

Chapter 2 Land Use

Goals and Objectives

- ◆ Produce a desirable residential environment with the ability to grow.
 - ❖ *Objective: Maintain the integrity of existing residential areas.*
 - ❖ *Objective: Protect residential neighborhoods from traffic and encroachment through commercial and industrial activities.*
 - ❖ *Objective: Encourage residential infill and redevelopment that is appropriate in existing neighborhood contexts.*
 - ❖ *Objective: Accommodate growth, primarily through appropriate annexation of adjacent lands.*
- ◆ Provide for affordable, attractive housing.
- ◆ Increase the downtown retail base, while maintaining and preserving the existing General Commercial/Central Business District and its small town charm.
 - ❖ *Objective: Emphasize the safety, convenience, and attractiveness of all commercial development.*
 - ❖ *Objective: Prevent strip development by encouraging shared parking opportunities and the clustering of commercial activity at optimal locations.*
- ◆ Attract industry and jobs to North East, in order to improve the jobs housing balance.
 - ❖ *Objective: Maintain opportunities for a viable economic base, which encourages further economic investment, diversification, and expansion by creating more employment and business opportunities to meet the needs of Town residents and tourists while enhancing the Town's tax base.*
- ◆ Perpetuate the economic success of established commercial areas while encouraging new economic activity in the Town.
 - ❖ *Objective: Encourage infill and redevelopment of existing vacant or underutilized commercial and industrial sites.*
- ◆ Encourage development of industrial activity, including high-tech industries, which can provide additional sources of jobs and complement the Town and its sensitive environmental areas.
 - ❖ *Objective: Minimize undesirable effects of development to ensure pollution does not adversely affect the North East River and, ultimately, the Chesapeake Bay.*
- ◆ Develop, promote, and expand tourism activities and industry.

Existing Land Use

Town

The corporate limits of North East encompass a total land area of approximately 1,280 acres. Annexations occurred in 2013-2018, resulting in the addition of approximately 15 total acres being added, approximately 12 acres (80% of the annexed area) Medium Density Residential and 3 acres (20% of the annexed area) Commercial existing land use. Utilizing updated existing land use information, analyzed and illustrated updated Geographic Information System (GIS) tools, approximately 37.5 percent of the Town’s land area was classified as residential. The predominant residential use is medium density residential (See Table 1 and the Existing Land Use Map). Commercial and industrial classifications, not including Places of Assembly, make up about 25 percent of the total land use. Land uses classified as “Other” consist of unclassified land within the corporate limits, including unofficially designated road rights of way and water courses.

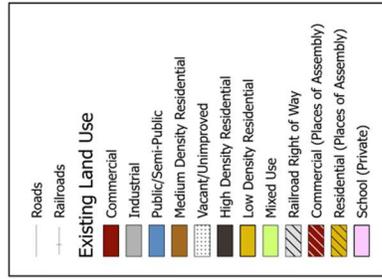
**Table 1
Existing Land Use – 2024
North East Planning Area**

Existing Land Use		
CATEGRORY	ACRES	PERCENT
Low Density Residential	100.28	7.83%
Medium Density Residential	244.13	19.07%
High Density Residential	135.48	10.58%
Mixed Use	2.04	0.16%
Residential (Places of Assembly)	67.48	5.27%
Commercial	111.77	8.73%
Commercial (Places of Assembly)	26.48	2.07%
Industrial	206.75	16.15%
Public/Semi Public	115.60	9.03%
School (Private)	11.73	0.92%
Railroad Right of Way	17.86	1.40%
Vacant/Unimproved	104.43	8.16%
Other	28.08	2.19%
Rights-of-way	108.00	8.44%
Total	1280.10	100.00%

Source: Town Staff, MDP, MD Property View, Cecil County MD Online GIS

Town of North East Comprehensive Plan

2040 Existing Land Use
DRAFT July 2025



The Planning Area

The comprehensive planning process considers the future of North East from several perspectives. The following section, entitled Land Use Recommendations, discusses a desired pattern of land use for areas within the corporate limits of North East. The land use pattern shown on the 2040 Land Use Plan (2040 Future Land Use Map) is greatly influenced by existing development. It will be further influenced by infill and redevelopment within the Town, new development in the County adjacent to existing developed areas, and the development of annexed areas. There are a number of structures and sites within the Town that are of historic, cultural or architectural significance. Infill and redevelopment will be sensitive to these sensitive and natural resource areas (more detail provided in the Natural Resource and Sensitive Areas Element). The incorporated area addressed in the Land Use Plan is the North East's Priority Funding Area (PFA), which is the focus of short- and mid-range capital improvements programming for public facilities to serve existing neighborhoods, including infill and redevelopment within these areas. In addition, some of the existing and planned capacity of Town facilities may be used to serve new development in the existing Town limits and annexed areas. The areas planned for water and sewer services, as shown in the *Cecil County Master Water and Sewer Plan (updated in 2019)* and the *Town of North East 20 Year Water System Master Plan*, reflect the Town's short and mid-range annexation priorities.

In the Municipal Growth Element (Chapter 9), the areas considered for municipal growth planning purposes also include a future growth area that lies beyond the Town's limits and the Town's short and mid-range annexation priorities. How and when these areas develop in the future depends on a number of variables. The purpose of including these future growth areas is to identify key areas where Town, County, and State long-range land use transportation and capital facilities planning will be closely coordinated.

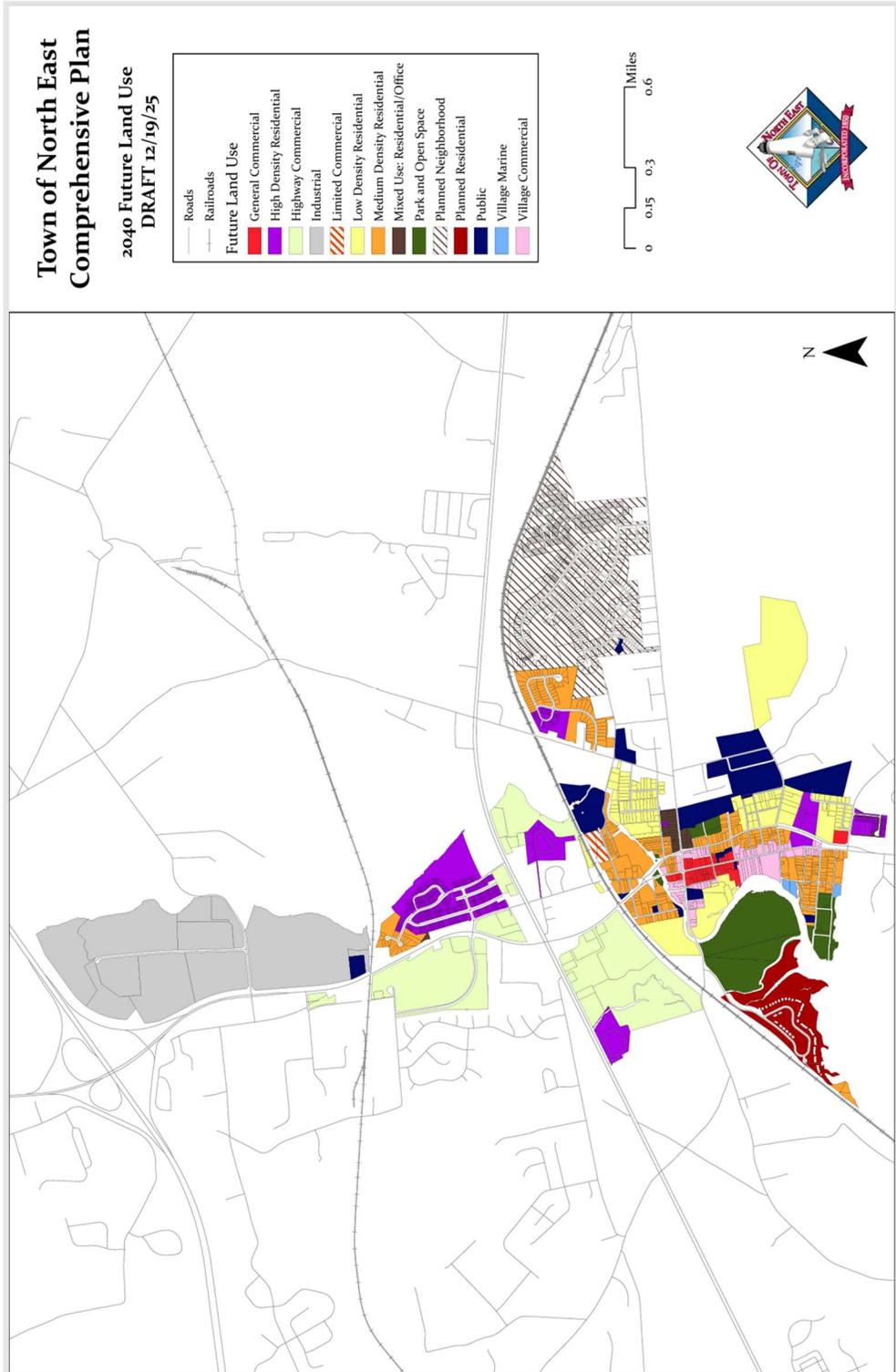
Annexation usually depends on the application of individual property owners seeking to be included in the incorporated limits. Typically, the annexation process involves a request for a specific land use designation. The Town then considers the application's merits, including the costs and benefits of the proposed annexation and the Town's ability to provide adequate facilities and services. The proposed land use will be considered in the context of existing development in the vicinity of the property, the North East Comprehensive Plan, and the results of the cost/benefit analysis.

Land Use Plan Recommendations

The Land Use Plan for North East envisions the community based on a variety of planning land use designations, including residential, commercial, industrial, mixed-use, public/semi-public areas, and park and open space areas. These Land Use Plan designations are shown on the Future Land Use Map – 2040 Land Use Plan. Some of these areas have updated or new Future Land Use designations from the 2012 Land Use Plan and notes about the amount of new areas are included in each relevant Land Use Category. The majority of

these are residential acreage increases due to annexations since 2012 and additional updates to areas to be Village Commercial.

2040 Land Use Plan - Future Land Use		
Category	Acres	Percent
Low Density Residential	122.06	9.54%
Medium Density Residential	107.47	8.40%
High Density Residential	86.20	6.73%
Planned Neighborhood	178.59	13.95%
Planned Residential	40.40	3.16%
Mixed Use/Residential Office	7.38	0.58%
Village Commercial	20.47	1.60%
Village Marine	2.452596	0.19%
General Commercial	12.61	0.99%
Highway Commercial	173.17	13.53%
Limited Commercial	3.758672	0.29%
Other	43.23816	3.38%
Public	77.24	6.03%
Park and Open Space	69.56	5.43%
Industrial	227.49	17.77%
Rights-of-way	108.00	8.44%
Total	1280.10	100.00%



Residential

Residential areas constitute a significant land use within the Town’s boundaries and future growth areas. Residential land use is particularly important since the level of community facilities needed to serve the Town's residential population depends upon recommendations regarding density, location, and distribution. Several residential density categories apply to North East, including:

Low Density: Areas characterized as “Low Density” generally consist of established residential neighborhoods with an average prevailing net residential density of approximately three dwelling units per acre.

Medium Density: “Medium Density” areas are characterized by net residential densities between four and five dwelling units per acre. The area also includes a few larger tracts that are potential sites for infill and redevelopment.

High Density: “High Density” includes detached, attached, and multi-family units. These areas are characterized by a net residential density of approximately ten dwelling units per acre.

Planned Residential Development: The Planned Residential Development (PRD) category encompasses North East Isles, a successful water-oriented multi-family development along the North East River. North East Isles was developed in accordance with PRD provisions contained in the North East Zoning Ordinance, which permit greater flexibility in the design of larger scale, unified residential development projects. The PRD provisions also allow for a variety of residential unit types in a single development, gross densities of up to six dwelling units per acre and require that a substantial portion of the site be set aside as common open space for the benefit of neighborhood residents.

Planned Neighborhood: The Planned Neighborhood land use is currently depicted primarily in one area shown on the Land Use Plan. The purpose of the Planned Neighborhood district is to establish land use planning policies for the “smart neighborhoods.” Smart neighborhoods are well-planned, compact, mixed-use neighborhoods that exhibit the following characteristics:

- integrated mix of uses, including residential, commercial, employment/office, civic, and open space;
- a range of housing types and densities;
- compact design;
- interconnected streets designed to balance the needs of all users, with sidewalks and on-street parking;
- open spaces integral to the community; and
- location adjacent to and extended fabric of existing development.

Development codes will continue to be revised as needed to implement the planned neighborhood principles discussed herein. Compact mixed-use neighborhoods should be the preferred type of residential development, where feasible, as opposed to single dwelling unit type developments that are the norm in existing medium and high density residential areas of the Town.

The Planned Neighborhood Development increased by approximately 11 acres on the 2040 Land Use Plan (Future Land Use Map) from the 2012 Land Use Plan, due to the annexation of Riverwoods Development on the east side of North East.

Master Planned Communities: One purpose of the “R-4” Mixed-Use Residential District is to encourage Master Planned Communities that include a diverse mix and efficient arrangement of land uses and housing types and to create communities that exhibit the following characteristics:

- Range of housing types and densities;
- Compact design;
- Interconnected streets designed to balance the needs of all users, with sidewalks and on-street parking;
- Open spaces integral to the community; and
- Location adjacent to and extending the Town into new areas in a manner that ensures development that is consistent with and complimentary to the existing Town character.

An “MPC” Master Planned Community Floating Zone District may be created to fulfill the purposes stated for the “R-4” Mixed-Use Residential District.

"RM-C" Multifamily Residential District: While existing land uses in the Town's Corporate limit provide for a variety of residential uses, it is the Town's intent to provide opportunities for Multifamily Residential uses interspersed with commercial uses along the Route 272 and Route 40 corridor. Residents within the Multifamily Residential District would benefit from the close proximity of goods and services. These neighborhoods would provide and encourage multi-modal transportation opportunities unique to the Route 272 and Route 40 corridor, as the road systems in these areas have been designed to handle traffic volumes that can support the multi-family residential district.

Employment

The Land Use Plan provides for a variety of employment uses, including commercial and industrial uses, at intensities consistent with their location.

The General Commercial District: The General Commercial District should remain the commercial center of the Town, and not be infringed upon by commercial and business uses

of a type, scale, or intensity which would not complement or fit with existing shops or businesses. This District will continue to cater to local residents and tourists.

The role of the General Commercial District should remain that of a small business town. Its goal should be to attract tourists through its pedestrian-oriented setting and specialty retailing. Aesthetics will be essential; trees, regulated signage, and well-maintained storefronts will help draw customers. The General Commercial District needs to differentiate itself from the strip commercial development located along major highway corridors in Town, rather than compete with it, by maintaining shops situated near the street edge, with on-street and rear parking. Streetscape improvements (e.g., sidewalks, lighting, street furniture) will help to create a unified visual image of a shopping district that caters equally to motorists and pedestrians.

Highway Commercial: Highway Commercial refers to commercial activity dependent on the local market area and passing highway traffic for business. This land use is characterized by retail and service establishments located to take advantage of highway access, typically consisting of restaurants, service stations, grocery stores, mini-marts, super markets, department and discount stores, and supply stores intended to serve travelers as well as local trade. The recommended location for highway commercial activity in North East is centered on Route 40 and MD 272 north of the Amtrak railroad tracks. The area has previously been designated for high-density development, and the infrastructure necessary for such development is already in place. It would also have direct access to the highway traffic necessary to support commercial activity of this kind.

New highway commercial development along highways should be permitted in a clustered fashion rather than the linear or strip configurations. Access to such areas should be limited with consolidated entrances. This should be required in the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations and coordinated with the State Highway Administration.

The Highway Commercial area increased by approximately 3 acres (2.95) acres on the 2040 Land Use Plan (Future Land Use Map) from the 2012 Land Use Plan, due to annexations in 2017-2018 in the US 40 Rogers Road area.

Village Commercial: The Village Commercial District is located at the fringe of the General Commercial District and allows for limited expansion of certain business and office uses south along Main Street. The plan's classification anticipates a mix of uses, including residential, small professional offices (including those located in existing residential buildings, e.g., doctors, lawyers, accountants), small specialty shops, and similar uses that primarily operate between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. during the week. In all cases, the scale and intensity of the proposed use should be the limiting factor. Uses within this District should not be disruptive of the surrounding residential neighborhood. New buildings and conversion of existing buildings should be done in a manner that is consistent with the existing character of the block. Uses should not be so intensive as to create congestion and/or parking problems along Main Street and in the adjacent residential neighborhoods. The scale and quality of signage should blend in with the existing visual character of the

area. The impact of new commercial uses on nearby residential areas should be carefully considered, implying that most new permitted non-residential uses should be processed as a special exception.

The total amount of Village Commercial Acreage on the 2040 Land Use Plan (Future Land Use Map) increased by 6.27 acres, from the 2012 Land Use Plan. Village Commercial Land use is more of a mixed use, providing residential and some additional commercial opportunities for these areas in the future. Some of this acreage is also within the Critical Area and any future development will be consistent with the Town of North East's Critical Area program.

Village Marine: Like the Village Commercial land use classification, the Village Marine land use is a limited commercial category that permits the development of key waterfront properties with uses that serve recreational boaters. In addition to docking and tie-up facilities, these sites may also be appropriate for related services, such as restaurants, boating specialties and supplies, and sanitary facilities. The sites are not appropriate for more intense marina uses, such as dry dock facilities, major boat repair, and high and dry storage.

Mixed Use Residential Office: The Residential Office land use classification encompasses areas of the Town where a mixture of residential and limited business uses coexist. Permitted businesses are strictly limited to those uses that are not unduly disruptive of the surrounding residential neighborhood, e.g., professional offices that are open only during daylight hours, result in little additional traffic, and do not need substantial parking.

Limited Commercial: The Limited Commercial land use classification includes properties located outside of the General Commercial District and the Highway Commercial area where existing limited industrial, commercial and/or business activities are currently being conducted. These properties are historically recognized commercial or business destinations that have adequate land area for existing and potential uses as well as adequate vehicle access, including for limited truck traffic. Considering surrounding land uses, these existing businesses pose little threat of adversely affecting neighboring properties. The Town does not intend to substantially increase the land area in this land use category but does intend for the existing uses to continue and to be allowed to expand in compliance with existing standards. In addition, appropriate infill and redevelopment will be permitted.

Industrial

Industrial development includes activities such as processing, manufacturing, assembly, and storage of bulk commodities. This land use falls under two broad classifications: heavy and light industrial activity. Future annexed industrial land use may include mineral extraction.

Heavy Industry: Heavy industrial uses include activities characterized by the operation of heavy equipment, manufacturing or assembly of durable goods, and handling or storage of

materials in bulk quantity. It is typically separated from other land uses in a community and has optimal access to major highways and other transportation routes.

It is recommended that heavy industrial activity and development remain in the area north of US Route 40. Future heavy industrial uses should be located at appropriate locations in the US Route 40 and MD 272 corridors where optimum access to major highway routes are available.

Heavy Industry - Mineral Extraction: Currently, no mineral extraction uses are located within the corporate limits, nor does the Town zoning ordinance permit such uses in any zoning district.

Light Industry: Light Industrial uses include activities such as processing, manufacturing, or assembly of soft or non-durable goods. Light industrial uses may be located in the Route 40 corridor at those locations where there will be little or no adverse impacts on existing commercial and/or residential land uses.

Strict performance standards should be required for all industrial uses along major highway corridors. For example, these uses should be heavily screened behind landscape buffers. To the maximum extent possible, existing trees and vegetation should be incorporated into these landscaped buffers. The Town must strive to protect the North East River and North East Creek from the undesirable effects of industrial development, as it is a major recreational and scenic asset to the Town and a source of drinking water. The Town of North East should work with the County to ensure appropriate regulation of all industrial activity, particularly industrial uses located in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area.

Public/Semi-Public

Public land uses cover a variety of uses for the health, education, safety, and the general well-being of the public (e.g. Town offices, post offices). They affect both the living and working environment of all residents. Once the desired living and working activities are described in the other land use sections, the Town must determine its responsibilities in accommodating these land uses and determine how to meet them. The utilization of land for public use-supports the planning of residential, commercial, and industrial development.

For purposes of this plan, public land uses are defined as those uses; which are owned and controlled by a public body for use of or service to the general public. Semi-public uses are those which are owned and controlled by a private or civic group for the purpose of aiding in the health, education, safety, or general well-being of the public or segment of the public.

It is recommended that North East ensure public facilities and services are available to all portions of the Town. Semi-public services, which are owned privately but meet the needs of the general public should be guaranteed to be accessible for reasonable public uses. Semi-public facilities which are not available to the general public should not be included in the inventory of public services.

Public services can only be provided according to the community's ability to support them. They should be utilized to their fullest, including using public lands for multiple purposes.

Public/Semi Public acreage on the 2040 Land Use Plan (Future Land Use Map) increased by approximately 2 acres (1.85) to more accurately depict two Town owned parcels that were previously Medium Density Residential (2012 Land Use Plan Map).

Park and Open Space

Park and Open Space land uses includes public-owned park land. Common open space in residential subdivisions is available to residents of that subdivision. These land uses and facilities are discussed further in Chapter 4, Community Facilities.

The total amount of Park and Open Space Acreage on the 2040 Land Use Plan (Future Land Use Map) increased by approximately 33 acres, from the 2012 Land Use Plan. This increase is primarily from the Town's 2020 acquisition and creation of the North East Preserve (formerly Planned Residential on 2012 Land Use Plan Map) and the reclassification of existing parks like Turner Park and North East Community Park to Park and Open Space.