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# Acknowledgements

This plan was prepared by the City of New Castle Ad-hoc Task Force:

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“...The town of New Castle, which has fulfilled many purposes since Peter Stuyvesant first built a fort in 1651, also succeeds in its present role as a suburb. With its generous public spaces, prominently placed institutions, range of architectural styles, housing for people of varied incomes, and encircling open spaces, New Castle stands as a provocative model for the development of new communities and the adaptive change of old ones. Through the interaction of deliberate design, accident, and benign neglect, New Castle merged its special qualities into a singular settlement. So near to, yet separated from, the rush of contemporary life, this venerable town, once neglected and now carefully tended, offers unique critique on many of the suburban developments we have recently built with such abandon.”

**Historic American Towns along the Atlantic Coast**  
Warren Boeschstein, 1999

“...In sum, the great physical planning challenge of the future will be to identify and implement community development initiatives that will better weave together the city’s disparate neighborhoods and achieve improved physical and social interconnections between them, the historic center and the city’s most significant open space asset: the river. A number of strategies to achieve greater connectivity are discussed in detail in the transportation, open space and recreation, and community and economic development sections of this comprehensive plan. However, what must now be more fully appreciated is that as the city plans its final annexations and stretches to fill its ultimate corporate boundaries, the great task ahead as New Castle approaches its fifth century of existence will be the consolidation and unification of its many parts into a seamless, fully integrated, single New Castle. It is a worthy challenge for one of America’s greatest historic communities.”

**The City of New Castle Comprehensive Plan Update 2002**

# Introduction

The following Comprehensive Plan represents an update of the city's very detailed and well-done 1998 Comprehensive Plan. Much of the data, information, assumptions, and many of the recommendations of the '98 plan are still valid. Rather than repeat them unnecessarily here, the current effort seeks to focus on creating a more strategic planning approach, bringing forward past recommendations, suggesting new ones, and matching both to a series of implementation strategies to assure that the recommendations of this document move from planning into action.

Thus, the 2002 Comprehensive Plan Update is comprised of two parts. Part One contains the update itself, and addresses all of the topics and requirements within the state's "Comprehensive Plan Checklist for Towns & Cities with a Population of 2000 Persons or More". Part Two, the "Five Year Action Program", contains a prioritization of those planning initiatives New Castle should and can realize over the five-year life of the current plan.

It would be difficult to improve on Warren Boeschstein's eloquent summary of the special character of the City of New Castle. It is important to note, however, that Boeschstein's evident delight is not focused on the city's well-documented architectural history, but rather on its service as an outstanding model for community planning. Equally significant is that Boeschstein refers mostly to New Castle's historic core. The mapping contained in his essay, for example, does not stray far beyond the edges of the downtown. But this, of course, is just part of the picture. The small colonial town founded on Peter Stuyvesant's fort, has now expanded to contain a land area of over three square miles and encompass four centuries of development.

While the city should be rightfully proud of the historic downtown – a pedestrian-oriented precinct of unmatched physical beauty and architectural distinction – it must likewise recognize that not all areas of the city benefit from same level of design quality. For example the quality of life in neighborhoods on the periphery of downtown, such as Washington Park, Shawtown, and Dobbinsville is significantly diminished by the high volumes of traffic that pass through these communities. Farther along the development timeline, the suburban-style subdivisions strung out along Route 9, such as Van Dyke Village, Boothurst and contemporary development in the Buttonwood area, are rather isolated – both from each other and the downtown. And the character of commercial development taking shape on the city's edges is provocative indeed, but for entirely the wrong reasons.

Clearly, with such an ideal model so close at hand, New Castle is more prepared than most communities to address the planning and design miscues of the recent decades, and to achieve the promise of "adaptive change" that Boeschstein believes is possible. Not only can New Castle serve as an important planning model for other communities across the county, its can also instruct local efforts to improve conditions closer to home.

# Community Profile

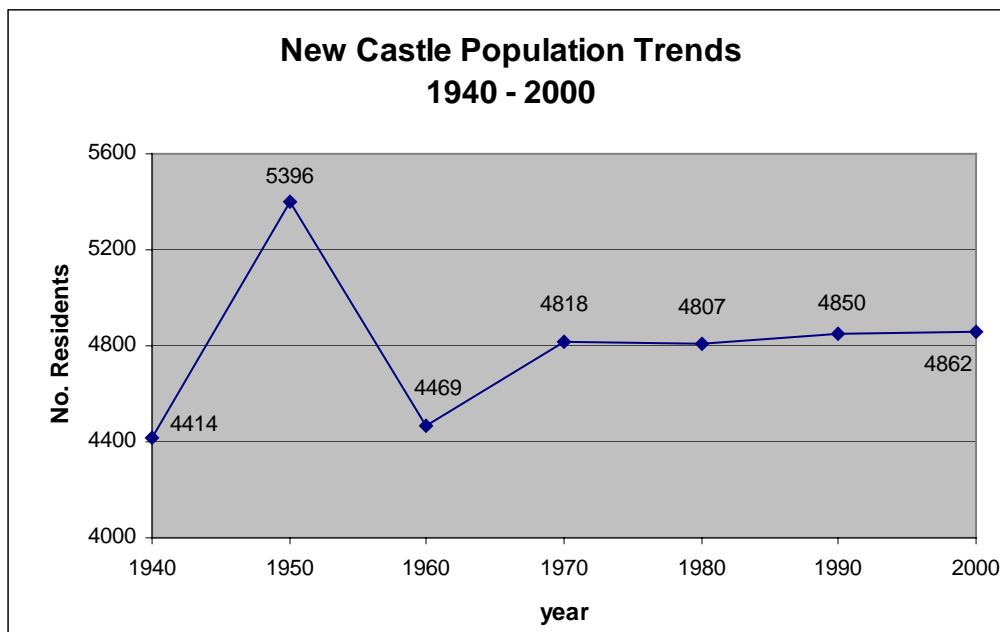
This chapter outlines data on population, demography, housing and economic conditions in New Castle and surrounding areas. Where it is appropriate, comparisons are made to New Castle County and the State of Delaware. The data for this analysis has been derived from a number of sources, most notably the United States Census.

## Population

According to the United States Census from 1940 to 2000, the population in New Castle increased just over 10 percent. Since 1970, there has been an increase of less than one percent in New Castle's population. From 1940 to 1960, the city experienced a sharp increase, reaching a peak in 1950 and declining significantly by 1960 to 4,469 people.

In 2000, there were 4,862 people living in the City of New Castle. The total population for New Castle County was 500,265 and 783,600 for the State of Delaware. To compare state and county population levels between 1990 and 2000, New Castle County grew by 13.2%. The State's population grew by 17.3%, whereas during this period the City of New Castle's population remained relatively unchanged. This stability can be attributed to the City nearly being built out and the city boundaries expanding to include primarily commercial properties. Although the residential population has remained unchanged, the number of people actually coming into the City of New Castle has ballooned to over 10,000 people a day, because of the growing number of businesses and tourists.

Table 1. Population Trends



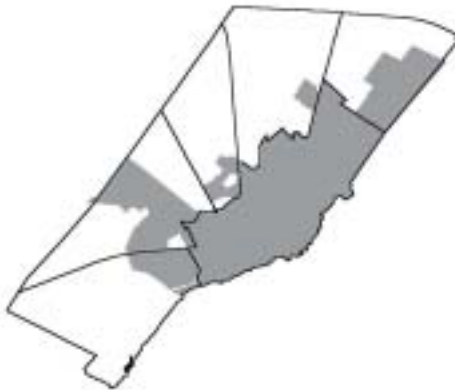
Source: 2000 US Census Data

## Population Projections

Assuming the city does not annex a significant amount of new territory, it is possible to estimate the future population. However, projections for small populations such as the City of New Castle are difficult to prepare accurately. Due to the small size of the population, slight inaccuracies or data errors in the current Census figures can become large errors when projected into the future. ***These projections should not be considered accurate or binding and should be relied upon with caution.***

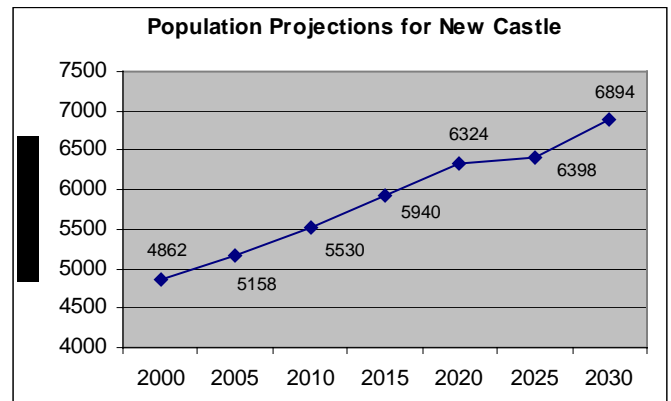
The University of Delaware, Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research prepares a series of population projections for the Delaware Department of Transportation based on small geographic areas called, “Modified Grids.” These projections are used for transportation planning purposes. The Center uses an area that mostly corresponds to New Castle’s municipal boundaries. The portions of land that extend beyond the municipal boundaries include industrial property. The population of New Castle is projected to increase by 43% from 4,862 in 2000 to 6,894 in 2030, according to Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research.

Map 1. New Castle Area Modified Grid Study Area.



Source: Draft Population, Employment, and Household Projections for New Castle County prepared by the Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research at the University of Delaware under contract with the Delaware Department of Transportation, 2001.

Table 2. Population Projections



Source: Draft Population, Employment, and Household Projections for New Castle County prepared by the Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research at the University of Delaware under contract with the Delaware Department of Transportation, 2001.

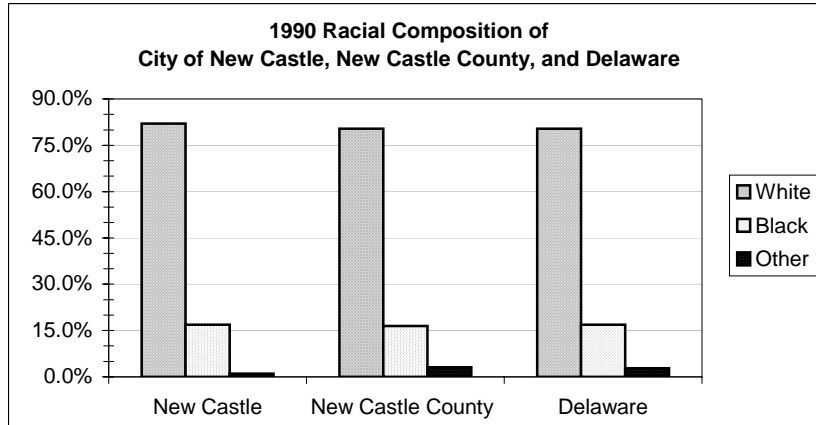
## Racial Profile

In 2000, the City of New Castle, New Castle County and the State of Delaware showed similar racial compositions. New Castle County’s population included 73.1% white, 20.2% black and 6.7% other races. The State of Delaware’s population included 74.6% white, 19.2% black and 6.2% other races. From 1990 to 2000, the major shift in demographics was growth in diversity<sup>1</sup>. Across the board, the white population dropped 5 to 6 percent, and this shift was almost evenly split between an increase in the black population and other races. The City of New Castle

<sup>1</sup> The 2000 Census methodology for recording race changed from the 1990 Census. A category was added which allowed respondents to answer “two or more races” when reporting their race. Thus, the 1990 and 2000 figures cannot be directly compared without acknowledging this disparity. This new category may have contributed to the increase in the population of “other races” discussed in the text and shown in the charts.

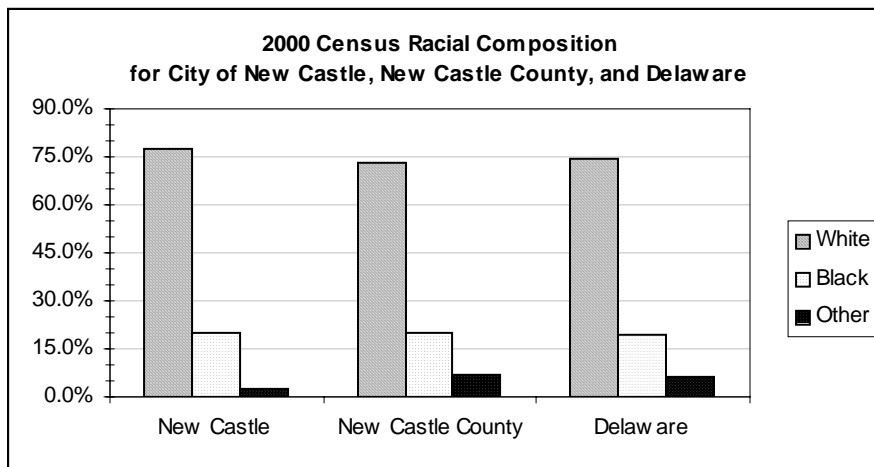
experienced a similar shift in population demographics from 1990 to 2000. The percentage of white people decreased from 82.1% to 77.5%; the black population increased from 16.9% to 20.2%; and the remaining races increased from 1.1% to 2.5% of the total population.

Table 3. 1990 Racial Distribution



Source: 1990 US Census Data

Table 4. 2000 Racial Distribution



Source: 2000 US Census Data

### Hispanic Population

New Castle's Hispanic population almost doubled from 1990 to 2000, with the City experiencing a growth from 1.26% to 2.41% of the City's population. The State also experienced significant growth in Hispanic population, while New Castle County's Hispanic population grew minimally. The proportion of Hispanic people living in New Castle is similar to the State and County's ratios of Hispanic people. (Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.)

Table 5. Hispanic Population Growth and Comparison – 1990 and 2000

	City of New Castle		New Castle County		Delaware	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
Population	61	117	11,804	12,986	15,280	26,293
Percent (of total population)	1.26%	2.41%	2.67%	1.66%	2.29%	5.26%

Source: 1990 & 2000 US Census Data

### Age Profile

Table 6 below indicates the population of New Castle has a slightly older population than New Castle County and the State of Delaware. The County and the State have a larger percentage of their population between birth and 34 years old than New Castle. While the bulk of New Castle residents are 45 years old or older. The most prevalent age group in New Castle is between 45 and 54 years old.

Table 6. 2000 Age Profile

Age	New Castle		New Castle County		Delaware	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
< 5	273	5.6%	33,384	6.7%	51,531	6.6%
5 to 9	265	5.5%	36,150	7.2%	55,813	7.1%
10 to 14	330	6.8%	34,961	7.0%	55,274	7.1%
15 to 19	298	6.1%	36,309	7.3%	55,632	7.1%
20 to 24	271	5.6%	35,499	7.1%	51,665	6.6%
25 to 34	610	12.5%	73,869	14.8%	108,840	13.9%
35 to 44	781	16.1%	83,616	16.7%	127,601	16.3%
45 to 54	790	16.2%	66,882	13.4%	103,999	13.3%
55 to 64	545	11.2%	41,692	8.3%	71,519	9.1%
65 to 74	383	7.9%	30,904	6.2%	56,415	7.2%
75 to 84	252	5.2%	20,556	4.1%	34,762	4.4%
85 >	64	1.3%	6,443	1.3%	10,549	1.3%

Source: 2000 US Census Data

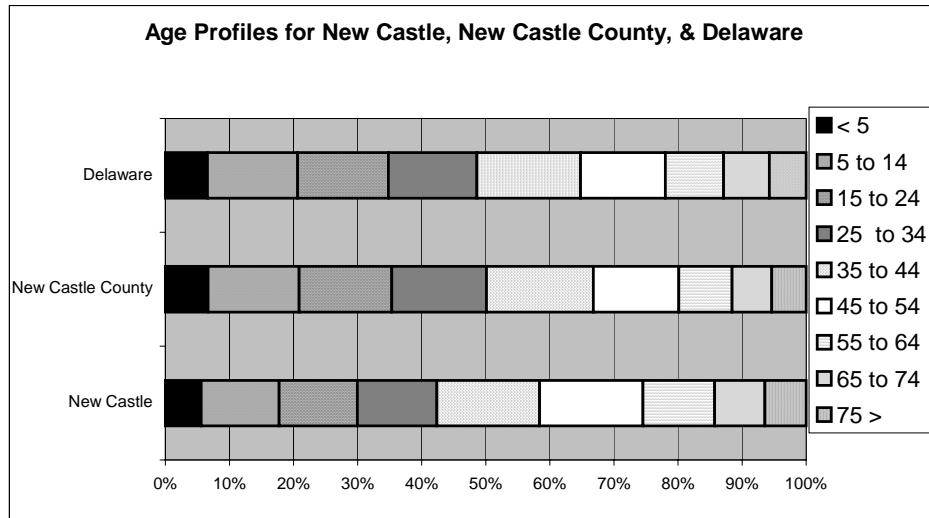
Throughout the State, the percentage of people who are under 24 years old has decreased and the percentage of people aged 45 to 64 has increased. However, the changes have been slightly magnified for New Castle. See Tables 7 and 8 below.

Table 7. 1990 & 2000 Age Comparison

	New Castle		New Castle County		Delaware	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
0 to 4 yrs	6.00%	5.60%	7.20%	6.70%	7.30%	6.60%
5 to 24 yrs	25.66%	23.94%	28.60%	28.57%	28.40%	27.87%
25 to 44 yrs	33.40%	28.61%	34.10%	31.48%	33.00%	30.17%
45 to 64 yrs	21.40%	27.46%	18.80%	21.70%	19.20%	22.40%
65+	13.60%	14.38%	11.40%	11.57%	12.10%	12.98%

Source: 1990 & 2000 US Census Data

Table 8. 2000 Age Distribution



Source: 2000 Census Data

### Educational Attainment

New Castle’s education attainment falls between the County and the State’s levels. According to the 2000 Census, 82.6% of New Castle residents 25 years old and older had graduated from high school or college. From 1990 to 2000 in New Castle County and Delaware, the percentage of residents who earned high school diplomas or bachelor’s degrees increased between three and five percent. However, the percentage of New Castle residents, who received a bachelor’s degree or higher, increased nearly 10 percent, from 16.5 percent to 26.4 percent.

Table 9. Residents with High School Diplomas or Better

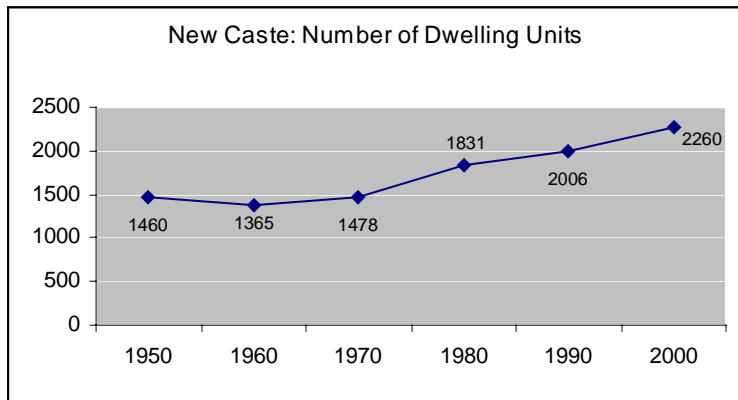
	New Castle		New Castle County		Delaware	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
high school >	77.6%	82.6%	80.6%	85.5%	77.5%	80.4%
bachelor's degree >	16.5%	26.4%	25.5%	29.5%	21.4%	24.4%

Source: 1990 & 2000 US Census Data

### Housing

A description of the housing stock and related data ensues in the following series of tables. Table 10 charts the number of dwelling units in New Castle since 1950. Since 1970, the housing stock in New Castle has grown by 52.9%, a net increase of 782 dwelling units. Table 11 examines the trends in the number of dwelling units for the City of New Castle, New Castle County and Delaware. Since 1970, the number of housing units more than doubled within the County and the State.

Table 10. Dwelling Units in the City of New Castle, 1950 - 2000



Source: 1998 New Castle Comprehensive Plan and 2000 US Census Data

Table 11. Dwelling Unit Trends, 1950 – 2000

	New Castle	% change	New Castle County	% change	Delaware	% change
1950	1,460		62,901		97,013	
1960	1,385	-5.1%	94,688	50.5%	143,725	48.2%
1970	1,478	6.7%	120,704	27.5%	180,233	25.4%
1980	1,831	23.9%	148,563	23.1%	238,611	32.4%
1990	2,006	9.6%	173,560	16.8%	289,919	21.5%
2000	2,260	12.7%	199,521	15.0%	343,072	18.3%

Source: 1998 City of New Castle Comprehensive Plan and 2000 US Census Data

### Type of Housing Stock

New Castle’s housing stock mainly consists of detached single-family homes. The City also has a larger percentage of row houses than the County or the State, which is attributed to the character of the City’s large historic district.

Table 12. Composition of Housing Stock in 2000

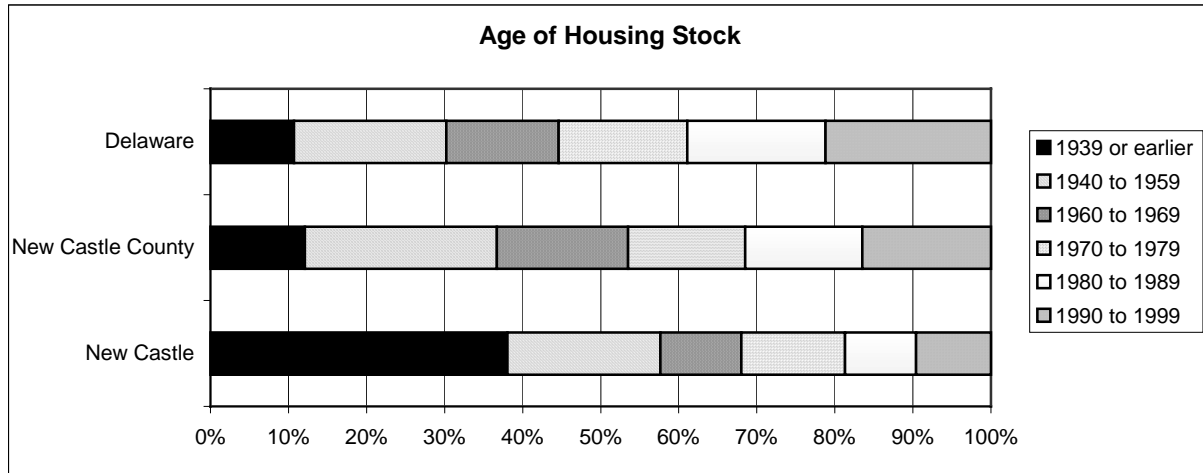
Housing Type	New Castle	% of total	New Castle County	% of total	Delaware	% of total
Single Family, detached	1,145	50.7%	107,015	53.6%	191,688	55.9%
Single Family, attached	770	34.1%	39,609	19.9%	48,340	14.1%
Multi-Family	337	14.9%	47,818	24.0%	64,128	18.7%
Mobile home	8	0.4%	5,072	2.5%	38,281	11.2%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	0	0.0%	7	0.0%	635	0.2%
Total	2,260		199,521		343,072	100.0%

Source: 2000 US Census Data

### Age of Housing Stock

Over 50 percent of New Castle’s housing stock was built before 1959. Whereas, housing built by this time accounts for only 30 percent of Delaware and 37 percent of New Castle County’s housing stock. During the 1980s and 1990s, New Castle experienced a modest growth spurt in housing stock. However, the County and the State experienced substantial growth. Table 13 compares the housing stock ages for New Castle, New Castle County and Delaware.

Table 13. Age of Housing Stock in New Castle, New Castle County and Delaware

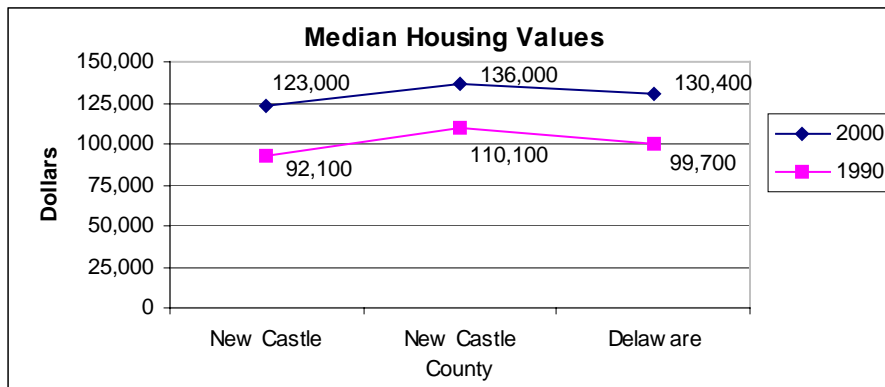


Source: 2000 US Census Data

### Housing Values

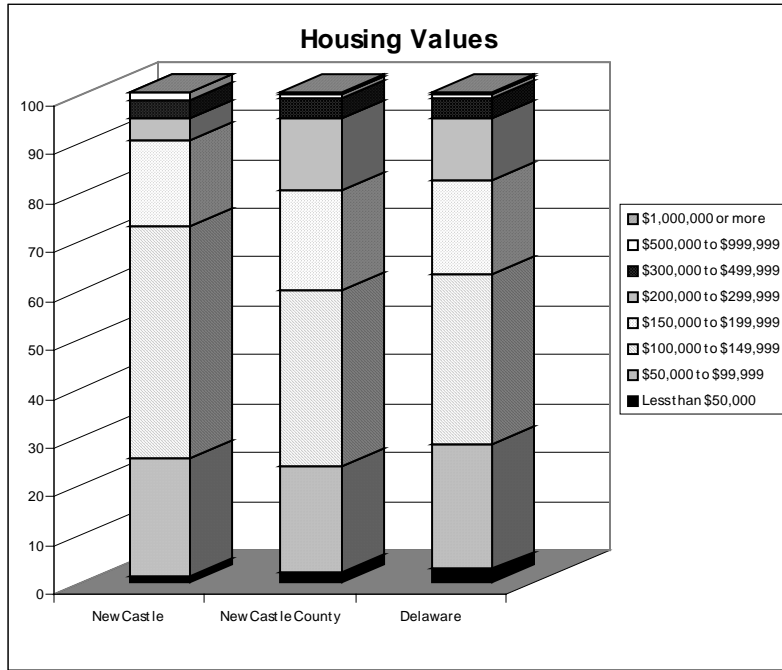
Table 14 depicts the 1990 and 2000 median housing values for New Castle, New Castle County and Delaware. Between 1990 and 2000, median housing values increased by approximately a third in the City of New Castle and the State and by 24% in the County. Table 15 compares the housing values in New Castle, New Castle County and Delaware in 2000. While the largest price range for all three governmental entities is \$100,000 to \$149,999, this particular segment is larger New Castle than in either the County or the State. In contrast, the City has a much smaller percentage of homes valued between \$200,000 and \$299,999 than the County and the State.

Table 14. Median Housing Values



Source: 1990 and 2000 US Census Data

Table 15. Housing Values in 2000.

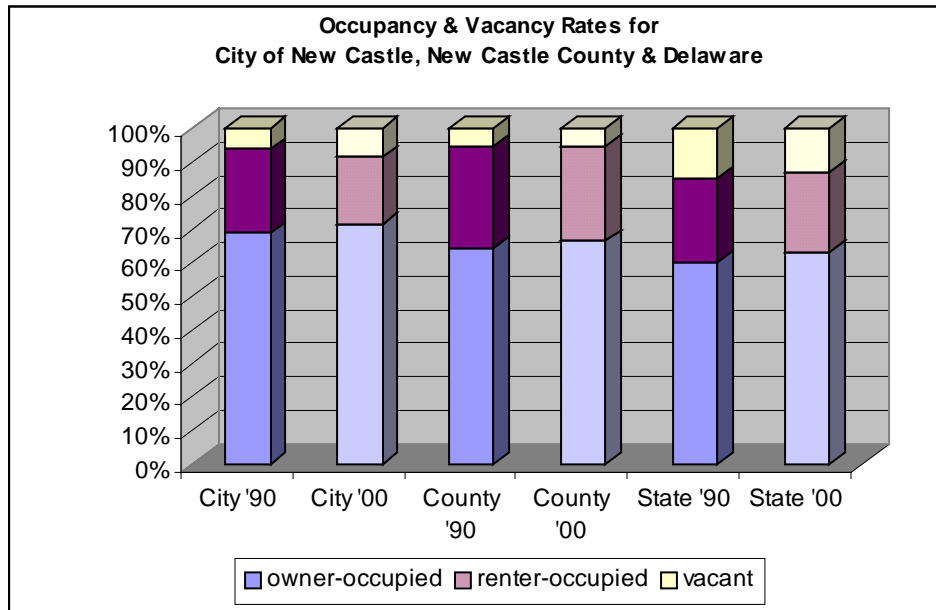


Source: 2000 US Census Data

### Ownership and Vacancy

The City of New Castle experiences a higher owner-occupancy rate than the County or the State. The 1990 rate of 68.8 percent, increased to 71.4 percent in 2000. The number of rental units decreased from 501 to 443 in New Castle, whereas, the number of rental units increased slightly in the County and the State. Vacancies rose slightly for all three governmental entities.

Table 16. Comparison of 1990 & 2000 Owner-Occupied, Renter-Occupied & Vacant Housing.



Source: 1990 & 2000 US Census Data

### Economic Profile

In 2000, New Castle's median income exceeded the County and State's. From 1990 to 2000, the City of New Castle increased its median household income by 43 percent and reduced the number of people who fall below the poverty line. The County saw a reduction in the number of single female heads of household who fall below the poverty line and have children 18 years or younger, while the City experienced a slight increase.

Table 17. 1990 & 2000 Income & Poverty Comparison

	New Castle		New Castle County		Delaware	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
median household income	36,792	<b>52,449</b>	38,617	<b>52,419</b>	34,875	<b>47,381</b>
per capita income	16,111	<b>24,052</b>	17,442	<b>25,413</b>	15,854	<b>23,305</b>
people below poverty level	292	<b>263</b>	32,268	40,710	56,223	69,901
female head of household with children < 18 yrs below poverty level	21	28	4,489	<b>3,991</b>	5,609	6,950

Source: 1990 & 2000 US Census Data

Table 18. 2000 Source of Income

	New Castle		New Castle County		Delaware	
Households	1,863% of total		164,104% of total		247,163% of total	
With wage and salary income	1,531	82.2%	135,957	82.8%	199,690	80.8%
With nonfarm self-employment income	208	11.2%	15,185	9.3%	24,165	9.8%
With farm self-employment income	5	0.3%	1,044	0.6%	3,376	1.4%
With Interest, Dividend, or Net Rental Income	793	42.6%	78,239	47.7%	106,385	43.0%
With Social Security income	548	29.4%	40,712	24.8%	65,306	26.4%
With public assistance income	105	5.6%	7,296	4.4%	12,914	5.2%
With retirement income	417	22.4%	29,157	17.8%	45,999	18.6%

Source: 2000 US Census Data

### Summary and Conclusions

Although New Castle's population has increased by less than one percent since 1970, the number of housing units has increased by over 50 percent. This confirms the nationwide trend of households becoming smaller. New Castle has a racially diverse population and a growing population of people aged 45 years and older. This shift toward an older population has created a workforce of more self-employed people. While the percentage of New Castle residents with bachelor's degrees or better rose by 10 percent, household incomes increased by 43 percent. New Castle's slightly elevated percentage of people who depend on retirement income would suggest that the City should be prepared to offer more elderly-related services.

# Government Services and Community Facilities Plan

## **City Government Format**

The mayor and a five-member council consisting of four members and a president govern the City of New Castle. Voters elect these officials for two-year terms. The council is the legislative branch, charged with passing laws in the form of ordinances, as well as creating and administering the budget. When the council adopts an ordinance, it is referred to the mayor. If the mayor signs the ordinance or does not return it to the council within five days, it becomes law with penalties for violation. If the mayor vetoes an ordinance, the council may override the veto with a 2/3 majority.

Since 1990, the Council has appointed a professional city administrator, who has directed the day-to-day operations of the city, such as the police, fire, public works, and building inspections. The administrative staff utilizes the city hall, located at 220 Delaware Street. The City is in the process of creating a campus for public works, building & code enforcement department, and police departments on Route 9.

## **Other Governing Boards & Commissions**

### Planning Commission

The Planning Commission is responsible for reviewing development plans and making recommendations to the City Council regarding development matters, as well as preparing and adopting the City's comprehensive plan. The Commission consists of nine members who are appointed for three-year terms by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council.

### Municipal Services Commission

The Municipal Services Commission (formerly known as the Board of Water & Light Commissioners) was formed by an act of the State legislature on petition of New Castle's Mayor and Council in 1921. Its roots lay in two private companies, the New Castle Water Works Company and the New Castle Electric Railway. The Board's mission is to provide reliable water and electric services to its residential and commercial customers at competitive rates.

### Trustees of New Castle Common

The 13-member Trustees of New Castle Common oversee a non-profit organization founded by William Penn, which was incorporated in 1762 and reincorporated by the General Assembly in 1792. The purpose of the Trustees is to benefit the citizens, to preserve the historical City of New Castle and to manage land and open space now held in trust. Trustee income is derived primarily from investments and rental properties.

## Historic Area Commission

Council created the Historic Area Commission (HAC) in <year> as a way to encourage and oversee the preservation of the City's historic resources. <Number> people are appointed by <whom> to serve of the commission for <number> years. The HAC approves changes that are made to structures within the historic district, as well as for individual sites that are outside the historic district.

## Tree Commission

The Tree Commission is made of <number> people appointed by <whom> and was formed in <year> in an effort <to accomplish what>.

## Others

To involve citizens in their local government and to seek advice, the Mayor and Council establish various committees and task forces, which may be permanent or formed for specific purposes. Examples of the issues such groups might examine include annexation, health matters, historic buildings, public buildings, parking, code enforcement, trees, and comprehensive plan updates.

## Schools

Table 19. Colonial School District Enrollment

(Last year reported in 1998 plan)

1991 - 1992	'95 - '96	'96 - '97	'97 - '98	'98 - '99	'99 - '00	'00 - '01
10,234	10,230	10,414	10,476	10,564	10,638	10,525

The Colonial School District includes all the schools with the City of New Castle as well as other schools in New Castle County. The 1998 projection for 2001 was 10,078 students; however, actual enrollment was 10,525. There are also several private and religious schools in the City. These schools include New Castle Baptist Academy, which offers classes from pre-kindergarten through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and Saint Peter's Catholic School, which offers classes pre-kindergarten through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

## Public Safety

New Castle receives public safety services from the City's police department, and the Good Will Fire Company offers fire and rescue services.

## Police

Established in 1672, the New Castle Police Department is one of the oldest in the United States. The department's current headquarters is located at the corner of Fourteenth Street and Washington Avenue, but will be moving to the new Municipal Services Campus on Route 9, north of the Ferry Cutoff. The department's personnel include full-time officers and support staff. The following table outlines some of the community programs sponsored by the police department.

Table 20. New Castle City Police Community Programs

<b>Name of Program</b>	<b>Activities</b>
VEST (Various Environmental Situations Training)	A program that teaches participants to be aware of their surroundings, including rape prevention
School & Community Meetings	Topics include drug & alcohol awareness seminars, safety tips, and organizing block watches
Fingerprinting	A program to fingerprint children which is provided in conjunction with the Good Will Fire Co.
Property Check	Arrangements for police officers to visit homes of residents when they are away from the City for extended periods.

## Fire

The Good Will Fire Company provides fire protection within the City of New Castle. Good Will is primarily an all-volunteer organization with between 50 and 600 active members. The company’s headquarters is in the process of evaluating new locations. The department provides fire fighting, basic life support, and water rescue. New Castle County paramedics provide advanced life support.

## Community Services

### Library Services

New Castle County provides library services for New Castle residents. The closest branch is the New Castle Public Library, located at 424 Delaware Street. This library is one of 11 libraries in the New Castle County Library System and the only public library in the City of New Castle. The library is open Monday through Saturday. Programs include weekly story times for pre-schoolers, a summer reading program for school-age children, and other family programs. It offers large print materials and books on audiocassette for visually impaired patrons.

### Health Care

Health care services for New Castle residents are available from a variety of nearby public and private hospitals and clinics. The Medical Center of Delaware, with Wilmington and Christiana Hospitals, is the largest acute care facility. Another acute care is St Francis Hospital in Wilmington. Riverside Hospital is an extended care facility affiliated with the Medical Center. Several other specialized hospitals serve New Castle County, including the Alfred I. DuPont Institute (Children’s Urgent Care and Orthopedics) and Bissel Hospital (Chronic Lung Disease). In addition, several State Health Care Centers and a variety of private agencies provide a range of clinical services. Private facilities, as well as the acute care hospitals, meet emergency needs. Outpatient services are provided by non-hospital affiliated facilities and acute infant mortality care facilities.

## Postal Service

New Castle has two post offices. The New Castle Main Branch is located at 501 Delaware Street, and the Centerpoint Carrier Annex is located at 101 Centerpoint Boulevard.

## Senior Services

The New Castle Senior Citizen Center, Inc. established in 2001 as a private, non-profit entity to provide senior services to the greater New Castle area. Its current location is on Delaware Street, and the future site will be the former Booker T. Washington School on South Street.

# Public Participation

## Summary

The public participation element for the comprehensive plan began with the formation of the Ad-Hoc Steering Committee in 2001, comprised of representatives from various city agencies and commissions, including the Planning Commission, Tree Commission, Historic Area Commission, Trustees of New Castle Common, the Visitors Bureau, and city Municipal Services. The purpose of the Steering Committee was to oversee the comprehensive plan development, and provide input and community expertise as representatives of the city.

Initially, the project team held four public meetings during April and May of 2002 that focused on transportation, annexation, economic development, and general land use planning issues. The Task Force sent meeting invitations to every New Castle household with the monthly water bill and posted flyers. In addition, the New Castle Weekly published an advertisement, the News Journal published a meeting notice, and the City's website maintained a schedule of meetings. Attendance at each meeting ranged from 30 to 60 people. During those meetings, feedback was solicited through a variety of means, such as audience participation and working groups. Comment forms were available for attendants to record their concerns or issues in written form.



**Shawtown Neighborhood Meeting, August 2002**

To further solicit community input, the Task Force took an unconventional approach by to meeting around a band trailer throughout the summer of 2002 in each of the city's neighborhoods: Boothhurst, Buttonwood, Dobbinsville, Shawtown, Van Dyke Village, Washington Park and the downtown. To advertise for these meetings, the Task Force sent notifications to every household with the monthly water bill, and placed an advertisement in the New Castle Weekly. During the neighborhood outreach, the task force and the consultant met with residents every Monday evening throughout July and August in local parks or open

spaces, drawing crowds of about 50 to 100 people. Over the course of several months, the Task Force met with several hundred people to hear their concerns about the future of New Castle.



**Open House, September 19, 2002**

With a great deal of feedback from the many public and neighborhood meetings, the consultant team prepared a colorful brochure outlining draft planning goals and descriptive strategies for the city organized by category: circulation & connectivity, economic development, annexation, aesthetics, recreation, environment, and land use. The brochure also served to invite the public to an open house meeting on September 19, 2002. The public open house consisted of a series of display boards that reflected the goals and strategies in the brochure with the consultant team available to answer questions. At the open house, the public had an opportunity to watch an on-going PowerPoint presentation that explained how the project team developed the goals and strategies for New Castle. See Appendix <letter>. About 100 people attended this event. The Task Force also advertised this open house through a mailing in the water bill, as well as a newspaper advertisement.

## **Results**

The Task Force and consultant team acquired a great deal of information and feedback from the public participation process throughout the course of the information-gathering phase of the comprehensive plan. Upon carefully evaluating the feedback, the consultant team created a series of goals and strategies to effectively reflect the community feedback and address the city's most pressing issues and concerns. These goals and strategies form the foundation of the Action Program, which is the section of the comprehensive plan that recommends the top priority projects for the city to pursue within the next five years.



# Land Use Plan

## **Land Use Issues**

How land is used in a community is largely guided by its land use plan as implemented through zoning ordinances. Zoning ordinances not only determine the types and locations of homes, businesses, stores, and public facilities in a community, but also include guidelines for the size and placement of buildings, and set requirements for parking and other infrastructure. In many ways, zoning ordinances are the most important and powerful tools communities possess, and are intimately intertwined with all aspects of the comprehensive plan.

New Castle's land use pattern is shaped by historic patterns of development and planned efforts starting with its first Comprehensive Plan in 1964. Often these two forces are at odds. Whereas historically, land developed with mixed types of land use within neighborhoods and even buildings, the trend since the Second World War has been to devote whole areas to a single use. Hence, the newer neighborhoods such as Van Dyke Village and Washington Park are solely residential, the office and industrial parks are solely places of work, and most properties along the Ferry Cutoff may only be used for commercial purposes. While the original intent of this type of land use zoning was to separate incompatible uses, such as heavy industry and residential, its effects have been to isolate uses at such a distance that many simple trips must be done by car. Thus, traffic has increased, commercial architecture has changed to facilitate and attract automobile drivers, and former neighborhood stores die off without parking and presence on a major road. Furthermore, without people living nearby (and their "eyes on the street"), many places in New Castle are dark and deserted at night, and feel unsafe unless heavily patrolled.

Lately, planners have looked critically at this practice, and the idea of mixing uses has come back into fashion. It is now felt that neighborhood-scale businesses should be encouraged to mix into residential areas to facilitate walkable living and foster neighborliness. Likewise, larger-scale commercial activity should be made to reflect the physical values of the older town centers with other uses mixed in, walkable streets, attractive architecture, and buildings close to the street and each other.

The task force together with the consultant conducted an intensive study of New Castle's land use issues and ideas for improvement. This study included an intensive community outreach and public involvement program, interviews with community stakeholders, critically examining the findings of the 1998 Comprehensive Plan, and field investigation by city staff and project team. Several goals were developed to update the land use plan:

## **Recommended Land Use Goals**

### **Goal #1: Encourage mixed residential/retail/office uses.**

#### Background

As mentioned above, mixing uses within neighborhoods and even buildings encourages walkable communities, fosters communal activity within neighborhoods, and can create safer “24-hour” places where someone’s eyes are “on the street” at all times. New Castle’s current zoning lacks this category, giving whole sections of town only one use. When non-conforming uses such as a neighborhood store disappears, the parcel’s zoning automatically converts to residential in five years making new commercial use in that location illegal.

#### Strategies

The following are several strategies that could be employed to achieve this goal:

1. Eliminate the long-standing provision that requires vacant commercial properties to revert to residential zoning when unused.
2. Create a new category of “mixed residential/retail/office” zoning that spells out the types of uses permitted in a single parcel and building – such as residences of various densities, neighborhood scale hardware stores, banks, small offices, restaurants, etc.
3. Identify specific parcels that should receive the new zoning category. These should typically be a few centrally located parcels with good access and some on- or off-street parking nearby, preferably with a history of commercial or service use.

### **Goal #2: Develop New Castle’s remaining undeveloped parcels, brownfields and redevelopment areas harmoniously with nearby land uses.**

#### Background

Several parcels of undeveloped land, as well as a few former industrial and commercial sites, remain in New Castle. In order to encourage certain uses, these parcels should be identified and given suggested uses.

#### Strategies

The following are several strategies that could be employed to achieve this goal:

1. Identify remaining undeveloped parcels and rezone if necessary to encourage an appropriate use.
2. Identify former industrial sites and rezone to appropriate uses given their locations.
3. Identify areas where long-term redevelopment of inappropriate and dilapidated uses should be encouraged. Prepare example site plans, identifying new land uses and recommended zoning and setback regulations.

**Goal #3: Encourage the development of areas outside but adjacent to New Castle, or under consideration for annexation, in a harmonious manner with nearby uses.**

1. Identify possible annexation areas and other developable land adjacent to the city and suggest possible land uses.
2. Work with New Castle County to enact appropriate zoning changes and other development controls.

Table 21. Vacant land and suggested land uses.

Map	Property / Location	Area	Land Use Recommendation, Comments	Owner
1	Hoover Universal - between Wash. Park and Centerpoint Ind. Pk.	12.9 acres	Open Space. Provides buffer between Washington Park and Centerpoint Industrial Park	?
2	ABEX, on Route 9 south of Washington Ave.	18.9 acres	Mixed-use. Compatible with surrounding land uses of residential and open space, sufficiently large parcel for residential and commercial uses.	Private
3	Deemer Steel - south side of 9th Street, east of Washington Ave.	5.8 acres	Residential. Compatible with recent development and surrounding uses.	Private
4	north side Basin Rd, opposite William Penn H.S.	68.2 acres	Mixed-use. Compatible with adjacent uses. Only small part along Basin Rd is usable due to wetlands. Could also hold a bike trail from proposed railbed trail to high school.	Trustees
5	Swedes Square	9.7 acres	Residential. Already subdivided for single family homes, though a new plat should delineate wetlands and locate lots away from them.	Private
6	Buttonwood, 7 parcels bounded roughly by Holcomb Lane, CSX tracks, Buttonwood Lane, Route 9	9-10 acres	Open Space. Mostly streams and wetlands, opportunity for extending open space into neighborhood.	Private
7	Rt. 273, to the east of New Castle Middle School	2 acres	Mixed use. Compatible with surrounding land uses.	Trustees
8	Rt. 273 to the east of Carrie Downie ES	6.5 acres	Institutional or mixed-use.	Trustees
9	SE corner Basin Road, Rt. 273	.74 acres	Commercial. Prime location at gateway to city.	?
10	Parcel between Washington Park, Rt. 273, to east of ballfields	11.9 acres	Residential. Some land should be set aside for neighborhood open space.	Trustees
11	Farm bounded by Rt. 273, School Lane	108 acres	Agriculture. Only remaining farm in New Castle area.	Trustees
12	Seven parcels to the north, west, and south of Dobbinsville	72 acres	Open space. Serves as neighborhood open space and gateway to south end of New Castle. Good location for proposed fishing pier and waterfront trailhead.	Trustees
13	SW corner 6th Street and Ferry Cutoff	2 acres	Mixed-use. Part of Ferry Cutoff commercial area.	Private
14	Area bounded by Route 9, Ferry Cutoff, on both sides of 3rd Street	15.7 acres	Open space. Mostly wetlands, serves as attractive gateway to historic area. Could hold residential parking lot.	Trustees/ City
15	Two parcels at foot of Chestnut Street	3.2 acres	Open space. Parking for residents, Narrow Dyke canal fishing.	Trustees/ City
16	Several parcels on Buttonwood Street west of Buttonwood School	3.1 acres	Residential. Compatible with surroundings, but some floodplain issues exist.	Private
17	Trustee property, east side of 6th Street north of downtown	53.5 acres	Open space. Historic cemetery, wetlands. Possible site for waterfront trail extension.	Trustees
18	parcel behind Bull Hill	??? acres	Open space.	Trustees
19	Riveredge Industrial Park, numerous parcels	60 acres	Light industrial, office park.	Riveredge Industrial Park

<<MAP - current zoning and suggested changes>>

# Annexation Plan

## **Annexation Issues**

Communities use annexation as a tool for multiple purposes, including controlling nearby development patterns, securing open space, “cleaning up” a city’s boundary, and strengthening a jurisdiction’s tax base. However, annexation frequently means additional responsibilities and expenses – increased city services, additional city staff, expensive capital projects, and a diminished “small town” feeling.

As recommended in the 1998 Comprehensive Plan, the City of New Castle has annexed numerous parcels in the past five years, extending the city’s southern boundary to Army Creek and its western boundary to Route 13. The new territory included marshland on the north side of Army Creek to be secured as open space, industrially zoned land adjacent to Centerpoint Industrial Park, and commercially zoned land adjacent to Route 13.

Annexing the area along Route 9 may also benefit the City. Several tracts to the south along Route 9 are vacant or undergoing redevelopment. As this serves as a gateway to the city and the county has zoned this land for industrial or heavy industrial uses, the city may want to pursue annexation here in order to protect open space and have control in any development. Furthermore, the trend of residential growth further south along Route 9 indicates that possibilities exist for higher or more intensive uses such as commercial, office, and service uses in the area around Grantham Lane. Annexation here could add to the tax base.

Throughout the extensive public involvement program undertaken with the update to the Comprehensive Plan, residents expressed mixed opinions over whether or not New Castle should expand further. Everyone seemed to agree, however, that some sort of *criteria* be developed that guides future annexation decisions, and the process should be as open as possible. In addition, many felt that remaining “pockets” or “islands” of unincorporated land within the city boundary should be annexed only towards creating an ultimate city boundary.

## **Recommended Annexation Goals**

A study of issues and ideas concerning New Castle’s annexation procedures and possible future annexation areas was featured in an intensive community outreach and public involvement program, as well as interviews with community stakeholders, suggestions from the 1998 Comprehensive Plan, and field investigation by city staff and project team. Several goals emerged from this study:

**Goal #1: Establish citywide annexation criteria, policy, and procedures.**

Background

New Castle's current annexation process is unclear, and lacks specific criteria by which to judge potential annexation areas. Annexations should be revenue neutral or positive, and should work to rationalize the city's edges, reduce inefficiencies in providing city services, and establish an ultimate municipal boundary.

Strategies

1. Establish an annexation policy with specific land use exclusions (i.e., residential) and inclusions (i.e., commercial, office, light industrial, open space).
2. All annexations should require a fiscal impact study, prepared at the expense of the property owner, to determine its potential economic impact on the City.
3. All annexations must require approval by City Council and a recommendation from the Planning Commission as to compatibility of proposed land uses.

**Goal #2: Identify possible areas for future annexation.**

Background

The majority of land surrounding New Castle is currently developed. Several tracts to the south, however, are vacant or undergoing redevelopment. As the county has zoned this land for industrial or heavy industrial uses, the city may want to pursue annexation here in order to protect open space and have control in any development, as well as add to the tax base. In other places, New Castle's small annexations would serve to fully rationalize the border.

## Strategies

The following table presents a list of possible annexation areas and suggestions for future uses:

Table 22. Possible Annexation Areas.

Map#	Property / Location	Area	Description	Purpose	Suggested Use
1	One parcel north of Carrie Downie ES	10.5 acres	Remnant "island" of marshy open space	Remove unincorporated "islands", protect as open space	Open space, recreation
2	Lot within Centerpoint Ind. Pk., along CSX tracks	13.7 acres	"Island" of industrial use	Remove unincorporated "islands", increase tax base	Industrial or light industrial
3	Three small parcels along north side of Buttonwood Dr.	1.1 acres	A few remnant homes oddly left out of city	Rationalize city's edges, more efficient services	Continued residences
4	Rogers Manor - 86 parcels off Route 9	16.0 acres	Small single-family res. subdivision	Rationalize city's edges, more efficient services	Continued residences
5	Six parcels on northern side of Swedes Square	4.6 acres	4 single-family homes & part of Jeff. Farms Pk	Rationalize city's edges, more efficient services	Continued residences, park
6	Schoolside Apartment complex	6.3 acres	Apartment complex	Rationalize city's edges, more efficient services	Continued residences
7	Rear of Carrie Downie ES	5.5 acres	Portion of elementary school site	Rationalize city's edges	School
8	Four parcels forming marshy area south of Army Creek	136.0 acres	Marshy area now zoned for heavy industry, some former industrial sites	Protect as open space	Open space
9	Apex and other nearby parcels north of Grantham Ln, 10 total	78.3 acres	Zoned industrial and heavy industrial, some current heavy industry, plans to build more	Increase tax base, more control over development	Industrial, commercial along Route 9
10	Between Grantham Ln & Tiger Ave 8 parcels south of Rt 9, 15 parcels north of Rt 9	88.5 acres	Industrial and heavy industry zoned land south of Rt 9, several single-family homes north of Rt. 9	Increase tax base, more control over development	Residential, Commercial

Annexation map



## **Inventory of Community Infrastructure**

### Water Supply

Water is supplied to homes and businesses in the city by the New Castle Municipal Services commission (formerly the Board of Water and Light). As reported in the city's 1998 Comprehensive Plan, two wells located on the Penn Farm serve as the principal source of the city's water supply, providing 1.7 million gallons per day – nearly double the city's average annual demand. The Municipal Services Commission also operates a third well, located on Basin Road; however, this well is not currently used as a drinking water source. The city's water supply, therefore, is considered adequate for the "foreseeable future".

The city's water supply is routinely tested and the Municipal Services Commission (MSC) is required to publish an annual "Consumer Confidence Report" regarding the source and quality of all drinking water. Tests prepared for the 2002 Consumer Confidence Report indicate that city water is well within the Environmental Protection Agency's quality standards.

The 1998 plan identified three ongoing or planned activities of the MSC relating to water supply:

- Fire hydrant replacement

In 1996, the Board began a multi-year plan to replace and upgrade fire hydrants throughout the city. This improvement plan was expected to be completed in 2001.

- Identification of new water sources

Although its current source of water is considered adequate, the 1998 Plan reported that the Board of Water and Light continues to drill test wells throughout the city to identify new sources of water. It is anticipated that this activity will continue into the future and, when needed, new wells will be added to the Board's system.

- Wellhead protection

A new concern of the board reported in the 1998 Plan was wellhead protection. This involves controlling development and land use in and around wellheads to prevent contamination. This is an important issue that may merit more attention, and one in which the City can play an important role through appropriate zoning and land use controls. The city can also protect its wells through open space preservation and conservation in wellhead protection zones.

## Wastewater

New Castle County provides sanitary sewer collection (through lines leased from the city) and treatment to residences and businesses in the City of New Castle. The collection system in the city was upgraded in the early and mid-90s, and there have been no further major upgrades or improvements currently anticipated. The County's Wilmington Wastewater Treatment Plant provides sanitary sewer treatment for the City of New Castle. This plant is expected to have sufficient capacity through the year 2010 and planned improvements will provide sufficient capacity to 2020.

## Electricity

As reported in the city's 1998 Comprehensive Plan, the MSC provides electrical power to all homes and most commercial properties in the City, with a small number of commercial properties receiving power from Delmarva Power and Light.

Since the adoption of the 1998 Plan, a number of system improvements have been undertaken, including the upgrading the city's primary voltage from 4 kV to 12 kV to better serve industrial customers in newly annexed areas, and to provide overall improved electrical service to city residents. The city's electric substation was upgraded from 15 kV to 30 kV.

Other on-going initiatives include exploring the provision of fiber-optic cable and the relocation of aerial service underground, when opportunities arise. The MSC is also considering other opportunities to expand its range of service to its clients, including, the provision of telecommunications services, gas, and cable and high speed Internet service.

## Recommended Community Infrastructure Goals

**Goal #1: Contribute to the protection of wellhead areas by coordinating city's open space preservation efforts with the Municipal Service Commission's efforts to identify new public well sites.**

### Background

One of the most effective ways to protect wellhead areas from development-related contamination is to maintain them as public open spaces. This will require the MSC to coordinate new well site location efforts with the City's own efforts to expand its inventory of parks and open spaces. However, such coordination may possibly lead to some cost sharing.

### Strategies

1. Share information between the MSC and the City on potential well sites and open space acquisition activities.

**Goal #2: In addition to all applicable state and county regulations, explore developing and adopting local land use controls that would add further protection for wellhead areas.**

## Background

Unlike many communities who receive their water from distant sources, the City's drinking water is drawn from wells drilled into the Potomac Aquifer located within its own boundaries. Future wells are also likely to be drilled locally. Therefore, the City, through its development regulations can have a direct role in safeguarding its current and future water supply. New Castle County Water Resource Protection Board currently establishes development controls, such as density and impervious coverage limitations, to protect wellhead areas, however, no local land use or development controls currently exist to enhance the protection the city's existing and future wellhead areas.

## Strategy

1. Review the extent of wellhead protection currently provided by the County Water Resource Board and determine if stronger, local regulation is possible.

**Goal #3: Encourage the relocation of aerial utilities below ground through development of a long-term utility relocation plan and through revisions to the city's subdivision and land development ordinance.**

## Background

Aerial utilities detract significantly from the aesthetic appearance of the city's neighborhoods. Additionally, aerial utilities are susceptible to storm damage resulting in more frequent interruption of service. The MSC has relocated some segments of aerial services below ground, when opportunities to do so have occurred; however, there is currently no systematic program to bury overhead utilities.

## Strategies

1. Develop a long-term plan to systematically bury aerial services in the historic area and other neighborhoods currently served by aerial utilities.
2. Determine the practical minimum level of development or redevelopment for which utility relocation would be financially feasible.
3. Based on information developed in the foregoing strategies, develop appropriate revisions to the subdivision and land development ordinance requiring utility relocation as a part of any development or redevelopment activity.

# T ransportation Plan

## **Inventory of Transportation Facilities**

Transportation infrastructure not only facilitates movement of people and goods within and through a community, but also serves to define a community physically and mentally. All residents of a community must have access to places to work, learn, shop, play, and socialize. Similarly, neighborhoods that are well connected, via all modes of transportation, not only retain their attractiveness but also are more aware of taking part in a larger community.

Pedestrian Facilities – Most of the streets in New Castle have sidewalks. Developers are required to provide sidewalks for new developments, and property owners are responsible for maintaining walkways along the frontage of their properties. However, there remain several places throughout the city where sidewalks are lacking, and several others where sidewalks are beyond an owner’s ability to repair.

Bicycle and other Non-Auto Facilities – Bicycles, skateboards, and roller blades are an important mode of transportation, especially for younger residents. The main roads of New Castle have wide shoulders, but almost no dedicated bicycle lanes exist in the city. The best known is the riverfront recreation path that has become an important link for places like Dobbinsville. Bicycle facilities could also provide tourism and economic selling points, especially if the East Coast Greenway – a bicycle equivalent of the Appalachian Trail – connects to New Castle as planned.

Streets and Highways – New Castle is built on several grids of streets and cul-de-sacs arranged around a few main roads such as Route 9, Route 273, and Route 141. From these main roads, there exists quick and direct access to regional highways, including Route 13 and Route 40, as well as Interstate 95 and the Delaware Memorial Bridge. Responsibility for street maintenance and construction is shared between the City (municipal streets) and DelDOT (interstate, U.S., and state roads). The City’s public works department performs routine maintenance on the 20+ miles of municipal streets, providing services such as leaf collection, street sweeping, cutting grass on rights-of-way, marking curbs and streets, and maintaining street signs.

Opinions differ on the adequacy of residential parking in New Castle, but clearly the number of automobiles per household is growing. Commercial parking in the downtown is also adequate except on days with special events or high visitation. Most of the parking lots near Battery Park and the edges of the downtown are dirt and gravel lots.

Bus Transportation – The Delaware Transit Corporation (DTC) operates two bus lines (#15 and #37) that connect New Castle with Wilmington, the Christiana Mall, and other nearby destinations. The DTC also operates a Paratransit service that provides door-to-door service for mentally and physically challenged individuals. New Castle County operates a volunteer-based “WHEELS” program that provides transportation for seniors to doctor appointments.

Rail – One active rail right-of-way exists in New Castle. It is owned by Norfolk Southern, and carries freight as part of the main Delmarva Peninsula Line. A former rail right-of-way that runs

to Wilmington is owned by DelDOT, and the City leases portions of the right-of-way for use as bike path corridor. Amtrak and SEPTA provide passenger rail services from Wilmington.

Air – The New Castle County Airport provides facilities for general aviation and some limited passenger flights. The nearest major airline hub is the Philadelphia International Airport.

### **Recommended Transportation Goals**

A study of issues and ideas concerning New Castle’s transportation facilities included an intensive community outreach and public involvement program, interviews with community stakeholders, suggestions from a 1999 Transportation Plan sponsored by WILMAPCO, and field investigation by city staff and project team.

Currently capital improvements for transportation project are carried out haphazardly. The city should consider creating a transportation committee made up of economic development entities, city officials, and interested residents. This committee would recommend projects and identify funding sources, and monitor project execution. This has resulted in the formation of several goals to enhance the circulation and connectivity within the city:

#### **Goal 1: Expand bike and pedestrian connections and facilities throughout the city.**

##### Background

New Castle is known for its waterfront recreation trail, but the rest of the city suffers from a lack of dedicated bicycle connections - a useful means of transportation in a city the size and density of New Castle. Likewise, though sidewalks exist throughout the town, their absence in places where auto traffic is given precedence hinders pedestrian movement.

##### Strategies

1. Construct new off-street paths and sidewalks to connect residential neighborhoods with commercial and recreational amenities, as well as other neighborhoods.
2. Incorporate new connections into plans for East Coast Greenway.
3. Add bike lanes and appropriate signage to roadways to enhance bicycle mobility and safety.
4. Create a community biking map identifying all bicycle routes & trails.
5. Replace any sidewalks that are beyond repair to improve pedestrian circulation.

**Goal 2: Clarify regional and local traffic patterns throughout the city.**

Background

Though congested at peak times in certain locations, New Castle's roads adequately serve the city. Issues such as speeding, cut-through traffic, pedestrian safety, and the presence of trucks on residential streets, rather than capacity, are the main concerns.

Strategies

1. Install clear signage on Route 9 (New Castle Avenue, Ferry Cutoff, and 7th Street) to direct through-traffic onto designated routes and off local streets.
2. Prohibit large trucks from utilizing small city streets, such as 6th Avenue and Delaware Avenue, with weight limit signage and enforcement.
3. Redesign Route 9 intersections at major entrances to the city to physically direct traffic away from the core residential areas.
4. Create a Route 9 bypass of the downtown south of Dobbinsville and Washington Park.

**Goal 3: Redesign streets and intersections to reduce speeding and cut-through traffic, while improving pedestrian safety in all city neighborhoods.**

Strategies

1. Provide enhancements at intersections, such as curb extensions, reduced curb radii, median refuges, crosswalk treatments, and pedestrian signals, to improve pedestrian safety.
2. Reduce street cross sections through narrower cartways or pavement striping to slow traffic.
3. Install new sidewalks, street trees, and decorative lighting to create pedestrian-oriented streets and thoroughfares.

**Goal 4: Formalize and optimize the existing parking supply.**

Background

Though the population of New Castle is staying relatively constant, the number of cars per household is increasing. This, along with increased tourism in the historic district and visitation of amenities such as Battery Park, underlies a need for more parking. Improvements to existing lots should be enough to meet the current demand, but future lots may be needed.

## Strategies

1. Create new visitor and/or employee parking areas on the fringes of the Historic District.
2. Consider a parking permit system for residents in the Historic District that better manages visitor parking.
3. Improve/maximize parking at Battery Park through paving and striping, particularly at 3<sup>rd</sup> and South Streets.
4. Explore opportunities to share existing off-street parking to increase parking supply capacity in the Historic District.
5. Improve signage to direct visitors to designated parking areas.
6. Enforce multi-vehicle parking per household on residential streets.

Table 23. Transportation Improvements

Map	Project / Location	Length / Size	Description	Cost Estimates*
1	Pedestrian and bike improvements along Route 9 from 6th Street north to city limits.	6,100 feet	Add sidewalks, paint crosswalks, bike lane stencils.	\$250,000
2	Create bike path along former railbed from Rt. 273 to 7th Street.	1,500 feet	Paved path to connect neighborhoods with Battery Park and future East Coast Greenway.	\$200,000
3	Clearly indicate state through-routes.	n/a	Improve directional signage for Route 9 and Route 13, directing through traffic around downtown.	\$10,000
3	Streetscape, traffic calming on Washington Street from 7th Street to Rt. 273	2,300 feet	Narrow lanes, add sidewalks, trees, lighting, crosswalks, curb extensions, stripe parking, bike lanes.	\$800,000
4	Streetscape Ferry Cutoff from Delaware St. to 6th St. Intersection improvements at Delaware St. and 6th St.	1,400 feet	Narrow lanes, add sidewalks, bike lanes, trees, lighting. Reconfigure intersections to right-angle meetings, improve pedestrian crossings.	\$600,000
6	Traffic calming on 6th Street from South St. to Chestnut St.	2,200 feet	Narrow lanes, crosswalk treatments, curb extensions, stripe parking, bike lanes.	\$240,000
5	Pedestrian crossing, streetscape, traffic calming on 7th Street through Dobbinsville.	800 feet	Narrow lanes, add sidewalks, trees, lighting, crosswalks, curb extensions, stripe parking, bike lanes.	\$300,000
6	Improve visitor parking lots at Battery Park.	60 spaces each	Pave, stripe, and sign dirt lots at foot of South Street, and along southern end of 3rd Street.	\$60,000
7	Improve downtown resident parking lots.	80 spaces	Pave and sign dirt lot at foot of Chestnut Street.	\$30,000
8	Improve downtown business parking.	n/a	Encourage businesses to share parking, improve directional signage for visitor and park parking.	n/a

\* construction only

<insert transportation map>

# C Community Character

## Physical Conditions

The City of New Castle began in the mid-seventeenth century as a small riverfront Dutch fort, a challenge to Swedish hegemony over the Delaware River. As it later grew into the state's first capital and significant commercial port, it remained a compact city, the result of environmental constraints, traditional town planning practices, and the city's unique belt of common land that once stretched over 1,000 acres along its northern and western borders. The first major expansion outside the traditional historic core occurred circa World War II, when the city released significant portions of New Castle Common for development. The city is now girdled on its northern and western boundaries by sprawling, post-war residential subdivisions, the New Castle County Airport, and a number of commercial complexes. Modern New Castle as a whole takes a somewhat linear form, with the Delaware River forming a central focus for the city's historic development, and Route 9 serving as the principal linkage between the historic core and more recent suburban development.

Although encompassing a relatively small land area of just over three square miles, the City of New Castle is surprisingly geographically diverse. The city's major elements include:

- A compact, intact historic downtown area dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, containing a mix of residential and nonresidential land uses in a highly pedestrian-orientated built form;
- 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban-style residential subdivisions on the periphery of downtown and arrayed along Route 9;
- Sizeable industrial parks, such as the Riveredge and Centerpoint, containing a mix of light manufacturing, distribution and office space;
- Great swaths of environmentally sensitive areas and open space, including 4 miles of river frontage, which have historically defined the city and are important components of its civic identity.

As mentioned above, natural features such as the river and associated wetlands have defined both the physical boundaries and unique identity of New Castle throughout its history. These same features, such as wetlands along the Narrow Dyke Canal, now create natural barriers between the historic core of the city and later development. Mid-century subdivisions such as Van Dyke Village and Boothhurst, and contemporary development in the Buttonwood neighborhood are linked to the historic core solely by highways.

Where streets in the City's network could serve to connect neighborhoods, they also fail for reasons of design and function. For example Washington Street, an important segment of Route 9's somewhat erratic sojourn through the City, could serve to link Washington Park to Shawtown. Instead, its heavy traffic volume, including truck traffic, essentially cuts these communities off from each other. Where Route 9 is in close physical proximity to well-established neighborhoods, such as the Ferry Cutoff area, its highway-oriented design and lack of sidewalks and other pedestrian and bicycle amenities does not relate to the existing setting.

The physical disconnect between the city's many neighborhoods is further compounded by the celebrity of the historic district, creating among many residents of the city's outlying neighborhoods a (perhaps predictable) perception that the downtown area receives preferential treatment and attention. Thus, the city's natural and man-made boundaries also serve to reinforce perceptions of social and economic separation.

In sum, the great physical planning challenge of the future will be to identify and implement community development initiatives that better weave together the city's disparate neighborhoods and achieve improved physical and social interconnections between outlying areas, the historic center, and the city's most significant open space asset: the river. A number of strategies for greater connectivity are discussed in detail in the transportation, open space and recreation, and community and economic development sections of this comprehensive plan. As the City plans its final annexations and stretches to fill its ultimate corporate boundaries, the great task for New Castle's fifth century of existence will be the consolidation and unification of its many parts into a seamless, fully integrated, single New Castle. It is a worthy challenge for one of America's greatest historic communities.

# Historic and Cultural Resources Plans

A portion of downtown New Castle was declared a National Historic District in 1967. Bounded by Harmony Street, The Strand, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Delaware Street, the district contained many fine examples from the Colonial, Federal and Victorian periods. In 1984, the district expanded to include the area roughly bounded by the Delaware River, the Broad Dike, 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and Penn Streets. Within that period, eight buildings and sites were also individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the only nomination in recent years is the Penn Farm located on Frenchtown Road and listed on the National Register in 1997. The following is a list of all resources within New Castle currently determined eligible for the National Register:

Table 24. Resources eligible for the National Register.

<i>Property Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Year Listed</i>	<i>Year Built</i>
1 Amstel House	Delaware and 4th Streets	1977	1783
2 Glebe House	Delaware Route 9	1973	1820
3 The Hermitage	Delaware Route 273	1973	1801
4 Lesley-Travers Mansion	112 W. 6th Street	1973	1855
5 New Castle Historic District	Bounded by Harmony Street, The Strand, 3rd Street and Delaware Street	1967	Various
6 New Castle Historic District	Bounded by the Delaware River, the Broad Dike, 4th, 6th, 7th and Penn Streets	1984	Various
7 New Castle Ice Piers	Delaware River	1982	1803
8 Old Courthouse	Delaware Street between 2nd and 3rd Streets	1972	1730
9 Penn Farm	807 Frenchtown Road	1997	
10 Stonum	9th & Washington Streets	1973	1830
11 Swanwyck	65 Landers Lane	1977	

New construction and the modification or demolition of existing buildings located within the historic district are subject to the review of the Historic Area Commission. Building permits are not issued for work in the historic area unless a historic review certificate has been obtained.

## Recommended Historic Preservation Goals

**Goal 1: Develop updated and enhanced design standards for development within the historic area.**

### Background

The city's current historic guidelines handbook provides an excellent overview of conditions in the historic area. Many current issues reviewed by HAC are not addressed within the handbook, or could be more specifically addressed. Current HAC policies should be codified within enhanced guidelines to provide more specific restoration, rehabilitation, or alteration guidance for both HAC and property owners.

## Strategy

1. Prepare updated Historic Area design guidelines that provide additional guidance, options and alternatives to property owners.

### **Goal 2: Develop strategies to protect resources outside of the historic district.**

#### Background

Presently, a number of important historic resources are located outside the historic area. This includes both isolated structures as well as entire communities, such as Dobbinsville, which may qualify as historic districts. Currently, the Historic Area Commission (HAC) operates with a series of un-codified policies governing areas. Measures should be taken to afford greater protection for these historic assets, including the codification of these standards.

#### Strategies

1. Conduct a historic survey to update and augment the City's historic inventory. Explore expanding the existing historic district or creating new districts.
2. Explore the potential benefit of expanding applicability of the Historic Area Guidelines to resources outside of the historic district.

### **Goal 3: Encourage greater coordination between the activities of the Historic Area Commission and the city's overall planning efforts.**

#### Background

In addition to evaluating permit applications for historic structures, the HAC also has jurisdiction over urban planning and design issues within the Historic Residence and Historic Commercial Zoning Districts, including the determination of minimum lot area; minimum lot width; maximum lot depth; maximum percentage of building bulk; maximum building length; and front, rear and side setbacks; vehicular circulation, and parking. While in all of the city's other districts these regulations are codified, within the historic area these standards are at the discretion of the HAC on a per property basis. Furthermore, despite the fact that the City Planning Commission and the HAC share planning responsibilities, there is little formal coordination between the two bodies and the potential exists for conflicting planning agendas.

The autonomy of the HAC is partly a by-product of the evolution of the city's government from a commission to a city manager system, and partly the result of the city's early strong support for historic preservation. It is more typical in modern governance structures for historic commissions to function as advisory agencies to local planning commissions to ensure coordination with the larger community plan.

## Strategies

1. Review the operation and organizational relationship between the City Planning Commission and the Historic Area Commission to ensure greater coordination between the two agencies.
2. Codify regulations within the Historic Residence and Historic Commercial Zoning Districts to ensure consistent control over the historic resources.
3. Establish an ordinance delineating the criteria under which an application before the Historic Area Commission would be referred to or subject to the review of the Planning Commission.

# Community Design Plan

Urban design analysis, though in the past not a major feature of comprehensive planning efforts, is increasingly appreciated as a necessary part of ensuring a high quality of community life. General land use designations, economic development policies, and transportation and infrastructure improvement recommendations do not in themselves assure the emergence of places of quality. More detailed instructions in the form of specific urban design guidelines and standards are required to transform planning goals into desired physical realities. Moreover, post war, suburban-style zoning regulations that prescribe minimum standards of performance have effectively delivered exactly that. Alternatively, place-making, human-scaled urban design standards can help to produce highly desirable, pedestrian-oriented places of quality.

## Recommended Community Design Goals

### **Goal 1: Incorporate detailed urban design standards into the city's development controls to assure that high quality new development.**

#### Background

A common criticism voiced during the intensive public involvement process preceding the establishment of this plan was that recent development has not been very high quality, that it lacks architectural merit and does not respect the historic built form of the city. A major contributing factor to the quality of new development is the city's weak zoning and land use regulations that prescribe minimum standards of performance rather than requiring excellence in design.

#### Strategies

1. Revise the city's zoning and land development to incorporate state-of-the-art urban design standards.

### **Goal 2: Improve and maintain public spaces and streetscapes in all of the city's neighborhoods.**

#### Background

While private developers have a major role in creating the built form of any community, local governments have an equally important role in creating parks, open spaces and streetscapes, which together comprise the "civic landscape". Well designed and maintained parks and open spaces, and attractive streetscapes significantly contribute to the positive image of a community. While many streets in New Castle, especially in the downtown area, benefit from graceful shady trees, pedestrian-oriented lighting, and attractive walking paths, these desirable attributes do not extend to all of the city's neighborhoods.

#### Strategies

1. Establish and adopt uniform streetscape standards for all neighborhoods in the city.

2. Coordinate local and state roadway improvement projects to include streetscape improvements.
3. Require streetscape improvements for all development and redevelopment projects, even if phased incrementally.

**Goal 3: Reinforce community identity with attractive gateways at the city's edges.**

#### Background

Another area of common concern is the appearance of the City's edges, particularly its principal gateways. New Castle's current main entrances consist of auto-oriented suburban sprawl, commercial strip malls and billboards belying the fact that just beyond lies a national architectural treasure. New Castle, sadly, is not alone in this condition. Many of the nation's other great historic cities and towns, like Beaufort and Charleston, South Carolina also lack relationships between the historic core and the surrounding modern development. But gateways and edges are important. They help to define and reinforce community identity and present a positive image of civic pride.

#### Strategies

1. Engage the service of a landscape architect or urban designer to develop specific designs to enhance all of the city's physical gateways.
2. Coordinate gateway development with all City annexation activities.
3. Coordinate gateway enhancement with state and local roadway improvement projects.
4. Require developers to incorporate gateway improvements as part of their proposals.

**Goal 4: Establish requirements for landscape buffers to screen residential neighborhoods from more intense land uses.**

#### Background

Historically, worker housing took its place near industrial sites, allowing easy pedestrian communication between home and the work site. Dobbinsville, dating to the end of the nineteenth century is an important local example of this traditional pattern of development. Today, the smokestack industries of the past have largely vanished from the landscape, replaced by so-called "clean industries" of fabrication and assembly, research and development, pharmaceuticals and warehousing and distribution. Although the air, water and noise pollution that characterized industrial operations of the past is not a major concern with modern industries, there are other negative impacts associated with large-scale commercial operations that merit special planning and design attention, including visual and traffic impacts.

## Strategies

1. Revise existing zoning and land use regulations to incorporate extensive landscape and buffering requirements.
2. Revise existing zoning and land use regulations to incorporate traffic impact and appropriate mitigation requirements.

# Economic Development Plan

The City of New Castle possesses a very diverse local economy, including traditional businesses such as local retail and commercial uses, offices, and industrial operations, and a number of hi-tech, information age businesses, such as Amazon.com fulfillment center that opened in 1998. Another important component of the local economy is tourism. Visitors are attracted year-round to the City's rich architectural heritage, museums, parks and open spaces.

Based on field investigation, a citywide economic development workshop, and comments received from the community during the intensive community outreach program preceding this plan, several areas of focus for future economic development planning emerged:

- There is a strong need to encourage more local retail opportunities within the city. A survey conducted in 1993 indicated that 70% of respondents were dissatisfied with local shopping opportunities. It appears that conditions have not improved and that coordinated action on the part of the city and business leaders will be necessary to improve the situation.
- Former industrial sites and other brownfields represent an important redevelopment opportunity and should be brought back into productive reuse. Such sites may be opportunities to provide new neighborhood retail and mixed-use developments.
- There is a need for greater coordination of the City's tourist industry to better manage impacts on local residential neighborhoods.
- Greater attention must be given to the impacts of industrial development on residential neighborhoods. Stronger aesthetic and buffer standards must be developed.

## **Recommended Economic Development Goals**

### **Goal 1: Encourage the growth and diversity of neighborhood scale businesses.**

#### Background

There has been a significant loss of neighborhood retail in the City of New Castle as a result of changing trends, including the continuing evolution of the downtown from a local service to a tourist economy, and the elimination of commercial zoning in the city's neighborhoods. The lack of neighborhood retail diminishes the quality of life of local communities and encourages greater reliance on the automobile. The availability of neighborhood retail, not only enhances the convenience of local residents (especially those who do not own a car or because of age or infirmity are unable to drive), it also diversifies the local economy and provides local employment opportunities.

## Strategies

1. Create a new economic development entity composed of local business owners, city officials, civic leaders and residents to provide leadership for economic development activities in New Castle.
2. Perform a market analysis should be to identify the types of local retail businesses for which there is strong market demand in the City of New Castle.
3. Seek to recruit businesses and entrepreneurs to the city through a coordinated marketing campaign designed to attract new locally oriented businesses.
4. Simultaneous to the aforementioned steps, reevaluate the current zoning ordinance to eliminate the long-standing provision that requires vacant commercial properties to revert to residential zoning. Additionally, as recommended in the land use component of this plan, rezone for neighborhood retail or mixed- use areas within or adjoining the neighborhoods that may be suitable for local commercial activity.

### **Goal 2: Redesign portions of Route 9 and the Ferry Cutoff as a pedestrian-oriented commercial district.**

#### Background

The Ferry Cutoff currently contains a number of retail and local commercial land uses and is located within easy walking distance of many of the city's neighborhoods. However, due to the present auto-oriented arrangement of land uses, and the almost total lack of pedestrian amenities, this portion of the city is not safe, convenient or attractive to pedestrians. Therefore, patrons who may live just blocks away are compelled to drive to businesses located in this area. Furthermore, as a principal entrance to the city, the Ferry Cutoff presents an unwelcoming and unattractive gateway. As the City's historic downtown continues to evolve into a tourist-based economy, the redesign of Ferry Cutoff offers the possibility of creating a new main street for New Castle.

#### Strategies

1. Revise the current zoning district regulations for the Ferry Cutoff (or create entirely new ones) to incorporate design standards that will foster pedestrian-oriented development and redevelopment along the corridor.
2. Redesign the streetscape along the entire length of the corridor to incorporate pedestrian-oriented streetscape improvements
3. Implement the traffic calming and vehicular circulation improvements recommended in the 1999 Transportation Plan

**Goal 3: Improve the management and infrastructure of the city's tourism industry.**

Background

An increasingly important component of the city's economy is tourism. The downtown, which is both a national architectural treasure and a National Historic Landmark, attracts visitors year round to visit its historic homes, museums, parks and open spaces. There is little doubt that New Castle will continue to be an important tourist destination. However, there is equally strong sentiment that the historic district should also remain a livable and viable residential neighborhood. Reconciling these sometimes divergent functions requires a more coordinated approach to managing tourism and its impacts on residential neighborhoods, and balancing the needs of residents and visitors. An important component to help direct this process would be to complete the interpretive record of the historic New Castle experience. While the city hosts a number of museums and historic homes, there is presently no point of overall orientation or comprehensive overview or interpretation of the city's entire, rich history. Filling this gap in the narrative record would be beneficial both to residents and visitors alike by increasing the understanding and appreciation of the full scope of the City's four centuries history.

Strategies

1. Sponsor the creation of new, nonprofit corporation dedicated to providing leadership for the improved management and further development of the city's tourist industry.
2. Retain the services of an appropriate consultant to prepare a strategic management plan for the historic area, identifying all needed facility and programmatic improvements.
3. A major component of the strategic management plan should be an educational/interpretive plan for the historic area.

**Goal 4: Protect residential neighborhoods by improving design standards and directing new industrial development to existing industrial parks.**

Background

A number of concerns were raised during the intensive public involvement program that preceded the preparation of this plan relating to impact of industrial land uses on residential neighborhoods. Concerns included the encroachment of industrial uses on residential neighborhoods, the lack of buffering, and the impact of increased truck traffic.

Strategies

1. Limit the development of industrial land uses to areas currently zoned for this use and discourage the development of new industries on former industrial sites near residential neighborhoods.
2. Revise the city's zoning and land development regulations to incorporate new buffer and aesthetic design standards.
3. Evaluate the extent to which current zoning and land development regulations would permit the intensification of development within existing industrial parks

**Goal 5: Encourage the sustainable redevelopment of industrial properties in the City.**

Background

The City contains a number of existing and former industrial sites that represent an important redevelopment opportunity for New Castle. The redevelopment of these sites can achieve a number of goals, including the productive re-use of vacant or marginally used land, the provision of new uses that may meet local demand (i.e., neighborhood retail), and the environmental cleanup of contaminated sites. The redevelopment of such sites should also seek to respect the scale of adjoining areas, especially in the case of residential neighborhoods.

Strategies

1. Rezone existing brownfields for mixed-use or other commercial uses that are suitable in the context of adjoining land uses.
2. Develop design standards to ensure that brownfields redevelopment respects the character of adjoining neighborhoods.

<insert economic development & redevelopment map>

# R Redevelopment Plan

While the annexation of additional territory has traditionally been New Castle's source of new economic development and community growth, opportunities for further geographic expansion are increasingly limited. Constrained by existing residential neighborhoods to the north and the west, and bounded by the river to the east, the City's only potential for additional annexation lies to the south. However, even southern expansion would be limited, thus it appears that the city's ultimate boundary may be taking shape. Once the additional annexations recommended as a part of this plan have been incorporated, the city must begin looking inward for new development and redevelopment opportunities.

## Recommended Redevelopment Goals

**Goal 1: Productively re-use vacant and marginally used land to achieve the city's overall community and economic development goals.**

### Background

The City of New Castle contains a number of vacant and marginally utilized tracts of land, and a number of former industrial or "brownfield" sites; which – though perhaps eyesores today – could be transformed into new community and economic development opportunities. In addition to offering potential sites for new retail, commercial, office, research and development, and other clean industries, other community development goals, such as the provision of new parks and open spaces, could also be achieved through the redevelopment of these properties.

An important recent example of the productive reuse of a brownfield site is the planned redevelopment of a portion of the Deemer Steel site for multi-family housing. This project will expand the Shawtown residential community and include amenities that will enhance the overall appearance of the adjoining neighborhoods, such as streetscape improvements. The redevelopment is also contextually appropriate, and respects the physical scale and character of adjoining areas. Similar future redevelopment projects can likewise contribute to the improvement of existing neighborhoods.

Following is an inventory of vacant or marginally used tracts of land, which appear to be the primary sites suitable for redevelopment within the city. Included as well are recommendations for future land uses.

### Strategies

1. Create and maintain an inventory of all vacant and marginally used lands suitable for redevelopment. (See Table 21, Vacant Land and Suggested Land Use and accompanying map on pages 24 – 25.)
2. Integrate and coordinate the park and open space development program, recommended in this comprehensive plan, with the city's redevelopment planning.

3. Consider the creation of a redevelopment committee to coordinate the marketing and promotion of redevelopment sites.

**Goal 2: Adopt appropriate zoning and land development controls to facilitate the reuse of vacant and marginally used land, and ensure that the redevelopment of such sites respects the character of adjoining neighborhoods and areas.**

#### Background

A number of potential redevelopment sites within the City of New Castle, including former industrial operations, adjoin residential neighborhoods or environmentally sensitive areas, reflecting historic land use patterns that today would be considered undesirable. To ensure that the redevelopment of these sites does not negatively impact adjoining areas, it is essential the City institute appropriate zoning and design controls.

A further consideration is that current zoning may prohibit the reuse of viable development sites. For example, the historic practice of rezoning vacant commercial properties to residential zoning may be inhibiting the re-emergence of suitable local commercial enterprises.

#### Strategies

1. Limit rezoning of redevelopment sites adjoining residential and environmentally sensitive areas to compatible land uses such as: residential, neighborhood commercial, and professional offices providing local services (doctors, dentists, accountants, real estate agents, etc.).
2. Adopt appropriate land uses controls to ensure that redevelopment sites are sensitively developed to respect the scale, character and built form of adjoining neighborhoods.

**Goal 3: Develop and adopt long-term redevelopment vision plans for the Ferry Cut-off and the 7<sup>th</sup> & South Street areas.**

#### Background

While the reuse of currently vacant land should be a primary concern, the City's redevelopment planning should also encompass sites that may be currently occupied but for which there may ultimately be a more productive or beneficial use. At least two areas of the city appear to meet these criteria:

- The Ferry Cutoff

As previously discussed in the Economic Conditions section of the comprehensive plan, the auto-oriented commercial district along Route 9 offers the opportunity to be redeveloped as a new pedestrian-oriented "main street" providing primarily local goods and services and presenting a gateway worthy of the City of New Castle. The re-planning of this area should seek to encompass and integrate the development of new community facilities, such as the police and fire department, further north along Route 9.

- 7<sup>th</sup> & South Street

Currently a mix of commercial and non-residential lands possessing dramatic vistas of the river, this area directly adjoins the southern boundaries of the downtown area and Battery Park. While it is likely that the currently land use pattern in this portion of the city could continue indefinitely, it is easy to envision this area as a new residential neighborhood, extending the built-form, character and scale of the historic district southward. This area could become a new, dynamic extension of downtown,

### Strategies

1. Develop and adopt a long-term redevelopment vision for the Ferry Cut-off and 7<sup>th</sup> & South areas, including designation of appropriate zoning and land use recommendations, and the identification of physical improvements necessary to better integrate these areas into the fabric of the city.
2. Coordinate state and local transportation improvements to achieve better pedestrian linkages between these areas of the city and existing adjoining neighborhoods.

# Housing Plan

## **Inventory of Housing**

New Castle is an architecturally diverse community. First settled in the mid- 1600s, New Castle's housing stock dates from the colonial era to the present day, resulting in an unusually wide range of housing styles. The original part of the city and its associated housing is known as the historic district. Newer neighborhoods have developed concentrically around the historic core, especially during the post-war boom of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A mixture of large detached homes and row homes characterizes housing in New Castle's historic district. The houses date from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, including an impressive array of Colonial and Federal-era homes, with late nineteenth century Victorian styles and later Colonial Revival-style homes built throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Very recent construction includes a group of new town homes built at the northern end of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. In general, the housing stock of the historic district is well maintained. All modifications to buildings within the historic district must be reviewed by the Historic Area Commission, which assists in maintaining the attractive appearance of the housing stock.

Just west of the downtown historic district is Shawtown. Shawtown is an older residential neighborhood of two- and three-story row houses constructed primarily in the mid 1800s. The condition of housing stock in this neighborhood is mixed. Some homes are in poorer condition, and others demolished and infilled with new construction. A vacant and boarded structure at the corner of 9<sup>th</sup> and Young Streets has remained unoccupied for several years. Maintenance seems to be a general problem on some streets in the neighborhood. Construction of new luxury apartments, however, is underway on Washington Avenue as well as new townhouses on Gray Street, so the general housing stock and value of real estate should begin to increase.

Adjacent to Shawtown, across Washington Street, is Washington Park. This development dates to the post-war era, and consists of small, detached homes on several parallel blocks. While most of the homes are in fair to good condition, some are falling into disrepair, so maintenance is an issue. Some residents are parking on front lawns due to an on-street parking shortage. Rentals are increasing in the neighborhood. Washington Park will require assistance for it to remain a viable residential neighborhood.

Buttonwood is another historic neighborhood located on the northern edge of New Castle in the vicinity of Buttonwood Avenue and east of Route 9. This neighborhood is characterized by smaller detached homes. Less dense than the historic core, it contains a mix of historic buildings, including Buttonwood School, and more recent construction. Housing stock quality and maintenance is a problem in Buttonwood, and many homes are in poor condition; however there are no vacant structures. The neighborhood has the potential to decline further, and additional investment in Buttonwood will be necessary for it to return to viability.

Van Dyke Village is another older residential area of New Castle located near the intersection of Route 9 and Moores Lane, and adjacent to two parks. Constructed over several decades, Van

Dyke Village consists of small to large detached single-family homes ranging that are well maintained. Homes along Baldt Avenue tend to be the smallest and oldest, and date from the 1930s and 1940s. Further north and west, such as along 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Van Dyke Drive, the homes are newer and larger, built from the 1950s to the present. Property maintenance is not an issue in this neighborhood, and it appears that Van Dyke Village will continue to thrive.

Boothurst is a newer moderate-income neighborhood just off Route 9 across from Buttonwood. Housing in this neighborhood was completed in the late 1990s and remains in good condition. Property maintenance enforcement should be emphasized to maintain the quality of the residential neighborhood.

Dobbinsville is New Castle's southern-most neighborhood bisected by Route 9. Dobbinsville dates to the mid-nineteenth century, and was constructed as housing for the adjacent former Deemer Steel factory. The neighborhood consists of only three parallel blocks of modest row houses surrounded by open land and recreation area. Homes in Dobbinsville range from well-maintained to deteriorated. Since the neighborhood is historic, improved maintenance and investment will be necessary to maintain and enhance its integrity.

In 2000, approximately 8.5% of the city's housing units were vacant, up from 6% in 1990. Vacant housing includes both abandoned units and those between tenants. Almost two-thirds of New Castle's vacant units in 2000 were rental units (106 of its 187 vacant units). Only 12 of the 187 were rented or sold and not occupied. New Castle has a 78% home ownership rate, while 22% of its total housing units are renter-occupied. This figure is an improvement over the 1990 ownership rate of 69% versus 25% renter-occupied. In summary, vacant housing has risen slightly, while home-ownership has increased as well, reducing the number of renters in the city over the last ten years.

## **Housing Pipeline**

Since New Castle is an established historic city, there is little space within the existing city limits for major new housing construction. New construction is, however, taking place on a large scale in neighboring New Castle County. The new housing underway or anticipated in the City of New Castle is in the form of in-fill housing, where various units are being constructed on scattered vacant lots or parcels.

The following lists housing currently underway, or anticipated new housing in New Castle in the next five years:

- Deemer's Landing luxury apartments at 9<sup>th</sup> and Washington Streets – 144 units
- Townhouses on Gray Street – 12 units
- Senior housing off South Street adjacent to Booker T. Washington school
- Various single-lot infill housing consisting of single family homes

The Deemer's Landing and Gray Street townhouse developments are expected to increase the population of New Castle by 10% when fully occupied.

## **Housing Needs Analysis**

The population of New Castle has declined since 1980, when the city's population was 4,907. Since then, the population was slightly reduced to 4,858 in 1990, and almost stayed exactly the same by 2000 with 4,862 residents. As these figures indicate, there has been no population growth in the city of New Castle since the 1970s, and the city does not anticipate residential growth that would need to be accommodated by new housing. In addition, 2000 Census figures reveal that 8.5% of New Castle's housing stock is vacant. While new developments are underway in the city, they will be drawing outside residents because of their location and amenities, as opposed to satisfying an existing housing shortage in the city.

Although the City of New Castle contains neighborhoods of expensive homes, a sizable portion of New Castle's housing stock could be considered affordable. Thus, the existing housing supply appears to be adequately providing the community with its range of housing needs. While New Castle strives to improve housing in various neighborhoods, the city must retain its share of affordable housing and provide opportunities for home ownership to all its residents for generations to come.

## **Recommended Housing Goals**

### **Goal 1: Increase affordable opportunities for home ownership.**

#### Background

The foundation for improving the housing stock in New Castle is increasing the number of homeowners. Since New Castle is mostly built-out, except for a few pending developments, the city will not be able to provide many opportunities for home ownership in the form of new housing, and the existing housing stock will continue to constitute the majority of the city's housing availability. The key, therefore, will be increasing the availability of housing, particularly affordable housing, throughout the city for potential homeowners. Thus, the need to rehabilitate and maintain the current housing supply and affordability will be particularly critical to attract additional homebuyers to New Castle.

#### Strategies

1. Investigate and advertise financial incentives for reconverting multi-family to single-family units.
2. Promote and advertise financial incentives for potential homebuyers, such as tax breaks or loan assistance, and offer such services to purchasers of all income levels.
  - Property Tax Abatement
  - Acquisition Rehabilitation Loan Program
3. Provide housing education programs for first-time homebuyers.

## **Goal 2: Improve housing maintenance.**

### Background

A primary housing concern in New Castle is improving the maintenance of its housing stock in various neighborhoods. While the city has a housing ordinance and a code enforcement staff, maintenance regulations need to be enhanced. The primary problem involves rental properties, particularly units with absentee landlords that remain neglected for long periods of time. A few years ago, New Castle had a pending ordinance that would require registration and licensing of rental properties so the city could better control and enforce the maintenance of the properties. The ordinance has not yet been passed. To improve the condition of housing citywide, New Castle should direct housing resources toward improved maintenance.

### Strategies

1. Reintroduce the ordinance requiring registration and licensing of rental properties.
2. Enforce existing and new property maintenance codes, particularly for multi-family housing units, and impose fines on violators.
3. Distribute a brochure to all property owners explaining the code requirements for property maintenance.
4. Control housing conversions from owner-occupied to rental through a city moratorium on conversions.
5. Provide home maintenance training programs to educate New Castle residents, particularly regarding historic residences.

## **Goal 3: Improve the integrity of the housing stock through rehabilitation.**

### Background

Another housing concern in New Castle is improving and rehabilitating its housing stock where it has deteriorated. While this problem is not widespread, the city should still strive to encourage housing rehabilitation in all of its neighborhoods to maintain a viable housing stock and improve its overall integrity.

### Strategies

1. Direct City's CDBG funding to targeted areas in need of rehabilitation.
2. Promote and advertise existing rehabilitation grants and loan programs to assist lower-income homeowners with maintaining and repairing their homes.
3. Encourage home improvement programs to provide assistance not based on income.
4. Promote and advertise historic rehabilitation grants for historic housing or housing within the historic district.

5. Provide home improvement training programs to educate New Castle residents, particularly regarding historic residences.
6. Provide a list of suggested reliable contractors for city residents to use for home improvements.

#### **Goal 4: Reduce vacant housing in New Castle.**

##### Background

As 2000 Census figures indicate, 8.5% of New Castle's housing stock is vacant. While most vacancies are rental units, some are rented or sold and still unoccupied. Most of these vacancies occur in "at-risk" neighborhoods, where the potential for disinvestments and spreading vacancies is greatest. As a result, the city should focus its resources for housing improvement in these locations first. Strategies should involve methods to acquire and rehabilitate any vacant housing in the city, and provide it as affordable housing opportunities.

##### Strategies

1. Identify and inventory vacant properties appropriate for rehabilitation.
2. Focus rehabilitation efforts on highly visible corner properties.
3. Solicit housing assistance from local community development corporations to facilitate the rehabilitation process.
4. Direct appropriate financial resources to developers with the means to effectively purchase and rehabilitate vacant housing.
5. Assist developers and/or community development corporations with funding assistance through state and federal tax credit programs.
6. Acquire delinquent vacant properties through eminent domain if necessary.

# Environmental Projection Plan

## Inventory of Critical Natural Resources

Positioned on low-lying ground at the edge of the Delaware River, New Castle contains many environmentally sensitive lands. The shoreline of the river is characterized by a well-defined floodplain that impacts a large area of town. Ideally, the floodplain should remain free from obstructions to preserve the capacity of the river system during floods, yet historically the floodplain has been built on, including in portions of Buttonwood, Penn Valley, Van Dyke

*100-year floodplain in New Castle*



Village, and the downtown. The city now has regulations concerning construction within the floodplain and additional permitting for construction is required through the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC).

Numerous wetlands exist up and down the river's edge, acting as floodwater storage areas and pollution filters as well as habitat for various species of birds and fish. Because of this, the portion of the city to the southeast of Routes 9 and 273 lies in the Coastal Zone and is subject to the state's Coastal Zone Act. The Act forbids heavy industrial uses and requires a permit from DNREC for most other uses.

The issue of stormwater runoff is attached to flood protection and healthy wetlands. New Castle is fairly developed, with rooftops and paved surfaces covering a large proportion of the ground. Because of these impervious surfaces, stormwater tends to run quickly into the wetlands and river, picking up oil and other pollutants, and exacerbating any flooding. There

are ways of lessening this runoff, such as the construction of retention basins and use of porous materials for paving, or creating grassy swales. New Castle is now undertaking a study to quantify the impacts of stormwater runoff.

In addition to pristine natural areas, there are several brownfield sites within New Castle, where former uses have left pollution. These sites can be quite hazardous and responsibility for their cleanliness falls on the property owner, though many times ownership is hard or impossible to track.

### **Recommended Environmental Protection Goals**

In preparing this update, the project team heard issues and ideas concerning environmental protection from a number of sources including the public, community stakeholders and city staff. At several neighborhood meetings, individuals mentioned that their basements and streets easily flooded. Also, residents adamantly supported increasing the amount of green space within the City. Several goals are recommended:

#### **Goal 1: Protect the capacity of the floodplain to carry floodwaters.**

##### Strategies

1. New Castle's current standards for construction call for new construction in the floodplain to not impair its ability to carry floodwaters or increase the height of floodwaters by more than one foot. These should continue to be enforced and amended if necessary.
2. Protect wetlands and woodlands along the river shore and banks from development as these have ecological values associated with flood protection.
3. New construction should utilize stormwater best management practices during the construction phase to alleviate increases of stormwater runoff and decrease of water infiltrating into the water table.
4. Rewrite zoning codes to establish a maximum amount of impervious surface allowed, with increases permitted with utilization of best management practices or low-impact development.
5. Create an open space management plan that includes converting some mown spaces into meadows with native species to reduce the amount of stormwater runoff generated.

#### **Goal 2: Improve drainage and stormwater management throughout the city.**

##### Strategies

1. The New Castle Conservation District is currently completing an analysis of flooding problems in the Washington Park neighborhood. This should be extended to other neighborhoods where flooding is a regular problem.
2. The city's land development ordinances should contain the most state-of-the-art stormwater management regulations and requirements.

## Inventory of Open Space and Recreation Facilities

Parks, open spaces and recreation facilities are essential components of a viable community, and contribute significantly to maintaining and enhancing the value and attractiveness of the residential neighborhoods. Parks and open spaces provide not only play areas and space for sports and recreation, they perform an important community-building function by supporting social interaction.

New Castle, the Colonial School District, and the Trustees of New Castle Common operate and maintain a series of parks, open spaces and recreation facilities throughout the City of New Castle (see Table 25). These parks and open spaces, - especially the New Castle Common and Battery Park – both help to define the city’s physical form and reinforce its unique character. In addition to its physical park and recreation assets, the city offers a modestly priced and popular summer recreation program.

Outside the city limits, county-owned park and recreation facilities, such as Rogers Manor Park and Jefferson Farm Park, are also available to city residents. Another important regional recreational facility is the Coastal Heritage Greenway, a 90-mile corridor along Delaware’s coastline extending from Fox Point State Park and the PA line to Fenwick Island in Sussex County. The Coastal Heritage Greenway passes through the City of New Castle along the Delaware River, extending from the Riveredge Industrial Park, through Battery Park to Army Creek. Currently, a paved trail is available along the river shoreline between Battery Park and the Dobbinsville neighborhood.

Table 25. Inventory of Open Space, Parks and Recreation Facilities.

Park	Location	Acres	Facilities
Battery Park	Terminus of Delaware Street	18.2	Pier; tennis courts; basketball; playground; picnic table; tot lot
Buttonwood Park	Buttonwood & Meehan Streets	0.6	Basketball court; playground
Bull Hill Park	North end of Second Street at waterside	5.1	Basketball court; playground
Carrie Downie Elementary School	Delaware Street	11.2	Baseball & multi-purpose field; playground; picnic tables
Dobbinsville	Route 9 (7th & Clymer Streets)	1	Volleyball & multi-purpose courts; basketball; playground; picnic tables
Fort Casmir	Second Street at the terminus of Chestnut	NA	Open field; horseshoes
Gray Street	Gray & 10th Street	1	Basketball court; playground; picnic tables
New Castle Middle School	903 Delaware Street	20.2	Baseball; football; track & multi-purpose fields
Penn Valley	Holcomb Lane & Booker Circle	2.1	Playground & picnic tables
Van Dyke	New Amstel Ave & 14th Street	3.1	Basketball court; playground; picnic tables

**<insert map of open space /recreation>**

## **Recommended Open Space, Parks & Recreation Goals**

In response to the comments received from the public during the intensive community outreach and public involvement program, interviews with community stakeholders, city staff and field investigation by the project team that preceded the development of this plan, several open space, park & recreation facility goals are recommended:

### **Goal 1: Enhance the maintenance of neighborhood recreational facilities, particularly in Buttonwood, Van Dyke Village, Shawtown and Dobbinsville.**

#### Background

Many of the city's neighborhoods contain local parks, which are important community assets. While a source of community pride, some of these facilities are beginning to age and are in need of modernization, maintenance and other improvements. The ever-increasing responsibilities of New Castle's municipal government suggest that the burden of responsibility for the City's parks and recreation facilities must be shared with other parties, and that a new approach to managing, maintaining and improving the city's park system is needed.

#### Strategies

1. Create a citywide park and recreation facility development program that will inventory and evaluate the condition of all parks in the city and recommend needed improvements, including entirely new facilities.
2. Engage the Trustees of New Castle Common in discussions to determine the extent to which they are able and willing to expand their responsibility to include neighborhood park maintenance and development.
3. Consider the formation of "neighborhood park committees" or a "park stewards" program consisting of resident volunteers to provide leadership for park planning, operation, maintenance and development.
4. Actively involve community members in the planning and design of park improvements to ensure that they respond to local recreation needs and continue to function as true community focal points.
5. Engage community members in fundraising and maintenance to foster a "sense of ownership" for community parks. Organize seasonal clean-up days or "party in the park" annual celebrations to reinforce community interest and support of neighborhood parks.
6. Identify all potential public and private funding sources that are available for park and recreation development.

**Goal 2: Expand local recreational opportunities by creating new neighborhood parks in the Boothurst and Washington Park neighborhoods.**

Background

Both Boothurst and Washington Park communities lack direct access to neighborhood-based recreation facilities. Residents of Boothurst feel that the development of a local park in their neighborhood could serve as a focus for community interaction, and provide a safe play alternative for neighborhood children. Residents of Washington Park expressed the concern that neighborhood children must cross busy streets to access adjacent recreational facilities, and that undeveloped open space that currently exists would be better maintained if developed as a public park.

Strategies

1. In conjunction with Goal #1, evaluate the creation of new facilities to serve these neighborhoods.
2. Actively involve community members in the planning and design of new parks to ensure that they respond to local recreation needs and function as true community focal points.
3. Engage community members in fundraising and maintenance to foster a “sense of ownership” for community parks.

**Goal 3: Explore the need for developing a community center or year-round recreation program oriented toward the city’s youth.**

Background

A concern expressed frequently by the residents throughout the city’s diverse neighborhoods was the lack of a facility or year-round programming oriented toward young people in the City of New Castle. A common sentiment repeated at almost all of the outreach meetings conducted for this planning effort was “there’s nothing for the kids to do”. While feelings were strong on this issue, it is impossible at this level of planning to determine whether actual new facilities or programs are required or if expansion of current services or better communication about existing resources and programming would respond effectively to community needs. As suggested in the city’s 1998 Comprehensive Plan, a “recreation coordinator” to better manage recreation demands may be a more efficient alternative to developing new and possibly redundant programs and facilities. Considering the substantial potential cost implications of a new youth-oriented community center, a detailed study and evaluation of this issue will be necessary.

Strategies

1. Form a task force or subcommittee to sponsor a community-wide forum on the issue in an effort to identify actual need and level of support for the initiative.
2. Identify all currently existing programs and facilities to determine the extent to which existing services can meet the perceived need, or the extent to which expansion or

enhancement of these facilities would satisfy the need for youth programming. Determine the need for a full-time recreation coordinator to better manage and promote existing programs and services.

3. Identify all potential public and private partners, such as schools, churches and existing youth organizations that could potentially provide facilities and new programming to meet any identified shortfall in services.

**Goal 4: Explore the development and potential funding of new community-wide recreation facilities, including:**

- Community swimming pool
- Public fishing pier/and or non-motorized boat
- Greenway and multi-use trail system expansion
- Dog park

### Background

During the community outreach effort, residents requested several specific community-wide recreational enhancements. These included the desire for a community swimming pool, the desire for a fishing pier and/or public boat launch in the southern portion of the city's riverfront, and a general desire for more biking and walking trails – especially where they would inter-connect neighborhoods and improve pedestrian accessibility to the riverfront. Some of these recreational needs may be more effectively met privately, such as the forming a private swim club to reduce municipal liability. Others improvements, such as a new recreational pier could be achieved through public-private partnerships during future development activities along the city's riverfront. Some improvements, such as expanded biking and walking trails could be supported through greenway grants and incorporated into state and local roadway improvement programs. More information on the development of improved pedestrian and bicycle connections is contained in the Transportation Plan element of this document.

### Strategies

1. Incorporate the need for specific community-wide recreational facilities into the citywide park and recreation facility development program that is recommended in Open Space, Parks and Recreation Plan Goal #1.
2. Encourage the formation of a private, non-profit community swim club.
3. Coordinate expansion of greenways, bikeways and multi-use trails with state and local road improvement projects.
4. Seek to incorporate the development of a public recreation pier in future development activities along the city's waterfront.

# Intergovernmental Coordination Plan

Intergovernmental coordination is critical for New Castle to achieve its planning goals. Many of the recommended planning initiatives for New Castle involve other agencies, such as the state or New Castle County, whether it is in the form of securing funding or coordinating physical improvements. In addition, proposed county and state plans in the New Castle area will have a direct impact on the city and its ability to accomplish its priority projects. Coordination among agencies in the key areas of transportation, land use, environmental protection, recreation, and annexation is particularly important because they often impact entities beyond city limits.

The following intergovernmental coordination goals are recommended for New Castle to improve and maintain positive relations with other governing agencies as the city strives to accomplish its overall planning goals:

## Recommended Intergovernmental Coordination Goals

**Goal 1: Establish and maintain cooperative relationships with state and local agencies.**

### Background

The city of New Castle currently deals with various state and local agencies to coordinate project implementation. It is also important for the city of New Castle to coordinate with state agencies for funding, since the state helps finance many infrastructure and other projects. Therefore, the city should establish any new intergovernmental relationships that do not currently exist, and continue to foster existing relationships. Furthermore, agency cooperation will allow New Castle to better involve itself in outside planning activities that may impact the city. The facilitation and success of future projects throughout the city depends on these relationships. The city will need to coordinate with adjacent New Castle County as well as the following state agencies for the associated types of projects:

Table 26. State agencies responsible for associated planning projects.

<b>Improvement Project</b>	<b>State Agency</b>
Transportation	Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) Delaware Area Regional Transit (DART)
Historic Preservation	State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
Economic Development	Delaware Economic Development Office (DEDO)
Environmental	Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC)
All Planning Projects	Office of State Planning Coordination

## Strategies

1. Arrange meetings with the state and county to establish or improve relationships with New Castle, and suggest subsequent regular or as-needed meetings.
2. Prepare and submit a formal memorandum of agreement with New Castle County to define the process for intermunicipal coordination and cooperation.
3. Develop a strategy with New Castle County regarding zoning, subdivision plans, annexation, and the type of development occurring in adjacent areas.
4. Forward all agendas and resolutions from City Council and the Planning Commission to New Castle County and the Office of State Planning Coordination to keep them informed of all planning related proposals and actions.
5. Create a task force or assign representatives to serve on a committee to review development plans or plans of outside agencies that may affect New Castle.
6. Attend meetings of state agencies or New Castle County regarding planning issues that may affect New Castle.
7. Request information on and input into proposed actions of governments that affect New Castle.