






Chapter 4: Economic Vitality

Economic vitality is the strength, energy, and continuance of Somerset County’s wealth and resources. Economic development refers to a program, a group of policies, or activity that seeks to improve the economic well-being and quality of life. The Somerset County Economic Development Commission (SCEDC) was established by the Somerset County Commissioners by resolution on September 30, 1980, to encourage and promote economic vitality and development for the betterment of all County citizens.

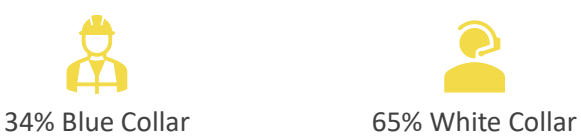
4.1 Economic Demographics – Labor Force

Somerset County has a labor force of 8,868 people, with an unemployment rate of 6.4%.

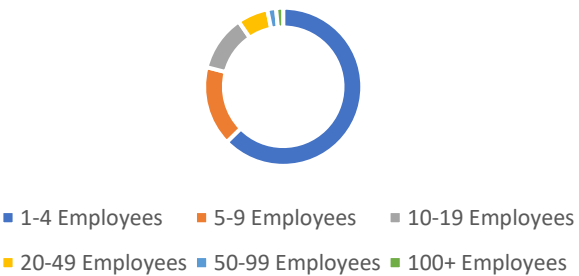
The largest job count percentages by occupation include:

-  Office and Administrative Support – 12.52%
-  Executive, Managers, and Administrators – 11.64%
-  Sales – 9.23%
-  Production Workers – 7.31%
-  Business and Financial Operations – 6.36%

The work distribution of total employees in Somerset County is:



Number of employees at Somerset County businesses are:



The **Somerset County Economic Development Commission's** goal is to increase the economic viability and vitality of the County's business community by creating a positive vision for economic growth. This will be accomplished by attracting new businesses to the county through a dynamic marketing program with business incentives, assisting those businesses already in Somerset County to grow and expand through the various financing programs and workforce development initiatives that are available through the state and local resources, and by encouraging the growth of tourism related activities that will take advantage of the County's water and land terrain natural features.

By developing a concerted effort to work in all three areas of economic development, the Somerset County Economic Development Commission will be able to help improve the employment, personal income, tax base, and quality of life for all the people in Somerset County.

Source: <https://somersectountyedc.org/somerset-county-edcoverview.php>

Economic Demographics Source: <https://business.maryland.gov>- Data – Applied Geographic Solutions and GIS Planning 2022, TaxFoundation.Org 2021 and GIS Planning research.

## 4.2 Strategic Economic Opportunities Analysis

Somerset County Economic Development commissioned Sage Policy Group and Partners to develop a strategic economic opportunities analysis, published in June 2020. The goal of the analysis was to supply policymakers and other stakeholders' guidance and to position the County for more broadly shared prosperity, greater visitation, livelier streetscapes, and fiscal sustainability<sup>1</sup>. The strategic economic opportunities analysis was Part 1 of 3 within the report. One of the key recommendations from Part 1 of the report included focusing particular attention on several promising industries including:

- retirement living and healthcare
- aquaculture, agriculture, food processing, and food distribution
- skilled trades, including those related to construction and manufacturing
- alternative energies
- tourism

As part of the comprehensive plan update process, these promising industries have been evaluated in relation to land use and existing zoning. This examination has assisted in the identification of goals, recommendations, and changes to future land use. Aligning this chapter of the comprehensive plan with economic development planning efforts will advance economic development programs and policies and improve the economic vitality of Somerset County.

### 4.2.1 Existing Land Use and Zoning Overview

Somerset County land use and zoning involve the regulation of use and development of property. The unincorporated area of Somerset County is divided into zoning districts.

Base Zoning Districts include:

- Agricultural Residential (AR)
- Conservation (CO)
- Low-Density Residential (R-1)
- Medium-Density Residential (R-2)
- High-Density Residential (R-3)
- Maritime-Residential-Commercial (MRC)
- Mixed-Use Village (C-1)
- General Commercial (C-2)
- Light Industrial (I-1)
- General Industrial (I-2)

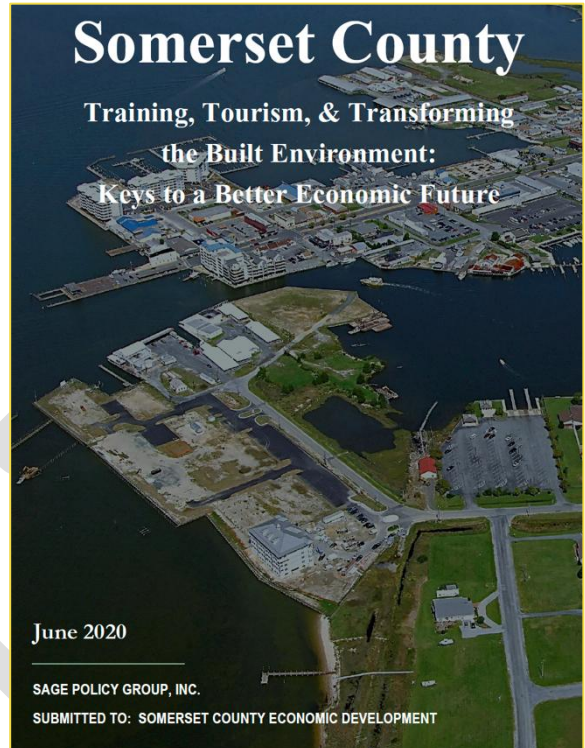


Figure 4-1: Cover photo from the strategic opportunities analysis, Sage Policy Group, Inc., June 2020

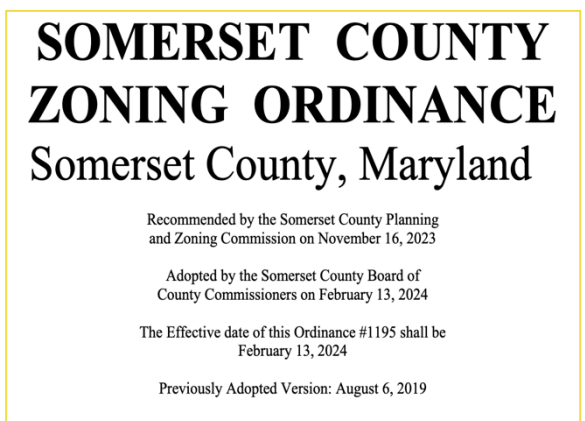


Figure 4-2: Cover photo from the [2024 Somerset County Zoning Ordinance](#)

<sup>1</sup> Sage Policy Group, [Somerset County Training, Tourism, & Transforming the Built Environment: A Key to a Better Economic Future](#), June 2020.

Floating Zones include:

- Planned Unit Development Floating Zone (PUD)
- Utility Scale Solar Energy Facility Floating Zone (SEF)

Overlay Zoning Districts include:

- Airport Overlay (AP)
- Overlay Commercial (O-C)
- Critical Area Overlay (CA-1)

Growth Allocation Floating District (GA) - The Growth Allocation Floating Zone is **not mapped** but is designated for use in areas classified as Resource Conservation Areas (RCA) and/or Limited Development Areas (LDA) within the Critical Area Overlay District (CA-1). Only projects which have been approved by the County Commissioners for award of the Critical Area Growth Allocation are eligible for the floating zone district.

#### 4.2.2 Retirement Living and Healthcare Existing Land Use and Zoning

Retirement living is a residential land use, however a **Continuing Care Retirement Community** with a minimum lot area of 2 acres, is considered public or institutional land use within the *2019 Somerset County Zoning Ordinance*.

A continuing care retirement community is considered an establishment that primarily engages in providing a range of residential and personal care services with on-site nursing care facilities for:

- The elderly and other persons who are unable to fully care for themselves
- The elderly and other persons who do not desire to live independently

Individuals live in a variety of residential settings with meals, housekeeping, social, leisure, and other services available to assist residents in daily living. Assisted living facilities with on-site nursing care facilities are included<sup>2</sup>.

Zoning districts that allow for Continuing Care Retirement Community include R-3, C-1, C-2, I-1, I-2, and the Overlay Commercial District (O-C). Special exception use may be issued in zoning districts R-1 and R-2 (Approved by Board of Zoning Appeals), typically for Group Domiciliary Home Care, which must have adequate staff supervision for the number and type of residents.

Utilizing Maryland Department of Planning's property view database and Somerset County's zoning data, parcels intersecting with zoning districts R-3, C-1, C-2, I-1, I-2, and the Overlay Commercial District (O-C) were extrapolated. A total of 620 developed parcels are located within these selected zoning districts, while 477 parcels are vacant. These parcels are predominately located along transportation corridors, US Route 13 and MD Route 413, see Map 4-1.

#### Retirement Living & Healthcare

The confluence of waterfront, lower cost of living, McCready Health and the intellectual center that is UMES represents reason to believe that Somerset County could emerge as a significant destination for retirees. There is of course already a population of retirees, but the study team believes that there is room for additional condominium development suitable for retirees, including perhaps along Main Street in Princess Anne and the waterfront in Crisfield. This development would expand the size of the real property tax base, create more demand for local goods and services, support more local employment, create a larger pool of citizens able to volunteer for local boards, stabilize population, and perhaps create opportunities to improve the quality and character of the local housing stock.

*Source: Somerset County Training, Tourism, & Transforming the Built Environment: Keys to a Better Economic Future, Sage Policy Group, June 2020*

<sup>2</sup> 2019 Somerset County Zoning Ordinance, Definition page 17-4.

**Table 4-1.**

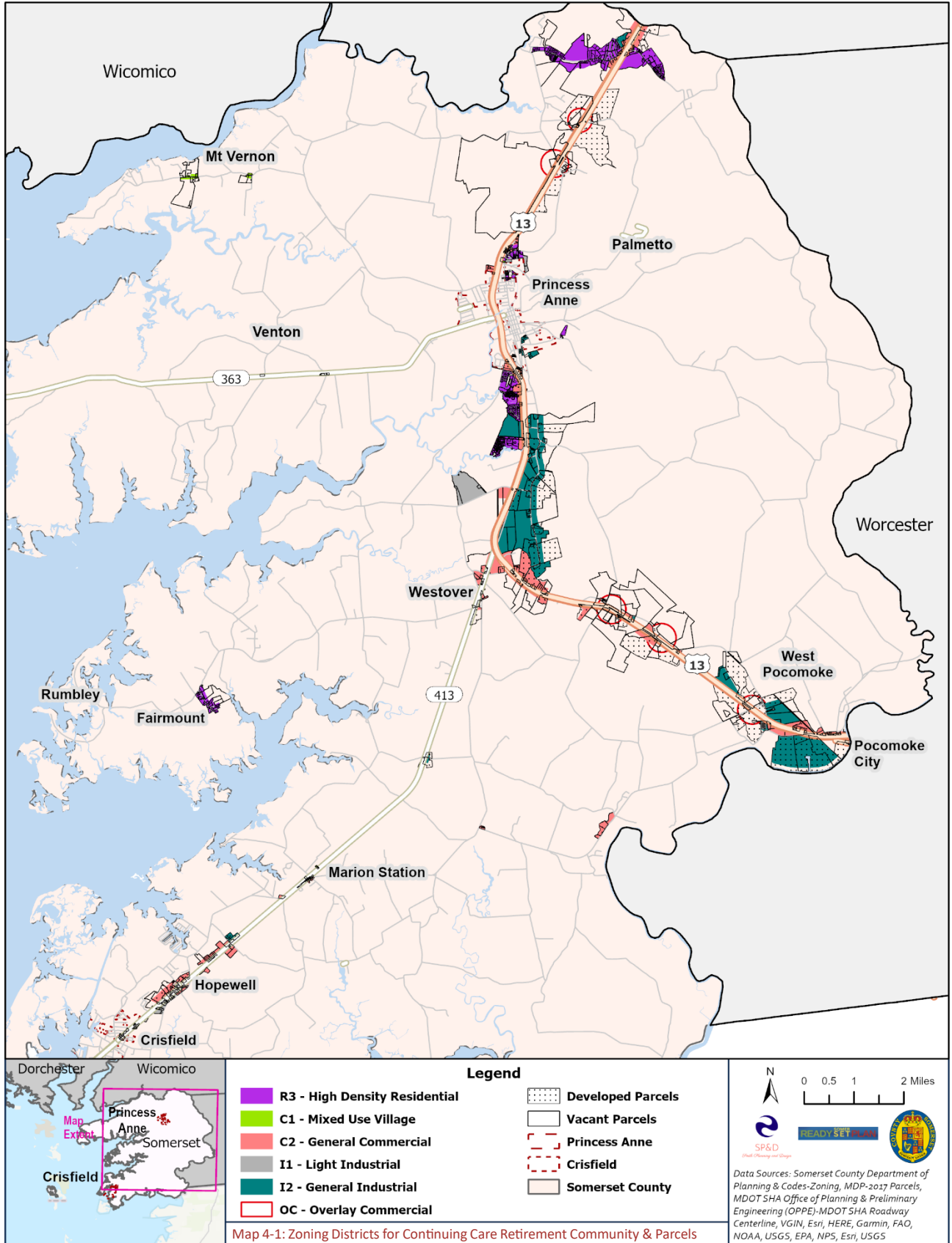
Zoning Districts for Continuing Care Retirement Community and Parcels		
Zoning	# of Parcels	
	Developed	Vacant
R3 - High Density Residential	283	191
C1 - Mixed Use Village	25	13
C2 - General Commercial	190	165
I1 - Light Industrial	13	12
I2 - General Industrial	61	48
OC - Overlay Commercial	48	48
Total	620	477

Source: MdProperty View – Somerset County. June 2020. Somerset County Department of Technical and Community Services – Zoning Data.

The following facilities considered part of the Continuing Care Retirement Community are not located in the zoning districts R-3, C-1, C-2, I-1, I-2, and the Overlay Commercial District (O-C):

- Manokin Nursing and Rehab, Manokin Manor, and The Gables at Manokin
  - These facilities are located on a single parcel and zoned R2 Medium Density Residential

Alice B. Tawes Nursing & Rehabilitation Center and Chesapeake Cove Assisted Living are located in the City of Crisfield. In addition, several continuing care retirement facilities are located just outside Somerset County.



### 4.2.3 Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food Processing, and Food Distribution Existing Land Use and Zoning

Aquaculture is defined as the farming or culturing of finfish, shellfish, other aquatic plants, or animals, or both, in lakes, streams, inlets, estuaries, and other natural or artificial water bodies or impoundments. Activities include the hatching, cultivating, planting, feeding, raising, and harvesting of aquatic plants and animals, and the maintenance and construction of necessary equipment, buildings, and growing areas. Cultivation methods include but are not limited to seed or larvae development and grow-out facilities, fish pens, shellfish rafts, racks and long lines, seaweed floats, and the culture of clams and oysters on tidelands and sub-tidal areas. For this definition, related activities such as wholesale and retail sales, processing and product storage facilities are not considered aquacultural practices<sup>3</sup>.

Aquaculture is considered an agricultural land use, however aquaculture zoning referred to fisheries activities within the *2019 Somerset County Zoning Ordinance*. Zoning districts that allow aquaculture-fisheries activities include AR, CO, MRC, C-1, C-2, I-1, I-2, AP, and the Overlay Commercial District (O-C).

Notably, Aquaculture Research Centers are permitted in all zoning districts except for MRC, which may allow for a special exception if approved by the Board of Zoning Appeals.

### Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food processing, and Food Distribution

Somerset County is already home to a number of significant food distribution operations. It is also home to several fishing operations. All of these activities are important and bring wealth into the community. It also helps the community preserve its history and rural character.

The study team concludes that aquaculture represents a potentially important complement to ongoing food production activities. Over the past half century, the per capita consumption of fish in the United States has grown by almost half (from 10.3 pounds per capita per year to 14.9 pounds). This growth has been entirely driven by fresh and frozen seafood. While consumption of canned and cured fish and seafood has declined over time, consumption of fresh and frozen seafood has nearly doubled over the past half century, increasing at an average annual rate of 0.7 percent.

The growth in U.S. fish consumption has resulted in an enormous demand for imported fish and seafood. In 2016, the value of domestically harvested fish and seafood was \$5.3 billion; the value of imported fresh and frozen fish and shellfish was \$17.3 billion. Over the past two decades imported fish and shellfish have dominated. The value of the domestic harvest, exports, and aquaculture has been little changed in this period.

*Source: Somerset County Training, Tourism, & Transforming the Built Environment: Keys to a Better Economic Future, Sage Policy Group, June 2020*

<sup>3</sup> 2019 Somerset County Zoning Ordinance, Definition page 17-3.

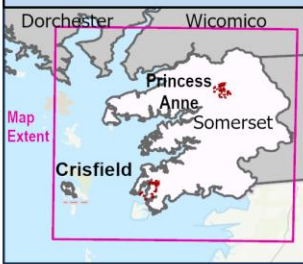
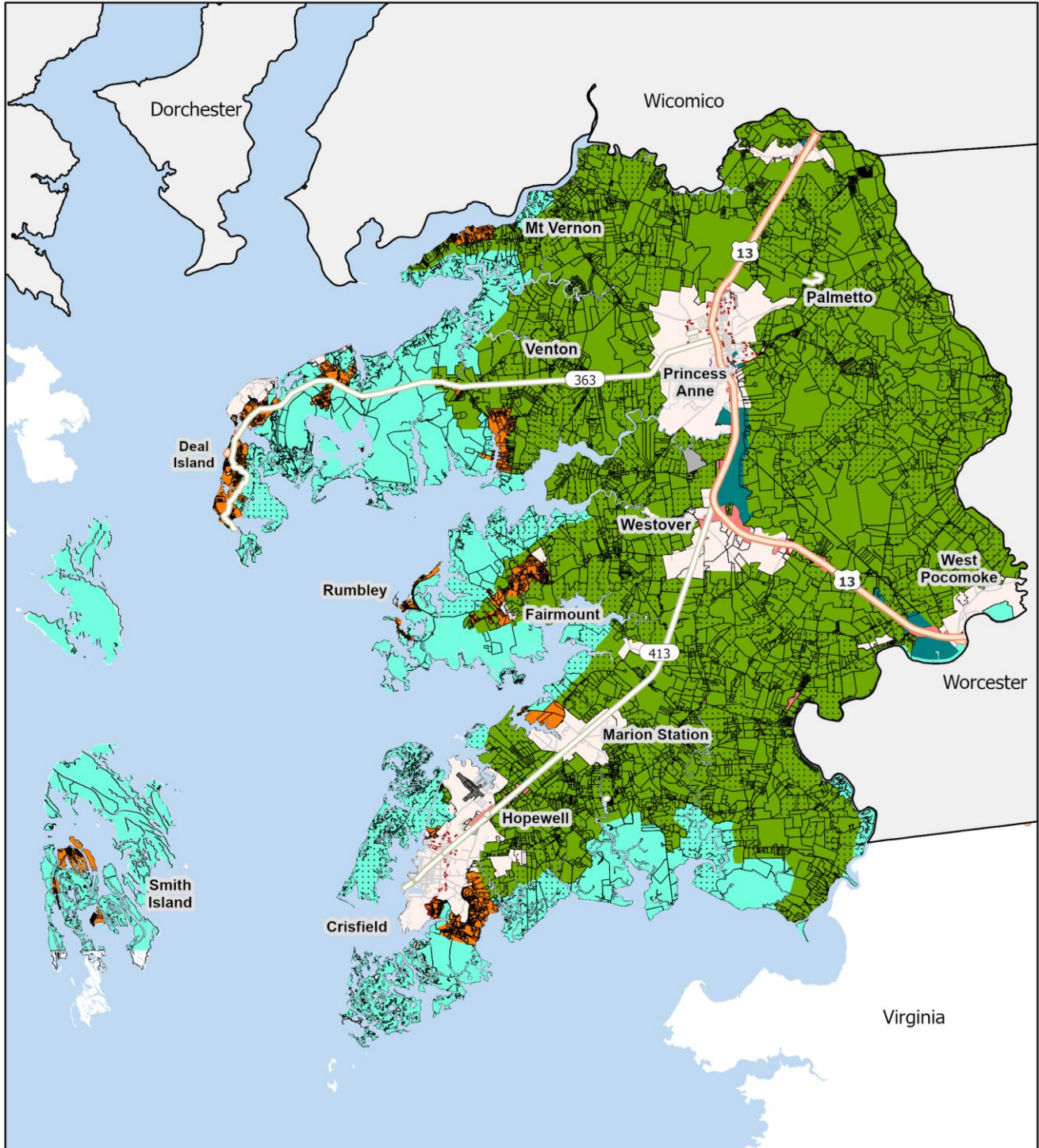
Utilizing Maryland Department of Planning’s property view database and Somerset County’s zoning data, parcels intersecting with zoning districts AR, CO, MRC, C-1, C-2, I-1, I-2, AP, and the Overlay Commercial District (O-C) were extrapolated. A total of 4,978 developed parcels are located within these selected zoning districts, while 4,702 parcels are vacant.

**Table 4-2.**

<b>Zoning Districts for Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food processing, and Food Distribution and Parcels</b>		
<b>Zoning</b>	<b># of Parcels</b>	
	<b>Developed</b>	<b>Vacant</b>
AR - Agricultural Residential	2,866	3,018
CO - Conservation	106	313
MRC - Maritime Residential Commercial	1,668	1,080
C1 - Mixed Use Village	25	13
C2 - General Commercial	190	165
I1 - Light Industrial	13	12
I2 - General Industrial	61	48
OC - Overlay Commercial	48	48
AP - Airport	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,978</b>	<b>4,702</b>

*Source: MdProperty View – Somerset County. June 2020. Somerset County Department of Technical and Community Services – Zoning Data.*

As shown on Map 4-2, the County is predominantly zoned for Agricultural Residential comprising a total of 5,884 parcels. More than half of the parcels zoned for Agricultural Residential are vacant.



Legend		
<span style="color: green;">■</span> AR - Agricultural Residential	<span style="background-color: lightgray;">■</span> I1 - Light Industrial	<span style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Vacant
<span style="color: cyan;">■</span> CO - Conservation	<span style="background-color: darkgray;">■</span> I2 - General Industrial	<span style="background-color: black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Building Footprints
<span style="color: orange;">■</span> MRC - Maritime Residential Commercial	<span style="border: 2px solid red; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> OC - Overlay Commercial	<span style="border: 1px dashed red; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Crisfield
<span style="color: lightgreen;">■</span> C1 - Mixed Use Village	<span style="background-color: gray; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> AP - Airport	<span style="border: 1px dashed gray; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Princess Anne
<span style="color: pink;">■</span> C2 - General Commercial	<span style="background-color: white; border: 1px dotted black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Developed	<span style="border: 1px solid gray; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Somerset County

N

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

*Data Sources: Somerset County Department of Planning & Codes-Zoning, MDP-2017 Parcels, MDOT SHA Office of Planning & Preliminary Engineering (OPPE)-MDOT SHA Roadway Centerline, VGIN, Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, EPA, NPS, Esri, USGS*

Map 4-2: Zoning Districts for Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food Distribution & Parcels



#### 4.2.4 Skilled Trades, those related to Construction and Manufacturing Existing Land Use and Zoning

Industrial land use including construction and manufacturing include both the Light Industrial District (I-1) and the General Industrial District (I-2).

**Light Industrial District (I-1)** - To contain industrial uses, which have limited effects upon surrounding land use. Uses permitted in this district include those related to fabricating, warehousing, and wholesale distributing without obnoxious characteristics. No use is to be permitted which will create offensive noise, vibration, dust, heat, smoke, odor, glare, or other objectionable influences. To also provide for selected commercial uses<sup>4</sup>.

**General Industrial District (I-2)** - In this district are permitted those manufacturing, processing, and storage uses which would be separated from other uses by reasons of characteristics, which may harmfully affect other uses. The exclusion of other uses is intended to promote the economic welfare of the County by reserving especially suited sites for industry and by controlling the mingling of incompatible uses. To also provide for selected commercial uses<sup>5</sup>.

In addition to I-1, and I-2, various types of construction and manufacturing activities are permitted in other zoning districts as specified in the *2019 Somerset County Zoning Ordinance*. These typically include C-1, C-2, O-C, and AP.

Utilizing Maryland Department of Planning’s property view database and Somerset County’s zoning data, parcels intersecting with zoning districts I-1 and I-2 were extrapolated. A total of 74 developed parcels are located within these selected zoning districts, while 67 parcels are vacant.

#### Skilled Trades, those related to Construction and Manufacturing

This is all about training. Both industries suffer from a scarcity of available workers. Many younger workers have eschewed the skilled trades, believing that the path to success is a college education. For many people, it is. However, there continues to be significant demand for electricians, HVAC professionals, pipefitters, welders, machinists, and others. The study team believes that a concerted effort to leverage the Somerset County Technical High School and other secondary schools into a trained, can-do workforce focused on construction, manufacturing, logistics and other technical fields could translate into stepped up firm recruitment, bulked up entrepreneurship, and the creation of scores of living wage positions. One of the keys is to ensure a ready supply of industrially zoned land in the County land that is marketable to manufacturers and other industrial players.

*Source: Somerset County Training, Tourism, & Transforming the Built Environment: Keys to a Better Economic Future, Sage Policy Group, June 2020*

**Table 4-3.**

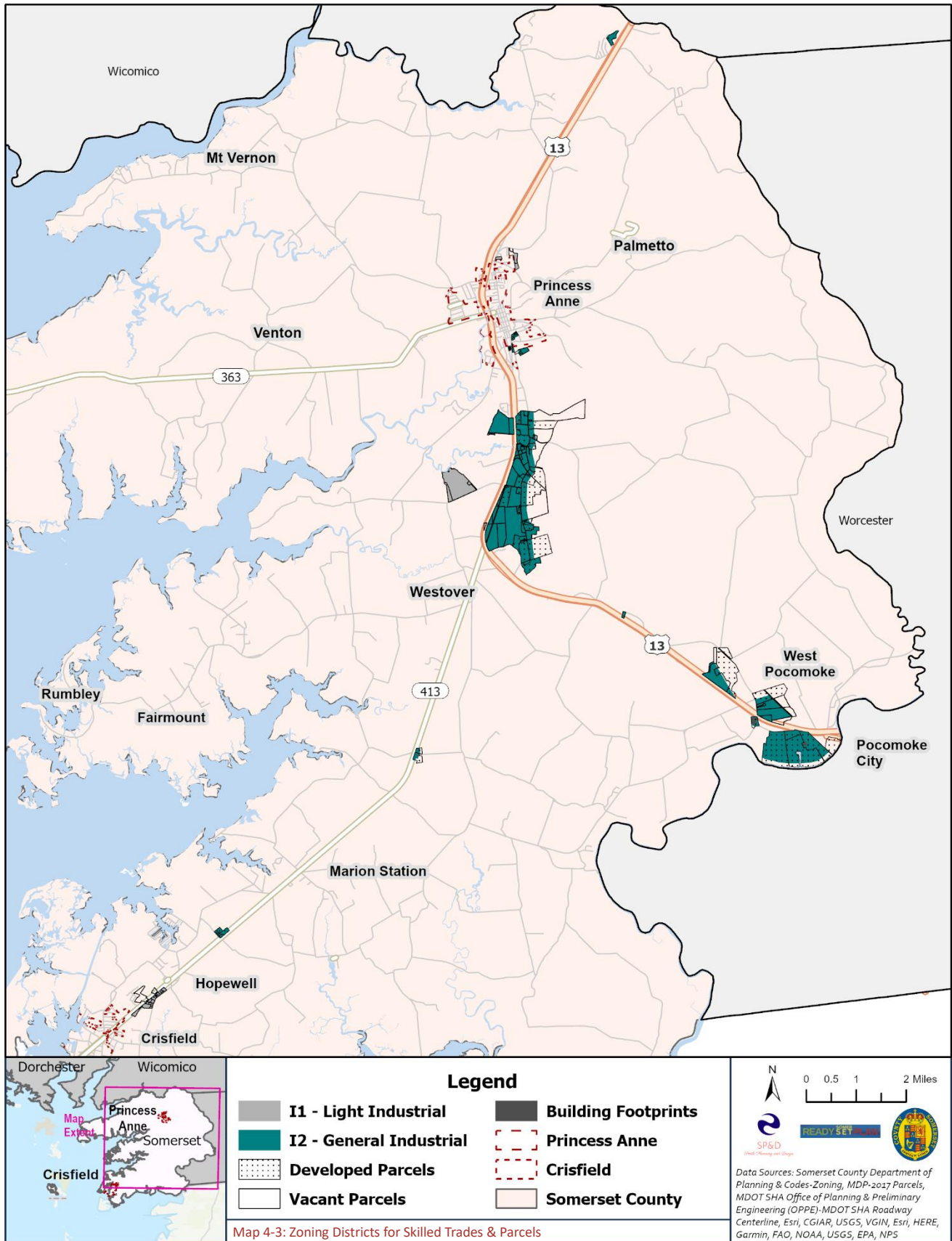
Zoning Districts for Skilled Trades and Parcels		
Zoning	# of Parcels	
	Developed	Vacant
I1 - Light Industrial	13	12
I2 - General Industrial	61	55
Total	74	67

*Source: MdProperty View – Somerset County. June 2020. Somerset County Department of Technical and Community Services – Zoning Data.*

The vacant parcel zoned I-2 Light Industrial on Revells Neck Road was identified by the Technical Committee as an opportunity for a cannabis facility, which could accommodate growing and processing of cannabis products.

<sup>4</sup> 2019 Somerset County Zoning Ordinance, Definition page 5-2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 4.



#### 4.2.5 Alternative Energies

Alternative energy facilities are defined in the *2024 Somerset County Zoning Ordinance* as facilities that generate electricity produced by solar, wind, biomass, hydropower, or similar renewable resources. Utility scale solar energy facilities and wind energy systems (as a principal use) are both included under industrial use. Utility scale solar energy facilities are permitted within zoning districts AR and I-2. While wind energy systems (as a principal use) are not permitted in any of the zoning districts.

The Utility Scale Solar Energy Facility Floating Zone (SEF) allows for the orderly development of utility scale solar energy facilities typically generating more than two (2) megawatts in electricity (AC) that are appropriately sited and sized. Furthermore, it is intended that utility scale solar energy facilities are not placed on prime agricultural lands, are aesthetically attractive, are placed so as to protect the commercial viability of the U.S. Route 13 and M.D. Route 413 corridors and are compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. Chapter 11 was added as part of this plan update. This chapter identified Somerset County's Priority Preservation Area (PPA.) The Utility Scale Solar Energy Facility Floating Zone (SEF) is not permitted within the PPA.

In addition, the following are included under accessory use:

- Small Wind Energy System, as an accessory use. This use is permitted within zoning districts AR, R-1, R-2, R-3, and MRC. Definitions for small wind energy systems include:
  - Off Grid System: A Small Wind Energy System that is not connected to the main power grid with the capability of transporting energy back to a commercial power provider.
  - Small Wind Energy System: A single towered wind energy conversion system that is used to generate electricity and which has a total height of one-hundred sixty (160) feet or less. The equipment includes, but is not limited to any base, blade, foundation, generator, nacelle, rotor, tower, transformer, vane, wire, inverter, batteries, guy wire or other component used in the system.
  - Wind Energy System Owner: The individual or ownership entity that owns, or intends to own, the real property upon which a Small Wind Energy System will be operated.
  - Wind Generator: The blades and associated mechanical and electrical conversion components.
  - Wind Tower: The monopole, freestanding or guyed structure that supports a wind generator.
- Small Solar Energy System, as an accessory to a residential use and generating no more than 999kv of electricity. Detached solar energy systems must be visually shielded from public rights of way and occupied dwellings on adjacent lots. This use is permitted within zoning districts AR, CO, R-1, R-2, R-3, and MRC.
- Medium Solar Energy System, as an accessory to a commercial or industrial use, generating no more than 2 MW of electricity, and not connected to the grid. Detached solar energy systems must be visually

#### Alternative Energies

Wind farms, solar farms, and other forms of alternative energy are often land intensive. Somerset County is home to plentiful land that could be used to house solar arrays, which are combinations of several solar panels. Whether solar or wind farms, these facilities would need to be maintained, creating additional demand for Somerset County's technical workforce.

Part of the motivation behind this recommendation is that Maryland is among the nation's most aggressive states in terms of obligating itself to move expeditiously toward the use of renewable energy during the decades ahead. Maryland's legislature recently passed the Clean Energy Jobs Act (May 29, 2019), which creates a mandate that 50 percent of the state's electricity be produced by renewable energy sources by 2030. Somerset County must position itself to help meet that mandate, helping bolster its own economy in the process.

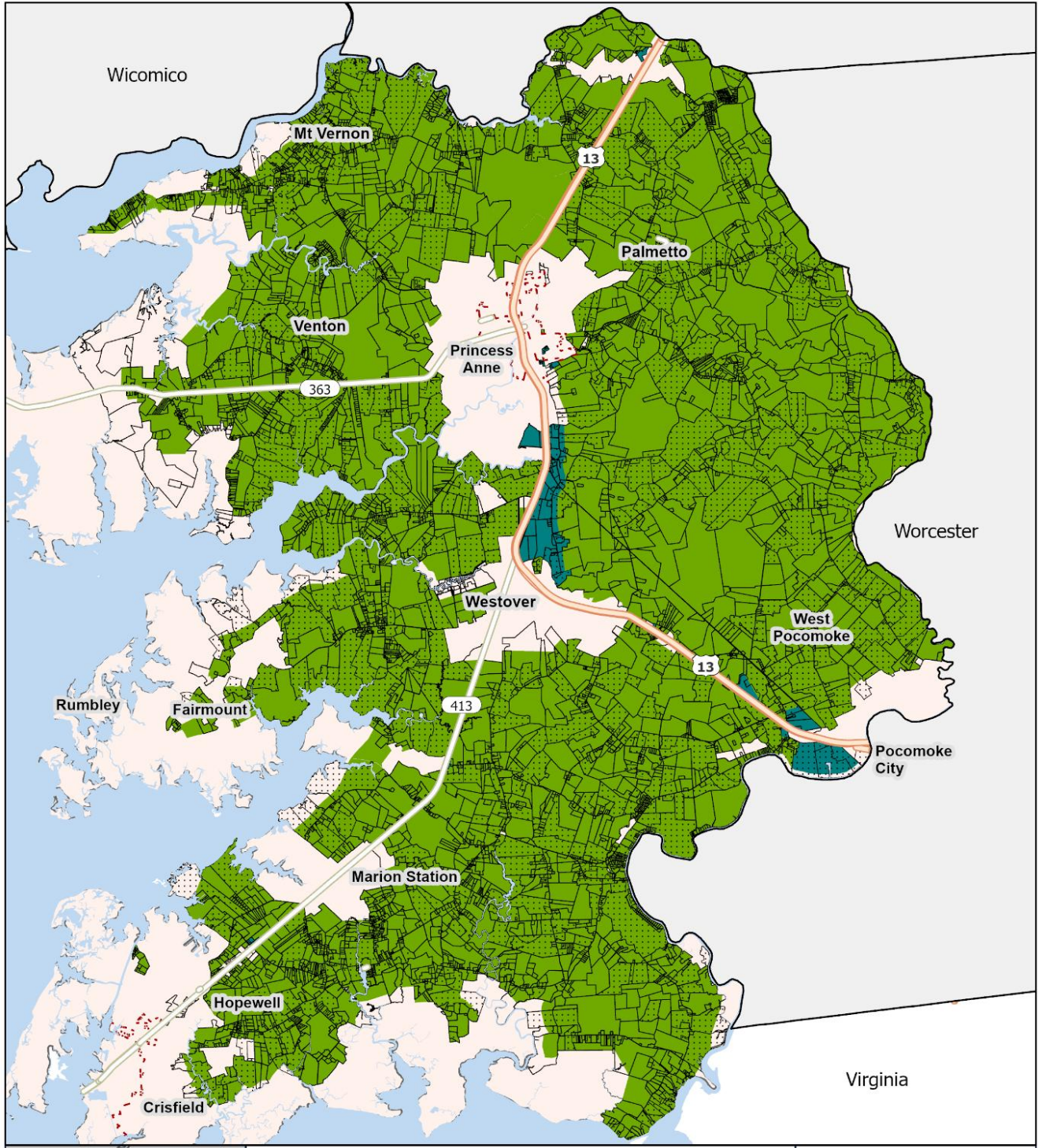
*Source: Somerset County Training, Tourism, & Transforming the Built Environment: Keys to a Better Economic Future, Sage Policy Group, June 2020*

shielded from public rights of way and occupied dwellings on adjacent lots. This use is permitted within zoning districts only by special exception in AR, C-1, C-2, I-1, I-2, and OC.

Availability for alternate energy facilities within Somerset County is permitted in Agricultural Residential (AR), General Industrial (GI) zoning districts, as well as the Utility Scale Solar Energy Facility Floating Zone (SEF) . The General Industrial parcels are located along U.S. Route 13, see Map 4-4.

*Note: Parcels designated as PPA and zoning are depicted on Map 11-3, while Map 11-2 depicts protected lands and designated PPA within Chapter 11.*

DRAFT



**Legend**

<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #4CAF50; border: 1px solid black;"></span> AR - Agricultural Residential	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: black; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Building Footprints
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #008080; border: 1px solid black;"></span> I2 - General Industrial	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; border: 2px dashed red;"></span> Princess Anne
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background: repeating-linear-gradient(45deg, transparent, transparent 2px, dotted green 2px, dotted green 4px); border: 1px solid black;"></span> Developed	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; border: 2px dotted red;"></span> Crisfield
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: white; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Vacant	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #FFCDD2; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Somerset County

N  
0 0.5 1 2 Miles

SP&D  
READY SET GO

Data Sources: Somerset County Department of Planning & Codes-Zoning, MDP-2017 Parcels, MDOT SHA Office of Planning & Preliminary Engineering (OPPE)-MDOT SHA Roadway Centerline, Esri, CGIAR, USGS, VGIN, Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, EPA, NPS

**Map 4-4: Zoning Districts for Alternative Energies & Parcels**

## 4.3 Tourism

Tourism is defined as the act and process of spending time away from home in pursuit of recreation, relaxation, and pleasure, while making use of the commercial provision of services<sup>6</sup>. Tourism businesses depend extensively on each other as well as on other businesses, government, and residents of the local community<sup>7</sup>. Typically, tourists need transportation, food, lodging, amusement, and entertainment. Communities that meet these needs and target their efforts achieve positive results.

Somerset County engaged in strategic planning to further target tourism policy, programs, and recommendations. Part 2 of the strategic economic opportunities analysis, published in June 2020, by the Sage Policy Group and Partners, focused on tourism. Key recommendations put forth in Part 2 of the report included:

- Focus on key hospitality targets: outdoorsy professionals and active families.
- Pursue projects positioning Somerset County as a preferred destination for outdoorsy professionals and active families: e.g., vacation packages; eco cottage development; brew pubs.
- Adopt a strong brand for Somerset County: “Endless Somerset.”
- Implement tourism messaging campaigns designed to appeal to target markets that are firmly wrapped around the “Endless Somerset” brand.

### 4.3.1 Key Hospitality Targets

Based on the research conducted during the development of the 2020 strategic opportunities analysis by the Sage Policy Group, Inc., there are two target markets that offer the greatest potential for Somerset County’s tourism efforts:

- **Outdoorsy Professionals** – This market has two attributes that make them attractive targets for Somerset County: an enthusiasm for the outdoors and disposable income. They will be attracted to the outdoor activities the County has to offer, as well as the slower pace that makes a nice break from hectic urban and suburban life. Somerset County is a reasonable driving distance from several major metropolitan markets with high concentrations of professionals. Targeting those interested in outdoor recreation is easy through digital ads, social media ads, and ad placements through niche content providers (podcasts, blogs, etc.).
- **Active Families** – This market overlaps somewhat with outdoorsy professionals, but with the added need for family-friendly activities. Also, although people in this group may be relatively affluent, they are more likely to be budget conscious. Somerset County offers a variety of affordable outdoor activities, along with reasonably priced accommodations and restaurants. This makes it an excellent option for active families. Again, targeting this market is relatively easy through digital methods and niche content providers.

One of the most important aspects of both target audiences is that they align well with Somerset County’s culture. They value the natural resources that the County offers, they appreciate the pace of daily life, and they crave authenticity.

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<sup>6</sup> [Arts & Culture-Tourism](#), John K. Walton, September 26, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> *Approaches to Estimating the Economic Impacts of Tourism; Some Examples*, Stynes, Daniel, 2011.

### 4.3.2 Projects

Projects were identified in the 2020 strategic opportunities analysis. These projects were identified to help position Somerset County as a preferred destination for **Outdoorsy Professionals** and **Active Families**.

- **Vacation Packages** – These packages would include lodging and focus on outdoor recreation, but they would also include a variety of other activities. For example, kayak and bicycle rentals could be included, along with a trip to Smith Island where visitors can learn about its history and enjoy a crab feast. The packages would be structured to provide visitors with some pre-determined activities that support local businesses, along with plenty of time to independently explore all that the County has to offer.
- **Eco Cottage Development** – The eco cottages would be highly efficient, architecturally interesting cottages available for rent by visitors to Somerset County. These cottages would be small, but they would incorporate quality finishes that make them feel very comfortable and a bit luxurious. A “rustic glam” aesthetic would tie in with the natural beauty of Somerset County while providing a high-end experience. These types of accommodations are very appealing to younger Gen X and Millennial professionals. They are more likely to book accommodations through websites like Airbnb or VRBO. Amenities specifically geared toward outdoor enthusiasts and active families would make the cottages an obvious choice for these travelers.
- **Brew Pub Attractions** – Although Somerset County is already home to several great dining establishments, there is a void in terms of the type of lively pub that is so appealing to visitors in their 30’s and 40’s. These types of establishments are the type of anchor establishments that bring tremendous energy and increased foot traffic to downtown areas.
- **Branding and Messaging** – Brands that are succinct, unique, and they evoke powerful imagery. By adopting such a brand, Somerset County will be able to differentiate itself within the region and be more memorable to its target markets.

Tourism strategies identified in the 2020 strategic opportunities analysis have been integrated into the goals and recommendations at the end of this chapter. Continuation of economic development investment will further capitalize on what is historically proven to be a sound investment, with a return of \$8 for every \$1 invested by the County.<sup>8</sup>

### 4.3.3 Tourism Existing Land Use and Zoning

Visitor Center or Tourism Information Center land use is permitted in all zoning districts, aside from R-1, however a special exception may be granted, if approved by the Board of Zoning Appeals. Businesses related to tourism are typically categorized under commercial use. These businesses include those associated with food, lodging, amusement, and entertainment. All commercial uses, as applicable, must provide additional parking or storage needed for the maximum number of vehicles stored, displayed, or based at the lot at any point in time. These additional spaces are not required to meet the stall size and parking aisle width requirements of this Ordinance.<sup>9</sup> Zoning districts C-1, C-2, MRC are considered commercial use districts.

Additionally, to provide an avenue for alcohol agritourism in the County, Section 5.12 Farm Breweries, Distilleries, and Wineries, of the ordinance enumerates standards, additional considerations, and regulations. Agritourism is permitted in zoning district AR and by special exception in zoning district CO.

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<sup>8</sup> Sage Policy Group, [Somerset County Training, Tourism, & Transforming the Built Environment](#): A Key to a Better Economic Future, June 2020.

<sup>9</sup> 2024 Somerset County Zoning Ordinance, pages 8-3 and 8-4.

## Chapter 4: Economic Vitality Goals & Strategies

### Goal 4.1

Attract visitors, entrepreneurs, and investors who will appreciate the quality of life, rural character, and heritage of Somerset County, rather than those who would want to change its character.

#### Strategies

- A. Work with the State, UMES, the business community, and technical schools to finalize and implement a cohesive marketing strategy to promote the County and both municipalities as tourist destinations.
- B. Track and report accomplishments, gaps, obstacles, and new opportunities that are reflective of Goal 4.1.

### Goal 4.2

Encourage retirement and healthcare living to expand the size of the real property tax base, create more demand for local goods and services, support more local employment, create a larger pool of citizens able to volunteer for local boards, and stabilize the population.

#### Strategies

- A. A tax break for older newcomers to Somerset County.
  - Incentivize a special retiree tax break for those households headed by an individual age 60 or older moving on a full-time basis to the County and purchasing for owner-occupancy.
  - Eligible individuals would receive a 50 percent reduction in their real estate tax obligation over the course of three years. The intent of such a tax break was to reduce the inventory of unsold housing units and to create an environment more conducive to residential development.

### Goal 4.3

Attract entrepreneurs who embrace cutting-edge food production, distribution, aquaculture, and support enterprise development in the County.

#### Strategies

- A. Incentivize a tax break to anyone with the proper credentials and intellectual property seeking to develop an aquaculture facility.
- B. Partner with UMES and CTE to encourage would-be entrepreneurs to commercialize their ideas in Somerset County.
- C. Encourage the adaptive reuse of vacant commercial and industrial property, by use of zoning or tax incentives.

### Goal 4.4

Promote the adaptive reuse of vacant commercial and industrial property for infill and redevelopment.

#### Strategies

- A. Maintain current database, maps, and photos of all available vacant commercial and industrial property.
- B. Using information gathered from strategy A above, provide this information to prospective developers.



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**Goal 4.5**

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Position Somerset County to help meet Maryland’s Clean Energy Jobs Act (May 29, 2019), which mandates that 50 percent of the state’s electricity be produced by renewable energy sources by 2030.

**Strategies**

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- A. Identify and promote potential alternative energy sites.
- B. Encourage careful consideration of potential sites for alternative energy, as wind farms, solar farms, and other forms of alternative energy are often land intensive.

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**Goal 4.6**

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Promote ecotourism for economic vitality and preservation by encouraging travel centered on camping, hiking, agriculture, and wildlife activities that exist in Somerset County.

**Strategies**

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- A. Encourage establishment of camping and hiking facilities that include water and/or trail access.
- B. Encourage agritourism destinations and provide destination mapping in relation to other ecotourism sites.

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