

## Executive Summary

Sussex County residents care deeply about their home. They value the county's beautiful natural landscapes, marshes, ocean beaches, farms, and the small-town atmosphere that gives Sussex County its identity and a sense of place. By 2030, the county's population is estimated to grow by 44 percent. This growth will bring change. Many county residents are concerned that more development will change the things about Sussex County that they care about. They want thoughtful development that is balanced and that improves the quality of their lives. They want growth that preserves the county's natural landscape and scenic beauty. They want development that reflects the county's coastal and agricultural heritage. And they want development that gives them choices how where they live and how they get around.

Sussex County is in a good position to shape future development patterns. It has taken an important first step to supporting growth patterns that meet community goals and values by updating its comprehensive plan. As the county moves forward with implementing the plan and revising its development rules and regulations, county leaders have the opportunity to develop in a way that is more consistent with local values and traditions and that provides the amenities that residents desire—more local-serving stores, more jobs, more housing choices, and more transportation choices.

Identifying and protecting the county's open spaces and resource lands will help guide development decisions. Lands to consider protecting include areas that give the county its identity and that perform key ecological functions such as protecting water quality and providing habitat. Maintaining the county's small-town character and scenic beauty will require decision-makers and residents to decide together where they want growth to occur. One option is to direct new growth and development to existing town centers and already developed properties, including infill, brownfield, and greyfield locations. Doing so uses land more efficiently, saves taxpayer money, can create jobs, and is good for water quality because it does not add to impervious surface.

County residents are very concerned about traffic congestion and want more choices in how they get around. County leaders can help expand transportation choices by encouraging compact, mixed-use development and supporting pedestrian-friendly streets and a more connected street network. Compact, mixed-use development provides the critical mass of people that makes places and streets lively and safe and that also makes public transit such as bus or rail more economically viable. Sussex County is familiar with mixed-use development. Some of its oldest and most cherished places, such as Lewes and Milton as well as new neighborhoods like Paynter's Mill, are walkable, compact, and mixed use. County leaders can also support more connected street networks, such as those in Georgetown or Seaford. These grids give residents more route options to avoid congestion and disperse

traffic over multiple roads. A connected street network makes walking and bicycling safer and more convenient because helps to slow traffic speeds and offers more direct routes.

A defining characteristic of Sussex County is its coastal environment. At the most basic level, keeping coastal and inland waters clean means reducing or preventing pollution. How Sussex County develops in the future and how it manages stormwater will have a tremendous impact on the health of the coast and inland waters. The county can protect water quality by adopting a sustainable approach to stormwater management, addressing stormwater at the regional, community, and site scales. At the regional scale, the county could direct development to locations where growth makes sense—town centers, underused parking lots, and already degraded sites—and away from undeveloped natural lands—forests, wetlands, riparian buffers, and open spaces—that naturally absorb, filter, and clean stormwater. At the community scale, the emphasis is on minimizing impervious surface by encouraging compact development. Compact development may reduce building footprints and result in less impervious coverage per unit or per capita than dispersed units. Compact development also often requires fewer miles of roads and parking lots than low-density development, which further reduces total impervious cover. Managing stormwater at the site scale involves strategically integrating green infrastructure (plants, soils, landscaping) into the design of the site to help slow, filter, and absorb stormwater. The county can more effectively manage stormwater at the site level by encouraging green infrastructure techniques, such as rain gardens, pervious paving, or swales into new construction or retrofits of existing streets, parking lots, and buildings. These approaches help manage stormwater runoff in a way that mimics natural processes, is aesthetically pleasing, and can be less expensive to build and maintain.

County leaders have a clear opportunity to respond to their residents' desire for more environmentally friendly development patterns. As the county considers integrating the smart growth and stormwater management strategies discussed in this report, some potential next steps include:

- Adopt land conservation strategies to direct development to land best suited for it while preserving farmland and environmentally sensitive areas. Strategies include conservation easements and transfer or purchase of development rights.
- Increase incentives for compact and location-efficient development to make it easier and more cost effective for developers to build the type of projects residents want. Incentives include streamlined permitting procedures and fast-tracking development proposals that meet the county's goals.
- Reach out to the public to get stakeholder and public support for the site-level stormwater management solutions, many of which may be new to the county. Education and outreach strategies include frequent public workshops on sustainable stormwater management and public tours of existing projects.
- Pursue demonstration projects to showcase site-level sustainable stormwater management solutions and educate people about their benefits. This could involve reaching out to developers and landowners who want such a project on their property or applying approaches to underused paved areas, such as parking lots or vacant properties.