

identified restaurants and lodging and extensive retail especially in Waldorf, the Regency Stadium and tournament-ready amateur sports facilities, extensive parkland and trails, heritage sites, miles of shoreline and beautiful scenery, and an extensive farming community as key assets to draw on.

The County participates in several local, regional and state tourism organizations. The Southern Maryland Heritage Area Consortium identifies destinations in Southern Maryland to promote historic sites and natural experiences for visitors. A Marketing Committee markets the region to tour operators and groups, travel writers through familiarization and regional theme tours. The Southern Maryland Heritage Area represents Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary's Counties' interests in identifying and preserving the region's natural and cultural heritage. The Southern Maryland Heritage Tourism Management Plan was adopted by the three counties in 2003. A five year action plan has been recommended as a supplement to the Heritage Area Plan and is currently being updated.

During the public participation process of updating the Comprehensive Plan, heritage tourism, and eco-tourism emerged as a high priority future strategy to help promote tourism. The County continues to work on these issues including the Religious Freedom National Scenic Byway and recent revitalization planning efforts related to the historic villages of Benedict and Port Tobacco. These types of tourism may need support facilities such as structures to accommodate business operations and supplies, equipment storage, and restrooms.

### **The Arts**

The arts have risen to prominence as an important quality of life issue affecting growth and economic development in Charles County. Successful competitiveness for economic growth requires the ability to attract well-educated, talented, innovative and creative people. Attracting such people requires an environment rich in educational, cultural, and recreational opportunities.

Charles County has a growing arts community presence. Existing arts organizations include the Mattawoman Creek Art Center, Port Tobacco Players, Black Box Theater, College of Southern Maryland Theater Company, and the Southern Maryland Concert Band. The Charles County Arts Alliance is an umbrella group founded in 1987 that works with the Maryland State Arts Council, an agency of the state department of Business and Economic Development. Among the Alliance's activities are organizing the annual Artsfest, promoting galleries and events both in Charles County and across Southern Maryland as well as fostering links and connections with historical, heritage, educational, and cultural organizations.

### **Telecommunications and Broadband**

Electronic communication has become an essential element for modern life whether for business, research, education, shopping, social life or entertainment. Businesses need the ability to send and receive large volumes of data quickly and economically. Residents need good electronic communication to manage their daily lives. As more information becomes digital and the volume of communication continues to increase, key considerations related to

internet access for residents and businesses are geographic coverage, data transfer speed, network reliability, and cost.

Telecommunication is also vital for county and municipal government for police, fire, and emergency management as well as for education and basic communication between government and citizens. This Telecommunications and Broadband element of the Comprehensive Plan has been expanded compared to prior plans to elevate treatment of the topic. The Comprehensive Plan Appendix contains a more detailed version of this element with additional background information and maps.

“Broadband” allows users to access the internet and internet-related services at significantly higher speeds than those available through “dial-up” internet access services. The term “broadband” refers to a signaling method that includes or handles a relatively wide range, or band, of frequencies. Broadband speeds vary significantly depending on the particular type and level of service ordered, and whether data is downloaded or uploaded<sup>7</sup>.

The term “broadband” is always relative. For example, a band may be broad enough for household needs but not for business. This Plan uses the term broadband to refer broadly to telecommunications capabilities that meet residents, business, and government’s respective needs.

### **Telecommunications and Broadband Coverage in Charles County**

Telecommunications coverage in Charles County is a mix of telephone, Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), cable, fiber, wireless (broadcast from towers and tall buildings), and satellite. The geographic extent and types of coverage are changing rapidly as technologies change.

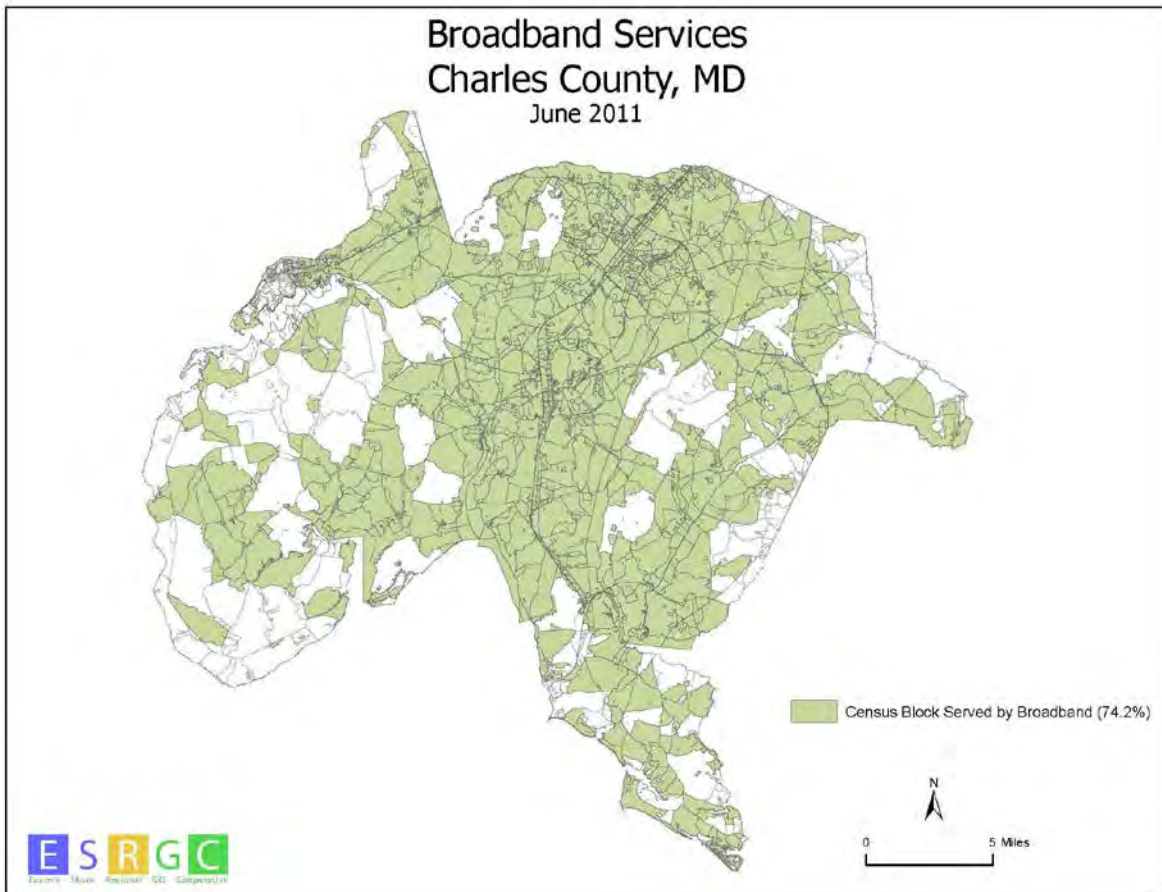
The extent of broadband coverage in Charles County is not easy to define with precision. On one level, it can be argued that using satellite or mobile wireless technology, broadband is available throughout all or most of Charles County. However, many people would disagree that it is really available since this coverage may not be complete and can be expensive depending on location.

Defining the extent of coverage is also difficult because some services may be available in one street or neighborhood but not in the adjacent one. The Maryland Broadband Cooperative (MdBC of which Charles County is a member) provides the best available coverage information. As part of a federal grant, MdBC tracks coverage by US Census block and almost 75 percent of the blocks in the County has coverage (Figure 7-1). However, the map may overstate the actual coverage, because, as required by federal rules, if one residence or business in that block can be served the entire block is reported as having coverage.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.fcc.gov/guides/getting-broadband> accessed 1-8-12

Figure 7-1 Broadband Service Coverage, 2011



*Note: Broadband means cable, DSL, or fiber. The map may overstate the actual coverage, because, as required by federal rules, if one residence or business in that block can be served the entire block is reported as having coverage.*