

COUNTY COUNCIL

DOUGLAS B. HUDSON, PRESIDENT
JOHN L. RIELEY, VICE PRESIDENT
JANE GRUENBAUM
STEVE C. MCCARRON
MATT LLOYD



Sussex County

DELAWARE
sussexcountyde.gov

(302) 855-7743

REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COUNCIL ON PLANNING

SUSSEX COUNTY, DELAWARE

2025-2026

June 23, 2026

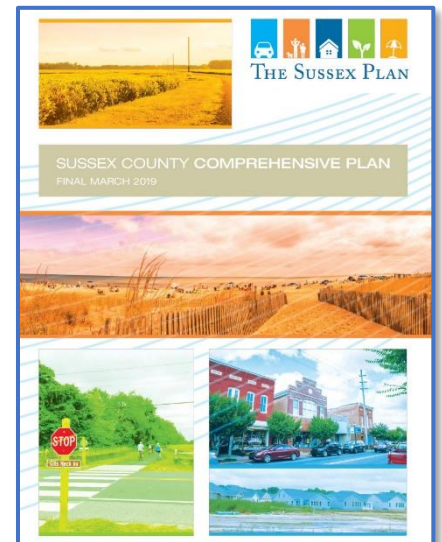
INTRODUCTION

This is the seventh annual report regarding Sussex County's 2018 Comprehensive Plan ("the Plan"), which was adopted by the Sussex County Council on Tuesday, December 4, 2018. The Plan was subsequently certified by Governor John C. Carney on March 19, 2019, as being in compliance with Title 9, Chapter 69, Subchapter II (The Quality of Life Act) of the Delaware Code.

This report is intended to comply with Title 9, Section 6958 of the Delaware Code. Delaware law mandates that all Counties and municipalities have a Comprehensive Plan in place. Counties and municipalities must review and update those plans for State certification every 10 years, while also providing annual updates on the progress of implementation.

NEW INITIATIVES

In the July 2024 to June 2025 reporting year, Sussex County has undertaken a number of initiatives to implement the strategies within the Comprehensive Plan. In accordance with the structure and format of the Comprehensive Plan, the initiatives are summarized below based on the different elements within the Comprehensive Plan.

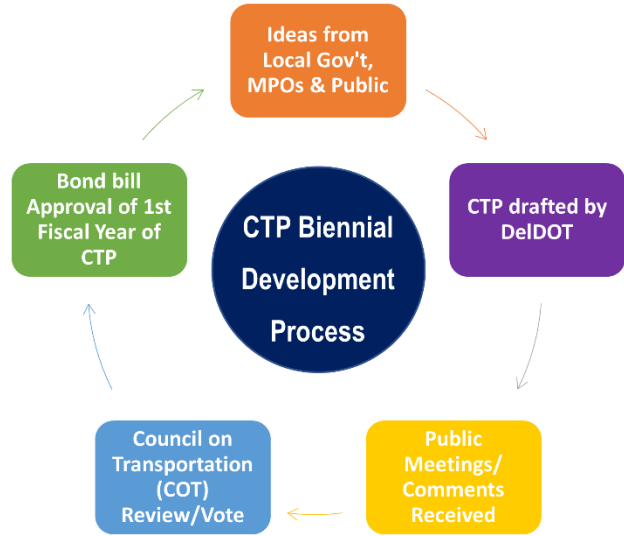


COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES
2 THE CIRCLE | PO BOX 417
GEORGETOWN, DELAWARE

MOBILITY/TRANSPORTATION

FY 27-32 Capital Transportation Program (“CTP”) Update for Sussex County

Every two years, the State of Delaware Department of Transportation (“DelDOT”) develops a 6-year Capital Transportation Program (CTP) that identifies anticipated capital investments for the transportation network in Delaware. This program is developed in cooperation with the Salisbury-Wicomico Metropolitan Planning Organization, and Sussex County. The program provides information on various



DelDOT capital and maintenance programs and the estimated cost expenditures for the project phasing of a capital project that are anticipated in each specific fiscal year. Due to the size and scale of CTP projects that are accepted into the CTP, most CTP projects are multi-year projects that can take several years to design and build. Road maintenance and day-to-day repairs, such as road patching projects, are usually not included in the CTP, as the State of Delaware has separate projects for road maintenance.

A link to an online map showing the CTP Projects, which are currently within the CTP, can be found at the link below:

[Capital Transportation Program \(CTP\) \(deldot.gov\)](https://deldot.gov)

On February 3, 2025, Sussex County invited the public to submit suggestions for the upcoming 2027-2032 Capital Transportation Program request. Submissions for new potential projects were accepted through Monday, March 24, 2025. During this period, the County received 74 ideas from the Public. These were reviewed and, where there were overlapping ideas for the same roads, combined into a condensed list of potential projects. On April 25, 2025, Sussex County submitted its recommendation to DelDOT for those projects that the County wished to be considered for potential acceptance into the next CTP Update.

In fall 2025, DelDOT finalized its Capital Transportation Program (CTP). Whilst the County has a role in identifying potential new CTP Projects within the County, the final list must be evaluated by the State's Council on Transportation ("COT"). The Council serves in an advisory capacity to the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Directors of the Department of Transportation and the Governor on issues relating to transportation and other matters which may aid the Department in providing the best possible transportation services for the traveling public.

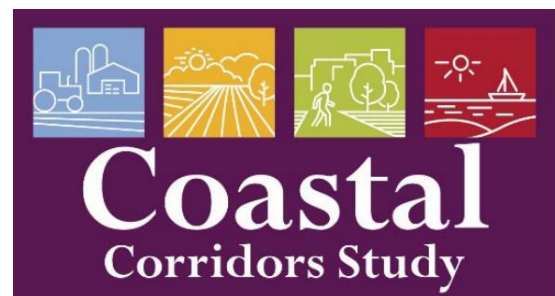
On September 8, 2025, the Council on Transportation released the draft FY27-FY32 Capital Transportation Program for public comment. Three public meetings were scheduled, one in each county, on September 22, 2025, September 29, 2025, and September 30, 2025. On February 19, 2026, the Council on Transportation adopted the FY27-FY32 Capital Transportation Program. The Implementation Plan provides a schedule by phase for the projects that fall under DelDOT's prioritization process. The Development Plan is a project level document that provides anticipated project spends per phase by fiscal year for all DelDOT projects.

Coastal Corridors Study and Monitoring Committee

This is an ongoing initiative that is currently within its monitoring phase. The DelDOT Coastal Corridors Study was completed in June 2024, and the Final Report of the Study was published on DelDOT's website. The report can be downloaded using the following link:

[Coastal Corridors Study - Delaware Department of Transportation](#)

DelDOT's Coastal Corridors Study is focused on identifying transportation solutions for east-west routes in Sussex County, including Route 16 and Routes 404/9 between US 113 and SR 1, as well as Redden Road and other local roads in the area. These roadways represent the primary east-west corridors in the northern part of Sussex County that are currently congested or are at risk for congestion based on anticipated growth.



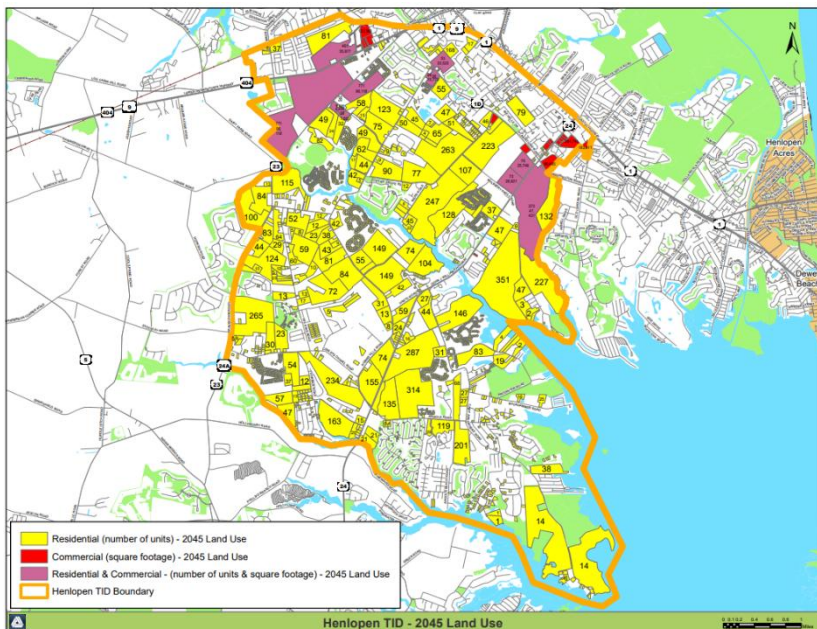
Following the completion of the Final Report of the Coastal Corridors Study, the group continued to meet as part of the Coastal Corridors Monitoring Committee. The most recent meeting of the Monitoring Committee, to which the public was able to participate, was held in June 2026.

The Coastal Corridors Study is an important document that will inform the update of the Mobility element in the County’s next 10-year Comprehensive Plan update, which is due to commence in CY 2026. Pages 161-162 of the document contain policy recommendations for consideration in the next Comprehensive Plan update. For example, recommendation G-2 encourages the adoption of specific language in the next Comprehensive Plan to encourage increased interconnectivity in order to improve safety and manage volumes on the roadways of Sussex County.

Henlopen Transportation Improvement District (“TID”)

The County has successfully implemented Strategy 13.1.1.2 of the Comprehensive Plan by working with the Delaware Department of Transportation to implement the County’s first Transportation Improvement District for the 24 square mile Henlopen area south of Rt. 9 and west of SR.1. The Henlopen TID was adopted on October 29, 2020, and unless a development falls within a specified exemption, is required to contribute to planned transportation infrastructure improvements within the District.

Projects have continued to come forward for consideration during the review period. As of June 2026, the total amount of financial commitments for the Henlopen TID, as reported by the State of Delaware Department of Transportation, now exceeds \$14 million since 2020. The table below illustrates the new commitments that have



come forward during the review period.

Project Name	Total Amount (\$)
Chase Oaks (New Total)	\$1,422,242 (increase of \$527,102)
Suncrest (New Total)	\$69,401.50 (increase of \$45,563.50)
Cambria Hotel Site Medical Office	\$48,951.54
Rehoboth Family Storage	\$376,668.50
Rehoboth Health Campus Phase 1	\$273,152.66
Rehoboth Health Campus Future Phase	\$275,179.42
Shell We Bounce Expansion	\$60,936.46
South DE Medical Center	\$128,200.40
Vineyards Phased 4B, 5 and 6	\$1,349,500.17
Total	\$4,004,232.65

The funds are collected and held by Sussex County, and transferred to DelDOT as part of the implementation of intersection improvements within the Transportation Improvement District.

Potential Roxana Transportation Improvement District

In July 2023, the Sussex County Planning & Zoning Department completed a three-month land-use study to assist the Delaware Department of Transportation with a long-range land-use forecast for a new potential Transportation Improvement District that is being explored. The TID is located in the southeast of Sussex County between Selbyville and the Indian River Bay. The land use forecast will be used by the Delaware Department of Transportation to predict likely infrastructure growth in the study area out to the year 2055.



A map showing the location of the new potential Transportation Improvement

District is shown (above). Following the completion of the Land Use Forecast, DelDOT has been undertaking further studies to identify the likely trip generation associated with the land use forecast, so that the required intersection improvements for all intersections inside the proposed TID boundary can be further analyzed. This is a large study, with further updates from DelDOT expected to follow in the 2026-2027 reporting period.

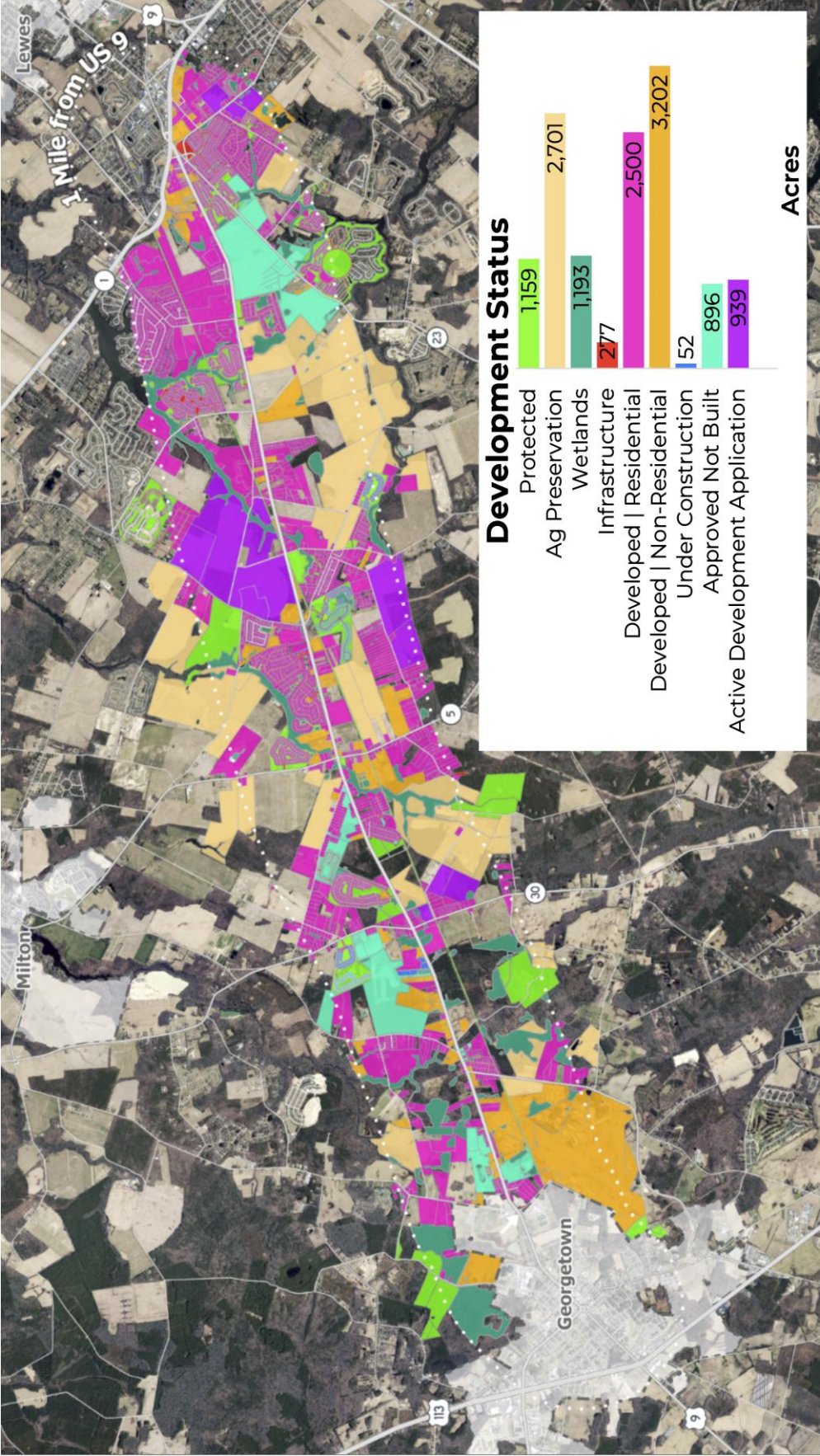
Potential South/South-East Milton Transportation Improvement District

In January 2024, following the adoption of a Transportation Improvement District by the Town, DelDOT and Sussex County began exploring the potential for an additional Transportation Improvement District for the parcels adjoining the Town of Milton. This study, which is being coordinated with the Delaware Department of Transportation, is ongoing, with further updates from DelDOT likely to follow in the 2026-2027 reporting period.

U.S. 9 Corridor Master Plan Study

On January 30, 2026, as part of the State of Delaware's adoption of the State Spending Strategies, Governor Myer issued Executive Order No. 16. This Executive Order kick-starts a seven-month coordinated planning effort between Sussex County and the Office of State Planning Coordination to define a land use plan for the Corridor Planning Areas ahead of the development of the County's Comprehensive Plan update. Once a land use plan for the Corridor Planning Areas has been agreed, the next steps are to identify and implement any changes to the State Strategies documents and maps prior to a five-year update, based on updated data reflected in a formally adopted update or modification to a Comprehensive Plan.

On May 19, 2026, as part of the corridor study, Sussex County and the State of Delaware held a Public Workshop to present data to the Public at the Cheer Center east of Georgetown. The workshop also launched the Rt. 9 Corridor Master Plan Public Survey. This survey will continue to run into the summer of 2026, with data analysis beginning in the fall of 2026. During the summer of 2026, the County and the State will continue to share and analyze data with a goal of formulating land use and transportation scenarios to present to the public in Fall 2026.



A link is provided below to the Public Survey:

[Link to the Rt. 9 Corridor Masterplan Public Survey](#)

LAND USE ORDINANCES

Land Use Reform Working Group (2025)

In 2025, the Land Use Reform Working Group was established by the County Council to review land use trends in Sussex County and to provide recommendations to the Council for possible changes in the County Code and Comprehensive Land Use Plan. The ten-member Working Group included representatives from a diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from the Sussex County Farm Bureau, the Office of State Planning Coordination, the Delaware Department of Transportation, and Affordable Housing Advocate, and Environmental Group, and a Citizens’ Group.



Photo 1: Showing the First Meeting of the Land Use Reform Working Group on March 27, 2025

The first meeting of the Working Group, to which the Public was able to attend and participate, was held on March 27, 2025. Subsequent meetings were held on April 10, 2025, May 1, 2025, May 19, 2025, and June 12, 2025. The Working Group released its Final Recommendations on Oct 7, 2025.

[Land Use Reform Working Group Final Report - October 7, 2025](#)

The report contains 20 recommendations developed and refined through that process. Together, they provide Sussex County Council with a roadmap for aligning growth with infrastructure, diversifying housing options, preserving farmland and natural resources, and reducing uncoordinated, low-density development. The recommendations are designed to be practical, defensible, and responsive to the County's stated goals (see Appendix A). Some of them can be implemented relatively quickly, while others will require more effort and a longer time horizon (See Appendix B within the document). They represent not only areas of consensus, but also the willingness of participants to work across differences to advance solutions for Sussex County's long-term success.

[Sussex County Rental Program Revisions](#)

County Council, at its regular meeting Tuesday, June 9, 2026, adopted the first in a series of ordinances aimed at addressing the pace and intensity of residential development in the county.

Two ordinances – one revamps the [Sussex County Rental Program](#) to entice more developer participation, the other makes technical changes in County code – are an outgrowth of 20 recommendations by the County's Land Use Reform Working Group, a Council-appointed panel comprising an array of stakeholders that came together in 2025 to formulate possible solutions. Those included channeling growth to designated areas through zoning reform, increasing housing diversity and affordability, strengthening resource protections in rural and environmentally sensitive areas, and improving planning transparency and predictability.

This spring, Council began the process of converting some of the easier recommendations into actionable plans. Staff drafted the first in a series of ordinances for Council's consideration, focusing on priorities such as affordable housing, design standards, and density allowances. The remainder of these recommendations will be addressed as the County embarks on its State-mandated update of the



overall comprehensive plan, a sort of development vision for the next 30 years, which must be adopted by 2028.

“The County has heard the public’s concerns, especially when it comes to affordable housing, loud and clear,” Council President Douglas B. Hudson said. “Hopefully, these are just the first of many changes, big and small, that will lead to tangible results and a better Sussex County.”

Changes to Chapter 99-9(C) of the Code of Sussex County

On June 9, 2026, and in furtherance of Objective 4.1.2 and 4.4 of the Comprehensive Plan, the Sussex County Council adopted an Ordinance that clarified the criteria to be considered in the consideration of subdivision applications. Of note is that the Ordinance, which came into effect on June 9, 2026, requires major subdivision applications to include additional information on interconnectivity and how it will be achieved as part of the implementation of the subdivision.

LAND USE APPLICATIONS

In the reporting year, there has been a change in the number and type of applications received. Since July 1, 2025, the Planning & Zoning Department has received a total of 51 applications for Conditional Uses and 11 Changes of Zone, compared with a total of 57 and 11, respectively, for the previous 12-month period.

	Change of Zone	Conditional Use
July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020	30	41
July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021	21	55
July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022	42	83
July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023	25	68
July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024	15	76
July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025	37	57
July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026	11	51

Total Conditional Use and Change of Zone applications by received date

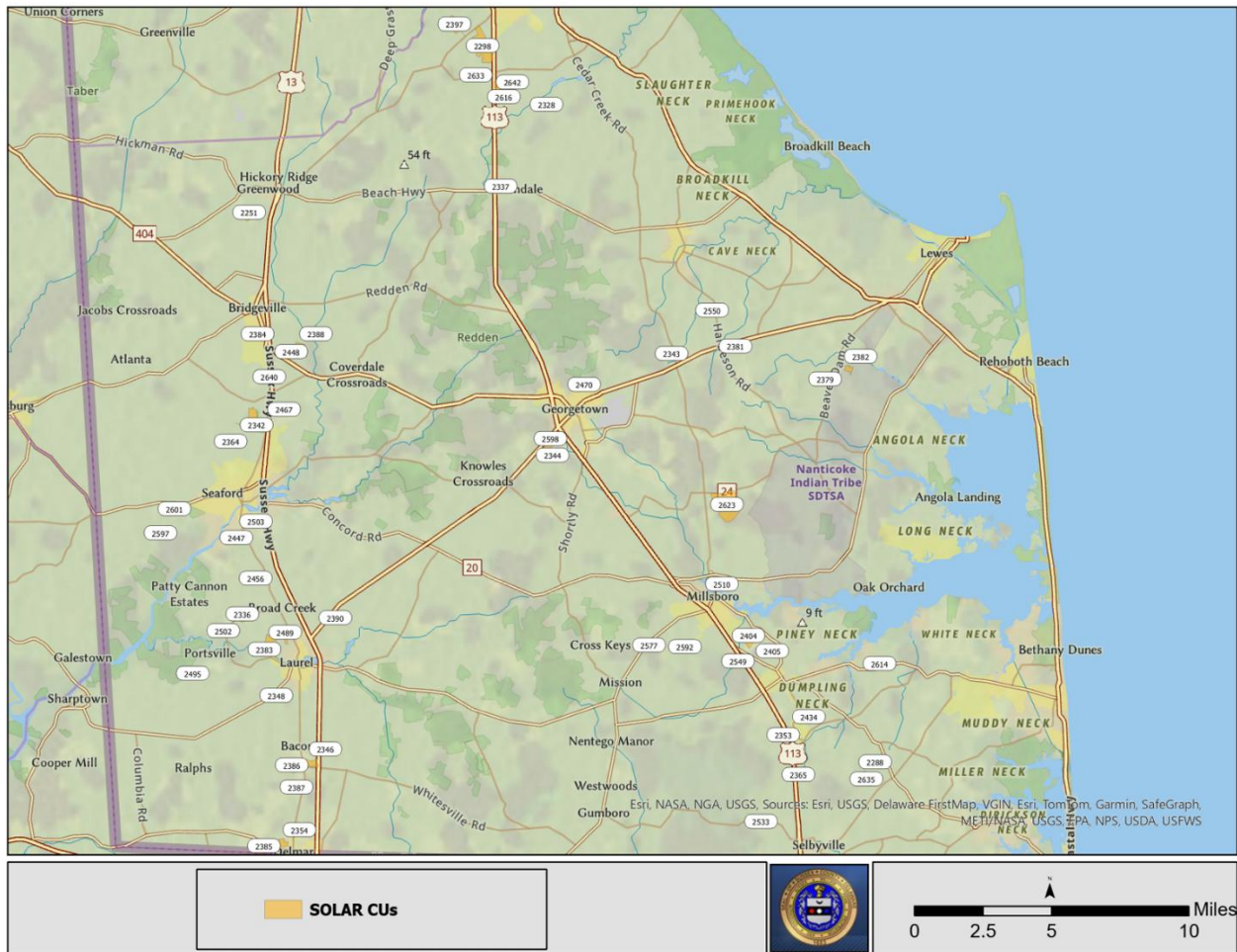
During the reporting year, the total number of Major Subdivision applications submitted has increased from 9 to 13, whilst the total number of lots collectively proposed has decreased from the previous year, to a total of 1,932 lots, as outlined in the table below:

	Total Number of Applications	Total Number of Lots Proposed
July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020	24	942
July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021	34	1,817
July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022	32	3,334
July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023	19	1,556
July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024	9	2,557
July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025	9	2,042
July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026	13	1,932

Total of Major Subdivision Applications by received date

Major subdivisions include applications for the creation of more than 5 lots or on parcels where the permitted number of minor subdivisions has been utilized. The above subdivision totals do not include Change of Zone applications for either Planned Commercial Zoning Districts (C-4), or Residential Planned Communities (“RPC”s). Both of these types of applications can include residential components.

The County continues to see growth across all sectors, including residential, commercial, agricultural, and industrial. Along with this growth, there has been a recent increase over the past three years in applications for solar arrays and renewable energy-related development. At the County Council meeting on June 9, 2026, staff provided an update on the 59 different solar projects currently being tracked by staff. A map showing their spatial distribution is below.



Map Showing Spatial Distribution of Solar Array Conditional Uses in Sussex County

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Sussex County continues to promote economic growth by focusing on the retention, expansion, and attraction of businesses and industries, while providing the resources necessary to support development and enhance community well-being. The Office of Economic Development, in collaboration with several County departments, is responsible for advancing this mission.

In Fiscal Year 2026, Sussex County placed increased emphasis on supporting business owners and commercial developers in securing funding opportunities that expand employment and strengthen the local economy. For example, several Sussex County applicants to the State of Delaware's Sports Tourism Investment Fund received application support and were collectively awarded more than \$3 million in state funding. These investments in sports facilities are expected to increase visitor spending and enhance quality of life for residents. The County also assisted multiple small businesses that applied for the State's Encouraging Development, Growth, and Expansion (EDGE) Program. The soon-to-open Juniper Modern Market in Milton, Delaware, is one such example of a successful applicant supported by the County.

In addition, Sussex County actively promoted the State's Site Readiness Fund, which provides matching financial assistance for the development of commercial and industrial sites. One recent recipient is the Delmar Business Center in Delmar, Delaware, which was awarded \$1.4 million through the program with support from Sussex County and the Town of Delmar. The same development team also received Transportation Infrastructure Investment Fund (TIIF) support for a separate commercial project in Seaford, Delaware, again with support from Sussex County and the City of Seaford. Promoting state-level economic development incentive programs has become a central strategy in the County's efforts to grow the economy and expand employment opportunities.

The first economic development goal of the County's 2018 Comprehensive Plan is to maintain and strengthen the County's economic base. In FY 2026, the County advanced this goal by increasing marketing and promotional efforts beyond the immediate region. For example, Sussex County, in partnership with the State of Delaware and Kent County, jointly promoted the region at the SelectUSA Investment Summit in Washington, D.C.—the premier national event for attracting foreign direct

investment (FDI) into the United States. This effort introduced Sussex County's value proposition to a global audience of potential investors.

In addition, the County's Delaware Coastal Airport was promoted for the first time at the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) Business Aviation Convention & Exhibition. Expanding awareness of key assets such as the Delaware Coastal Airport remains an important strategy in strengthening the County's economic base.

Small business development continues to be a key priority. Established in late 2023, the Sussex County Kitchen Incubator, located at Delaware Technical Community College in Georgetown, now supports 48 small food-based businesses. The County has expanded programming at the incubator to include initiatives such as the Feeding Every Delawarean Program, which purchases meals from incubator members for distribution through local CHEER Senior Centers.

The County has also developed partnerships with regional business support organizations to help scale local food businesses. For example, incubator members are actively referred to the Delaware Manufacturing Extension Partnership (DEMPEP) and the Food Bank of Delaware for co-packing and production support services.

The "One Big Beautiful Bill Act," signed into law on July 4, 2025, established an updated Opportunity Zone program (OZ 2.0). As part of this initiative, Sussex County was invited to submit recommendations for census tract designations. The County provided a list of proposed tracts and has since worked in coordination with the State's Director of Special Projects, local investors, and regional partners—including the Sussex County Economic Development Action Committee (SEDAC)—to refine these recommendations. Sussex County will continue to collaborate with these stakeholders to advance the strategic use of the OZ 2.0 program as a tool for economic development and community revitalization.

WASTEWATER

The County has begun the data collection and development of a hydraulic modeling system for the county's wastewater collection and transmission system. This model along with the county's efforts for an advanced asset management program and work order system will help to take a proactive approach to maintain the county's infrastructure in an attempt to avoid costly failures and ensure reliable performance. This will include multiple required pump station rebuilds that will involve modern upgrades with advanced monitoring, control systems and energy efficient technologies.

Sussex County continues to increase the availability of central sewer to environmentally sensitive areas of the county. The Lochwood vacuum sewer project is complete with all AirVac pods installed and connections have begun. Sanitary sewer collection and transmission systems for Tanglewood and Oak Acres are complete and connections are underway. The Warwick Park Phase I project is in process, removing two large private community onsite systems from the area, one of those systems being on DNREC's list of non-complying systems for several years. There are several other projects in various stages of bidding or construction including Countryside Hamlet, Warwick Park Phase 2, Briarwood and Love Creek MHC. Water quality projects in design include Joy Beach Phase 2, and Slaughter Beach, with Indian River Acres, Bethany Forest, Beaver Dam Road, Red Fox Run and Bay Oaks in the planning stages.

The County has also entered into a design-build project for a 5.7± mile transmission line from the county's Piney Neck Regional Wastewater Facility to the South Coastal Regional Wastewater Facility (SCRWF) for treatment and disposal. The project will include several tie-in locations, one for a new forcemain redirecting flow from part of the Town of Frankford collection area to SCWRF. The overall project will eliminate the treatment and disposal at the Piney Neck RWF allowing for repurposing of the facility. The County is in design and bidding for the North Ellendale Diversion that will redirect effluent from the Town of Georgetown facility to the Artesian-owned SRRF facility for treatment and disposal as part of the County-Artesian interchange agreement.

The county-owned and operated regional wastewater facilities are all in various stages of upgrades meeting the 20-year demand. The status summary is as follows:

- South Coastal RWF upgrade to 10.0 MGD is complete.
- The Inland Bays RWF upgrade to 4.0 MGD is under construction with completion in 2027.
- Wolfe Neck RWF upgrade to 4.0 MGD is in the design stage.

The County continues its effort to utilize private utility infrastructure owned by regulated utilities under bilateral agreement(s) in an effort to prevent the installation of parallel underutilized or redundant infrastructure.

Water

The County has completed the construction of the Winding Creek Village Optimized Water District project with many of the connections already complete. The County Council had previously approved the creation of the optimized area water district in October of 2017. Connections continue in the Ellendale water district area.

USG Water Solutions, an infrastructure asset management company, conducted an inspection of the water tanks located at the Business Park as well as the Dewey Beach elevated storage tank. Based on these recommendations, the County is undertaking upgrades to the water storage at the Coastal Business Park by increasing the capacity of the existing glass-lined tank from 326,000 to 417,000 gallons, by the addition of new wall section, while demolishing the (2) older steel tanks. The Dewey Beach water system's formal assessment determined that the Dewey Beach elevated storage tank requires painting, structural repairs and valve replacement. This project is scheduled to bid May/June 2026 with work scheduled to begin in the fall of 2026.

Watershed Restoration and Environmental Stewardship

During the 2025–2026 reporting period, Sussex County continued implementation of water quality improvement, open space preservation, and environmental stewardship initiatives intended to reduce nutrient runoff, improve resiliency, and enhance ecological resources throughout the County. In May 2026, Sussex County completed the plantings associated with the Delaware Forest Resiliency Fund at the Inland Bays Regional Wastewater Facility. Approximately 41 acres of former agricultural land were replanted with a diverse mix of native deciduous and evergreen tree species. In addition, Sussex County partnered with the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays to afforest approximately 37 additional acres of former agricultural fields surrounding the facility. Collectively, these projects resulted in nearly 80 acres of new afforestation within the Inland Bays watershed. The projects are anticipated to reduce nutrient runoff and wind erosion, improve groundwater infiltration, increase carbon sequestration, and enhance long-term climate resiliency. The afforestation efforts also provide

expanded habitat opportunities for native wildlife and pollinator species while creating visual buffers along Cannon Road and Mount Joy Road. Sussex County will continue monitoring and maintenance activities to support successful establishment and long-term survivability of the planted areas. These projects reflect ongoing coordination between Sussex County, the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays, and other environmental partners to support watershed-scale environmental improvements and implementation of Comprehensive Plan conservation goals.

Sussex County also continued expansion of its stormwater management and watershed restoration program during the reporting period through the addition of a new Best Management Practice (“BMP”) facility as part of the Sussex County EMS Station 103 project in Millsboro, Delaware. In addition, the Peterkins Branch Water Quality Improvements Project continued through the design phase, with construction anticipated to begin in spring 2027. The Peterkins Branch project is intended to address longstanding nuisance flooding concerns within the Delaware Coastal Business Park, the Delaware Coastal Airport, and surrounding areas through implementation of regional stormwater management and water quality improvements. The project is being designed to improve conveyance capacity, reduce localized flooding impacts, and safely manage stormwater quantity flows associated with the 10-year and 100-year storm events. In addition to flood mitigation and drainage resiliency benefits, the Peterkins Branch project will provide regional water quality treatment for approximately 450 acres comprising the eastern portion of the Delaware Coastal Airport property. The project incorporates enhanced stormwater treatment and ecological restoration measures intended to reduce nutrient and sediment loading, improve stormwater infiltration, stabilize degraded drainage areas, and enhance the long-term resiliency of the drainage system during larger rainfall events. The project represents a significant regional investment in watershed-based infrastructure improvements intended to protect public infrastructure, improve environmental conditions, and support Sussex County’s long-term water quality, resiliency, and sustainability goals as identified within the Comprehensive Plan.

The Hopkins Preserve project, which received approval in 2025 and is currently under construction, represents a collaborative preservation and recreation initiative between Sussex County and the Sussex County Land Trust. The project incorporates stormwater quality treatment measures, ecological restoration, open space preservation, and passive recreational amenities intended to support long-term watershed protection goals. The preserve design includes approximately 2.5 miles of scenic trails

traversing a variety of ecological habitats, including meadow areas, ephemeral wetlands, shrublands, reforested areas, freshwater pond features, and preserved mature woodlands. The project also preserves approximately 11 acres of historic forested area while enhancing habitat connectivity and promoting public access to natural resources. Meadow and wetland restoration areas incorporated into the design are intended to improve stormwater infiltration, reduce localized flooding, enhance water quality, and increase resiliency to extreme weather events.

Stormwater Management Ordinance Updates

In March 2026, Sussex County Council adopted amendments to Chapter 90 of the Sussex County Code relating to sediment and stormwater management requirements. The amendments were adopted to improve sediment control practices, strengthen stormwater management requirements, and enhance protections for downstream properties and water resources. The ordinance revisions were developed in response to evolving stormwater management challenges, including increased rainfall intensity, localized flooding concerns, and the need for enhanced sediment and erosion control measures during construction activities. The amendments include updated provisions relating to sediment capture evaluations, project-specific limit of disturbance requirements, stormwater management coordination during subdivision review, and enhanced consideration of drainage, resource buffers, and runoff impacts during land development review. The amendments further support Sussex County Comprehensive Plan goals related to natural resource protection, water quality improvement, resiliency, and environmentally responsible development practices. The ordinance amendments are also intended to strengthen coordination between land development review, sediment and stormwater management design, and long-term water resource protection goals. Sussex County will continue evaluating opportunities to expand watershed restoration efforts, enhance stormwater infrastructure resiliency, and implement projects that improve water quality and environmental sustainability throughout the County.

HOUSING

Sussex County continues to promote fair and affordable housing through the Planning & Zoning Department and the Community Development and Housing Department. In October 2022, Sussex County Council approved an ordinance seeking to provide more affordable rental opportunities for Sussex County residents. This Ordinance not only amended Chapter 72 of the Sussex County Code to streamline the existing Sussex County Rental Program (SCRCP) process but also added a new and substantial change to the zoning code to allow “by-right” multi-family housing projects at a density of twelve units per acre if at least thirty percent of those units are set aside as SCRCP units.

Since the Ordinance's adoption, several applications have been submitted. The Chapel Branch apartment development, developed by Volker, a national affordable-housing developer, has been constructed with all units affordably priced and 24 units participating in the County's SCRCP program. The first large-scale SCRCP project, Coastal Tide, was expanded in 2023, and all 32 SCRCP units within that development are occupied by eligible tenants earning less than 80% of Area Median Income for Sussex County. The Cool Spring Crossing application, proposing 175 units to be included within the SCRCP, remains under consideration.

Recognizing that the program has been underutilized since its adoption, Sussex County Council is actively considering amendments to the SCRCP ordinance to strengthen developer incentives and increase participation. Proposed changes include reductions to setback and open space requirements, a reduction of the affordable set-aside threshold from 25% to 15%, and a revised income qualification structure. The proposed ordinance completed the Planning & Zoning public hearing process and came before County Council for a public hearing in May 2026. Following revisions to the technical detail within the Ordinance, the County Council adopted the Ordinance on June 9, 2026. The County continues to work with applicants proposing residential developments to explore ways to deliver an increase in affordably priced units.

The Sussex County Housing Trust Fund (SCHTF) was officially launched in April 2022 and continues to be a cornerstone of the County's affordable homeownership efforts. The homebuyer assistance program provides grants of \$20,000 for down payment and closing costs to households below 120% AMI seeking to purchase a home in Sussex County. During the reporting year, the County assisted

twenty-seven (27) qualifying households. The County began the fiscal year with \$500,000 in County Council-appropriated funds, which have been fully expended. In April 2026, Sussex County Council approved a Memorandum of Understanding with the Delaware Diamond Fund — a nonprofit administered by the Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA) — unlocking an additional \$500,000 in grant funding made possible through a partnership with Capital One Bank. This infusion is expected to support approximately 25 additional homebuyer households and reflects a growing public-private partnership in support of affordable homeownership in Sussex County.

In a significant step forward for housing policy modernization, Sussex County was selected to participate in the Delaware State Housing Authority's Technical Assistance for Zoning & Land Use Reform Program, established pursuant to Senate Joint Resolution 8 (SJR 8) enacted by the Delaware General Assembly. The County received notification of its selection in October 2025, and in February 2026, DSHA confirmed McCormick Taylor as the County's technical assistance provider — the same planning consultant that guided the County through the Land Use Reform Working Group (LURWG) process. Their existing familiarity with the County's land use framework and stakeholder community positions this engagement to move forward efficiently, with the technical assistance period running from April 2026 through March 2027.

The County has directed the technical assistance engagement toward two targeted housing priorities aligned with the LURWG recommendations. The first is a review and update of the County's Moderately Priced Housing Unit (MPHU) program to strengthen its effectiveness in expanding affordable homeownership opportunities. The second is a review of the County's current code to identify barriers to tiny home development and propose regulatory updates that better accommodate tiny homes as a viable housing option, including alignment with the County's existing ADU ordinances. The deliverables produced through this no-cost, state-funded engagement will position the County well for future Council consideration and action.

RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

Since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 2019, the County has protected the following lands in perpetuity as open space:

- On April 30, 2026, the purchase of an 88-Acre tract in Lewes, known as Ard Na Greine Farm. This acquisition secures one of the largest stretches of open space east of Route 1 and keeps the land as a working agricultural property for years to come.
- On October 1, 2024, the purchase of a 165-acre property, known as the 'Pepper Fork Preserve,' located just outside the northwest edge of Dagsboro. The County bought the land for \$2.65 million from Riverview Associates III LLC, which reduced the price by over half a million dollars. An image is shown below:



Photo: Showing the Layfield Property in 2024

- In May 2023, A 294-acre tract known as the Forest of Broadkill Preserve, bordering Ingram Branch, off Shingle Point Road outside Milton. The property, a mix of fields and wooded areas costing \$1.85 million, will be managed by the Sussex County Land Trust, and is expected to eventually include a publicly accessible trail system;
- In May 2023, an 11-acre assemblage of three wooded parcels, known as the Wright properties, along the Nanticoke River near Seaford. The parcels, costing approximately \$460,000, will be managed by the Nanticoke Conservancy and feature public access at a later date.



- In 2022, Fifty-one acres known as the Hopkins Preserve, along Sweetbriar Road, just north of U.S. 9, outside Lewes, for a price of \$1.5 million. The property owner, Walter Hopkins, and his family (a fourth-generation farmer), discounted the sale price by 50 percent in exchange for the parcel being used at a later time as open space and a recreational amenity, specifically as part of a trailhead that will be developed and managed by the Sussex County Land Trust for the still-under-construction Georgetown to Lewes Trail;
- In 2022, Forty-seven acres known as the Jones Family tract, for \$650,000, located off Conaway Road adjacent to the State-owned Midlands Wildlife Area, west of Millsboro;
- In 2022, forty acres, named the Dawson Bros. tract, for a price of \$2.5 million, located along the south side of Del. Route 24, near the Nanticoke Indian Center, east of Millsboro;
- In 2022, thirteen acres, for a sale price of \$400,000, adjoining a larger parcel acquired by the County in 2020 and collectively known as the Dorman Family Farm Preserve, located along Herring Creek and Sarah Run, near Angola.

Protection of Lands Through the Subdivision Code

The Sussex County Subdivision Code allows applicants to apply under the cluster development option whereby the lot size and lot width requirement of the AR-1 Zoning District is reduced for subdivisions that provide a minimum of 30% of the site area as open space. This option is also available within the Coastal Area.

During the review period, the following areas of open space were approved or recommended for approval under this option (shown on the next page)

County Project Reference Number	Subdivision Name	Total # of Lots/Units	Open Space Retained (in Acres)
2023-12	Windscape Farms	49	14.64
2024-03	Tepache Farms	31	6.16
2024-05	Rivers Edge	187	73.7



2024-07	Stockley Acres	83	20.06
2024-12	Symphony Glen	219	52.9
CZ 2021	Crosswinds Landing, LLC (Swann Lake)	345	114.04
TOTAL		914	281.5

The total new open space approved during the review period is 281.5 Acres. Land approved as “open space”, as defined by the Code of Sussex County, must be maintained in a predominantly undeveloped or natural state, including lands used for agricultural purposes, promote conservation, protect wildlife, or serve as a buffer between residential and nonresidential areas and/or commercial and noncommercial areas.

The table below illustrates the total amount of open space created over the past 6 years.

Year	Total Open Space Protected
July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021	362.33 ac.
July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022	453.02 ac.
July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023	657.97 ac.
July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024	456.94 ac.
July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025	497.96 ac.
July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026	281.5 ac.
6-Year Total	2,709.72 (4.23 square miles)

The table shows that cumulatively, the total amount of open space protected is significant, and that this number continues to grow each year.

INTER-GOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

In addition to cooperating with State Agencies on various technical matters throughout the year, Sussex County continues to work with the municipalities within Sussex County to share and receive data to provide accurate information to the public. In January 2025, staff provided comments to the Town of Bethel on its proposed draft Comprehensive Plan documents.

In addition to providing comments on emerging Comprehensive Plans, the Planning & Zoning Department has continued to participate in Delaware Department Public Workshops and events held throughout the year, including the DelDOT Five Points group, which held its last meeting during the review period.

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES IMPACTING COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

As reported in last year's update, during the 2023-2024 reporting period, changes to Titles 9 and 22 of the Delaware Code were considered by the 152nd General Assembly. Senate Bill 237 requires that, with effect from November 15, 2026, New Castle, Kent, and Sussex Counties' Comprehensive Plans contain strategies to increase community resiliency and address the impacts of climate change. Senate Bill 237 also requires that County Comprehensive Plans consider forests, habitat areas, and wildlife corridors, and that the housing element consider anticipated growth areas and encourage new housing growth away from areas vulnerable to inland and coastal flooding.

In May 2025, the University of Delaware presented to the Sussex County Planning & Zoning Commission to discuss the implementation of Senate Bill 237 and the likely implications for the next Comprehensive Plan Update, which is due to begin in the next reporting period. In Spring 2026, the Department provided comments back to the State of Delaware on the proposed new Comprehensive Plan Checklist.

In addition, on October 3, 2022, Senate Bill 327 was adopted by the 151st General Assembly. The Bill amends Title 9 of the Delaware Code to require that, effective January 1, 2023, all three Counties in Delaware must include an educational element in their next Comprehensive Plan update.



The 153rd General Assembly is currently considering Senate Substitute for Senate Bill 23. This Bill, if enacted, would amend Title 9, Title 22, and Title 29 of the Delaware Code in relation to Housing Supply, and Housing Affordability. If enacted, the County would need to create an Affordable Housing plan, to include the mandatory elements in the Bill, as part of its Comprehensive Plan Update.

CONCLUSION

The 2025-2026 reporting period has seen solid progress toward the implementation of the Strategies contained within the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. The County looks forward to continuing to implement the Comprehensive Plan during the 2026-2027 reporting period.

Work for the 10-year update is due to commence in the 2026-2027 reporting period, with public workshops before both the Planning & Zoning Commission and the County Council anticipated to follow in the 2026-2027, and 2027-2028 reporting periods. Public Hearings on the next Comprehensive Plan Update, along with submittals to the State of Delaware for review by the Office of State Planning and Coordination, are then expected to follow in the 2027-2028 reporting period, to enable the County to be ready for submittal to the Governor for certification ahead of the 10-year anniversary of the current Comprehensive Plan on December 4, 2028.

To further this objective, in June 2026, the Sussex County Council selected consultants to assist staff and Council in the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan Update.