

Section IV

Rural Character Conservation Plan:
A Countywide Functional Master Plan

Rural Character Conservation Plan: A Countywide Functional Master Plan

Miles of Special Roadways:
390 miles



Percentage of Mount Vernon's
viewshed within Prince George's County: **53%**



Number of supporting documents: **20**
(See Appendix A)





Our Vision for the Future

Plan 2035 contains a broad vision for our future. The following vision statement reflects how the implementation of the Rural Character Conservation Plan could shape the future in support of the healthy, vibrant, connected communities envisioned in Plan 2035

In 2035,
Prince George's
County is participating in
the ongoing conservation of its
rural heritage through careful
and strategic application
of context-sensitive
solutions, including
viewshed protections.

Prince George's County is
distinguished as having beautiful
rural landscapes that support rural
living and a thriving rural economy
based on heritage and ecotourism.

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BACKGROUND

One of Prince George’s County’s most significant defining features is its rich rural and agricultural heritage. A significant portion of the County remains rural, much of it designated as the Rural and Agricultural Area (RAA) in *Plan Prince George’s 2035 Approved General Plan* (Plan 2035). Rural character includes resources such as scenic views, historic sites, and magnificent landscapes that are historically and culturally significant and in need of conservation. Rural areas hold tremendous value as the embodiment of the County’s heritage, and have been the subject of many studies and conservation measures to preserve, protect, and maintain their unique character. Table 5 summarizes three recent studies that contributed significantly to this plan.



This plan amends the related policies and strategies of previously approved plans, in particular the following:

- Plan 2035
- 2010 Historic Sites and Districts Plan
- 2013 Subregion 5 Master Plan
- 2013 Subregion 6 Master Plan
- 2010 Subregion 1 Master Plan

A full inventory of relevant studies, applicable plans, and supporting documents is provided in Appendix A.

Table 5. Studies that Contributed to Recommendations in the 2017 Rural Character Conservation Plan

Study Name	Status of Implementation
<i>Croom and Aquasco Roads Scenic Byway Plan Elements</i> , May 2012	CR-79-2013 endorses the findings of this study and authorized the Croom and Aquasco Scenic Byway Advisory Committee. The committee has not been established.
<i>Rural Villages Study</i> , September 2012	CR-79-2013 recognizes the Rural Villages Study as an effort by the Planning Department to work with the communities of Aquasco, Baden, and Croom to conserve rural character. Implementation has been limited by the requirements of the Sustainable Growth Act, which restricts development on septic systems in certain areas of the County.
<i>Conserving Significant Cultural Landscapes: Protecting the Piscataway and Accokeek Historic Communities and the Mount Vernon Viewshed</i> , March 2013	The study was presented during a Planning Board briefing on April 18, 2013. The Planning Board endorsed the study’s recommendations, authorized its release to the public, and approved staff’s request to proceed to viewshed legislation. The implementation of the protections recommended in the study are being considered as part of this plan and the ongoing Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations Rewrite project.

The Rural Character Conservation Plan (RCCP) builds upon the recommendations of these studies, as well as the multiple other planning documents, to provide goals, policies, and strategies to preserve landscapes in Prince George’s County that contribute to its significant cultural and historic resources and rural character. The plan is a tool that can help support rural lifestyles, heritage, and ecotourism and can assist in making development in rural areas more attractive to potential residents who value authentic landscapes.

The purpose of the RCCP is to provide broad countywide strategies and recommendations as a tool to guide future development activity and preservation, and to provide a foundation to achieve its stated goals. It should not be construed as superseding or conflicting with codified criteria for development.

Conservation of Rural Character

Each of the plans within the Resource Conservation Plan (RCP) provides a more detailed definition of conservation as appropriate for that plan. This plan uses a definition of conservation that is broader than the one most people in historic and cultural preservation circles are accustomed to. The definition of conservation used in this context is purposefully broad to include preservation as well as enhancement and restoration.

Figure 8. Definition of Conservation in the Rural Character Conservation Plan

As noted in the Section I: Overview, the word **conservation** can be defined as:

“...the action of conserving something, in particular:

- Preservation, protection or restoration of the natural environment, natural ecosystems, vegetation, wildlife.
- Preservation, repair, and prevention of deterioration of archeological, historic, and cultural sites and artifacts.”

The Rural Character Conservation Plan seeks to conserve the remaining vast and varied rural character elements: to preserve remaining features, to provide enhancement where needed, and to restore lost cultural and landscape elements.

The RCCP is written to function in concert with the other two elements of the RCP—the Green Infrastructure Functional Master Plan (GI Plan) and the Agricultural Conservation Functional Master Plan (ACP). It aligns with the goals of these plans in that it contributes to environmental protection by encouraging development patterns that minimally impact existing ecosystems and natural resources, helping to assure that existing agricultural land is able to remain in production. Together, these three plan elements will help to guide growth appropriately throughout the County, ensuring that areas with significant rural character retain value as historic resources and environmental assets, promoting a thriving agricultural and tourism economy.



Summary of Community Input

Between 2010 and 2015, public input was sought and received in conjunction with the studies noted in Table 5. In particular, the public participation was focused on rural character conservation in the Rural Villages study, which contains the results of a visioning session and various meetings with rural residents.

Building on the input received during the preparation of these three recent studies, the public participation process sought to engage residents countywide regarding the value of rural landscapes. As noted in Section I: Overview, the public input process consisted of three community input sessions where participants were asked what they wanted to see more of and less of in the three subject areas covered in the plan—green infrastructure, agriculture, and rural character. These sessions were followed by an open forum where a summary of the input was provided and an opportunity was offered to comment on draft maps. An input session was also held to focus on the issues of interest to municipalities.



The issues of interest to the most participants relevant to the RCCP included:

- Provide regulations for special roadways and protect viewsheds of scenic roadways.
- Ensure good wildlife habitat conditions such as wildlife crossings/underpasses and signage to alert drivers of wildlife.
- Maintain current subdivision restrictions (must be conservation subdivision).
- Ensure improved preservation of public and private properties along/in the rural tier.
- Allow for bike trails along utility rights-of-way.
- Promote the use and enjoyment of historic sites, parks, trails, agricultural resources, and bikeways to increase the number of people who want to protect areas.

During the development of the RCP, public agencies came together to discuss the plan's contents and future implementation. Each agency saw how its work is reflected in the plan and sought ways to participate in implementation. Moving forward, just as the implementation of Plan 2035 will involve the coordinated efforts of everyone, so must the RCP seek to involve public agencies and nonprofits, places of worship and educational institutions, and businesses and volunteers in its implementation. The implementation of the GI Plan is especially dependent upon interagency and nonprofit coordination because there are so many people working toward the same environmental goals. The County's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) is one example of an ongoing, multiagency project where a coordinated effort is necessary.

For a summary of the public input provided for the RCP, refer to Section I: Overview. Full summaries of all of the public input sessions are available in the RCP Technical Summary.

PLAN GOALS

Rural character conservation provides multiple benefits to both residents of and visitors to rural and agricultural areas. Viewsheds provide connections to our shared heritage, and land conservation goals support the County's goals for agricultural conservation. Rural landscapes are an economic asset for growing a green and agricultural-based economy.

The goals of the 2017 RCCP are to support the desired development pattern of Plan 2035 by:

- Preserving, enhancing, and restoring our rural heritage.
- Supporting rural agriculture.
- Improving human health by connecting more people to rural and scenic places.

The RCCP provides guidance for decision-making at all levels of government, businesses, developers, nonprofits, and associated organizations, provides the framework for conservation of critical historic landscapes, and supports the continuation of rural and agricultural lifestyles in appropriate settings.

MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

When the resources to be measured involve the beauty and benefits of conserving historic and cultural landscapes, it can be difficult to quantify implementation milestones.

Objective One:

In 2035, 90 percent of the implementation strategies in this plan will be either completed or will be implemented and ongoing.

When the implementation status of this plan is evaluated in the future, it will be viewed through the lens of the total number of strategies completed plus the number implemented and ongoing. Some of the implementation strategies in the RCCP are ongoing tasks and some are one-time tasks. For an example of this type of analysis, see the RCP Technical Summary analysis of the strategies in the 2005 Green Infrastructure Plan (GI Plan), where 80 of the 92 strategies were completed or ongoing by 2015.

The implementation time frame for the measurable objectives and implementation strategies in this plan is 20 years; however, it will likely be updated prior to completion of the 20-year period.

Purpose and Need for the Rural Character Conservation Plan

The purpose of the RCCP is to preserve, protect and, where appropriate, restore the rural and historic character of Prince George's County by:

- Building upon past policies, strategies, and studies.
- Coordinating with the goals and efforts of relevant state and County agencies.
- Complementing the green infrastructure and agricultural conservation elements of the RCP.

This functional master plan brings together rural character conservation policies and strategies from various existing planning documents and elevates the concerns raised in previous studies to master plan status, allowing them to contribute to future land development and roadway construction decisions.

One of the themes that runs throughout the existing planning documents and studies is the need to create rural design standards that can shape proposed changes to the rural landscape and address not just certain roads and properties, but viewsheds and landscapes as a whole. The RCCP contains policies and strategies that help to shape future design standards to fulfill the needs identified by previous studies and contributes to context-sensitive development affecting rural landscapes.

Plan 2035 contains six principles that guide its vision, policies, and strategies. The principle most relevant to this plan is:

6. Protect and Value Our Natural Resources

Protecting and restoring our green infrastructure network, waterways, agricultural preservation areas, and forested lands will help improve the quality of our water and air, preserve remaining open spaces, and enhance community health. A healthy environment is increasingly a prerequisite for many businesses and workers looking to relocate to the region. Plan 2035 commits to proactively greening our built environment, restoring degraded resources, and promoting a more sustainable development pattern that reduces our reliance on driving and shifts development pressures away from our greenfields.

Comprehensive implementation of Plan 2035, where development is directed away from rural, agricultural, and forested lands, could make significant contributions to the long-term conservation of rural character.

Conserving rural character aligns with numerous other community goals. By ensuring the protection of views along scenic areas, residents and visitors can tangibly travel through history as they visit rural areas. They are provided with a full experience, not just a few picturesque sites. This could enhance Prince George's County's standing as a unique tourism destination,

as well as foster local and regional pride and interest in the County's history. The Conserving Significant Cultural Landscapes study identifies numerous benefits of rural character conservation, including boosting heritage tourism by capitalizing on links between important heritage sites and potentially increasing homeowner property values by ensuring proximity to mature forest or other green space.¹

The RCCP fulfills both Plan 2035's goal of implementing previous rural character studies and supports



¹ *Conserving Significant Cultural Landscapes*, pg. 32.

its growth policy of focusing new urban and suburban development around designated downtowns and centers. The combination of directing growth toward areas with existing infrastructure and minimizing its impact on rural landscapes will ensure that future development is both efficient and contextually appropriate, contributing to, rather than detracting from, Prince George’s County’s appealing historic landscape.

As repeatedly identified in the policies and strategies of Plan 2035—most pointedly under Policy 13 of the Community Heritage, Culture, and Design section—there is a need to “...implement context-sensitive design for roadways and residential and commercial development to preserve the County’s rural character.”² The *Rural Villages Study* recommends “...extending and broadening the intent of the conservation subdivision; ...protecting scenic viewsheds...and site characteristics unique to the Rural Tier while improving connectivity and safety for the pedestrian, cyclist, and motorist; and developing design guidelines to guide future development patterns.”³

Context sensitive solutions are also supported by the Department of Public Works and Transportation’s (DWP&T) *Guidelines for the Design of Scenic and Historic Roadways* when balancing scenic and historic road preservation with vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian safety:

“In resolving such matters as needed safety improvements, maintenance issues, and preservation of scenic or historic features, all parties are to consider



various solutions for attaining the primary goals of safety.”⁴

In addition to preserving rural character along Special Roadways, the importance of the Mount Vernon viewshed cannot be overstated. This historic home of George Washington serves as a reminder of this region’s heritage as the birthplace of the nation, and points to the areas’ rich history and the shaping of Native American, European, and African (slave) cultures. The significance of preserving the view from this landmark has long been recognized by many, including active groups such as the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association that has maintained the property and its historical context since 1860. Approximately 53 percent of the viewshed is within the County, and almost half that is protected.

Multiple public or nonprofit properties exist within the Mount Vernon viewshed, including The Accokeek Foundation’s National Colonial Farm, Alice Ferguson Foundation’s Hard Bargain Farm Environmental Center,

² *Abridged Version Plan Prince George’s 2035*, pg. 25, Strategy HD13.2.

³ *Rural Villages*, pg. 3.

⁴ *Guidelines for the Design of Scenic and Historic Roadways*, Appendix F, Section IV.F–1 in *Specifications and Standards for Roadways and Bridges*, Prince George’s County Department of Public Works and Transportation.

the Piscataway Historic District, the Fort Washington National Historic Site, the Moyaone Reserve, and Piscataway Park. Numerous planning efforts, such as successive Subregion 5 Master Plans and the Historic Sites and Districts Plan contain land use policies and strategies aimed at preserving rural character in the Mount Vernon Viewshed, which is also called the Area of Primary Concern (APC). See Map 11 on page 117 for the delineation of the APC. Throughout this plan, the APC is referred to as the Mount Vernon Viewshed.

Although about 6,000 acres of the Mount Vernon Viewshed are already protected as public land or through scenic and environmental easements, more than 8,000 acres remain in private ownership. Insensitive development of these private lands has the potential to erode the area's environmental quality, rural character, and viewshed integrity over time. The strategies recommended in this plan provide the guidance for land use decision-making within the Mount Vernon Viewshed and the guidance for the creation of design standards in the future to protect irreplaceable landscape elements.

This plan consolidates the recommendations of numerous plans and studies. By implementing the strategies in the plan, and updating the County Code as needed, the vision of conserving landscapes and viewsheds critical to our heritage can become a reality.



POLICY AREAS

Preserving Rural Character

Past planning efforts have discussed the need to define the elements of rural character. For example, the Conserving Significant Cultural Landscapes study describes unique features of the Piscataway-Accoek area as the wide, peaceful confluence of the Potomac River and Piscataway Creek and prominent ridges and knolls with unfragmented blocks of mature forest, farmland, and other open space.⁵ The *Rural Villages Study* engaged the community by using visual preference surveys and discussions, and concluded that character elements relating to the natural and built environment in rural areas can change depending on the presence of contextual elements, although some characteristics were favored—low-density residential development well-screened from scenic and historic roadways; small-scale, farm-related storefronts; simple, unobtrusive signs; fencing; rustic driveways; and appropriate traffic calming elements. This conclusion is consistent with the best practices in this field—rural character must be evaluated within its context and design solutions need to be context sensitive.

The *Croom and Aquasco Scenic Byway Plan Elements* document largely references the character-defining efforts of other studies such as the *Lower Patuxent Scenic Byway Intrinsic Quality Inventory Report*. The Lower Patuxent Scenic Byway is now called the Star-Spangled Banner Scenic Byway (SSBSB), and is a part of the larger Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail and Scenic Byway (STSP). This report provides a detailed account of the byway’s qualities that contribute to its rural character. Descriptions of these qualities include:

“The canopy of trees along the edge increases the scenic quality of this segment of Croom Road, with open vistas of agricultural land just beyond it.” and “...beyond this point, the landscape is rolling and Croom Road follows the natural topography of the land. The road turns more picturesque, offering views of open fields or views enclosed by shrubs and tree canopies on either side.”⁶

While rural character is often best defined by its context and relies on identification of unique landscape features, certain design standards can be applied countywide to lessen the visual impact of changes made to rural landscapes. Future design standards should be established in the Zoning Ordinance that strike a

Ways to improve bicycle safety on rural roadways:

- Improve shoulders, reduce changes in surfaces.
- Improve signage for motorists and cyclists.
- Provide designated bicycle lanes where the width of pavement allows.



⁵ *Conserving Significant Cultural Landscapes*, pg. 2.

⁶ *Lower Patuxent Scenic Byway Intrinsic Quality Inventory Report*, appendix to *Croom and Aquasco Scenic Byway Plan Elements*, pg. A1–26

balance between context-specific and broad definitions of rural character that are recommended to allow for transparency, consistency, and efficiency in the development review process.

Agencies responsible for Special Roadways:

- Parkway: National Park Service
- Scenic Byways: Maryland State Highway Administration
- Scenic and Historic Roads: Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation

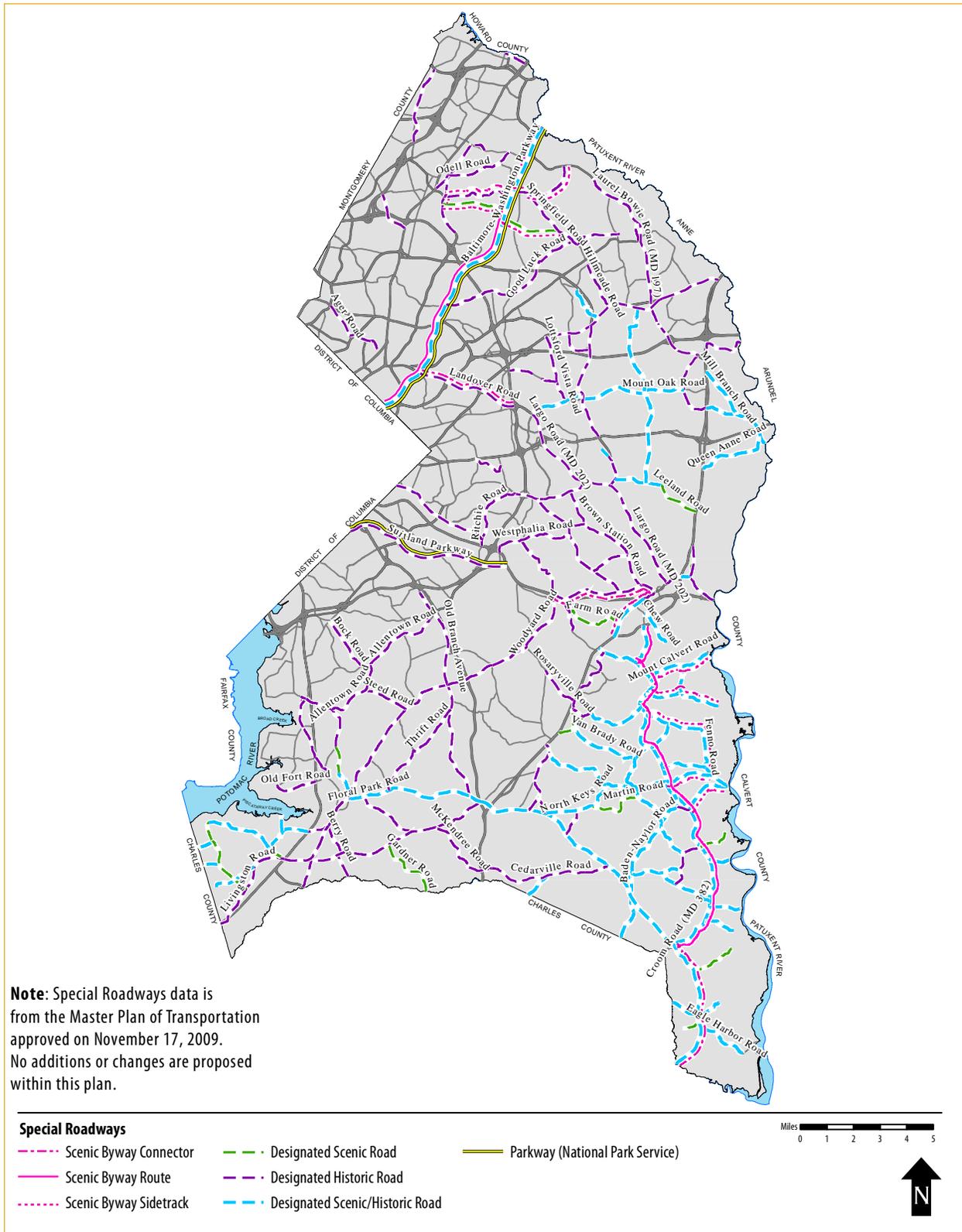
The master plans for Subregions 5 and 6 provide extensive guidance on how to treat rural character and landscapes when development occurs. In addition, the need for rural design standards has been addressed in several master plans and was clearly articulated in the 2009 *Approved Master Plan of Transportation (MPoT)*, which addresses the need to provide rural character protections for Special Roadways. Special Roadways, as shown on Map 10, include any road or

section of road that is designated scenic, historic, or both; a scenic byway; or a parkway. Scenic and historic roads are designated as such by the County Council. Parkways are under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, and scenic byways are designated by the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA). The Master Plan of Transportation provides the official inventory of currently designated Special Roadways and devotes a section to Conservation and Enhancement of Special Roadways, with policies such as “conserve and enhance the viewsheds along designated roadways,” under which strategies include “develop guidelines for the design of activities adjacent to designated roadways to include building setbacks, landscaping, scenic easements, and utility clearing.”⁷



⁷ *Approved Countywide Master Plan of Transportation* (2009), pg. 49.

Map 10. Special Roadways



Rural character design standards should address:

- Preservation of identified contributing features.
- Need for viewshed analysis.
- Constructed site features—building height, materials, lighting, site layout.
- Applicability.

SEE ALSO: The Community Heritage, Culture and Design chapter in Plan 2035 has additional policies and strategies related to rural character and design.

Development applications within the viewsheds of Special Roadways and properties within the Mount Vernon Viewshed as designated in this plan should be subject to a designated set of rural design standards in the Zoning Ordinance, to provide direction on how these critical landscapes and viewsheds are to be protected and enhanced. These standards should complement the requirements of other countywide ordinances and guidelines such as the Woodland and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Ordinance, the Landscape Manual, and DPW&T's Specifications and Standards for Roadways and Bridges. Land development applications within designated viewsheds should be accompanied by an inventory of viewshed assets, perhaps as part of the review of the required Natural Resource Inventory.

The conservation subdivision method can improve rural character conservation, reduce development costs, and increase the preservation of natural, cultural, and agricultural site features when compared to conventional designs. The conservation subdivision method of development has been mandatory in the Rural and Agricultural Areas (formerly known as the Rural Tier) since 2010 and optional elsewhere in the County. In much of the Rural and Agricultural Area (RAA) conservation subdivisions are no longer mandatory because when the Sustainable Growth Act was passed, it eliminated the ability to create major subdivisions of more than seven lots in designated areas. Only minor subdivisions are allowed, and minor subdivisions are not required to use the conservation subdivision development method. The conservation subdivision requirements need to be reassessed to determine where they should be mandatory and where they should be optional. To support the desired development pattern of Plan 2035, subdivisions should be required to use the conservation subdivision approach wherever possible. If a site would be better developed using a traditional lot layout because there are no resources to preserve, or a traditional layout would serve another purpose such as improving site access, then traditional subdivision methods should be allowed to be used as an optional approach.

The concept of rural villages was developed in the *Rural Villages Study*, which proposed the consolidation of development rights in such a way that small villages could be created at specified nodes. The existing villages of Aquasco, Baden, and Croom were studied to determine feasible options. The concepts used in the *Rural Villages Study* depended upon land use options that no longer exist, because of the restrictions imposed by the Sustainable Growth Act, negating the opportunity to transfer density to the rural villages and consolidate the development pattern. However, a time may come when technologies and land use options are available to create more vibrant villages. Options should be left open for a time when the limited development of small rural villages is feasible.



Protecting Designated Viewsheds

The viewsheds of concern in this plan are those along designated Special Roadways and the Mount Vernon Viewshed. Special Roadways include the parkways that are under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, Scenic Byways that are designated by the state, and scenic and historic roads that are designated by the County. See Table 6 for a breakdown of the miles of each type of roadway. Map 10 shows the locations of the Special Roadways.

Table 6. Miles of Special Roadways

Roadway Type	Total Length (miles)	Total Length (miles) Not Counted Elsewhere
Scenic Roads	24.3	24.3
Historic Roads	203.6	203.6
Roads designated both Scenic and Historic	141.4	141.4
Scenic Byways	82.5	19.8
Parkways	18.9	0.0
TOTAL MILES	470.7	389.1

A viewshed can be defined as the area of land that can be seen from a particular location. In the case of Special Roadways, because it is not possible to identify any one location for viewing, this encompasses all land within one-half mile of the roadway to ensure that all appropriate impacts are evaluated. For Mount Vernon, the viewshed has been established using specialized computer mapping techniques that demonstrate what land is visible from the front porch of the Mount Vernon mansion at approximately 125 feet above sea level (see Map 11).



The Mount Vernon Viewshed covers approximately 28,000 acres of land in northern Virginia and southern Maryland, of which 15,000 acres (23 square miles) are in southwestern Prince George’s County—approximately 53 percent of the entire viewshed. Much of the development within the Area of Primary Concern (APC) has not significantly impacted the view from Mount Vernon, and almost half of the portion of the viewshed within Prince George’s County has been preserved, primarily through acquisition by government entities and through private conservation easements. The remainder of the Mount Vernon Viewshed that is not protected remains vulnerable to visually impactful development. To address potential visual impacts, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) staff developed and are using an informational and analytical geographic mapping tool that has been integrated into everyday planning and development review tasks.

Numerous viewshed analyses have addressed locations most vulnerable to development. The most recent analysis, conducted by M-NCPPC staff in 2011, concluded that the most important tools to protect the APC are:

1. Retaining existing tree cover and replanting where necessary.
2. Controlling the siting, height, and materials of structures.
3. Ensuring conformance of subdivision layouts and street alignment.

Rural design standards would provide the opportunity to address development in the Mount Vernon Viewshed in a consistent way, ensuring that properties within this area of significant rural character remain relevant with their historic and cultural contexts.

Map 11. Mount Vernon Viewshed (Area of Primary Concern)



Conserving the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA)

On September 25, 2001, the County Council approved the *Anacostia Trails Heritage Area Management Plan: A Functional Master Plan for Heritage Tourism* (Heritage Plan). The Heritage Plan included numerous policies, strategies, and recommendations to build upon the extensive cultural, historic, and natural resources contained within the designated area, with an emphasis on encouraging and accommodating heritage tourism. Since its approval, a variety of efforts have been undertaken to implement the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area Functional Master Plan. As part of the RCP, the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA) is being expanded to allow more communities the opportunity to apply for heritage grants through the state.

The State of Maryland created the Maryland Heritage Preservation and Tourism Program to preserve the state's historic, natural, and cultural resources and to develop programs that encourage heritage tourism. This program is administered by the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA), which has the authority to recognize and certify heritage areas. The ATHA has been formally recognized by the state as a heritage area.

The 2001 Heritage Plan is a functional master plan required by the Zoning Ordinance to be amended



according to a process and schedule approved by the County Council. Because the RCP is also a countywide functional plan that amends the General Plan, it is an appropriate vehicle for amending the boundaries of ATHA. The map of the amended ATHA boundaries is provided in Map 12 and is being included in the RCP for public input and comment, per the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance. While the majority of ATHA is located in developed portions of the County, some areas contain rural character elements that support the ATHA heritage conservation goals.

As implied by the name, the ATHA boasts an extensive network of existing stream valley trails and rail-trails that provide nonmotorized access to many of the key historical, cultural, and recreational features in the area. One of the key recommendations of the heritage plan was the extension of the Anacostia Tributaries Trails System into both Washington, D.C. and north to the City of Laurel. The Prince George’s County Department of Parks and Recreation and other stakeholders are working to achieve this goal by extending the trail system from the Capital Beltway to the Beltsville Community Center. Likewise, the recently constructed Anacostia Riverwalk in the south connects the trail network into Washington, D.C. as envisioned in the Heritage Plan.

As shown on Map 12, portions of Cheverly, Bowie, and Glenn Dale are proposed to be added to the ATHA. This designation and boundary change will not result in new regulations on the properties being added, but will make additional grant and funding opportunities available to these communities, including possible funds for the extension of the trails network into each of these areas. A planned trail to Bladensburg Waterfront Park will connect Cheverly to the Anacostia River Trail System, while Bowie and Glen Dale will have access to the Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis (WB&A) Trail and a planned future trail linking the WB&A Trail with the Anacostia Tributaries Trails System. The City of Bowie is also planning the Bowie Heritage Trail, which will extend north and south of the WB&A Trail and connect to destinations like the Bowie MARC Station and Old Town Bowie. The Anacostia Tributaries Trails System is the largest urban trail system in the country, and the planned extensions into Cheverly, Glenn Dale, and Bowie will greatly expand this network.

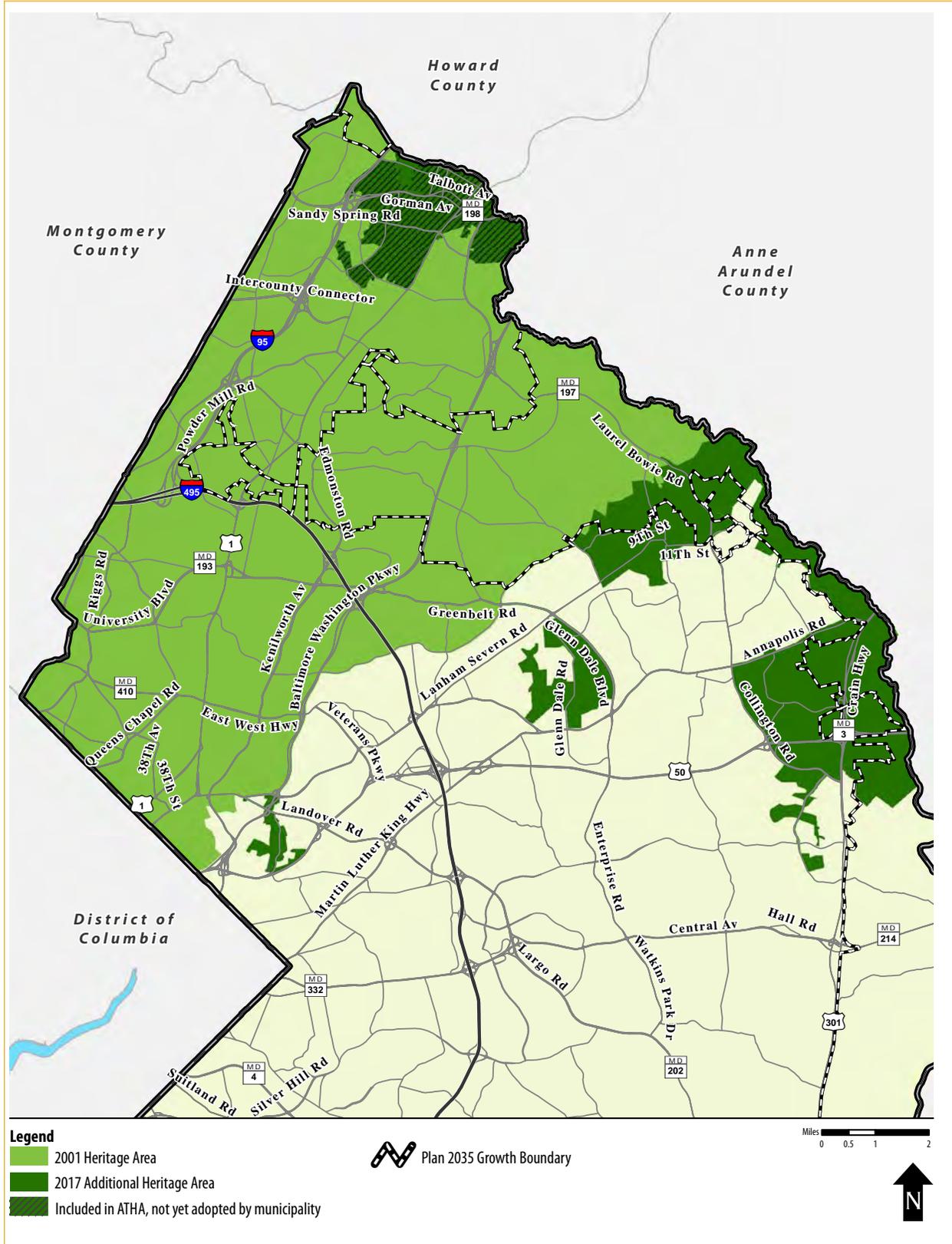
The City of Laurel was included in the 2001 Heritage Plan and is proposed to be retained within ATHA, pending the concurrence of the City of Laurel. The existing extent of ATHA is approximately 88 square miles. The proposed addition to ATHA as highlighted on Map 12 is 22 square miles, for a total of approximately 110 square miles. Table 7 provides the approximate area totals.

Table 7. ATHA Boundaries

ATHA BOUNDARIES		
Portion of ATHA	Acres	Square Miles
Existing ATHA	56,351	88
Added Area	13,948	22
TOTAL	70,299	110

The properties within ATHA are not subject to additional requirements, standards, or guidelines as a result of being within its boundaries. This designation makes the communities eligible for additional heritage-related funding and other related benefits.

Map 12. 2017 Anacostia Trails Heritage Area



IMPLEMENTATION

The following policies and strategies provide the decision-making framework regarding land uses in rural areas of the County. They are grouped by policy area and provide guidance for nonprofits, businesses, and County agencies and commissions.

Preserving Rural Character

POLICY 1: Promote development patterns that preserve, protect, and enhance rural character.

- 1.1 Require the use of the conservation subdivision method as the standard single-family detached method of subdivision in Rural and Agricultural Area and the areas designated as Sustainable Growth Act Tier II. Allow the use of traditional subdivision standards where little or no environmental or agricultural resources exist or can be restored on the property.
- 1.2 Ensure that the uses allowed in rural areas are appropriate to preserve rural character while ensuring that externalities such as traffic are addressed. An over concentration of industrial uses should be discouraged.
- 1.3 Consider requiring wider minimum buffers and setbacks from rural and Special Roadways to protect the rural character and setting.
- 1.4 Require the use of natural materials for constructed features to promote visual continuity with the landscape.
- 1.5 Utilize agriculture preservation programs and other funding sources to protect key elements of designated viewsheds.
- 1.6 Explore the establishment of scenic easement tax credits to protect historic and cultural viewsheds.
- 1.7 Provide wildlife with safe passage across or under roads as appropriate. Require bridges or bottomless culverts when existing structures are replaced or new roads, sidewalks, or trails are constructed to preserve the rural character of the area.
- 1.8 Require the use of appropriate spectrum, energy conserving, full cut-off optics on all street lights and residential and commercial lighting, and prohibit or limit electronic signs.
- 1.9 Ensure that noise impacts from roadways of arterial designation or higher are mitigated whether through the siting of buildings or through the provision of appropriate noise barriers.
- 1.10 Maintain the size and configuration of the Rural and Agricultural Area in perpetuity and do not reduce the size for any reason.
- 1.11 Evaluate options that may become viable in the future for alternative development scenarios for rural villages such as Aquasco, Baden, and Croom.

POLICY 2: Ensure that both safety and context sensitivity are taken into account when altering features within the rights-of-way of Special Roadways.

- 2.1 Consider the safety and design standards of the applicable County, state, or federal departments of transportation or public works as an integral part of determining context-sensitive solutions within designated rights-of-way.
- 2.2 Prioritize design options that best address context sensitivity where multiple, equally safe options for alterations within rights-of-way are available.
- 2.3 Avoid the use of concrete solutions such as curb and gutter where green stormwater solutions are also appropriate.
- 2.4 Avoid the addition of extra lanes or acceleration/deceleration lanes on Special Roadways.
- 2.5 Promote community connectivity and safety for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles as appropriate in rural settings, while minimizing the visual impacts or alterations resulting from transportation improvements.
- 2.6 Improve bicycle facilities where possible along all rural roadways to promote recreational activity in rural areas while maximizing safety for bicyclists and motorists.

POLICY 3: Ensure that rural development procedures are clear, predictable, and efficient.

- 3.1 Develop a system by which areas subject to rural design standards can be readily identified, either through the Zoning Ordinance or some other mechanism.
- 3.2 Develop a guidance document to help applicants meet the requirements of a viewshed inventory.

Protecting Designated Viewsheds

POLICY 4: Preserve, protect, and enhance the designated viewsheds of Special Roadways and Mount Vernon.

- 4.1 Require the submission of an inventory of the site and landscape features that contribute to the cultural, historic, and/or scenic significance of the designated viewsheds when land-disturbing activities are proposed within the Mount Vernon Viewshed or within one-half mile of the centerline of a Special Roadway.
- 4.2 Establish design standards within the Zoning Ordinance that apply to land-disturbing activities within designated viewsheds. Design standards should conserve landscape features and be context-sensitive, prioritizing avoidance, and then minimization of impacts on the landscape, before alteration of existing features. Where impacts on the landscape are unavoidable, mitigation may be necessary, including but not limited to the use of appropriate colors and materials of buildings, planting for screening purposes, or restoring landscape features to provide visual continuity.

- 4.3 Educate the public about the design standards and inform applicants early in the review process by placing a note on the site's Natural Resource Inventory.

POLICY 5: Ensure the maintenance of existing and newly built features contributing to rural character over time.

- 5.1 Employ conservation easements to protect designated landscape features where identified in the viewshed analysis.
- 5.2 Prioritize planting of native species wherever possible, and focus on connecting functioning ecosystems and limiting the need for maintenance.
- 5.3 Enforce conservation and maintenance standards in areas subject to rural design standards.

Conserving the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area

POLICY 6: Support the continued implementation of the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area Management Plan and the Maryland Milestones program.

- 6.1 Promote the amended boundaries of ATHA to stimulate renewed interest in this aspect of heritage tourism and the expansion of heritage tourism to additional areas within Prince George's County.
- 6.2 Encourage planning and coordination between ATHA and other local cultural and heritage organizations.
- 6.3 Connect the Anacostia Tributaries Trails System with the WB&A Trail.
- 6.4 Continue to seek grants that support heritage tourism and the expansion of the trails network.
- 6.5 Support the development of the Bowie Heritage Trail in order to promote heritage tourism and resource restoration in the Old Town Bowie area.
- 6.6 Support the implementation of the trail connection between the Town of Cheverly and Bladensburg Waterfront Park to support a variety of potential users.

APPENDIX

Planning Efforts and Documents Supporting the Rural Character Conservation Plan

This list was compiled from the three main supporting documents for the Rural Character Conservation Plan—the *Rural Villages Study*, *Croom and Aquasco Scenic Byway Plan Elements*, *Conserving Significant Cultural Landscapes: Protecting the Piscataway and Accokeek Historic Communities and the Mount Vernon Viewshed*, and additional research conducted for the preparation on the Resource Conservation Plan.

Year	Document name	Document Summary
1995	<i>Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes</i>	Developed by the Secretary of the Interior and National Park Service, these guidelines describe how to apply treatment standards to historic and cultural landscapes through preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction, as appropriate. They intend to guide all actors in the development process in the planning and implementation of project work. While they officially apply to federally-funded projects, “the principles embodied in the Standards have also been adopted by hundreds of preservation commissions across the country in local design guidelines.” They have not been adopted by the County but can be used as a guide.
2002	<i>Approved Prince George’s County General Plan</i>	Established the Rural Tier, now known as the Rural and Agricultural Area, with a vision for preserving agriculture, rural character, vistas, recreation, woodlands, and wildlife habitat.
2004	Southern Maryland Tobacco Barn Coalition (SMTBC)	The National Trust for Historic Preservation added the estimated 5,000 Tobacco Barns of Southern Maryland to America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in 2004. The SMTBC formed to support farmers’ efforts to preserve and repurpose the barns. This intercounty coalition helped spark future preservation efforts and brought attention to the valuable cultural resources in Southern Maryland and Prince George’s County. Participating counties included Prince George’s, St. Mary’s, Anne Arundel, Calvert, and Charles.
2005	<i>Approved Countywide Green Infrastructure Plan</i>	Identified Special Conservation Areas within the Rural and Agricultural Area and countywide. SCAs are recommended for conservation because of their unique resources, which in many cases includes preservation of the rural landscape.

Year	Document name	Document Summary
2007	<i>Lower Patuxent Scenic Byway Intrinsic Quality Inventory Report</i>	This study, initiated by The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, was the first step in the development of a corridor management plan for the Lower Patuxent Scenic Byway, now known as the Star-Spangled Banner Historic Trail and Scenic Byway. This report covers in detail the archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities of the Byway, emphasizing their significance and value. Along with this inventory, a survey of tobacco barns along Croom Road was conducted and attached as an appendix to the report and entitled <i>Croom Road Tobacco Barn Survey Report</i> .
2008	<i>Context Sensitive Solutions for Work on Maryland Byways</i>	The purpose of this publication is to serve as a planning, design, and management tool and to provide general information that will assist the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) in their efforts to preserve, maintain, and enhance Maryland's Byways. Its recommendations do not carry regulatory weight, but are consulted as guidelines.
2009	<i>Countywide Master Plan of Transportation (MPoT)</i>	This plan contains the designations of Special Roadways which include parkways, scenic byways, and County-designated scenic and historic roads. More than 200 road segments are designated as Special Roadways. These designations are also noted in PGAtlas, the County's online mapping website. The MPoT recommends formulating design guidelines to protect significant features within the rights-of-way and viewsheds of these roads.
2010	<i>Approved Historic Sites and Districts Plan</i>	This plan sets countywide preservation policies and provides citizens, nonprofit organizations, the private sector, and government agencies with guidance on historic preservation. Many historic resources are located in rural areas and contribute significantly to rural character.
2010	<i>Prince George's County Landscape Manual</i>	The purpose of the manual is to beautify communities and improve the quality of life of County residents. The Landscape Manual contains the buffer yard requirements for Special Roadways.
2012	<i>Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012</i>	Also known as the SGA or SB 236, this statewide legislation required that localities designate septic tiers, or areas that either will or will not be allowed to connect to public sewer lines, in order to direct future development. While this legislation does not address rural character directly, the effect is to reduce development demand in portions of the RAA, indirectly preserving rural character and historically agricultural areas.

Year	Document name	Document Summary
2012	<i>Priority Preservation Area Functional Master Plan</i>	Also known as the PPA, this plan fulfills the state requirement for each County to define a priority preservation area that supports profitable agricultural and forestry enterprises. Among the PPA recommendations are agricultural land preservation and minimization of development that could affect the viability of agriculture in the PPA. The County has since received certification by the Maryland Agricultural and Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), allowing many areas in the PPA to be preserved through MALPF funding and other programs. The PPA Plan helped lay the groundwork for minimizing the impacts of development in rural areas.
2012	<i>Croom and Aquasco Roads Scenic Byway Plan Elements: A Corridor Management Program for these Roadways and other related Star-Spangled Banner Historic Roadways in Prince George's County</i>	This study presents concepts for promoting more context-sensitive design along the Star-Spangled Banner Scenic Byway (SSBSB) Corridor in southeastern Prince George's County as both public improvements to roadways and private development along these roadways occur. The Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail and Scenic Byway (STSP) is the designation used by the National Park Service (NPS) for the entirety of the route, which passes through Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The STSP has an overall corridor management plan prepared by NPS. The SSBSB is the section of the route specific to Prince George's County, and this corridor management program more specifically addresses elements specific to the SSBSB in complement to the STSP plan. The road segments encompassing the SSBSB are further designated as Special Roadways in the MPoT, and are designated scenic and historic by the County. This study contributed greatly to the recommendations in the RCCP.
2012	<i>Rural Villages Study</i>	The intent of this study was to better understand how regulations relating to site development and road improvements affect rural character and other development issues in rural areas. It focused on the Aquasco, Baden, and Croom communities in southeastern Prince George's County and the citizen input collected during the preparation of the Rural Villages Study was particularly helpful in the writing of the RCCP.

Year	Document name	Document Summary
2012 (revised)	<i>Guidelines for the Treatment of Scenic and Historic Roads</i>	These guidelines are incorporated by reference into the DPW&T's Specifications and Standards for Roadways and Bridges in Prince George's County, Maryland (Specifications and Standards). The guidelines provide parameters for the design of designated scenic and historic roadways in the County, particularly addressing the impacts of new development along County designated scenic and historic roads. They are used whenever a development is proposed along a scenic or historic roadway or when reconstruction or other roadway improvements are proposed.
2013	<i>Conserving Significant Cultural Landscapes: Protecting the Piscataway and Accokeek Historic Communities and the Mount Vernon Viewshed</i>	This study focuses on the Mount Vernon Viewshed's Area of Primary Concern, which encompasses the properties that can be seen from Mount Vernon. This study contributed greatly to the recommendations regarding future treatment of the viewshed in the RCCP.
2013	<i>2013 Approved Subregion 5 Master Plan and Proposed Sectional Map Amendment</i>	The Subregion 5 Master Plan includes areas in the south and southwest of Prince George's County. It outlines a vision for the Rural and Agricultural Area (RAA) that protects large amounts of land for environmental quality, recreation, agriculture, and preserving rural character and vistas. Recommendations for the RAA "...are intended to balance pressure for residential development and landowners' equity with the desire to maintain rural character and sustainable natural environments." Especially important are the Piscataway, Mattawoman, and Potomac watersheds, which are areas with significant environmental and historic value.
2013	<i>Approved Subregion 6 Master Plan and Sectional Map Amendment</i>	Subregion 6 comprises the southeastern portion of the County, 70 percent of which is designated as being within the RAA. It is the largest contiguous rural area in the County. Subregion 6 Master Plan development policies echo those of the Subregion 5 Master Plan. They allow for limited residential development at low densities and in ways that preserve rural character. These include employing conservation subdivision techniques and limiting the effects of lighting in rural areas. The plan also devotes a section to the subregion's ample historic and cultural resources, which is aimed at protecting rural and historic character by safeguarding vernacular architecture and encouraging adaptive use of historic structures.
2014	<i>Plan Prince George's 2035 Approved General Plan</i>	The most recent General Plan for the County specifically calls for implementation of the guidelines from the Croom and Aquasco Scenic Byway Plan and for the preservation of viewsheds and historic resources. It also establishes a growth policy that focuses on directing development to established communities, especially designated Local Centers and Regional Transit Districts, and away from rural areas.

Year	Document name	Document Summary
Various dates	Prince George’s County Code	Sections of the County Code that influence rural character include Roads and Sidewalks (Subtitle 23), Conservation Subdivision Ordinance (Subtitle 24), Woodland and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Ordinance (Subtitle 25), and the Historic Preservation Ordinance (Subtitle 29).
Various dates	Prince George’s County Zoning Ordinance	The Zoning Ordinance applies countywide and contains the regulations that apply to land development in the various zoning categories. There are few references to rural character. The Zoning Ordinance is being rewritten, and the updated version intends to include design standards, including those related to rural character.