

# ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY REGION PLAN HANDBOOK



MAY, 2023

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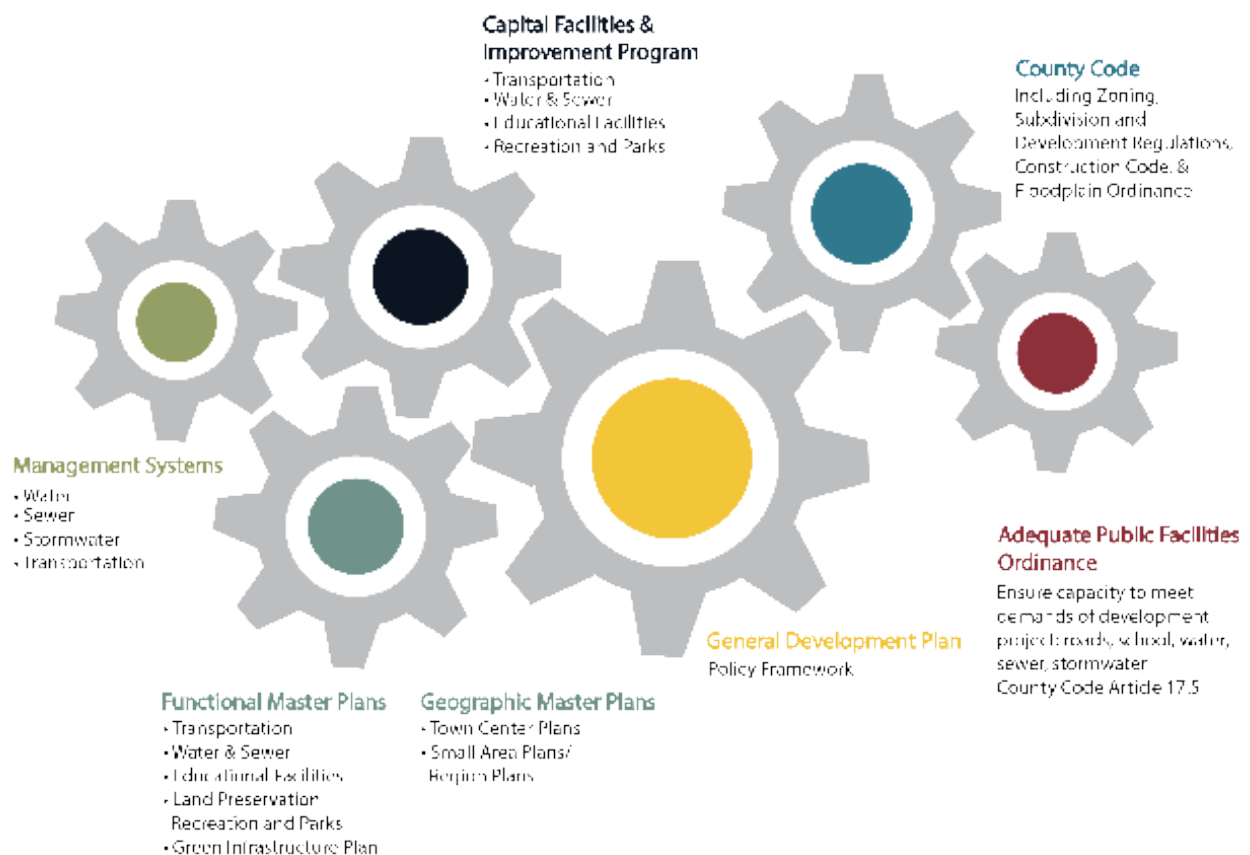
# 1. Purpose

This handbook offers an overview of the Region Plan process for Anne Arundel County. It is intended to be a resource for community members as they collaborate with each other, with their stakeholder advisory committees, and with County staff to develop a shared vision for the future.

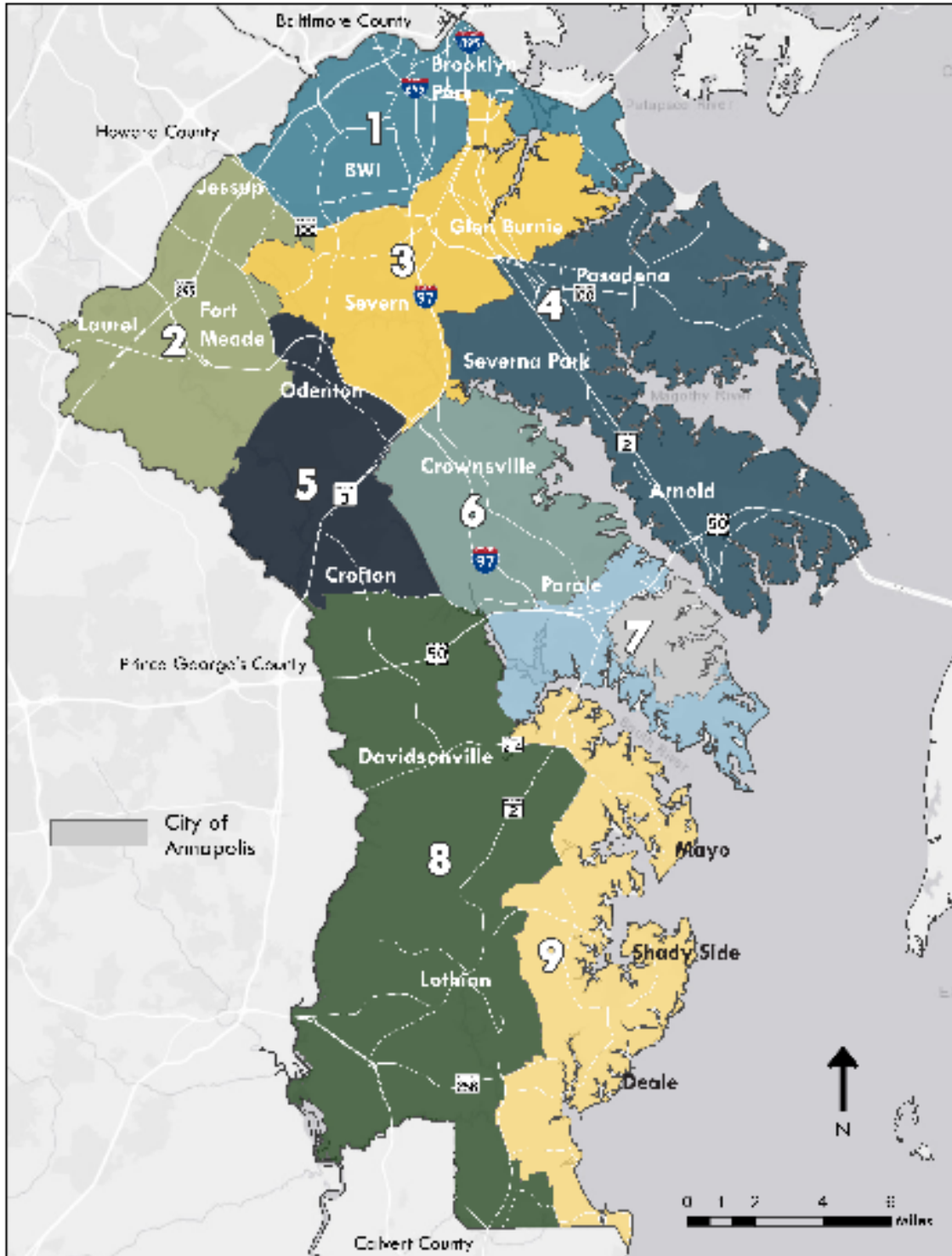
## 2. Overview of Region Plans

### 2.1 How is Land Development Managed in Anne Arundel County?

Maryland State law establishes policies and requirements that empower local governments to adopt plans and ordinances to manage land development and promote smart growth. Anne Arundel County has established a growth management program that includes six primary elements. The General Development Plan (GDP) is a broad policy document that establishes goals, policies, and strategies for the physical development of the County. The County Code implements the GDP through regulations for zoning, subdivision of land, construction, stormwater management, and protection of natural features and cultural resources. The adequate public facilities regulations in the County Code provide standards and requirements to ensure that infrastructure is constructed to support growth. Functional and Geographic Master Plans complement the GDP and provide more detailed guidance for systems like transportation and water and sewer or specific areas like Town Centers and Regions. The County's Capital Improvement Program budgets for public investments to support the GDP. Management systems to public infrastructure analyze the impacts of development and aid County departments in delivering public services.



It is important to understand the County's limitations in managing development. The vast majority of development in the County is constructed by the private sector which responds to the market forces of supply and demand. County plans try to direct those market forces to guide development that meets community interests while acknowledging that there are many and diverse interests in land development and respecting private property rights.



Map of the 9 Region Plan areas prepared through Plan2040

## **2.2 What are Region Plans?**

Region Plans offer community members an opportunity to get together to develop a shared vision for their future. After adoption of the 1997 GDP, a set of Small Area Plans were prepared for each of 16 designated subareas of Anne Arundel County. The latest update of the GDP, Plan2040, directs the County to prepare 9 Region Plans. The Region Plans will build on the work of the previous Small Area Plans as well as Plan2040.

The Region Plans will include an evaluation of community assets and needs, a shared vision for the next 20 years, and specific recommendations for each region about land use, zoning, environmental protection, transportation improvements, public facilities, and community design.

## **2.3 Why are Region Plans Needed?**

Region Plans provide detailed planning that is not possible or appropriate in the Countywide General Development Plan. Localized planning allows for strong community engagement on site-specific recommendations for land use and zoning, public facility improvements, community enhancement, and other local priorities.

The Region Plans will bring together the various plans for County programs and systems—like transportation, water and sewer, parks and recreation—and engage community members in exploring how public investments can be leveraged to support a shared vision for the future.

Additionally, Region Plans may address social or community concerns. These recommendations may guide provision of public services or support private, community-driven efforts to improve quality of life.

## **2.4 What is the Relationship of Region Plans and the General Development Plan?**

Plan2040 establishes broad policies for guiding decisions relating to future development, resource management and protection, and provision of public services in the County. The Region Plans provide area-specific recommendations for achieving and refining the goals of Plan2040. For example, a strategy of Plan2040 is to "Develop a comprehensive Countywide Trails Plan that analyzes where there are deficiencies in the current existing and planned network with the intent of linking existing and future neighborhoods to community facilities, parks, points of interest, and major activity centers. This Plan shall include a comprehensive network of off-road bicycle, pedestrian and recreation trails in the southern half of the County." The Region Plan process should aid in identifying deficiencies in the trails network and make recommendations for where linkages should be provided. The Region Plan process will include a comprehensive assessment and recommendations for Land Use Map and Zoning Map changes. After they are adopted by the County Council, Region Plans will be considered amendments to the GDP.

## **2.5 How will the Region Plans be used?**

Region Plans will be adopted by the County Council and become amendments to Plan2040. After a Region Plan is adopted, the County government will consider the recommendations of the plan in the development of future plans and policies, review of development applications, planning for capital improvements, and preparation of budgets. The Region Plans will also be used to inform the next update of the General Development Plan.

## 2.6 How were the Region Plan Boundaries established?

Defining the boundaries of a community is an inherently difficult exercise, but one that is necessary for planning. People's lives, families, relationships, work, and recreation do not follow set lines. The Region boundaries are different from the Small Area Plan boundaries. As part of the Plan2040 process, the Plan2040 Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) recognized the limited County resources and drafted nine region plan boundaries for community discussion. The boundaries of the Regions were defined based on community, geographic, environmental and development characteristics of different parts of the County. The public provided Input on the draft Region boundaries through a series of open house meetings and an online comment tool. The Plan2040 Citizen Advisory Committee modified the Region boundaries to reflect the public comments.

## 2.7 What is the sequence and timing of the Region Plans?

Preparation of the Region Plans will need to be staggered over time in recognition of limited resources to facilitate community engagement, conduct research and analyses, and write the Region Plans. It is expected that each Region Plan will take 18 to 36 months to complete.

The County Council determined the order of the Region Plans based on a number of factors including amount of development and change in the regions and geographic distribution.

Target Start Date	Regions
May 2021	2, 4, and 7
December 2022	1, 3, and 9
April 2024	5, 6 and 8

## 2.8 Who will do the work of developing the Region Plans?

County Code states that "the Office of Planning and Zoning shall work with the stakeholder advisory committees to create the Region Plans and to ensure that the Region Plans are consistent with the policies in the General Development Plan" (Article 18-2-103(d)(3)).

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) will include 9 to 15 members who represent the diverse interests of each Region. County staff will help direct and facilitate the planning process and provide data and technical expertise from a variety of disciplines. Other experts may be engaged to provide perspective and additional resources.

## 2.9 How will the Stakeholder Advisory Committees be selected?

The County will hold an open application period for people interested in joining the SAC. The County will screen the applications with support from outside organizations. Applications will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

- Relationship with community
- Relevant knowledge of Region
- Consensus- building, community service, and/or other soft skills

Consideration will also be given to ensure that the SAC includes diverse representation of the different neighborhoods within each Region, the ethnic and minority demographics of the Region, and different interests and perspectives such as the following:

Long-time resident property owner/renter (over 20 years)	Recent resident property owner/renter (less than 10 years)	HOA or Civic Association Board Member
Local business representative	Home builder/ real estate developer	Military, Department of Defense, or Other Relevant Government Agency or Contractor
Environmental organization	Community/ social organization	Affordable Housing Advocate
Member from a Commercial or Maritime Association	Real Estate broker	Member of a School Organization
Young adult representative	Member of a Local Recreation Council or Group	Farming and Agriculture representative

SAC members will be appointed by the County Executive and approved by the County Council.

## 2.10 What will a Region Plan include?

Each Region Plan will be tailored to address the unique characteristics and needs of the local community. The content of each Region Plan will align with Plan2040. The Region Plans will analyze existing conditions and trends in each of the major Plan2040 topic areas, and will establish goals, strategies, and performance measures and action items for each topic area. The Region Plans will also provide an opportunity to recognize the individual communities within the Region and their uniqueness; provide for additional stakeholder input; identify unique features within the communities that should be protected; identify community needs; and refine the land use plan with particular focus on the Targeted Development, Redevelopment, and Revitalization Areas.

Concept plans for these targeted growth and the Critical Corridor areas will be developed to help shape the future vision for these areas. Using the results of a fiscal impact analysis, additional land use alternatives will be assessed to consider the regional impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic, and to improve the balance between water resource limitations and forecasted housing and job growth, while directing growth to occur within the Targeted Areas. During the Region Plan process, the need for additional implementation tools, such as design guidelines, urban design standards, density adjustments, new zoning districts, and form-based codes will be explored. In addition, an analysis of the Region's data on workers per household will be conducted in order to make adjustments that will achieve a more balanced Countywide ratio. Each Region Plan is expected to include action strategies to address elements specific to each Region, such as agriculture, sea level rise, mobility, equity and accessibility. The outline below is a broad framework for each Region Plan's structure:

1. Introduction
2. Community Characteristics
3. Natural Environment
4. Built Environment
5. Healthy Communities
6. Healthy Economy
7. Implementation

## PLANNING THEMES

The Office of Planning and Zoning expects to organize each Region Plan around the following themes, in alignment with the organization of Plan2040.

**Natural Environment:** Plans will develop measures to protect and restore environmental assets and sensitive features, such as shorelines, while mitigating environmental harm from issues like inland flooding and sea-level rise. Plans will address questions such as

- What natural areas are locally important?
- What actions are currently underway or planned to protect and restore natural resources?
- What additional actions are important to the community?

**Built Environment:** Residents can expect Region Plans to address mobility, housing, and redevelopment, among other built environment details. For example, Plan2040 includes goals and policies promoting walkability. A Region Plan can identify locations where the community wants sidewalks and bicycle infrastructure. Plans will address questions such as

- How can land use changes and transportation investments promote community development?
- Where are the best opportunities to support more housing options?
- What measures are needed to protect cultural and historic resources?



- How can our built environment become more resilient?

**Healthy Community:** Region Plans will work to develop localized frameworks for services that support healthy communities, such as improved access to culturally-relevant foods, or better access to public parks and recreation opportunities. For example, Plan2040 includes goals and policies supporting increased accessibility to parks and recreation facilities. A Region Plan can identify areas where the community would like a new park or renovation of an existing park. Plans will address questions such as

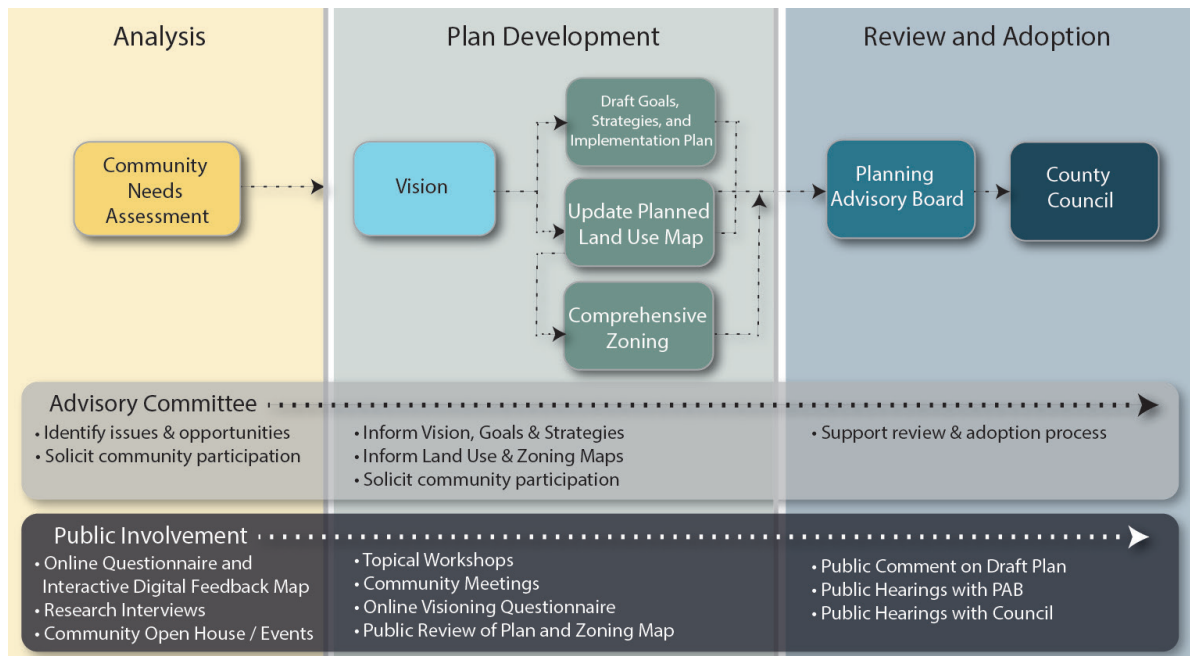
- How can we provide better access to parks, trails, and open space?
- How can we ensure schools have capacity and resources to support students?
- What facilities and programs are needed to support our aging population?

**Healthy Economy:** Plans will also address actions that can strengthen and grow a healthier economy through, for example, planning efforts that help revitalize commercial corridors. Plans will address questions such as:

- How can we improve access to employment and housing?
- How can we promote revitalization of vacant or struggling commercial areas?

### 3. Steps in the Region Planning Process

Each Region Plan will follow the same general planning process as illustrated in the following graphic and described below. The details of the process will be tailored to the unique characteristics and needs of each Region.



# Stakeholder Advisory Committee

The Stakeholder Advisory Committees (SAC) will meet throughout the planning process and collaborate with County staff to guide development of the Region Plans. SAC meetings will be open to the public. Agendas and meetings notes will be made available for public review.

## Step 1. Public Involvement

Community members are critical to the Region Plan process.

The County will use a variety of different outreach techniques to reach diverse audiences, including digital, by mail, social media, traditional media, in-person events, and more. It is never too soon to help spread the word about Region Plans to your friends, neighbors, and other community connections. The County encourages residents to please share this handbook and the Region Plan website: [aacounty.org/regionplans](http://aacounty.org/regionplans).

## Step 2. Community Assets and Needs Assessment

The conditions and needs assessment for each region will integrate both County studies and public input. The assessment will cover a number of topics including, but not limited to address demographics, transportation, land use, environment, infrastructure. The assessment will incorporate a racial and social equity perspective. The findings of the assessment will be presented on the project website with interactive maps and graphs. The findings will also be included in the Region Plan documents.

## Step 3. Visioning

The SAC and the public will contribute to creating a vision statement for the future of the region. Conceptual plans will be prepared to complement the vision statement and illustrate the future development of key areas in the region.

## Step 4. Goals, Policies and Strategies

Building on the Goals, Policies, and Strategies of Plan2040, the SAC will participate in the development of specific recommendations for the Region. These may include recommendations for physical projects and County policy.

## Step 5. Planned Land Use Map and Rezoning

The SAC will review the Planned Land Use Map and Zoning Map and make recommendations for changes to support the vision, goals, policies and strategies and manage forecasted growth. The County will provide an open application period for property owners to request changes in land use and/or zoning. The applications will be analyzed by County staff and reviewed by the Stakeholder Advisory Committee and the public.

## Step 6. Preliminary Draft Public Review

The SAC and County staff present a preliminary draft of the Region Plan for public review and comment.

## **Step 7. Review and Adoption Process**

The SAC and County staff will present the Region Plans, including recommendations for comprehensive zoning, to the Planning Advisory Board (PAB) for review and recommendations. As part of that process, the PAB will establish a period of time to accept formal written comments on the plan and will hold a public hearing to accept formal oral comments on the plan.

County staff will work with the Administration to finalize a recommended Region Plan that will be presented to the County Council for review and adoption. Once any bill is introduced by the County Council, the legislative process will last up to 95 days. If the bill has not been adopted within 95 days, it fails. Detailed information about the Legislative Branch and its process can be found in Article III of the County Charter as well as within the Rules of Procedure of the County Council, found in Appendix A of the County Code.

## **4. Staying Involved**

If you are interested in joining a Region Plan Stakeholder Advisory Committee, you can fill out an application at [aacounty.org/regionplans](http://aacounty.org/regionplans)

If you want to stay informed of the planning process, subscribe to the email list by visiting [aacounty.org/regionplans](http://aacounty.org/regionplans).

Please check the Region Plan website for updates and schedule of meetings and opportunities to provide input.