

## PLAN BACKGROUND

### CONTEXT

Before diving into the heart of this Plan, it is important to understand some background and the context in which it was written. Although adopted in 2009, the preparation of this particular version of the Comprehensive Plan started in 2007, with the lion's share of the work, particularly the community input and information gathering, occurring in 2008. In actuality though, this Plan is simply the latest evolution of the one that was adopted in 1997. That Plan represented a distinct break in substance and style and talked about ideas and issues that had generally not been covered in Easton's Comprehensive Plan before. It was also produced of, for, and by the people, the citizens of Easton and those who work in Easton. That Plan was modified somewhat in 2004 and thus we come to the 2009 Plan when it is time to look again at our Town and ponder our future.

The framework for this Plan was laid in 2007 with a joint meeting of the Planning Commission and Town Council where it was generally agreed that the 2004 Plan was a good one and as such, little should be changed in it to create this 2009 Plan. It contains solid ideas concerning the future growth of the Town, limiting the ultimate geographic size of the Town, and improving the design of everything from neighborhoods to individual buildings. There is no desire to throw any of those thoughts out. Rather, the decision was made to build on these ideas, improve them where possible, but essentially just add the new requirements for Comprehensive Plans that were imposed by the State through the provisions of HB 1141. In a nutshell, that is the context and spirit in which this Plan was created.

## HISTORICAL SETTING

In order to understand what comprises present-day Easton and contemplate what the Easton of the future might be, it is important to understand the Easton of the past. As might be expected of a Town nicknamed the "Colonial Capital of the Eastern Shore," Easton has a long history. In 2010, Easton will celebrate the Tri-centennial anniversary of its founding.

The Town of Easton seems to have received its official beginning from an Act of the Assembly of the Province of Maryland dated November 4, 1710. The Act was entitled, "An Act for the Building of a Court House for Talbot County, at Armstrong's Old Field near Pitt's Bridge". Pitt's Bridge crossed a stream forming the headwaters of the Tred Avon or Third Haven River. It was located at a point where North Washington Street crosses this stream, now enclosed in culverts, north of the Talbottown Shopping Center, and passes under the Electric Plant property.

Prior to this date, the Court had met at York, a small settlement located on Skipton Creek. The Court decided that this location was not convenient to all sections of the County and, in order to change the location, the 1710 Act of the Assembly was passed.

As a result of this Act, two acres of land were purchased from Philemon Armstrong, at a cost of 5,000 pounds of tobacco, the currency of the times. Upon this tract, the same plot upon which the present Talbot County Court House now stands, the Court House, a brick building 20 x 30 feet, was erected at a cost of 115,000 pounds of tobacco. The Courts of the County were held in this building from 1712 until 1794. A Tavern to accommodate those who attended Court was one of the first buildings erected; stores and dwellings followed. The village was then known as Talbot Court House.

These were not the first buildings in the area. The frame meetinghouse of the Society of Friends was built between 1682 and 1684. Undoubtedly some homes were built nearby.

This Court House building continued to be used until the State Legislature, at its first Session after the adoption of the State Constitution in 1777, authorized the General Court, the forerunner of the present Court of Appeals, to sit alternately on the Western Shore and on the Eastern Shore at "Talbot Court House in Talbot County". To care for the needs of the General Court, the Legislature in 1789 enacted "An Act for the building of a Court House in Talbot County for the Accommodation of the General Court for the Eastern Shore and the County of Talbot". This building, built at a cost of 3,000 pounds sterling, paid by the State and County, was completed in 1794, and still serves as the seat of the County Courts. Its use by the General Court and the Court of Appeals has long since been discontinued. It is, however, after many remodelings, the last being in 2001, still used by the United States District Court, which customarily sits in Baltimore.

On March 12, 1785, the Legislature passed an Act to erect the Town in Talbot County, and a Commission headed by Jeremiah Banning, was appointed to purchase land and "Lay it Out in the Best and most convenient manner into lots not exceeding one-half acre each". This Act also authorized the Commission to survey the land and lay out the streets as well as name them. The name of the Town was to be known as "Talbot". In 1788 another Act of the Legislature changed the name to "Easton". It is not definitely known why this change was made. Some writers believe that the Town was first known as "East Town" or "East Capital", as it was the seat of State Government of the Eastern Shore, and from this later became Easton.

In 1790 the Legislature provided for the election of five Commissioners to whom was entrusted the administration of the Town. The Commission was charged with the

preservation of order, the maintenance of the roadways in passable condition, keeping open the drainage ditches, providing plank footwalks where necessary and making and enforcing such regulations as were needed for the preservation of the peace and welfare of the Community.

The powers of the Commission were rather limited and it appears that at times it almost ceased to function. This may account for the fact that some of the streets of the Town as originally laid out have been encroached upon to such an extent by the abutting property owners. Dover Street, which was laid out at a uniform width, is one example. Magazine Alley originally provided vehicular passage but has now become a narrow pedestrian walkway.

Prior to 1906, Easton was a village with unpaved streets, which had to be crossed at the corners where plank crossings were provided. Electricity for streets and homes has been provided since 1887. The electric service at the turn of the twentieth century, however, was discontinued at midnight, causing late visitors to scurry home before the old carbon globes gradually died out as the Town Clock struck the hour of midnight. After midnight, the only lights about the Town were half a dozen gas jet lamps encased in square glass lanterns set on top of wooden poles.

In 1906 the Legislature authorized a new Charter setting up the Mayor and Council form of government. Martin M. Higgins was elected as the first Mayor and served for six years, or a total of three terms.

Under Mayor Higgins, Easton developed rapidly into a modern municipality. In 1911, Easton was a pioneer in Maryland in constructing a complete municipal sewerage system. In 1912 the main residential and business streets were paved. In 1914 the Town purchased and began operation of a municipal water system, and in the same year commenced the operation of a municipal electric plant. In 1922 the Town purchased and

commenced operating a local gas plant. Since that time, it has been one of the few municipalities in the United States that owns and operates all of the public utilities: electric, gas, water and sewer, and more recently, cable television and Internet service.

Planning in the Town of Easton has a relatively long history for a community of its size. The first meeting of the Easton Planning and Zoning Commission was held October 18, 1946. The purpose of this meeting was to hear from members of the Maryland Department of State Planning and the St. Mary's County Planning and Zoning Commission about the steps necessary to establish and empower a Planning and Zoning Commission in Easton. This was later done by Charter Ordinance approved December 17, 1946. The original members of the Easton Planning and Zoning Commission were Louis S. Welty, Chairman, Calvin Skinner, Vice-Chairman, Robert Johnston, William C. Meintzer, and W. H. Corkoran, Jr.

The first Subdivision Regulations were adopted in 1947; the first part of the first Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1950, and the original Easton Zoning Ordinance was adopted in 1953. More recently the Town has been much more active in land use planning, both in terms of long-range comprehensive planning and day-to-day planning activities. The hiring of a professional Planner in 1988, recent revisions to the Town's Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, and the adoption of a Critical Areas Program and Forest Conservation Ordinance evidence this. This current update of the Comprehensive Development Plan is the latest undertaking in what has become a nearly continuous effort to assess and revise the Town's development-related regulations. Since the 2004 Plan was adopted the Town has followed up with comprehensive revisions to the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, adopted Design Guidelines for New Development of properties outside of the Historic District, and most recently adopted a Plan prepared under the auspices of Historic Easton, Inc., for Downtown Infill Development.

## REGIONAL SETTING

When planning for Easton's future, the location of the Town and the interdependence of the Town with other geographic and economic regions are of prime importance. The future population and economic vitality of Easton is determined, not only by local activities, but also by activities in the larger region of which Easton is a part. To this extent, it is essential to relate the Town of Easton to Talbot County, the Eastern Shore, the Delmarva Peninsula, and larger metropolitan areas within close proximity.

Easton, the County seat, is situated in the central portion of Talbot County. The Town is located near the headwaters of the Tred Avon River, which provides access to the Chesapeake Bay. In 2000, the Town was the third largest municipality on the Eastern Shore with a population of 11,708 inhabitants, smaller than only Salisbury and Elkton. Based on the number of Occupancy Permits that have been issued since the date of the Census, the 2009 population is estimated to be 15,249 (1/1/09 estimate). In 2000 the Town contained 34.6% of the County's population. Easton remains the market and service center of the central portion of Maryland's Eastern Shore. Easton is bisected by U.S. Route 50, which provides excellent access to many other major highways. U.S. Route 50 is a major route connecting the Baltimore/Washington metropolitan area to the coastal resort of Ocean City on Maryland's lower shore. The Town is home to a regional municipal airport and is only about one hour's drive from Baltimore-Washington International Airport.

Talbot County, in the central portion of the Eastern Shore, is characterized by gently rolling land areas virtually surrounded by the Chesapeake Bay and four of its major tributaries. Talbot County contains over 600 miles of waterfront. Its land and adjacent waters support agriculture and seafood processing activities that have historically formed a substantial portion of the County's economic base. Development in recent years reflects



*Map 1, Easton Regional Context*

diversification of this base economy to include a broader manufacturing, service, and tourism economy. Over 75% of the 279 square miles of County land is arable. In 2000, 33,812 people lived in the County, an increase of 11% over 1990. This was a substantial decrease in the rate of growth of the 80's when the population expanded by 19%.

The Eastern Shore of Maryland contains nine counties with a 2000 population of 395,903. This represents an increase of 15% over the 1990 population. An abundance of fresh water and favorable soil characteristics enhance the Eastern Shore's value for agricultural purposes; although in recent years agricultural lands across the Shore have become increasingly threatened by development. Industrial activity in the region has historically been related primarily to agricultural activities and processing of seafood taken from the numerous waterways. However, since 1970 several industries have located on the Shore, which are not reliant upon food products. These include manufacturing, electronics assembly and commercial services, resulting in significant industrial diversification. In the early to mid part of the present decade, the Talbot County Economic Development Commission embarked upon a strategy of concentrating on attracting environmental research and technology businesses to the County with the ultimate goal of becoming the "Silicon Valley" or "Research Triangle" for this particular segment of the national economy.

"Delmarva" is a term that describes the 6,057 square mile peninsula encompassing the nine Eastern Shore of Maryland counties (although some do not include Cecil County as part of Delmarva; for the purposes of this Plan it is included), all of the State of Delaware and the two counties on Virginia's Eastern Shore. In 2000 the population of Delmarva was 1,230,901. Fifty-five percent of the land area and roughly 1/3 of the population of the Delmarva Peninsula is in Maryland. The peninsula is bounded by the Chesapeake Bay on

the west and south, and the Delaware Bay and the Atlantic Ocean on the east. The peninsula lies almost entirely within the Atlantic coastal plain region.

Table 1 below lists the population of Easton, Talbot County, and the Eastern Shore since 1960. This table indicates Easton's continued significance as a population center in both Talbot County and the Eastern Shore.

TABLE 1 POPULATION FIGURES

	2000	Easton as %	1990	Easton as %	1980	Easton as %	1970	Easton as %	1960	Easton as %
Easton	11,708	--	9,372	--	7,536	--	6,809	--	6,337	--
Talbot County	33,812	34.6	30,549	30.7	25,604	29.4	23,682	28.8	21,578	29.4
Eastern Shore	395,903	3.0	343,769	2.7	296,620	2.5	258,329	2.6	243,570	2.6

Enjoying relative proximity to surrounding states, Easton is located approximately 20 miles from Delaware, 80 miles from Pennsylvania and 85 miles from Virginia. The Town enjoys excellent access to major metropolitan areas. From Easton, it is 59 miles to Baltimore, 62 miles to Washington, 85 miles to Wilmington and 114 miles to Philadelphia (See Map 1). The Capital's of five states are also located nearby. Easton lies only 37 miles (via highway) from Annapolis, 46 miles from Dover, Delaware, 174 from Richmond, Virginia, 127 miles from Trenton New Jersey, and 133 miles from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Thus Washington D.C. and five State Capitals are located within three hours driving time of Easton.

With today's modern highway facilities, distance ceases to be as important a consideration as travel time. Easton is 60 – 90 minutes from the fourth largest consumer market in the United States, the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. Philadelphia and New York, two larger consumer markets, are 2-3 hours travel time from Easton.

Within 350 miles of Easton live approximately 34% of the U.S. population and 40% of the U.S. industrial market.

Furthermore, with today's communication infrastructure, travel time is also becoming less important. Many entrepreneurs are able to run a business from practically anywhere. In such circumstances, quality of life factors become extremely important in attracting such people. Easton and Talbot County generally are viewed as scoring highly on such factors. Because of the natural attractiveness of its living and working environments, Easton will increasingly be considered as a possible relocation site for people and industries. As other areas become less attractive, the Easton area will be encouraged by outside influences to grow and develop. However, this is no guarantee that these people and jobs will ultimately locate in Easton. For example, a lack of adequately sized, sited, and zoned land can keep away potential new business or industries. It is the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan to provide the Town with a guide to organize its growth in a pattern and at a rate that can be accommodated within the human and fiscal resources of the Town and in a manner that does not destroy the character of the place that so many people love and enjoy.

## **2009 GROWTH DYNAMICS**

Easton has experienced moderate but consistent population growth since its founding. In recent years the rate of growth has increased substantially. Table 2 indicates Easton's population at various years since 1800. The 1800 population is an estimate from an article in the Maryland Room of the Talbot County Free Library which stated that in 1800 Easton was a Town of "about 1,000 inhabitants." All other figures are U.S. Census figures, although the figures for 1910 and 1920 are interpreted from a graph of Easton's population.

TABLE 2 TOWN OF EASTON HISTORIC POPULATION

YEAR	POPULATION
1800	1,000
1810	NA
1820	NA
1830	NA
1840	1,358
1850	1,413
1860	NA
1870	NA
1880	3,005
1890	NA
1900	3,074
1910	3,100
1920	3,400
1930	4,092
1940	4,536
1950	4,836
1960	6,337
1970	6,809
1980	7,536
1990	9,372
2000	11,708

The racial composition of the Town's population appears to be becoming more constant. The non-white population represented 28% of the total population in 1980. This represented a 4.1% increase during the 1970 - 1980 period. However, during the 1980's and 90's this figure stabilized as both the 1990 and 2000 Census indicated that the non-white population remained at 28% of Easton's total.

The age composition of the population is changing. Table 3, located on the following page, Age Distribution shows the patterns of age distribution from 1970 to 2000. Two numbers stand out on this Table. One is the high growth in the older population. In

fact, the “Over 74” age group has grown by 176% since 1970. The other notable observation is that in the 1990’s, every single age category except the “25 to 29” showed an increase.

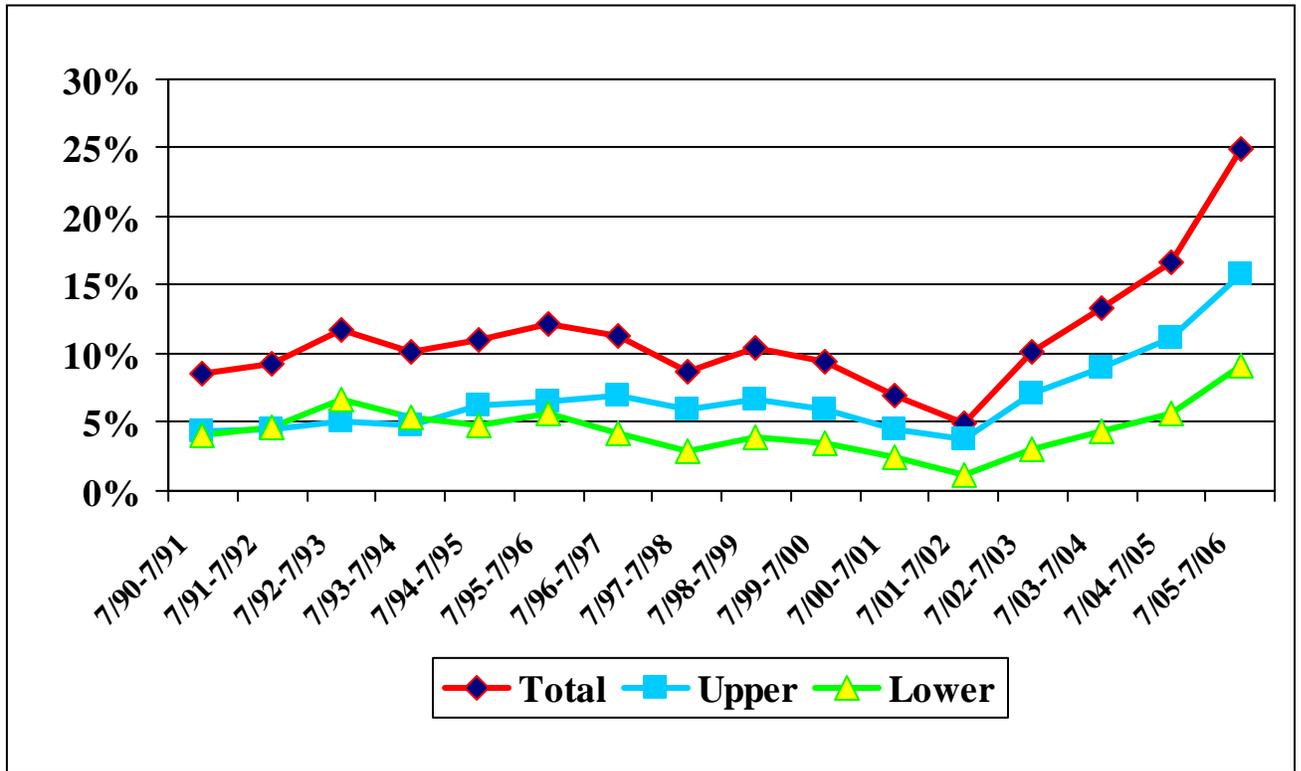
Changes in the general age distribution reveal a complex series of demands on the level of local services. The increase in the number of young and middle-aged adults reflects a larger number of people potentially available for the labor market. When older populations increase, medical facilities and convenience services normally reflect a corresponding increase, as evidenced by the Hospital expansion (and most recently its proposed move to a new site on the edge of the Town’s Growth Area) and development of related services along Dutchman's Lane and Idlewild Avenue, as well as the growth in Assisted Living and Senior Housing during the most recent decade. As the characteristics of the population change, so must the direction and focus of community services.

Age	1970		1980		1990		2000	
	Total Number	% of Total						
Under 5	472	6.9	407	5.4	658	7.0	743	6.3
5 to 9	569	8.4	363	4.8	581	6.2	768	6.6
10 to 14	575	8.4	506	6.7	504	5.4	739	6.3
15 to 19	580	8.5	599	7.9	502	5.4	649	5.5
20 to 24	494	7.3	710	9.4	621	6.6	631	5.4
25 to 29	420	6.2	691	9.2	869	9.3	745	6.4
30 to 34	308	4.5	541	7.2	793	8.5	904	7.7
35 to 44	732	10.8	739	9.8	1,315	14.0	1,839	15.7
45 to 54	847	12.4	736	9.8	805	8.6	1,475	12.6
55 to 64	785	11.5	882	11.7	825	8.8	962	8.2
65 to 74	546	8.0	746	9.9	867	9.3	925	7.9
Over 74	481	7.1	616	8.2	1,032	11.0	1,328	11.3
Totals	6,809	100%	7,536	100%	9,372	100%	11,708	100%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census

Furthermore, all of this change is coming within the overall context of increasing regional and State-wide growth pressures. The State of Maryland is quite concerned about the projected State population growth or more particularly about local government's ability to accommodate this growth in a "Smart" manner. That is, they would like to see this growth occur in designated growth areas, especially within municipalities where the infrastructure to accommodate growth is most likely to exist. Figure 1 below graphically depicts Eastern Shore growth. Note that growth on the Shore now represents about 25% of the overall State growth according to the Maryland Department of Planning.

Refusing to grow and hoping that it simply goes somewhere else seems like an unlikely option as well. Delaware is growing every bit as fast, if not faster, than the Eastern Shore. To a certain extent, people are fleeing the Western Shore and the one place with a lot of capacity to accommodate additional growth, Baltimore City, is the main place people are fleeing. The Base-Realignment and Closure Act (BRAC) promises to bring thousands of new homes and jobs just beyond the Shore, with the likelihood that some will reside on the western and northern edges of the region. Finally, along our southern border a planned aggressive expansion of NASA's Wallop's Island Flight Center on Virginia's Eastern Shore promises to bring more growth to that portion of our region. It just does not appear, unlike so many times in our past, that this time we can just hold steady and let the latest wave of growth pass the Shore by.



**Figure 1 – Eastern Shore Growth 1990 – 2006**

Source – *Maryland Department of Planning*

**INCOME**

Income statistics present an overall view of the community's economic health. Without a suitable distribution of income, many facets of the Town's economy are restricted because local residents cannot provide for their own needs in the private market.

Extreme income groups, upper and lower, demand different and sometimes conflicting types of housing, retailing needs and community services. The high-income groups demand a more expensive life style than the low-income groups are able to afford. Lower income groups are less able to provide for their own needs and in turn look to

governmental agencies for community services. Both categories are significantly large in Easton indicating that the diverse needs of each group will need to be considered.

The 2000 Census indicates that incomes rose significantly in Easton during the 1990's. According to the 2000 Census, for example the percentage of households with incomes less than \$10,000 declined from 17.9% to 10.6% of all households. (See Table 4).

Still, while incomes continue to rise, inflation and adjustments to the definition of poverty, established by the Bureau of the Census, result in a large number and percentage of households within the Town that can be considered low and moderate income. Housing affordability continues to be a problem for families in these income groups. Other Census results describe an Easton that is not nearly as affluent as Talbot County or even the State as a whole. The 2000 Census indicates that the median household income in Maryland in 1999 was \$52,868. The corresponding figure for Talbot County was \$43,532. Easton's 1999 median household income was \$36,464. Table 5 below shows the corresponding figures for the most recent update available (2007). The median household income went up by more than 25% for all jurisdictions, although Easton grew by the lowest percentage (27.2% vs. 28.8% for both Talbot and Maryland).

TABLE 4 HOUSEHOLD INCOME DISTRIBUTION, 1999		
Income Category	Number of Households	Percent
Under \$10,000	527	10.6%
\$10,000 - \$14,999	393	7.9%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	839	16.9%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	658	13.2%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	858	17.3%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	962	19.4%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	300	6.0%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	312	6.3%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	50	1.0%
\$Over \$200,000	72	1.4%
Median Income = \$36,464	Total Households = 4,971	

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census

Table 5 Median Household Income			
	Easton	Talbot County	Maryland
1999	\$36,464	\$43,532	\$52,868
2007	\$46,378	\$56,057	\$68,080

## POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Table 2 earlier indicated the historic population growth of the Town of Easton. A closer examination of these numbers reveals distinctive growth rates at various points. This is perhaps more clearly evident by looking at a graph of this data. Figure 1 below shows this information graphically.

# Town of Easton Population

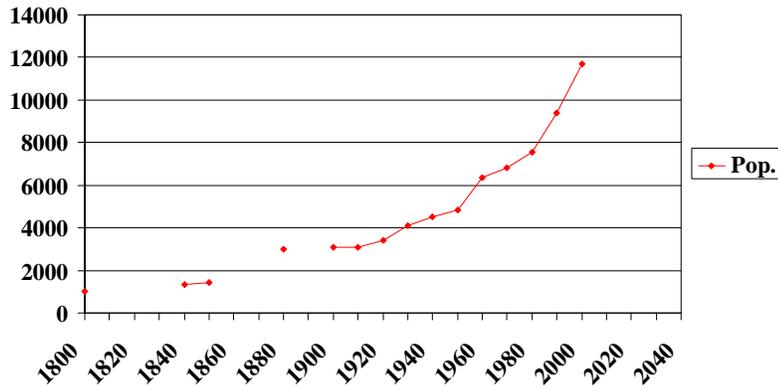


Figure 2 – Historic Town Growth 1800 – 2000

This graph indicates that there are two distinct points at which the rate of growth increases. The first is at 1950 and the second is at 1980. Looking at the population figures corresponding to these different periods of time, it is possible to calculate the growth rate for each. On an average annual compounded basis, the growth rate of the Town from 1800 to 1950 was approximately 1.06%. For the period 1950 to 1980, it was approximately 1.5%. Finally, for the most recent twenty-year period, it was approximately 2.3%.

Figure 2 above looks only to the year 2000, using the Census population counts for each year on the graph. We are now almost through this first decade of the new millennium, and as such it can be useful to look at growth throughout this decade. The Planning Office annually reports on the number of new residential units that received permits during the previous calendar year. Using this data as well as information from the Building Department concerning the number of demolitions, estimates are prepared of the

Town's population as of January 1<sup>st</sup> of each year. Table 6 below summarizes these estimates.

Year	Net Units Approved	Population Added	Annual Growth Rate	Following Year's Population Estimate
2000	147	228	2.5	11,936
2001	177	366	3.1	12,302
2002	306	633	5.1	12,935
2003	315	652	5.0	13,587
2004	346	716	5.3	14,303
2005	188	389	2.7	14,692
2006	95	197	1.3	14,889
2007	90	186	1.3	15,075
2008	84	174	1.2	15,249

*147 units approved in 2000, however since the Census figure is as of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 75% or 110, was used to estimate population growth for 2000 from the time since the Census figure was released. The growth rate for that year was similarly adjusted so that it reflects a full year.*

*Net Approved Units derived from subtracting the number of units demolished from the total approved.*

*Population estimates developed by multiplying the net units approved by the household size (2.22) and occupancy rate (93.2%) reported in the 2000 Census.*

While observing and analyzing the historic growth of the Town of Easton is an interesting exercise, the more important task for a Comprehensive Planning effort is to look forward. The various growth rates can be used as a basis for doing this. Table 6 below

projects Easton’s population to the year 2030 at each of the distinctly different historic growth rates. There is also one addition. That is a 3% growth rate. 3% is the figure used in each of the previous two Comprehensive Plans as the “High” projection. It is also the rate at which the Town has been growing since the latter half of the 90’s. It is also almost exactly the average annual compound growth rate of the current decade, which given that we are 90% through it, it seems reasonable to assume will be very close to the figure for the decade as a whole.

TABLE 6				
POPULATION PROJECTIONS				
TOWN OF EASTON				
GROWTH RATE	2010	2020	2030	2040
1.06%	15,410	17,124	19,029	21,145
1.5%	15,478	17,963	20,846	24,193
2.3%	15,600	19,583	24,583	30,859
3.0%	15,706	21,108	28,368	38,124

During the Visioning phase of each of the last two Comprehensive Plan Updates there was a great deal of discussion and comment concerning the rate of growth in Easton. In 2004, after careful consideration the Planning Commission and ultimately the Town Council decided that the most appropriate method to manage growth was to specify geographic limits where growth should occur and establish an order in which different areas should come into Town to accommodate new growth, until the point at which we reach the ultimate Growth Boundary. This Plan modifies that strategy somewhat, but essentially reinforces it. Specifically, the Plan identifies areas and a sequence for when and where growth should occur. The quality and appearance of both new and existing

development is also an important element of this Plan and measures to reach that goal are also included. Town Officials believe this combination of growth management techniques will maintain Easton’s character and charm while allowing for limited and deliberate growth so that the Town can continue to provide the services needed by its citizens and visitors.

By far the biggest change to this strategy is the establishment of goals, policies, and objectives designed to limit future residential growth to no more than 1% annually. This will be a challenge to achieve given the projections of 3% annual growth that would likely occur absent any actions to either inflate or retard the growth rate. 1% is significantly less than Easton’s recent historic growth rate. However, the Planning Commission believes that Easton has reached a point where growth at a rate faster than 1% endangers our ability to keep up with the provision of the services necessary to accommodate that growth, contributes to making already bad problems (i.e. traffic) worse, and threatens the small-Town charm and atmosphere that so many love about Easton.

Growth at a 1% Annual Rate produces the following population projections:

2010	2020	2030	2040
15,401	17,013	18,793	20,759

Elements of this refined, limited growth strategy will permeate throughout this Plan. However, it is most clearly and comprehensively outlined in the Municipal Growth and the Implementation Chapters of the Plan.