# SHAPE THE ISLE



*Proactively shape the County's future form by preserving valuable resource lands, prized community character, and historical assets by guiding the form of future development and providing public facilities and services in a fiscally sustainable manner.*



# SHAPE THE ISLE

The focus of this chapter is to identify policies and actions to meet the community's goal of preserving its historical and natural legacy while accommodating future population growth that is cost effective, provides an equitable standard of living for all residents, and respects its community character.

**COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC FORUMS**

**PUBLIC FORUM 1**
WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST ISSUES FACING ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY IN THE FUTURE?

- "Maintaining the 'County community' culture"
- "Preservation of Historic Properties"
- "Proper growth which generates jobs and keeps the beauty of Isle of Wight"
- "Major tax increases to support schools, police, fire, etc."

Successful implementation of the goal is achieved by establishing and completing objectives for the four key components of this goal, including:

- Historical preservation;
- Community Character;
- Development Service Districts and growth management; and
- Fiscal Management.

The Plan will identify key trends since the adoption of the 2008 Comprehensive Plan as well as potential issues based on the County's projected growth and recommended future land use plan. The County's historical resources, unique character, growth management strategy and future fiscal sustainability will be assessed in the following sections.

## Historical Preservation

Isle of Wight County encompasses an area richly endowed with a legacy of historic properties, scenic roadways and historic rural landscapes. During the *Envisioning the Isle* public input process, citizens raised concerns that these resources are threatened by the changing character of the community. Through the public input process, the community has established a recognized need for more public awareness of the importance of history and natural beauty to the quality of life in the County.

Recognition and appreciation of the County's historic legacy is not just an issue of historic preservation but that it is also a key contributor to the local economy. It is at the heart of the vision for the County which calls for preservation of rural community character, cultural resources and traditional lifestyles. Because the County's historical development pattern has been agrarian with scattered, small village-style development for most of the last four hundred years of its existence, rural character has traditionally defined the County and is favored by most of its residents.

The County's current historic resource preservation efforts include:

- Actively mapping resource locations;
- Requiring archaeological assessments for new development in sensitive areas;
- Enforcement of historic overlay district criteria in its Zoning Ordinance;
- Providing a partial exemption from real estate taxes for qualifying commercial or industrial structures no less than thirty years of age which have been substantially rehabilitated for commercial or industrial use;
- Working with the Isle of Wight County Museum and local nonprofit preservation organizations to analyze, document and interpret its historic resources; and
- Promoting of heritage tourism attractions by the County's Tourism Department.

The County also coordinates with other government agencies as well as local private preservation organizations to identify, catalogue, and preserve its historic resources, such as the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the Isle of Wight County Historic Society. Isle of Wight County is fortunate to also have a number of facilities that raise awareness of the area's rich history, including the Isle of Wight County Museum, established in 1976, and the



AERIAL IMAGE OF HISTORIC FORT HUGER ON THE JAMES RIVER IN ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY, PHOTO BY DAVID SAWYER

Schoolhouse Museum, established in 2005. This one-room structure, while focusing on the education of African-American children in the early 20th century in the County, also honors the legacy of individuals who contributed to the education of these children.

In 2014, the County dissolved its Historic Resources Department, which included a local historic archives repository at the Isle of Wight County Museum. Staff at the museum are now employees of the Town of Smithfield, but the museum and its staff still serve as the chief interpreter of the County's historic resources to include the museum, Fort Huger, Fort Boykin, Nike Park, and Boykin's Tavern. Museum staff members also work with the County and local preservation organizations to perform historical research, preservation, conservation, interpretation, archaeological/architectural analysis, and educational programming.

Local conservation efforts can be combined with the National Register of Historic Places (the National Register), a list of cultural resources of national, regional, state, or local significance that is kept by the Department of the Interior's (DOI) National Park Service (NPS). Listing a property in the National Register recognizes that it is of significance to the Country, the State, and the local community. Being listed on the Register does not protect a property from demolition, but it does document and evaluate the property's historic significance based on National Register criteria and makes the property eligible for federal grants when available, including rehabilitation tax credits. It also mandates consideration of potential impacts on the historic properties that result from federal or federally-assisted projects.

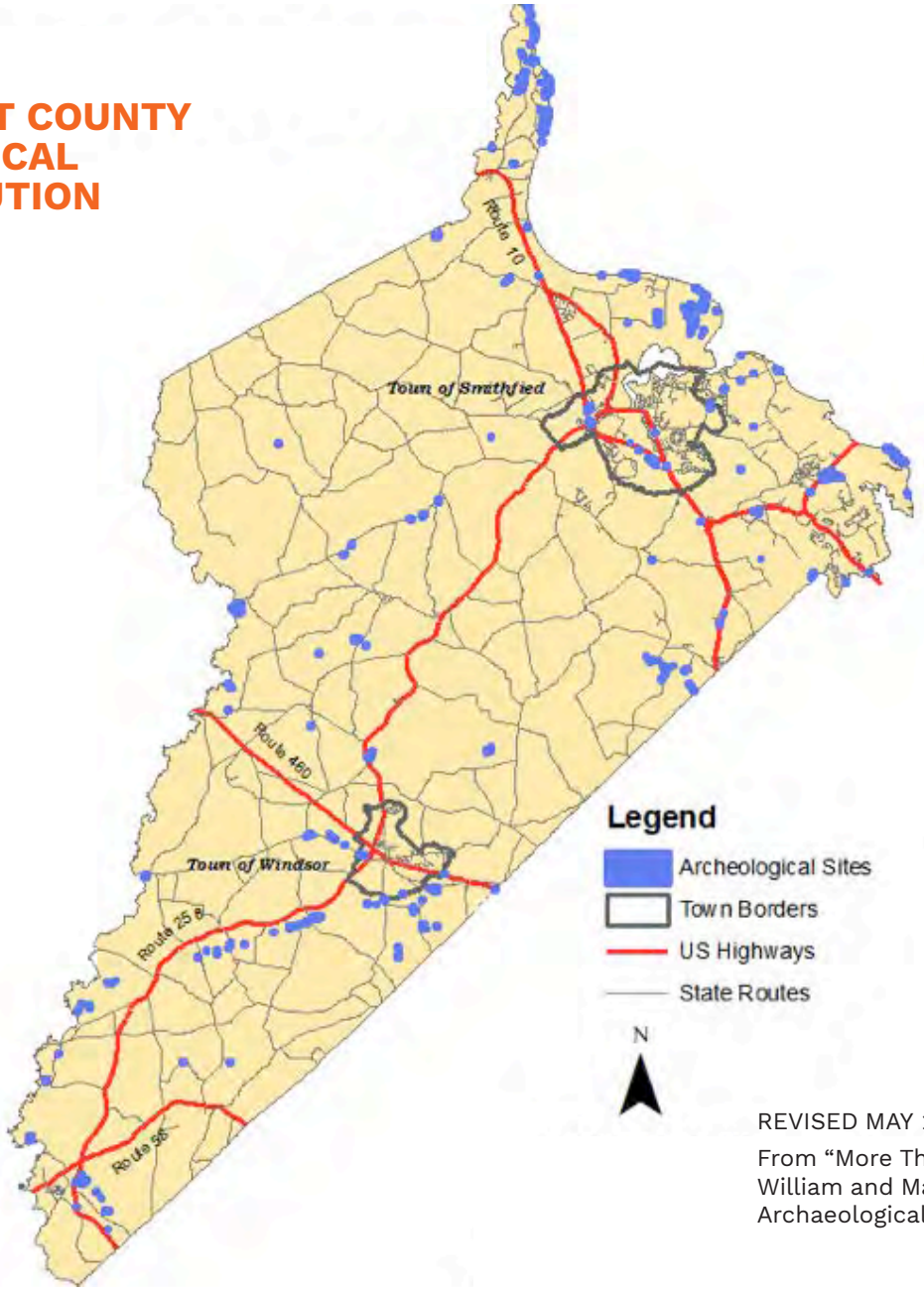
The County's 2008 Plan included an "Historic Sites and Structures Inventory" based on the book, *Historical Notes on Isle of Wight County, Virginia*, written in 1993 by local historian Helen Haverty King. The inventory includes 146 buildings and sites of historical significance. The majority of the inventory consists of residential buildings.

In 2005, the William and Mary Center for Archeological Research conducted an archaeological assessment which included the Towns of Smithfield and Windsor. The assessment identified 228 archeological sites in the County, mapped their location, and identified areas of high, moderate and low probability where archeological resources could be found throughout the County. The assessment also included both short and long term management recommendations.

**KEY FACTS AND TRENDS**

- The Isle of Wight County Museum documents the County's historic properties and archeological resources and functions as the County's Historic Resources Department.
- In addition to the work performed by the Schoolhouse Museum in Smithfield, the Isle of Wight County Museum works to preserve and protect the heritage and unique settlement patterns of African American communities. It makes its work available to the public either with displays, programming, as online resources or by appointment.
- There is no formalized local effort to preserve and protect local Native American culture or archeological resources, but the Isle of Wight County Museum preserves the archaeological resources in its collection, works to identify new resources and makes its work available to the public either with displays, programming, as online resources or by appointment.
- The County's current architectural inventory was created in 1993 and needs to be updated to reflect new discoveries as well as losses experienced since that time.
- The County's 2005 archeological assessment recommends that the assessment be updated after a period of ten years to provide an accurate catalogue of the County's archeological resources.
- The County provides a partial real estate tax exemption for rehabilitation of older commercial and industrial structures only.
- The Nike-Ajax Missle Site and the Isle of Wight County Courthouse Complex were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2019.

## ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE DISTRIBUTION




REVISED MAY 17, 2019

From "More Than Meets the Eye," William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research, 2005

## Community Character

While considerations of location, amount, density, and cost of growth are traditionally part of most growth management programs around the country, only a handful of communities have also factored concerns such as quality, appearance, and environmental protection into the growth management equation. Together, all three make up that elusive concept known as "community character."

Increasingly, jurisdictions recognize that they must be able to articulate what type of community character is important to them, and then enact regulations to ensure that character is protected, in order for future growth to be of sufficiently high quality. Only then can a community be assured that its distinctive character will be protected and that development will be sustainable from an environmental perspective.

County citizens should be able to articulate the aesthetic attributes of development that are important to them; and the officials and staff should work hard to protect those values and to enact regulations to ensure that future development lives up to the high standards already in place. The County currently preserves community character by imposing design standards in a variety of overlay districts, such as its Historic Overlay Districts, Highway Corridor Overlay District, and the Newport Development Service District Overlay District.

Additional tools that would enhance the County's community character identification and preservation efforts could include:

- A development pattern book to include design elements based on local examples like building size and height, setbacks from the street, access, parking, and landscaping;
- Develop design standards for the County's main entrance corridors to help establish a sense of identity upon arrival into the County; and
- A review and update of existing standards to ensure the most effective protection of locally important viewsheds, landscapes, historic and culturally significant sites.

**KEY FACTS AND TRENDS**

- **The County does not have an overall pattern book to inform design standards for future development.**
- **The County currently does not have an entrance corridor protection strategy.**

## Development Service Districts and Growth Management

One consistent theme between the 2008 Comprehensive Plan and *Envisioning the Isle* is the concern of County residents about who will be responsible for the costs of the additional public services needed to meet future growth needs. During the public input process, community members reaffirmed their commitment to proactively managing the location and form of future growth as well as the need to strategically plan for future public service needs.

In 1991, the County created three target growth areas called Development Service Districts (DSDs). These three districts are called the Newport DSD, Windsor DSD, and Camptown DSD. The DSDs incorporate historical population centers in the northern, central and southern portions of the County. Since that time, the County has sought to guide new development to these areas where adequate public infrastructure, such as roads, water and sewer, are either available or planned. In addition to controlling public service costs, the DSDs also conserve areas outside of their boundaries for agricultural and forestal uses, helping to protect the County's traditional rural landscape and lifestyle.

In July 2018, the County's estimated population is 37,492 persons according to the Weldon Cooper Center. The County is estimated to grow by another 7,485 people by 2040. Since the last census in 2010, the County has experienced steady population growth at an average annual rate of 0.63%. Over that time, the County added about 2,222 residents, translating to a 6.3% increase in population. The growth rate in the County outpaced the growth rate of the larger Hampton Roads metropolitan area and stayed on par with the State of Virginia as a whole over the eight year period.

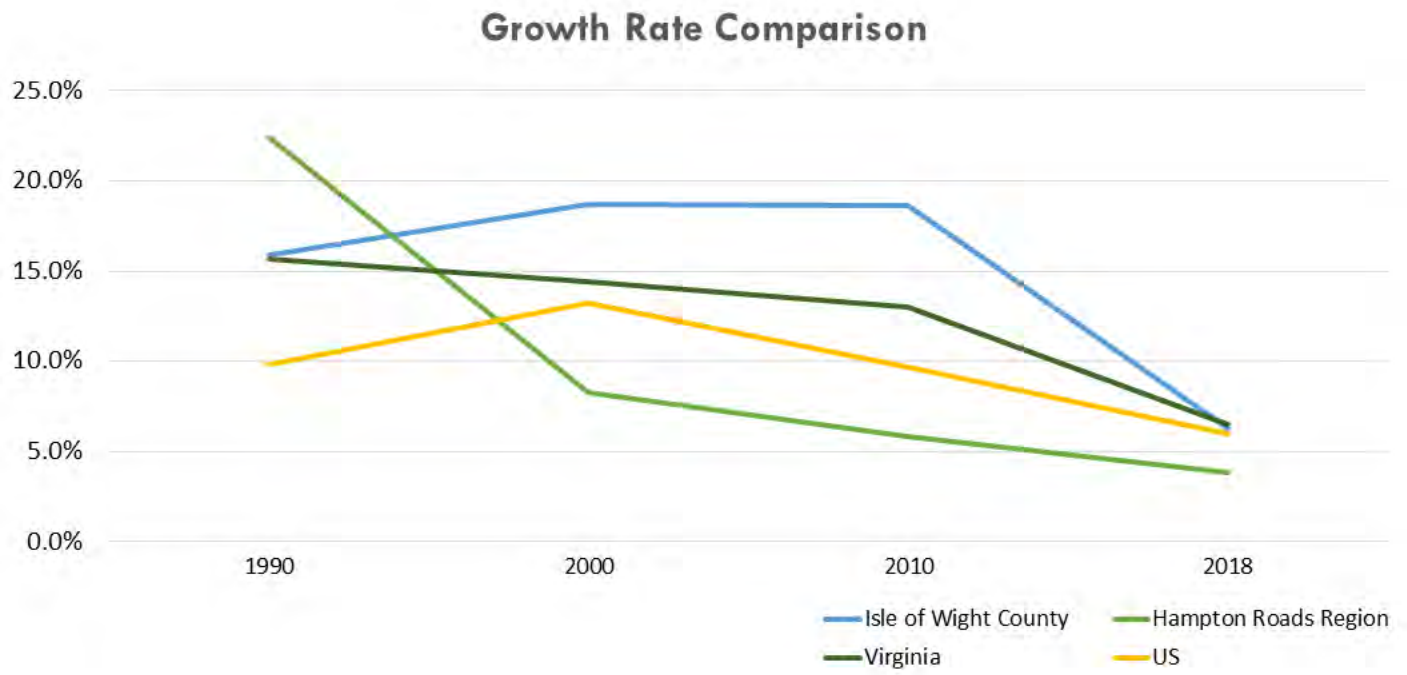
Although growing faster than many of its neighbors, the County's current average growth rate is slower than the previous two decades between 1990 and 2010, when its average annual growth rate was 1.87%. The great economic recession beginning in 2008, an aging population, and lower birth rates are some of the causes for the slower population growth rate. The table and chart below compare the average growth rates over the last 28 years for the County, region, state and nation.

In order to assess whether the County's desired future land use recommendations provide sufficient area for future residential and employment growth

## HISTORICAL POPULATION TRENDS COMPARISON

### SOURCE: WELDON COOPER AND US CENSUS (US PROJECTION AND HISTORICAL CENSUS DATA)

| | 1990 CENSUS | 2000 CENSUS | 2010 CENSUS | 2018 POPULATION ESTIMATE | AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH RATE (1990-2018) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Isle of Wight County | 25,053 | 29,728 | 35,270 | 37,492 | 1.9% |
| Hampton Roads Region | 1,454,185 | 1,547,801 | 1,666,310 | 1,729,326 | 0.1% |
| Virginia | 6,187,358 | 7,079,030 | 8,001,024 | 8,517,685 | 1.4% |
| US | 248,709,873 | 281,421,906 | 308,745,538 | 327,167,434 | 1.2% |




over the next twenty years, the County conducted a market feasibility study to be used as a tool by the community in selecting the best future land use scenario for the new Comprehensive Plan. An accompanying economic sustainability study assessed how the desired future land uses will affect the County's long-term economic sustainability based on its current revenue model. Based on the County's population growth trends, demographic data, and market trends, the studies compared different alternative land use scenarios with those of the 2008 Future Recommend Land Use Plan. Both studies are included as an appendix to this Plan. The studies found the preferred scenarios provide sufficient area to accommodate future growth and would be fiscally positive for the County. In addition, the studies found the following:

- The County's local economy is becoming increasingly diverse, especially in the areas of health care, professional and scientific sectors, and the warehousing and distribution industry;
- Gradual growth in both employment and the number of residents in the County will continue to occur; and
- Strong population growth, higher than average median age, low unemployment and higher than average household income in the County demonstrates its increasing importance as a residential community.

As the County continues to grow and provide services to new residents and employers, the County must periodically assess the continued effectiveness of its current growth management policies.

With the development of the new Comprehensive Plan, the majority of the community wishes to continue to implement the DSD concept with a few boundary adjustments to the Newport and Windsor DSDs. The changes are discussed in detail in the "Envision the Isle" chapter of the Plan. The community also seeks to increase the potential allowable densities within the DSD boundaries in order to

**KEY FACTS AND TRENDS**

- **Community members are concerned about growth and its impact upon the natural resources, existing development, and public services.**
- **Most of the County's growth has occurred within the DSDs since 1991.**

maximize the utility of these areas, increase housing diversity, and offer additional flexibility to property owners.

The County currently seeks to manage growth using a variety of tools, including:

1. Guiding new development to areas within the DSDs;
2. Limiting utility extensions to within DSD boundaries; and
3. Adopting land use controls, such as agricultural zoning and special overlay district architectural criteria, to control the quality and location of new development.

## Fiscal Management

During the public forums that formed the basis of the new Plan, the community expressed concerns about the budgetary impacts of new growth and their desire for a fiscally sustainable growth management model that would ensure reasonable costs for providing public services to existing and future residents.

Both the County and Isle of Wight County Schools integrate priority public facility projects into their respective ten-year Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) which are updated and adopted on an annual basis. The County's CIP outlines immediate and emerging capital projects and funding needs and priorities. The CIP is the end result of significant planning processes that must establish priorities for balancing and allocating funding between longer-term strategic needs and ongoing maintenance and existing infrastructure needs.

No explicit, formalized system is currently in place to ensure that County investment decisions primarily made through the CIP process consider the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan or other plans. Currently, the Board of Supervisors provides the Planning Commission with the opportunity to make a recommendation on the CIP based on whether or not it is consistent with County plans. A simple, first step toward developing such a system would be to establish an internal checklist for staff to use to track compliance with Plan goals. Such a checklist would formalize a series of evaluations and decisions that are already being made by staff and officials. Ideally, such a checklist should not be restricted only to public investment decisions, but also should track Plan compliance for all types of development proposals.

The Zoning Ordinance currently requires that applicants seeking a change in zoning for residential development consisting of ten or more lots must prepare a fiscal impact analysis (FIA). The FIA describes how the new development may impact public services and facilities.

In order to provide a more comprehensive and consistent way to project the fiscal impacts of new development, Isle of Wight County undertook a Capital Impact Study in 2019 to include in its new Comprehensive Plan a calculation of the capital costs of public facilities necessary to serve future residential uses. The County also prepared a Capital Impact Model to be used by County staff to determine the cost to the County of mitigating impacts of new proposed residential development on capital facilities on a case-by-case basis. The study is included as an appendix to this Plan. The capital facilities addressed as part of this effort are:

1. public schools
2. parks and recreation
3. public safety: sheriff
4. public safety: fire and rescue
5. public safety: animal protection
6. transportation
7. library
8. general government
9. courts
10. environmental services/solid waste

**KEY FACTS AND TRENDS**

- **The County plans for future facility needs and costs through its CIP process.**
- **The Planning Commission currently reviews the CIP for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.**
- **The County recently prepared a capital impact study and capital impact model for use by staff to better project the potential costs of new development on public facilities.**

# POLICIES AND ACTIONS

**"Shape the Isle" summarizes the community's vision for preserving its unique historical and cultural legacy while ensuring its future fiscal stability. This goal has a set of policies that identify actions and principles that provide the best course of action for regulations and procedures to achieve the goal. The final chapter of the Plan, "Create the Isle," establishes timeframes and responsible parties for the implementation of each action step.**

| POLICY | ACTION |
|---|---|
| **The County shall enhance its efforts to protect and preserve the significant historic and archaeological resources and cultural heritage of the County essential to its identity by utilizing effective land use techniques, increasing public awareness of the historic character of the County, and promoting the economic benefits of heritage tourism.** | Create an architectural and historical inventory for the County to be located and maintained by the Isle of Wight County Museum. |
| | Share development plans and reports with potential impact to historic resources with the Isle of Wight County Museum. |
| | Update the County's Archeological Assessment. |
| | Update and maintain the County's GIS database of archaeological resources, historic properties, roads, and landscapes for use in the development review process. |
| | Monitor inventories and studies conducted by other agencies and preservation organizations which identify new or recently discovered historic or cultural resources, including those associated with the historic settlement of African American and Native American communities. |
| | Protect rural historic landscapes by ensuring development is consistent with existing community character through performance criteria for new development. |
| | Review and update where needed the development standards in the County's overlay districts that preserve scenic and historic roadways and vistas. |
| | Develop small area plans to protect historic communities and neighborhoods and other areas of cultural significance, such as the County's village centers. |
| | Research and consider additional local tax relief initiatives to owners who rehabilitate historically significant residential and commercial property. |
| | Encourage adaptive reuse and rehabilitation of older buildings that complement historic development patterns. |
| **The County shall preserve and enhance its special rural character and small town atmosphere with its blending of new development with its traditional architecture, historic landmarks, and natural landscapes.** | Develop a pattern book based on the unique, recognizable features found in the County's historical community development pattern, such as building architecture, colors, signage, and accessory structures. |
| | Review and update existing standards to ensure the most effective protection of locally important viewsheds, landscapes, historic and culturally significant sites. |
| | Develop new zoning, design standards, and design guidelines to ensure the quality and attractiveness of future development respects community character. |

| POLICY | ACTION |
| --- | --- |
| **The County shall proactively address the location, amount, and timing of growth in order to preserve its distinctive character, protect sensitive environmental and cultural resources, and control costs associated with growth.** | Continue to utilize the area within the County's DSD boundaries for future growth. |
| | Develop a system of transferable density credits that will allow owners of sensitive lands to transfer the development potential of their property to other, preferred locations. |
| | Develop an emergency utility extension policy where the County shall only approve the extension of services in circumstances where applicable state and County health agencies have declared a potential or imminent health hazard or as outlined in an intergovernmental agreement regarding water or sewer provision. |
| | Work with the County School System to ensure that adequate school facilities are in place for school-age residents and ensure that new schools are supported by adequate infrastructure. |
| | Utilize the County's long-range plans, such as *Envisioning the Isle* and the Master Water and Sewer Plan, to assess future public infrastructure requests in the County's Capital Improvements Plan to ensure adequate service provision within the DSDs. |
| **The County shall maintain financial stability and sufficient financial capacity for present and future needs.** | Develop a more formal monitoring system to ensure that the County's public investment decisions are consistent with adopted plans. |
| | Utilize a capital impact analysis model for new development, so that the County may adequately assess the costs that new development will impose on public facilities. |
| | Develop a system to monitor a desired balance of residential and nonresidential development for tax base purposes. |
| | Regularly review and renegotiate intergovernmental agreements where advisable to ensure adequate provisions are in place to safeguard the financial well-being of the County, such as utility agreements or revenue sharing agreements. |