

CHAPTER 8: IMPLEMENTATION

The most important part of any comprehensive plan is ensuring that goals and objectives are implemented by municipal government and supported by residents. Accordingly, significant attention and activity should be devoted to reviewing the various land use regulations in The Town of Willards. In light of possible new development as well as infill and redevelopment in the future, there is a particular reason to ensure that actual regulations will guide development and determine how it is integrated with the Town.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Town of Willards 2009 Comprehensive Plan forms the policies that will dictate how Town regulations (Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations) are designed in the future.

There is a strong need to manage the use of existing properties in Willards, including buildable lots. Presently, most of the community consists of older single-family homes. The architectural and landscape character of Willards is an important and valuable asset. Therefore, this Comprehensive Plan is designed to encourage the preservation of the older community and village scale of the Town. Accordingly, this Plan will be used by the Town Council, The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission, private property owners, developers, and citizens to ensure that expressed values and goals are used to guide municipal actions and control growth.

Specific implementation actions are listed. These implementation actions were designed to supply a policy direction to The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission and Town Council in order to fulfill the goals and objectives of this Comprehensive Plan.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Willards should prepare a five and ten-year plan for capital improvements or “Capital Improvement Program (CIP),” which can be used by various administrative departments of the Town’s government or for the general benefit of the community. The CIP should identify needs, provide a justification for purchase or construction, and identify the sources of funds that will be used to pay for the project or item. The CIP should allow for alteration of the plan to meet changing needs.

PUBLIC WATER AND SEWER

Municipal water and sewer system upgrades are important to serve infill and redevelopment areas as well as any potential new development in the future. There is every reasonable expectation the population of the community will increase in the future. Maryland regulations and policies have been adopted to encourage development in and around existing communities with adequate infrastructure and the capacity to support new projects (Smart Growth).

An important recommendation is the annexation of the Town's existing wastewater treatment site (WWTP), which currently lies outside corporate boundaries. This area should be annexed into the Town. The purpose of annexation is to provide Willards with flexibility for WWTP upgrades. Currently, these upgrades will require a high-level of coordination with the County and State due to the fact that the WWTP is located in Wicomico County. The WWTP should be annexed into the Town and designated as a Priority Funding Area (PFA) site to access State funding for assistance with upgrades.

ADEQUATE FACILITIES PROVISIONS

As a primary policy, The Town of Willards should ensure that there is adequate water and sewer capacity for infill, redevelopment, and new development in the existing corporate boundaries of the Town. The Town also should ensure that there are sufficient roads and other infrastructure needs available for development. If the Town determines that it does not have adequate facilities for development, it should explore methods to acquire the needed facilities. Chief among the options available is to require that the owners of proposed development areas provide sufficient funds to build such required facilities.

Updating the Town's Capital Improvement Program-CIP, infrastructure studies (including water and sewer plans) and impact fee structure are critical. These updates are particularly important prior to the annexation of any new land outside current corporate boundaries for annexation and development.

ZONING REGULATIONS

The current zoning regulations reflect efforts for zoning designations to match conditions when they were established in years past. These regulations should be reviewed and revised to ensure that compatible uses are created and ensure that growth and development is properly channeled into appropriate areas. The specific zoning regulations that deal with lot size and setbacks should be examined to ensure that they encourage the type of village development appropriate to The Town of Willards. This also will ensure that property owners of existing buildings, rebuilding on small lots common to the older sections of Town, are given the flexibility needed to accomplish appropriate infill and redevelopment.

Town Center

In a recent publication, the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) described the characteristics of "Smart Neighborhoods" as follows:

- Integrated mix of uses - residential, commercial, employment/office, civic, and open space;
- Range of housing types and densities;
- Compact design;
- Interconnected streets designed to balance the needs of all users with sidewalks and on-street parking;
- Open spaces integral to the community; and

- Location adjacent to and extending the fabric of existing development.

The existing Town Center character that has resulted from historic land use development patterns reflects many of the characteristics of “Smart Neighborhoods”. However, the current zoning for much of the “Town Center Planning Area” does not recognize the legitimacy of the historic land use mix.

The Town should create zoning provisions for the Town Center that expressly recognizes the existing mix of residential and non-residential uses. Zoning standards for this planning area should provide for the expansion of existing non-residential uses, and where appropriate, creation of new compatible commercial and business uses. There are several strategies the Town may employ to regulate future development or redevelopment in this district.

Much of the development potential in this planning area can be classified as infill or redevelopment. Infill and redevelopment standards and guidelines for the Town Center could be established that permit The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission to approve new and expanded non-residential uses that are found to be compatible with surrounding land uses. Infill and redevelopment standards also could apply to residential development and redevelopment.

Neighborhood Conservation

The Comprehensive Plan identifies existing neighborhoods as areas in need of protection. The primary objectives for these areas involve maintaining the existing residential character of the neighborhoods and allowing compatible infill and redevelopment. Particular concerns that should be addressed through appropriate zoning standards and guidelines include:

- **Connectivity** – appropriate vehicular and pedestrian connections between on-site and off-site transportation systems.
- **Circulation** – consistency with the area wide vehicular and pedestrian circulation concepts of the Comprehensive Plan.
- **Parking** – flexible parking requirements.
- **Compatibility** – essential elements of compatible project design, e.g., design, pattern, alignment, size, and shape.

Planned Redevelopment Areas

The Comprehensive Plan identifies the redevelopment areas where the Town wants to encourage appropriate infill and redevelopment. In order to enable this outcome, the Zoning Ordinance will need to include standards and guidelines for infill and redevelopment projects in this planning area. This may best be accomplished with a special overlay zone that allows The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission to judge the merit of a proposed infill or redevelopment project against design objectives and give administrative relief for projects that meet these criteria.

Commercial and Industrial Uses

Willards should develop design standards and guidelines for all new commercial and industrial development. These should include the design of the building, landscaping, parking requirements, and signage. All such new buildings should be compatible with the scale and character of the Town. Great care should be exercised to ensure that the entrance into Willards does not deteriorate into an unattractive strip of commercial uses and storage facilities.

Landscape Standards

The development standards should include minimum street and site landscape standards for all development. On-site landscape requirements may be stated as performance standards, e.g., 15 percent of the site is landscaped. Willards may want to consider using Wicomico County's landscape standards as a guide for developing local standards to ensure consistency across jurisdictions.

Environmental Protection

The Eight Visions for Maryland encourage stewardship of the land as a universal ethic. The Planning Act of 1992 requires the Town to adopt policies for the protection of sensitive environmental areas. *The Town of Willards Zoning Code* should be amended to include standards that address stream buffers, non-tidal wetlands, steep slopes, and the habitats of threatened and endangered species. In addition, the Town should encourage development design that maintains or enhances “green infrastructure,” incorporates low impact design stormwater management techniques for water quality and quantity management, and includes “green building” technology that conserves energy and improves indoor and outdoor air quality.

Forest and Farmland Conservation

Although Willards is a well-established community, there are significant amounts of farmland as well as forested areas within its municipal boundaries. The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission and the Town Council expect, at some point, the existing forest and farmland will be converted to buildable lots for residential development. The timing of that conversion will depend on the availability of water and sewer and the market demand for housing. In the meantime agriculture and forestry activities should be permitted to continue provided they do not adversely impact the health, safety, and welfare of the community.

SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS

The Town of Willards should review the current subdivision regulations for their impact on the character of the existing community. The current subdivision regulations do not adequately prepare the Town for growth. In addition to infrastructure requirements, any new and large scale development should not follow a “sprawling suburban development pattern.” Therefore, the Willards subdivision regulations should encourage developments that are extensions of the Town and not developments that do not match the scale and character of Willards.

An essential part of the subdivision regulations should be that the owners and developers of all new subdivisions be required to post surety for the proper and timely construction of all water and sewer systems, fire protection systems, all roads and sidewalks, and all other necessary and required improvements. Surety also should be posted for the appropriate completion of any other public feature or amenity that might be proposed by developers. This might include such things as recreational facilities, community halls, street lighting, and street furniture. The developers should be required to post bonds for the successful and timely completion of all buildings started in a development.

BUILDING CODES

The Town Willards has adopted the Building Officials and Codes Administrators (BOCA) “National Standards for Building Codes and Regulations.” An employee or contractor provides for enforcement. As part of the enforcement of building codes, the Town’s building inspector views the exterior of each property and develops a list of those properties that require remediation. Those that have obvious and major defects are noted and their property owners are given a written listing of deficiencies.

Property owners are thus given an appropriate time limit within which to make the necessary repairs. If a property is too deteriorated that it causes a danger to the health and safety of the community and a hazard of residents, the Town can initiate condemnation proceedings against the property owner as provided in the building codes and by Maryland law and civil procedure.

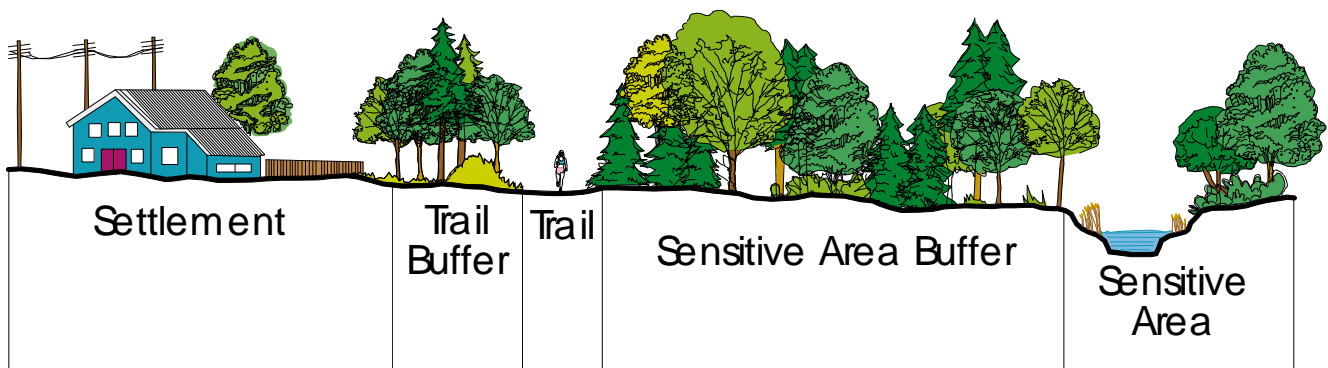
DEVELOPMENT DESIGN

The development and design of a community is important for maintaining what is special about a given place. Whether special characteristics are historic sites and structures, parks and open spaces, natural features, or shopping and recreation, maintaining and enhancing these characteristics is vital.

Conservation Site Design

The use of flexible development regulations to promote innovative and environmentally friendly site design is important for maintaining aesthetic, scenic, and ecologically important community features. In addition, conservation design techniques for development are critical for preserving precious resources. Essentially, these resources are an economic lifeline for the future and are what draw people to the Eastern Shore area, boosting the local economy.

Rural countryside, historic sites and structures, scenic viewsheds of farms or waterways, and small towns all contribute to identity of a region. The consequences of preservation can be seen in small towns where vibrant tourist industries have been built helping to reshape and revitalize these areas. The backdrop for these historic towns is the rural farms, fields, and rivers that surround them. These entities co-exist and are mutually dependent.



Conservation Design for Resource Preservation and Environmental Enhancement

Innovative design to achieve the preservation of resources is important. Many design guidelines advocate clustering to preserve open space however, even though clustering is important to achieve density and preserve open space, it is not a general panacea for development on the Eastern Shore. One important reason is the flat topography of the region. Whereas, clustering obviously works in areas with wide and ranging topography such as New England (because development can be hidden behind hills and forests), topography works against clustering in flat areas where development “sticks out like a sore thumb.” Buffering is the most important component of development design on the Eastern Shore. When integrated with clustering, it produces an effective combination. Buffering also provides numerous environmental benefits. Design guidelines should seek to successfully integrate buffering techniques with clustering including the utilization of native plant species.

With flexible development regulations and streamlined processes, developers can be persuaded to initiate appropriate design for project development. Time and money cause developers to follow a “by-the-book” approach for projects, which often prevails over innovation. Sometimes this type of inflexible process promotes less environmental protection and resource conservation rather than more. The key to good design in development is innovation, a plan that integrates the existing environment and its resources. Edward McMahon’s “Better Models for Development in Maryland,” provides six broad principles for better development.¹ These include:

- Conserving farmland, open space, and scenic resources;
- Maintaining a clear edge between towns and the countryside;
- Building livable communities;
- Preserving historic resources respect local character in new construction; and
- Reducing the impact of the car by providing more transportation choices.



It is important to maintain some existing rural character during the development site planning and review process and develop flexible regulations that promote conservation site design.

Total Maximum Daily Load’s (TMDL’s)

An important aspect of conservation design is to enhance water quality. To begin to address TMDL’s, as required by the Federal and State government, the Town should review existing regulations and determine where simple administrative and/or regulatory changes can be made to incorporate new techniques promoted by the State for stormwater management and improved water quality, including buffering, rain barrels, filter strips, and other infrastructure improvements.

The Town of Willards should encourage Wicomico County to develop comprehensive regional and sub-regional watershed analyses and characterizations, which identify and categorize resources. This process generally begins with a “Watershed Restoration Action Strategy” (WRAS) and can be included in the mandated Water Resources Element under Maryland House Bill 1141.

It is important for Wicomico County to establish a system for all jurisdictions, whereby TMDL’s can be assessed on a regional by sub-regional watershed basis. The watershed characterization supplies the foundation for the TMDL process, particularly the development of methodologies and formulae to calculate when a watershed reaches critical mass in regards to new development

¹ *Better Models for Development in Maryland: Ideas for Creating More Livable and Prosperous Communities*; Edward T. McMahon and Shelley S. Mastran; Prepared in coordination with the Conservation Funds; October 2004.

and when potential nutrient trading may be required. Watersheds reaching a critical mass could nutrient trade to agricultural areas to off-set degraded areas. Any strategy may include “Best Management Practices,” particularly for municipalities and encourage sensitive site design or conservation design that accounts for environmental factors and resources. In this regard, agricultural areas can become partners for minimizing water quality degradation in urban/suburban areas.

Design Principles

The Town of Willards is interested in having projects that are attractive, with good site planning, including structures, circulation, and landscaping, and well thought out in terms of how they relate to all surrounding properties. The views of the site and from the site should be clearly considered by the developer and addressed in development plans. Time spent on working out the details, both visual and functional, will speed approvals. The following general “rules” serves to clarify the Town’s intent and stimulate the submission of noteworthy projects:

- Natural features and site constraints should suggest “natural” common sense design solutions. Development needs to design with nature, not fight, control, or dominate natural and ecological processes.
- The automobile should not be the dominant force that dictates the layout and design of residential communities. New residential streets should be narrow, discourage through traffic, be well landscaped with shade trees, and recognized as the principal public spaces that they are. In view of their visual and functional importance, thought, deliberation, and investment in landscape and streetscape design should be evident.
- Substantial landscaping should be included in common open spaces that may be proposed. Landscaping should provide shade, shelter from wind, and visual screens or buffers from unsightly elements on adjoining properties or such on-site things as parking lots, loading areas, dumpsters, or utility structures. Landscaping also separates and buffers incompatible land uses such as the rear of commercial buildings and loading areas from adjoining residential lots. Landscaping can also provide wildlife habitat and linkages to forested and natural areas, greenways, and walking paths.
- Parking should not be a dominant site feature. Parking areas should be small scale, highly landscaped, attractive and inviting. Many examples exist of highly successful shopping areas where paved parking spots were reduced in favor of shade trees, landscaped berms, shrubs and flowers. Whenever possible, it is better to give preference to green space over asphalt and paved parking.
- Signage should be informative without being intrusive. Signs should not dominate the visual landscape. Signs should be compatible with their purpose, be clear, concise, and as small as reasonably possible. Small signs slow traffic, and low level pedestrian scale signage that is attached to its parent structure is preferred.

- The architecture and styles proposed should be in keeping with the building types and styles that have evolved in the region. The Town strongly encourages traditional designs and materials so that new developments blend seamlessly with the old. Modern materials and layouts need not conflict with the character of our Town if developers and builders are sensitive to the overall appearance of their creation.

Large-scale development projects can best address those issues that affect the Town’s guiding principal for this element, protection and enhancement of our “small town character” by adhering to the following design parameters:

- Architectural harmony, including compatibility in styles, materials, colors, and building size and setbacks;
- Variety in housing types, density, and cost;
- Parks, squares, and other common open spaces for residents to interact and recreate, and to provide a setting for the architecture of the development;
- Neighborhood centers and civic spaces, which, depending on the scale of the development, can include places to shop, work, learn, or worship;
- An interconnected street system which is based on a modified grid system;
- Sidewalks, street trees, and substantial on-street parking, providing distinct separation between pedestrians and traffic;
- Streets and sidewalks that are spatially defined by buildings in a regular pattern, unbroken by parking lots;
- Traffic calming, including more narrow streets with shorter turning radii than suburban streets, and medians, circles and related features along prominent streets;
- Lighting which is designed for safe walking and signage which has a pedestrian orientation;
- A system of land subdivision and development which links one neighborhood to another and can logically be extended.

Building Character

The appearance and architectural character of new construction and renovation is a subject that warrants some discussion and guidance. While the Town has no intention to legislate style or “taste,” it recognizes a responsibility to guide the overall appearance of our built environment. Toward that end the Town’s objective is to ensure that additions to the community complement, blend with, and improve the general attractiveness and appearance of Willards.

The Town wants to maintain its rural Eastern Shore, small town character. That means new construction should take design inspiration from the simple forms and building masses that are prevalent in our area. Commercial buildings should retain as much of a residential “flavor” as is feasible. This can be accomplished in ways such as breaking up the façade of larger buildings to give the appearance of smaller structures that are grouped together, including generous roof pitches (and avoiding flat roofs), and using window, door, and siding details that are similar to styles commonly found in residential construction. Parking should be screened, landscaped, lit with pedestrian scale lighting fixtures, and distributed around the sides and rear of commercial buildings. The Town does not want large parking lots that present a “sea of asphalt” appearance. Shade trees and flowering shrubs should be combined with berms and evergreens to soften both building edges and parking areas.

Access, Circulation and Parking Design

The layout of access and circulation systems in new developments must balance the mobility, safety and other needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicular traffic. Achieving this end requires more than simply complying with street standards and specifications. Successful design of access, circulation and parking systems in new developments requires considerable effort.

Streets may be the most important public spaces in neighborhoods and must be thought of as an integral part of the overall design of communities. Interconnected streets encourage people to walk by providing a variety of route options. Small blocks encourage people to walk by maintaining a human scale environment. A fine-grained system of streets, pedestrian ways and bicycle routes helps disperse traffic and reduce congestion. Multiple streets provide opportunities to connect new neighborhoods with old neighborhoods. Pedestrian walkways, bicycle lanes, and other amenities enhance the desirability of walking and bicycling.

New development design should be based on a modified grid system consisting of a simple and logical hierarchy of streets that contributes to the sense of place and helps orient people. Every lot should be afforded a reasonable means of ingress and egress for emergency vehicles as well as for all those likely to need or desire access to the property in its intended use. No direct driveway access should be provided onto an existing or planned major collector street from a residential lot. Vehicles should be able to enter and exit without posing any substantial danger to themselves, pedestrians, or vehicles traveling on abutting streets, or interfere with the free and convenient flow of traffic on abutting or surrounding streets.

Alleys provide opportunities for parking in the rear of housing and contribute to the overall permeability of the road network. Alleys should be considered for all residential neighborhoods and as access to rear parking areas in commercial and office areas.

The street layout should present an attractive streetscape. A streetscape that is interesting to pedestrians encourages more people to walk. Buildings should front on the street. Structures, whether residential, commercial, or office, should form a continuous street edge, a vertical wall that contains the street and encloses space. In this regard, most streets need to be designed so that they are usable and frontable.

The street layout should permit the safe, efficient, and orderly movement of traffic while meeting the multi-faceted needs of drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists. Street rights-of-way should be adequate to serve all functions including carrying motor vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian traffic, allow on-street parking, and serve as a link in the town's drainage system.

Streets should connect with surrounding streets to permit the convenient movement of traffic between neighborhoods or to facilitate access to neighborhoods by emergency service vehicles or for other sufficient reasons. The street layout should serve the needs of the neighborhood and discourages use by through traffic. At the same time, the layout should provide appropriate vehicular and pedestrian connections between residential neighborhood, shopping and employment areas.

The design of circulation systems in all new developments should be consistent with the recommendations of this Comprehensive Plan. Proposed new streets should provide for the appropriate extension of existing streets and key links of planned collector roads. The street layout should respect natural features, should relate appropriately to the topography and should be designed to facilitate the drainage and storm water runoff.

The design of residential streets should discourage motorists from traveling above the intended speed and reflect their function in the system hierarchy. In particular, horizontal and vertical alignment should not be conducive to excess speed. Residential streets will be designed to manage the speed and volume of traffic in residential neighborhoods using "traffic calming" methods that encourage speeds of 25 mph or less. Lower order streets should be less than 1/3 mile in length, so that motorists will have no incentive to speed. The majority of roadways should utilize "T" intersections or controlled 4-way intersections with roundabouts.

When required, parking lots should consist of heavily landscaped small lot segments that are unobtrusive. In commercial areas, parking should consist of ample on-street parking and small lots located to the side or rear of buildings and screened from the main commercial street. Access to parking should be provided from rear driveways where possible. All parking lots should be screened from adjacent residential uses.

Appropriate facilities for bicycles should be provided at key commercial, civic and recreation locations. To ensure this, the Town Zoning and Subdivision codes should be amended to require non-residential uses to provide bicycle storage/parking facilities to encourage and support this alternative mode of travel.

Park and Open Space

A variety of parks and open space should be provided for enjoyment by people of all ages. Parks and open space should be purposeful components of design and should be prominently displayed. Special views and vistas should be framed or enhanced. Greens or commons should be located in each neighborhood to function as community gathering areas. Formal parks should be designed to complement civic architecture, where appropriate. Parks should serve the active and passive recreation needs of residents. Parks should be located within easy walking distance

(500 to 800 feet) of every residence. Parks and open space should be linked together by walking paths to the maximum extent possible. In all cases parks should be easily accessible and highly visible. Ideally, neighborhood parks or greens should be fronted on at least two sides by residential units so that residents can clearly see park activities.

The design of parks should respond to user needs. As a general rule, park design should adhere to the following principles:

- Everything should have an identified purpose;
- Design should be for people not a simple application of standards;
- Both function and aesthetics should be satisfied;
- Nothing should be randomly placed;
- Satisfy the technical requirements, e.g., for play fields, ball courts, etc.
- Use the most cost efficient design; and
- Provide for ease of use and supervision.

Current park facilities are adequate to serve the needs of the existing population. New developments should be required to provide a variety of park and open space facilities to address the needs of the new neighborhoods. Parks should range from small, vest-pocket parks located within the neighborhoods to larger, community parks serving all Town residents, as deemed appropriate.

ADMINISTRATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Streamlining the Development Review Process

Development review of infill and redevelopment projects within the old town portions of Willards will be streamlined by amending the Zoning Code to give The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission greater authority to vary certain development standards for proposed projects that meet voluntary design guidelines.

Innovative Development Techniques

Amendments to *The Town of Willards Zoning Code* will add special provisions for planned developments. The standards and guidelines will establish a development and design framework for mixed-use projects, including commercial and business uses appropriate to a neighborhood context. The process will include a requirement that a “Developer Rights and Responsibilities Agreement” (DRRA) is executed as part of the zoning approval process.

Comprehensive Plan Updates

The ability of a municipal government to develop comprehensive plans and land-use regulations are based on the laws of the State of Maryland and on the charter and ordinances passed by the Town. This Comprehensive Plan provides a guide for the management of Willards and should be followed by the Town government.

The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission, appointed by The Town Council, are charged with ensuring that this Plan is followed. The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission advises The Town Council on changes that might need to be made to the Comprehensive Plan and its implementing regulations over the Plan's life.

The Comprehensive Plan is not a document that should remain "on the shelf." Copies should be provided to all members of The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission and the Town Council; as well as all employees and consultants that have responsibilities governed by the Comprehensive Plan.

The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission should also review the Plan every year. The Comprehensive Plan should be reviewed on six-year intervals to ensure that it still reflects and satisfies the needs of the Town and the citizens. The yearly review and the six-year review should be done as part of regular Planning and Zoning Commission meetings and as part of a public hearing on the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that appropriate citizen input is provided to The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission.

Because the central role of The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission is guiding growth, development, and revitalization, it is important that it be composed of residents of the community. The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission should be kept at full strength at all times and the Town should ensure that they remain current with changing State laws and policies, with Wicomico County's laws and regulations, and with the management of Willards, providing the proper advice and guidance.

In addition, The Willards Planning and Zoning Commission should have at least the following responsibilities:

- Maintain a current and accurate Comprehensive Plan and enforcement regulations for the Town of Willards;
- Review all decisions made by both Willards and other agencies that might affect the Town, the Comprehensive Plan, zoning regulations, subdivision ordinances, land-use regulations and guidance, and the future direction of Willards and its government and governance;
- Review and act on all requests for subdivision and other land-use change requests;
- Review and recommend changes on all revisions to the Willards Zoning Ordinance and associated maps;
- Assist the Town Council in the development of a Capital Improvements Program-CIP;
- Activate and participate in all programs and recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan and in other regulations, ordinances, and resolutions that fall into areas of responsibility;
- Complete other tasks and responsibilities that might be assigned to it by the Town Council; and
- Recommend changes to the Comprehensive Plan, zoning regulations, subdivision ordinances, and other land-use policies, regulations, and guidance.