

August 26, 2025

Joe Wilson, Chairperson  
Town of Ocean City Planning Commission  
301 N. Baltimore Ave  
Ocean City, MD 21842

Dear Mr. Wilson,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Town of Ocean City, Maryland Comprehensive Plan (Draft Plan). The Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) believes good planning is important for efficient and responsible development that addresses resource protection, adequate public facilities, housing, community character, and economic development. MDP's attached review comments reflect the agency's thoughts on ways to strengthen the Draft Plan, as well as satisfy the requirements of Maryland's Land Use Article.

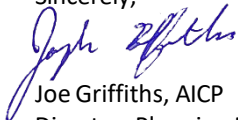
MDP forwarded a copy of the Draft Plan to several state agencies for review. To date, we have received comments from the Maryland Departments of Housing and Community Development, Transportation, Natural Resources, Disabilities, and Critical Area Commission. These comments are included with this letter. Any plan review comments received after the date of this letter will be forwarded upon receipt.

The department hopes that Ocean City considers the comments included in this review as a reflection of our desire to support the town in its comprehensive planning efforts and notes that our suggestions are intended to help further the implementation of state, county, and the town's own visions. MDP staff are available and eager to assist Ocean City in any Draft Plan updates. Please let the department know if the town would like to meet with us to discuss our comments.

MDP respectfully requests that this letter and accompanying review comments be made part of the town's public hearing record. When the Draft Plan is adopted, please send Michelle Koenig a PDF copy of the final document.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding these comments, please email me at [joseph.griffiths@maryland.gov](mailto:joseph.griffiths@maryland.gov).

Sincerely,



Joe Griffiths, AICP  
Director, Planning Best Practices

Enclosures: Review Comments Ocean City Draft Plan Amendment

cc: George Bendler, Director, Ocean City Planning & Community Development  
Bill Neville, City Planner, Ocean City Planning & Community Development  
Jennifer Keener, Director, Worcester County Department of Development Review & Permitting  
Michelle Koenig, Eastern Maryland Director, MDP



**Maryland Department of Planning**  
**Review Comments**  
**August 26, 2025**  
**Draft Town of Ocean City, Maryland Comprehensive Plan**

The Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) received the Draft Town of Ocean City, Maryland Comprehensive Plan (Draft Plan) from the Town of Ocean City on June 27, 2025. These comments are offered as suggestions to improve the Draft Plan and better address the statutory requirements of the Land Use Article. Other state agencies, as noted below, have contributed comments and others may submit comments separately. If comments are subsequently received by MDP, the department will forward them to town.

**2025 Legislation Impacting Local Planning**

MDP identified the following bills, adopted by the General Assembly during the 2025 session, that impact local planning, implementation, and reporting. MDP cannot determine at this time how they may impact Emmitsburg, but the department wants to make the town aware of them. In partnership with other state agencies, MDP is analyzing the bills and will be developing guidance.

Local Land Use Reporting

- [HB 1193](#) - Maryland Housing Data Transparency Act

Energy

- [SB 931/HB 1036](#) - Renewable Energy Certainty Act  
Natural Resources and Comp Plans, effective July 1, 2015
- [HB 731](#) - Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings, effective July 1, 2025

Housing

- [HB 1466/SB 891](#) Accessory Dwelling Units - Requirements and Prohibitions, effective October 1, 2025

**Plan Analysis**

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MDP commends the Town of Ocean City for effectively incorporating the new Sustainable Growth Planning Principles, adopted by the General Assembly with 2025's HB 286, signed by Governor Moore into law on April 8, 2026, and effective October 1, 2025. The Draft Plan addresses the Principles throughout and connects plan goals and objectives to Principles implementation. MDP intends to share Ocean City's example with other jurisdictions desiring to similarly address this new comprehensive planning requirement.

### Municipality Minimum Planning Requirements

Land Use Article Section 3-102 describes the required and optional elements for non-charter county and municipal comprehensive plans but does not mandate how they are to be addressed. The following checklist identifies required plan elements and where and how the Draft Plan addresses them.

<b>Checklist of Maryland Code (Land Use Article) Element Requirements for Non-Charter Counties and Municipalities</b>			
<b>Comprehensive Plan Requirements</b>	<b>MD Code Reference</b>	<b>Additional MD Code Reference</b>	<b>Reference</b>
(1) A comprehensive plan for a non-charter county or municipality must include:	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)</a>		
(a) a community facilities element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(1)(i)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-108 -- Community facilities element.</a>	Chapter 5: (Community Facilities and Public Safety Services)
(b) an area of critical state concern element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(1)(ii)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-109 -- Areas of critical State concern element</a>	Not specifically provided – addressed within Chapters 7 (Environment), and 11 (WRE and Mineral Resources)
(c) a goals and objectives element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(1)(iii)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-110 -- Goals and objectives element</a>	Not specifically provided – Incorporated as “Objectives and Recommendations” throughout Draft Plan Chapters
(d) a housing element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(1)(iv)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-114 -- Housing element</a> SB-687(2021)	Chapter 6 (Housing)
(d) a land use element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(1)(v)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-111 -- Land use element</a>	Chapter 3 (Land Use and Community Character)
(e) a development regulations element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(1)(vi)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-103 -- Development regulations element</a>	Chapter 9 (Plan Implementation), pages 9-6 through 9-9
(f) a sensitive areas element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(1)(vii)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-104 -- Sensitive areas element</a>	Chapter 7 (Environment)
(g) a transportation element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(1)(viii)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-105 -- Transportation element</a>	Chapter 4 (Transportation)
(h) a water resources element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(1)(ix)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-106 -- Water resources element</a>	Chapter 11 (Water Resources Element/Mineral Resources)

(i) a mineral resources element, IF current geological information is available	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(2)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-107 -- Mineral resources element</a>	Chapter 11 (Water Resources Element/Mineral Resources)
(j) for municipalities only, a municipal growth element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(3)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-112 -- Municipal growth element</a>	Chapter 10 (Municipal Growth Element)
(k) for counties only if located on tidal waters, a fisheries element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(a)(4)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-113 -- Fisheries element</a>	N/A
Optional: (2) A comprehensive plan for a non- charter county or municipality MAY include: (a) a community renewal element; (b) a conservation element; (c) a flood control element; (d) a natural resources element; (e) a pollution control element; (f) information concerning the general location and extent of public utilities; and (f) a priority preservation area (PPA) element	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(b)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-102(b)(2)(i)</a>	Not specifically provided – Incorporated as “Objectives and Recommendations” throughout Draft Plan Chapters
(3) Visions -- A local jurisdiction SHALL through the comprehensive plan implement the 12 planning visions established in L.U. § 1-201	<a href="#">L.U. § 3-201(c)</a>	<a href="#">L.U. § 1-201 -- The 12 Planning Visions</a>	Appendix F (Maryland Visions). Note: in separate emails to MDP, OC Staff has indicated during 60-day Review Period, the city is working on a transition to “Planning Principles”
Optional: (4) Growth Tiers -- If the local jurisdiction has adopted growth tiers in accordance with L.U. § 1- 502, the growth tiers must be incorporated into the jurisdiction's comprehensive plan	<a href="#">L.U. § 1-509</a>		Chapter 5 (Municipal Growth Element) page 10-1, “the Town of Ocean City Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012 Map only depicts a Tier 1 designation for the entire municipal boundary.” Page 10-2 (SB-236 Tier Map)

### Conformance with Section 3-102 of the Land Use Article

The following analyzes how the Draft Plan meets the requirements of municipal comprehensive plan elements, in accordance with the Land Use Article.

#### 1. Development Regulations Element – Synopsis

The element is required to include the planning commission’s recommendations for land development regulations to implement the plan. Regulations are required to be flexible to promote innovative and

cost saving site design, protect the environment and identify areas of growth. The areas identified for growth are required to encourage flexible regulations, which should further promote economic development using innovative techniques, streamlining the review of applications, including permit review and subdivision processing.

### **Plan Analysis**

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The Draft Plan highlights that infrastructure management and resilience outlined in the Hazard Mitigation Plan and Capital Improvement Plan are integral to economic development. MDP encourages Ocean City to include the targets for economic development which resilience may benefit the most. Incorporating resilience may support these possible targets:

- Minimizing maintenance and recovery costs post-disaster/hazard so that city capital may be freed up for other uses
- Ensuring more resilient infrastructure and community services that reduce strain on emergency systems and personnel

The Draft Plan adequately addresses resilience for downtown development. However, the scope is limited to nuisance flooding. To address this, MDP encourages the town to incorporate other hazards for consideration such as heat, stormwater, and human-induced hazards. The Draft Plan may also provide strategy on how these risks and the mitigation of them may be assessed.

The Draft Plan states that 40% of all land and structures within the town exist within floodplains. Page 7-12 of the Draft Plan states that “new development in the special flood hazard areas cannot be avoided”, but that building principles and code will provide best practice. To address this, the Draft Plan may emphasize if development in non-floodplain areas will be prioritized or incentivized before increasing uses in hazard areas. The Draft Plan mentions elevation as a key component but provides no technical detail. To address this, MDP encourages Ocean City to provide a reference for technical guidance that the town plans to follow and specify how the city will utilize zoning, code, and building standards to deliver resilient land use development. To conclude, the Draft Plan specifies that a Coastal Resilience element will be included within the next plan update, encouraging further resilience projects and adaptation efforts.

### **Housing Element - Synopsis**

The housing element is required to address the need for housing within the jurisdiction that is affordable to low-income and workforce households. The housing element is also required to assess fair housing and ensure that a jurisdiction is affirmatively furthering fair housing through its housing and urban development programs.

### **Plan Analysis**

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Given its status as a high-profile Maryland tourist destination, Ocean City faces unique challenges and opportunities for housing planning. The Draft Plan housing element effectively connects the town’s housing needs to its economic profile and growth, addressing both the Housing and Economy Principles in the process. To this end, the Draft Plan incorporates workforce development and the housing requirements of a seasonal labor force into its housing needs assessment. The town analyses and plans for this labor force on page 6-15, noting that a lack of affordable housing has led to previous summer

labor shortages, which in turn hinders the tourist economy. MDP encourages the town's strategies to partner with employers on providing housing for their employees by granting density and parking exceptions. MDP also supports the town's thoughtful approach to addressing the impacts of short-term rentals on the Ocean City community and housing stock/affordability, as discussed on page 6-16, as well as its impressive consideration of the needs of its homeless population (page. 6-17).

#### **Housing Affordability (Land Use Article Section 3-114 (a-c))**

The Draft Plan's housing element appears to meet the affordability requirements of Land Use Article 3-114 through its analysis and strategies. Pages 6-7 and 6-8 define the low income and workforce thresholds added by 2019's HB 1045, and Table 6-5 displays those ranges for the Worcester County Income Limit Area. The AMI used is from 2023. The town should consider updating the housing element with 2025 data, which would better align it with the 2019-2023 ACS 5-yr estimate data also used in the housing element, and which the 2025 AMI data is based on. Page 6-8 effectively compares 2023 household income to AMI calculations to determine the percent and counts of households that fall into low-income category, thus establishing the "need" for housing that they can afford. However, this section does not complete the same calculation and comparison for households in the workforce income ranges established in Land Use Article 3-114. How will the town ensure affordability for full-time resident workforce households?

Housing cost is addressed on pages 6-9 – 6-11. The call out box at top of Pg. 6-11 states "[t]his analysis demonstrates that approximately 1,079 resident housing units may exceed the monthly cost threshold (>30%) for resident households in Ocean City MD. Since these results are based on community survey data of existing residents, it is reasonable to state that affordable housing needs are currently being met through a variety of means affordability needs are being met". This is a strong statement which the Draft Plan does not support with standards explaining why 1,079 falls within a threshold of reasonable cost burden for a town with a year-round population equivalent that that of Ocean City. The Housing Element indeed catalogs an impressive variety of affordable housing strategies that the town has already implemented, as well as those it plans to implement, but the assertion above could be strengthened by connecting it to a standard for comparison. Even if 1,079 falls within a burdened household range that demonstrates that the town's affordable housing needs are currently being met, the housing element could still be strengthened by describing those strategies, listed at the end of the element, that will address the housing needs of the remaining 1,079 households burdened by housing costs.

#### **Fair Housing (Land Use Article Section 3-114 (d))**

The affirmatively furthering fair housing requirements of Land Use Article Section 3-114 are addressed on page 6-12 and in the strategies on page 6-18. The town affirms its commitment to affirmatively further fair housing, identifies potential partnerships and a census tract designated as an Opportunity Zone, and includes a future strategy to "Affirm fair housing principles through Town programs and practices, and with affiliated partners, to foster and maintain compliance with civil rights and fair housing laws". However, the fair housing section does not appear to assess fair housing, as required in LUA 3-114 (d)(2).

Land Use Article Section 3-114 does not define what an assessment of fair housing entails. MDP's research into this issue has shown that a traditional US HUD assessment of fair housing includes an analysis of the following four housing issues in a community.

1. **Patterns of segregation/integration:** Areas within the jurisdiction that are residentially segregated by protected class
2. **Racially or Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty (R/ECAPS):** US HUD defines r/ecaps in *metropolitan areas* as census tracts with a non-white population of 50 percent or more and a poverty rate of 40 percent or more (or a poverty rate that is three or more times the average tract poverty rate for the metropolitan area, whichever threshold is lower). For rural areas, HUD lowers the non-white percentage threshold to 20 percent.
3. **Disparities in access to opportunity:** Areas within the community/jurisdiction that provide access to opportunity, such as good schools, medical facilities, employment centers, positive public health outcomes, and low crime rates. A fair housing assessment would consider if protected classes have less access to such areas.
4. **Disproportionate housing needs:** An analysis considering whether certain areas or populations within a community, particularly protected classes, have disproportionate housing needs than other areas or populations.

The Land Use Article does not state that these four issues must be included in an assessment of fair housing in a housing element, nor is MDP setting any standards for what must be included. I encourage Ocean City to discuss the legal requirements of the assessment with its attorney. I also encourage the town to visit MDP's [HB 90 Resources page](#) and [Self-Assessment-Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing in Small Jurisdictions](#), for more information on how it may complete an assessment of fair housing. While not a small jurisdiction, Ocean City could use the self-assessment to complete a qualitative analysis of fair housing for the town.

I also encourage the town to discuss with its attorney if Objective 6.2, to “[e]ncourage a balanced housing stock with housing opportunities for all residents” and Future Strategy 5, to “[a]ffirm fair housing principles through Town programs and practices, and with affiliated partners, to foster and maintain compliance with civil right and fair housing laws” meet the requirement to “take meaningful action” as defined in Housing and Community Development Article Section 2-401 and required by Land Use Article Section 3-114, which defines such actions as, taken together:

- (i) address significant disparities in housing needs and access to opportunity;
- (ii) replace segregated living patterns with truly integrated and balanced living patterns;
- (iii) transform racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty into areas of opportunity;
- and
- (iv) foster and maintain compliance with civil rights and fair housing laws.

MDP's HB 90 Resources page, linked above, includes more information and examples about meaningful goals, policies, actions, and best practices that affirmatively further fair housing.

MDP also reminds Ocean City about [HB 1466's](#) requirement that all jurisdictions adopt a local law meeting its accessory dwelling unit provisions by October 1, 2026. MDP is available to assist the town with this requirement and will be developing resources to this end. MDP recognizes and appreciates that Ocean City already permits ADUs in some districts and addresses them specifically as a land use objective on page 3-2.

## **2. Sensitive Areas Element – Synopsis**

The sensitive areas element is required to include the goals, objectives, principles, policies, and standards designed to protect sensitive areas from the adverse effects of development (more recently referred to as climate change impacts). The Land Use Article also assigns sensitive areas element data provision and review responsibilities to the Maryland Departments of the Environment and Natural Resources.

### **Plan Analysis**

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The Draft Plan notes that the town will focus on resilience to address severe climate events. By aligning land use with the Hazard Mitigation Plan, the FEMA Community Rating System, and the Maryland Sustainable Communities Plan, Ocean City seeks to incorporate resilience findings into each element of the comprehensive plan. This includes developing a strategy for updated building standards and environmental resilience. To further build resilience beyond environmental, MDP encourages Ocean City to develop built environment standards and resilience activities which improve the stability and risk mitigation for structures and resources within residential, commercial, and mixed-use divisions.

The Draft Plan mentions “severe and lasting adverse impacts” from offshore wind energy systems. MDP encourages Ocean City to highlight some of these adverse impacts and the strategy to contain or mitigate the risk or hazard from offshore wind energy systems (safety, environment, quality of life or otherwise). Ocean City may consider providing examples of how offshore wind development conflicts with the other components of the proposed comprehensive plan.

## **1. 3. Transportation Element - Synopsis**

The transportation element is required to reasonably project into the future the most appropriate and desirable location, character, and extent of transportation facilities to move individuals and goods, provide for bicycle and pedestrian access and travelways, and estimate the use of proposed improvements.

### **Plan Analysis**

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#### **General**

- Figure 2.4 is missing traffic data since 2020.
- The Draft Plan is supportive of alternative transportation modes but generally prioritizes parking and roadway enhancements to an extent that is likely to negatively impact bus and bicycle ridership.
- The Transportation Element’s “Key Principles” includes “Provide a variety of transportation alternatives to support the land use principles of park where you stay, then walk/bike/ride the bus...”. MDP suggests expanding on how Ocean City is incorporating this principle into the Draft Plan.
- The Draft Plan states that resilience in transportation consists of effective evacuation, accessible emergency routes, and understanding the impact of flooding on roadways. MDP encourages Ocean City to consider the built resilience of all transportation assets including bridges,



maintenance facilities, or multi-modal systems which may be adversely impacted by severe weather conditions or human-induced threats (accidents, terrorism, or otherwise).

### **Parking and Roads**

The Transportation Element includes goals to increase parking, including 4.14 “Ensure adequate off-street parking...” and 4.19 “...develop financing mechanisms to provide necessary parking...” as well as Parking Strategy A: “provide additional public parking in the downtown area”. These presume a need for additional parking, which is likely to undermine the goal of increasing transit ridership and revitalizing the downtown core, and will both maintain and increase impermeable surfaces.

MDP recommends that the town conduct a parking study, as recommended in Parking Strategy D. MDP suggests the study consider how transit (including park and ride facilities), pedestrian connections and bicycle connections and parking can mitigate the need for additional car parking.

### **Bicycling and Pedestrian Infrastructure**

MDP strongly suggests that Ocean City incorporate an assessment of Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress for existing and proposed bicycle infrastructure. The Draft Plan recommends creating a Bikeway Master Plan with location specific Pedestrian and Bicycle Recommendations. MDP suggests that this include a linear north-south path separated from Coastal Highway (LTS-4), such as a shared use path or boardwalk extension, to improve the LTS for use by families of all ages and J-1 summer visa workers.

MDP suggests that Ocean City consider the trail and pathway designs implemented in other ocean beach communities in New Jersey and Cape Cod, which allow for recreation and commuting but also increase the draw and reputation of those communities. An eventual Route 50 bridge replacement could include a bicycle connection between Ocean City and the MD-611 shared use path, which connects from West Ocean City to Assateague Island. The original bridge could also be maintained as a shared use path and fishing pier.

MDP suggests that the town work with SHA to reduce traffic speeds on Coastal Highway, potentially through lane removal or width reduction to improve pedestrian conditions so that a median fence is not necessary.

### **Transit**

The Draft Plan includes a strong recommendation to look at express bus service along Coastal Highway. Faster bus service could also be achieved by reducing the total number of stops, which is currently about 60 in each direction of the 9.5-mile route. In addition to digital fare payment, Ocean City could explore selling weekly and monthly transit passes. Ocean City is looking at extending bus lanes into downtown and notes the congestion in this area. MDP suggests exploring automated enforcement of the bus lanes.

Ocean City is a prominent tourist destination in the state. MDP suggests that the town explore the feasibility of conducting a regional bus service study for visitors from the Western Shore and other long-distance routes outside of the town to support tourism and provide other travel options. The town is considering extending its West Ocean City loop to the Berlin Wal-Mart and coordinating shuttles to local campgrounds. MDP suggests considering other regional destinations, such as Salisbury, Assateague,

Berlin, and the Delaware beaches, as both a traffic mitigation strategy and an alternative to new parking in the downtown area and the proposed North End Transit Center Park and Ride.

### **3. Water Resources Element – Synopsis**

The water resource element is required to consider available data provided by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to identify drinking water that will be adequate for the needs of existing and future development proposed in the plan, as well as suitable receiving waters and land areas to meet stormwater management and wastewater treatment and disposal needs. MDE and MDP are available to provide technical assistance to prepare the water resources element, ensuring consistency with MDE programs and goals. MDE and MDP jointly developed WRE guidance to demonstrate how local governments can ensure compliance with the WRE requirements. Local jurisdictions are expected to implement the most important aspects of the [MDE/MDP WRE guidance](#).

#### **Plan Analysis**

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The WRE chapter references two of the newly adopted MD Sustainable Growth Principles: 8—Ecology and 6—Resilience. The chapter includes 11 objectives, one of which is to “incorporate climate adaptation and future conditions into water resources research, analysis, and amended plans when updated” (page 11-3). This addresses the 2022 Water Resources Element Guidance Update’s focus on “Integrating Water-related Climate Change Adaptation into Local Comprehensive Plans.”

The WRE states that the town’s long-range population growth is estimated to be 1-1.5%, but that groundwater use is expected to reduce. The town most recently updated the 1997 comprehensive water study in 2024 and determined that the town’s water supply will remain safe and adequate through the 10-year planning period (2035) and beyond to 2040.

The town completed a Climate Change Resiliency Report in 2024 for MDE. Regarding wastewater, the report determined that maximum monthly average flow (recorded in August 2023) was 9.112 millions of gallons per day (MGD) - 65% of the permitted flow of 14 MGD. And peak daily flow (recorded during a special event weekend on August 12, 2023) of 11.210 MGD was 80% of the permitted flow. MDP commends the town for transporting treated Class "A" biosolids to local farms for land application daily during the summer season. The town has plans for a fourth secondary clarifier for the wastewater treatment system which would increase treatment capacity to 16 MGD if needed to accommodate future growth. The entire town is served by sewer, so there are no septic systems. As described in the MGE, wastewater treatment capacity limits are based on maximum peak summer populations, so there will be sufficient wastewater treatment and disposal capabilities to handle projected population increases through 2035 and beyond.

Regarding stormwater, the system is separate from the wastewater system. In 2016, the town hired a contractor to clean, evaluate, and line sewer laterals and mains, resulting in reduced infiltration during hightide cycles and rain events. The town adopted a Stormwater Management Ordinance in 2010 “to control the adverse impacts associated with increased stormwater runoff” (page 11-14). In addition, redevelopment in the town is subject to the Stormwater Management and Critical Area Program regulations, which apply Critical Area Program standards to the entire town. In addition, environmentally sensitive design is required to the maximum extent possible.

The WRE does not provide demand and capacity comparison tables for water or wastewater supply.

Although the town has adequate capacity to meet future water and wastewater demand since capacity design is based on the peak seasonal population that is not anticipated to change, has the town considered providing tables to demonstrate current and future equivalent dwelling units (EDUs) and non-residential uses compared to water and wastewater capacity and demand?

The Draft Plan adequately addresses the incorporation of resilience into the WRE. This element takes strong opposition to offshore wind energy development, though the initiative is a state goal. MDP encourages Ocean City to incorporate positions or strategies that will identify offshore wind development or alternative energy development that is feasible and supportive of Ocean City's, the region, and the State of Maryland's urgent energy needs.

#### **4. Community Facilities Element - Synopsis**

The community facilities element is required to propose, as far into the future as is reasonable, the most appropriate and desirable patterns for the general location, character, and extent of public and semipublic buildings, land, and facilities. These facilities may include, but are not limited to fire stations, libraries, cultural facilities, hospitals, places of worship, school and education facilities, and parks.

##### **Plan Analysis**

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The Draft Plan adequately addresses resilience within community facilities. MDP encourages Ocean City to provide an approach for resilience activities which will identify community needs and develop strategy to deliver community needs immediately after disruptions/hazards.

#### **5. Municipal Growth Element - Synopsis**

The municipal growth element (MGE) is only required in Maryland municipal comprehensive plans. The MGE is required to plan for and describe the municipality's past growth patterns, the capacity of land available for new and infill development, and areas outside of the existing corporate boundaries into which the municipality wishes to grow. The MGE is required to calculate the land area needed to satisfy the demand for growth based on population projections and desired densities. The MGE needs to consider and include any rural buffers, transition areas, and sensitive areas to be protected. MGEs are also required to consider and plan for the community facilities and public infrastructure, as well as their financing mechanisms, required to accommodate desired growth. If a municipality wishes to annex land, such areas are required to be included and described in the MGE.

##### **Plan Analysis**

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The MGE chapter explains that Ocean City's seasonal tourism population is the basis for estimating infrastructure demand. And the seasonal population is expected to remain at current levels for the foreseeable future.

The chapter also includes a build-out analysis, resulting in 7,479 potential additional housing units. However, the chapter notes that this analysis is not very meaningful or realistic for Ocean City as they already have such high housing surplus since so much of their population is seasonal. Based on the current state and county growth rate, no population growth is proposed for the purposes of the Draft Plan. In addition, "all projections of future water and wastewater facility needs are based on the projections of peak visitor population found in the 2006 Comprehensive Plan" (page 10-13).

## **6. Growth Tiers**

### **Plan Analysis**

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A resolution establishing the Growth Tier Map for Ocean City was passed on October 9, 2012, showing the entire municipality is Tier I. Page 10-3 of the draft plan states: "In accordance with the Act, the Town of Ocean City's Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012 Map is hereby incorporated as part of the Town of Ocean City Comprehensive Plan." Therefore, the town's Growth Tier Map will be considered adopted with the adoption of the plan.

### **Ocean City is a Sustainable Community**

Ocean City has a designated Sustainable Community. As part of the Sustainable Community designation, quality of life, environment, economy, transportation, housing, planning and land use, and local capacity are all subjects of the action plan. MDP suggests the town review the Sustainable Community action plan for consistency with the Draft Plan and consider how the action plan and the financial incentives provided in the Sustainable Communities designation can support plan implementation. Contact the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, [Sustainable Communities Program](#) for more information.

**Maryland Department of Planning Review Comments  
Draft Plan**

**STATE AGENCY COMMENTS**

The following are state agency comments in support of MDP's review of the draft plan. Comments not included here may be submitted under separate cover, or via the State Clearinghouse. If comments from other agencies are received by MDP, the department will forward them to Ocean City as soon as possible.

**Attachments**

- Page #13: Maryland Department of Natural Resources
- Page #15: Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development
- Page #18: Maryland Department of Transportation
- Page #22: Critical Area Commission
- Page #24: Maryland Department of Disabilities



Wes Moore, Governor  
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor  
Josh Kurtz, Secretary  
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

Maryland Department of Planning  
301 West Preston Street  
Suite 1101  
Baltimore, MD 21201

Memo: MD DNR comments on the Draft Ocean City Comprehensive Plan

To: Keith Lackie  
cc: Rita Pritchett

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Ocean City Comprehensive Plan. The draft document was distributed to appropriate contacts at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and reviewed. DNR offers the following comments:

The Maryland Forest Service recommends implementing a Forestry Program, would promote the State Forest Action plan and the community could benefit from the addition of a city Forestry Conservation Ordinance. We understand and commend Ocean City already having a Tree Care Ordinance. The Maryland Forest Service Supports the implementation of a forestry program to promote forest health. Maryland Forest Service and Maryland Department of Agriculture staff can assist the city in identifying prevalent forest health needs such as emerald ash borer (EAB), invasive and noxious plants, and encouraging the city's use of native plant species in landscaping projects. We also encourage staff awareness and training of invasive plant species identification and removal options. Programs like Tree City USA and Maryland P.L.A.N.T. Award are a great way for the city to receive recognition for their tree planting and care efforts. We commend Ocean City on repeatedly being named as a Arbor Day "Tree City USA" and receiving the Maryland PLANT Award.

The [USFS Wildland urban interface \(UWI\)](#) is an important concept to consider. Maryland Forest Service reviewed Ocean City based on this map. UWI is not significant at this time, however with changing climate would benefit with further review and urban wildland prevention plan. Reach out to MD Forestry Fire Staff for more information.

The Maryland Forest Service agrees with Ocean City's recognition that Sensitive Areas require protection through buffers and agree with the continued active participation and support in the Maryland Coastal Bays Program. In addition, we agree with the management of coastal marsh and wetlands due to their importance in maintaining benefits of water quality, shoreline stabilization, and wildlife habitat, applauding the focus on the continued monitoring and protection of Threatened and Endangered Species. The Maryland Forest Service can help identify sites and programs that can assist with forest buffer implementation and expansion. With urban plantings, thought should be given to [climate change](#) and what species would thrive in an altered climate.

The Sport Fishing and Commercial Fishing Industry -

This section does not adequately reflect the key fisheries of interest to the commercial, recreational, and for-hire vessels in Ocean City. There are for-hire vessels that focus on summer flounder, black sea bass, tautog, tuna, billfishes, and sharks. In addition to the well-known White Marlin Open, there are several other tournaments that also have an economic impact on the town. There are several commercial species of interest in OC such as summer flounder, black sea bass, blue crabs, American lobster, Jonah crab, whelks, horseshoe crabs, spiny

dogfish, and striped bass to name a few. Publicly available economic data does not accurately reflect the economic importance of these industries. MDNR is currently developing a Geographic Location Description (GLD) for reviewing renewable energy development activities off of Maryland's coast, however, the GLD will not be fully implemented until federal review and approval processes are complete. During this process, staff have collaborated with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) and a contractor to update fisheries economic data for the proposed GLD area and the Ocean City port. The additional economic data demonstrates the historical importance of the commercial fishing industry in Maryland. However, the reported values will not include the valuable horseshoe crab biomedical industry due to a lack of publicly available data. Given the significance of this industry, we recommend including a statement acknowledging its value in the plan. Finally, we suggest an edit to item d) of the Chapter 7 summary strategies ("Advocate for state legislation to adopt Maryland CZM enforceable standards for offshore energy resource development, and request adoption of a GLD sufficient to guide development of offshore resources"); as the GLD is already under development and requires no additional legislative action, the Town might consider an edit to reflect the current status of this process.

Recommendation to upgrade and improve the OC Airport - Further development of the airport facility should take into consideration the Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) beds adjacent to the Ocean City Airport which are important habitat for fisheries (e.g. tautog, black sea bass). Fishing opportunities in Sinepuxent Bay are also important to the area so it is important to maintain the habitat for those fisheries.

Impervious surface - Impervious surface has negative impacts on fisheries. Runoff carries sediment and pollutants that can harm aquatic life in the coastal bays. Sediment can smother fish eggs, reduce water clarity, and negatively impact fish feeding and schooling behaviors. Impervious surfaces absorb and retain heat, and runoff from these surfaces can cause thermal shock and stress to fish. Impervious surfaces and urban drainage systems alter hydrology, can lead to fluctuating water levels and eroding shorelines, which can degrade fish habitat. Changes to riparian vegetation should be evaluated for aquatic needs so that fish abundance isn't negatively impacted. Vegetation provides shade, bank stability, and food for fish.

Suggestion to provide more detail on the SWOT analysis in Appendix B and how the rankings were determined overall. Is there an explanation as to why fishing and crabbing are ranked as 0s?

Nomenclature updates: The name of the Fisheries Service should be updated to Fishing and Boating Services. The Chesapeake and Coastal Service is now the Watershed and Climate Service.

Finally, the Town should keep track of POS Local funded property and not transfer it out of recreation and/or open space. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. If you have any questions about these comments or would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 443-534-4151 or [christine.burns1@maryland.gov](mailto:christine.burns1@maryland.gov).

Best,  
Christine Burns



July 25, 2025

Mr. Keith Lackie, Regional Planner  
Maryland Department of Planning  
Lower Eastern Shore Regional Office  
Salisbury Multi-Service Center  
201 Baptist Street, Suite 24  
Salisbury, MD 21801-4974

Dear Mr. Lackie:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the June 2025 draft Ocean City Comprehensive Plan (the "Plan"). When reviewing plans, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development ("DHCD") comments on items for which political subdivisions can strategically leverage DHCD's resources to accomplish their housing and community development goals. DHCD also reviews comprehensive plans for consistency with relevant statutes and, if appropriate, Sustainable Communities Plans.

Overall, DHCD staff were impressed with the quality of the Plan. Staff in the DHCD Division of Neighborhood Revitalization reviewed the Plan and provided the following comments, which are meant to help realize the Plan's goals. We present the following in no particular order:

1. The housing and economic development components of the Plan are consistent with and build upon the Sustainable Communities Action Plan. Key elements of the Sustainable Communities Action Plan are referenced in the Plan.
2. DHCD can assist with home repairs that improve comfort, livability, and accessibility for homeowners through its Special Loan Programs. Planning staff and residents can learn more about these programs at <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Residents/Pages/SpecialLoans.aspx> or contact the program directly at 301-429-7409 or [DHCD.SpecialLoans@maryland.gov](mailto:DHCD.SpecialLoans@maryland.gov).
3. While the Plan includes a section addressing homelessness and outreach efforts, the Plan does not show that Ocean City has conducted a point-in-time count to identify the total number of people experiencing homelessness in Ocean City, and the Plan does not identify goals or actions regarding services for people experiencing homelessness. For information on DHCD's programs addressing homelessness, please see more online at <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/HomelessServices/Pages/GrantFunding.aspx> or contact the Homelessness Solutions Program Manager, Suzanne Korff, at 410-209-5850 or



[Suzanne.Korff@maryland.gov](mailto:Suzanne.Korff@maryland.gov). If you are a person experiencing homelessness and need assistance, please contact the Worcester County adult intake line at 410-632-9915

4. The Plan identifies the community's needs with respect to income and poverty. Ocean City or non-profits active in Ocean City may be eligible to apply for discretionary Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds administered by DHCD in order to provide services for low-income individuals and families at or below 125% of poverty. Planning staff can learn more about CSBG programs online at <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Communities/Pages/programs/CSBG.aspx> or contact the Poverty Solutions Team at 301-429-7525 or [csbg.dhcd@maryland.gov](mailto:csbg.dhcd@maryland.gov).
5. The Plan identifies a need for affordable housing, including workforce and low-income housing. If planning staff want to explore financing through the Low Income Housing Tax credit Program (LIHTC, they may find more info online at <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/HousingDevelopment/Pages/lihtc/default.aspx> or contact Edward Barnett, Director of Rental Lending, at 301-429-7740 or [edward.barnett@maryland.gov](mailto:edward.barnett@maryland.gov).
6. Planning staff and residents may learn more about Maryland's homeownership programs at <https://mmp.maryland.gov/pages/default.aspx>.
7. Ocean City's downtown has been designated as a Maryland Main Street. More information on the revitalization benefits associated with this designation can be found online at <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/communities/pages/programs/mainstreet.aspx> or by contacting Christine McPherson, the Main Street Coordinator, at 410-209-5802 or by email at [christine.mcpherson@maryland.gov](mailto:christine.mcpherson@maryland.gov)
8. The Plan identifies a need to support businesses in the town's core. Info on DHCD's support for businesses can be found online at <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Business/Pages/SmallBusinesses.aspx> or by contacting Mike Haloskey, Director of Business Lending Programs, at 301-429-7523 or [Michael.Haloskey@maryland.gov](mailto:Michael.Haloskey@maryland.gov).
9. The Plan's Housing Element includes an assessment of fair housing in compliance with House Bill 90 (2021). For technical assistance in development of the Plan's Housing Element, please contact Carter Reitman, Lead Housing Planner at the Maryland Department of Planning, (410) 767-3837 or email [Carter.Reitman2@maryland.gov](mailto:Carter.Reitman2@maryland.gov)

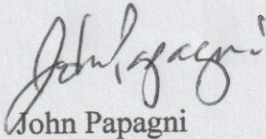




July 25, 2025  
Page 3

We in the Division of Neighborhood Revitalization look forward to continuing our productive partnership with Ocean City in its future initiatives. Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Plan. If you have any questions regarding the comments above, please contact me at [john.papagni@maryland.gov](mailto:john.papagni@maryland.gov) or 301-429-7670.

Sincerely,



John Papagni  
Program Officer  
State Revitalization Programs

Cc: Joseph Griffiths, Maryland Department of Planning  
Rita Pritchett, Maryland Department of Planning  
Garland Thomas, DHCD Division of Neighborhood Revitalization  
Maria Mougridis, DHCD Division of Neighborhood Revitalization  
Olivia Ceccarelli, DHCD Division of Neighborhood Revitalization





July 24, 2025

Mr. Keith Lackie  
c/o Rita Pritchett  
Maryland Department of Planning  
301 West Preston Street, Suite 1101  
Baltimore MD 21201

Dear Mr. Lackie:

Thank you for coordinating the State of Maryland's comments on The Town of Ocean City, Maryland 2025 Comprehensive Plan (the Plan). The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) offers the following comments on the Plan for consistency with the State of Maryland and MDOT's goals and objectives:

**General Comments**

- In general, the Plan is consistent with MDOT plans and programs. The MDOT supports the goals of the Plan, which include:
  - Fostering clear patterns of land use which accommodate a variety of development types and scales appropriate to improve transportation systems, enhance pedestrian connectivity within the Downtown, and protect natural resources.
  - Improving the transportation system in partnership with MDOT/State Highway Administration (SHA) while accommodating the movement of people and goods as efficiently as possible with minimum congestion and maximum safety.
- Shifting transportation mode choice towards transit and active transportation, shortening automobile trips, and increasing carpooling and vanpooling, are critical components to building efficient, equitable, and sustainable places, and is also essential to accommodating Maryland's changing demographic composition. The MDOT manages several active transportation programs:
  - Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program: a reimbursable, federally funded program for local sponsors to complete community projects designed to strengthen the intermodal transportation system. The program provides funding for projects that enhance the cultural, aesthetic, historic, and intermodal transportation system. The program can assist with projects that create bicycle and pedestrian facilities, restore historic transportation buildings, convert abandoned railway corridors to pedestrian trails, mitigate highway runoff, and other transportation-related enhancements. Project sponsors are required to provide a minimum 20% of the total project as a match.

- Recreational Trails Program: a federally funded program that SHA administers on a reimbursement basis. Like the TA Program, the Recreational Trails Program may reimburse a local project sponsor up to 80 percent of the project's total eligible costs to develop community-based, motorized, and non-motorized recreational trail projects.
- The MDOT's Kim Lamphier Bikeways Network Program: a program that allocates State transportation funds administered by the MDOT Secretary's Office to promote biking as an alternative transportation mode.
- For more information on MDOT's active transportation planning and programming efforts, please see our Maryland's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans and Programs web page:  
<https://www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=24>.
- Commuter Choice Maryland is MDOT's Travel Demand Management (TDM) program, and it could be incorporated into the Plan as a strategy to support the Plan. The program offers an extensive menu of commuter transportation services, such as ridesharing and incentives. Please visit the Commuter Choice Maryland web site at <https://www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=29> for more information.
- The MDOT supports continued improvements to expand and enhance transit options. Please continue to coordinate with the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) Office of Statewide Planning for the ongoing expansion of regional transit and the coordination of MDOT supported locally-operated transit services (LOTS). The MTA also supports park and ride (with SHA), demand response services, paratransit, medical services, and senior center transportation options. For regional transit planning, please contact Mr. Stephen Miller, Chief of Strategic Planning, via email at [SMiller6@mdot.maryland.gov](mailto:SMiller6@mdot.maryland.gov) or by phone at 410-767-3869. For local transit service planning, please contact Mr. Jason Kepple, MTA Regional Planner, via email at [Jkepple@mdot.maryland.gov](mailto:Jkepple@mdot.maryland.gov) or by phone at 410-767-7330.
- A Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Program was established within MDOT to provide services including identifying potential TOD opportunities and evaluating existing and future needs of public transportation facilities. For TOD related data resources please visit the Transit-Oriented Development in Maryland web page:  
<https://data-maryland.opendata.arcgis.com/pages/tod>
- Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) is recommended throughout the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that the document is error-free. The following is a selection of revisions and is not comprehensive to the Plan as a whole:
  - P. 4-1: remove double word "this" in last sentence of first paragraph.
  - P. 4-2: fix formatting for item 4.6. Remove blank item 4.7 and renumber all subsequent items.
  - P. 4-8: please substitute periods after listing the following two localities, "Milford, Georgetown" and replace with commas in the first sentence of the last paragraph.
  - P. 4-11: correct last paragraph to state "22nd Street".

- Please be sure that all hyperlinks are functional. For example, the PEL hyperlink on pages 4-8.

#### **Chapter 4: Transportation Comments**

- General Comments
  - Refrain from referring to “accidents” and shift language to “crash” to align with Vision Zero / Towards Zero Deaths initiative language.
  - Please specify the correct MD route with either MD or US. For example, “Route 50” should be noted as “US 50”; “Route 13/113” should be noted as “US 13 and US 113”; “Route 90” should be noted as “MD 90”.
- Targeted Comments
  - P. 4-3 – item 4.15: Please refer to Transportation System Management and Operations (TSMO) strategies that focus on operational improvements that can maintain and even restore the performance of the existing transportation system before extra capacity is needed (per the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)).
  - P. 4-3 – item 4.22: Please refer to the 2024 adopted Complete Streets. Policy: [https://policymanual.mdot.maryland.gov/mediawiki/index.php?title=MDOT\\_750 Complete Streets](https://policymanual.mdot.maryland.gov/mediawiki/index.php?title=MDOT_750_Complete_Streets).
  - P. 4-4 – Regional Network: Please note that the priorities mentioned in the second paragraph are included in the latest 2025 County priorities letter.
  - P. 4-4 – Regional Network: Please revise the last paragraph to note the MD 90 Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study was completed in February 2023. The SHA currently is pursuing National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) planning and preliminary design, which was initiated in November 2023 and anticipated to extend through 2030.
  - P. 4-7: For the Bay Bridge Crossing Study, please clarify that the Tier 2 NEPA study is anticipated to be completed in Fall 2026, which will include a final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Record of Decision and a selected alternative.
  - P. 4-26 – Coastal Highway: For the MD 528 Pedestrian Safety Action Plan (PSAP) project, please mention that preliminary design was initiated in 2024 and is anticipated to be completed in 2026.
  - P. 4-30 – Strategies: Regarding the last paragraph, relative to MDOT implementing resilience strategies and initiatives to withstand the impacts of climate change on transportation infrastructure, please review SHA Climate Change Vulnerability online ArcGIS web application map: <https://hub.arcgis.com/apps/maryland::mdot-sha-climate-change-vulnerability-viewer-cccw/explore>. The map showcases geospatial data products related to climate change and the potential impacts on State transportation infrastructure.

Mr. Keith Lackie  
Page Four

The purpose of this application is to support efforts to avert and mitigate potential impacts of sea-level rise that result from global climate change on State roadway and bridge infrastructure. To review other MDOT Climate Change programs and to access this information please visit:

<https://www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=169>

- P. 4-33 – Pedestrian and Bike Movement: Consider including various available grant opportunities such as:
  - Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program
  - Recreational Trails Program
  - MDOT's Kim Lamphier Bikeways Network Program
- For questions about SHA or the regional transportation network, please contact Ben Allen, SHA Regional Planner at 410-545-5649 or via email at [ballen3@mdot.maryland.gov](mailto:ballen3@mdot.maryland.gov).

Thank you again for the opportunity to review the Plan. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Nicole Condol, Transportation Planner, MDOT Office of Planning, Programming, and Project Delivery (OPPPD) at 410-230-6614, or via email at [ncondol@mdot.maryland.gov](mailto:ncondol@mdot.maryland.gov). Ms. Condol will be happy to assist you.

Sincerely,



Geoff Anderson  
Chief, OPPPD, MDOT

cc: Mr. Ben Allen, Regional Planner, SHA  
Ms. Nicole Condol, Transportation Planner, OPPPD, MDOT  
Mr. Jason Kepple, Regional Planner, MTA  
Mr. Joseph Lombardo, Assistant Regional Planner, SHA  
Mr. Stephen Miller, Chief of Strategic Planning, MTA  
Mr. Hunter Withers, Assistant Regional Planner, SHA

Wes Moore  
Governor  
Aruna Miller  
Lt. Governor



Erik Fisher  
Chair  
Nick Kelly  
Executive Director

**STATE OF MARYLAND  
CRITICAL AREA COMMISSION  
CHESAPEAKE AND ATLANTIC COASTAL BAYS**

July 24, 2025

Mr. Keith Lackie  
Maryland Department of Planning  
Lower Eastern Shore Regional Office  
201 Baptist Street, Suite 24  
Salisbury, MD 21801

Re: Ocean City 2025 Draft Comprehensive Plan

Dear Mr. Lackie,

Our office received a copy of the Town of Ocean City's Draft 2025 Comprehensive Plan and we have the following comments:

1. We recognize that Ocean City will continue to develop strategies to implement a "Bayside Boardwalk" that may start at Inlet Park to invite pedestrian activity to the bayside and distribute greater pedestrian activity in the Downtown area. We encourage the town to consider the Critical Area Commission's [Public Pathways Assistance Guide](#) when designing the boardwalk.
2. Page 11-15 states that "Redevelopment activities in Ocean City are subject to Stormwater Management and Critical Area Program regulations found in Town Code Chapter 30. Maryland State Law requires that stormwater water quality and water quantity management be provided for all development activity, including demolition, construction, site improvement and redevelopment, when more than 5,000 square feet of land will be disturbed." Please note that in accordance with Ocean City Code of Ordinances Chapter 30 Article VII Section 553 (c)(7), stormwater management shall be provided for all development and redevelopment projects with a disturbed area greater than 250 square feet in the Critical Area.

Thank you for allowing our office to provide comments on this draft comprehensive plan. If you have any question, please don't hesitate to contact me at [kathryn.hayden@maryland.gov](mailto:kathryn.hayden@maryland.gov) or 443-848-9160.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathryn Hayden".

Kathryn Hayden  
Natural Resources Planner

cc: Charlotte Shearin, Critical Area Commission  
Rita Pritchett, Maryland Department of Planning





Draft Ocean City Comprehensive Plan - June 2025  
Comments

Please consider removing the word “handicapped” and replacing it with the word “disabled” from the first paragraph on page 4-17. The term handicapped is out of date and could be offensive.



**Bong Delrosario** ((He, Him))  
Director of Transportation Policy and Programs/  
MDOT Liaison  
Department of Disabilities  
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