

H A R F O R D  
**2016** **NEXT**

A MASTER PLAN FOR THE NEXT GENERATION



**BARRY GLASSMAN**  
County Executive

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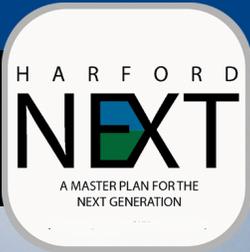
# **LETTER FROM COUNTY EXECUTIVE GLASSMAN**

# LETTER FROM DIRECTOR

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION



## A Master Plan for the Next Generation



### Background

For centuries, people have been attracted to Harford County's rolling countryside and fertile soils. Through the years, Harford County has strived to maintain its rural character and identity while balancing the needs of a diverse and growing population. The County faces new challenges, as it strives to balance its heritage with future growth. HarfordNEXT will provide opportunities to accommodate and focus growth in a manner that maintains rural areas, as well as, strengthens communities, with an emphasis on sustainable development. This plan will serve as the policy guide for implementing innovative ideas that will help build strong communities, grow a competitive economic base, and preserve our rich heritage.

HarfordNEXT unites the County's element plans into one streamlined document and introduces a thematic approach to organize policies and implementation strategies. At the core of the plan are policies promoting safe, harmonious, and livable communities. The plan provides strategies to create opportunities for small businesses and initiatives to attract large national corporations with diverse workforce needs. HarfordNEXT reaffirms the County's commitment to the mission of the Aberdeen Proving Ground and creating opportunities for revitalization and reinvestment within the Chesapeake Science and Security Corridor (CSSC). The plan also recognizes the County's diverse history and agricultural roots. HarfordNEXT must balance the preservation of our productive farm lands with sustainable development, to ensure continued economic vitality. Promoting an efficient, multi-modal transportation system is another vital component to the County's economic engine. HarfordNEXT aims to ensure we are a resilient community, poised to adapt to an ever changing social and economic climate.

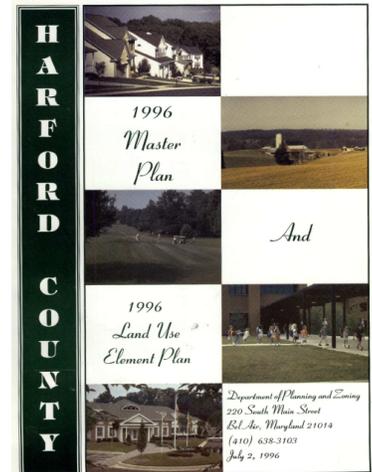
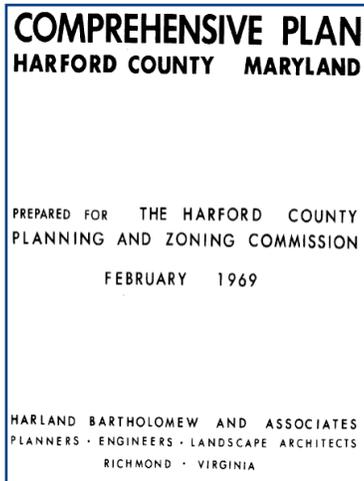
Attending to the physical and mental well-being of our citizens is a new and important component to the County's Master Plan. Harford County is seeing an alarming increase in chronic diseases such as diabetes and cancer, as well as, troublesome increases in heroin addiction. HarfordNEXT proposes goals and strategies to improve the built environment to help promote healthier, active communities. Advocating for mental wellness is also important to combating the heroin epidemic and reducing the incidence of chronic diseases.

Public participation is critical to the development of a successful master plan, and the outreach program for HarfordNEXT was unprecedented in engaging a wide range of citizens and community groups. Valuable comments and suggestions were collected in various formats of engagement including public meetings, email, social media, and Open Town Hall, an online citizen engagement tool. Presentations were also given to the eight Community Advisory Boards. The Department's outreach efforts were important to maintaining transparency and ensuring trust between the County and its residents.

HarfordNEXT is a forward thinking plan and an exciting opportunity to address the evolving needs of the County. Implementation strategies identified in this document will help strengthen the sense of place of our diverse communities and nurture a vibrant economy. HarfordNEXT establishes the necessary framework for maintaining and enhancing our quality of life, both now and in the future.

## Harford County Comprehensive Planning History

Harford County’s first Master Plan was completed in 1969 and established the original vision for growth in the County. The 1977 Master Plan introduced the Development Envelope, conceived to focus growth to areas where infrastructure was available or planned. Later, individual element plans were established to support the Land Use Element Plan, and these were related to the topics of transportation, natural resources, and historic preservation. In 1996, the Community Planning Councils were created for information sharing on common issues and to foster the development of a county-wide, comprehensive planning vision.



*The 1969, 1977, and 1996 Comprehensive/Master Plans anticipated the future growth of the County and established important planning concepts such as the Development Envelope, which continues to be an important growth management tool today.*

The 2004 Master Plan addressed state policies and initiatives, such as the eight planning visions identified in the 1997 Smart Growth Act, which established a Priority Funding Area (PFA) for capital investment and the Rural Legacy Program for land preservation. In Harford County, the PFA includes the Development Envelope, the municipalities, designated rural villages, University Center, Harford Community College, and areas designated for Mixed Office.

The Rural Legacy program uses state funds to purchase conservation easements on large tracts of land whether for agriculture, forestry, or habitat protection. Harford County has two Rural Legacy Areas: the Deer Creek Rural Legacy Area, which encompasses much of the Deer Creek watershed, and the Manor Rural Legacy Area, which is shared with Baltimore County.

In 2006, two pieces of legislation were introduced in the Maryland General Assembly: the Agricultural Stewardship Act of 2006 and House Bill 1141. The Agricultural Stewardship Act of 2006 required the adoption of a Priority Preservation Area (PPA) Plan, an updated PPA can be found in Appendix I. It also established a set of strategies to further land preservation in the area and established the goal of preserving 80% of the remaining undeveloped land.

House Bill 1141 was addressed in 2009 with the update of the Natural Resources Element Plan, which included the required Water Resources Element (WRE). The main purpose of the WRE (Appendix II) is to ensure that Harford County has adequate water resources to meet its current

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and future needs for drinking water and wastewater treatment. The WRE was developed in coordination with the County's municipalities.

In 2009, the state launched Smart, Green and Growing, a multi-agency initiative that clarified the role of the local comprehensive plans, required accountability by local jurisdictions, and added to the state planning visions. As part of the Smart, Green, and Growing legislative package, Harford County must submit an annual report that addresses specific smart growth measures and indicators that support the statewide land use goal of targeting development within designated Priority Funding Areas and minimizing development outside of these areas. Harford County's 2012 Master Plan and Land Use Element Plan built upon various state and regional planning initiatives, including all of the elements previously mentioned.

### Relationship to Municipalities

Harford County has coordinated with the Town of Bel Air and the cities of Aberdeen and Havre de Grace on the creation of their growth plans. State law requires municipal jurisdictions to develop a Municipal Growth Element (MGE) as part of their Comprehensive Plan. The MGE must identify future municipal growth areas outside of the existing corporate limits and must be submitted to the County for review and comment. Proposed annexations must be consistent with those outlined in the Municipal Growth Element Plans, and permitted development on the annexed lands must be in accordance with the County's zoning classification that is in place at the time of the annexation.

The County and municipalities are also working together on the development of Phase III of the County's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP). The WIP will address how Harford County will partner with local, state, and federal governments to achieve and maintain water quality standards.

### Plan Objectives

Five primary objectives underscored the development of HarfordNEXT:

- Establish a vision for Harford County.
- Consolidate various element plans into one cohesive document.
- Create a document that is accessible and easily understood.
- Provide strategic implementations to guide County actions.
- Refine planning strategies to be implemented at the community level.

These objectives form the underlying purpose of HarfordNEXT; each theme, principle, goal, and implementation was conceived with these objectives in mind.

### The Big Ideas

HarfordNEXT presents an ambitious vision for the future of Harford County. While the plan articulates numerous goals and implementations impacting all aspects of County government,

several key concepts emerged. These Big Ideas represent a bold direction for the County and are a sample of signature strategies that will distinguish Harford County:

### *1. Innovative development emphasizing sustainability*

Design manuals can provide a framework for new development and redevelopment to achieve harmonious design by establishing a comprehensive set of site layout and architectural standards. Overlay districts can be tailored to specific areas to provide context sensitive zoning solutions and achieve broader community goals, such as celebrating historic assets or rebranding an economically challenged neighborhood. Design manuals and overlay districts can help reinforce or define architectural character and encourage quality public open spaces and streetscapes that are compatible with existing communities.

### *2. Green Infrastructure Planning*

Developing a Green Infrastructure Plan will help to identify an interconnected system of ecologically important hubs and corridors county-wide. The network will support the migration of native plant and animal species while focusing restoration efforts to help improve air and water quality. The plan will also guide state and County preservation efforts and inform decision-making when preparing master plans, evaluating development proposals, prioritizing the purchase of agricultural or conservation easements, and acquiring land for public facilities.

### *3. Promotion of our historical and cultural resources*

With the advancement of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and mobile applications, the County can streamline the field survey workflow and create a new inventory system that has the potential for local, state, and national agencies and preservation organizations to prioritize future preservation and promotion activities. Mobile applications can also be developed to create walking, bicycling, and driving tours that promote the County's cultural resources, which can, in turn, benefit the local economy. The County will also pursue Certified Local Government (CLG) designation, which can provide access to grants and technical assistance to enhance our historic preservation program.

### *4. Collective Impact Model to establish health goals across various agencies and organizations*

The Collective Impact Model is a framework for fostering collaboration between organizations from different sectors to solve a specific social problem by aligning their efforts and determining overlapping measures of success. The model typically relies on five conditions to ensure success: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support. The County will utilize the Collective Impact Model to identify and solve various health issues such as the heroin epidemic, childhood obesity, and other chronic diseases.

### *5. Blue Zone Community*

HarfordNEXT seeks to establish Harford County as a place that emulates many facets of a Blue Zone Community where people live measurably longer, healthier, and happier lives. Some of the implementation strategies proposed in HarfordNEXT are a first step towards improving

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the health and well-being of our population. The County will develop policies and programs by collaboratively involving citizens, schools, employers, restaurants, grocery stores, and community leaders. Harford County can achieve certification as a Blue Zone Community through individual, public, and private commitments to act on specific goals and policies outlined in HarfordNEXT.

### 6. Holistic transportation planning

Innovative approaches are necessary to relieve congestion and improve safety on Harford County's roads and highways. HarfordNEXT proposes strategies, such as Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs, that are designed to reduce travel demand during the peak hours and/or redistribute travel demand. TDM promotes alternative ways to manage congestion, such as expanding rideshare programs, providing transit incentives, and encouraging businesses to implement teleworking and flexible scheduling for their employees. The plan also supports transportation alternatives, such as walking and bicycling, which have the added benefit of promoting an active lifestyle. Preserving rights-of-way is also essential to meeting long-range transportation goals and establishing a Complete Streets program.

### Plan Organization

HarfordNEXT is designed with a focus on enhancing the excellent quality of life enjoyed by Harford County residents, building healthy and resilient communities, and fostering economic vitality. Preparing a master plan for the next generation required the inclusion of innovative approaches to help the County grow with purpose, while also ensuring adaptability in an ever changing socio-economic environment.

The image displays a collage of six Harford County Element Plans, each featuring the Harford County seal and a representative photograph. The plans are arranged in a grid-like fashion on a dark blue background. The plans shown are:

- Transportation Element Plan (2010):** Features a photograph of a paved road winding through a wooded area.
- Historic Preservation Element Plan (2010):** Features a photograph of a historic stone building with a large wooden water wheel in the foreground.
- Natural Resources Element Plan (2009):** Features a photograph of a river flowing through a lush, green forest.
- Master Plan and Land Use Element Plan (2012):** Features a photograph of a grassy field with trees in the background.
- Priority Preservation Area Element Plan (2009):** Features a photograph of a green field with a wooden fence and trees in the distance.
- Harford County (2010):** A central plan with a photograph of a wooded area.

At the bottom of the collage, a white text box reads: *HarfordNEXT combines multiple Element Plans that were updated on different timetables into one overarching plan.*

Previously, Harford County's Master Plan and Land Use Element Plan were supported by several standalone element plans; such as the Transportation Element Plan, Natural Resource Element Plan, Historic Preservation Element Plan, and the Priority Preservation Area Element Plan. In an effort to streamline the Master Plan and coordinate policies and implementations across different disciplines, the Department of Planning and Zoning conceived a contemporary approach that organizes the plan around six overarching themes. This thematic approach covers the same fundamental topics as previous element plans; compiling the elements into a single document allows for more comprehensive and coordinated planning across the 25 year planning horizon of HarfordNEXT.

The six themes represent a holistic perspective on broad planning topics; the six themes are Grow With Purpose, Preserving Our Heritage, Mobility and Connectivity, Promoting Healthy Communities, Environmental Stewardship, and Economic Vitality. Each theme is structured around a number of principles and goals that correspond to implementation strategies to guide county policies over the life of the plan. The goals and implementations proposed in HarfordNEXT will become the work plan for County agencies.

From Darlington to Edgewood, the fabric of Harford County is sewn together by its diverse communities, and they are the foundation of HarfordNEXT. Seven community planning areas were established to facilitate strategic implementations at the community level. The Community Areas include Churchville-Creswell, Edgewood, Fallston, Greater Bel Air-Forest Hill-Emmorton, Greater Havre de Grace-Aberdeen-Bush River, Joppa-Joppatowne, and the Northern Tier. These seven areas vary slightly from the eight Community Advisory Boards, to maintain consistent data analysis. Each of the seven community planning areas is discussed in detail with an emphasis on identifying strengths and opportunities to achieve a high quality of life for residents .

Relevant implementation strategies from each of the themes have been applied to the Community Areas. After reviewing the strengths and opportunities for each Community Area, strategies were selected to help ensure the areas remain attractive, livable communities, which offer residents the quality of life they desire. The Community Areas section of the plan also stresses the importance of resilience and adapting to an ever changing socio-economic climate. To achieve this, the Community Areas section emphasizes the following goals:

- Protection and enhancement of existing neighborhoods;
- Provision of balanced residential, commercial and employment opportunities;
- Ensuring that neighborhoods are sustainable and resilient;
- Provision of multimodal transportation connections that are sensitive to community character;
- Provision of opportunities for a healthy lifestyle;
- Protection of natural, historical, and cultural resources; and
- Protection of rural areas.

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Each of the Community Area narratives provides information on existing population and growth trends. A description of each community's character along with a land use plan for the area is included. Variations exist among the descriptions, but this reflects the uniqueness of each area. The Community Areas section of HarfordNEXT will provide the framework for future planning studies and analysis in coordination with citizens and community groups.

### Public Participation

The Department of Planning and Zoning (Department) initiated HarfordNEXT with a presentation to the County Council on April 7, 2015. The presentation included a discussion on the changes to the format of the plan; specifically, the use of a thematic approach. Following the presentation to the Council, the Department of Planning and Zoning held an open house kickoff meeting at Harford Community College on April 29, 2015. The meeting was attended by 85 citizens who provided comments on the six guiding themes explored throughout the plan.

The Department simultaneously launched a HarfordNEXT webpage that provided information on the master plan process, status of the update, and links to reference material. A link was also provided to a cloud-based online civic engagement platform known as Open Town Hall. This platform allowed for an unprecedented level of community outreach. Citizens were able to access Open Town Hall anywhere from a computer or mobile device. The forum was updated periodically with questions to engage the public on a wide range of topics. Citizens could also forward their comments directly to the Department via an email link on the webpage.



During the spring and summer of 2015, staff made presentations to all of the Community Advisory Boards (CAB). Similar to the presentation given to the County Council, Department staff educated CAB members on the changes to the format of the master plan and discussed the six guiding themes. The CAB's were then given an opportunity to provide formal written comments. As part of the engagement process, the information gathered at these events was transposed into a written format and then shared on the HarfordNEXT website. Department staff also made presentations and solicited input from stakeholder groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, Farm Bureau, and Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC), as well as forming a

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) composed of representatives from various county and state agencies.

The draft of HarfordNEXT was released for public review on February 8, 2016. The draft was accessible through the HarfordNEXT webpage. In keeping with the Department's commitment to infuse technology into the planning process, citizens could use the online tool known as OpenComment to provide feedback on the draft plan.

## State Planning Visions

In 2009, the Maryland Legislature passed a suite of legislation called Smart, Green and Growing, which included 12 Visions that address quality of life and sustainability, public participation, growth areas, community design, infrastructure, transportation, housing, economic development, environmental protection, resource conservation, stewardship, and implementation approaches. HarfordNEXT incorporates the State's planning Visions throughout the various themes, goals, and implementation strategies. The Visions are:

*1. Quality of Life and Sustainability: A high quality of life is achieved through universal stewardship of the land, water, and air resulting in sustainable communities and protection of the environment.*

Enhancing quality of life is a priority for the citizens of Harford County. The County continues to foster environmental stewardship and sustainable living, with an added focus on resiliency and adaptation. Policies related to sustainability and resilience have been incorporated into this plan and can be found within the Grow With Purpose, Environmental Stewardship and Preserving our Heritage themes.

*2. Public Participation: Citizens are active partners in the planning and implementation of community initiatives and are sensitive to their responsibilities in achieving community goals.*

Public participation is a significant component of comprehensive planning and the County is dedicated to providing diverse forums for public participation; including email, web portals, social media, and community meetings.

*3. Growth Areas: Growth is concentrated in existing population and business centers, growth areas adjacent to these centers, or strategically selected new centers.*

HarfordNEXT continues to focus future residential and commercial development within the Development Envelope, while exploring areas to accommodate future growth. Growth areas are discussed within the Grow With Purpose and Mobility and Connectivity themes.

*4. Community Design: Compact, mixed-use, walkable design consistent with existing community character and located near available or planned transit options is encouraged, to ensure efficient use of land and transportation resources, and preservation and enhancement of natural systems, open spaces, recreational areas, and historical, cultural, and archeological resources.*

HarfordNEXT proposes innovative design guidelines that promote mixed-use and transit oriented development, with an emphasis on providing multi-modal transportation options. Community

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design is discussed within the Grow With Purpose and Mobility and Connectivity themes.

*5. Infrastructure: Growth areas have the water resources and infrastructure to accommodate population and business expansion in an orderly, efficient, and environmentally sustainable manner.*

The Priority Funding Area (PFA) was established in 1997 to direct growth around existing population centers where community facilities and infrastructure exists. The County's Adequate Public Facilities Program monitors the number and location of new housing units approved and also provides an analysis of the current and future capacity of public facilities and services such as schools, water and sewer, and roads.

In coordination with the municipalities, the County has updated the Water Resources Element Plan (Appendix II). This Plan ensures that Harford County has adequate water resources to meet its current and future needs for drinking water and waste water treatment. It also requires that there be suitable receiving water and land areas to meet the stormwater management needs of existing and future development as identified in this Plan.

Infrastructure is discussed within the Grow With Purpose, Economic Vitality, and Mobility and Connectivity themes.

*6. Transportation: A well-maintained, multimodal transportation system, facilitates the safe, convenient, affordable, and efficient movement of people, goods, and services within and between population and business centers.*

HarfordNEXT explores various policies and goals to establish an efficient and reliable multi-modal transportation system within Harford County and in accordance with State initiatives. An efficient multi-modal transportation system includes transit, rail, and non-motorized transportation options, which encourage walking and biking as an alternative to motorized options. Transportation and related issues are discussed within the Mobility and Connectivity, Grow With Purpose, Promoting Healthy Communities and Economic Vitality themes.

*7. Housing: A range of housing densities, types, and sizes provides residential options for citizens of all ages and incomes.*

In response to social and economic changes, HarfordNEXT explores the importance of providing a variety of housing options that meets the diverse needs of our citizens. The County also has the Consolidated Plan (FY 2013-2017) that establishes a five year strategy for how the County will provide a suitable living environment for low to moderate income families. Housing is discussed within the Grow With Purpose and Economic Vitality themes.

*8. Economic Development: Economic development and natural resource-based businesses that promote employment opportunities for all income levels within the capacity of the County.*

The Department of Planning and Zoning in cooperation with the Office of Economic Development will continue to actively support established businesses within the County, while seeking to attract new businesses to broaden the County's economic base. The County also seeks to provide prospective employers with a highly trained and skilled workforce, which will further enhance the County's attractiveness to national companies.

Economic Development is discussed in the Preserving Our Heritage, Economic Vitality, and Grow With Purpose themes.

*9. Environmental Protection: Land and water resources, including the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays, are carefully managed to restore and maintain healthy air and water, natural systems, and living resources.*

Harford County has long been committed to the protection and stewardship of the environment as evidenced by our Natural Resource District (NRD) regulations and Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Program (CBCA). HarfordNEXT explores new and innovative strategies to enhance, encourage, and promote environmental stewardship to help meet the State's goals of improving the water quality of our streams, rivers, and ultimately the health of the Chesapeake Bay. Environmental Protection is discussed within the Grow With Purpose, Environmental Stewardship and Preserving our Heritage themes.

*10. Resource Conservation: Waterways, forest, agricultural areas, open space, natural systems, and scenic areas are conserved.*

Harford County continues to be committed to the protection and preservation of its natural systems and scenic areas through the implementation of its Forest Conservation and NRD regulations. HarfordNEXT proposes the creation of a Green Infrastructure Plan, to identify an interconnected system of ecologically valuable land, where consideration will be given to minimize the impacts of new development and to focus restoration efforts. HarfordNEXT also emphasizes renewed efforts to preserve our valuable historic and cultural resources. Resource Conservation is discussed within the Grow With Purpose, Environmental Stewardship, and Preserving Our Heritage themes.

*11. Stewardship: Government, business entities, and residents are responsible for the creation of sustainable communities by collaborating to balance efficient growth with resource protection.*

HarfordNEXT emphasizes the concept of sustainability with a new emphasis on resilience and adapting to a rapidly changing world. Sustainability and resilience strategies must be incorporated into planning for future growth, in order to ensure that future generations are not burdened by problems created by today's generation.

Stewardship is discussed within the Grow With Purpose, Environmental Stewardship, and Preserving our Heritage themes.

*12. Implementation: Strategies, policies, programs, and funding for growth and development, resource conservation, infrastructure, and transportation are integrated across the local, regional, State, and interstate levels to achieve these visions.*

Harford County uses many tools to achieve the Visions, including Adequate Public Facilities (APF) legislation to manage growth by tying development to the capacity of existing government services such as water and sewer, roads, and schools. APF laws are designed to ensure that new development does not adversely impact a community's quality of life by overburdening these facilities.