

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

Community Facilities and Services includes the basic infrastructure of the Town such as water and sewer service, essential services such as solid waste disposal, and public safety services such as police and fire and rescue.

This chapter examines the community facilities and services provided in Easton. It offers brief background information on each component of this system and incorporates the input received throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process into a series of goals and objectives.

Also, while not specifically mentioned in this Chapter, the concept of sustainability is covered elsewhere in this Plan. It is worth at least noting here because the more sustainable development projects become, the less their impact upon many community facilities and services.

BACKGROUND

Easton's public services and utilities are of vital importance to the continued physical, economic, and social improvement of the Town and the surrounding region. Expansion of certain basic economic activities can be more readily accomplished provided that public and private utility and service systems are adequate for the existing and projected population of the Town. A major goal of the Town is to ensure the continued adequate maintenance and expansion of community facilities and public services necessary to guarantee public health, safety and welfare and enhance resident's quality of life. This goal is balanced against the fiscal ability of the Town to provide necessary community facilities and services and its objectives for managing the location and rate of the Town's growth and development. It must also be remembered that because of the Town's dominant function as a regional commercial and employment center, Easton must consider

the demands of the surrounding region, as well as the needs for local residents, upon Town facilities and services.

UTILITIES

Utility service in the Town of Easton is predominately provided by Easton Utilities, who is responsible for the operation, management and maintenance of the electric, water, sewer, and natural gas (as well as internet and cable television) systems for the Town (and some surrounding areas for some services). In 1923, Easton became the first municipality in the state to own all of its utilities, and this arrangement is still unique today.

The Easton Utilities Commission, a three member board, two of which must be Easton residents with the third only residing in the electric service territory, who are appointed by the mayor with the advice and consent of the Town Council, governs Easton Utilities. A full-time President/CEO has day-to-day responsibilities for executing the policies and regulations as determined by the Commission.

ELECTRICITY

Electricity first came to Easton in 1887, but was not under town jurisdiction until 1915. Electric service is now provided by Easton Utilities to over 10,000 customers in a 54 square mile service territory through 16 diesel engine generators and through PJM Interconnection, LLC. Easton residents benefit from this arrangement because Easton Utilities is able to choose the most economical and reliable source of electric power on an hourly basis, either through PJM, through its own generators, or a combination of these sources.

Easton's installed electrical generation capacity is 70 megawatts, which is more than adequate to meet the town's current demand. This represents a 10 megawatt increase since the 2004 Plan was adopted.

Until very recently, Easton Utilities provided all of Easton with electrical service. However, some of the most recent projects in Town fall partially within the service areas of

other electricity providers. As the Town grows, this will be the case more frequently. The two other providers of electricity in Easton are Choptank Electrical Cooperative and Delmarva Power and Light. Now with multiple service providers, the need for coordination and cooperation among the various electric companies in order to continue to provide Easton with the most optimum service is vital. For example, the various companies should work together to transfer service areas when necessary to avoid situations where single subdivisions or projects would be served by two (or three) different companies.

WATER AND SEWER

The Easton Utilities Commission also provides water and sewer services for the Town. The Easton Utilities Commission is responsible for the operation, construction and maintenance of the Town's water and sewer systems. It is anticipated that the Town will remain the sole supplier of water and sewer services in Easton throughout the plan period.

The Town's water source currently is derived from wells tapping into deep fresh water aquifers. The Town has supplied water service to its residents since 1914.

The Town of Easton first constructed a sanitary sewage collection system in 1911. Through the subsequent years, as the Town grew so too did the need for additional capacity and treatment. In 1938, a treatment plant was constructed along the banks of the Choptank River. In 1988, construction was completed on an innovative treatment facility. This new facility utilizes an Overland Flow Treatment Process which at the time of construction was the fifth largest such system in the United States. In 2007 a new state-of-the-art enhanced nutrient removal treatment facility was brought online.

Extensions of the Town's public water and sewer systems are currently based upon a County-wide Water and Sewer Facilities Plan and "on demand as required" by new development. In order to more effectively manage the location and rate of growth and development in Easton, it is recommended that, in the future, sewer and water service

extensions be based upon a Capital Improvement Program that is in accordance with this Comprehensive Plan.

The Town should continue to provide water and sewer delivery services to only those areas within the corporate Town limits. Annexation decisions should carefully consider the costs and benefits of extending services to proposed annexation areas.

The Easton Utilities Commission has established capital and connection fees for water and sewer for all new development within the Town. These fees compensate for the Town's expense of connecting service to new development and an equitable proportional share of future capital improvements costs for sewer and water systems maintenance and expansion. The cost of extending sewer and water lines to any new development is borne in full by the developer.

More recently the Town has enacted legislation that limits the amount of sewer service available to any one development in any one-year to not more than ten (10) percent of the Town's annual net available capacity. Annual net available capacity is determined by subtracting the Town's annual obligations for sewer capacity from the annual gross available sewer capacity as determined by the State. The basis for this new regulation is to extend the availability of the Town's sewer capacity over a longer period of time and also to ensure an equitable distribution of that capacity to a number of different development projects in different areas of the Town. Without this annual ten (10) percent cap it is possible that a single large development project could consume the Town's entire annual sewer capacity in one year thereby necessitating the Town to undertake expensive expansion of its treatment facilities. The closer the plant gets to its capacity, the more important this cap becomes.

More detailed information, particularly with regards to the requirements for water and wastewater service required to satisfy the needs of future growth, are provided in the Municipal Growth and the Water Resources Elements.

NATURAL GAS

Acquired by the Town in 1923, Easton's Gas Department is the only municipal gas utility in the state today. Originally, burning coal at a plant on West Street derived Easton's gas. However, Easton Utilities converted to natural gas in 1966 when it signed an agreement to purchase its gas supply from Eastern Shore Natural Gas Company.

The town's gas supply is now piped in from the Federalsburg, Maryland area, and distributed to over 4,500 customers through 38 miles of steel and plastic mains. The Gas Department distributes an average of 1,200,000 cubic feet of natural gas per day to Easton's residents living in its 8.5 square mile service territory.

HOSPITAL FACILITIES

Hospital Services in the Town of Easton are provided by Shore Health Systems at Memorial Hospital. In the realm of the Comprehensive Plan, this facility has two kinds of impact. The first is the service provided to the community. The second is the impact this facility has on the Town in general and its neighborhood more specifically. In the former area, the impact is unquestionably positive. In the latter though, the results are mixed.

As Memorial Hospital has expanded, the Hospital and surrounding residential areas have encountered increasing conflicts. The Hospital is unable to consolidate all related facilities on a single parcel of land because of a lack of space. As a result the Hospital and its parking facilities have begun to encroach upon the surrounding neighborhood. Neighborhood residents are disturbed by traffic, parking and the intrusion of intensive activities into their residential environment. Activities to reduce conflict between the Hospital and adjoining residential areas include: continued coordination of any remaining Hospital expansion plans with the Town, and improvement of the traffic circulation and parking pattern in the area.

In recent years Shore Health Systems has made a decision to seek a site for a new, state-of-the-art regional medical facility. They studied a site in the Wye Mill's area as well as a new Easton site located between the Talbot Community Center and the current Town boundary adjacent to the airport. Late in 2008, Shore Health Systems announced that they had selected the Easton site.

This is terrific news for Easton and its residents. In addition to the medical care that is provided, the Hospital is also a major employer and attracts numerous labs, doctor's offices, physical rehabilitation centers, pharmacies, etc... to Easton. This is both more service for Easton residents, as well as more medically-related jobs.

Remaining to be seen is whether these businesses will move from the Idlewild/Dutchman's Lane area up to the vicinity of the new hospital and what becomes of the current hospital facility. These are issues that will need to be explored in detail as the prospective move comes closer to reality.

SOLID WASTE FACILITIES

The citizens of Easton receive collection of their solid waste from the Town. The Town of Easton in turn contracts with Talbot County to dispose of this waste at the Mid-Shore Regional Landfill located on Barkers Landing Road, southeast of town. In 1993, the Town adopted a residential disposal fee to cover the tipping charges associated with solid waste disposal at the landfill.

At the present time the Mid-Shore landfill adequately meets the needs of the citizens of Easton. However, it is scheduled to close on December 31, 2010 and the next Regional Landfill will open the next business day, January 3, 2011 in Caroline County. At that time the Town will need to provide a site or sites for a transfer station(s). The logical location is at the site of the current landfill.

Facilities, in the form of "igloos", for recycling are located at the landfill and at several sites in and around Easton. At present time there is no public curbside recycling

service in Easton. A private company (Infinity Recycling) will provide such service for a fee. The County is also exploring options for the reuse of the current landfill site which include a transfer station and recycling center. Curbside recycling is a service that continues to be frequently mentioned whenever we collect public opinion about issues like what service or facility would you like to see expanded or started in Easton. As the Town grows, particularly if it does so in a more dense urban setting, this becomes more feasible. In fact, it is expected that single-stream curbside recycling will begin in Easton in July 2010.

SETTING THE STANDARD WITH PUBLIC BUILDINGS

The previous Comprehensive Plan Visioning process kicked off with a presentation by Ed McMahon of the Conservation Fund. Mr. McMahon has spoken in Easton on a number of occasions on the general theme of improving the quality of the built environment. One of many excellent points that Mr. McMahon makes concerns the importance of government setting the standard for a community through its public buildings. The following passage is from Mr. McMahon's book, *Better Models for Development in Virginia*.

People have long understood that public buildings can help nurture feelings of heritage and community that enrich a nation and its people. Public buildings and spaces create identity and sense of place. They give communities something to remember and admire. The challenge facing public architecture is to provide every generation with structures that link them with their past, fill them with pride, and reinforce their sense of belonging.

Public buildings should set the standard in a community. Public buildings with civic stature, quality materials, and prominent settings project

a sense of permanence and human scale that expresses the dignity and importance of public institutions.

During the 18th, 19th, and first half of the 20th centuries, public buildings [in Virginia] such as city halls, courthouses, post offices, and public schools were always the community's most beautiful and important buildings. In the last half of the 20th century, however, public buildings often have been relegated to little more than utilitarian boxes. We sometimes have designed schools and libraries that resemble correctional facilities. We have built fire stations and post offices that look like warehouses, and we have moved many of our public buildings from downtown to new locations on the strip outside of town.

People appreciate public buildings that express the dignity, permanence, and importance of civic institutions and which harmonize with their surroundings.

Easton is blessed with some wonderful public buildings, almost all of which are located, as they should be, downtown. But, it was not without some close calls that this occurred. In the last two decades, Talbot County has advertised for bids to acquire land for new administrative offices and some of the bids were well outside of the downtown. The Post Office recently substantially upgraded its existing facility but it originally entertained moving out of downtown.

On the positive side of things, the Easton Utilities Commission opened a new Customer Service Center in 2000. This facility is clearly the most significant addition to the Town Center in decades and is a beautiful building that looks as if it belongs in an historic downtown, which of, course, it is. It stands as an example for Town, County and possibly State governments to try to emulate when building new office space in Easton.

One new governmental building that may be necessary in the not-too-distant future is a new Town Office. The current facility at 14 South Harrison Street has proved adequate for many years and is an excellent example of adaptive reuse of a former firehouse and then police station. However it is running short on space to house employees. There may be additional opportunities to add onto the building or it may ultimately prove to be more feasible to build at a new site. If so, the new building should follow the lead of the Easton Utilities Building by (1) being located in downtown and (2) being a building that all of Easton's citizens can be proud of.



The Easton Utilities Commission's Customer Service Center

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL: To continue to provide a high-quality of community services and facilities through adequate maintenance of existing systems and the addition of new facilities/services when necessary to guarantee public health, safety and welfare and enhance the quality of life of those who visit, live, or work in Easton.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Distribute the cost of community facilities and services equitably between the public, the developer and future users.
- ✓ Require that in conjunction with annexation, developers shall bring any deficient community facilities that serve their project up to Town standards for that facility, on a proportionate basis.
- ✓ Require all community facilities and services users to pay their "fair-share" of capital costs for necessary systems improvements.
- ✓ Ensure that the provision of community facilities and services are coordinated and consistent with the growth and development policies established in this Comprehensive Plan.
- ✓ Ensure that community facilities and services are provided equitably to all Town residents and businesses.
- ✓ Require all development to pay for all road, water, sewer, and other community facilities and services extensions and additions needed as a result of new development utilizing the Town's recently adopted Impact Fee Ordinance and whatever additional tools may become available.
- ✓ Encourage development to occur in an orderly and logically progressive manner through Town provision or extension of utilities to desirable growth areas with the provision for recapture of the cost thereof from future development.
- ✓ Expand opportunities for Town residents to participate in recycling programs.

- ✓ Plan for the location of a solid waste transfer station when the Regional Landfill located east of Town closes and the new one opens in Caroline County.
- ✓ Encourage the development of a Community Center and/or more recreational/entertainment opportunities for Easton's youth.
- ✓ Encourage regional and innovative approaches to storm water management.
- ✓ Encourage a college to locate a general purpose satellite campus in Easton.

GOAL: To coordinate Town community facilities with Plans and services of other agencies.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Encourage Talbot County to amend its Master Water and Sewer Plan to reflect the readiness of projects to proceed within the Easton Growth Area.
- ✓ Avoid having subdivisions served by multiple electric companies by supporting efforts of the Easton Utilities Commission to trade service areas with Delmarva Power and/or Choptank Electric in order to create more logical areas of service within the corporate limits of the Town.
- ✓ Create a Capital Improvement Program to better coordinate operations and projects between various agencies.

GOAL: To express the dignity and stature of public institutions by constructing great public buildings.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Construct public facilities with materials and in a style such that they are generally among the finest buildings in Easton.
- ✓ Build public facilities that are large enough and have ample opportunities for expansion, in order to insure that they will remain for a very long time.

- ✓ Locate public buildings in, or in close proximity to, the historic Town Center of Easton (one exception may be for smaller “sub-stations” which should be located in outlying neighborhoods, nearer the population they are intended to serve).
- ✓ Encourage Talbot County to locate their public buildings in or near the Town Center as well.
- ✓ Investigate the need for a new Town Office Building or the feasibility of an expansion of the existing building.