



## Section One The Vision

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### Introduction

The City of Chesapeake is a diverse and rapidly growing community with a heritage deeply rooted in the history of our developing nation. The present City of Chesapeake was formed in 1963 through the consolidation of the City of South Norfolk and Norfolk County. Chesapeake's landmarks and communities have a long and diverse history that stretches back to the early days of the Colony of Virginia.

While most of the present City of Chesapeake retained its rural character throughout the early twentieth century, the northern section near the City of Norfolk began to develop as the suburb of South Norfolk. South Norfolk became an independent town in 1919, a city of the second class in 1922, and in 1950 it became a city of the first class. As noted above, in 1963, South Norfolk joined Norfolk County to become the new City of Chesapeake. Thus, Chesapeake is a combination of an old county, a city, and many villages and settlements.

Between the mid-1980's and mid-1990's, the City experienced unprecedented changes in population and land use. During this period, the City's average annual growth rate was 4.5%, the highest 10-year growth period in the City's history. From 1990 to 2000, the City's population increased by 31.1%, making it the 33<sup>rd</sup> fastest growing locality in the United States. During this same period, the total number of housing units increased from 55,742 to 72,672, an increase of 30%. The vast majority of these new housing units have been single-family units. Although the growth rate has declined in recent years, the City continues to grow each year and is now the third largest city in Virginia with a January 1, 2004 population of 210,549.

The City is very diverse in terms of its land use patterns. Unlike most localities that are primarily urban, suburban or rural in nature, Chesapeake exhibits all three patterns. Most of the growth has occurred in the City's suburban areas, changing the once rural character of the landscape to that of neighborhoods, shopping centers and business parks largely dependent on the use of the automobile. The former City of South Norfolk has retained its urban character, while the southernmost reaches of the City have remained rural.

Due to the expansive size of the City (353 square miles), it was assumed that this suburban growth pattern would continue; however, a land availability analysis performed in 1998 indicated that there are a number of factors that limit the City's ability to grow in the same manner. As a result of this analysis, City Council directed the Planning Department to begin a citywide update to the City's Comprehensive Plan.

The Forward Chesapeake 2026 Comprehensive Plan represents a policy guide that recognizes the diversity found in the City. The City Council and Planning Commission are

committed to the wise and equitable management of economic, land, natural and human resources for which they are stewards and to the judicious growth and maturation of the broad community and interests they represent.

### **Community Participation in the Comprehensive Plan Update Process**

Opportunities for citizen participation were offered during each phase of the plan. Throughout the process, staff at the Planning Department called on the participation of citizens, business and development representatives, special interests, government officials, department heads, staff of other city agencies and staff from other governmental agencies whose actions would affect the physical development of the City. A brief overview of these activities is contained here; please refer to the Appendix for a full accounting of community participation activities.

Two key committees were heavily involved in the plan development process: the Plan Advisory Team, or PAT, and the Technical Advisory Committee, or TAC. The purpose of the Plan Advisory Team was to provide input and guidance throughout the development of the Comprehensive Plan. The group's primary purpose was to develop consensus on difficult issues and to suggest solutions to problems. The PAT was comprised of thirty-two citizens representing a broad range of interests. The selection of the PAT was deliberate so that a balance of the representation of interests was maintained. The PAT consisted of nine citizens/community representatives (one appointee per Council Member), eight citizens representing business and development interests, and 15 quality of life/amenities representatives. The Plan Advisory Team provided a simulation of the issues of the community as a whole and provided the opportunity to resolve competing interests during the Plan's development.

The purpose of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was to provide technical input throughout the development of the plan. The TAC representatives reviewed and provided comment on the products developed through the plan process. The TAC was comprised of staff from departments, and federal, state, and regional agencies that have a stake in the future growth of the City.

Input was sought from any citizen who desired to participate during each phase of the project. The objective of the Phase One citizen participation activities was to get as much broad citizen input as possible within the resources available. To accomplish this objective, post cards were mailed to every household in the City making citizens aware of the Forward Chesapeake 2026 workbooks. The purpose of the workbook was threefold: 1) to educate citizens on the Comprehensive Plan process; 2) to inform citizens on the ways they could participate in the project including a calendar of community meetings; and 3) to ask citizens questions regarding their perceptions on the past and future Chesapeake.

In addition to the workbooks, the Planning Department hosted six community meetings through the City. These meetings were designed to collect information on the City's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and to identify the critical issues and future possibilities for the City. The results of these efforts were published in the document "Community Input Report – Phase I."

The second phase of the planning process involved the analysis and selection of a preferred development scenario. During the process, the planning team developed three alternatives for development: the Dispersed alternative, the Compact alternative, and the Nodal alternative. The alternatives were then tested through infrastructure and fiscal impact modeling. The results indicated that all three alternatives were plausible. Results of the analysis were published in the document, "Concept Assessment

Summary.” Community input activities for Phase II surrounded determining the community’s preferences for each of the alternatives.

There were several opportunities for citizens to offer their feedback. First, an information brochure and survey entitled “Charting the Future” was developed. Second, the Planning staff hosted three community meetings. Third, a special survey was prepared and administered to government classes of the Chesapeake Public School System. The results of the Phase Two community input process were published in document “Community Input Report – Phase II.”

The third phase of the planning process consisted of the development of the Comprehensive Plan policy document, the Future Land Use plan, and the 2050 Transportation plan. The public was invited to comment on the initial draft of the Plan through a series of five informational meetings held throughout the City. Comments collected were assembled and summarized in the document, “Community Input Report – Phase III.” The Report was later used by the Plan Advisory Team, Planning Commission, and City Council as they considered the Plan draft.

### **Planning Commission and City Council Participation in the Comprehensive Plan Update Process**

As the City of Chesapeake embarked on the complete update of its Comprehensive Plan, City Council played an integral role in helping to shape the vision statement, goals, and objectives for the Plan, through a series of public forums, retreats and joint meetings with the Planning Commission and other entities. Relevant goals identified by City Council have been incorporated into the updated Comprehensive Plan where appropriate (i.e. growth management goals and objectives are included in the Growth Management section of this Plan).

Both the Planning Commission and City Council provided valuable guidance throughout the Plan’s development by periodically reviewing the Plan’s development and providing direction if necessary. The products of the Plan were presented to the both bodies as they were developed and the opportunity for redirection was offered to the groups.

Ultimately, as provided for in Section 15.1-2223 of the Code of Virginia, City Council, as the governing body in Chesapeake, “shall adopt a comprehensive plan for the territory under its jurisdiction.”

## **A Vision for Chesapeake**

The Vision for the future of Chesapeake consists of both a philosophical and physical element. During the summer of 2002, the Plan Advisory Team worked to develop a philosophical vision for the City which was later endorsed by the Planning Commission and City Council. This vision statement represents a consensus of the Chesapeake City Council, Planning Commission and Plan Advisory Team and provided the foundation on which the Forward Chesapeake 2026 Comprehensive Plan was developed.

### **Vision Statement**

**C**hesapeake will be a City with vision, diversity, balance, vitality and pride. As the City continues to grow, it will be a progressive community of vibrant residential and commercial neighborhoods - some new and some old - each with their own identity yet interconnected culturally, economically, politically, and physically. Neighborhoods will be linked to each other, to businesses, to the natural environment and to recreational and cultural centers, through efficient and sustainable multi-modal transportation systems and open space corridors.

**T**he City will manage growth to achieve a balance between employment opportunities, an expanding tax base, housing that meets the needs of a diverse population, and a healthy natural environment. The City will make the best use of land resources so that growth will include revitalization and redevelopment as well as development of new areas, in a manner that will preserve rural, historic and environmental assets.

**T**he City will provide opportunities and stimulate citizens to be involved in governance and civic activities. The City will honor that involvement by achieving an optimum balance in providing government services, with reasonable tax levels and high quality, efficient public services that meet the changing needs of the full population, including excellent public education and safety systems. Public facilities will be strategically located for efficiency and all infrastructure systems will be developed to sustain planned levels of growth.

**C**hesapeake will be culturally diverse, economically strong, and environmentally healthy with a quality of life that defines the unique identity of Chesapeake as a destination and a place to live, work and play. The citizens of Chesapeake will prize the City's strengths and act constructively to address its challenges and will use its resources to plan and create an unparalleled city where residents and businesses meet their full potential.

***Endorsed by the Chesapeake City Council and  
Planning Commission on August 17, 2002***

## **Forward Chesapeake 2026 Comprehensive Plan Goals**

As a part of the development of the Vision Statement, the Plan Advisory Team also developed a list of Plan goals. These goals were also endorsed by the Chesapeake City Council and Planning Commission and served as guiding principles throughout the planning process. The goals are as follows:

### **Growth Management**

*The City will:*

1. Plan with the assumption that growth will occur in the City.
2. Foster the revitalization and preservation of older areas of the City as well as develop newer areas.
3. Preserve as much of the existing natural areas as practical while recognizing that future growth will require some conversion of natural areas to developed land.
4. Ensure that adequate public services and utilities are available to support the expected growth rates of people and jobs in accord with its Comprehensive Plan.
5. Ensure that all new development will be designed to have a minimum impact on natural areas.
6. Plan for density and intensity of land development to generally be highest in areas with public water and sewer service and good road and transit access, and thus the City will use the location and design of its future utility and transportation facilities to guide the location, pattern, character and timing of growth.

### **Governance**

*The City will:*

1. Adhere closely to the policies of the Comprehensive Plan.
2. Establish a unique cultural, economic and visual identity for Chesapeake as a destination in the region.
3. Achieve a strong level of citizen involvement in planning and government policy-making.
4. Ensure that the business community is involved and fairly represented.
5. Ensure that all communities in the City are fairly represented.
6. Foster the creation and maintenance of identifiable communities.

## **Land Use and Development**

### *The City will:*

1. Foster the development of visually attractive and physically safe residential neighborhoods and business centers.
2. Create visually attractive and distinctive gateways into the City on major roadways.
3. Create a land use pattern consisting of residential neighborhoods and mixed-use centers of employment and retail uses, all linked together by a multi-modal transportation system, as well as places planned with a sufficient mass of commercial development to achieve economies of scale and a balanced range of centers of various sizes.
4. Foster the revitalization, preservation and redevelopment of older neighborhoods and commercial corridors.
5. Maintain areas with rural character, natural areas and open spaces to protect quality of life.
6. Preserve key portions of the waterfront areas in a natural state while developing other portions for compatible recreational and commercial activities.
7. Preserve and maintain the visual quality and ecological functions of the open space system centered on waterways and other important natural resources.
8. Achieve a pattern of land use and growth that is balanced between open space, housing, public facilities, industrial, agricultural and commercial uses.
9. Integrate natural environmental areas and recreation areas into neighborhoods and mixed-use centers.
10. Achieve a land use and development pattern that is economically stable and sustainable over the course of time.
11. Coordinate development in the City with neighboring localities in the region through joint planning activities.

## **Housing**

### *The City will:*

1. In all parts of the City, the City will foster the development and maintenance of a diverse, safe and high quality housing stock for people of all ages, ethnic groups, races, special needs and incomes, including housing that is affordable to all people who live or work in the City.
2. Locate new housing so that it provides safe and convenient access to employment, shopping, recreation and educational facilities.
3. Foster the development and maintenance of stable and vibrant communities with strong, distinct identities.

## **Economy & Fiscal**

### *The City will:*

1. Retain the existing businesses and attract new businesses, with a focus on industries that maintain or raise the income level of residents, expand the tax base and enhance the quality of life.
2. Pro-actively facilitate compatible, clean future economic development opportunities.
3. Enhance the City's economic base through the expansion of progressive business initiatives such as history, nature and recreation-based tourism industries and telecommuting options.
4. Maintain a moderate and reasonable tax rate to support an optimum level of city services.
5. Capitalize on water-related commerce and the yachting market by providing or encouraging support services.
6. Maintain and enhance the strength of the local agricultural industry.

## **Community Services & Facilities**

### *The City will:*

1. Provide adequate public facilities and services for all services which the City provides.
2. Maintain an adequate level of public water and sewer service, designed to manage the pattern of growth in accord with the Comprehensive Plan.
3. Coordinate the location and design of all City public facilities with the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

### Education

1. Provide excellent educational services that exceed state standards.
2. Ensure that new school facilities are designed and located to reinforce and support the goals and policies of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

### Parks and Recreation

1. Ensure that new parks and recreation facilities are designed and located to reinforce and support the goals and policies of the City's Comprehensive Plan.
2. Provide parks that meet the needs of special needs citizens and youth.
3. Create more recreational facilities sufficient to meet the City's adopted service standards.
4. Develop parks and open space on existing city lands.
5. Provide trails and bikeways to link parks and neighborhoods.

## **Transportation**

### *The City will:*

1. Achieve a safe, efficient, economical and multi-modal transportation system, including non-motor vehicle modes and public transportation, while recognizing that pressures for increased motor vehicle travel will continue.
2. Balance the priorities of motor vehicles with those of bicycles and pedestrians in the design of roadways and land use patterns so that most residents have the choice to walk and bicycle conveniently to shopping, schools and recreation.
3. Coordinate land use and public facilities development with the transportation system in order to ensure safety, efficiency and convenience.
4. Provide adequate transportation facilities and services that meet the City's adopted service standards.
5. Provide adequate transportation access to the City's waterways.
6. Coordinate the City's transportation system with the regional transportation network to promote commerce and emergency evacuation routes.

## **Natural Environment**

### *The City will:*

1. Balance land development with environmental preservation so that unique or essential natural resources are preserved in a pristine condition while citizens and businesses are also able to use and enjoy the benefits of high quality natural areas.
2. Maintain and improve the quality of the natural environmental systems - air, water, natural habitats and wetlands.

## **Historic Resources**

### *The City will:*

1. Foster the preservation and rehabilitation of significant historic sites and structures.
2. Incorporate the City's historic resources and cultural heritage into the creation of a unique identity and image for Chesapeake.
3. Ensure that historic sites and structures are integrated into new development during the land development process.

## **Fine Arts & Cultural Activities**

### *The City will:*

1. Foster the development of a performing arts school.
2. Foster the development of an independent cultural arts center that is accessible by highway and transit.
3. Foster the development of satellite cultural arts centers.
4. Foster International cultural exchanges.

## City Form and Development

### Nature Sets the Pattern

The relationship between natural and man-made patterns on the landscape has always been a close one. In Chesapeake, natural landforms and the location of waterways have always influenced the human patterns of settlement and development and continue to do so today.

The Coastal Plain geology and flat terrain of the area have shaped the particular relationship of water and land in the region. The waterways exhibit a classic “dendritic” or “finger-like” pattern with sinuous slow-moving tributaries branching off from main river channels. The terrain is frequently low and the soils impermeable so that extensive bottomlands and swampy fringes are located along the waterways.



By contrast, the high ground between waterways has often offered ideal usable land, without the usual considerations of slope or rock to constrain farming or human settlement. The pattern of settlement, since Colonial times, has responded to these natural constraints and opportunities, with villages located where high ground and transportation routes, whether by rivers or roads, came together.

Transportation routes were first laid out with consideration for easy water crossings, and many of these crossing points formed the earliest settlements, such as Great Bridge and Deep Creek. As population in the area has grown, these same settlements have become the nucleus for some of the area’s larger suburban communities.

Fundamentally, nature’s imprint was the guiding force in shaping settlement patterns in the area that would one day become the City of Chesapeake. It has contributed to Chesapeake’s attractive pattern of dispersed communities and open space. As the City plans for its future, it is important to acknowledge the part played by nature’s hand in determining the basic urban form of the City, and to use this as an opportunity to give structure and beauty to the City’s future growth.



### Farm, Village and Town

The area that became Chesapeake was, for much of its history, a thriving rural landscape, situated at the edge of a thriving southern port town. The merger of South Norfolk and Norfolk County in 1963, which gave birth to the City of Chesapeake, brought together two distinct settlement patterns within one jurisdictional boundary. The urban character of South Norfolk and adjacent areas such as Portlock grew out of Norfolk’s expansion from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much of the industrial expansion was along the southern branch of the Elizabeth River. That area is still characterized as an industrialized, urban waterfront, with excellent road and rail linkages

By contrast, Norfolk County was predominantly rural. Villages were generally small market and transshipment centers for farming products, whether by cart or canal, as in

Great Bridge, or by rail as in Fentress. These urban and rural settlement types are still two of the main features of the present-day design character of Chesapeake. The third main element, suburban-style settlement, has expanded widely since World War II, and is threatening to overwhelm the other two with its widespread popularity.



### **New Suburban Growth**

Chesapeake's dramatic growth since its founding in 1963 has been spurred by the improvement of major transportation corridors. Many of the limitations imposed by early roads and bridge crossings were overcome with modern highway construction through the City, linking formerly dispersed communities with employment and housing centers throughout Hampton Roads. The early expansion of I-64 and the more recent completion of the I-664 corridor, the I-464 corridor, and the Chesapeake Expressway have transformed the roadway network in the area, and have cast a singular stamp on the patterns of suburban growth and development in the City.

In particular, they have contributed to the development of suburban activity nodes such as Greenbrier, Western Branch and Great Bridge. As these areas have grown, they have taken on a similar design character, one that has more in common with other exurban "Edge Cities" throughout the United States, than with anything familiar to the local architectural context. These new suburban prototypes have brought new design challenges, such as bringing visual order and harmony to a landscape fragmented by wide highway corridors and expanses of parking.



### **A New Emphasis on Neighborhoods**

At the same time, Chesapeake has experienced a dramatic growth in new suburban neighborhoods. Early "bedroom suburb" communities of the 1960's and 70's, such as Wilson Heights in Great Bridge and the Crestwood area, primarily served populations who commuted to Norfolk or Virginia Beach for employment. In the 1980's, the communities became larger and planned developments such as those in Etheridge became more prevalent. The pattern continues today, with attractive new developments following a basic suburban pattern of low density, single family dispersed settlement, incorporating considerable private and semi-private open space. These suburban subdivisions and planned developments form the new "neighborhoods" of today's Chesapeake. By emphasizing their careful design, human scale and mutual interconnection, they can become effective building blocks for a high quality built environment in Chesapeake's future.

As Chesapeake continues to grow, there are significant opportunities to build on and to improve its built form and the visual character of its streets, its commercial and industrial centers and its residential neighborhoods. A clear strategy for enhancing the built form of the future must take into account the natural and man-made elements that contributed to Chesapeake's present scale and character and use these as a framework for the future.

### **Chesapeake's Future City Form -- Building on a Legacy**

In preparing a comprehensive plan that will guide the future built form of Chesapeake, it is important to clearly describe a vision for the overall design character of the future City. The design of the built environment is a key component of quality of life and the locational decisions that are based on the perception of quality lifestyle. It will also be a vital component of future economic development. Due to modern trends in job growth in the service and technology sectors, quality of life has become one of the most important elements of corporate location decisions.

Chesapeake in the future will be a City built on quality design principles that enhance the City's neighborhoods, commercial and industrial areas and natural and rural spaces. A continued emphasis on high quality built design will strengthen existing neighborhoods and improve Chesapeake's attractiveness for new residents and businesses.

To guide Chesapeake's new emphasis on city design, a series of key design principles should be established as fundamental to future planning in the City. Overall city design principles are described fully in Section 3 Community Preservation and Development. The following vision of Chesapeake's future urban form is derived from the overall citizen and City Council visioning processes of the Comprehensive Plan and serves as a benchmark for defining a high quality built environment in the Chesapeake of the future.

### **Waterways and Greenways**

Chesapeake in the future will continue to value its natural legacy of waterways and adjacent open spaces as a design opportunity and amenity in its future growth and development. The natural pattern of waterways and wooded wetlands will become the backbone of a system of greenways that both link and buffer development areas and population centers throughout the City. They will provide recreational amenity, help clean the air and water and provide overall "green relief" within easy access of all residents and businesses in the future. The waterway and greenway network will become an organizing network for future growth as it has in other classic city designs, such as Boston's "emerald necklace" and Washington's "wedges and corridors." Chesapeake will become a City noted for the quality of the natural legacy it has preserved, as much as for the quality of its built environment.

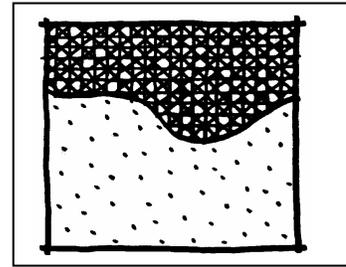
### **Development Patterns**

Chesapeake will continue to be a multi-focal city, without a single exclusive city center, but with a series of centers and focal points throughout the City organized around an efficient transportation network. This pattern will be designed to minimize congestion and disperse city services and amenities conveniently to all citizens, rather than concentrating them in a single "downtown" district.

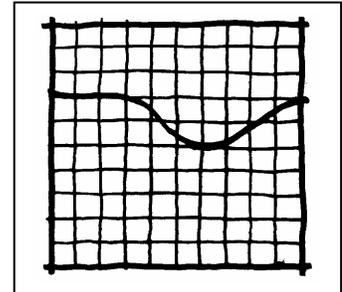
Within this overall multi-focal urban form, there will be designated areas where four different scales and patterns of development will be encouraged, Compact, Dispersed, Nodal and Rural. This framework of development patterns was developed as a result of extensive input from the Planning Advisory Team for the Comprehensive Plan and a series of public forums throughout the City. The resulting framework map is the

culmination of the public input and defines how Chesapeake's citizens want to shape their city in the future.

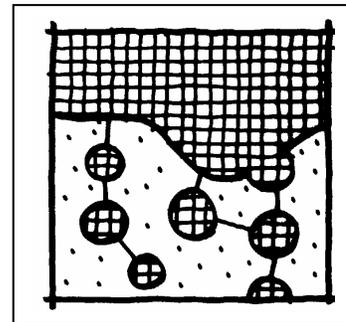
**Compact** – In the Compact area, the older city fabric will be revitalized and infilled with higher density and higher quality mixed use developments arranged around existing neighborhood and transportation networks. As population and employment in these areas grow, they will be served by an efficient high speed transit system that supplements and reduces dependence on auto transportation.



**Dispersed** – The Dispersed area surrounding the older city fabric will be developed with high quality suburban neighborhoods and employment areas that are generally low density and served by landscaped boulevards and efficient highway networks. These areas will maintain the high quality lifestyle of conventional suburban development but will improve it with design features that enhance pedestrian scale and access, vehicular connections, and overall access to common open space and amenities.



**Nodal** – Certain key development nodes will grow up around important transportation connections. These nodal areas will be developed as vital mixed-use urban employment and activity centers, with moderate to high densities at the core, tapering to lower densities in rings surrounding the core area. They will have an emphasis on walkability and access to transit at the center, with a range of office, retail, housing and community amenities clustered around a public open space as a focal point. The nodes have been classified into major activity centers, which are employment- based, and villages which are residential-based.



**Rural** – Chesapeake will retain a well-defined and protected belt of rural landscape surrounding the more developed portions of the City. The rural area will not be a mere buffer zone, but a thriving working landscape, with programs that encourage new farming economy enterprises and rural industries that are compatible with the preserved rural character of the area.

The Plan Advisory Team developed a consensus regarding the distribution of these development types for the year 2050 on the following map. This consensus is referred to as the 2050 Preferred Development Concept and was later endorsed by City Council and Planning Commission with a limited amount of modification. This preferred development concept provided the guidance for the development of the Forward Chesapeake 2026 Land Use Plan and Master Transportation Plan.

# 2050 Preferred Development Concept

