



*The Town of Cape Charles  
Community Strategic Plan  
2025*



# *Community Strategic Plan*

What is a **Strategic Plan**, and what makes it different than our **Comprehensive Plan**? These are great questions, and understanding this difference is critical to any evaluation of this document.

A **Comprehensive Plan** is required by Virginia Administrative Code, which prescribes a detailed set of requirements. A Comprehensive Plan is a lengthy, intricate document, that can take a very long time to create. Due to its complexity and the length of time needed to develop it, the average citizen does not typically take the time to study a Comprehensive Plan in detail.

**Strategic Plans** on the other hand are much nimbler, they can be customized to any particular need of a community and are more easily digestible by members of the public. Strategic Plans also happen quicker, which facilitates more interest and better participation by community members. Our Strategic Plan shares the same community values and vision as our Comprehensive Plan but can be updated annually if desired, making the Strategic Plan a living document; flexible enough to react to current community developments in real time. This makes the Strategic Plan an ideal implementation tool for our Comprehensive Plan.

Both the Comprehensive and Strategic Plans start broad, and then become more specific. They begin with the values that are important to us and define us as a community. These values inspired our vision; a brief statement that looks to the future; is a source of inspiration; and serves to identify the ideals or characteristics we desire in our future.

The vision and its supporting goals represent the long-term view. The specific strategies needed to attain these goals are more short-term in nature and are considered objectives. They are the distinct, measurable deliverables that are affordable and implementable actions the Town can work into its next annual budget.

Following a three-year development period, the Town Council approved the most current Comprehensive Plan in December of 2022. The Strategic Plan will now start tackling the many discrete goals/objectives in the Comprehensive Plan by determining current priorities to assist with developing annual work plans.

While goals are longer term and subject to ongoing metrics, the Strategic Plan objectives are more fluid. As some objectives are completed, others may be added, contributing to the living nature of this document. Therefore, the objectives listed here should not be considered the definitive or complete list, but rather what is considered important or desirable to tackle first.

Community input to the annual Strategic Plan update is critical, and it will be solicited from annual community surveys and public input sessions.

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## **Our Community Values:**

- 1) **Sense of Community**
- 2) **Heritage – Traditional**
- 3) **Diversity – Tolerance – Respect**
- 4) **Adaptability**
- 5) **Environmental Stewardship**



## **Our Vision:**

*Preserve our historical, natural, and cultural resources, while managing growth and fostering a sense of community that enhances well-being and prosperity, now and for generations to come*

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## **Our Goals\*:**

- **To retain the small-town character of Cape Charles**
  - Metric: citizen confirmation in annual survey
- **To protect and maintain the beachfront**
  - Metric: no degradation via annual beach survey
- **To protect and maintain the harbor**
  - Metric: maintain/increase occupancy
- **To protect, support and maintain Central Park**
  - Metric: maintain/increase appearance and usage
- **To promote environmental stewardship**
  - Metric: develop implementable plans
- **To retain and expand businesses in a business-friendly environment**
  - Metric: increase in business licenses, increase in business-related revenues, and data from building permits issued and an annual questionnaire on employment
- **To enhance the visitor experience in Cape Charles**
  - Metric: maintain/increase visitation and tourism related revenues
- **To advance a variety of housing options**
  - Metric: increase in more affordable housing units
- **To meet our residents' expectation for Town services**
  - Metric: citizen confirmation in annual survey

**\*Not in any particular order**

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## Our Objectives:



- **Retain the small-town character of Cape Charles:**
  - a. Encourage a sense of engagement and inclusion among our community service organizations:
    - i. Town boards and commissions chairpersons to provide an annual briefing to Council
    - ii. Celebrate volunteer appreciation, to include a volunteer of the year award during the annual Town Council Ice Cream Social – invite all board/commission members and civic groups
    - iii. Hold an annual strategic plan forum to get input from the public and civic groups
    - iv. Quarterly recognition of board/commission members or other volunteers in the Gazette, on Facebook, and during Regular Council meetings
    - v. Invite local civic groups, as appropriate, to participate in Town working groups

Note: Current Cape Charles Civic Groups – Friends of the Library, Citizens for Central Park, Cape Charles Main Street, Cape Charles Rotary, Cape Charles Historical Society, Cape Charles Rosenwald School Restoration Initiative, Cape Charles Yacht Club, New Roots Youth Garden, GEAR, Arts Enter, CC Historic District Civic League, Vacation Rental Home Owners Association, Bay Creek Community Association

- b. Encourage Citizen Engagement:
  - i. Maintain Facebook event postings for public events
  - ii. Provide routine reporting of Town business and outcomes
  - iii. Promote subscription to e-notifications and other sources of information
  - iv. Publish Strategic Plan “report card” prior to the annual Community Survey
  - v. Involve citizens in committee projects/committees where appropriate

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- c. Maintain/improve walkability:
  - i. Complete multi-use path between historic district, harbor, and Bay Creek
  - ii. Promote improvements to, and additions to sidewalks
    - a. Press for state maintenance
    - b. Explore ordinance changes for rehabilitation and resale
    - c. Identify specific strategies and prioritization for sidewalk infill and provide capital funding as available
  - iii. Support Rails to Trails project
- d. Promote and encourage community/quirky events:
  - i. Promote centralized calendar of events (sharing information)
  - ii. Pursue Northampton County Infrastructure Grants to support events
- e. Promote the arts, entertainment, and recreation:
  - i. Provide services and venues at low or no cost to local non-profits
  - ii. Evaluate ways to provide volleyball/basketball courts; work with the YMCA to promote available scholarships
  - iii. Encourage a public arts league that will develop guidance and promotions for the public arts and provide recommendations to the Town Council when appropriate
- f. Evaluate short-term rental (STR) regulations
  - i. Develop metrics to monitor STR regulation effectiveness
  - ii. Evaluate STR regulations to determine if tweaks or changes are required
- g. Manage tourism benefits and impacts to ensure a healthy balance between a quality of life for our residents and the quality of place for our visitors
  - i. Develop a visitor pledge to communicate the important values of responsible behavior to visitors
  - ii. Improve accessibility for people of all age groups and abilities
- h. Foster a safe golf cart culture:
  - i. Better and more signage
  - ii. Better enforcement (information to rentals and better reporting)
  - iii. Designate golf cart parking spots
  - iv. Foster positive relationship and meet annually with golf cart rental companies
  - v. Evaluate better connectivity options between Bay Creek and the balance of the Town
- **Protect and maintain the beachfront:**
  - a. Develop beachfront master plan (beach, dunes, boardwalk, LOVE sign area, bathhouse, etc.) to include specific parameters for beach and dune management, detailing desired size and characteristics of both

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- b. Continue annual surveys and sand replenishment budget
- c. Evaluate survey data to determine erosion protection strategy
  
- **Protect and maintain the harbor:**
  - a. As part of larger area planning efforts, develop criteria to promote a healthy balance of commercial and recreational uses
  - b. Implement long-term major maintenance and replacement plan
  
- **Protect, support and maintain Central Park:**
  - a. In collaboration with Citizens for Central Park (CCP), promote an attractive, yet sustainable, multi-function public park
  - b. Implement long-term major maintenance and replacement plan
  - c. Provide in-kind staffing support for community programming efforts
  - d. Work with CCP to add handicapped parking to the park
  
- **Promote environmental stewardship**
  - a. Develop an implementable coastal resiliency plan, to include the Resilience Adaptation Feasibility Tool (RAFT) recommendations and VIMS Comprehensive Coastal Resource Management Portal
  - b. Review adequacy of existing/previous public green/open space infrastructure plans and develop an updated implementable plan
  - c. Protect, improve, and financially support our tree canopy and other natural and designed landscapes
  
- **Retain and expand businesses in a business-friendly environment:**
  - a. In collaboration with Cape Charles Main Street (CCMS) develop a public/private effort to guide business development and help remove obstacles
    - i. Review ordinances, regulations, and processes to identify business impediments
    - ii. Distribute the CCMS business tool kit to assist with common questions/concerns
    - iii. Support the economic vitality of the commercial district
  
  - b. Improve business access to workforce resources:
    - i. Develop programs with high schools, the Eastern Shore Community College (ESCC), and the restored Cape Charles Washington-Rosenwald School
    - ii. Support CCMS Job Fairs through Cape Charles Main Street, Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce, and/or Eastern Shore Tourism
    - iii. Develop internships and apprenticeships (Dept of Labor & Industry - DOLI)

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- **To enhance the visitor experience in Cape Charles**
  - a. In collaboration with Cape Charles Main Street (CCMS), identify the needs of visitors to the Cape Charles commercial district
  - b. In collaboration with CCMS, continue plans to build and fund a visitors' welcome center and restrooms in the commercial district
  - c. Work with CCMS to measure and increase traffic and engagement in social media channels and the Cape Charles Virginia's Cape (CCVC) website
  - d. Work with CCMS, Town staff, and other organizations to enhance the process for submitting events for posting on the CCVC website
  
- **Advance a variety of housing options:**
  - a. Explore the viability of a workforce housing ordinance related to Planned Unit Developments (PUDs); pursuant to VA Code Sec 15.2-2305.1
  - b. Work with developers on workforce housing projects
  - c. Promote the ability of accessory dwelling units to be long-term housing
  - d. Evaluate incentives for the use of accessory dwellings units as long-term housing
  - e. Stay informed about Northampton County efforts
  
- **Meet our residents' expectation for Town services:**
  - a. Establish modern municipal facilities
    - i. Ensure safe/effective workplaces
    - ii. Develop an accessible and efficient Town Hall
    - iii. Strive to centralize resources
  - b. Manage smart growth and development, ensuring our small-town character remains balanced against increasing needs for services/infrastructure
    - i. Perform analysis of public service needs as a function of anticipated growth
    - ii. Evaluate potential financial impacts on municipal budgets
    - iii. Develop proffer policy to pay for impacts of future developments
  - c. Conduct master planning for potential development of the old railroad property and surrounding harbor areas
  - d. Develop a town-wide parking capacity inventory and develop recommendations for possible expansions or improvements
  - e. Continue employee training (cross training, customer service training, etc.)

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- f. Continue citizen concern reporting system
  - i. Promote citizen use of “Report a Concern” on Town website
  - ii. Follow up public comments expressed during council meetings and through emails received from citizens
  
- g. Evaluate the need and viability of additional services
  - i. Recycling, when feasible
  - ii. Electric vehicle charging stations, when feasible
  
- h. Evaluate the need and viability of temporary office space for town staff until a new town hall can be built

### **Implementation:**

Any plan is only as good as its implementation strategy. Our current Comprehensive Plan identified this Strategic Plan as its implementation tool. That was because this plan is reviewed annually and can be updated as needed to react in real time to current conditions. However, that does not mean that it is possible for all the objectives in this plan to be accomplished immediately or concurrently. Therefore, the Strategic Plan must be seen as a multi-year planning tool, which is updated each year.

Successful implementation depends on many things, including Political Will, money, staff capacity, and the time to do the work; with each of these representing their own unique challenges.

Political Will was demonstrated by the Mayor and Town Council through their participation in the development of this Strategic Plan. However, this Will can only be sustained with public support. The Strategic Plan cannot be seen as the Town Council’s plan, but rather must be perceived as the community’s plan. This public buy-in will be sought via annual public meetings to obtain input and address any questions/concerns; as well as using an annual community survey to gain insights and collect data over time regarding community needs and satisfaction.

The Town’s fiscal situation has improved significantly since the first Strategic Plan was adopted in 2021. While this does not mean we can fund everything at once, it does mean that we can now begin to put together a reasonable, prioritized spending plan.

While money may be less of an issue, the staff resources necessary to carry out this work remains constrained. Town staff are typically fully engaged in their routine day-to-day duties, which does not afford much additional capacity to take on new objectives. Staff workspace is an additional constraint. If more staff were hired, there is currently insufficient space to house them. While volunteer resources can often help, volunteers cannot be counted upon to shoulder the sole responsibility for specific actions. Volunteer help is an excellent force multiplier but should not be counted upon as the primary resource in formal implementation planning. Therefore, expectations must remain reasonable, so that annual work plans don’t become impractical.

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## **Work Plans:**

The Strategic Plan was referenced during this year's annual update to the Town's ongoing project priority list. That list, along with this plan will be used in the development of the next Town budget (FY26 - which begins on July 1). That budget is what will establish the resources and expectations for Town work plans in the coming year. A good faith effort will be attempted to work on those objectives which receive sufficient resources in the next budget. However, since this is a multi-year plan, we must accept that some objectives contained herein will not be scheduled until FY27 or beyond.

Please refer to Appendix B to see the current ongoing Town project list and how objectives have been prioritized for the coming year.

**Appendix A**  
**Cape Charles Comprehensive Plan Summary of Objectives and Strategies**

A) Housing

- 1 Pursue additional supply and diversity of housing
- 2 Encourage workforce housing
- 3 Participate in Housing Finance Programs
- 4 Promote manufactured housing
- 5 Address STR impacts on housing

B) Economy

- 1 Seek healthy balance - residents & tourists
- 2 Attract families with children
- 3 Strengthen household economic wellbeing
- 4 Promote and expand business
- 5 Promote diverse economic benefits for the harbor
- 6 Expand local manufacturing base
- 7 Promote traditional water based economic activities
- 8 Study chains of activities to identify gaps in a visitor's day
- 9 Identify placemaking opportunities
- 10 Update Bay Creek Planned Unit Development (PUD)

C) Transportation

- 1 Reduce traffic congestion
- 2 Enhance walkability
- 3 Maintain safe golf cart operations
- 4 Increase parking
- 5 Identify and maintain alleys and easements
- 6 Promote affordable public transportation
- 7 Complete multi-use path between historic district, harbor, and Bay Creek
- 8 Intergrade harbor area with other trail/path networks
- 9 Support Rails to Trails

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## D) Environment

- 1 Enhance Chesapeake Bay water quality
- 2 Promote strong aesthetics and limit litter
- 3 Ensure high quality drinking water (Now Virginia American Water)
- 4 Maintain long-term viability of beach and harbor
- 5 Promote coastal resiliency
- 6 Protect wetlands
- 7 Implement Coastal Resources Management guidance
- 8 Develop recommendations to improve resiliency to storm events
- 9 Assess feasibility of recycling
- 10 Protect and promote tree canopy
- 11 Evaluate I&I to sewer (Now Virginia American Water)

## E) Facilities & Services

- 1 Pursue amenities for town facilities
- 2 Create modernized municipal facilities
- 3 Create multi-use recreation field
- 4 Ensure effective water & sewer utilities (Now Virginia American Water)
- 5 Develop policy for paying for facility expansions
- 6 Develop proffer policy to pay for impacts of future developments
- 7 Pursue arts, public events, etc.

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## **Appendix B 2025 Ongoing Town Priorities List**

**BLUE: still in progress from previous work periods and require additional time to complete; All items in blue are currently being worked concurrently (not listed in any particular order):**

- **Develop New Municipal Center**
- **Develop New Downtown Restrooms and Visitors Center**
- **Finish Library building sale/upgrades**
- **Work with developers/agencies to facilitate workforce housing**
- **Publish recently adopted Zoning Ordinances to online platform**
- **Develop beachfront master plan (beach, dunes, boardwalk, LOVE sign area, bathhouse, etc.)**

**New items to be started as soon as time/resources are available:**

1. Pursue development of a shared revenue agreement with the County
2. Develop harbor/RR area conceptual master plan, new design guidelines, and Article IX update
3. Develop an implementable sidewalk infill program
4. Mason Ave & Strawberry Street Electrical Upgrade
5. Review efficiency of current planning and zoning processes and fees
6. Develop a town-wide parking plan to include a parking capacity inventory and recommendations for possible parking area expansions or improvements
7. Develop metrics and review short term rental ordinances/codes to determine if changes or updates are needed
8. Develop a plan to address coastal resiliency, to include RAFT recommendations

***NOTE: Refer to the Town's FY26 Capital Asset Management Plan (CAMP) to see a five-year schedule of proposed capital projects.***