

**Municipal Comprehensive Land Use Plan
Annual Report**

** New Question added - - #4 Opportunities for technical assistance**

Name of Municipality: City of New Castle

Date of Plan Certification: 04/2021 **Date of Report:** July 22, 2024

In accordance with 22 Del. C. §702 (g) Municipalities shall provide to the Office of State Planning Coordination a report describing implementation of their comprehensive plan and identifying development issues, trends* or conditions since the plan was last adopted or amended. The report shall be due annually no later than July 1.

*Please note that the development trends data is collected each year to further supplement this requirement. Please contact the Office of State Planning Coordination with questions regarding development trends or this annual report.

1. Please review the recommendations, goals and implementation items within your comprehensive plan and Please indicate which items are complete, underway, or not yet started. Also please include any other comments you may wish to add.

G4 – 3: Incentivize private investment in New Castle’s remaining undeveloped parcels, brownfields, and redevelopment areas harmoniously with nearby land uses. Ideas may include tax abatement.

Status: Following designation as Delaware Downtown Development District (DDD in 2019), the City adopted economic and housing development incentives to complement the DDD grant program. These incentives decrease the costs of developing a business within the DDD by reducing taxes and fees and by reducing the time to receive approval. The incentives also include a waiver of the City Realty Transfer Tax for first-time homebuyers to encourage home ownership. It should be noted that following conditional approval by the State Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues on October 2, 2022, the City Council expanded the DDD boundary to include an additional 7.81 acres on February 13, 2024 via Resolution 2024-3.

Based on the Downtown Development Districts FY 23 Annual Report prepared by the Delaware State Housing Authority, 11 “small projects” and one “large project” received rebates through the program. The subject annual report can be found here:

<https://www.destatehousing.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ddd-annual-report-2023.pdf>

G4 – 4: In light of new plans for roadways, reevaluate plans for roadways to determine best use of land and transportation. Studies for land use and transportation will be needed.

Studies: The City collaborated with WILMAPCO and DelDOT to update the City of New Castle Transportation Plan. The Plan developed recommendations to address transportation goals identified in the City’s Comprehensive Plan. The Plan seeks to improve the multimodal transportation network, provide connectivity to communities and trails, enhance health and livability, reduce illegal truck traffic, and improve safety.

The Plan was received by the City Council on October 11, 2022.

Information regarding the City of New Castle Transportation Plan can be found here:

<http://www.wilmapco.org/cityofnewcastle/>

The City has also been in discussions with DelDOT regarding the feasibility/applicability of creating a Transportation Improvement District (TID) for the City and its environs.

G6 – 2: 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. Aerial utilities detract significantly from the appearance of the City’s neighborhoods. Additionally, aerial utilities are susceptible to storm damage, resulting in more frequent interruptions of service. The MSC has relocated some segments of its aerial service below ground, when opportunities to do so have occurred. However, there is currently no systematic program to bury overhead utilities.

Status: During this past year, MSC Electric and Water Crews continued working on the Van Dyke aerial to underground electric conversion project. Electric and communication conduits, vaults, manholes, and transformer pads have been installed. In the Spring of 2024 MSC initiated the final phase of the project with approximately 30 homes remaining to be converted to the new underground system. MSC anticipates completing this 5-year capital improvement project by the end of 2024.

G7 – 2: Develop a transportation master plan and land use master plan for the City. Conduct an outside regional impact analysis on the interconnections of roads and streets (i.e. Rte. 9, Rte. 13, Rte. 141, Rte. 273, 295, etc.) Engage state and local representatives for support of analysis. Clarify regional and local traffic patterns throughout the City including emergency evacuation routes.

See G4-4 status above.

G12 – 1: Preserve the capacity of the floodplain to carry floodwaters.

G12 – 2: Improve drainage and stormwater management throughout the City.

G12 – 3: Implement the recommendations of the Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan dated March 2018.

G12 – 4: Plan for protection of Historic District and other flood prone areas.

Status: In furtherance of the 2019 Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan recommendations, in 2020 the City received a grant from the Delaware Emergency Management Agency (DEMA) to obtain more detailed information on building elevations and building characteristics relative to the feasibility of floodproofing the structures. In 2022, field survey elevation data was obtained for approximately 610 structures that had been identified in the 2019 Vulnerability Assessment as being within the 100-year floodplain or being in the floodplain based on a 2-foot rise in sea level. In addition, information was obtained on these structures regarding the existence of a basement or crawl space, existence of accessways, windows, flood vents, etc., for basement or crawl space, basement finishes, approximate height to first floor finish elevation, foundation and first floor framing materials where readily visible, year built (known or estimated), and replacement costs based on rough square footage on an order-of-magnitude unit price (\$/SF) basis.

The data collected was to be used to further analyze and compare the feasibility and costs of community-wide flood protection systems (such as raising of the dikes, flood walls, etc.) with the feasibility and costs of designing and installing individual, property-specific structural flood protection such as wet or dry floodproofing on a widespread basis. If the grant budget allowed, the data would be input into a Hazus model (developed by FEMA as a GIS-based natural hazards analytical tool) to estimate the benefits of multiple scenarios.

In March 2022, the City Council passed Resolution 2022-04 which established a “Temporary Task Force of Citizens to Research Existing Information Concerning the Impact of Sea Level Rise on the City of New Castle, and to Prepare Remediation Recommendations.” This Resolution that established the Sea Level Rise Task Force (SLRTF) specifically cited G12-3 and G12-4 of the Comprehensive Plan as the primary reasons for its formation. In pursuit of one of its goals to “identify potential funding sources”, the SLRTF identified the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Watershed Protection Program. In August 2022 at the urging of the SLRTF, the City Council sent a request to the NRCS to prepare a Preliminary Investigation Findings Report (PIFR) to determine if the City was eligible for funding through the Watershed Protection Program. In May 2023 the City was notified that it was eligible for capital funding for flood protection measures that would consider sea-level rise. According to NRCS staff, preliminary budgeting has been established at approximately \$37.5m however that amount is subject to change based on the results of upcoming studies. NRCS anticipates that planning and preliminary engineering on flood protection alternatives will start in October 2023. This planning and engineering effort is anticipated to take 2-years to complete and will include intensive public and stakeholder participation. It is anticipated that the data collected under the DEMA grant described above will be integrated into the NRCS planning/engineering effort however the scope and data needs of said effort have yet to be determined.

As of June 2024, the City was notified by NRCS that funding would be significantly reduced for the upcoming Federal Fiscal Year. NRCS requested \$2,000,000 for the development of the plan for FFY 25.

G13 – 3: Explore the development and potential funding of new community-wide recreation facilities.

In June 2022, the City Council passed Resolution 2022-18 which established a temporary committee (Playground Subcommittee) for the purpose of researching the feasibility of designing and financing the construction of a newly renovated children’s playground at Battery Park, and making recommendations to the City Council toward the furtherance of that project. The Playground Subcommittee has been meeting monthly in furtherance of their mission, including developing plans, researching suitable equipment and grant funding opportunities. Two grants have been awarded for playground equipment in Battery Park resulting in completion of Phase 1 of the new playground. The Playground Subcommittee has received some funding for Phase 2 of the playground, including funding from the Bond Bill, and continues to seek additional funding.

2. Please highlight any significant accomplishments development issues, trends or conditions since the plan was last adopted or amended that may either have enhanced or hindered the implementation of your plan. These accomplishments may be used in the annual report to the Governor.

Status: The status update on the Plan’s goals and implementation items highlights the City’s significant accomplishments and development issues and trends.

3. Are there any planning issues that the municipality is currently facing Do you anticipate any comprehensive plan changes for which the Office of State Planning Coordination may be able to offer technical assistance? If yes, please describe below.

Status: Over the last approximately 2-year period, the City has received four (4) development applications totaling 1,023 units with the vast majority comprised of multi-family apartment units (844 units). The projects are in various stages of the development review and approval process, ranging from final site plan approval to concept plan review stage. The 1,023 units represents a 40% increase in the number of existing housing units within the City (2,612 housing units based on 2020 Census). The 5-year Comprehensive Plan review is to occur in 2025. As part of the 5-year review, the City Planning Commission will be considering the number of proposed dwelling units when reviewing the need to recommend changes to the Comprehensive Plan relative to future land use, housing, transportation, etc.

It should be noted that the Planning Commission recently requested and received a presentation from Karen Horton, AICP from the Delaware State Housing Authority regarding best practices for increasing housing affordability. It is intended that this presentation will also inform the 5-year review.

4. Opportunities for technical assistance, planning help, and funding for resiliency related projects that arise throughout the year. What resiliency projects* or efforts might your town need help with?

**Resiliency projects might include (but are not limited to) addressing flooding impacts, energy efficiency/sustainability efforts, identifying vulnerability to climate change, etc.*

Status: The City is open and interested in discussing the specific ways OSPC could help implement the Comprehensive Plan. The City will reach out when necessary. It should be noted that the City has also been in discussions with DelDOT recently regarding the persistent flooding of Route 9 south of the City. DelDOT has recommended the City pursue assistance through DelDOT's Division of Transportation Resiliency and Sustainability to address this issue.

5. Please help update our mailing list by supplying the following information:

Mayor: Valarie Leary e-mail address: vleary@newcastlecity.delaware.gov

City/Town Manager: Antonina Tantillo e-mail address: atantillo@newcastlecity.delaware.gov

Planning Director: Chris Rogers, AICP e-mail address: christopher.rogers@aecom.com

Town/City Clerk: Courtaney Taylor e-mail address: ctaylor@newcastlecity.delaware.gov

Council/Commission Members:

Suzanne Souder, Council President; Nermin Zubaca; Joseph F. Day, III; Brian Mattaway; Andrew Zelt

Planning Commission Members:

Margo Reign, Chair; David Majewski, Jr.; Brie Rivera; Cynthia Batty; Stephen Franklin; Timothy E. Gibbs; Tamara Stoner; Vera Worthy; Kristin Zumar.

On behalf of the City of New Castle, I respectfully submit this comprehensive plan annual report to the Office of State Planning Coordination. The information contained in the report is correct and complete.

Signature of Mayor

Date

Valarie Leary

Printed Name of Mayor