore counties. The FaRM population increased sharply between 2007 and 2011, and has incrementally increased since then.

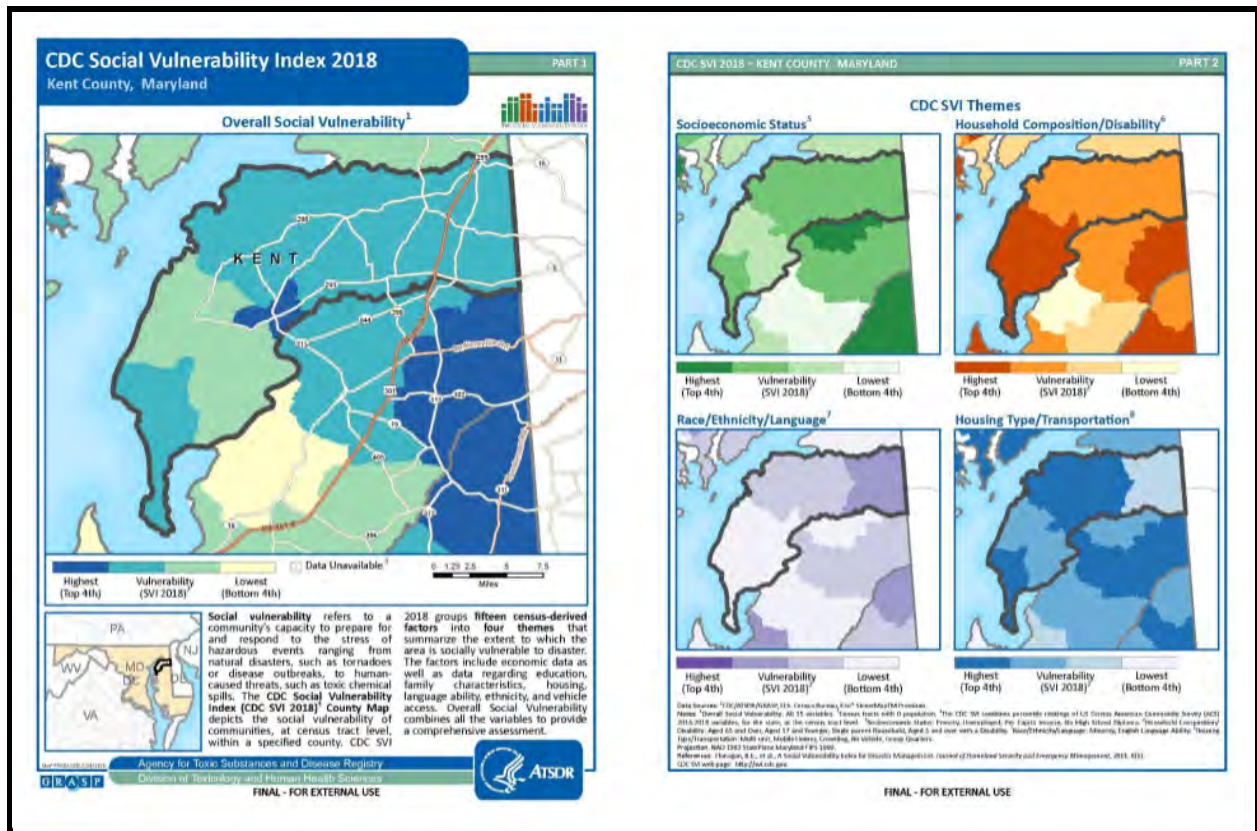
**Table II-12 Free & Reduced-Priced Meals in Public Schools Midshore**

Locale	School Year Dataset					Change SY2008 - SY2020
	SY2008	SY2012	SY2016	SY2020	SY2021*	
Maryland	34%	42%	45%	42%	48%	45%
Caroline County	45%	56%	57%	52%	59%	31%
Dorchester County	50%	62%	67%	67%	83%	67%
Kent County	40%	52%	55%	56%	66%	67%
Queen Anne's County	15%	25%	26%	25%	29%	88%
Talbot County	29%	38%	44%	47%	50%	72%

Source: Maryland State Department of Education  
<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/FreeReducedPriceMealStatistic.aspx>  
 \*Note discrepancy due to documentation requirements in pandemic

In 2018, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) created a Social Vulnerability Index for every jurisdiction in the country. Social vulnerability demonstrates a community’s capacity to prepare for and respond to the stress of hazardous events. It also demonstrates where residents are generally more vulnerable. The index uses fifteen census-derived factors grouped in four themes to display which areas of the County are most socially vulnerable to disaster. As Image I-1 below shows, overall, Kent is in the mid-range of the index. Within the four themes considered, Kent has scores that demonstrate higher vulnerability, as indicated by the darker shade, in the southernmost tip of the County, particularly as it relates to housing type and transportation as well as household composition/disability. Socioeconomically the County does not demonstrate high social vulnerability, as indicated by the lighter shade. These data provide only a broad generalization of the distribution of individuals and households across the County. As shown in the park equity analysis in Chapter II, awareness of the distribution of poverty at the town and village level is also an important consideration for park planning.

**Image I-1 CDC Social Vulnerability Index**



## E. Characteristics of Population Below the Poverty Level

According to the Maryland Alliance for the Poor, Kent County has the highest percentage of people living in deep poverty. Deep poverty is defined as 50% of the poverty level - \$6,070 for an individual in 2018.

Based on the U.S. Census, 2019, the population living below poverty level in Kent County has the following characteristics:



- The population is nearly equally split between male and female residents.
- Children are much more likely to live in poverty – 16.9% as compared to 11.5% of the total population.
- Black, indigenous, and people of color are more than twice as likely to live in poverty compared to Kent’s White population. Approximately one in 10 Whites in Kent County live in poverty as compared to nearly one in 5 (18.3% of Blacks and 19.6% of Hispanic/Latinos.)
- Nearly three In 10 Kent County residents over age 25 without a high school diploma live in poverty as compared to one in ten with a high school diploma and less than one in 20 for those with a college degree.

## F. Employment

There were just under 8,000 jobs in Kent County in 2019, including approximately 5,197 service sector jobs (See Table I-14). The largest employer by industry was education and health services followed by trade, transportation and utilities (1,324); manufacturing (1,291) and government (1,075). Industries paying the highest wages in the County included professional and business services, followed by financial activities and manufacturing.

**Table I-13 Employment by Industry Kent County, 2019 Calendar Year**

Industry	Average Number of Reporting Units	Annual Average Employment	Total Wages	Average Weekly Wage Per Worker
<b>TOTAL EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>718</b>	<b>7,930</b>	<b>\$331,054,729</b>	<b>\$803</b>
<b>GOVERNMENT SECTOR TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>1,075</b>	<b>\$49,018,433</b>	<b>\$876</b>
Federal Government	11	61	\$3,136,206	\$985
State Government	7	257	\$11,316,590	\$847
Local Government	16	757	\$34,565,637	\$878
<b>PRIVATE SECTOR TOTAL</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>6,854</b>	<b>\$282,036,296</b>	<b>\$791</b>
<b>GOODS PRODUCING</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>1,657</b>	<b>\$84,442,610</b>	<b>\$980</b>
Natural Resources and Mining	32	276	\$12,691,376	\$883
Construction	73	471	\$22,912,297	\$936
Manufacturing	24	910	\$48,838,937	\$1,032
<b>SERVICE PROVIDING</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>5,197</b>	<b>\$197,593,686</b>	<b>\$731</b>
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	137	1,324	\$44,919,604	\$653
Information	5	41	\$1,732,491	\$821
Financial Activities	46	262	\$14,722,820	\$1,080
Professional and Business Services	97	500	\$33,556,310	\$1,290
Education and Health Services	97	1,855	\$72,903,470	\$756
Leisure and Hospitality	93	967	\$21,896,077	\$435
Other Services	77	248	\$7,862,914	\$610

Source: Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation Industry Series Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) - OWIP

<https://www.dlrl.state.md.us/lmi/emppay/kent2019ep.shtml>

Since 2011, Kent County unemployment rates have been falling, reaching a low of 4.2% in 2019 according to the U.S. Census American Community Survey (See Table I-15). In the second quarter of 2020, Kent County's unemployment rate rose to 8.1% following stay-at-home orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic (See Table I-16). Currently, Kent's rate has decreased to 6.2% in Quarter 2 of 2021, 2% higher than 2019's rate.

**Table I-14 Unemployment Rate for Population 16 Years and Over**

Locale	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	Change 2011 - 2019
Maryland	7.3%	8.2%	7.4%	6.1%	5.1%	-30%
Kent County	6.4%	7.9%	7.2%	4.8%	4.2%	-34%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey  
[https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?id=ACSDP5Y2019\\_DP03&q=0400000US24\\_0500000US24011](https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?id=ACSDP5Y2019_DP03&q=0400000US24_0500000US24011)

**Table I-15 Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS)**

	2019 Q4	2020 Q1	2020 Q2	2020 Q3	2020 Q4	2021 Q1	2021 Q2
Kent County	3.5%	4.7%	8.1%	5.5%	6.4%	5.5%	6.2%

Source: Maryland Department of Labor  
<https://www.dlr.state.md.us/lmi/laus/>

## G. Educational Attainment

**Table I-16 Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Over**

Highest Level of Educational Attainment	Kent County			Maryland		
	2010	2015	2019	2010	2015	2019
No High School Diploma	14.0%	13.0%	11.4%	12.2%	10.7%	9.8%
High School Graduate (includes equivalency)	33.4%	33.2%	29.8%	26.4%	25.5%	24.6%
Some College, No Degree	17.0%	17.4%	17.6%	19.3%	19.5%	18.7%
Associate's Degree	5.4%	6.5%	6.0%	6.3%	6.4%	6.7%
Bachelor's Degree	17.8%	16.4%	19.5%	19.8%	20.6%	21.5%
Graduate or Professional Degree	12.4%	13.6%	15.6%	16.0%	17.3%	18.6%
High School Graduate or Higher	86.0%	87.0%	88.6%	87.8%	89.4%	90.2%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	30.2%	30.0%	35.1%	35.7%	37.9%	40.2%

Source: US Census Bureau, Maryland Department of Planning  
[https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Educational%20Attainment&q=0400000US24\\_0500000US24011,24029\\_24041&tid=ACST5Y2019.S1501](https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Educational%20Attainment&q=0400000US24_0500000US24011,24029_24041&tid=ACST5Y2019.S1501)

In 2019, 88.6% of the Kent County population aged 25 years and older held a high school diploma or higher (See Table I-17). Just over one-third, 35.1% of the County's population held a bachelor's degree or higher. In comparison to the State, Kent

continues to lag behind in educational attainment. Overall, 40.2% of the State's population hold bachelor's degrees or higher. It should be noted that since 2010 Kent County has made steady progress, with more young people graduating from high school and more going on to complete higher education degrees.

This demographic information about the people and municipalities in Kent County is important to consider within the context of providing access to parks and recreation and to land preservation efforts as well. Other considerations to be undertaken in Chapter II of this plan include analysis of equitable accessibility of parks to residents, particularly to residents who have been marginalized by race and socioeconomics and other factors as well as consideration of equity in planning for development as well as land preservation and conservation efforts.



## 5. Comprehensive Planning Framework

Kent County's most recent Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2018. According to the Comp Plan, the vision for the County is to "preserve its historic and cultural traditions, along with its high quality of life, while embracing sufficient economic opportunities to provide for the economic well-being of our citizens." The Plan focuses on protecting agriculture as the "linchpin" of this vision, as well as to continue to protect the quality of Kent's environment and quality of life in Kent County. Within the principles guiding the Plan that related to the Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation's Plan are the following from the goals of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Stewardship of Kent's land and waters
- Commitment to supporting agriculture and promoting the working landscape
- Ensure growth occurs in limited and specific locations in a way that complements and enhances each designated growth area's character
- Provision of elements that enrich the lives of citizens and sustain a healthy community including a quality set of recreation and cultural activities and a safe and inviting environment.

### A. General Planning Strategy

The Comprehensive Plan provides the County's policy framework for land use management. Plan elements address land use, water resources, resource conservation, priority preservation areas, community facilities, transportation, economic development, and housing.

The land use goals direct development to growth centers while seeking to preserve the agricultural rural character of the surrounding landscape. The Comprehensive Plan identifies the five towns (Betterton, Chestertown, Galena, Millington, and Rock Hall) as "the best locations for future residential, commercial, and business centers. It also identifies the 10 villages and 11 additional communities where potential growth could occur.

The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the importance of public services, especially water and sewer, in determining the extent and type of growth the County will experience. Policies support expansion of public water and sewer systems in the towns to accommodate future development.

The Comprehensive Plan also identifies that development of major public and private facilities including health care facilities, schools and other facilities that support the public will be directed toward the growth areas in towns. Additionally the plan identifies "adding new and enhancing existing public amenities, such as parks, open spaces, pedestrian paths, landscaping, bikeways, water access, public parking, pedestrian trails, community centers, and other agricultural recreational facilities in the designated town growth areas and in the villages."

## **B. Town Comprehensive Plans**

The Comprehensive Plans for Kent County's towns were last updated as follows: Betterton (2009), Chestertown (2015), Galena (2009), Millington (2018) and Rock Hall (2011).

Betterton, Galena and Rock Hall will be updating their plans within the next few years. Each town has included recreation and open space planning in its Comprehensive Plans to some degree. Comprehensive plans can be found at

<https://planning.maryland.gov/Pages/OurWork/CountyDashboard.aspx?County=Kent%20County>.

## **C. Implications for Land Preservation and Recreation**

The County's physical features, demographics, and planning framework have implications for land preservation and recreation policies.

Some major characteristics of the County that impact this plan are as follows:

### **Natural Resources and Planning Framework**

- Kent County is rural. Population densities are low; automobile travel is expected and essential for most of the population.
- Farming is a stable, healthy and dominant industry.
- Rivers and streams, both tidal and non-tidal, are very important environmental and recreational resources.
- The municipalities provide services, varied housing, and opportunity for limited new growth for the County.
- The area of greatest residential growth potential is in and around its towns.

### **Demographic Characteristics**

- County population is decreasing although official State projections continue to anticipate population growth through 2045.
- Median household incomes in the County are lower than in the State and two of its three bordering counties. Poverty levels are correspondingly higher than the State and its neighbors.
- The proportion of the population over the age of 55 is expected to increase at a moderate rate, while the 35-54 population is expected to decline. The proportion of younger age groups is expected to change little.
- The racial demographics of the County are changing with 8.7% of school age residents identifying as Hispanic/Latino as compared to only 4.2% of the overall population. White residents make up 80.6% of the County's overall population but only 60.7% of the student population.

- Education levels are modest; however there has been progress at each attainment level.
- Racial and ethnic diversity is expected to increase at a modest rate.
- ALICE households make up a significant number of the households in Kent County, living above the federal poverty level, but struggling to cover basic needs. Individuals with income below the poverty level are more likely to be either unemployed or not in the labor force; children are more likely to be in single parent households.

# Chapter II Recreation, Parks, and Open Space

## 1. Executive Summary



This chapter identifies Kent County’s goals and objectives for parks and recreation, and evaluates them in the context of the future needs and priorities for parks and open space acquisition, facility development, and programming. The County’s goals and priorities are established based on:

- User demand
- A proximity and equity analysis
- Engagement with local leadership
- State goals for recreation and parks
- National Recreation & Parks Association goals
- Kent County’s Comprehensive Plan, 2018

### A. Mission

The work of the Department is guided by its mission and its alignment with the National Recreation & Park Association’s (NRPA) mission and vision.

#### ***Mission***

The mission of Kent County Parks and Recreation (KCPR) is to create balanced opportunities for our patrons to play, learn, and grow through our programs and parks.

#### ***Alignment with National Recreation & Parks Association Mission & Vision***

In pursuing its mission, the KCPR is guided by the National Recreation and Park Association’s (NRPA) three pillars:

**Well-being: Leading the nation to improve health and wellness through parks and recreation.**

Kent County provides access for people of all ages to participate in healthy physical activity.

**Conservation (Climate Readiness): Protecting open space, connecting children to nature, and engaging communities in conservation practices.**

Kent County's planning efforts tie directly to the rich agricultural and natural resources that provide the basis for the County's quality of life. This includes a commitment to good environmental stewardship practices.

Environmental stewardship is valued for the critical role it plays in protecting the County's most valuable resources - its rich agricultural lands and its critical role in the health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

**Social Equity: Ensuring all people have access to the benefits of local parks and recreation.**

KCPR seeks to provide a network of recreation programs, parks and facilities distributed through the County so that all residents have convenient access. For County parks and facilities, this refers to parks within a short driving distance. Within municipalities, "convenient access" includes neighborhood parks and other recreation facilities within ½ mile walking distance.

***Overarching Concepts for Land Preservation & Recreation***

The County's physical features, demographics, and planning framework have implications for land preservation and recreation policies. Overarching concepts are as follows:

- The County intends to provide parks and recreation services that are distributed throughout the County and accessible for all County residents.
- The towns play a major role in the provision of recreation facilities and services in the County. Pedestrian access to parks in the towns is important in the towns.
- The projected age distribution in the County will result in stable demand for recreation services from all age groups, with increasing demand from the 55 and older age group.
- Public recreation programs and parks are important resources for lower-income residents who cannot easily afford private or fee-based recreation. Equitable access to parks, recreation, and open spaces needs to be a priority in planning efforts.
- Farmland is interspersed with forests and water resources (bay, rivers, streams and wetlands). This land use pattern requires a coordinated approach to land preservation that addresses both agriculture and environmental resources.
- The Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries contribute greatly to the sense of place in the County, and are a significant recreational and natural resource asset. Climate change, sea level rise, and storm surge need to be a part of land planning at all levels.
- Continued commitment to the preservation of agricultural and natural resource lands is important to maintaining the County's quality of life and environmental quality, which are closely linked.

## 2. Park Land and Recreation Inventory

The County has updated its inventory of parks and recreation land. Maps II-1 through II-4 include the locations of this inventory across the County. The inventory includes publicly owned land by the County, municipalities, State government and federal government. The diversity of lands as shown in the amenity data for each location includes athletic fields and sport courts, swimming facilities, recreation centers, picnic facilities, playgrounds, trails and paths, and public landings/water access, and includes natural resources and agriculturally preserved lands. A detailed inventory that includes additional information about parks and open space parcels can be found in Appendix B. Table II-1 below indicates total Recreation and Resource Land by Owner.

**Table II-1 Recreation and Resource Land by Owner in Acres**

Owner	Recreation	Resource	Total
<b>Local Recreation and Resource Lands Total</b>	<b>449.2</b>		<b>449.2</b>
Kent County Parks	289.0		289.0
Kent County Water Access	27.8		27.8
Town of Betterton	4.5		4.5
Town of Chestertown	43.5		43.5
Town of Galena	2.6		2.6
Town of Millington	3.2		3.2
Town of Rock Hall	78.7		78.7
<b>State and Federal Recreation and Resource Lands Total</b>		<b>7441.0</b>	<b>7441.0</b>
State	0.0	5158.0	5158.0
Federal	0.0	2283.0	2283.0
<b>Private/Quasi-Public Recreation and Resource Lands</b>	<b>139.7</b>		<b>139.7</b>
Board of Education*	139.7		139.7
<b>TOTAL - ALL RECREATION &amp; RESOURCE LANDS</b>			<b>8029.9</b>

**County and Municipal Land:** Recreation land is currently developed for public use; resource land is currently unimproved, but is reserved to be developed and used in the future for public recreation. This includes Special Use acreage. Currently there are 449.2 acres of recreation land maintained by the County and its municipalities.

**State Land:** Kent does not have any State parks located within its boundaries. All State land in the County is considered resource land and includes wildlife management areas and other environmental conservation lands.

**Federal:** This includes natural resource lands owned and maintained by the federal government.

**Private/Quasi-public:** These lands are privately owned but are accessible to the general public and include Board of Education owned land. Recreation land includes outdoor areas that are available and developed for public education and outdoor

community use. This includes outdoor playing fields, playgrounds, grass areas, paths, parking areas, etc.

State and quasi-public resource land is shown in Table II-1 but is described in more detail in Chapter III Natural Resources. This chapter focuses on recreation land.

### A. County and Town Land

Kent County maintains 288.96 acres of land developed for recreational use. This includes all developed County parks. There has been no change since the 2017 Plan in the number of recreational and resource acreage owned by the County.



## 1. Regional Parks

Regional parks provide a wide variety of recreation opportunities including ball fields, field sports, boat ramps, picnic areas and playgrounds. The County has two regional parks.

Worton Park and Community Center & Pool are located close to the geographic center of the County. This 97 acre park is the epicenter of youth recreation activities in the County, with an outdoor swimming pool and multipurpose fields, ball fields, sport courts and the indoor community facility.

Turner's Creek Park is a 147 acre park located on the Sassafras River, which borders the Sassafras Natural Resource Management Area (NRMA). It includes nature trails, a pavilion, and several historic structures.



## 2. Community and Neighborhood Parks

Community and neighborhood parks provide swimming pools, ball fields (baseball, softball, and multi-purpose), basketball, tennis, and pickleball courts, playgrounds and picnic areas. The five County-owned community parks are generally larger than the neighborhood parks and provide facilities that serve a larger geographic population. These parks include:

- Betterton Beach, a popular destination for County residents and visitors located on the Chesapeake Bay in the Town of Betterton. It is bordered by a County-owned and maintained boat ramp and pier.



- Toal Park, located just outside of Galena on Route 213, is 37.5 acres and includes a multipurpose field, ball diamond, playground and picnic area as well as two short undeveloped natural trails.

- Edesville Park is located in the unincorporated area known as Edesville on Route 20, approximately 2 miles from the town of Rock Hall and offers a playground, volleyball court, ball field and a picnic shelter..



- Bayside Landing Park & Pool in Rock Hall and Millington Park & Pool provide small community pools for County residents.

- Still Pond Station Park provides a small beach for wading and fishing but does not allow swimming. It is anticipated the park will be developed within the next 2 to 3 years and will include a picnic shelter, restrooms, playground with swings, and parking lot improvements.



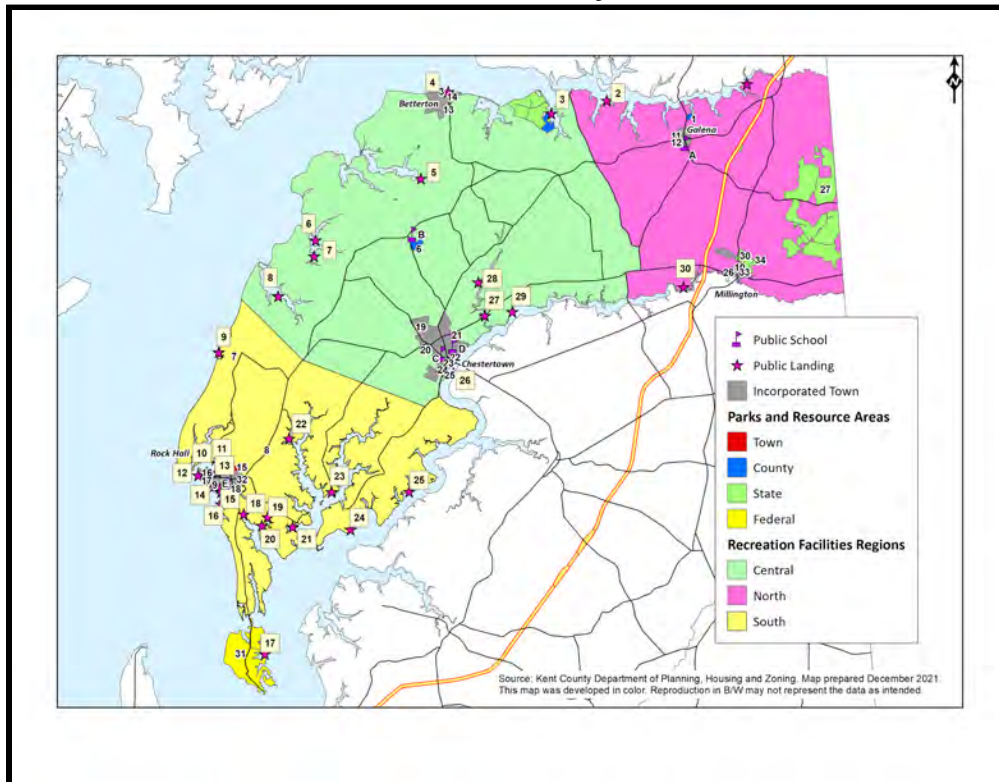
There are also several community parks located in Kent's towns. In particular, Chestertown is home to Margo G. Bailey Community Park and Phillip G. Wilmer Park. Chestertown is also home to four neighborhood parks - Louisa Carpenter D'Andelot Park, Fountain Park, Gateway Park and Ajax Park. Betterton, Galena, Millington and Rock Hall also have neighborhood parks.

### **3. Other Recreation Sites**

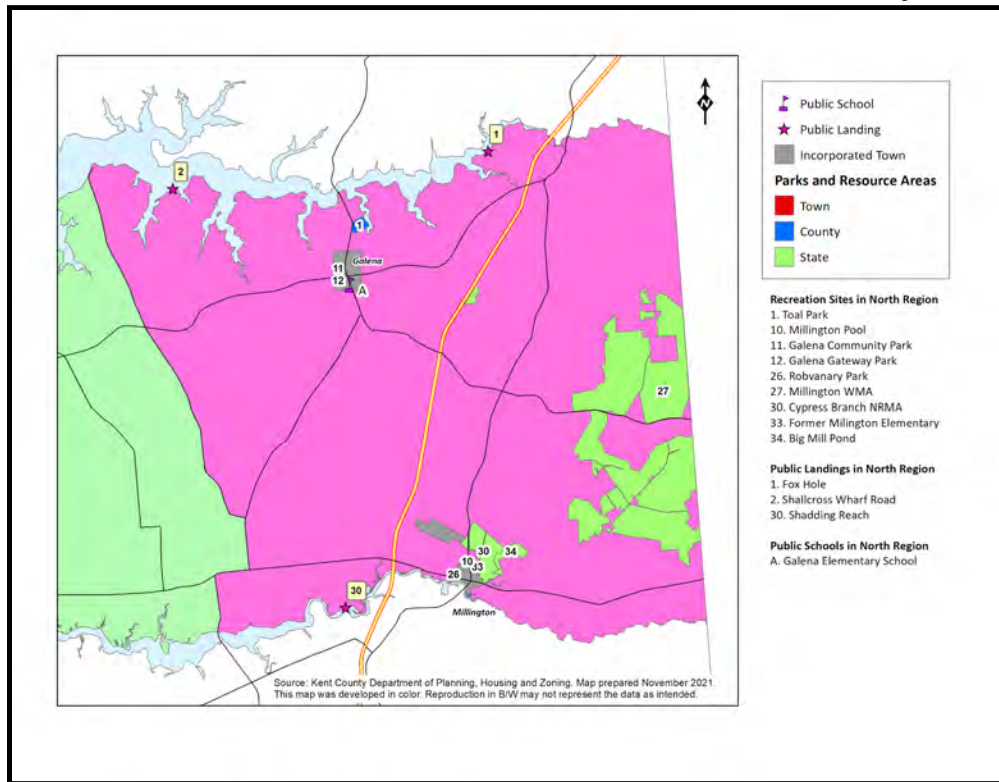
Other recreation sites include a number of special-use properties including:

- Kent County Agricultural Center - Located on Tolchester Road, the 22.6 acre property contains unique facilities, including pavilions, show rings and several buildings. It is the home of the annual Kent County Fair and the County's 4-H programs..
- Francis Cann Demonstration Woodlot - Located off of Still Pond Creek Road in Worton, this 8 acre property is a special use area for educational purposes such as horticulture, nature, and the environment. Use must be scheduled in advance and coordinated with the Department of Parks and Recreation.

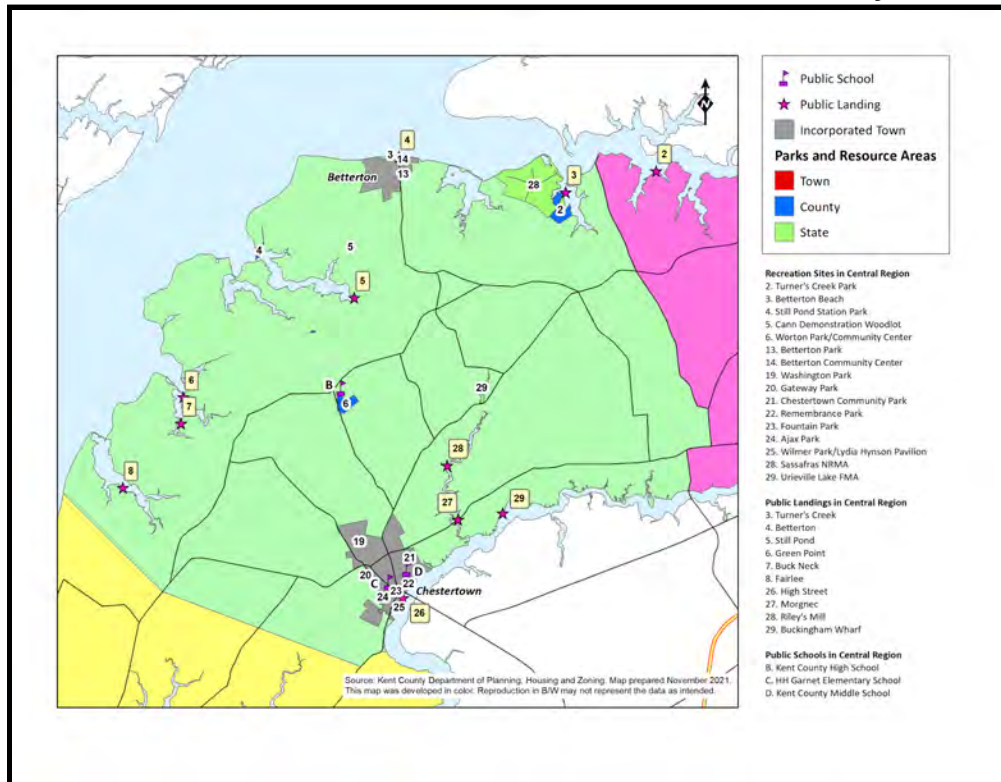
**Map II-1 Recreation Sites in Kent County**



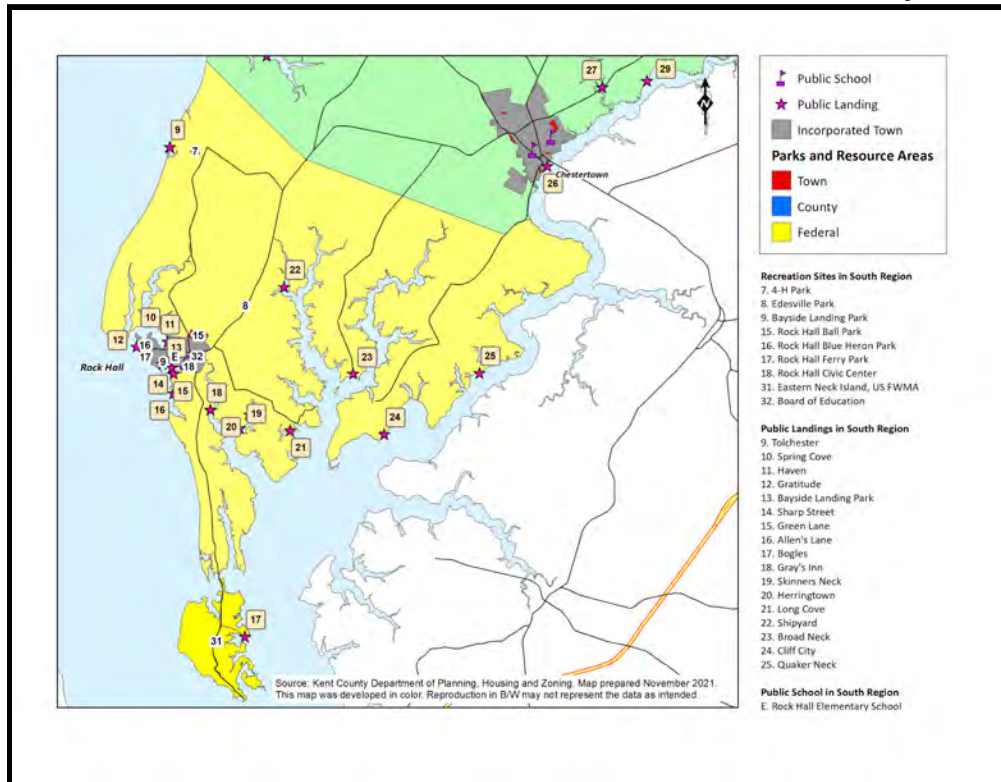
**Map II-2 Parks and Recreation Sites in Northern Kent County**



## Map II-3 Parks and Recreation Sites in Central Kent County



## Map II-4 Parks and Recreation Sites in Southern Kent County



## B. State Land

There are 5,158 acres of land owned by the State in Kent County. These include Millington Wildlife Management Area, Sassafras Natural Resource Management Area, Cypress branch



NRMA and Urieville Lake Fishing Management Area. These areas provide access to fishing, hiking, hunting and picnicking as well as wildlife viewing.

Sassafras NRMA - This 1,008 acre property is open to the public and popular for a variety of activities including hiking, biking, horseback riding, and birding. The property includes Knock's Folly Visitor Center.

## C. Federal Land

The Eastern Neck Island National Wildlife Refuge is a 2,283 acre refuge originally set aside for migrating and wintering waterfowl. There are several short hiking trails as well as a paddling trail around the island. Recreation activities include hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and photography.

## D. Private Quasi-Public land and Facilities

Private/quasi-public lands make a significant contribution to recreational opportunities in Kent County. They include open space areas in subdivisions, marinas, golf courses, and Washington College. These private/quasi-public organizations are not always available to the public and may be fee-based for use of the facility. Vitrally important for filling niche recreation needs, they are important in the overall open space of Kent's resources, but are not included in the overall County inventory of County recreation land.

Board of Education property accounts for an additional 140 acres of recreational land, 30 percent of the County's locally-owned recreation land.

## E. Water Access

Public access to rivers and lakes for boating and fishing is an important component of the County's recreation facilities. Table II-3 summarizes County-owned public landings. These are managed by the Kent County Environmental Operations Division of the Department of Public Works.

There are a total of 30 publicly owned water access points in Kent County. These vary from undeveloped access points at the end of a road to commercial boat ramps with piers and boat slips.

**Table II-2 Kent County Public Landings**

Landing	Location	Linear Feet of Shoreline	Boat Ramp	Pier	Bulk head	Boat Slips	Vehicle Spaces	Trailer Spaces	Additional Information
Allens Lane	Near Rock Hall	45	0	0	0	0	3	0	N/A
Bayside Landing Park	Rock Hall		1	3	1	42	46	82	Water 6'2", Concrete Ramp, Pier & Bulkhead Load/Unload Only, Waiting List for Slip Rental
Betterton	Betterton		1	1	0	11	52	6	Water 1'8", Sectional Slab Ramp, Pier Load/Unload Only Transient Slips
Bogles	Eastern Neck Island		1	2	1	0	50	40	Water 1'7", Concrete Ramp, Pier & Bulkhead Load/Unload Only
Broad Neck	Near Chestertown	45	1	0	0	0	3	3	Water 2'6", Dirt Ramp
Buck Neck	Near Melitota		0	0	1	0	6	0	Bulkhead Load/Unload Only
Buckingham Wharf	Near Chestertown	72	1	0	0	0	6	6	Water Less than 1'6", Dirt Ramp
Cliffs City	Near Chestertown		1	1	1	0	20	25	Water 2'1", Sectional Slab Ramp, Pier & Bulkhead Load/Unload Only
Fairlee	Near Fairlee		1	1	1	0	20	10	Water 3', Sectional Slab Ramp, Pier & Bulkhead Load/Unload Only
Foxhole	Near Galena	30	1	0	0	0	3	3	Water less than 1'6", Dirt Ramp
Gratitude	Rock Hall	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	No Facilities, End of Road Only
Grays Inn	Near Rock Hall	30	1	0	0	0	3	3	Water less than 1'6", Dirt Ramp
Green Lane	Rock Hall		1	0	1	0	8	8	Water 5'5", Concrete ramp, Bulkhead Load/Unload Only
Green Point	Near Worton		1	0	0	0	0	0	Water 3', Sectional Slab Ramp
Harrington	Near Rock Hall	75	1	0	0	0	2	2	Water less than 1'6", Dirt Ramp
Haven	Rock Hall	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	No Facilities, End of Road Only
High Street	Chestertown		0	1	1	0	22	0	Pier & Bulkhead Load/Unload Only
Long Cove	Near Rock Hall		1	2	1	37	32	16	Water 4'2", Concrete Ramp, Pier & Bulkhead Load/Unload Only, Waiting List for Slip Rental
Morgnec	Near Chestertown	300	0	0	0	0	10	0	Fishing and Kayak Access
Quaker Neck	Near Chestertown		1	1	0	16	8	6	Water 2'4", Sectional Slab Ramp, Pier Load/Unload Only, Waiting List for Slip Rental
Rileys Mill	Near Chestertown	270	0	0	0	0	10	0	N/A
Shadding Beach	Near Millington	36	1	0	0	0	3	3	Dirt Ramp
Shallcross	Near Galena	38	0	0	0	0	0	0	No Facilities, End of Road Only
Sharp Street	Rock Hall		0	1	0	0	0	0	Pier Load/Unload Only
Shipyards	Near Rock Hall		1	0	1	0	10	6	Water 4'7", Concrete Ramp, Bulkhead Load/Unload Only
Skinnners Neck	Near Worton		1	1	0	13	16	5	Water 1'6", Sectional Slab Ramp, Pier Load/Unload Only, Waiting List for Slip Rental
Spring Cove	Rock Hall		1	1	0	14	4	0	Water 6', Sectional Slab Ramp, Pier Load/Unload Only, Waiting List for Slip Rental
Still Pond	Near Still Pond	150	1	0	0	0	3	3	Water less than 1'6", Dirt Ramp
Tolchester	Tolchester	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	Fishing Access Only
Turners Creek	Near Kennedyville		1	2	4	0	42	51	Water 5'6", Concrete Ramp, Pier Transient Use, Bulkhead Load/Unload Only
Urieville Lake	Near Worton		1	0	0	0	4	3	Boating and fishing, State owned

### 3. Accomplishments & Challenges since 2017

Kent County Parks & Recreation has experienced a number of challenges over the past five years which have slowed down progress in meeting goals established in 2017. In addition to the challenges related to the pandemic that all parks and recreation departments have experienced since March 2020, the Department has also navigated staff shortages at all staffing levels from managerial to camp staff and lifeguards. Additionally parks development and maintenance are managed through the Department of Public Works which has also experienced leadership changes and staffing shortages over the past five years. The impact of these operational challenges delayed final revisions to the 2017 Land Preservation Parks and Recreation Plan which in turn impacted development projects.

Despite the challenges discussed above, the Recreation & Parks department working with Public Works was able to complete a number of projects begun prior to 2017. The following rehabilitation and enhancements were made at County Parks including installation of:

- Installation of video surveillance systems at Bayside Landing Park & Pool, Betterton Beach Park, Millington Park & Pool and Worton Park.
- Construction of maintenance facility, ball diamond, additional parking spaces, and picnic tables as well as installation on ball diamond and field at Worton Park
- Creation of a Concept Plan for Still Pond Park that includes picnic pavilion, restroom and playground.
- Added broadband access at all county public parks to support access for families during the COVID-19 school closures.
- Chestertown, Galena and Betterton completed Community Parks and Playground projects. (Carpenter Park, Betterton Park, Galena Community Park).



# 4. Measuring User Demand

This section examines park land and recreation facility needs in the County using six sources of information:

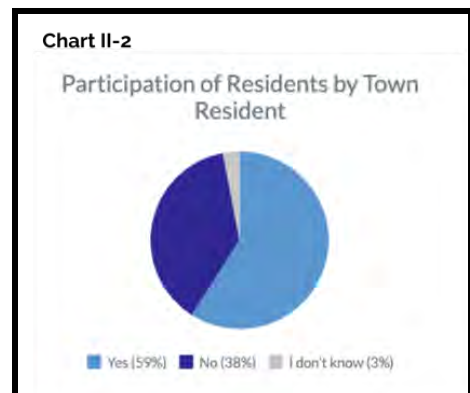
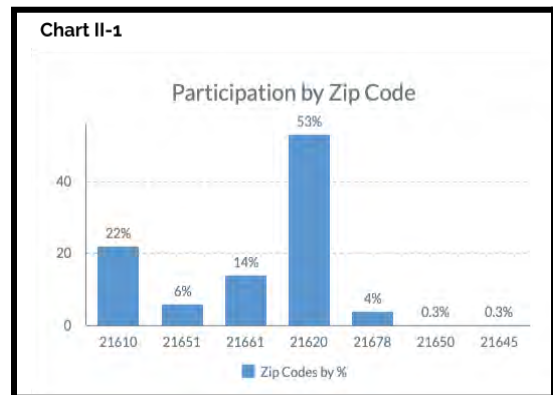
- Community input: survey and focus groups.
- County and municipal staff input.
- State surveys and priorities.
- National trends.
- Proximity analysis: determining whether parks and recreation facilities are distributed throughout the County so that all residents have reasonably convenient access.
- Park equity analysis: closely related to the proximity analysis, an evaluation of the availability of parks and recreation facilities in geographic areas with higher concentrations of population, children, seniors and low-income residents.



## A. County Community Engagement

During the Summer of 2021 Kent County Parks & Recreation hosted a series of community engagement opportunities for County residents and stakeholders to share their impressions and suggestions about parks and recreation in the County. The series included:

- Interviews with a variety of stakeholders in the County representing a diverse range of interests from youth sports to tourism and health.
- In person focus groups held in five municipal locations that included a total of 52 participants.
- Community-wide on-line survey with participation by 402 County residents.



Survey responses came from across the County. Chart II-1 demonstrates the geographic distribution of respondents by zip code. Chart II-2 represents the breakdown between whether respondents lived within their town boundaries or



in the County. Nearly six in ten respondents lived in towns as compared to about 40% of the County's total population. The majority of respondents (75%) identified as female, 22% as male and 3% as gender variant/non-conforming or preferred not to answer.

Survey participants, for the most part, accessed and utilized parks and open spaces in the County (Chart II-3). Interview, focus group, and survey prompts focused on these basic questions:

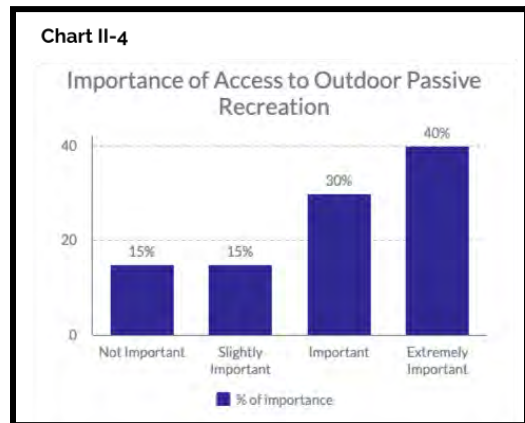
- Are parks/open space available and accessible?
- Do they offer the features and amenities desired by users?
- Are recreation programs and activities available and accessible?
- Do recreation programs and activity opportunities meet the varied recreation needs of County residents?



***Parks are Available & Accessible***

Spatial analysis demonstrates that Kent County has a network of outdoor parks and open spaces that are broadly distributed across the County. As Maps II-1 through II-4 indicate, there are parks/open spaces available across the County from North (Toal Park) to South (Eastern Neck). At the center of the County is the comprehensive Worton Park and Kent County Community Center and complex.

For the most part survey respondents agreed that parks are geographically well-distributed across the County, although approximately one-third were not satisfied with the distribution. In focus group discussions and written responses to open-ended survey questions as well as stakeholder interviews, County residents identified several deficits related to availability of parks and related features. In particular, participants were most interested in additional, longer distance and varied walking and hiking trails around the County, and placed high importance on access to outdoor passive recreation opportunities (Chart II-4).



Responses related to accessibility were also mixed. This was particularly clear in the focus groups and stakeholder interviews. Of particular note in focus groups in Rock Hall and Galena, participants shared that while there were ample municipal parks, recreation activities for youth sports have all been primarily centralized in Worton and municipal multipurpose

fields are underutilized. As the youth population of Kent has decreased, towns no longer have the numbers of players for municipal teams in sports like baseball, softball and soccer because there are too few participating youth. Therefore, some municipal and town parks with multipurpose fields and ball diamonds may be underutilized. Focus group participants shared ideas about how these open spaces could be better utilized - either by increasing youth sports participation or utilizing the open space for other activities.

Individuals and residents who live within a ½ mile of parks may also face limited accessibility if the walking route does not have adequate sidewalks or walking paths for park users to safely travel to the park location. Examples of the barriers to accessibility were given throughout the network of parks including SState, County and municipally owned parks.

### ***Features & Amenities and Accessibility***

**Features** - The features that community members want in their parks directly correlates to what activities they and family members enjoy in the park.



Most utilized features include:

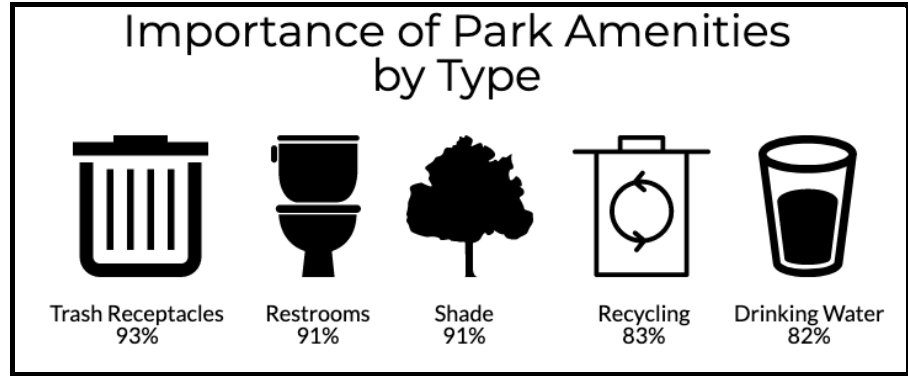
- Walking/Hiking/Biking Trails
- Picnic Areas
- Playgrounds
- Water Access (for boating, kayaking, fishing, crabbing, and wading)
- Sports fields (soccer, lacrosse, and baseball/softball)
- Paved Courts (basketball, tennis, and pickleball)

Features noted as needs across the County's network of parks are:

- Longer hiking/walking/bike trails
- Tennis courts that are in good condition for play
- Additional courts for pickleball use (either sole use or dual use with tennis)

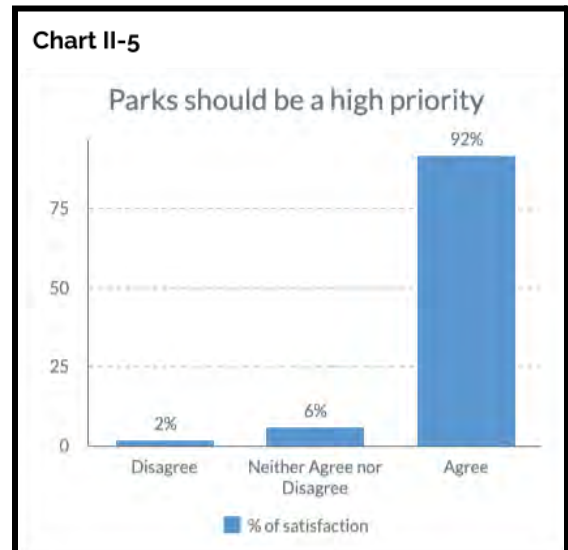


**Amenities** - In surveys, focus groups and stakeholder interviews, respondents identified their top priorities as restrooms, trash receptacles, and shade, followed by drinking water and recycling.



Across stakeholder interviews, focus groups and the community surveys, participants placed a significant amount of importance on amenities. Topping the list is the need for built restroom facilities at regional and community parks and full-year access to portable facilities where built restroom facilities are not available. Community members also indicated that shade structures are needed at many of the parks. Toal Park and Edesville Park were specifically identified as locations that would be improved by built restroom facilities. Additional shade structures at Worton Park were also mentioned.

**Accessibility within the parks** was an area mentioned in interviews and focus groups. There were several mentions that the parks were not designed for those who use mobility devices or those who struggle with balance when walking and could be improved upon with these modifications. Mulch, grass or stone dust paths are difficult to navigate with mobility devices. Paved paths are often narrow. Playground equipment for differently abled children was also observed as a feature that should be available in more parks. More playgrounds do not have these types of equipment than playgrounds that do have these types of equipment. Participants also noted that adults with mobility issues cannot access many of the fields where sporting activities occur because there are no maintained walkways within parks except perimeter trails. Water access for differently abled was also raised as an accessibility concern. This included shoreline access as well as access to kayak launches designed for users with special physical needs. With an increasing aging population, this was of particular concern to older residents who participated in focus groups and who want to be able to continue to access parks and open spaces as they continue to age.

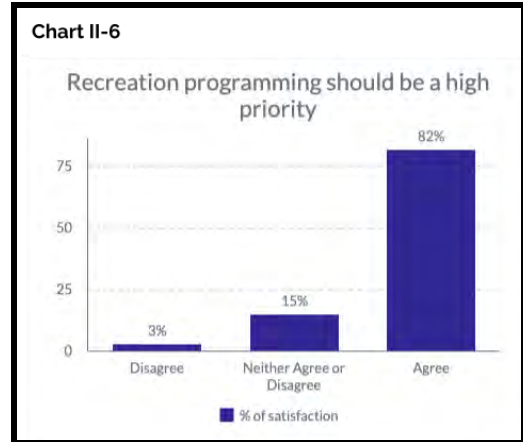


Overall, 92% of survey respondents indicated that parks should be a priority for the County (See Chart II-5).

## ***Recreation Availability and Accessibility***

Overall, community engagement participants indicated that they were most satisfied with the activities available for preschool and elementary age youth in the County and with programs for adults ages 50-64. However 41% of survey respondents felt that there were not enough recreation offerings for teens.

Overall, 82% of survey respondents indicated that recreational programming should be a high priority for the County (See Chart II-6).



**Maintenance & Upkeep** - The majority (59%) of community survey responses demonstrated that County residents are generally satisfied with the maintenance at parks and facilities, 19% were ambivalent and 22% were not satisfied with the maintenance and upkeep of the parks and facilities. In stakeholder calls and focus groups there were cautionary recommendations that existing parks, fields and facilities should be upgraded and well maintained before new properties are acquired or developed.

## ***Advisory Board & Community Stakeholder Workgroup***

The LPPRP has been an agenda feature of the County Commissioner-appointed citizen Advisory Board for Parks and Recreation since late 2020. The Parks & Recreation Director also established a LPPRP Work Group that met three times during the Plan development. These work sessions and general meeting discussions yielded similar themes and objectives reflected in previous sections.

## ***Staff Observations***

To provide a comprehensive perspective on parks and recreation, Shore Strategies held staff level focus groups with both the Department of Public Works supervisors with responsibility for parks maintenance and capital improvements as well as with the Recreation Division staff. During a focus group in September 2022, DPW supervisors identified the following priorities from their perspectives:

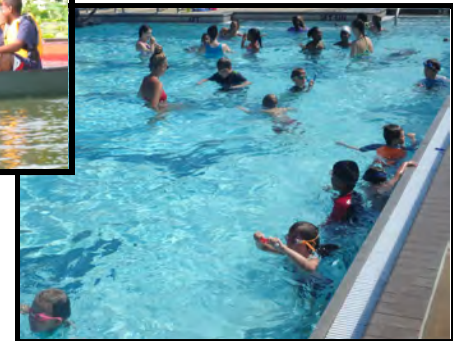
- Create formal comprehensive engineered master plans for any development projects.
- Enhance maintenance staff during prime outdoor recreation months of April through October to meet the high demand for mowed and lined fields for recreation usage and care for Betterton Beach, a County maintained public beach with high usage.

In October 2021, Recreation Division staff met with Shore Strategies to discuss goals and priorities for recreation programming. This staff felt the priorities for the Department are:

- Maintain/enhance existing fields in the County.
- Expand programming options in County parks and municipalities.

## Trends in County Recreation Program and Facility Utilization

Analysis of registration data from Kent County Parks & Recreation demonstrates that the department routinely fills its classes and programs and often carries waiting lists for participation, particularly in programs like youth summer camp. Program offerings include an array for all ages from preschool through senior adults. Swimming lessons, summer camps, and youth basketball are consistently filled.



**Table II-3 Kent County Youth Programs and Activities Registrations**

Program Name	Ages	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Track and Field	7 to 14	Not Offered	27	24	Not Offered	Not Offered
Hoop Jam	5 & 6	15	18	11	Not Offered	Not Offered
Co-Ed Rookies	7 & 8	17	25	31	Not Offered	20
Basketball (Boys)	9 to 11	85	85	84	Not Offered	48
Basketball (Girls)	9 to 13	25	28	17	Not Offered	10
Girls Indoor Field Hockey	5th -12th grade	33	32	28	Not Offered	Offering Jan 2022
Start Smart (all sports)	2 to 5	10	10	15	Not Offered	7
Quick Ball	4 to 6	Not Offered	Not Offered	Not Offered	Not Offered	2
Junior Wrestling	K - 8th grade	28	28	28	Not Offered	20- Reg still Open
Middle School/High School Age Drop In Rec Center	12 to 18	58	51	48	Not Offered	20
Elementary After School (Garnet, Galena & Rock Hall)	pre-K - 5th Grade	82	79	76	Not Offered	29
Indoor Soccer	16 and Up	71	17	22	Not Offered	22
Platform Tennis	18 and Up	18	22	20	23	25
Ping Pong	16 and Up	8	12	8	Not Offered	10

**Table II-4 Kent County Summer Camp Registrations**

Program Name	Ages	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Leaders Club	7th - 9th grades	23	25	Not Offered	Not Offered	Not Offered
Summer Camp-Session 1	3 1/2 to 12	114	102	99	Not Offered	44
Summer Camp-Session 2	3 1/2 to 12	112	103	97	Not Offered	41
Summer Camp-Session 3	3 1/2 to 12	114	102	99	Not Offered	44
Summer Camp-Session 4	3 1/2 to 12	114	103	99	Not Offered	44
Summer Camp-Session 5	3 1/2 to 12	114	103	99	Not Offered	42
Summer Camp-Session 6	3 1/2 to 12	114	103	99	Not Offered	44
Summer Camp-Session 7	3 1/2 to 12	114	103	98	Not Offered	44
Summer Camp-Session 8	3 1/2 to 12	114	103	99	Not Offered	44
Last Days of Summer Rec. Club	6 to 10	29	27	27	Not Offered	9

**Table II-5 Kent County Swim Lesson Registrations**

Program Name	Ages	2017	2018	2019
Adult Swim Lessons	16 and Up	6	12	13
Youth Swim Lessons-Session 1	4 to 13	16	14	16
Youth Swim Lessons-Session 2	4 to 13	33	30	23
Youth Swim Lessons-Session 3	4 to 13	22	26	20
Youth Swim Lessons-Session 4	4 to 13	27	18	20
Aqua Fitness	16 and Up	8	7	10

The Kent County Community Center located in Worton is well utilized and requires a

**Table II-6 Kent County Pool and Beach Attendance Summer 2017-2021**

Pool	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Bayside Pool	1,928	1,132	1,036	CLOSE D	CLOSED
Kent County Community Center Pool	13,739	13,433	16,005	CLOSE D	9,195
Millington Pool	5,615	5,370	5,711	CLOSE D	CLOSED
Betterton Beach	NA	NA	10,380	16,864	17,680

membership card to access. Currently 494 adults and 134 youth under age 22 have memberships. The swimming pool in Worton is busy throughout the summer. Typically, Bayside Pool in Rock Hall and Millington Pool are also well accessed during the summer months, however in 2020 all pools remained closed due to the pandemic. In

**Table II-7 Kent County Pool Capacity**

Pool	Capacity
Bayside Pool	43
Kent County Community Center Pool	335
Millington Pool	241

In 2021 the Community Center Pool reopened, however KCPR was unable to open the two smaller pools due to a significant shortage of lifeguards.

KCPR does not currently have a system that tracks utilization of parks over time, however, anecdotal discussions with staff indicate that parks usage as measured by pavilion reservations has been consistent between 2018 and 2021, except during the height of COVID in 2020. From mid-April through mid-October the sports fields at Worton Park are reserved by youth and adult sports leagues. Developing tracking measures for field and facility utilization is an internal goal for the Department for the 2022-2026 years included in this Plan.

## B. Priorities from Community Feedback

The following key points emerge from the analyses of need and demand and current usage trends provided in this section.

### 1. User Satisfaction

County parks and programs are well-used and are an important asset to Kent County. Ongoing maintenance and rehabilitation of existing parks facilities and expansion of features and amenities are primary concerns when considering capital investments in parks and open spaces in the County.

### 2. Land Acquisition Needs

As shown in Table II-1 the County and towns currently have about 450 acres of parks and open space land. While Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) population trends indicate that Kent County will experience small gains in population over the next 10 years, trends from the past decade demonstrate a decrease in population. Through the comprehensive community engagement process, Kent residents indicated a desire for the development/redevelopment of features and amenities within existing parks as well as maintaining an inventory that can be properly maintained. Parks and recreation sites are

well-distributed through the County and towns. Kent County's Capital Improvement Plan 2022-2030 does not include any acquisitions.

### **3. Program Priorities**

Responses from the community engagement process as well as Advisory Board and staff discussions indicate that the County, in concert with the towns, should focus on providing additional access to places and spaces that support the health and wellness of County residents as well as meet their recreational programming needs. This includes:

- Expanding access to programs for youth, in particular continued investigation of the possibility of incorporating the Sassafras Environmental Education Center program into the KCPR program portfolio.
- Developing programming opportunities for adults, with special emphasis on programming that appeals to older residents as this is the demographic of the County that is growing, but also considering the needs of youth.
- Promoting good physical and mental health by promoting activities and programs that engage residents of every ability in parks and open spaces.
- Seeking opportunities to provide access to youth and family programming within towns that are further away from the Community Center nexus of the County parks system. In particular focusing on providing free activities to meet the needs of youth from low-income households as evidenced by Free and Reduced Meal data.

### **4. Facility Needs**

The community-wide recreational facility needs as identified through the Community Engagement process include:

- Longer multi-use trails (rails to trails type)
- Picnic areas/playgrounds, especially ADA accessible areas and equipment
- Pickleball courts/dual-use pickleball-tennis courts
- Additional built restrooms; rehabilitation of existing restroom facilities
- ADA certified kayak/canoe launches for recreators with physical disabilities
- Skateboard/BMX facility within the County or a municipality

It is important to note that participants in the community engagement process also stressed that development should be focused on properties that are already in the inventory and expansion and enhancement of features and amenities should be balanced with the County and towns' ability to upkeep and maintain the properties within the inventory.

Beyond these particular types of facilities, the following needs have been identified as priorities:

- Retaining and enhancing park areas for unstructured, outdoor activities such as walking, picnicking and nature appreciation.
- Developing and improving multi-purpose fields with lights and associated service buildings (restrooms, etc.)
- Continuing to emphasize public access to waterfront locations in development of public lands. Long-term projects should focus on joint efforts between the Parks & Recreation Division and the Parks & Grounds Maintenance and Environmental Operations Divisions of DPW. Address both the interest in pathways and the goal of public access to water by seeking opportunities for paths or boardwalks along publicly owned shorelines.
- Continuing partnership and investment in rehabilitation and expansion of park assets in municipalities, in response to current and anticipated recreation activity demands.
- Coordinating with the Town of Betterton, the Environmental Operations Division, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Police and other public agencies and private residents to address citizen concerns about perceived over-usage and safety at Betterton Beach and the Betterton boat ramp.
- Developing a multi-phase comprehensive master plan that identifies a 10+ year plan for Turner’s Park that includes rehabilitation of the historic structures located at the park - the Granary and the Lathim House. Explore partnerships with historic preservation organizations to complete this project. With its proximity to the Sassafras NRMA, this park has the potential to be a destination that attracts visitors to the County and enhances the lives of County residents.

## C. State of Maryland Initiatives

### 1. Economic Impact

The 2018 Kent County Comprehensive Plan indicates that developing recreation and tourism drivers is a County goal, while still protecting the rural nature of the County.

In 2022 the County Commissioners adopted the [2022 Kent County Economic Development and Tourism Strategic Plan](#) which identifies tourism as a key strategy for the County in their future efforts. Kent County relies on its pastoral beauty and access to the natural world as primary in attracting both short-term visitors and those looking to purchase a second home or relocate. Retail trade is among the top five industry





sectors for the county according to data in the strategic plan. This industry relies on the purchasing power of residents and visitors. In December 2019, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Department of Commerce released the [Maryland Outdoor Recreation Economic Commission Final Report](#), which resulted in the creation of the Governor's Office of Outdoor Recreation in September 2021. This report found that outdoor recreation in Maryland is an economic engine. Kent County's water access, pastoral landscapes, and various recreation opportunities make Kent County a potential destination for outdoor recreation enthusiasts. In the last Statewide survey of residents regarding outdoor recreation participation, completed in 2018 as part of the [2019 – 2023 Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan](#), respondents identified their favorite activities as walking, hiking, biking, playgrounds, team sports, running/jogging. This is similar to the finding in the 2021 Kent County Community Survey which identified water and shoreline activities, walking, hiking, biking, picnicking and playing on playgrounds as favored activities among survey participants.

The most recent Statewide economic impact study of parks was completed in 2010. The [2010 Maryland State Parks Economic Impact and Visitor Study](#) surveyed approximately 3,400 Maryland State Park visitors, including visitors to Tuckahoe and Martinak State Parks. Respondents at the time ranked hiking/walking as the most popular activity in the State parks. This report study also identified that for every \$1 the State invests in State parks, \$29.27 is generated in economic activity.

The study demonstrated the substantial economic benefit of State parks by gathering data on spending by park visitors within the communities outside the park. Seventy percent of spending impacts were found to be concentrated within a 20-minute drive of parks. Statewide, the average daily spending outside of the park was \$37 per person for day visitors and \$53 per person for overnight visitors.

While County-specific information was not provided and Kent County does not have a State park, extrapolating from the survey results indicated that parks in the Eastern Region, in which Kent is a part, resulted in \$82 per person for day visitors and \$61 per person for overnight spending. It is important to note however that in addition to Kent County, the Eastern Region includes the beach areas of Wicomico County. As home to Eastern Neck Wildlife Refuge, Sassafra NRMA, and 30 public water access points, Kent is situated to capitalize on outdoor recreation revenue opportunities.

## ***2. Project Green Classrooms (Children in Nature)***

In 2017, through executive order, Governor Larry Hogan created Project Green Classroom (PGC) building on the State's "Children in Nature" initiative begun in 2008, through a partnership of several State and private agencies, including the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Education, and Natural Resources. The goals of the initiative are to ensure that Maryland's youth experience, understand, and learn to conserve the natural environment and to promote outdoor activities and environmental education in schools, communities and public lands.

Within its [2021 Progress Report and Recommendations](#), PGC has three focus areas:

1. Supporting environmental literacy programs in schools;
2. Increasing access to nearby nature; and
3. Promoting the use of the outdoors for learning, discovery, healthy play and career exploration.

In Kent County, there are many opportunities to support this initiative. As indicated later in this chapter in the 2022-2027 Goals, Kent County Parks & Recreation will be focused on increasing involvement in partnerships with other community stakeholders to expand youth involvement in the environment and natural world. Engaging with the natural environment has been found to improve physical health, mental health, and academic outcomes for children and youth

## D. National Trends in Outdoor Program Participation and Organized Youth Sports

By participation, the most popular outdoor activities nationally are running, hiking, fishing, biking and camping. According to the [2020 Outdoor Participation Report](#) published by the Outdoor Foundation, in 2020, 53% of Americans age 6+ participated in outdoor recreation activity at least once, the highest participation rate on record. The COVID-19 pandemic has



increased outdoor recreation to its highest level ever. Participation in outdoor activities had already been trending up prior to the shutdown, increasing 3% annually over the past three years. While participation overall has increased, the frequency of participation has continued to fall. Whites still participate in outdoor activities far more than other races. Three in four outdoor participants (75%) are White as compared to 60% of the American population. Participation in outdoor activities among children ages 6 to 17 continues to trend down, on average children spent time in outdoor activities 77 times in 2020 compared to 91 in 2012.

According to the [Youth Sports Facts: Participation Rates — The Aspen Institute Project Play](#), 61% of children ages 6 - 12 played some team sport at least casually. However, the percentage of children who participated on a regular basis has continued to fall from 41.4% in 2012 to 38.1% in 2019. Before the COVID-19 shutdown, there had been participation gains in a number of sports. Baseball after a significant decline was up 6% with its highest rate since 2011. Soccer was up 3%. Tackle football, after years of drops in participation over concussion



concerns, increased participation 5%. Children from higher income families continue to be more likely to play organized sports. There was a 21.6% difference in participation between children from households with incomes under \$25,000 as compared with households with incomes above \$100,000 during 2019. This gap has continued to widen since 2012 when it was 15 points.

The transition from elementary to middle school has been a turning point in youth sports participation for years. In 2019, significant decreases in participation occurred in baseball, soccer, gymnastics, and basketball between ages 11 and 13. Sports that experienced minimal increases at the elementary to middle school junction included wrestling, field hockey and tennis.



One additional consideration in the report indicates trend changes may occur with COVID-19 with a shift to more outdoor individualized (cycling/hiking) or smaller team sports tennis/pickleball because it is easier to accommodate social distancing,

A 2016 Social Issues in Sports found that team sports participation peaks at age 11, and many participants drop out of the sports programs before high school. Possible causes cited include the stress on high performance that translates into longer hours of practice and greater specialization in one sport; expenses for training, traveling teams, sports camps, and equipment; injuries; lack of training for youth coaches; and earlier starts in youth sports, leading to boredom with a sport after several years.

The Aspen Institute [State of Play 2020](#) report includes recommendations for stakeholders in youth sports. It calls on community recreation groups and local recreation providers to “proactively build programs that represent its diversity.” The authors suggest allocating free/reduced roster spots or facility space based on Free and Reduced Meal (FaRM) rates within communities. In 2021 in Kent County, 66% % of school age youth were eligible for free or reduced meals.



Additionally, the authors suggest ensuring that funding of open space development supports the development of parks and recreation spaces that are open and accessible to all youth, carefully taking into consideration not only proximity but also equity. Finally, they encourage a collective impact model in designing community sports and recreation opportunities for youth that engage the entire community.

## 5. Level of Service Analysis

### A. Proximity Analysis

This section evaluates the extent to which residents in all areas of Kent County have access to parks and recreation facilities. It examines whether parks and recreation facilities are concentrated in a few areas of the County or in a few towns, and whether the facilities support the County's land use policies.

Maps II-5, II-6, II-7, and II-8 show the location of four types of park facilities within the County that are important in providing access to nature and access to recreational sports leagues. A five-mile radius is shown around each location. Map II-5 indicates picnic areas are well-distributed. Trails, the feature that per the community engagement survey and focus groups are the most frequently used and most desired, are shown on Map II-6 and demonstrate that trails are well-distributed across each region of the County with the exception of in or near the towns of Rock Hall in the south eastern part of the county and Millington in the northwestern part. Eastern Neck Island, which offers several trail options, is located 6 miles from Rock Hall. Millington Natural Resource Management Area offers hiking opportunities however it does not have any formal trails. Populations in both of these areas of the County are relatively low with approximately 74 people per square mile in each of these areas. Both towns lost population between 2010 and 2020. It is also important to note that the trails available across the County are relatively short and survey respondents and focus group participants expressed desire for longer trails. Map III-7 shows locations of shoreline access or boat ramps, features that are important to enhance appreciation of nature and of the County's natural environment. These maps, in conjunction with Maps II-1 through II- 4 above, illustrate that the County has a well-distributed system of park land.

Pedestrian access to local parks is very important within the municipalities. Maps II-10 through II-14 show that each town has neighborhood parks - and often community parks - accessible within a ½ mile. What these maps do not demonstrate is that other barriers which may exist, including lack of sidewalks or safe shoulders along roadways. This is further discussed in the Park Equity section of this Plan.

Maps II-1 through II-4, which show park and recreation facilities by type, lead to the following observations:

- Regional facilities: Kent County's two parks identified as regional parks offer different features. Worton Park & Kent County Community Center is located in the middle of the County and adjacent to Kent County High School. The majority of youth and adult recreational team sports (football, soccer, field hockey, baseball and softball) take place at this complex. It is five miles from the center of Chestertown. For residents of other municipalities and population centers, driving distance ranges from 8-15 miles and 15 to 30 minutes. The other regional park, Turner's Creek, offers two short nature trails, picnicking areas, a boat ramp, pavilion, and access to passive recreation in a natural setting. It is also home to a National & Historic Tree Grove and shares a boundary with

the State's Sassafras NRMA. It is 11 miles from Chestertown and 21 miles from Rock Hall, with shorter distances to travel for residents in the areas around Betterton, Millington and Galena.

- Community parks: The six County-owned and maintained community parks are well-distributed and located in or near municipal centers. These include: Toal Park (Galena), Betterton Beach (Betterton), Edesville Park (outside Rock Hall); Bayside Landing Park & Pool (Rock Hall) and Millington Pool & Park (Millington). In addition, Chestertown has two community parks: Bailey Park and Wilmer Park. Rock Hall's Civic Center Park is also identified as a community park.



- Neighborhood parks are located in several municipalities as well: Rock Hall Ball Park and Ferry Park, Chestertown's Washington Park, Gateway Park, Fountain Park and Ajax Park, Galena Community Park, and Millington's Robvanary Park.

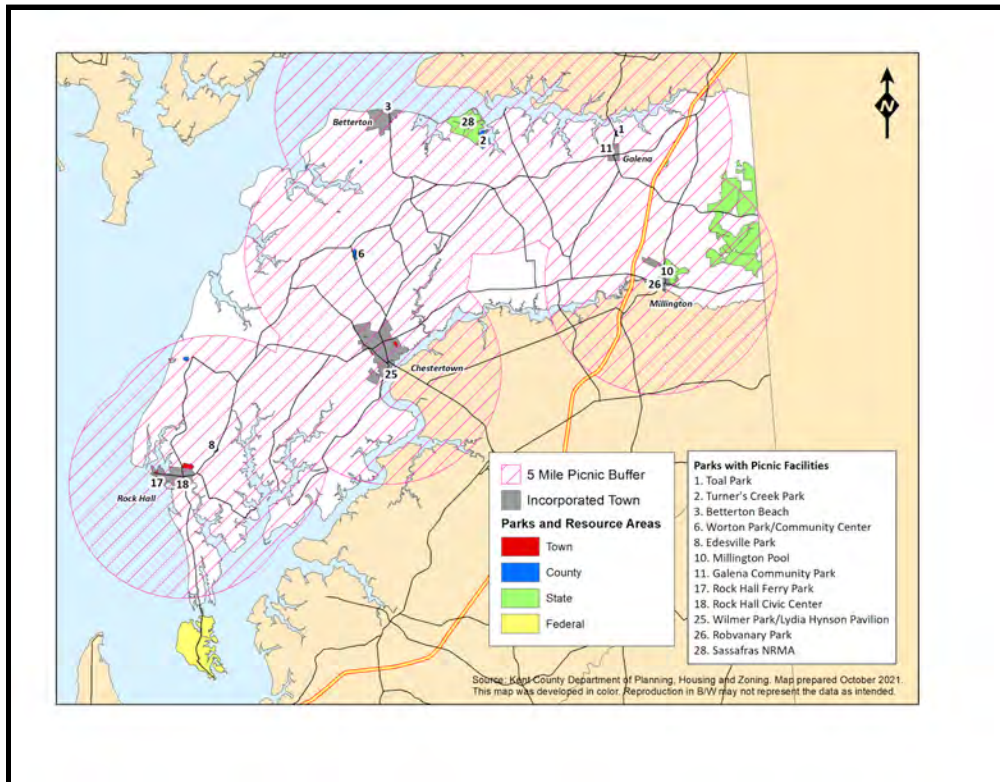


- With 30 public landings, water access points are also well-distributed along the County's waterways, providing access to the Chesapeake Bay, Sassafras River and many Creeks throughout the County.
- The majority of County and municipal parks offering active recreation are appropriately concentrated within or near the incorporated municipalities, in proximity to the largest share of population, while both County and SState green spaces for passive recreation are located in more remote areas of the County, for example, Turner's Creek Park and Sassafras NRMA, and Still Pond Station Park.

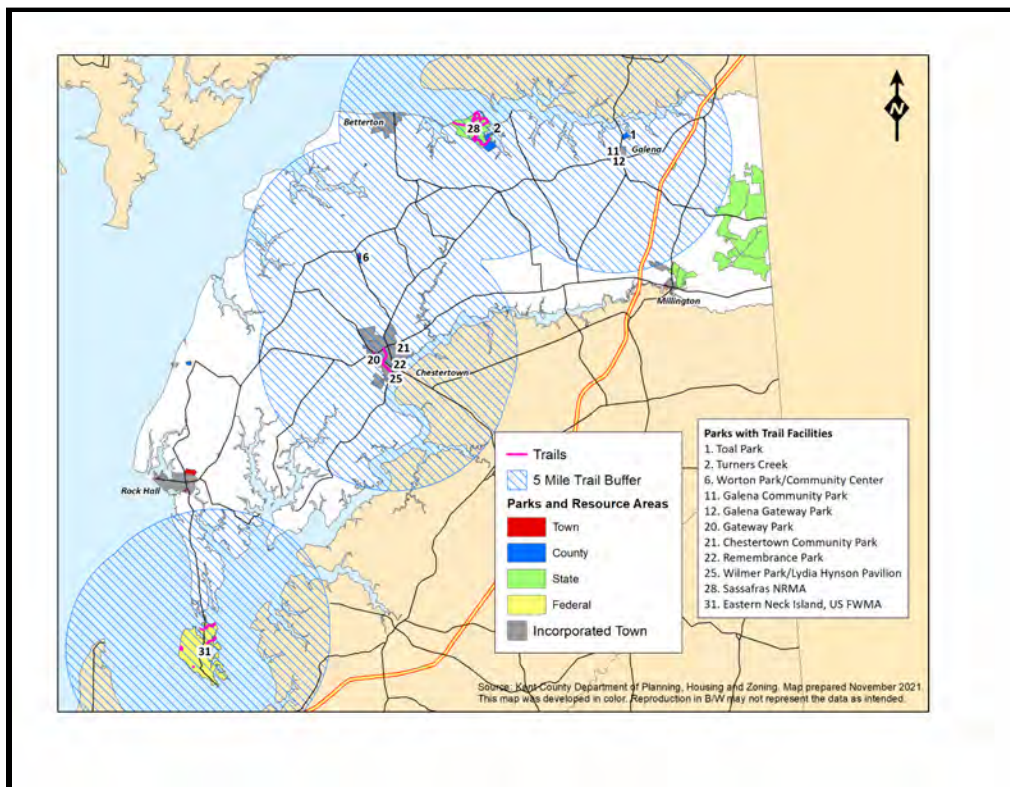
- County school sites provide additional outdoor play space and indoor space for recreation programs throughout the County. KCPR maintains a Memorandum of Understanding with Kent County Public Schools for priority use of school facilities. Increased opportunities for communities to access school facilities during non-school hours would expand access to recreation for many youth and families who may not be able to access the Community Center complex in Worton due to distance and transportation limitations.



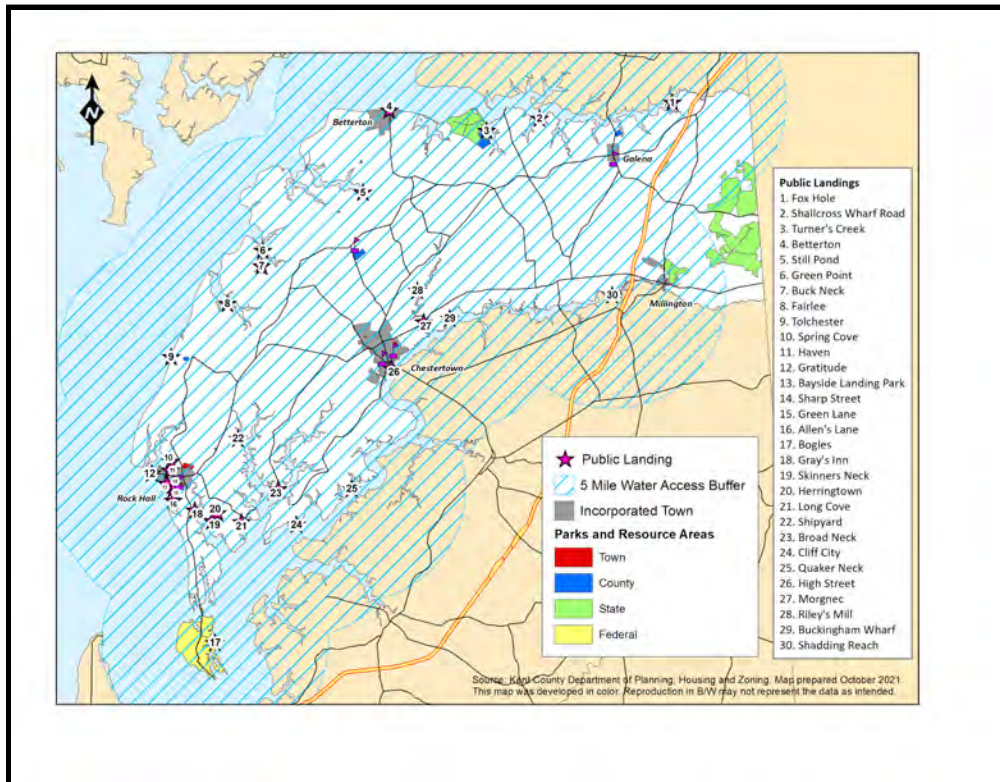
## Map II-5 Areas within Five Miles of Recreation Facilities with Picnic Areas



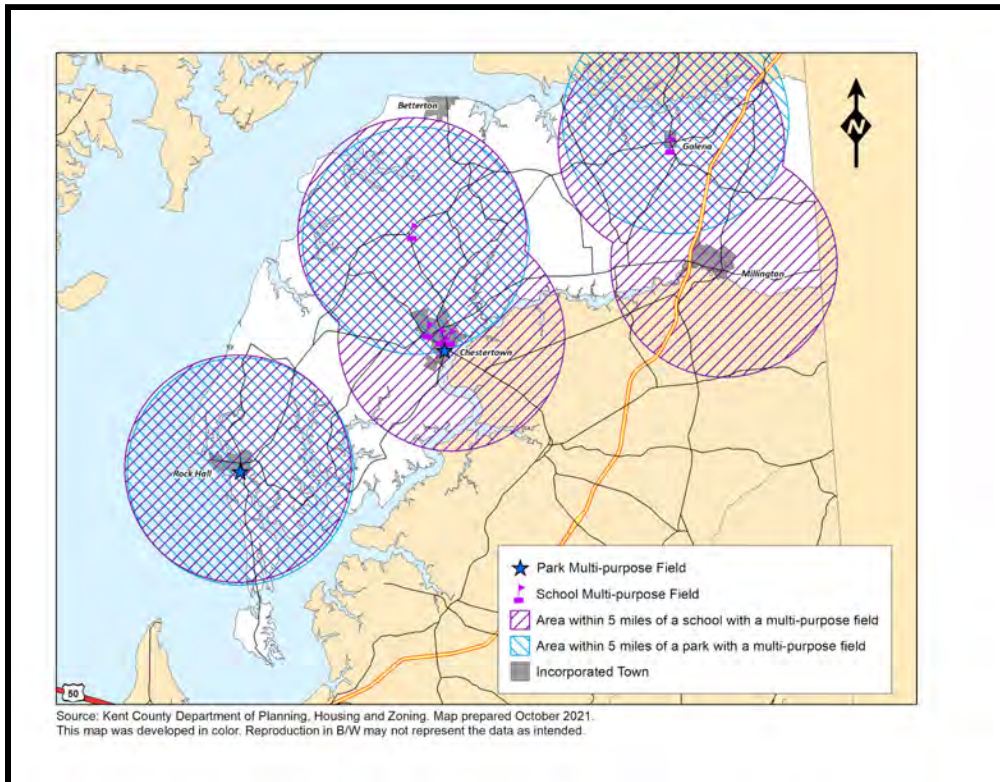
## Map II-6 Areas within Five Miles of Recreation Facilities with Trails



**Map II-7 Areas within Five Miles of Public Water Access Locations**



**Map II-8 Areas within Five Miles of Multipurpose Fields Locations**



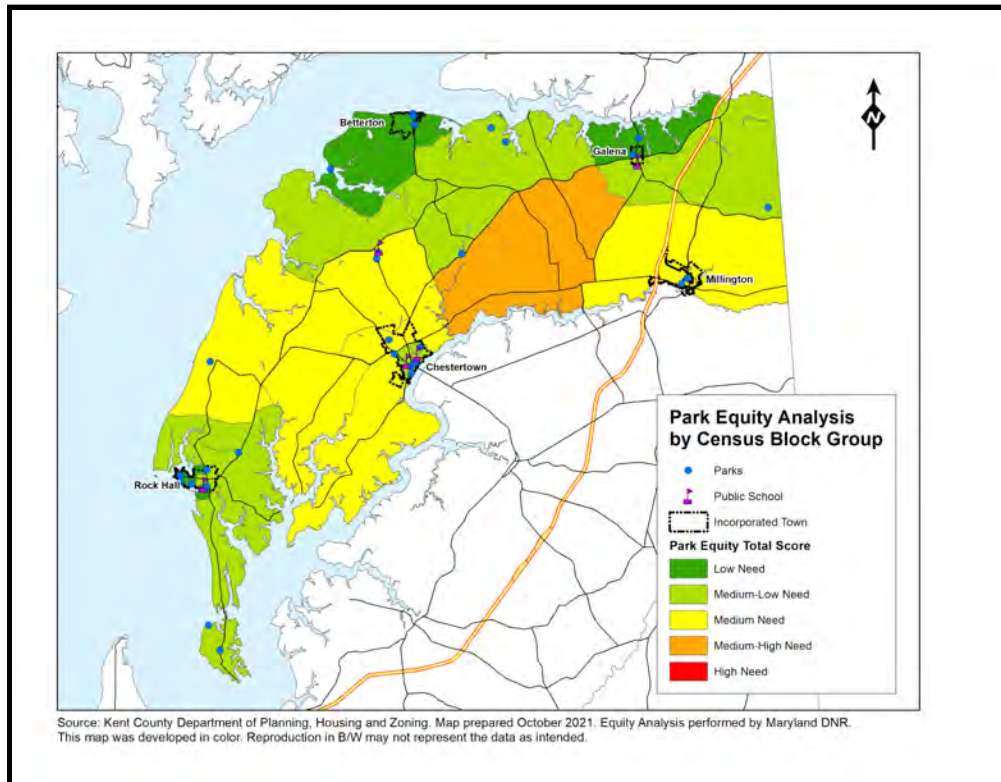
## B. Park Equity Analysis

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources has provided a tool to assist in the evaluation of park land needs. The “Park Equity Analysis” uses Census data in conjunction with mapped GIS layers showing State and local parks to prioritize park land needs based on four factors:

- Concentration of children under age 17;
- Concentration of older adults;
- Concentration of the population with incomes below the poverty threshold; and
- Population density.

Using the Park Equity Mapper, Map II-9 demonstrates that overall, the County has only one significant area of medium/high need and two areas with medium need. Parks are well-distributed and primarily located in or near municipalities. The areas indicated as medium-high need on Map II-9 is located in a sparsely populated area of the county and is also served by Worton Park and Community Center, located at the center of the county and adjacent to Kent County High School. With a shrinking population and land planning that locates any new growth in or near existing municipalities and population centers there is no current need for additional park land acquisition in these low to medium need areas. Parks are well distributed within the existing municipalities.

### Map II-9 Park Equity in Kent County

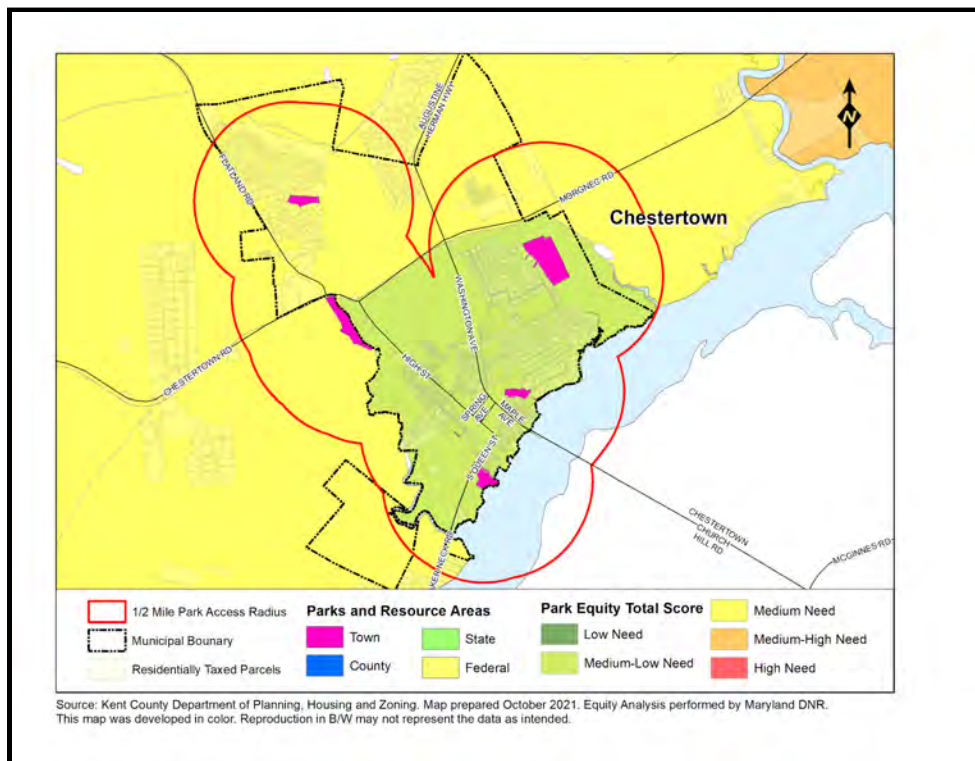




The results of the analysis draw attention to Chestertown, which is considered to be a medium low to medium need area. (See Map II-10) By proximity, Chestertown's parks are well-distributed with six parks located throughout its municipal area. At least one park is accessible within a ½ mile walk of any point in the town. Ajax Park and Gateway Park are located on the Gilchrest Rail Trail, a rail-to-trail project that now extends from what was an old train station near Wilmer Park to Morgnec Road/SR 291. Another section of the trail will be completed in 2022, across Morgnec Road and another ¼ mile to Foxley Manor. There is interest in extending the inactive rail tracks that continue out of Chestertown to Worton. This connector provides safe access to parks for town residents. Additionally, housing developments along Flatland Road also have safe access to reach Bailey Park.

Chestertown has had several controversial park projects in the last year that could be equity related. Currently, the only playground on the Cannon Street side of Chestertown is a pocket park that includes a small one-hoop basketball court, an outdated piece of climbing equipment and a swingset. There has been considerable community engagement about the park's future, with one faction wishing to replace the small basketball and playground areas with a larger full basketball court and another faction wishing to see the primary use of the park be a playground for children and families with a smaller court surface and one hoop. There is a full-size basketball court at Gateway Park located about a ½ mile from Ajax and accessible by walking or biking on the Gilchrest Trail. An earlier version of a larger (non-regulation) two-hoop basketball court at Ajax was a community recreation and social meeting place for Chestertown's Black residents for many years and has significant historic perspective. After scheduled rehab, Ajax will retain a basketball court and updated playground.

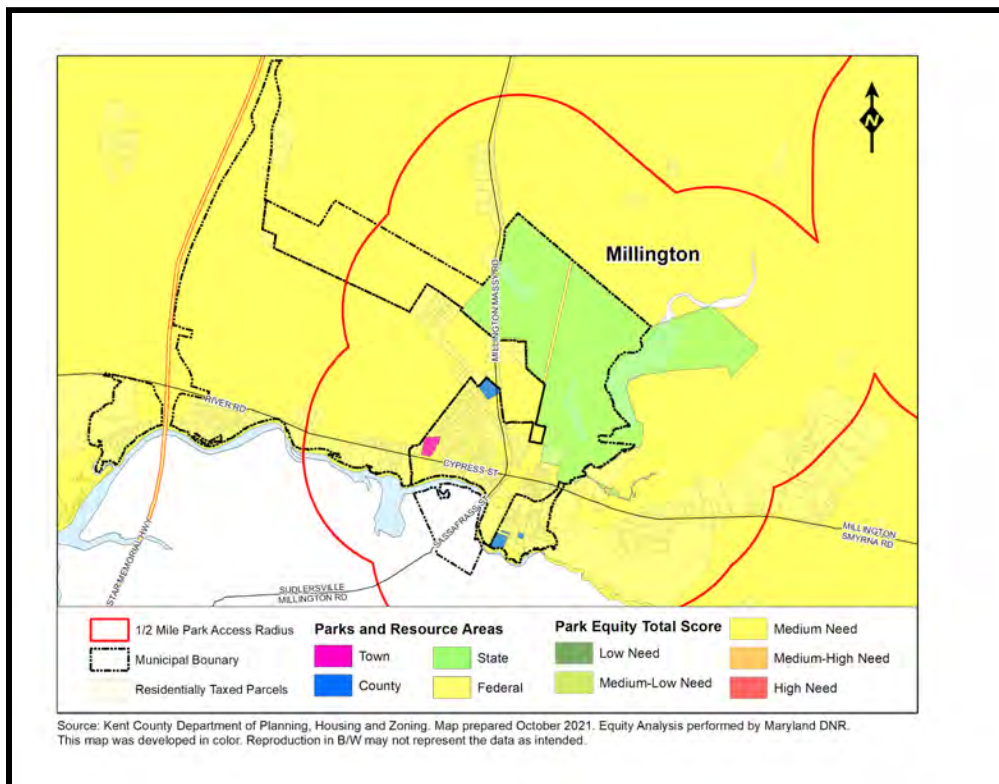
**Map II-10 Park Equity in Chestertown**



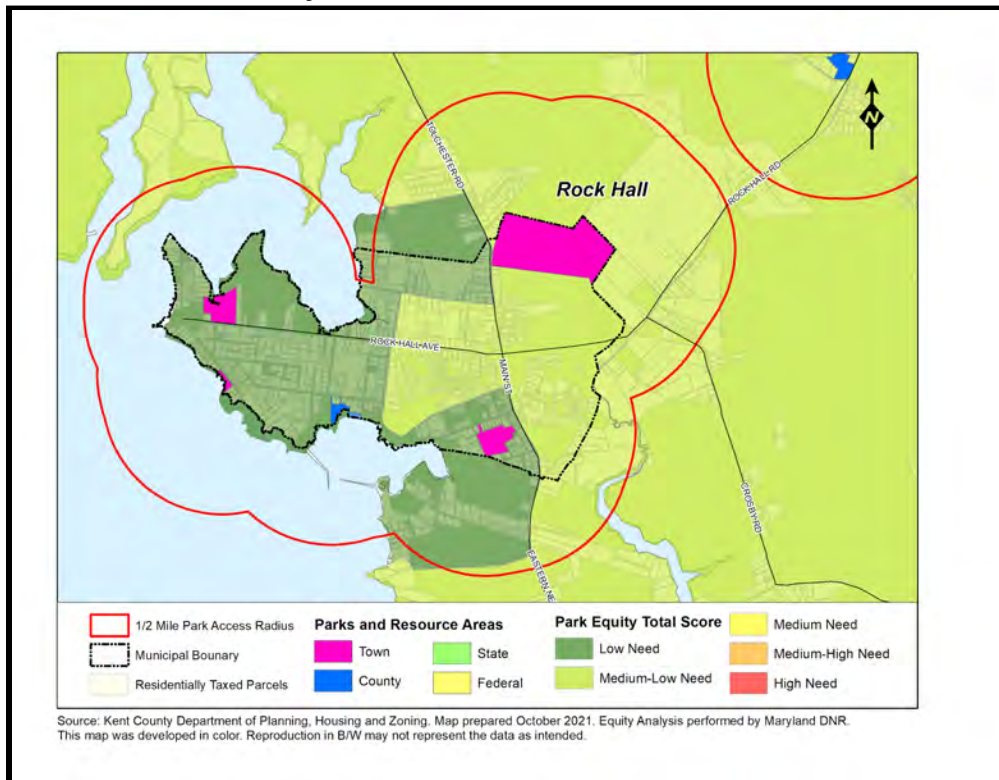
Wilmer Park, often considered a destination park, has a metal installation that is both a piece for art and play, but the park does not include any traditional playground equipment. Residents are split on whether the addition of a playground is appropriate for the park, with homeowners along the park boundary concerned that a playground detracts from the other parks usages. At both the Chestertown focus group and in written comments on the community survey, some participants indicated that a playground would enhance the attractiveness of the park to visitors as well as provide a playground for residents within walking distance. Chestertown has secured State Community Parks and Playground funding for the playground installation. Wilmer Park is well situated along the shoreline of the Sassafras River, however sidewalks are not consistent between downtown Chestertown and the park, and there are areas where there is no sidewalk along routes to access points into the park. Parks within Chestertown are well maintained.

Rock Hall and Millington are both located within medium-medium-low need areas. (See Maps II-11 and II-12). Both towns have neighborhood parks with varied and well-maintained features which are accessible within ½ mile of the majority of residents via sidewalks. Both of these communities also have access to a County park with a public outdoor swimming pool. However, neither pool opened in summer 2021 due to a shortage of lifeguards. The only pool to open in the County was the community pool at the Community Center and Worton Park complex. This pool has limited accessibility without access to transportation.

### Map II-11 Park Equity in Millington

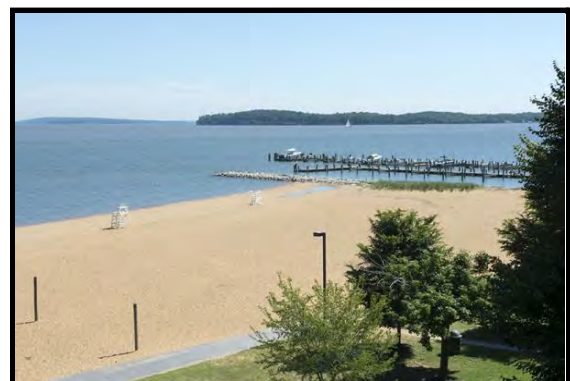


## Map II-12 Park Equity in Rock Hall

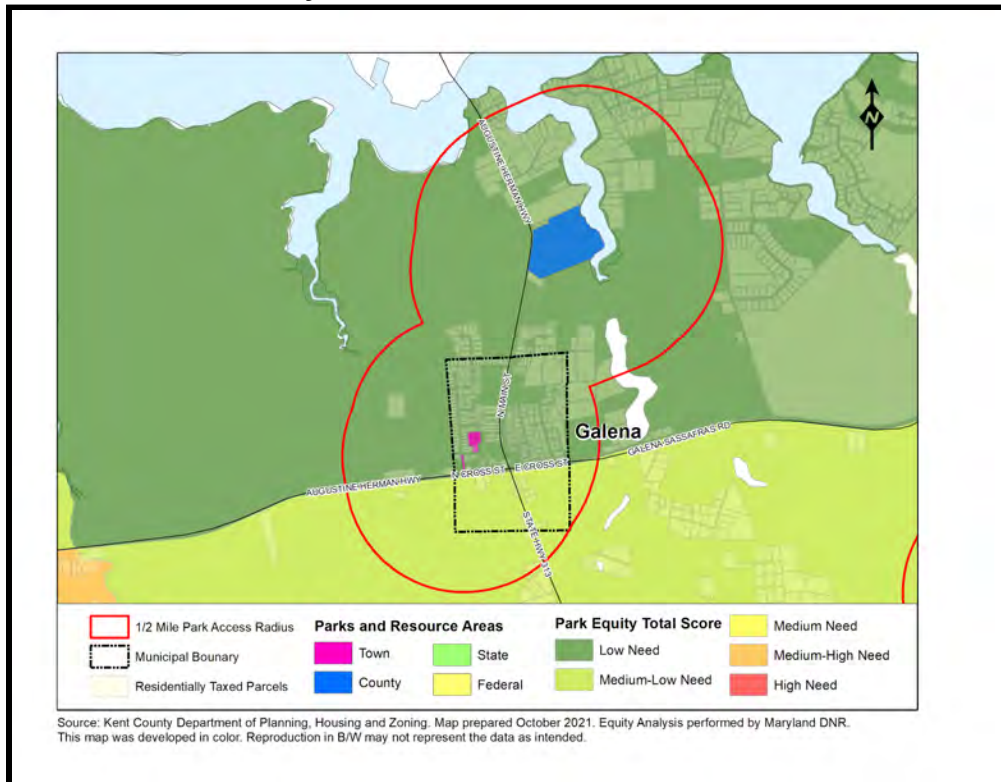


Galena and Betterton (See Maps II-13 and II-14) are both located in low need to medium-low need areas of the County. Galena has recently completed a Community Parks & Playground rehabilitation at Galena Park, which is centrally located and within 1/2 mile walking distance of all areas of the municipal residences. Additionally, town staff and elected officials are currently working to develop a phased in Safe Routes project that will improve safe walking accessibility within the town limits to connect

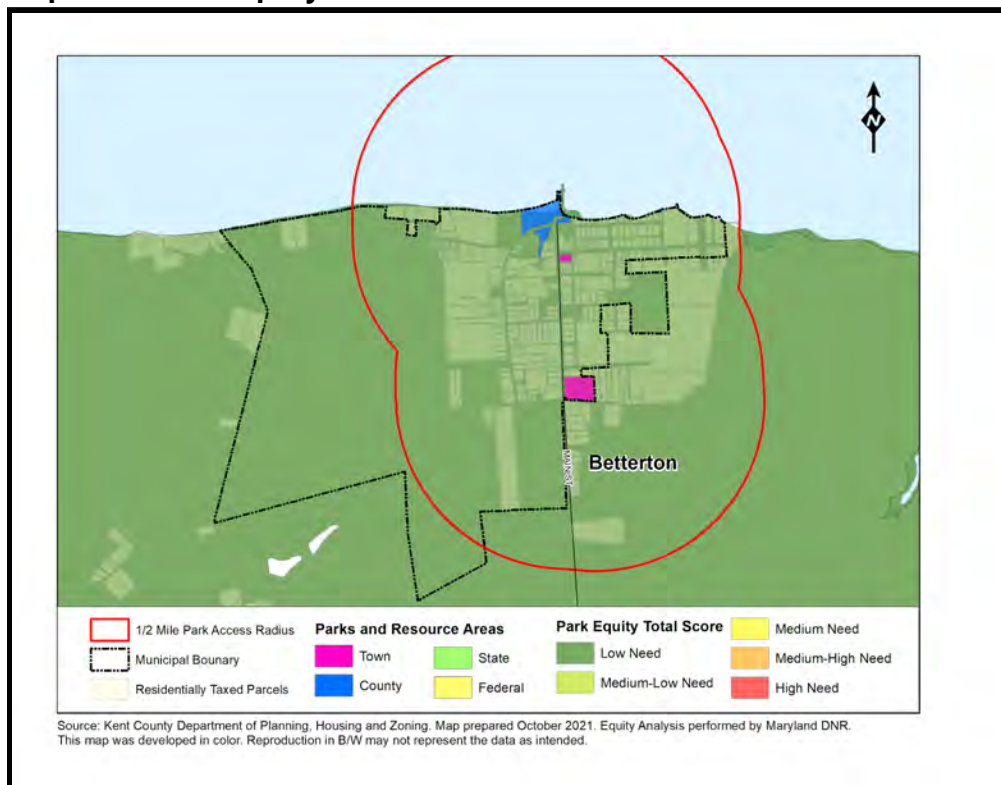
various key community locations. While still in very preliminary planning stages, this safe walking route structure could potentially connect to Toal Park, a larger community park less than a mile from Galena's downtown. Betterton also provides residents with access to town parks within close proximity.



**Map II-13 Park Equity in Galena**



**Map II-14 Park Equity in Betterton**



In reviewing the maps of the County, it is clear that there is a gap in accessible open space/recreation opportunities in the central/Western part of the County, however population density in these areas is low as well.

### **C. Other Equity Considerations**

Worton Park & Kent County Community Center are located on the edge of a medium-high need - medium-low need area. (See Map 11-9) The Community Center was opened in 2010 in response to County-wide resident desire for indoor community recreation space. Located next to Kent County High School, it is an after school community hub for youth and the primary location for youth and adult sports leagues. However, its use relies heavily on access by private transportation and therefore has the potential to create disparities for families and youth from lower economic groups who do not have reliable transportation.

Overall, the location of other County parks and pool facilities in municipalities as well as municipal park locations, provides a good balance of equity to all Kent County citizens. KCPR could also consider utilizing its parks and open spaces to promote opportunities for community building. For the past several years, a group called Kent Social Action Committee for Racial Justice has been working to raise awareness and address disparities within the County. Stakeholder discussions about community controversy over the development projects at Ajax Park and Wilmer Park could be connected to equity related to race and class. Generally, open spaces play a critical role in providing space for communities to come together and both KCPR and municipalities have an opportunity to promote the use of its parks as places to build community.

## **6. Goals & Objectives for Parks & Recreation**

### **A. County Goals**

Kent County is committed to developing its parks and recreation system in a manner that supports and reinforces the County's vision to preserve its historic and cultural traditions, high quality of life and the well-being of its citizens, as established in the policies of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. Kent County's network of parks and open space provides a variety of public parks and facilities including open spaces for passive recreation and enjoyment of the natural world as well as access to fields and other recreational amenities to meet the active recreational needs of the County's residents. Goals for 2022 and beyond focus on continuing to provide quality fields, outdoor courts, and pools for children, youth and adults to participate in active play that improves well-being both physically and mentally. Additionally, maintaining access to natural environments provides residents and visitors with opportunities to interact with the natural world and experience the wonders of the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries and shorelines, as well as forestland and open fields. In addition to providing residents with important access to the outdoors and physical activity, Kent County's parks and recreation spaces are attractive to visitors. Conservation and agriculturally based tourism have emerged as an important economic driver for the County.

## B. Progress Towards 2017 Goals & Objectives

The goals and objectives for recreation and parks programming and facilities, described below, support the Department’s Mission Statement and are reflected in the most recent Kent County Comprehensive Plan. These guide the ongoing work of the Parks & Recreation Department and have been carried forward from the previous LPPRP with minor changes.

Over the past five years Kent County Parks & Recreation has worked toward the goals outlined in the 2017 plan. These goals were:

- Goal 1: Enhance existing and provide new recreational programs to meet the recreational needs of all County residents.
- Goal 2: Provide for the varied recreational needs and interests of citizens and visitors in Kent County by developing and enhancing parks and recreation facilities throughout the County.
- Goal 3: Enhance and promote the preservation and recreational use of public open space and natural resources.

Accomplishments since 2017 have focused on rehabilitation and enhancements in County parks and include progress as follows:

STATE Goal	Goals & Objectives Progress 2017-2021
1. Make a variety of quality recreational environments and opportunities readily available to all its citizens and thereby contribute to their physical and mental well-being.	<p>Kent County made progress toward State Goals with continued provision of access to quality recreational programs through the Recreation Division and capital improvements. The following rehabilitation and enhancements were made at County Parks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● video surveillance systems at Bayside Landing Park &amp; Pool, Betterton Beach Park, Millington Park &amp; Pool and Worton Park.</li> <li>● maintenance facility, ball diamond, additional parking spaces, and picnic tables at Worton Park</li> <li>● pavilion, playground, basketball court and trail completed at Washington Park within the town limits of Chestertown.</li> <li>● Created a Concept Plan for Still Pond Park that includes picnic pavilion, restroom and playground.</li> </ul> <p>The distribution of parks throughout the County and the availability of neighborhood and community parks in municipalities provides County residents with access to parks and open space. Kent County Commissioners voted to utilize approximately half of its Local Parks and Playground Infrastructure Grant funds to invest in parks improvements in Chestertown, Betterton and Rock Hall, as well as several projects in County-owned parks.</p> <p>More than 85% of Kent County land is located in an Agriculturally Zoned District and is protected from development. Between 2017 and 2021 no additional acres were added to the inventory of protected lands..</p>
2. Recognize and strategically use parks and recreation facilities as amenities to make communities, counties, and the State more desirable places to live, work, play and visit.	
3. Use State investment in parks, recreation and open space to complement and mutually support the broader goals and objectives of local comprehensive/master plans.	
4. To the greatest degree feasible, ensure that recreational land and facilities for local populations are conveniently located relative to population centers, are accessible without reliance on the automobile, and help to protect natural open spaces and resources.	
5. Complement infrastructure and other public investments and priorities in existing communities and areas planned for growth through investment in neighborhood and community parks and facilities.	
6. Continue to protect recreational open space and resource lands at a rate that equals or exceeds the rate that land is developed at a Statewide level.	

## **C. 2022 - 2027 Goals**

In 2022, Kent County's goals for parks and recreation remain consistent with the goals included in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. Strategies to continue to meet these goals have been modified and updated to reflect the information gathered in preparation for this Plan.

### **Goal 1: Enhance existing and provide new recreational programs to meet the recreational needs of all County residents. Strategies include:**

1. Promote cooperation among recreation-related agencies and community organizations to increase recreation opportunities throughout the County.
2. Increase use of County parks for outdoor recreation by facilitating activities in parks and open spaces.
3. Support youth recreational sports through provision of specialized clinic opportunities and technical assistance to youth sports organizational leadership.

### **Goal 2: Provide for the varied recreational needs and interests of citizens and visitors in Kent County by developing and enhancing parks and recreation facilities throughout the County. Strategies include:**

1. Promote multiple use of existing facilities to more effectively serve community needs.
2. Focus on development of recreation facilities in towns and villages in close proximity to population centers by supporting municipal efforts to expand and/or enhance their parks and facilities.
3. Focus on creating inviting parks and open spaces that are accessible for all.
4. Collaborate with the public and partner agencies to identify and develop longer land and water trail systems.

### **Goal 3: Enhance and promote the preservation and recreational use of public open space and natural resources. Strategies include:**

1. Coordinate development of public parks and open spaces with other natural resource protection programs within the County.
2. Improve public access to the Chesapeake and its tributaries by exploring opportunities to enhance public water access points with additional park features (i.e. picnic tables, benches, etc.) for scenic viewing, etc.
3. Develop parks and open space features and amenities in a manner that keeps pace with the changing needs in the demographics of the County population.
4. Meet regularly with municipal leadership to collaborate on future land use planning related to public recreation needs and opportunities.

### **Goal 4: Increase opportunities for youth to be actively engaged in their communities and the natural environment. Strategies include:**

1. Expand partnership with Kent County Public Schools and Kent County community based organizations to expand out-of-school programming opportunities.
2. Seek additional grant funding sources for afterschool and summer learning programs that promote environmental education and preservation.

3. Explore the opportunity to embed the Sassafras Environmental Education Center (SEEC) outdoor classroom/recreation program into KCPR program offerings.

**Goal 5: Recruit, retain and reward a workforce of committed, passionate parks and recreation professionals. Strategies include:**

1. Foster an environment that promotes each staff member to find their own work - home balance.
2. Promote a passion for recreation and parks while providing opportunities to enhance workplace skills.
3. Provide high quality professional development, training and educational opportunities for all staff.

**D. Alignment with State Goals**

The State’s goals for recreation, parks, and open space complement and provide guidance to the County’s recreation goals. The State goals are listed below in Table II-1. County goals and objectives complement State goals as well as incorporate the input of County residents and stakeholders.

**Table II-1. State Goals and Complementary County Goals**

State Goal	Complementary County Goals and Objectives
1. Make a variety of quality recreational environments and opportunities readily available to all its citizens and thereby contribute to their physical and mental well-being.	Goal 1: Enhance existing and provide new recreational programs to meet the recreational needs of all County residents.
2. Recognize and strategically use parks and recreation facilities as amenities to make communities, counties, and the State more desirable places to live, work, play and visit.	Goal 2: Provide for the varied recreational needs and interests of citizens and visitors in Kent County by developing and enhancing parks and recreation facilities throughout the County.
3. Use State investment in parks, recreation and open space to complement and mutually support the broader goals and objectives of local comprehensive/master plans.	Goal 3: Enhance and promote the preservation and recreational use of public open space and natural resources.
4. To the greatest degree feasible, ensure that recreational land and facilities for local populations are conveniently located relative to population centers, are accessible without reliance on the automobile, and help to protect natural open spaces and resources.	Goal 4: Increase opportunities for youth to be actively engaged in their communities and the natural environment.
5. Complement infrastructure and other public investments and priorities in existing communities and areas planned for growth through investment in neighborhood and community parks and facilities.	Goal 5: Recruit, retain and reward a workforce of committed, passionate parks and recreation professionals.
6. Continue to protect recreational open space and resource lands at a rate that equals or exceeds the rate that land is developed at a Statewide level.	



## 7. County Implementation Program

This section describes the framework in which Kent County plans, acquires, develops, and operates recreation and parks facilities and open space, including sources of funding.

### A. Organizational Structure

#### ***1. Parks and Recreation Advisory Board***

The Kent County Commissioners appoint a 10-member board to work in an advisory role with the Parks and Recreation Department on developing a comprehensive program of public recreation and parks. According to the ordinance/law establishing the Advisory Board, this Board, subject to budgetary policies, appropriations and approval of the County Commissioners, may initiate, adopt, direct or cause to be conducted or directed a program of public recreation in schools, parks or other lands or buildings, either publicly or privately owned. Further, it may develop, equip, operate, maintain and issue permits for use of any facilities made available to the Board and suggest to the County Commissioners charges where appropriate.

#### ***2. Parks & Recreation Division***

As noted earlier, the mission of the Kent County Department of Parks and Recreation (KCPR) is to create balanced opportunities for patrons to play, learn and grow through its programs and parks..

The Kent County Departments of Parks and Recreation and Public Works, jointly, are the major providers of public recreational spaces for citizens for active play. The Director of Parks and Recreation oversees the Recreation Division. Comprising eight full-time staff, the Recreation Division is responsible for coordinating and scheduling recreation programs and activities. The Director of Public Works oversees the Parks and Grounds Maintenance Division and its six full-time staff. The Maintenance Division is responsible for implementation of new development, rehabilitation and maintenance of all County parks and recreation facilities. The Directors act as liaisons between the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, the County Commissioners, and department staff.

The Parks and Grounds Maintenance Division is responsible for maintaining 12 County parks and three recreational facilities totaling 349 acres. These parks and facilities include playgrounds, athletic fields, ball diamonds, beaches, pools, natural areas, historic sites, forestry demonstration areas, picnic pavilions, restroom facilities, and other park amenities.

The Recreation Division is responsible for providing a comprehensive array of programs and activities for all citizens of the County. It facilitates youth sports programs and leagues, adult leagues, elementary after school programs at school recreation centers, and summer day camp programs. It also coordinates classes for all age groups, such as tumbling, dance, art, line dancing, swimming, certification courses, and fitness and exercise. In addition, adult drop-in programs, such as basketball, tennis, pickleball, and soccer, are organized by the Division. The

Recreation Division also staffs pool operations and lifeguarding at the three County pools and lifeguarding at Betterton Beach.

### 3. Incorporated Towns

Incorporated towns play an important role in providing parks, open space and recreation services for County residents. Nearly half the recreation land in the County lies within the incorporated towns of Betterton, Chestertown, Galena, Millington and Rockhall. Both the development and ongoing maintenance of municipal parks are coordinated through municipal government. Park development within these municipalities has occurred primarily through funding from the Community Parks and Playground program through the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and with support from each municipality’s capital budget. At times the County has partnered with town officials to accomplish parks development projects.

### 4. Other County, State, and Non-Governmental Organizations

The County Parks & Recreation division works closely with other County agencies, private organizations, individuals and State agencies to coordinate comprehensive access and support for parks, open space and recreation activities. Key partnerships include:

- Collaboration with the County Department of Public Works on both the ongoing maintenance and the capital reconstruction projects at established parks and facilities.
- Partnership with local community organizations such as Minary’s Dream Alliance, Echo Hill Outdoor School, Kent Cultural Alliance, Kent County Judy Center, and Boys & Girls Clubs of Cecil and Harford Counties.
- Coordination with volunteer youth sports organizations to provide broad access to County residents for recreational opportunities.

## B. Funding

The County funds its park and recreational programs from a variety of sources. The County’s total Fiscal Year 2022 operating budget for parks and recreation was approximately \$2M; approximately \$1.2 for the Recreation Division and \$800,000 for the Parks Division.

Traditionally, funding for capital and development projects has been based primarily on Program Open Space yearly allocations and the County’s required matching funds. The construction of future project funding options are anticipated through Program Open Space, additional State, federal and private funding opportunities, depending on the nature of projects. The County’s allocation from the Program Open

**Table II-8 Kent County Program Open Space Apportionments, FY 2012-2021**

Year	POS Apportionment
2012	\$ 69,667.00
2013	\$ 286,946.00
2014	\$ 156,036.00
2015	\$ 86,369.00
2016	\$ 72,204.00
2017	\$ 71,341.00
<b>TOTAL 2012-2017</b>	<b>\$ 742,563.00</b>
2018	\$ 122,393.00
2019	\$ 179,985.00
2020	\$ 161,940.00
2021	\$ 149,097.00
<b>TOTAL 2018-2021</b>	<b>\$ 613,415.00</b>

Space Grant program for 2018-2021 has been \$613,414. In addition, the County received a one-time Local Parks & Playground Infrastructure allocation of \$1 million in FY2022.

**Table II-9 Kent County Waterway Improvement Grant Funding, FY2012-2021**

Fiscal Year	Grant Funding
2012	\$ 299,289
2013	\$ 12,624
2014	\$ 8,022
2015	\$ 111,808
2016	\$ 85,405
2017	\$ 69,517
<b>TOTAL 2012-2017</b>	<b>\$ 586,665</b>
2018	\$ 7,200
2019	\$ 7,200
2020	\$ 485,767
2021	\$ 104,700
<b>TOTAL 2018-2021</b>	<b>\$ 604,867</b>

Public waterway access is managed by the Environmental Operations Division within the Department of Public Works. A number of the public waterway accesses/boat ramps are located in park locations and all public water access points enhance the both residents' and visitors' opportunities to experience Kents waterwayDs. These are supported through County general funding allocations and through Waterway Improvement funding. Total Waterway Improvement allocations for 2018-2021 is \$604,868.

The County also assists its municipalities in applying for funds from the Community Parks and Playgrounds program, a competitive State grant program that provides funds for development, improvement, or expansion of municipal parks. The towns of Chestertown, Rock Hall and Galena have received grants through this program in the past five years.

**1. Cost Estimates**

The program priorities through 2026 (Table II-5) include 10 County projects that would cost approximately \$1.63 million. Cost estimates are approximate and based on recent project and facility development and rehabilitation costs.

**2. County and State Funds**

The County expects to rely heavily on existing funding sources to meet recreation facility needs, especially Program Open Space and County capital budget funds. In the longer range projects included in Appendix C, the County also proposes to expand to other funding sources hitherto untapped, including working with the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, Historic Preservation funds, and other private, State and federal funding opportunities.

**3. Funding for Town Projects**

The County proposes within its goals and strategies for this LPPRP to improve and expand collaboration with municipalities, recognizing that municipal parks are destinations for all County residents and visitors. Municipal projects address a vital need in the County's network of parks and open spaces. KCPR will continue to work closely with the incorporated towns to support their efforts to secure and invest Community Parks and Playgrounds (CPP) funds to support rehabilitation of existing parks and open spaces within towns and will direct County Program Open Space funds toward County projects located in parks within town boundaries. This is important to the County goals, as the parks inside town limits are often the most easily accessible. Currently, Chestertown has a CPP grant for improvements at Wilmer Park and Betterton has an application pending for Betterton Community Park for FY23 funding.

#### **4. Diversifying Funding**

As noted above in section B, the County will also investigate new and varied funding sources to support ongoing park development. In particular, exploring preservation funding for the historic structures at Turner's Creek, State and federal transportation funds for projects like extension of the Gilcrest Trail from Chestertown to Worton and for safe routes to parks on the outskirts of towns like Toal Park, less than a mile from downtown Galena.

#### **5. Land Use Management Authority**

The Kent County Land Use Ordinance requires the set aside of open space at a rate of 1/10 acre per lot or dwelling unit at the time of the subdivision. If the land is not of significant quality or size for the purpose of providing parks and recreational facilities, a developer may be permitted to pay a fee-in-lieu. The rate of payment is currently set at \$250 per lot or dwelling unit. Currently, the fund contains approximately \$27K which can be used for park land acquisition or facility development. These requirements provide some limited funds (through the fee-in-lieu option) but are not likely to result in significant contributions to public recreation in the County as new development outside municipal boundaries is limited.

## **8. Capital Improvement and Acquisition Priorities**

### **A. Capital Projects**

Table II-5 outlines a program for development of parks and recreation facilities, including estimated costs. A five-year time frame is included in this table. For the longer capital improvement plan see Appendix C. Based both on spatial analysis of proximity to parks throughout the County and within municipalities, Kent's parks are well-distributed. Included in this spatial analysis was proximity of locations that offered the top parks and recreation features desired by residents as identified through both the community survey and focus groups. Top priority parks features (trails, multi-purpose/ball fields, and water access) as well as proximity to neighborhood and community parks within town limits, demonstrate that Kent County has an adequate inventory of parks and open spaces to meet the needs of its residents. Additional analysis using the Equity Mapper Tool demonstrates that Kent County and its municipalities provide equitable access to parks and open spaces. Community residents, through both completion of the on-line survey and in focus groups, indicated that park distribution is adequate, however features and amenities within parks are not. Therefore, Kent County's Parks & Recreation leadership have determined that Kent does not currently have a need to acquire additional parcels of land to meet need, but should invest its capital resources in developing (and in some instances re-developing) existing inventory.

**Table II-10 Kent County 2022 LPPRP CIP Priority Projects Based on Allocation Estimates through 2026**

Project	Location	Description of Land Preservation and Recreation Park Recommendations	Estimated Total Cost
Betterton Beach Pavilion Steps Replacement & Boardwalk Rehab	Betterton	Project included in FY22 POS, Approved by BPW 7/2021	\$ 175,000
Betterton Beach Pavilion Roof	Betterton	Project included in FY22 Local Park and Playground Infrastructure Grant - Replace deteriorated wood and shingles on the roof of the pavilion. Anticipated Completion: 2022	\$ 20,000
Betterton Beach	Betterton	Extend boardwalk to increase ADA accessibility to beach/sand/shoreline	\$ -
Still Pond Station Park Site Plan	Worton	Site Development/Concept Plan- Project included in FY22 POS, Approved by BPW 7/2021	\$ 30,000
Still Pond Station Park Development	Worton	Parking Lot, Pavilion, Playground and Restrooms	\$ -
Worton Park Enhancement	Worton	Project included in FY22 POS funding request. Replace the existing backstops on four of six ballfields, installing fencing for team benches, and replacing sideline fencing on one ballfield. Park benches will be installed around the existing walking path and at the playground area. Additionally, a digital messaging board to display notices, advise of field assignments and pavilion reservations will be installed. Anticipated Completion: 2022	\$ 210,000
Worton Park Enhancement	Worton	Project included in FY22 Local Park and Playground Infrastructure Grant. Install multi-purpose athletic field lighting on one field; Replace thirty year old playground equipment and swings with ADA accessible play equipment; Replace pavilion roof shingles; Replace concession stand roof shingles. Anticipated Completion: 2022	\$ 509,000
Worton Park	Worton	Second restroom facility (rear park); Second picnic pavilion (rear park). Dog park (rear park)? Rear park defined parking area. E Diamond Softball Field Lighting. Phase II Multi-purpose field lighting. Orem Field Lighting Upgrade. Resurface basketball courts, posts and backboards. Volleyball Court Rehab - lighting, quality sand. Tennis Court Resurfacing (tennis/pickleball lines).	\$ -
Toal Park	Galena	Project included in FY22 POS funding request. - Replace the existing backstop on the ballfield, installing fencing for team benches, and replacing sideline fencing. Park benches will also be installed at the playground area. Anticipated Completion: 2022	\$ 38,000
Toal Park Trail Rehab	Galena		\$ -

Turner's Creek Park	Kennedyville	Granary Preservation; Latham House Preservation, Restrooms Rehab, Remove wooden steps from pavilion to shoreline and install fencing to prevent future access to entry point. National and Historic Tree Grove Restoration. Nature trails signage rehab. Low ropes course. Disc golf course. Replace all existing signage, including Chesapeake Bay Gateways interpretative panels.	\$ -
Edesville Park Rehab	Rock Hall	Convert existing ball field to multi-purpose field. Convert grass volleyball court to sand court. Convert existing picnic shed to traditional pavilion. Rehab existing walking path, perimeter trail.	\$ -
Edesville Park Swings	Rock Hall	Project included in FY22 Local Park and Playground Infrastructure Grant - Install swings inside existing playground area. ADA handicap swing. Anticipated Completion: 2022	\$ 10,000
Bayside Landing Park & Pool Flooring	Rock Hall	Project included in FY22 Local Park and Playground Infrastructure Grant - Install slip proof flooring inside bath house restrooms. Anticipated Completion; 2022	\$ 15,000
Millington Pool Replastering	Millington	Replaster the pool. Anticipated Completion; 2022	\$ 45,000
Millington Pool Enhancement	Millington	Repave parking lot; Half basketball court rehab; Tennis court resurfacing (tennis/pickleball lines); Rehab picnic area - regrade grass / improve picnic surface areas, tree removal/trimming	\$ -
Community Center Pool	Worton	Replace underwater lights and replaster shallow end of pool; pool storage room shelving. Anticipated Completion; 2022	\$ 55,000
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$1,127,000</b>

**Table II-11 Kent County 2022 LPPRP CIP Projects Based through 2027 (based on Municipal Planning)**

Project	Location	Description of Land Preservation and Recreation Park Municipal Projects	Estimated Total Cost
Betterton Park	Betterton	Betterton Park - 6th Avenue - LPPRI Project underway to rehabilitate tennis courts and add pickleball lines. LPPRI Project - Anticipated Completion; 2022 CPP Proposal under review to replace basketball court (cost not included).	\$ 95,800
Rigby Walk		Walking path development. County is currently developing engineered plans related to critical areas protection. Town interested in further developing the walkway as an amenity for residents and visitors.	TBD
Planned acquisition of 30-acre property in town limits for mixed use		Preliminary concept plans include open space as well as residential housing, solar array.	\$ 550,000
Louisa Carpenter D'Andelot Park	Chestertown	Installation of park benches and concrete chess table. LPPRI Project - Anticipated Completion: 2022	\$ 5,000

Margo G. Bailey Community Park	Chestertown	Expansion of parking lot and addition of chess tables. LPPI Project - Anticipated Completion: 2022	\$ 46,000
Ajax Park		Rehabilitation of pocket park to include replacement of tot lot playground and swing set with ADA playground for young children. New 1/2 court basketball court. Completion TBD	\$ 75,000
Phillip G. Wilmer Park		Installation of playground, park benches and chess tables in this destination park. LPPI Project - Anticipated Completion: 2022	\$ 209,395
Gilchrest Rail to Trail		.3-mile extension of Gilchrest Rail Trail, the final section to be completed within town limits. To include 400 feet of fencing on both sides of the Trail where steep slopes require it. LPPI Project - Anticipated Completion: 2022	\$ 194,660
Galena Community Park	Galena	ShoreRivers will be submitting an application for a grant in December 2021n behalf of the Town. The project is to create bioswales for stormwater retention at the park. A new welcome sign will be installed in 2022.	\$ 1,000
Galena Gateway Park		Two new park signs will be added in the spring 2022. This is a dog friendly park. The cost of the signs were funded through DHCD Grant.	\$ 1,000
Galena Walkability Project		Safe Walking routes between parks and other destinations within the Town of Galena and continuing outside of town along Route 213 to Toal Park. A letter of Intent will be submitted before April 1, 2022 for approval from SHA.	TBD
Galena Walking Path		8 ft wide walking path around the perimeter of the school yard. Distance: 1,800 linear feet. Construction is estimated to begin in summer of 2022.	\$ 90,000
Robvinary Park	Millington		
Rock Hall Civic Center	Rock Hall	Drainage and Restroom Upgrades (LPPI Project) Anticipated Completion: 2022	\$ 250,200
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$ 948,265</b>

## B. Acreage Goals

Based on the community engagement, proximity, and equity analysis completed as a part of this planning process, Kent County has determined that it does not currently have any acquisition needs and will focus on development of existing properties within its inventory. Municipalities are also focusing efforts on development of existing properties, with the exception of Betterton which is in the preliminary phase of exploring a new property acquisition and development project that could potentially include green space/park development.

**Table II-12 Kent County 2017 Parks and Recreation Acreage Goals Updates**

Open Space and Parks and Recreational Land Goals Established in 2017	Type and Specific Location	Acreage Needed	Acreage Acquired
In 2017, Kent County did not have any acquisition goals. At the time the Plan was completed, according to the previous 30 acre/1,000 resident formula, Kent had met its acquisition goals and focused its efforts on capital improvement to properties in the County inventory.	---	0	---

**Table II-13 Kent County 2022 Land Acquisition Goals Plan**

Open Space and Parks and Recreational Land Goals 2022	Type and Specific Location	Acreage Needed	Plan for Meeting Need
With a shrinking population, particularly in specific areas of the County (Rock Hall and Millington) Kent County and its municipalities currently have adequate inventory of parks and open space that is well-distributed throughout the County. Overall Kent County has a shrinking population, and the county has a density of 74 residents/square mile. The populations of both of these communities fell between 2010 and 2020. Utilizing information gathered and considered through the Proximity and Equity Analyses of Kent County, combined with responses to the community engagement process, Kent County has met its acquisition goals and will be focusing its efforts on continued development/redevelopment of existing parks/open space. For details see narrative on this page of the Plan.	---	0	---

**C. Summary of Capital Priorities**

In summary, the short (five year) and longer term (ten year) capital project priorities are identified in Tables II-10 and II-11 as well as in Appendix C. Additionally, however, there are a number of projects that are not far enough along to be added to the Capital Improvement Plan but that there is merit in continuing to explore. These are included below, along with the larger projects included in Table II-10.

**1. Regional Parks**

- Still Pond State Master Plan and development of old Coast Guard Station property.
- Comprehensive Master Plan and phased completion of park development at Turner’s Creek.



- Continued enhancements at Worton Park complex to include both redevelopment and new development of features and amenities.

## **2. Water Access**

The Department of Parks & Recreation will explore how the Department can work with the County's Public Landings and Facilities Board, which is charged with regulating public water access, to leverage State Waterway Improvement grants with other resources to develop the shoreline at County-owned public water access points, particularly within or adjacent to public parks as potential destinations for public recreation. At this time these are not all included in the Capital Improvement Plan as exploration of joint development opportunities are still in the planning stage.

- Turner's Creek Park and Landing
- Still Pond Station Park
- Betterton Beach
- Other public water access locations that offer shoreline recreation opportunities

## **3. Trails**

- Addition to trail system at Turner's Creek Park with the potential to connect to Sassafras NRMA trail system
- Work with DNR and other interested parties to continue to investigate continuation of the Gilcrest Trail, the additional four miles to Worton as well as other longer trail options
- Work with the Town of Galena and other interested State agencies to explore the development of a safe walking/biking access trail along Route 213 between Galena and Georgetown.

## **4. Unique Special Use Features**

- Identify location, develop master plan, and complete construction of a Skate/BMX Park at a to be identified location either in the County or through partnership in one of the municipalities
- Addition of a Dog Park at a County park location to be determined
- Extend the boardwalk at Betterton Beach to provide more access for individuals with mobility constraints
- Preservation of historic buildings (Lathim House and the Granary) located at Turner's Creek Park

## **D. Operational Strategies**

This section addresses the capacity of the County to effectively maintain and operate the park system. These two sections are equally important; capital expansion must be balanced with the capacity to maintain operations, conditions and safety standards at all County parks and facilities. In developing the project priorities in Table II-10, consideration was given to:

- Developing the parks and recreation system in a manner that respects the rural nature of the County, incorporates good environmental stewardship practices that protect the land and waters of Kent County.
- Aligning with the County Goals and Objectives outlined in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan, which includes additional emphasis on the County assets that increase the numbers of visitors to Kent County and meeting the recreational needs of residents.
- Emphasis on addressing the priorities identified by residents who participated in the community engagement process.

### ***1. Department of Parks & Recreation***

Within the Parks & Recreation general operations and capital improvement project management, the December 2021 retirement of the County engineer is anticipated to have an impact on future operations and project planning. This position currently has supervisory responsibility for the development and implementation of capital projects, supervision of the Maintenance Supervisor, as well as the day-to-day operations of the Parks & Grounds Maintenance Division within the Department of Public Works. The County has had the position advertised since July 1, 2021 without attracting a qualified candidate to fill the position. The KCPR Director will work closely with DPW leadership to meet the immediate maintenance and operations demands and the long-term planning goals for parks and open space.

Over the past five years KCPR has undergone significant staff turnover within the Recreation Division and anticipates additional changes over the next few years. In particular, the Recreation Division will be onboarding new staff into critical management positions: two Recreation Program Coordinators, two Facility Monitors, and two Administrative Specialists.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the recent and anticipated personnel, and the opening of the new 52,000 square foot YMCA in Chestertown are expected to continue to impact the operational direction of the Department. As evidenced in the goals, the Department will focus on enhancing partnerships with municipalities and community organizations to support affordable recreation opportunities for all ages throughout the County, with special emphasis on youth development and environmental education as well as physical activities.

### ***2. Coordination***

Because of the dispersed nature of recreation facility provision between the County, towns, State and federal agencies, the County will strive to take on an increasingly strong supportive leadership role with respect to recreation and parks with the continued development of

County-municipal partnerships. This will be integral to meeting the future needs of the County's residents – both those within and outside of municipal boundaries.

### **3. Towns**

This Plan proposes that the County develop both formal and informal partnerships with municipalities that enhance the County's and municipalities' commitment to work together to plan and develop future public parks and open space projects and opportunities.

### **4. Non-Governmental Sector**

KCPR has included a new goal for 2022-2027 to further support youth engagement by working with Kent County Public Schools and community based organizations as well as Kent County Public Schools to improve access to after school programs for young people. KCPR will pursue partnerships with KCPS, the Sultana Foundation, Echo Hill Outdoor School, Minary's Dream Alliance, Shore Rivers, Washington College, and more to further expand and enhance youth involvement in environmental education. This includes playing an active role in exploring keeping the Sassafras Environmental Education Center a viable youth development and environmental education opportunity for the County's young people.

### **5. Summary of Operational Action Items**

The planning process for this LPPRP has resulted in the development of a series of operational action items that can be undertaken by the Department of Recreation & Parks to enhance access to parks, open spaces and recreational services in Kent County and better serve its citizens. These action items are as follows:

- Implement data tracking measures for both recreation programs and park use to increase understanding of participation and park usage. Explore use of counters at park entrances to track usage. Include integration of an annual public satisfaction and needs assessment survey.
- Establish formal partnership agreements with the incorporated municipalities that define the working relationships between the County and the municipality as it relates to parks and open space development and management.
- Refine KCPR Recreation Division's role to include a larger outreach presence in the community and additional focus on collaboration with towns and community-based-organizations to expand resources for children, youth, families and individuals in Kent County.
- Expand KCPR's active participation on various County-wide initiatives that are working to improve the well-being of County residents.
- Exploration, including cost/benefit analysis, of reuniting the Parks & Grounds Maintenance Division of DPW and the Recreation Division under one County Department.

# Chapter III Natural Resources Conservation

## 1. Executive Summary

This chapter identifies Kent County's goals and strategies for natural resources and evaluates their effectiveness to achieve the State and County goals for protecting and conserving natural resource lands. Natural resource lands contain forest, wetlands, floodplains, stream buffers, and other sensitive natural features that form the County's character.

Kent County is blessed with a rich natural resource base that sustains the County's rural character as well as the physical attractiveness of the developed areas, while providing wildlife habitat, natural filtration for air and water pollution, and opportunities for resource-based recreation. These natural

resource lands also provide flood, erosion, and sediment control. Natural resource lands require few government services, provide opportunities for ecotourism, and help enhance property values. The County seeks to maintain and improve these natural resources through the practice of sustainability in its development regulations and policies and its own facilities and operations. This is achieved through the goals and strategies articulated in



the Comprehensive Plan; the regulations of the Land Use Ordinance; the Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP); the Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Adaptation Report; the Hazard Mitigation Plan; and the efforts of the Kent County Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Committee.

The hallmarks of Kent County are the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, good soils, rich marshlands, and a landscape teeming with wildlife. These resources are the foundation from which our local culture emerged. Today, they remain the foundation of Kent's economy and are the very essence of its character. These irreplaceable resources are the basis upon which we will continue to thrive and maintain our heritage. The 2018 Comprehensive Plan update identifies Kent County's natural resources as its most valuable asset. Through its County parks as well as State and federal green spaces, Kent County offers visitors and residents alike

continued access to the natural resource lands for the physical and mental health benefits of time spent in nature.

Kent County’s primary challenge in protecting natural resource lands is lack of funding for easement acquisitions. Eastern Shore Land Conservancy has continued to be committed to preserving land in the County and works with both the county and private landowners to leverage Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Funding (MALPF) and Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) funds to secure easements. The county’s plans, policies and zoning ordinances are designed to preserve its rural landscapes and way of life.

## 2. Natural Resource Land Inventory

**Table III-2 Inventory of Natural Resource Lands**

Site Name	Property Size (Acres)	Outdoor Recreation Amenities	Trails / Interpretive Trails	Water Access	Owned / Managed
Millington Wildlife Management Area (WMA); includes the 131-acre Massey Pond Heritage Conservation Fund (HCF) Site, and the 48-acre Golts Ponds HCF Site	3,943	Fishing; Hiking; Hunting	Yes	No	Wildlife & Heritage Service / Maryland Park Service
Sassafras Natural Resources Management Area (NRMA)	1,008	Picnicking; Knock's Folly Visitors Center; Hunting; Fishing; Youth Group Camping	Hiking; Mountain Biking; Equestrian Trail Riding	Yes	Maryland Park Service
Urieville Lake FMA	54	Boat Ramp; Fishing; Picnicking	N/A	Yes	Maryland4-2 DNR Fisheries Service
Cypress Branch Natural Resources Management Area (NRMA) [Big Mill Pond Public Fishing Area was transferred to the Cypress Creek NRMA]	314	Fishing	N/A	Yes	Maryland Park Service
Eastern Neck Island U.S. FWMA	2,284	Hunting; Fishing; Boat Launch; Wildlife Viewing	Yes	Yes	Federal
<b>STATE TOTAL</b>	<b>5,319</b>				
<b>STATE AND FEDERAL LANDS TOTAL</b>	<b>7,603</b>				

*Source: Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Fiscal Year 2016 DNR Owned Lands Acreage*

Kent County’s natural resource lands are all State lands and federal lands. They include 5,319 acres of State lands in four property parcels: Millington Wildlife Management Area is the largest parcel with 3,943 acres. It provides opportunities for fishing, hiking and hunting. Sassafras Natural Resources Management Area is a 1,008 acre parcel and is improved with the Knock’s Folly Visitors Center. It provides access to hunting, fishing, youth group camping, hiking, mountain biking and equestrian trail riding. Urieville Lake FMA offers a boat ramp, fishing and picnic area. The Cypress Branch Natural Resources Management Area is open only for fishing.

Kent County is also home to the Eastern Neck Federal Wildlife Management Area. This 2,284 acre property is situated on the eastern flyway for many migrating birds. In particular it is known as a stop over for migrating Tundra Swans. In addition to opportunities to view birds and other wildlife, it provides a boat launch, short hiking trails, and fishing.

### 3. Natural Resource Land & Conservation Goals

This section discusses the interrelationship between the State's and County's goals for natural resource conservation. These goals carry over from the 2017 LPPRP and align with the 2018 update to the Comprehensive Plan. Kent County continues to support and promote natural resource land protection and conservation through the various means available.

#### A. State Goals for Natural Resource Land Conservation

- Identify, protect, and restore lands and waterways in Maryland that support important aquatic and terrestrial natural resources and ecological functions, through combined use of the following techniques:
  - Public land acquisition and stewardship;
  - Private land conservation easements and stewardship practices through purchased or donated easement programs;
  - Local land use management plans and procedures that conserve natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas and minimize impacts to resource lands when development occurs;
  - Support and incentives for resource-based economies that increase retention of forests, wetlands, or agricultural lands;
  - Avoidance of impacts on natural resources by publicly funded infrastructure development projects; and
  - Appropriate mitigation response, commensurate with the value of the affected resource.
- Focus conservation and restoration activities on priority areas, according to a strategic framework such as the Targeted Ecological Areas (TEAs) in GreenPrint (which is not to be confused with the former easement program also called GreenPrint).
- Conserve and restore species of concern and important habitat types that fall outside the green infrastructure (examples include: rock outcrops, karst systems, caves, shale barren communities, grasslands, shoreline beach and dune systems, mud flats, non-forested islands, etc.)
- Develop a more comprehensive inventory of natural resource lands and environmentally sensitive areas to assist State and local implementation programs.
- Assess the combined ability of State and local programs to:
  - Expand and connect forests, farmlands, and other natural lands as a network of contiguous green infrastructure;
  - Protect critical terrestrial and aquatic habitats, biological communities, and populations;
  - Manage watersheds in ways that protect, conserve, and restore stream corridors, riparian forest buffers, wetlands, floodplains, and aquifer recharge areas and their associated hydrologic and water quality functions;

- Adopt coordinated land and watershed management strategies that recognize the critical links between growth management and aquatic biodiversity and fisheries production; and
  - Support a productive forest land base and forest resource industry, emphasizing the economic viability of privately owned forestland.
- Establish measurable objectives for natural resource conservation and an integrated State/local strategy to achieve them through State and local implementation programs.

## **B. County Goals**

Kent County's Comprehensive Plan was adopted in April 2018. The County's Vision for the future as expressed in the Plan is to protect our environment and the County's inherent quality of life while facing growth and change. Many of the guiding principles support this vision including:

- Stewardship of our lands and waters is a universal ethic;
- Continue and reaffirm our commitment to supporting agriculture and promoting working landscapes.;
- Preserve our cultural, historic, and archeological resources as they are essential to maintain our sense of place;
- Preserve the County's unique quality of life; growth is planned to occur slowly and deliberately at a manageable rate which does not exceed the County's historic growth rate;
- Ensure growth occurs in limited and specific locations in a way that complements and enhances each designated growth area's character. These locations will be a result of mutually agreed upon boundaries established by working with existing communities.

The 2018 Comprehensive Plan lists a series of goals and strategies to achieve the County's Vision. The goals describe the County's policy. The strategies describe concrete actions that the County may take to achieve the goals and vision. The natural resources important to Kent County are clean air, prime agricultural land, tidal marshes, non-tidal wetlands, woodlands, large forests, ground water, the Chesapeake Bay, the Chester and Sassafras Rivers and their tributaries, ponds, mineral resources, landscapes of agriculture, waterfront, open space, historic sites, dark nighttime skies and a peaceful, unhurried atmosphere.

The Comprehensive Plan includes a Water Resources Element, or WRE. In addition to identifying safe and adequate drinking water sources as well as wastewater treatment facilities needed to support existing and future development, it also establishes the County's water resource goals to protect and restore water quality and meet water quality regulatory standards in the County's tributaries.

The County also values its diverse ecosystems. We have hedgerows, cropped fields, shorelines, meadows, forests, wetlands, submerged aquatic vegetation, and other plants. The

varied wildlife include deer, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians, waterfowl, game birds, songbirds, colonial nesting waterbirds, raptors, fish, crabs, and many species of shellfish.

### **C. Implementing the Plan**

The Kent County Land Use Ordinance is one tool the County uses to implement the goals identified in the Comprehensive Plan. Each zoning district includes a series of environmental standards – both general and specific – to provide for the proper stewardship of the County’s natural resources. These standards address forest conservation, natural heritage areas, anadromous fish, habitat, forest interior dwelling birds, non-tidal wetlands, sensitive species, stormwater management, water quality, and stream buffers.

### **D. Comparison between State and Local Goals**

State and County Goals are fully compatible. Both recognize the role of natural resources in maintaining a healthy environment and the overall character and quality of life that our citizens enjoy. Both goals recognize the cultural and economic benefits that natural resources provide. Both address the need to protect and manage natural resources. Both identify techniques such as easements and land purchase that may be used for land protection.

## **4. Current Implementation Program**

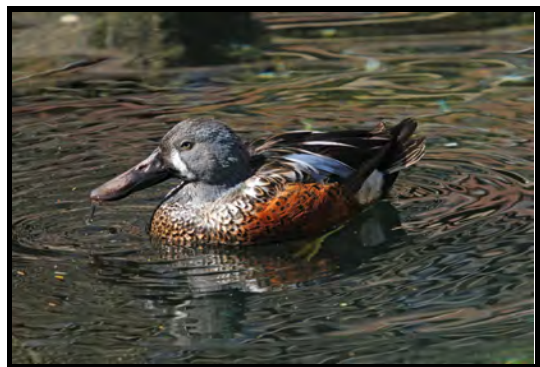
### **A. Comprehensive Planning Context**

The County’s 2018 Comprehensive Plan has multiple goals and objectives to support natural resource based use and conservation. This section describes the steps that are currently being taken in the County to implement these goals and objectives.

### **B. Designated Conservation Areas, Inventories and Maps of Resources**

Most of Kent County is a designated conservation area. In addition to the lands included in the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area, the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, the Priority Preservation Area, and the Chesapeake Country National Scenic Byway, the County has identified the followings areas and habitats as protection areas:

- All designated Habitat Protection Areas, buffers and protective zones including:
  - Colonial waterbird nesting sites;
  - Historic waterfowl staging and concentrations areas in tidal water, tributary streams or tidal and non-tidal wetlands;
  - Riparian forest;





- Forested areas of 50 acres or more and forest corridors connecting these areas;
  - Anadromous fish spawning areas;
  - Threatened and endangered species and Species in Need of Conservation with their habitat;
  - Non-tidal wetlands;
  - Minimum 100-foot buffer and 100-foot stream protection corridor.
- Other areas which because of their unique wildlife habitat types and plant communities are of local significance. These shall be managed to protect the unique habitat or community.
    - Lloyd Creek Habitat for proposed State threatened species;
    - Andover Branch;
    - Sandy Bottom - St. Paul's Lake;
    - Churn Creek (Still Pond Creek Headwaters);
    - Big Marsh;
    - Swantown Creek;
    - Jacobs Creek;
    - Upper Sassafras;
    - Sassafras Lake;
    - Mill Creek (wooded swamp, 1118-555 on the Maryland Coordinated Grid System);
    - Still Pond Creek (inland open fresh water, 1050-540 on the MCGS);
    - East Langford Mill Pond (Shrub swamp, 1050-495 on the MCGS);
    - Langford Creek East Fork Headwaters (inland shallow fresh marsh, 1055-499 on the MCGS);
    - N/W Fork Morgan Creek (inland shallow fresh marsh, 1077-536 on the MCGS);
    - Tavern Creek.
  - Any natural heritage areas as may be designated by the State of Maryland.

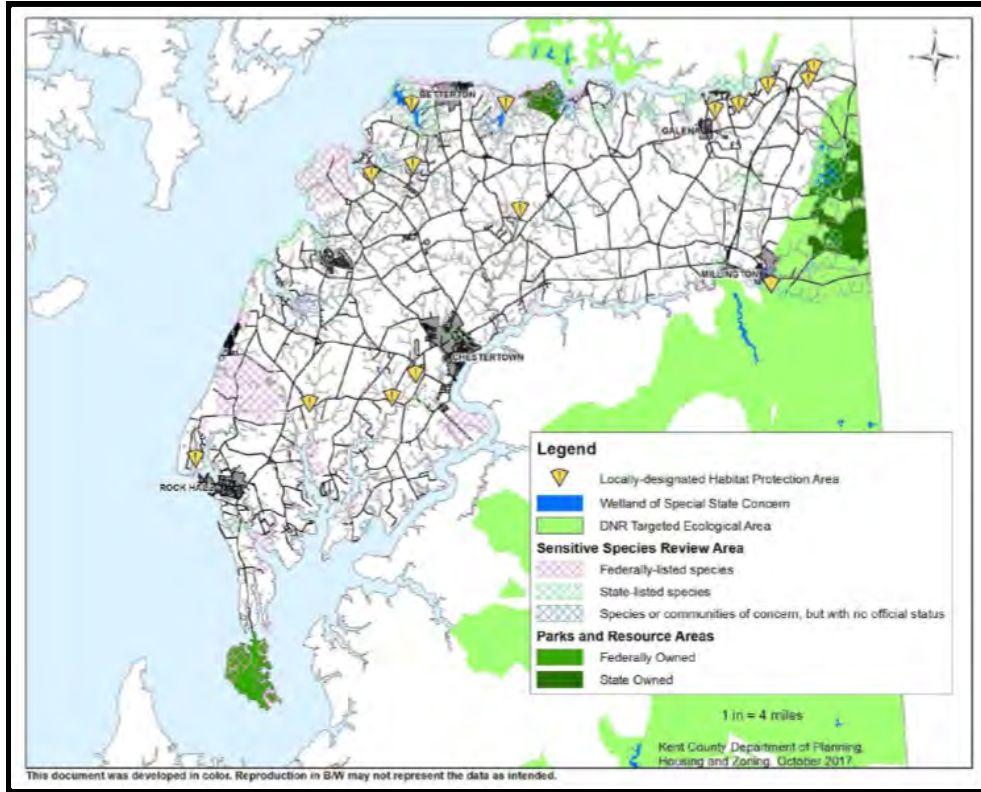
Protective zoning in the countryside and specific environmental standards are in place to protect these unique resources. Kent County also has several natural resource areas that deserve special attention (Map III-1). These include:

- Eastern Neck Island National Wildlife Refuge;
- Sassafras River Natural Resource Management Area and Turners Creek Park;
- Sassafras Rural Legacy Area;
- Millington Wildlife Management Area.

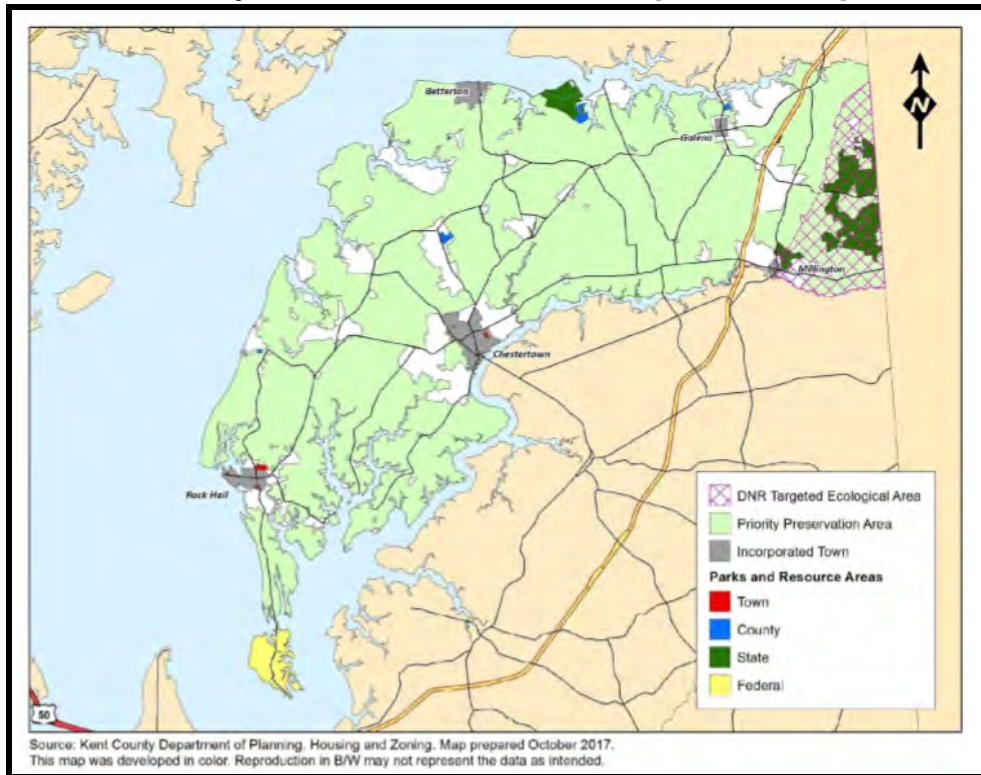


While the County does not have a program specifically directed toward DNR's Targeted Ecological Area, the Priority Preservation Area overlaps this area. In addition, much of the DNR Targeted Ecological Area is already within the Millington Wildlife Management Area as reflected on Map III-2.

**Map III-1 Habitat Protection Areas and Sensitive Species Areas**



**Map III-2 Priority Preservation Area and Targeted Ecological Area**



## C. Easement Acquisition, Funding, Planning and Land Use Management

The primary components of Kent County's strategy to implement its natural resource goals are its land use authority, watershed restoration action strategies, the Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP), Baywide Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), Hazard Mitigation Plan, the Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Adaptation Report, and partnerships with private organizations such as Shore Rivers, the Nature Conservancy, and the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy. The Kent County Land Use Ordinance includes conservation subdivision techniques that require a substantial amount of subdivisions to include open space that is located so as to enlarge and connect to other open space and natural areas. These documents also incorporate protection for sensitive natural areas such as:

- Forest – retention of high quality forest, reforestation or afforestation of 15 to 20 percent of the net tract area;
- Natural Heritage Areas – preserved during subdivision and site plan review;
- Anadromous Fish – preservation of spawning streams and identification and removal of fish blockages;
- Habitat – creation and preservation of wildlife corridors, avoidance of habitat fragmentation, development of hedgerows;
- Forest Interior Dwelling Birds – safe building and harvest times, canopy preservation;
- Nontidal Wetlands – buffers, net increase in quality and quantity;
- Sensitive Species – checked and federal or State guidelines followed on all permits and projects;
- Buffers and Stream Protection Corridors – 100-foot buffers.



Kent County has completed three watershed restoration action strategies – the Middle Chester River, the Upper Chester River and the Sassafras River. Kent County also partnered with Kent County Delaware and the Nature Conservancy to develop a plan for the conservation of the Blackbird-Millington Corridor which includes large forested areas, Delmarva Bays, prime farmland, and habitat for numerous rare, threatened, and endangered species. Each includes strategies for stream restoration, education, agricultural best management practices, and suburban and urban best management practices.

The Kent County Phase II WIP (Phase II) was completed in 2011. The TMDL program is designed to have bodies of water meet water quality standards. The Kent County WIP identifies its strategy for taking water quality improvement actions. The County will work cooperatively with adjacent jurisdictions to develop and implement watershed restoration action strategies and to update and implement Phase II WIP strategies. However, the WIP notes that significant funding and staffing shortfalls exist unless additional resources are made available. Therefore, the County will continue to work with the State and federal governments to secure sufficient funding and/or techniques to overcome local resource shortfalls to fully achieve the TMDL. Also, the County will continue its collaborative efforts with neighboring jurisdictions and nonprofit organizations to explore regional support and approaches to implement nutrient load reduction goals.

## **D. Easement and Funding**

Although the County's easement programs are geared primarily toward agricultural lands, easement acquisitions tend to protect both farmland and natural resource areas. The County participates in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program, the Federal Farmland and Ranchland Preservation Program, the Maryland Rural Legacy Program and partners with the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, Maryland Environmental Trust, Conservation Fund, and the American Farmland Trust to hold easements on both natural resource and agricultural lands.

## **E. Other Programs, Eco-Tourism, and Resourced-based Recreation**

The 2018 Comprehensive Plan includes several strategies to promote eco-tourism and other resource-based recreation. The overall goal is to enhance and expand locally based tourism that is rooted in the unique natural, cultural and historic features and qualities of Kent County. Strategies that are outlined in the Comp Plan align with the LPPRP.



# **5. Evaluation of the Natural Resource Land Conservation Program**

This section examines the ability of the County to achieve its natural resource goals. The Comprehensive Plan continues to be a major strength. The Plan was developed after extensive public involvement and moves from vision to goals to strategies with priority actions clearly identified. Most of Kent County is a designated conservation area. The County has long standing protection measures included in its ordinances, and partnerships with organizations such as the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy achieves protection through easement, and The Nature Conservancy has led to preservation of sensitive areas such as Delmarva Bays.

No action has been taken to develop a Greenways Plan, a Biological Management Plan, or a Green Infrastructure Assessment, and no timeline has been identified to begin these projects.

However, the County still actively works to protect our natural resources and to evaluate the impacts of proposed development projects, including administering the Forest Conservation Act. Table III-1 reflects the acreage in forest protection easements or the amount paid through a fee-in-lieu when the required afforestation would not provide an adequate forested area for the years 2018 through 2021. Additionally, there are many day-to-day activities, such as requiring native plantings in the Critical Area or enforcing floodplain regulations, that cumulatively have a positive effect on preserving important natural resources. In addition, Shore Rivers, a non-profit watershed organization, is active in the community promoting the health and sustainability of the County's watersheds.

**Table III-1 Forest Conservation 2018-2021**

Project	Acreage in Easements	Fee-In-Lieu
Creafill Fibers Corporation	0.800	
Melinda Pinder	3.500	
PB Land Trust	0.700	
Ross Swope	1.100	
Animal Care Shelter	1.200	
County Commissioners of Kent County (Worton Maintenance Building)	1.180	
William Davidson	0.500	
Jimstown, LLC	0.400	
Fifth Investments, LLC	6.200	
CK Property Management, LLC (Greenscapes Land Care LLC)	0.600	
Dixie Land Energy		\$2,325.00
Delmarva Power (Chestertown Substation)		\$4,782.70
Henlyn Farm, LLC	10.120	
Mervin Lapp	4.978	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31.278</b>	<b>\$7,107.70</b>

Section 303(d) of the federal Clean Water Act requires Maryland to assess and identify impaired waters and set Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) restoration goals. The TMDL program began in 1998 with many

partnerships such as the Maryland Department of the Environment, Department of Natural Resources, Army Corps, Maryland Geological Society, U.S. Geological Survey, local government and non-profit environmental groups. Kent County has an active TMDL Committee that was established in November 2006. Since that time, the committee has completed two plans:

- The Local Tributary Strategy Basin Implementation Plan was completed in March 2008. It represents a snapshot in time, and the Kent County Plan was based on the State model which evolved into the phases of the Maryland Watershed Improvement Plan.
- The Phase II WIP was completed in November 2012 and will inform the County's Phase III Plan.

In 2010, Statewide TMDL development focused on the Chesapeake Bay Priority Watershed and the main pollutants of nitrogen and phosphorus. Other pollutants such as bacteria, mercury, PCBs and chlorides were addressed with the goal of working towards healthy aquatic ecosystems.

The 2016 TMDL prioritization is to monitor and assess impaired waters and to continue developing TMDLs by setting pollution limits. The 2016-2022 Maryland's Priority Listings focus on addressing impairments affecting the following: 1) Chesapeake Bay, 2) Public Life and 3) Aquatic Life. First, the Chesapeake Bay is monitored for nutrient loads. Second, public life is monitored for bacteriological impairments affecting shellfish harvesting areas and beaches. Third, chlorides are a potent stressor to aquatic life. Promoting aquaculture is essential.

Kent County's 2015 Local Programmatic Milestone Report reflected that the County's focus is two-fold. The County needs to devise a tool to track, and, then, report best management practice implementation. Therefore, the County will strive to create a best management practice data collection form for ease of quarterly reporting. Data will be organized according to location, practice, volume/acres treated, and installation date. The County activity engages with its neighbors in the Healthy Waters Roundtable. It is this collaborative effort which will best-suit non-MS4 counties in developing such a tracking mechanism.

The County adopted its Phase II Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) in November 2012. The WIP strives to meet the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) targets. The WIP includes both municipal and County level efforts to improve water quality. Below is a listing of some of the more significant County efforts addressing water quality enhancement:

- Major and minor wastewater treatment plant upgrades;
- Septic system upgrades to best available technology systems, septic system pump out program and connections of existing septic system uses to public sanitary sewer systems;
- Stormwater management retrofits including rain gardens, rain barrels, living shorelines, implementing current stormwater management regulations, applying the Critical Area Program of a 10% pollution reduction, street sweeping, stream restorations, tree canopy and forest expansions, wetland restorations, and streamside forest buffers;
- Middle Chester River Watershed Restoration Action Strategy;
- 2010 Trust Fund Middle Chester Partners Local Implementation Grant;
- Upper Chester River Watershed Restoration Action Strategy;
- Sassafras Watershed Action Plan;
- Early Action Compact;
- Hazard Mitigation Plan;
- Kent County Bay Restoration Fund Program;
- Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Adaptation Report.



The details of the TMDL program are presented in the County's current Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP). These programs assist landowners in the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) to help achieve the TMDLs; however, no one landowner or government agency can solve the water quality issues independently. Achieving TMDLs and improving water quality of the Bay and its tributaries requires the long-term cooperation of State and federal agencies, counties, and individual stake-holders.

## 6. Program Development Strategy

This section describes Kent County's program development strategy for natural resource conservation.

- Continue to support and promote the goals and strategies outlined in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan; the Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Adaptation Report; the Hazard Mitigation Plan; the Phase II and III WIPs; Middle and Upper Chester River WRASs; Sassafra Watershed Action Plan; the Blackbird-Millington Study; and the efforts of the Kent County Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Committee;
- Continue the strong support and County funding for land preservation and continue to participate in all State and Federal programs such as MALPF, Rural Legacy, Program Open Space, Heritage Areas, etc.;
- Identify funding sources for programs to purchase easements on sensitive area lands that do not meet the MALPF criteria;
- Promote the development of heritage and ecotourism businesses;
- Continue to require conservation subdivision techniques for new subdivisions;
- Support a no net forest loss strategy;
- Prepare the Phase III Local Watershed Implementation Plan.

# Chapter IV Agricultural Land Preservation

## 1. Executive Summary

Kent County is blessed with large, open, flat expanses of fertile soil that blanket the County, which is a gift of immeasurable value. The County has some of the best agricultural land in the United States, and its proximity to a variety of markets makes Kent County an ideal location for agribusiness to thrive. In addition to being an important component of the local economy, agriculture also provides a picturesque agrarian landscape, which contributes to the tourism industry and the overall quality of life for Kent County residents.

Agriculture remains the County's keystone land use and is the preferred land use for most of the County. It has served as the cultural foundation for the County and is planned to continue its important economic and cultural role. Kent County's economy builds on the traditional livelihoods of farming, fishing, forestry, and hunting associated with its working landscapes and natural areas. The 2018 Comprehensive Plan identifies economic development strategies which promote and support agriculture, recognizing it as the County's primary land-based industry with



substantial potential for additional growth. This policy recognizes agriculture's keystone role in the County's identity and culture and its significant economic contribution. Maintenance and growth of this industry will have significant and ongoing influence on the overall prosperity and identity of Kent County. Additionally, a new generation of farmers is materializing and investing in local agriculture. Agricultural support industries and suppliers are doing likewise.

The 2017 Census of Agriculture found that the land in farms, and average farm size increased from the 2012 Census. The number of farms decreased. The 2017 Census reported 134,262 acres, or 75% of the total land area, in Kent County is in farms. The total number of farms was 346, the average farm size was 388 acres, and the median farm size was 123 acres. The market value of production was \$111.2 million (down 1% from 2012). Crop sales accounted for \$68.9 million and livestock sales totaled \$42.1 million. The County consistently ranks near the top statewide for crop production and in 2017, ranked 5th for crop production and 10th for livestock, poultry, and products.



Not only does staff promote the traditional industry, but it also has been directly engaged in the support of burgeoning agricultural industries such as Chesapeake Fields (the 2002 value-added initiative), Crow Vineyard, and in 2020, adoption of a text amendment to allow farm breweries. In 2014, County staff sat on the Governor’s Intergovernmental Committee on Agriculture’s Agritourism subcommittee and assisted in the drafting of a model definition and guidance for Agritourism in the State.



Protecting farmland and natural resources from development and encouraging growth in and around existing towns in the form of sustainable growth are fundamental goals of the Comprehensive Plan and *Land Use Ordinance*. The Comprehensive Plan emphasizes the preservation of the County’s rural character and agricultural resources. Agriculture is viewed as a permanent and preferred land use which is reflected in the goals and strategies within the current 2018

Comprehensive Plan and the regulations within the *Land Use Ordinance*.

On April 27, 2010, the County adopted a Priority Preservation Area Element that was incorporated as an Appendix to the 2006 Comprehensive Plan and likewise included in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. Based on the acreage calculated for the Priority Preservation Area (PPA) Element, there is now 36.7% of the undeveloped portion of the PPA protected through conservation easements. Since the 1970s when the first easements were donated to the Maryland Environmental Trust, almost 44,000 acres of private land has been placed under some type of conservation easement.

Kent County has a strong agricultural community and participation in the various land preservation programs has been high. There is support at all levels to maintain a viable agricultural industry. Over 24% of the entire County is now protected by some type of easement, not including publicly owned lands.

Table IV-1 presents the total acreage of lands protected through the various land preservation programs in Kent County between 2017 and 2021. This reflects that the acreage of protected land grew by more than 5,000 acres, which is more than a 12% increase since 2017.

**Table IV-1: Change in Preserved Land 2017-2020 in Acres**

Land Preservation Program	2017 Total Acres	2020 Total Acres	Increase Acres
Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)	19,085.41	23,362.74	4,277.33
Maryland Environmental Trust / Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (MET / ESLC)	12,541.68	13,170.81	629.13
The Conservation Fund /American Farmland Trust (TCF/AFT)	3,300.00	3,300.00	0.00
Chesapeake Country National Scenic Byway	1,663.98	1,663.98	0.00
Rural Legacy	2,205.16	2,205.16	0.00
ESLC/ ACUB*	23.52	176.97	153.45
NRCS**	43.88	43.88	0.00
Other private preserved lands	312.58	312.58	0.00
<b>Total Preserved Lands</b>	<b>39,176.21</b>	<b>44,236.12</b>	<b>5,059.91</b>

\*ACUB = Army Compatible Use Buffer Program/Aberdeen Proving Ground  
 \*\*NRCS = Natural Resources Conservation Service

## 2. Agricultural Land Preservation Goals

Kent County's Agricultural Preservation Program is certified by the Maryland Department of Planning and the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, with the most recent recertification approved in 2018. The County recognizes the important economic role and other long-term benefits of agriculture and shares the State of Maryland's goals for farmland protection:

- Permanently preserve agricultural land capable of supporting a reasonable diversity of agricultural production.
- Protect natural, forestry and historic resources and the rural character of the landscape associated with Maryland's farmland.
- To the greatest degree possible, concentrate preserved land in large, relatively contiguous blocks to effectively support long-term protection of resources and resource-based industries.
- Limit the intrusion of development and its impacts on rural resources and resource-based industries.
- Ensure good return on public investment by concentrating State agricultural land preservation funds in areas where the investment is reasonably well supported by both local investment and land use management programs.
- Work with local governments to achieve the following:
  - Establish preservation areas, goals and strategies through local comprehensive planning processes that address and complement State goals;
  - In each area designated for preservation, develop a shared understanding of goals and the strategy to achieve them among rural landowners, the public-at-large and State and local government officials;
  - Protect the equity interests of rural landowners in preservation areas by ensuring sufficient public commitment and investment in preservation through easement acquisition and incentive programs;
  - Use local land use management authority effectively to protect public investment in preservation by managing development in rural preservation areas;
  - Establish effective measures to support profitable agriculture, including assistance in production, marketing and the practice of stewardship, so that farming remains a desirable way of life for both the farmer and public-at-large.



In accordance with these goals, Kent County continues to have one of the lowest rates of land conversion in Maryland. Since the County's initial certification of its Agricultural Preservation Program in the Spring of 1997 and submission of the first report commencing in Fiscal Year 1998, only 1,506 acres have been converted during these past 20 years. This low rate of agricultural land conversion reflects a successful achievement in preservation of the County's agricultural land.

## 1. Comprehensive Plan

Kent County's 2018 Comprehensive Plan recognizes that agriculture is the keystone to Kent County's heritage and its future. Therefore, the Plan includes long-term goals and strategies that emphasize the preservation of the County's rural character and agricultural resources. Implementation of the Plan's goals and strategies is continuous and on-going. As articulated in the Comprehensive Plan, agriculture is viewed as a permanent and preferred land use for the majority of Kent County.

## 3. Current Implementation Program

Kent County recognizes that a successful farmland preservation program requires a comprehensive approach, which integrates a variety of techniques, promotes the purchase of farms by farmers, and minimizes the potential conflicts between farmers and their non-farm neighbors. The following describes the key elements of the program.

### A. Land Use Management

Approximately 85% of the County is within the Priority Preservation Area and is considered to be outside the County's Designated Growth Areas. The County considers agriculture to be the preferred and primary use in the Agricultural Zoning District (AZD) and the Resource Conservation District (RCD), and the *Land Use Ordinance* limits the use of these lands for non-agricultural purposes. The base density in the AZD is 1 dwelling unit per 30 acres. Under certain limited and restrictive conditions, enclave developments are allowed at a density of 1 dwelling unit per 10 acres. The *Land Use Ordinance* also limits development in the AZD to 10% of the property and a maximum of two new lots fronting onto a public road. In the RCD, development is limited to 1 dwelling unit per 20 acres. Although the Planning Commission and Board of Appeals regularly consider the impact of development on scenic viewsheds, no formal guidelines have been adopted to evaluate or protect these viewsheds.

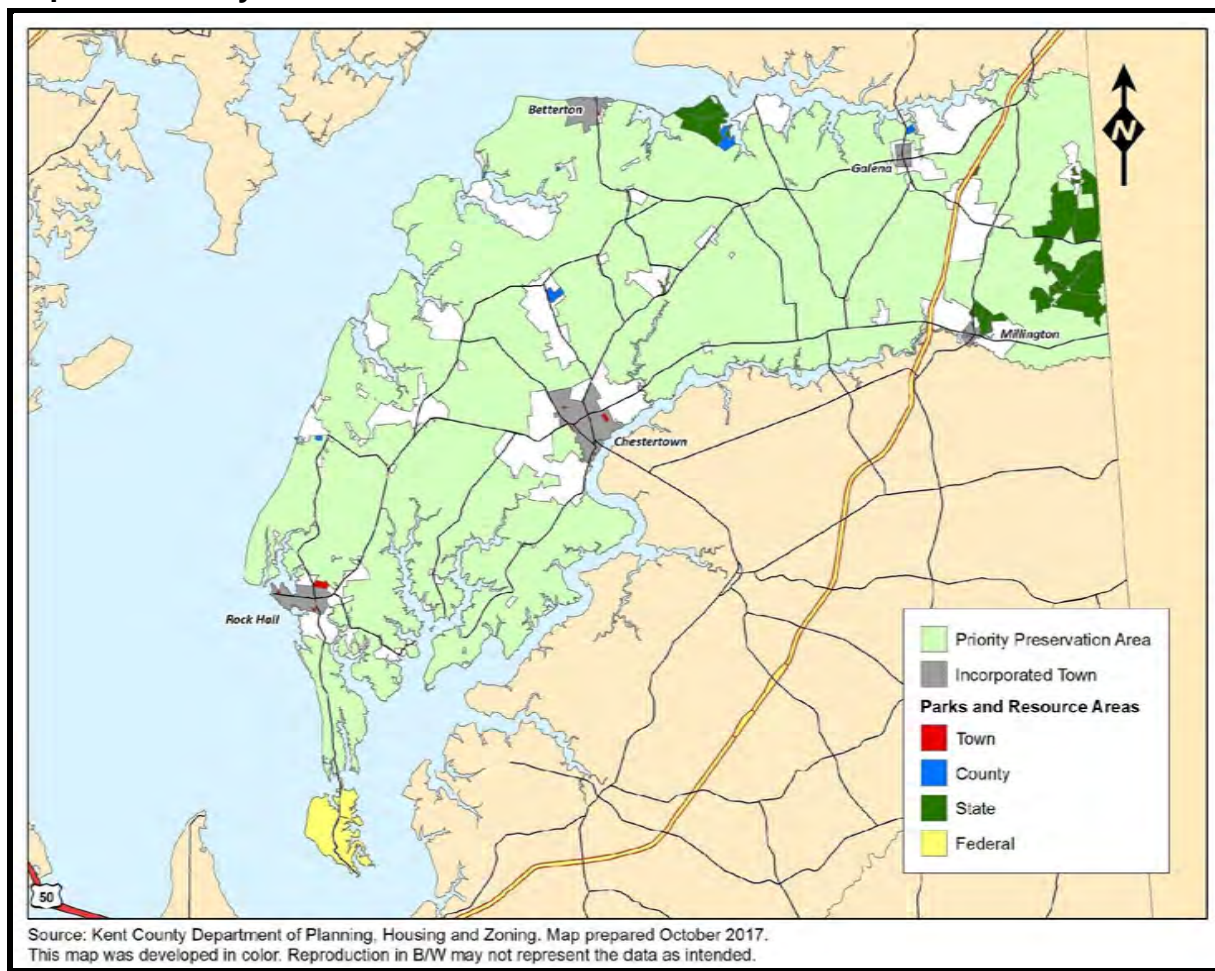
The Comprehensive Plan calls for investigating a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program. During the last comprehensive rezoning in 2002, the Planning Commission included a TDR Program in the draft Ordinance. However, the County Commissioners felt that the time was not right for implementing a TDR Program and asked the Planning Commission to remove it. In addition, no formal steps have been taken to actively reduce the number of undeveloped lots in the countryside.

In addition, the Plan calls for the County to adopt an "Economic Resource Bill of Rights" that includes the right to farm, the right to fish, and the right to hunt. The County first adopted a right to farm law in 1989. This law was revised and strengthened in 2004. The law limits the circumstances under which agricultural and forestry operations may be deemed a nuisance and established an Agricultural Resolution Board. The law also requires that a right to farm statement be added to subdivision plats where appropriate, contains a provision for notice to go to all taxpayers and requires a real estate disclosure statement be signed at the time of settlement. The Agricultural Resolution Board has not heard a single case and the right to farm disclosures are routinely signed and added to plats. In 2009, the County adopted a right to fish

ordinance that protects fishing and seafood operations adhering to generally accepted industry practices. No action has been taken to adopt a right to hunt ordinance.

Maryland's Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012 required the adoption of a Growth Tier Map, which designates all land into one of four tiers. Within Tier IV, which are resource areas, major subdivisions are prohibited unless an exemption is granted by the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP). In April of 2013, Kent County was granted an exemption upon finding that the established zoning and subdivision rules as articulated in the *Land Use Ordinance* already limit residential subdivision such that there was no need for the additional restrictions that would be imposed by Tier IV restrictions. This finding was based on MDP's estimate that the actual overall yield for the cumulative Tier IV area in Kent County would be less than one dwelling unit per twenty (20) acres, and that this yield was likely to continue into the future. MDP's finding was further supported by the established record of the County's land use and preservation plans, rules, policies, and funding to limit subdivision and development, as well as the vitality of resource-based industries in the Tier IV areas and particularly agriculture, as along with the County's available development capacity outside of the Tier IV areas.

#### Map IV-1 Priority Preservation Area



## **B. Designated Preservation Areas**

In the 1980s the Kent County Agricultural Advisory Commission created a map showing the County's Agricultural Priority Area. The Agricultural Priority Area was defined as areas of critical or special concern for the continuance of agriculture in Kent County and was reviewed every 3-5 years. The area was defined using the following criteria:

- Areas of large contiguous acreage
- Areas that contain predominantly Class I, II or III soils
- Protection of areas needed for market or support services
- Some environmentally sensitive areas
- Farms considered essential to agriculture in Kent County
- Properties surrounding current district or easement properties
- Farms that will help maintain the agricultural infrastructure
- Farms with a high degree of operability

In 2010, the County adopted the Agricultural Priority Preservation Area Element as an appendix to the 2006 Comprehensive Plan. The Agricultural Priority Area map was the basis for the Priority Preservation Area (PPA). The PPA contains approximately 151,350 acres and at the time of designation approximately 142,925 acres were considered undeveloped. The goal to preserve at least eighty percent (80%) of this remaining undeveloped land within the PPA through easements and zoning translates to approximately 114,340 acres. Map 3-1 is a map of the Priority Preservation Area.

Based on the acreage calculated for the Comprehensive Plan's Priority Preservation Area (PPA) Element, almost 37% of the undeveloped portion of the PPA is protected through conservation easements. Since the 1970s when the first easements were donated to the Maryland Environmental Trust through MALPF FY2021 offers, almost 44,000 acres of private land has been placed under some type of conservation easement. Table 3-2, at the end of this chapter, is an inventory spreadsheet of these preserved lands.

## **C. Easement Acquisition Mechanisms**

Kent County relies primarily upon three programs to purchase/extinguish development rights on farmland.

### ***1. Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation***

The Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) program is a voluntary purchase of development rights program. The property must meet certain size, location and soil requirements. Following the change in State law to eliminate districts, Kent County elected to require establishment of a local district as a prerequisite to applying to sell a perpetual easement to the State.

As of September 2021, Kent County had 9,160 acres enrolled in 54 Agricultural Land Preservation Districts and had permanently protected 23,363 acres in 124 MALPF Easements. Kent County has participated in the MALPF Program since 1983 and interest continues to remain high. In the FY2022 easement acquisition cycle there were 17 easement applications. The County dedicates local funding to the farms selected to receive easements. The County contributed approximately \$28,000 in local match funds toward the most recent MALPF easement cycle. The modest amount contributed as matching funds is a reflection of the low level of land conversion in the County.

## **2. Rural Legacy Program**

The goal of this program is the protection of areas that are rich in agricultural, natural and cultural resources, thereby preserving resource-based economies, greenbelts and greenways. The Rural Legacy Program provides the funding necessary to protect large contiguous tracts of farms, forests and natural areas through cooperative grant agreements with the State and a local sponsor. The protection of natural resources is accomplished through the voluntary acquisition of property through easement or fee simple purchase. Kent County has participated in this program from the beginning through a regional partnership with the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy and Cecil, Talbot, Caroline, and Dorchester Counties known as the “Agricultural Security Corridor” partnership. There are eleven (11) easements covering 2,205 acres which have been acquired in the Sassafras Rural Legacy Area in Kent County.

## **3. Land Trusts and Other Private Conservation Efforts**

Conservation groups have pursued the preservation of agricultural and environmental lands throughout Kent County. The groups have used various preservation methods including conservation easements. Kent County works closely with the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) and the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC) in obtaining donated conservation easements. The Eastern Shore Land Conservancy is a non-profit organization founded in 1990 to preserve farmland and unique natural areas on Maryland’s Middle Eastern Shore. The ESLC and MET have protected over 13,170 acres in Kent County through conservation easements. In addition the Conservation Fund and the American Farmland Trust have preserved 3,300 acres through the donation of the Chesapeake Farms property and another property on the Chesapeake Bay. Kent County has almost 16,784 acres permanently preserved through privately donated easements, one of the highest totals in the State of Maryland.

## **4. Funding for Acquisition**

Placing conservation easements on private land from willing landowners is the chief mechanism for permanently protecting agricultural land in Kent County. The majority of these easements have been purchased through MALPF or Rural Legacy with the State of Maryland providing a large majority of the funding. Kent County has had a “certified” agricultural land preservation program since 1998.

Since Fiscal Year 1985, the County has committed over \$1.24M towards easement acquisition, mostly from retained agricultural transfer taxes. The County dedicates local funding to the farms selected to receive easements. The County contributed approximately \$28,000 in local matching funds toward the most recent MALPF easement cycle. The County Commissioners have shown support for agricultural preservation through past allocations from the general fund. Given the State of the economy over the past several years, the County has taken no

action to further develop a Purchase of Development Rights Program or explore a tax credit incentive program.

## 5. Farming Assistance Programs

Kent County is active in a variety of ways to promote and support agriculture. Since 1980, the County has had a seven-member Agricultural Advisory Commission whose role is to advise the Planning Commission and County Commissioners on any proposals or zoning changes that affect agriculture. In 2021, the number of members was increased to 9 due to demand from citizens to serve on the Commission. The members must be actively engaged in agriculture. Other County Boards and Commissions also routinely include at least one member who is actively engaged in agricultural pursuits. These boards and commissions work to promote agriculture as a viable industry and support the development of farm-based businesses.



Kent County is known throughout the region for having a strong commitment to agriculture from both the government and citizens. In 2014, the County was granted a Maryland Sustainable Growth Award for its Farmland Preservation Program. Farming assistance programs mainly exist in State and federal agencies, such as the Kent County Soil and Water Conservation District, the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service, and the USDA Farm Service Agency. While the County does not have an agricultural marketing specialist, agricultural interests are represented on the Economic and Tourism Development Advisory Board.

The Maryland Cooperative Extension maintains an office in Chestertown. The Kent County Soil and Water Conservation District, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service and the USDA Farm Service Agency operate from a joint location to provide assistance and services to local farmers. The Upper Shore Regional Council, in partnership with Washington College, also offers a searchable on-line Eastern Shore Harvest Directory, of which print copies are also available. The County will continue to work with regional partners to expand opportunities and promote natural resource-based industries.

## 4. Evaluation of the Land Preservation Program

### A. Overall Strategy

Kent County has a strong agricultural community and participation in the various land preservation programs has been high. There is support at all levels to maintain a viable agricultural industry, with over 24% of the entire County being protected by some type of easement, which does not include publicly owned lands. Donated conservation easements tend to be located along the water, especially the Chester River. The protection of these sensitive lands ensures that important wildlife habitat will remain intact. Farms protected by the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation and Rural Legacy are located primarily in the central part of the County, which will help maintain the agricultural infrastructure. Even with the County's low rate of land conversion, the County has been able to preserve large tracts of land and anticipates a continued high-level of interest and increased participation in the various programs.



### B. Funding

Although Kent County has limited financial resources, the County remains committed to agricultural preservation and participates in all available programs. Since Fiscal Year 1985, the County has committed over \$1.24M towards easement acquisition, mostly from retained agricultural transfer taxes. The County relies primarily on State funding for purchasing easements and there is always more landowner interest than funding available. As land values continue to rise, the dollars available will buy fewer acres. The County accepts donations toward the purchase of development rights, although active solicitation of monies has not occurred in several years. All donations to the program are used to supplement the County's match in the MALPF matching funds program. The County intends to continue the availability of this program to generate the funds needed to remain certified.

### C. Land Management Tools

Kent County's protective agricultural zoning was adopted in 1989 and additional restrictions were adopted in 2003. In combination with relatively low development pressure, this zoning has been generally effective in helping to protect the County's agricultural land base. Although growth pressure has greatly diminished since 2008, the County recognizes that growth must be carefully managed. The 2018 Comprehensive Plan calls for growth to occur slowly and deliberately at a manageable rate which does not exceed the County's historic growth rate.

### D. Combined Performance of Preservation Tools

The tools Kent County is currently using have been partially successful in preserving farmland. The County has one of the lowest rates of farmland conversion; since July 1997, agricultural

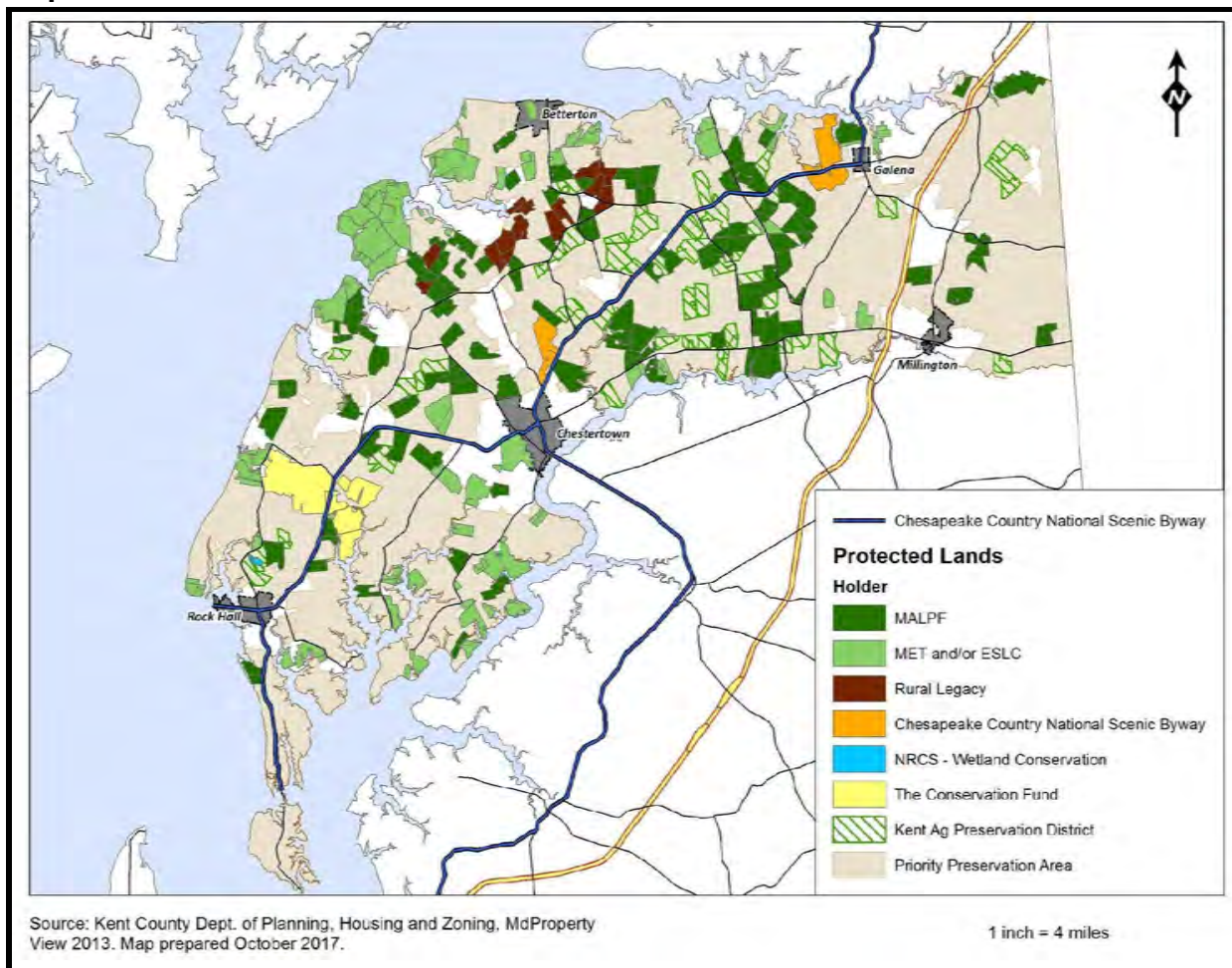


transfer taxes have been collected on only 1,506 acres. In that same time, over 44,000 acres have been preserved through purchased or donated easements, such that more than 36% of the undeveloped land in the Priority Preservation Area is protected. This includes land protected through easements since 2017. See highlights in Table 3-2.

### E. Effects of Potential Development on Land Markets

Since 2000 the majority of new houses and new lots have been built or located in the development areas and not within the Priority Preservation Area, which is targeted for protection. Although development pressure has significantly declined since 2008, there remains a potential for large scale development projects, that even when located in our growth areas could affect the viability of the agricultural industry. It should be noted that 24 of the “lots” created in the PPA in 2020, represent the subdivision of an existing development to establish individual lots to replace a condominium ownership structure. It is the site of the military housing associated with a former NIKE missile base. The County’s goals and policies for new development in both the incorporated towns and unincorporated villages direct that growth should occur at a rate and scale that is compatible with our rural heritage.

**Map IV-2 Protected Lands**



## 5. Program Development Strategy

This section describes Kent County's program development strategy for agricultural land preservation. The following on-going actions are recommended:

- Continued implementation of the County's Comprehensive Plan;
- Continued support from the County Commissioners through matching funds and policy decisions;
- Increased funding through MALPF and Rural Legacy for agricultural easement acquisition to meet the demand to sell easements;
- Increased rate of easement acquisition;
- Continued landowner outreach regarding available land protection options. This includes landowner meetings, mailings and press releases;
- Continued and ongoing coordination to direct growth to the towns and villages;
- Support, to the extent possible, programs that assist the agricultural industry in economic development;
- Continue to support agricultural land preservation with local funding;
- Continue to support and work collaboratively with the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy.