



# **01 Introduction**

## WELCOME TO PLAN ABERDEEN!

Plan Aberdeen, the 2022 update to the City of Aberdeen (City) 2011 Comprehensive Plan (2011 Plan), is an official long-range policy document adopted and amended by formal resolution by the City Council. This Plan is a major component of the City’s planning process as it guides the long-range, comprehensive decision-making process involving primarily physical development and those City actions expected to influence development in the long-term. Plan Aberdeen strengthens the City’s long-standing guiding principles and growth management policies, while identifying goals and objectives to continue to improve the existing and future needs for the City of Aberdeen.

Aberdeen is located on the southeast quadrant of Harford County, along the I-95 Corridor between Baltimore, Maryland and Wilmington, Delaware (See **Figure 1-1, Regional Location Map**). This Plan incorporates components to support a sustainable and active community and works in coordination with Harford County and the State of Maryland’s Smart Growth goals and objectives.

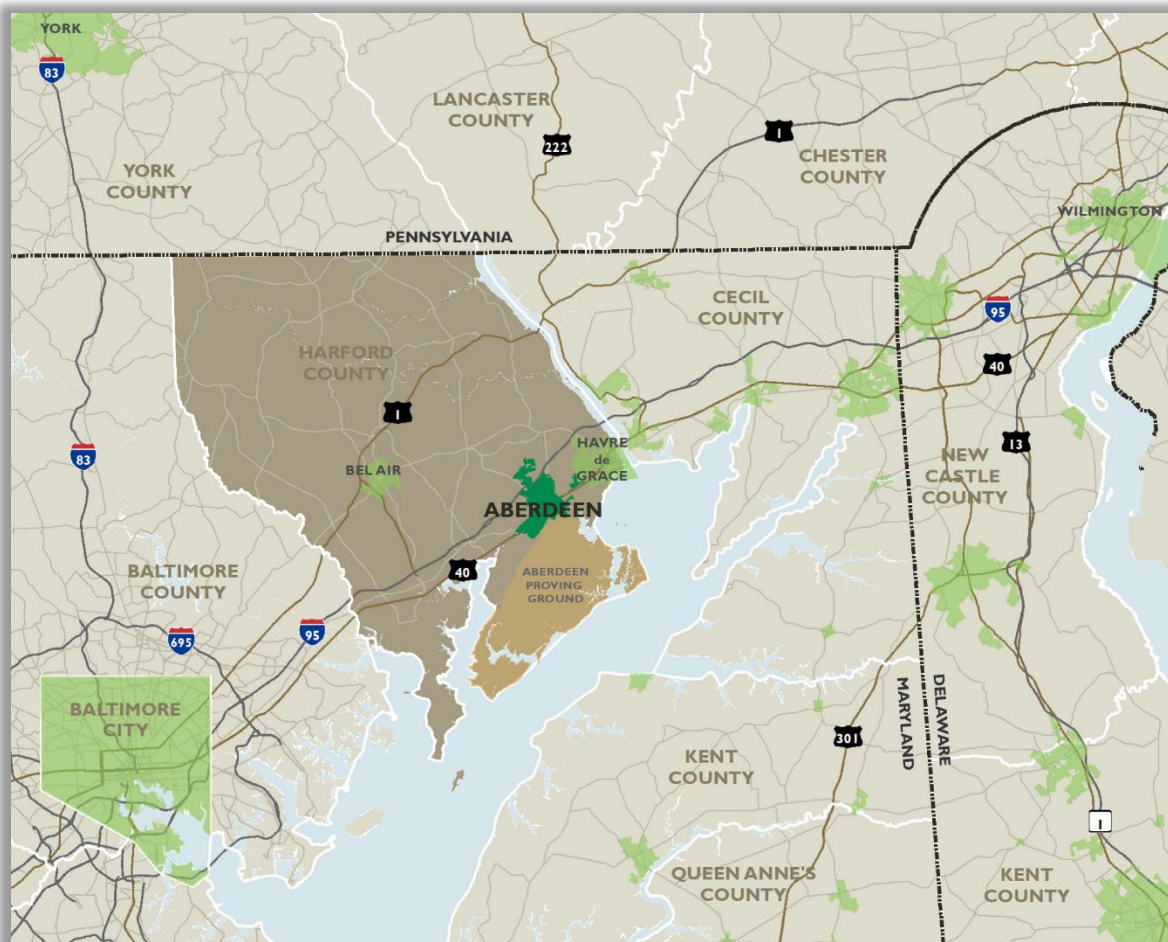


Figure 1-1. Regional Location Map

## COMMUNITY VISION

During the Plan Aberdeen public outreach process, City residents, business owners, and other stakeholders expressed what they most valued about Aberdeen and identified issues that should be addressed over the next 10 years. The vision statement for Plan Aberdeen was developed through working sessions with the Planning Commission and community input from the Visioning Workshops.

*The City of Aberdeen is a destination to work, live, learn, and play with an actively engaged community, diverse neighborhoods, thriving businesses, economic opportunities, transportation options, and a sustainable future.*

This vision—and the goals proposed to achieve it are highlighted in subsequent chapters—represents the community’s efforts to build upon the past and strengthen the foundation for Aberdeen’s future. Detailed information on the City’s three Community Visioning Workshops is found in **Appendix C—Public Involvement Summary**.

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ROLE

Plan Aberdeen is a guide for future decisions about appropriate land uses, based on forecasts of existing land use patterns and anticipated trends. It addresses environmental resources, population, demographics, land use, transportation, water and wastewater utilities, community facilities, housing, economic development, historic resources, and municipal growth.



Plan Aberdeen establishes priorities as well as direction to achieve desired future land use patterns. It identifies goals and recommendations to maintain the overall community vision and is intended to guide City officials when making decisions about future land use issues, prioritizing infrastructure needs, and budgeting for capital projects.

The Plan also provides an opportunity to set the stage for updates to zoning districts as well as revisions to the Development Code. Updating the Plan provides an opportunity for City officials to review current zoning maps and regulations to identify where revisions may be needed to better help the City reach its stated vision and goals. Ideally, the changes and revisions identified and proposed within this document address and provide solutions to any issues the City is currently facing as well as issues that may arise in the future.

## POLICY & LEGAL CONTEXT

The state of Maryland delegates planning and land use regulatory authority to all incorporated municipalities through the *Local Government* and *Land Use Articles* of the *Annotated Code of Maryland*. The *Local Government* and *Land Use Articles* require local jurisdictions to prepare comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and subdivision regulations. The Comprehensive Plan is reviewed by the Aberdeen Planning Commission for updates at least once every ten (10) years pursuant to these *Articles*.

The state of Maryland's twelve Planning Visions (Twelve Visions), outlined in the *Smart, Green & Growing* legislation of 2009, are incorporated throughout the Plan:

1. Quality of Life and Sustainability: A high quality of life is achieved through universal stewardship of the land, water, air, and protection of the environment.
2. Public Participation: Citizens are active partners in the planning and implementation of community initiatives.
3. Growth Areas: Growth is concentrated in existing population and business centers.
4. Community Design: Compact, mixed-use, walkable design, consistent with existing community character and located near available or planned transit options, is encouraged to ensure efficient use of land and transportation resources.
5. Infrastructure: Growth areas have the water resources and infrastructure to accommodate population and business expansion in an orderly, efficient, and environmentally sustainable manner.
6. Transportation: A well-maintained, multimodal transportation system facilitates the safe, convenient, affordable, and efficient movement of people, goods, and services within and between population and business centers.
7. Housing: A range of housing densities, types, and sizes provides residential options for citizens of all ages and incomes.
8. Economic Development: Promoting job growth, business vitality, and employment opportunities is essential to continue our prosperity.
9. Environmental Protection: Land and water resources, including the Chesapeake and coastal bays, are carefully managed to restore and maintain healthy air and water, natural systems, and living resources.
10. Resource Conservation: Waterways, forest, agricultural areas, open space, natural systems, and scenic areas are conserved.
11. Stewardship: Government, business entities, and residents create sustainable communities by balancing efficient growth with resource protection.
12. Implementation: Strategies, policies, programs, and funding for growth and development, resource conservation, infrastructure and transportation are integrated across local, regional, state, and interstate levels.

Plan Aberdeen addresses these Twelve Planning Visions through the various chapter elements and was prepared to be consistent with, and in consideration of, ongoing efforts in the State and Harford County to work toward these Visions. The following section denotes other major planning legislation followed by municipalities within the State of Maryland and are included as part of the Plan.

## Economic Growth, Resource Protection & Planning Act

In 1992, the Maryland General Assembly adopted the *Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act (1992 Act)* to articulate the State’s growth policy and intent to reduce sprawl, concentrate growth in and near existing development areas, promote economic development, and protect sensitive natural resources. It required that comprehensive plans include seven Vision Statements (amended to eight in 2000 and twelve in 2009).

The *1992 Act* required comprehensive plans to include a Sensitive Areas Element establishing policies to protect wetlands, stream buffers, and habitats of rare, threatened, and endangered species. It also required local governments to review their comprehensive plans at least every six years and perform updates, as necessary.

In 2013, the General Assembly approved House Bill 409, changing the Comprehensive Plan review period to every 10 years to coincide with the Decennial Census. It also required annual reports to be filed with the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) as well as a 5-Year Mid-Cycle Review that includes a narrative on the comprehensive plan’s implementation status.

## Smart Growth Legislation

In 1997, the State enacted Smart Growth legislation, giving it programmatic and fiscal authority to encourage local governments to implement “smart growth” planning. The *Priority Funding Areas Act* directed State funding for growth-related infrastructure to Priority Funding Areas (PFAs), providing a geographic focus for its investments. It designated certain areas as PFAs and established local designation criteria, including permitted density, water and sewer availability requirements, and the designation of growth areas in the comprehensive plan.

Subsequently, MDP and other State agency initiatives provided resources, incentives, and programs to achieve smart growth goals. The General Assembly also passed related legislation modifying and expanding planning goals and requirements.

## Smart, Green & Growing

In 2009, the General Assembly passed three planning bills as part of its *Smart, Green & Growing* legislation to protect environmental resources and promote sustainable growth across the State:

Smart & Sustainable Growth Act	Planning Visions Implementation	Planning Visions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local jurisdictions must implement and follow adopted comprehensive plans</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Established State land use goals</li><li>• Jurisdictions must collect smart growth measures and indicators</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Established 12 state planning visions</li><li>• Local jurisdictions must submit an annual report on changing development patterns and implementation of Vision regulations</li></ul>

## Areas of State Concern

In 2017, Governor Hogan signed an executive order directing the Maryland Department of Planning to create a State Development Plan to replace *PlanMaryland*, leading to the adoption of *A Better Maryland* in 2019. To support the implementation of *A Better Maryland* and the State’s smart growth policies, MDP has identified several Areas of State Concern, a list of spatially designated areas, plans and programs that local jurisdiction may consider when developing and implementing their comprehensive plans.

The State’s Smart Growth Subcabinet, made up of several state agencies that review and implement the State’s Smart Growth policies, has endorsed the list, and may update it periodically. The list includes topic areas that transcend local jurisdictional boundaries; state-level initiatives and plans that are relevant to local comprehensive plans; implementation programs and measures that require coordination or collaboration between and among state and local governments; and subjects that involve collaboration and planning across state agencies.

*A Better Maryland* clarifies that local governments may address additional topics that are not required by state law or identified as Areas of State Concern. This plan addresses these Areas of State Concern, and issues or items of relevance to this list are cited throughout the document.

## Other Planning Legislation Guiding the Plan

Additional State Planning legislation includes:

### HB 90

Adopted in 2021, HB 90 requires all housing elements for municipalities and non-charter counties to “affirmatively further fair housing.” This adds to the requirements to plan for affordable housing that HB 1045 (2019) initiated.

HB 90 also requires that the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development submit a report on fair housing to the Governor and General Assembly by Dec 1, 2023, and every five years thereafter. The bill mandates that DHCD complete this report in consultation with local governments and housing authorities in Maryland and develop a template that these partners can use to gather and present data on fair housing within their own jurisdictions.

HB 90 defines affirmatively furthering fair housing as, “taking meaningful actions to:

- Overcome patterns of segregation;
- Foster inclusive communities free from barriers that restrict access to housing and opportunity based on protected characteristics;
- Address significant disparities in housing needs and access to opportunity;
- Replace segregated living patterns with truly integrated and balanced living patterns; and
- Foster and maintain compliance with civil rights and fair housing laws.”

The bill intentionally refrains from specifying the actions jurisdictions must implement. Rather, they can develop their own approach for furthering fair housing in their communities, given that their chosen approach includes meaningful actions to address the issues listed above. **(See Chapter 6—Housing)**

## HB 1045

HB 1045, adopted in 2019, amended the Land Use Article to require all Maryland jurisdictions to include a housing element in their comprehensive plans after June 2020. The element must address the need for affordable housing within the jurisdiction, including workforce and low-income housing and may include goals, objectives, policies, plans and standards.

The law allows jurisdictions flexibility to address affordable housing issues. Because municipalities may have limited undeveloped land or redevelopment opportunities, the law allows that jurisdictions may address some future housing needs within municipal growth areas outside existing boundaries. **(See Chapter 6—Housing)**

## HB 1141

Adopted in 2006, HB 1141 requires inclusion of a comprehensive plan Water Resources Element (WRE) to addresses the relationship of planned growth to water resources for wastewater treatment and disposal, safe drinking water, and non-point source pollution of nitrogen and phosphorus. **(See Chapter 9—Water Resources)** HB 1141 also requires municipalities to prepare a Municipal Growth Element (MGE) as part of their comprehensive plan, identifying areas for future growth through annexation and allowing for coordination around municipal boundaries. **(See Chapter 5—Municipal Growth)**

## HB 1160

In 2006, HB 1160 established a Workforce Housing Grant Program within the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). To participate, jurisdictions must adopt a Workforce Housing Element containing an assessment of needs, goals, objectives, and policies that preserve or develop workforce housing. **(See Chapter 6—Housing)**

## Sustainable Communities Act

The *Sustainable Communities Act of 2010* strengthens reinvestment and revitalization in Maryland's older communities by renewing an existing rehabilitation tax credit; creating “sustainable communities” to simplify the framework for designated target areas in the Community Legacy (CL) and Neighborhood Business Works (NBW) programs; establishing a new transportation focus in older communities; and enhancing the role of the Smart Growth Subcabinet (SGSC) in community revitalization. **(See Chapter 8—Economic Development)**

## Sustainable Growth & Agricultural Preservation Act

The Maryland General Assembly approved the *Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012* (also known as the Septic Bill), during the 2012 General Assembly session. This Act provides an option for local jurisdictions to adopt growth tier designations and has associated requirements related to residential subdivisions. **(See Chapter 4—Land Use)**

## Sustainable Communities Tax Increment Financing Designation & Financing Law

The 2013 *Sustainable Communities Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Designation & Financing Law (TIF Law)* authorizes local governments to designate places as a Sustainable Community. In turn, they may finance the costs of infrastructure improvements in these areas in a manner similar to Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) designated Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) methods. These approaches

include issuance of bonds, creation of special taxing districts, and tax increment financing. This allows local governments to make important infrastructure and asset investments in their Sustainable Community areas to spur economic development and ensure quality of life and livable communities.

The *TIF Law* provides for new funding uses that include historic preservation, environmental remediation, demolition, site preparation, parking lots, facilities, highways, or transit assets that support Sustainable Community residents, schools, and affordable or mixed-use housing. It gives Sustainable Communities the opportunity to utilize Maryland Economic Development Corporation (MEDCO) bonding authority, which can finance, acquire, develop, own, and/or operate projects for economic development purposes. *(See Chapter 8—Economic Development)*

## PLANNING HISTORY

The City of Aberdeen adopted its first full scale-zoning ordinance in 1957 and its first Comprehensive Plan in 1969. Since the adoption of the first Comprehensive Plan there have been three updates: 1994, 2002, and 2011. Plan Aberdeen is the 2022 update to the 2011 Plan. Plan Aberdeen strengthens the City’s long-standing guiding principles and growth management policies, while identifying goals and objectives to continue to improve the existing and future needs for the City of Aberdeen.

## PLAN ABERDEEN UPDATE

Using the 2011 Plan as a baseline, the planning team evaluated existing conditions and trends, and incorporated newly available data and studies completed in the last decade. The team also identified and analyzed priority issues, evaluating those from the 2011 Plan in addition to new issues that evolved during the Plan Aberdeen process. Plan Aberdeen builds on the 2011 Plan process and seeks to exceed the technical analyses and community outreach that helped the 2011 Plan remain applicable over the last decade. Starting with such a solid foundation has allowed this subsequent effort to truly seek to enhance and expand on the hard work that has come before, helping to update the community vision, refine and develop goals and strategies, and identify policies and actions in a fashion familiar to those involved in the process. These goals, objectives, strategies, and actions highlighted in this 2022 Plan Aberdeen emerged during the planning process, informed by community and citizen input.

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Consistent with the Twelve Visions, for public participation, Plan Aberdeen utilized an outreach process to identify priority issues and visions for the future. In addition to technical analyses, its preparation included a community public opinion survey, stakeholder input meetings, public workshops, and discussions with the Planning Commission, Economic Development Commission, and City Council. Community outreach was a key component of the comprehensive planning process. The opinions of residents, businesses, property owners, employees, and visitors helped identify important issues and growth and preservation priorities.





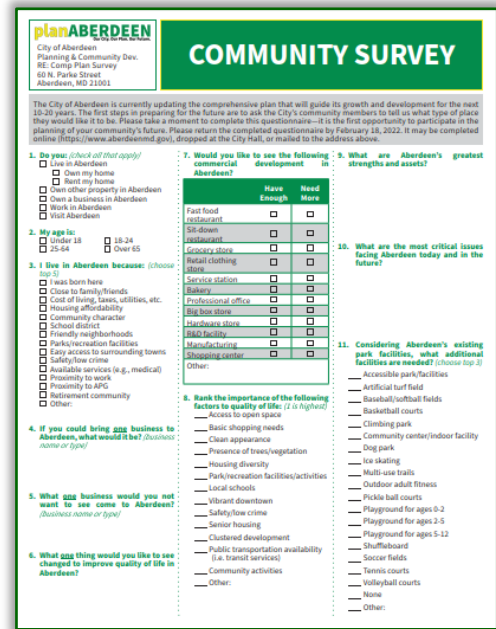
Three separate Visioning Workshops were held in order to receive community and stakeholder input on the update for Plan Aberdeen. Various activities allowed citizens and stakeholders to share their point of views, concerns, and ideas for the future of Aberdeen. These events were also used to gather input and help prepare the overall Vision Statement listed in the beginning of this chapter.

## Community Survey

A thorough understanding of community and citizen attitudes toward growth and development provides a strong foundation on which to build policy for the Plan. In January 2022, the City released a 16-question community survey (online and in print) as part of its effort to solicit public input into Plan Aberdeen’s development. The survey was administered online using Survey Monkey; hardcopies of the print survey were located at City Hall.







The survey’s purpose was to identify what issues respondents felt were most important to the City’s preservation, enhancement, and physical development; it served as a key public participation component. A total of 105 responses were received through the end of February 2022, focused on the following areas:

- Uses the City should encourage or discourage
- The importance of various housing types
- Attributes that make a community appealing
- Types of businesses sought
- Importance of quality-of-life elements
- Concerns about Aberdeen’s future
- Recreational facilities, programs, and improvements
- What people like most and least about the City



Most survey respondents live within the City of Aberdeen (75 or 71%) and/or work in Aberdeen (24 or 22%). The vast majority of those who live in Aberdeen also own their own home (68 or 91%). Nearly three-quarters of the respondents are between the ages of 25-64 (77 or 73%), while over one-quarter are over the age of 65 (28 or 26%). Over 75% of respondents already knew that the City had a Comprehensive Plan (171 or 76%). The two reasons most frequently identified by residents as to why they live in Aberdeen are to be close to family and friends (32 or 42%) and housing affordability (24 or 32%). Plan Aberdeen integrates the survey results throughout various elements and a summary of results can be found in **Appendix C—Public Involvement**.

Highlights from the survey responses include the following:

 <p>What residents wish they had</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revitalized downtown</li> <li>• Community Center</li> <li>• More sit-down restaurants</li> </ul>	 <p>What residents do not want</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult entertainment</li> <li>• Fast food restaurants</li> <li>• Rehabilitation facility/adult counseling</li> </ul>	 <p>What would improve the quality of life in Aberdeen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce crime</li> <li>• More community Activities</li> <li>• Revitalize downtown area</li> <li>• Increase green space/parks throughout the City</li> </ul>
 <p>Aberdeen's greatest strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community</li> <li>• Ripken Stadium</li> <li>• Diversity</li> </ul>	 <p>Aberdeen's most critical issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crime</li> <li>• Code Enforcement</li> <li>• Downtown area/sustaining businesses</li> </ul>	 <p>Residents top concern</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crime</li> <li>• Safety</li> </ul>

## Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

The Planning Commission, Economic Development Commission, City Council, and applicable City staff conducted a SWOT analysis as a homework exercise for the Plan update. SWOT stands for **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats**. The responses received were used to help determine key issues and to initially conceptualize Plan Aberdeen's goals and recommendations.

Reviewing these often divergent issues, risks, and opportunities allow the Plan to consider a wide array of future projects, the economic responsibilities associated with those projects, and to prepare to combat any considerable threats. The following section summarizes the responses received to the SWOT Analysis (See Appendix C—Public Involvement for complete responses).

- **Strengths: Internal elements that give the City an edge or competitive advantage. These can be unique assets, skills, or resources that Aberdeen can use to its benefit.**
  - Aberdeen Proving Ground
  - Ability to expand
  - Affordable shopping
  - Amtrak/MARC line
  - Business friendly
  - City staff/officials
  - Diversity
  - Havre de Grace water partnership
  - Healthcare hub (Upper Chesapeake)
  - Infrastructure investment
  - Low cost of living
  - Low traffic
  - Own wastewater treatment plant
  - Ripken Stadium/sports tourism
  - Schools
  - Strategic location
  - Multimodal transportation hub
  - Transit Oriented Development
  - Volunteers (organizations/individuals)

- **Weaknesses: Internal elements that hinder the City’s ability to reach optimal performance and prevents Aberdeen from reaching its goals. The goal is to make improvements to these.**
  - Appearance/aesthetics
  - City interactions with communities/citizens
  - Code enforcement/property maintenance
  - Concentration of low-income areas
  - Over-extended public works staff
  - Downtown activity/variety/streetscape
  - Extent of supportive services/programs
  - Extent of warehouse facilities
  - Few ties/events to Aberdeen Proving Ground
  - Future vision
  - Lack of long-term infrastructure plan
  - Lack of parks/recreation program/facilities
  - Lack of youth activities
  - MDOT/FHWA/CSX/Amtrak
  - Mix of restaurants/retailers
  - Needed revitalization
  - Perception of safety
  - Perception of schools
  - Relationship with Harford County
  - Road conditions
  
- **Opportunities: External circumstances and potential situations that can be used or exploited to benefit Aberdeen. They are beyond the City’s control, but Aberdeen can make the most of them.**
  - Aberdeen Proving Ground
  - Affordable housing
  - Amtrak/MARC
  - Availability of downtown properties/properties for lease
  - Federal infrastructure investment
  - UMD Upper Chesapeake Medical Center
  - Land for future growth
  - Proactive adaptation to lifestyle changes
  - Recreation Center
  - Ripken Stadium
  - Stagnant growth of nearby cities
  - Strategic location
  
- **Threats: External circumstances that pose a threat to Aberdeen’s current or future ability to achieve what it wants to. The City should mitigate or avoid these potentially damaging effects.**
  - Aesthetics/appearance
  - Business closures
  - Reduction in Employment at Aberdeen Proving Ground
  - Concentration of low-income areas
  - COVID-19 pandemic
  - Crime
  - Extent of warehouse distribution facilities
  - Harford County coordination efforts
  - Housing mix
  - Lack of vision
  - Overdevelopment
  - Perception of safety
  - Retailer locating
  - School ratings
  - State legislation guided by Baltimore politics
  - Teleworking impacts
  - Traffic issues
  - Trash collection
  - Water cost

## USING PLAN ABERDEEN

As with the previous Comprehensive Plans, Plan Aberdeen represents the Vision for the City of Aberdeen and provides direction to public and private stakeholders and representatives to help guide the City as it equitably and sustainably meets resident’s current needs, while providing a platform to continue this growth into the future. Plan Aberdeen strengthens the City’s long-standing guiding principles and growth management policies, while identifying goals and objectives to continue to improve the existing and future needs for the City of Aberdeen.

This Plan represents a coordinated effort to serve as the basis for decision-making for the City, representing the social, economic, and environmental realities of today, while promoting balanced services, initiatives and infrastructure required for the future. Changes to the Plan may be initiated through private application or through the State process of updating the Plan by the City every 10 years.

Ultimately, the City will be able to guide decisions based on the goals and objectives outlined in Plan Aberdeen and will continue to develop and move the City forward cohesively – taking into account the thoughts, concerns and input provided by stakeholders, residents, and businesses alike. Goals and Objectives for each chapter in Plan Aberdeen are summarized in Chapter 11 – Implementation. Following adoption of Plan Aberdeen, the Planning Commission will work with City Staff and City Council to identify priorities for implementation of the various goals and objectives. Priorities will be identified as: high - occurring in the first five years; medium- between 5 and 10 years; and low, occurring in 10 or more years. Priorities are subject to change as situations may change following adoption of Plan Aberdeen. All efforts are subject to availability of funds and resources to help meet the goals and objectives identified as part of this plan update.