

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Town, County, and State Officials .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Institute for Public Administration.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Authority to Plan.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 1-1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
History of Blades .....	6
Town of Blades 1978 Comprehensive Plan .....	7
2002 Town of Blades Comprehensive Plan .....	8
<b>Chapter 1-2. Community Profile.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Population.....	9
Baseline Population and Demographic Projections.....	12
Racial Composition .....	14
Age Profile.....	15
Educational Attainment .....	16
Housing.....	17
Economic Profile .....	21
<b>Chapter 1-3. Government Services and Resources.....</b>	<b>23</b>
Town Government.....	23
Public Safety .....	23
Library Facilities.....	24
Health Care .....	24
State Service Center.....	24
Postal Service .....	25
<b>Chapter 1-4. Public Participation.....</b>	<b>25</b>
The Planning Principles.....	25
<b>Chapter 2-1. Land Use Plan.....</b>	<b>27</b>
Background – Land Use .....	27
Plan Recommendations – Land Use.....	29
<b>Chapter 2-2. Growth and Annexation Plan.....</b>	<b>33</b>
Background – Growth and Annexation .....	33
Recommendations – Growth and Annexation.....	35

Proposed Annexation Areas .....	36
Plan Recommendations .....	38
<b>Chapter 2-3. Infrastructure Plan.....</b>	<b>40</b>
Background – Infrastructure .....	40
Recommendations – Infrastructure.....	44
<b>Chapter 2-4. Transportation Plan.....</b>	<b>46</b>
Background – Transportation .....	46
Recommendations – Transportation.....	49
<b>Chapter 2-5. Historic and Cultural Resources Plan.....</b>	<b>51</b>
Background – Historic and Cultural Resources .....	51
Recommendations – Historic and Cultural Resources .....	51
<b>Chapter 2-6. Economic Development Plan.....</b>	<b>52</b>
Background – Economic Development.....	52
Recommendations – Economic Development.....	54
<b>Chapter 2-7. Housing Plan.....</b>	<b>55</b>
Background – Housing .....	55
Recommendations – Housing.....	58
<b>Chapter 2-8. Environmental Protection Plan.....</b>	<b>59</b>
Background – Environmental Protection .....	59
Total Maximum Daily Loads .....	61
Recommendations – Environmental Protection .....	63
<b>Chapter 2-9. Open Space and Recreation.....</b>	<b>65</b>
Background – Open Space and Recreation .....	65
Recommendations – Open Space and Recreation .....	66
<b>Chapter 3-1. Intergovernmental Coordination.....</b>	<b>68</b>
Coordination with Agencies .....	68
Coordination with Planning Activities .....	69
<b>Chapter 3-2. Implementation Policies and Projects .....</b>	<b>69</b>
Town Policies .....	70
Implementation Projects .....	71
<b>Appendix – Maps and Planning &amp; Zoning Commission Minutes.....</b>	<b>72</b>

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## **Town, County, and State Officials**

### **Town of Blades**

#### *Council of Blades*

Mr. David L. Ruff, Mayor  
Mr. Russell T. Joseph, Vice Mayor  
Mr. Donald Trice, Councilperson  
Ms. Starr Kulikauski, Councilperson  
Mr. Michael J. Smith, Councilperson  
Mr. B.J. Hardin, Councilperson

#### *Planning Commission*

Mr. B.J. Hardin – Chair and Housing Commissioner  
Mr. Martin Evans  
Mr. Donald R. Hastings  
Mr. Robert Hutton

#### *Town Staff*

Ms. Vikki Prettyman, Town Administrator  
Mr. Edwin Cooke, Chief of Police  
Mr. Brandon Slater, Technician, Water Department  
Mr. William Matsinger, Code Enforcement Officer

### **Sussex County**

Mr. Dale Dukes, County Council Member, First District  
Mr. David B. Baker, County Administrator  
Mr. Lawrence Lank, County Planning Director

### **State of Delaware**

The Honorable Ruth Ann Minner, Governor  
The Honorable John C. Carney Jr., Lt. Governor  
The Honorable Robert L. Venables, Sr., Senator, Twenty First District  
The Honorable Daniel B. Short, Representative, Thirty Ninth District  
Ms. Constance Holland, AICP, State Planning Coordinator

## ***Institute for Public Administration***

This plan was prepared by the Institute for Public Administration (IPA) of the College of Human Services, Education & Public Policy at the University of Delaware. IPA links the research and resources of the University of Delaware with the management and information needs of local, state, and regional governments in the Delaware Valley. IPA provides assistance to agencies and local governments through direct staff assistance and research projects as well as training programs and policy forums. Jerome R. Lewis is the director of the Institute. Mr. William J. DeCoursey served as project manager, coordinated staff efforts, and was IPA's liaison with officials and staff from the Town of Blades. Nick Walls and Richard M. Nietubicz assisted with various portions of the planning process and wrote portions of the text. The development of all maps was handled by IPA staffer Nicole Minni. A number of staff from IPA's Planning Services Group reviewed and edited drafts of this document.

### **Institute Director**

Jerome R. Lewis, Ph.D.

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Nick Walls, Research Assistant

Richard M. Nietubicz, Research Assistant

### **Mapping and GIS Development**

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### **Staff Review Team**

Mr. DeCoursey wishes to thank the following IPA staff; Linda Raab and Martin Wollaston, who reviewed drafts of this plan and provided valuable comments and ideas and Mark Deshon, who provided editorial support and designed the cover.

## ***The Authority to Plan***

Delaware Law requires that municipalities engage in comprehensive-planning activities for the purpose of encouraging “the most appropriate uses of the physical and fiscal resources of the municipality and the coordination of the municipal growth, development, and infrastructure investment actions with those of other municipalities, counties, and the State....” This plan was written to comply with the requirements of a municipal-development strategy as described in the Delaware Code for towns with a population of less than 2,000 people.

The municipal comprehensive plan for small communities (such as Blades) with fewer than 2,000 people is to be a

Document in text and maps, containing at a minimum, a municipal development strategy setting forth the jurisdiction’s position on population and housing growth within the jurisdiction, expansion of its boundaries, development of adjacent areas, redevelopment potential, community character, and the general uses of land within the community, and critical community development and infrastructure issues. In addition, the town’s comprehensive-planning process must demonstrate coordination with other municipalities, the county, and the state during plan preparation. (22 Del. C. 1953, § 702; 49 Del Laws, c. 415, § 1.)

State law requires that planning be an ongoing process and that municipalities identify future planning activities. This document serves as an update to the Town of Blades 2002 Comprehensive Plan as well as the Town of Blades Municipal Comprehensive Development Plan, as required by state law. It is intended to cover a ten-year planning period and be reviewed at least every five years.

## **Chapter 1-1 Introduction**

### **Preface**

The Town of Blades Comprehensive Plan has several purposes. The planning project that led to the creation of this document was initiated by the town in response to a variety of growth, development, transportation, and annexation issues resulting from the marina recently built within Blades, as well as increasing levels of urban growth both within and around Blades.

The plan serves as an official statement about the future of the town. First and foremost, the plan is a unified advisory document to the Council and the Planning Commission on land use and growth issues. It should be used to guide future development decisions, re-zonings, annexations, and capital improvements throughout the town.

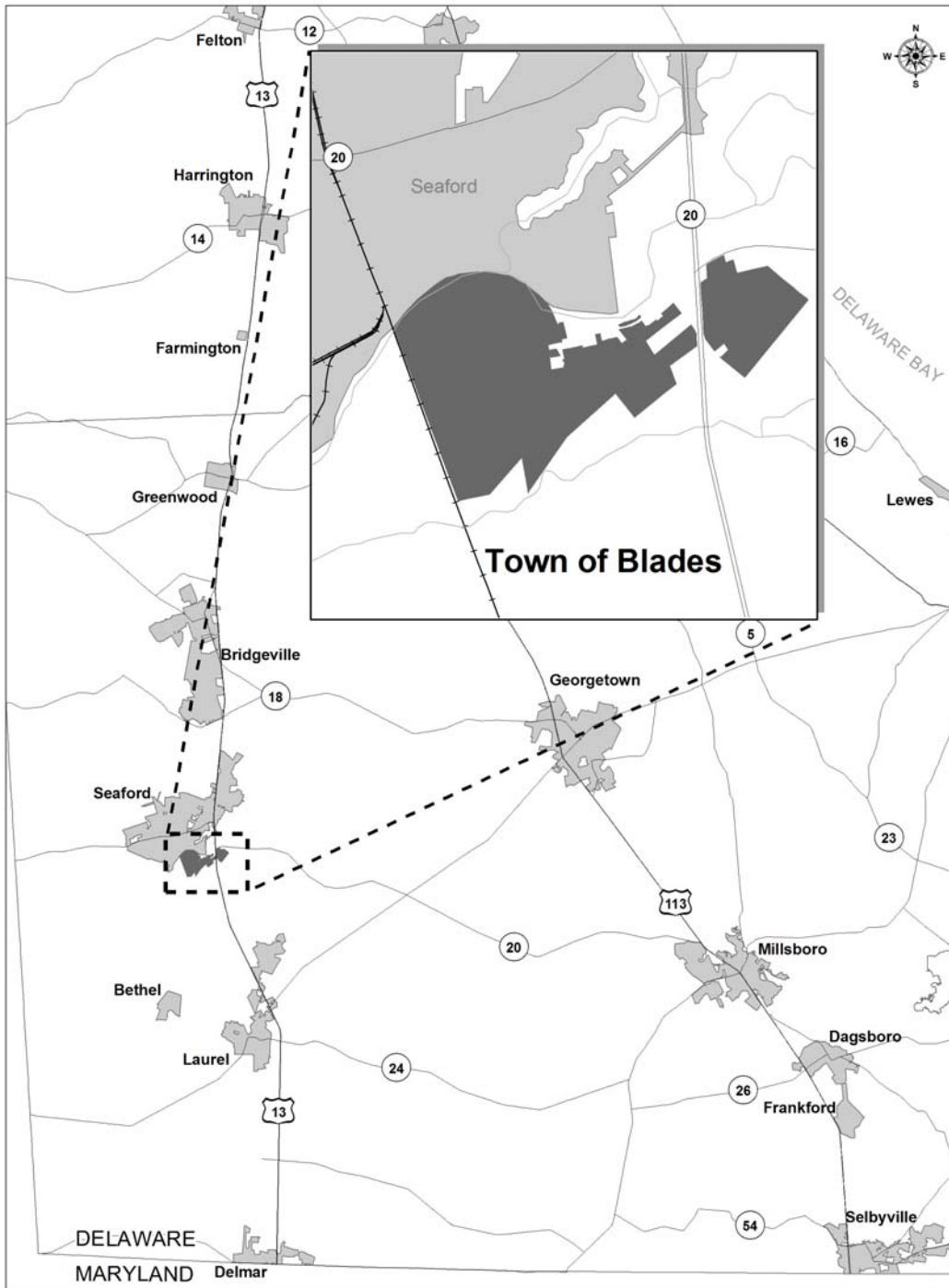
The plan is also an informational document for the public. Citizens, business people, and government officials can turn to the plan to learn more about Blades and its policies for future land use decisions. Potential new residents can use the documents as an informational resource about the town, its characteristics, and facilities to help them make decisions about moving to Blades. This document contains the most current information on population, transportation, housing, employment, and the environment, which will be of interest to land developers, economic development professionals, and financiers.

Finally, the Blades Comprehensive Plan is a legal document. The Delaware Code specifies that “. . . any incorporated municipality under this chapter shall prepare a comprehensive plan for the city or town or portions thereof as the commission deems appropriate.” The code further specifies that, “after a comprehensive plan or portion thereof has been adopted by the municipality in accordance with this chapter, the comprehensive plan shall have the force of law and no development shall be permitted except as consistent with the plan.” (§ 702, Title 22, Delaware Code)

### **Location**

The Town of Blades is located on the southern shore of the Nanticoke River in western Sussex County, Delaware. Blades is adjacent to Seaford, Del., at its northern boundary. Blades is near U.S. Route 13, at a point that is 21 miles north of Salisbury, Maryland, and 39 miles south of Dover, Del.

### Blades Location Map



## History of Blades

The Town of Blades was one of the last municipalities to be incorporated in the state of Delaware. In 1910, Blades was granted a charter by the Delaware General Assembly and officially became the Town of Bladesville. The Town of Bladesville officially became the Town of Blades in 1929, when the Bladesville and Seaford post offices were consolidated in order to facilitate a new home-delivery mail system. Although incorporation did not take place until 1910, the town itself is likely as old as its sister community, Seaford.

During the mid 1800s, the Pennsylvania Railroad arrived in Seaford. Around 1850, a railroad employee named James Blades purchased a tract of land that included the present Causeway and the area corresponding to High and Market Streets in Blades. Shortly thereafter, several local families settled in James Blades' community. For the convenience of the fledgling community, James Blades opened a small store on a street formerly known as Concord Road, at what is now the intersection of Market and High Streets. This tract of land later came to be known as Bladesville, after its owner.

By 1870 Bladesville had acquired a church and a school. The Methodist church was located on Concord Road. The first school, founded in 1870 at East Second and Cannon Streets, consisted of a few elementary grades.

When Bladesville was chartered in 1910, Henry Riggin became the town's first mayor. By the time that Bladesville was incorporated, a new school had been built to replace the original one-room schoolhouse. The new school building was constructed on the hill at West Fourth Street, which is now occupied by the town hall. The new two-room school was later expanded to three rooms and eventually provided the equivalent of a seventh-grade education. Eighth-grade and high school classes were conducted in Seaford.

Through the early 1900s, the Town of Bladesville generally attracted artisans who worked in Seaford. Blades produced many fine craftsmen who were well known in this area, including furniture-makers, carpenters, masons, painters, and well-drillers. The Blades area was also sparsely populated with farmers, though the soil was fairly sandy, forcing them to locate on the inland portions of the town. However, when the trucking industry began to replace the railroad as the principal method of hauling freight, many Blades residents entered the field of trucking.

Blades seniors recall a close-knit village of quiet tree-lined streets, graded with oyster shells. A unique civic attraction that Bladesville residents were proud of was a musical group known as the Blades Concert Band. The Blades band pre-dated the Seaford Band. The Blades Band was organized, trained, and conducted by Charles Robinson, a local merchant who later lived in Seaford. Charles Robinson was the father of the renowned Wright W. Robinson, former editor and publisher of the *Seaford Leader*.

As the Town of Blades grew, its business expanded. At one time there were seven grocery stores in Blades. One of the most well-known stores was operated in Blades by Clarence Chipman and his son Alan for a period of 76 years.



The Blades Volunteer Fire Company has been in operation since 1934, when it began operation out of a one-car garage on West High Street. Soon thereafter, a firehouse and fully equipped company came into being. The second firehouse, located on East Second Street, was used until 1974, when a larger and more modern structure was dedicated on East Fifth Street. The new fire building is located near Blades School, which was built in 1952. Today, the new Blades School is part of the Seaford School District. It provides elementary classes and has complete facilities including a cafeteria, recreation hall, and outdoor recreational activities.

In 1948 Delaware's the Town of Blades elected the state's first female mayor. Margaret Hastings assumed the office after a lively campaign, won by a margin of nine votes. She was the first Republican to hold the office in many years. Mayor Hastings was very active in the Republican Party and was named a delegate to two National Republican Conventions. She was later honored by President Nixon at the International Conference for Women in 1979 for her dedication to the international women's movement. Mayor Hastings also became the first Delaware woman to be awarded a license to drive a school bus. Her political clout opened a door for thousands of women school-bus drivers.

In 1981, the citizens of Blades voted to improve the water and sewage facilities by establishing a central water supply and tying all town properties into the Seaford Sewer System. In February of 1982, these projects were completed. Since then the town has enjoyed a modern, safe, clean, and sanitary municipal water supply and sewer system.

Today, the Town of Blades is a tranquil, residential community, keenly interested in preserving the good life that has become a tradition in Sussex County. However, Blades is also experiencing a significant boom in population and a resultant expansion of residential development. This plan seeks to balance the tranquil character that the community has established with its desire to encourage growth and opportunities.

## **Town of Blades 1978 Comprehensive Plan**

Brown Associates, a planning consultant from Dover, completed the first comprehensive plan prepared for the Town of Blades in 1978. The 1978 plan includes an introductory chapter on the planning process, two detailed chapters on Blades "existing environment" (including climate, the natural environment, demographics, and urban development suitability), a set of planning goals, and finally "A Plan for Community Development Policy and Objectives." Although there are a number of maps in the document, the land use map has been misplaced over the years.

The 1978 plan relied mostly on written policy statements. The plan included recommendations regarding land use, housing, economic development, community services, parks and open space, transportation, and government management.

One of the primary recommendations in the plan was the adoption of zoning regulations and a zoning map. The Town accomplished this shortly after the plan was adopted, and relied on these regulations until 2004 when a land-development ordinance was enacted, and the town was comprehensively rezoned following the adoption of the 2002 Town of Blades Comprehensive Plan.

The Town has also accomplished a number of other substantial recommendations since 1978. The most notable were the provision of public water and sewer service to Blades residents and the development of Blades Community Park.

## **2002 Comprehensive Plan, Town of Blades**

The 2002 Town of Blades Comprehensive Plan, prepared by the Institute for Public Administration at the University of Delaware, updated the town's vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

After a long period of having relatively static borders, the plan identified and described several new areas for annexation. It characterized the town's demographic and economic characteristics, described the transportation system in and around town, and characterized and inventoried the municipality's housing stock. Open space, historic and cultural resources, and economic development were also discussed.

Particular attention was paid to town services, chiefly water and sewer, as they related to its ability to grow and expand. It also marked the first time that environmental conditions and concerns were systematically addressed in a Blades comprehensive plan.

Following a considerable public outreach and engagement effort, the plan laid out Blades' vision for its future. An important recommendation of this plan was the designation of marina and neighborhood business districts, each intended to spur economic growth and attract small-scale, low impact, commercial uses to the northern third of the town. These districts were codified in the town's subsequent 2004 zoning update.

The plan also went into considerable detail in recommending a strategy of intergovernmental coordination, cooperation, and implementation, giving town leaders a step-by-step guide for accomplishing the goals and recommendations included in the plan.

This document is an update of the 2002 plan.

## **Chapter 1-2 Community Profile**

This chapter outlines data on population, demography, housing, and economic conditions in Blades and the surrounding areas. Where appropriate, comparisons are also made to Sussex County and the state of Delaware. The data for this analysis have been derived from a number of sources, most notably the United States Census.

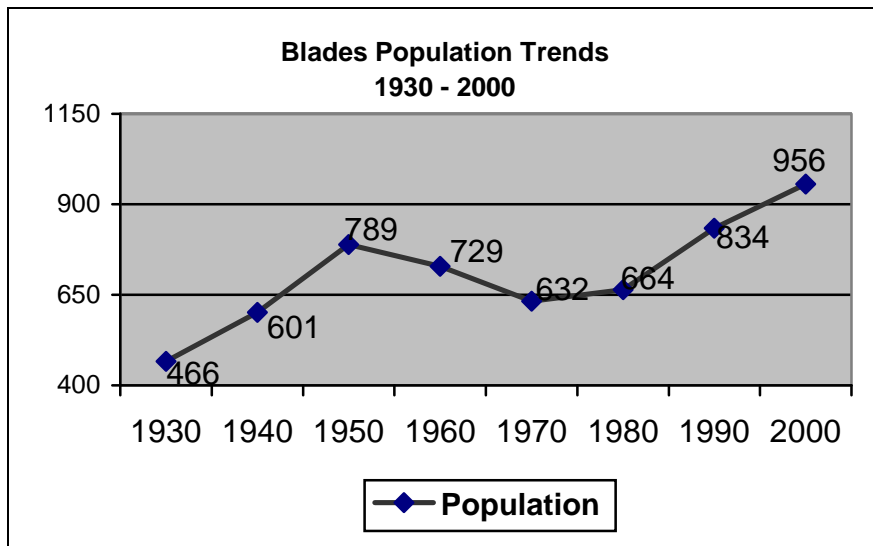
### **Population**

Chart 1 depicts the population trends in Blades from 1930 to 2000 using U.S. Census data. As the chart shows, from 1930 to 1990 the population in the state and the Sussex County has been steadily increasing, while the population in Blades has varied when compared to county and state trends. The town population initially peaked at 789 in the 1940s, and then steadily declined through 1970. The town's population remained generally static throughout the 1970's and then began a continuous pattern of growth.

In 1990 there were 834 people living in the town. The total population for Sussex County was 113,229, and 666,168 for the state of Delaware. Compared with the population in 1980, there was an increase of 25.6 percent for the town, an increase of 15.5 percent for Sussex County, and an increase of 12.1 percent for the state of Delaware. During this period, Blades increased its population at a much faster rate than did either the state or the county. This population influx is likely due to the quiet atmosphere and availability of affordable housing within the town. These factors, when combined with public sewer and water systems, create desirable conditions for the combination of young families and retired seniors who tend to reside in Blades (refer to Population Chart 2).

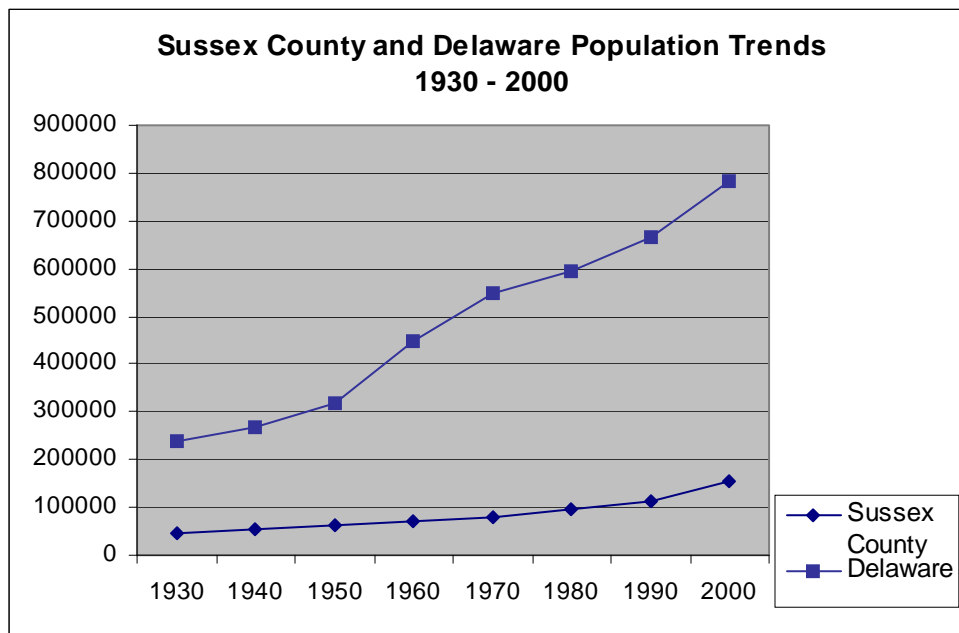
During the 1990s, the state of Delaware grew by 17.3 percent to 783,600, and Sussex County grew by 38.3 percent to 156,638. Blades grew more slowly than did the state or the county but still increased its population by 14.6 percent, to 956 in 2000, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

**Chart 1. Blades Population Trends**



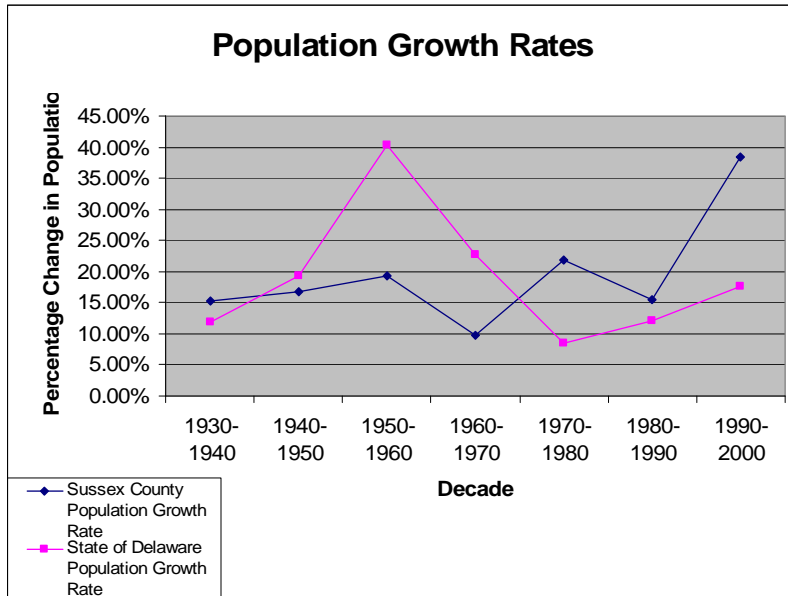
Source: U.S. Census 1930 to 2000. Compiled by IPA

**Chart 2. Sussex County and Delaware Population Trends**



Source: U.S. Census 1930 to 2000. Compiled by IPA

**Chart 3: Rate of Population Change**



**Table 1: Rate of Population Change**

	Sussex County	Delaware
1930-1940	15.37%	11.80%
1940-1950	16.83%	19.35%
1950-1960	19.33%	40.31%
1960-1970	9.78%	22.81%
1970-1980	21.96%	8.44%
1980-1990	15.54%	12.09%
1990-2000	38.34%	17.63%

Chart 3 and Table 1 illustrate historical growth trends in Sussex County and the state. From 1950 till 1970, the state consistently grew more rapidly than did Sussex, historically a relatively undeveloped and largely agrarian county. However, growth rates from 1970 to 2000 clearly show a markedly increased pace of growth in the county. Sussex nearly tripled the state’s growth rate in the 1970s, maintained a slightly higher rate in the 1980s, and better than doubled the state’s rate of growth during the 1990s.

Source: U.S. Census 2000

## Baseline Population and Future Population Projections

Using the U.S. Census 2000 data as a baseline, the number of total residents in Blades as of 2006 may be estimated by analyzing the number of Certificates of Occupancy issued for new residential structures. Since 2000, Blades had issued 82 such certificates. The 2000 Census established Blades' people per household ratio at 2.71. Applying this figure to the new residential occupancy numbers, there should be approximately 222 new residents in town since 2000. Therefore, the 2006 population of Blades is estimated to have been 1,178 people.

**Table 2. Estimated Population of Blades 2006**

	2000 Census Population	Certificates of Occupancy Issued since 2000	People Per Household	Additional Population	Total 2006 Population
Blades	956	82	2.71	222	1,178

Source: 2000 Census STF 3, Town of Blades permit records, compiled by IPA

Assuming that the town does not annex a significant amount of new territory, it is possible to estimate the future population. However, projections for small populations, such as Blades, are very difficult to prepare accurately. The small size of the population makes it likely that slight inaccuracies or data errors in the current Census figures can compound into sizeable errors when projected into the future. *These projections should be relied on with caution, as the conditions upon which the calculations are made are susceptible to change.*

The population projection is based on established growth rates for the town of Blades over the past 15 years. Taking the 1990 population and comparing it to the population for 2006, the annual average rate of growth was 2.18 percent. Using this figure, the projected populations may be calculated and are summarized in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Population Projection for Blades**

	2000	2006	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Blades population	956	1178	1284	1430	1593	1775	1977

Source: Census 2000 STF 3, compiled by IPA, Town of Blades permit records

It appears reasonable to assume that the population of Blades may increase in size by about 800 people over the course of the next 25 years. This assumes that the town's boundaries stay relatively static over this time period and that the growth rate that has been evident over the last 15 years remains relatively constant. The town's population could substantially increase if the town annexes adjacent land that is then developed as residential units or areas that are already populated.

### Build-Out Analysis

A more meaningful method of gauging Blades' future population is through a build-out analysis. This is accomplished in a series of steps. First, a historical ratio of the town's land uses is established. Second, an estimation of developable land within town is made. The land use percentages are then applied to the developable area to determine the likely amount of space that will be residentially developed. Lastly, the likely number of homes that would fit in this area is

derived by dividing the available residential area by 3.5 homes per acre, roughly the residential density of Blades. Finally, the number of new homes is multiplied by the historic average household size. While it is still a projection and should be relied upon with caution, unlike an abstract, trend-based projection, it yields a result that should be fairly accurate, assuming no major land use changes or large-scale changes in development patterns/density. Neither of which are called for in the plan. The process is then repeated to include the annexation areas in which residential uses are proposed and expected. Existing residential areas in proposed annexation areas are also included.

Map 6 shows the existing land uses in Blades. Nearly two-thirds (65.72%) of the developed areas in town are residential. Just over 12 percent are commercial. The remaining 22 percent are either open space, institutional, industrial, redevelopment, or public utilities.

The existing land use map also shows 96.8 acres of vacant lands, 66 acres of which are accounted for in the town's most recent annexation east of U.S. Rt. 13. Under current regulations, virtually all of this area is developable. Assuming historical development trends hold true, 63.6 acres of this area can be expected to be developed as residential. At 3.5 homes per acre, this translates into 222 additional homes. As of 2000, Blades' average household size was 2.71 people per household, meaning that within the existing town boundaries, Blades could expect an additional 603 residents. Added to the estimate of Blades' 2006 population of 1178, upon build out the town could expect to host 1781 residents. Next, annexation areas slated for, or containing, residential uses are accounted for. Referring to Map 4, annexation areas one, two, three, and six call for, or have existing, residential use.

**Table 4 Build-Out/Incorporation of Identified Areas of Annexation**

<b>Annexation Area</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
Existing Homes	23.0	0.0	50.0	4.0
Estimated Residents	62.3	0.0	135.5	10.8
Developable Acreage	11.2	34.9	24.7	0.0
Potential New Homes	<i>5.0</i>	122.2	<i>20.0</i>	0.0
Potential new residents	13.6	331.0	54.2	0.0
<b>Total Number of Existing and Future Residents</b>				<b>607</b>

Source: IPA GIS analysis of aerial photography available from the Office of State Planning Coordination. All acreages are approximate and the developable acreages calculation was completed without benefit of detailed site or engineering analysis. Also, the italicized figures are estimates of potential new homes, based on aerial observations, in annexation areas where the estimate of 3.5 homes per acre clearly overstates the development pattern of the structures in the relevant annexation area.

Annexation area one is largely built-out. Hosting 23 homes, it does have some vacant, developable acreage; however, the pattern of development in this area is far less dense than the core of Blades. It would seem unlikely that more than a handful of new homes could or would be constructed here. Area two is virtually vacant. Though it contains some non-tidal wetlands, it is largely developable, with enough room for over 100 new homes. Area three already has 50 homes and an estimated 136 residents. Though it has roughly 25 acres of technically developable space, it is in small pockets as opposed to a large block. An estimation based on available aerial photography suggests space for approximately 20 new homes. Taken together,

the eventual incorporation of existing residential neighborhoods and their subsequent build-outs would add approximately 607 new residents to the town of Blades.

In total then, Blades could expect to see an additional 603 residents within its 2007 municipal boundary and an additional 607, assuming it annexes all identified areas and they are subsequently built-out—a 1,210 total. With an estimated current population of 1,178, Blades may well double its population within the next 15 to 20 years.

## Racial Composition

Tables 5 and 6 compare the racial composition of Blades, Sussex County, and Delaware. In 1990, Sussex County and the state of Delaware showed a very similar racial composition. Sussex County's population included 82.5 percent white, 17 percent black and 0.5 percent other. Delaware's population included 81.7 percent white, 17.2 percent black and 1.2 percent other.

The 2000 U.S. Census Redistricting Data indicate that Sussex County and the state of Delaware became more diverse over the past decade.<sup>1</sup> Sussex County's white population decreased by 2.2 percent during the 1990s. At the same time, Sussex County's black population decreased by 2.1 percent. The increase in diversity was principally due to a 4.2 percent increase in the population of people who are neither white nor black. The state of Delaware, as a whole, had a much greater increase in non-white populations (7.05%) than did the county. The state's black population increased from 17.2 percent to 19.2 percent, and the population of races other than white or black increased from 1.2 to 6.2 percent.

The racial composition of Blades was very similar to that of the county and state in 1990. The proportions of the population for all groups were within one percentage point of the county and state (82.85% white, 16.43% black and 0.72% other).

However, 2000 U.S. Census Data indicate that Blades has become more diverse than either Sussex County or the state. The white population has decreased from nearly 83 percent to 69.8 percent. The population of black residents has increased to 21.8 percent from 16.4 percent in 1990. Similarly, the population of those of "other" races (almost all Spanish-speaking) has increased to 8.47 percent, up from less than one percent in 1990.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2000 Census methodology for recording race changed from the 1990 Census. A category was added that 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.



**Table 5 Racial Composition of Blades 1990, 2000**

Race	Blades			Sussex			Delaware		
	1990	2000	% Change	1990	2000	% Change	1990	2000	% Change
White %	82.85	69.77	-15.78	82.50	80.35	-2.60	81.68	74.63	-8.63
Black %	16.43	21.76	32.42	16.96	14.89	-12.20	17.17	19.23	11.99
Other %	0.72	8.47	1,076.38	0.54	4.76	781.48	1.15	6.15	434.78

Source: 1990 U.S. Census STF 3, 2000 U.S. Census SF 3, Compiled by IPA

### Hispanic Population

The Hispanic population of Blades more than doubled since 1990. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, 29 people, or 3.50 percent of those living in Blades, were of Hispanic origin at that time. The Hispanic population had grown to 63 by the year 2000, 6.59 percent of the town's population. The proportion of Hispanics living in Blades is higher than in the state or the county.

**Table 6. Hispanic Population Growth and Comparison – 1990, 2000**

	Blades		Sussex County		State of Delaware	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
Population	29	63	1,221	6,915	15,151	37,277
Percent (of total population)	3.50	6.59	1	4.4	2.2	4.8

Note: Persons of Hispanic Origin may be of any race

Source: U.S. Census, 1990 and 2000

### Age Profile

Table 6 presents age profiles for Blades, Sussex County, and Delaware. Blades maintained a somewhat younger population than either the state of Delaware or Sussex County. Census 2000 data indicate that the median age in Blades is 32.7 years. This is 3.7 years younger than that of Sussex County (36.4) and just under than that of the state (32.9).

In 1990, school-age children (ages 5-17) accounted for 159 residents in Blades. The total child population (ages 0-17) of Blades was 234, or 28.3 percent of all residents. The town's percentage of children was higher than that of the county or state (23.9% and 24.5%, respectively).

The 2000 Census indicates that the population of school-aged children and young adults (5-19 years) had increased to 249 from 185, or 26.1 percent of the total population. This is also significantly higher than increases for the state of Delaware (21.3%) and Sussex County (20%).

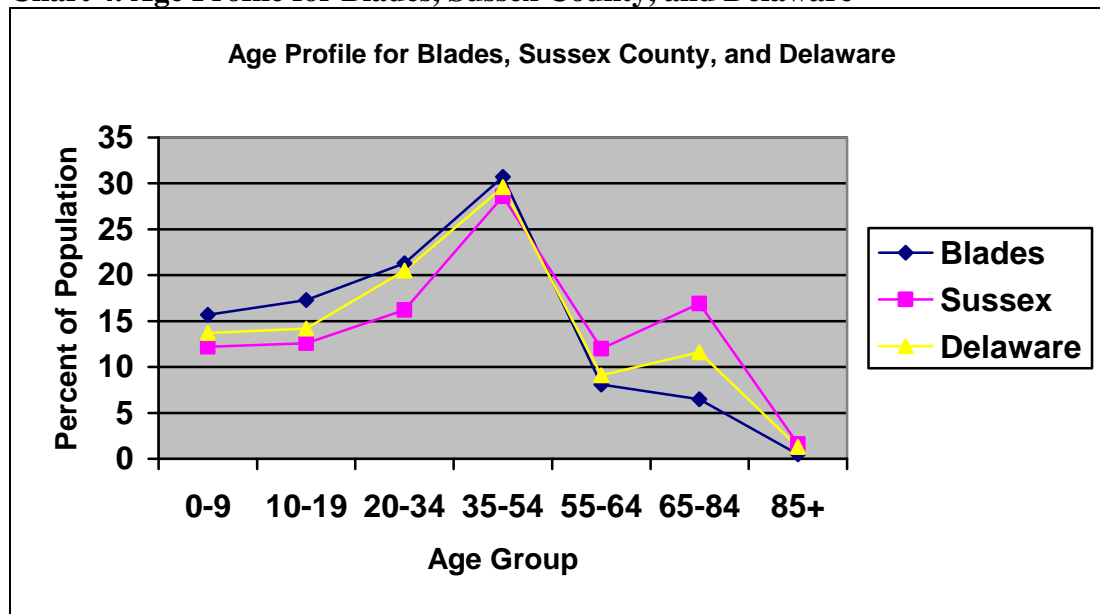
The population of young, working-aged adults was more concentrated in Blades in 2000 than in Sussex County or the state of Delaware. There were 303 individuals in this age group, which represented 21.3 percent of the total population in the town. There were smaller percentages of individuals in this age group in Sussex County (16.2%) and the state (20.5%).

**Table 6. Age Profiles for Blades, Sussex County, and Delaware, 2000**

Age Group	Delaware			Sussex County			Town of Blades		
	1990	2000	% Change	1990	2000	% Change	1990	2000	% Change
0-19	185134	218250	17.88	29810	38699	29.81	276	315	14.13
20-64	400299	463624	15.82	64488	88917	37.88	479	574	19.83
65+	80735	101726	25.99	18931	29022	53.30	79	67	-15.19

Source: 1990, 2000 U.S. Census

**Chart 4. Age Profile for Blades, Sussex County, and Delaware**



Source: 2000 U.S. Census, Compiled by IPA

### Educational Attainment

In 2000, the level of education of Blades’ residents was lower than the average level for the county and the state. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 56.9 percent of Blades residents 25 years old and above were high school graduates, had attended college, or were college graduates. In comparison, 76.5 percent of Sussex County residents, and 82.5 percent of Delaware residents reported that they had received a high school diploma, attended college, or received a college degree.

Proportionally fewer Blades residents (3.5 %) had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 16.6 percent for Sussex County and 25.0 percent for the state.

**Table 7. Educational Attainment**

Jurisdiction	High School Graduate	Some College*	Bachelor's Degree or Higher**	Total
Blades	33.7%	19.7%	3.5%	56.9%
Sussex County	35.6%	24.3%	16.6%	76.5%
State of Delaware	31.4%	26.1%	25.0%	82.5%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census SF 3, Compiled by IPA

\* includes those who attained an Associates Degree or spent any time at school

\*\* includes professional degree programs

## Housing

This section describes the housing stock found in Blades. Table 8 compares changes in the number of dwelling units in Blades, Sussex County, and the state of Delaware as recorded by the U.S. Census. Between 1970 and 1980, all three jurisdictions increased their housing stock, but the rate of growth for the state and the county was much higher than in Blades. Between 1980 and 1990, Blades grew at a rate similar to that of the county and greater than that of the state. From 1990 to 2000, there was a net increase of 44 new dwelling units added to the town. A portion of these dwelling units were new units constructed within the town boundaries, yet some (11) were unaccounted for in the town's building records. This perhaps implies an inaccuracy in Census data. It is likely that these 11 units were already present in 1990 but were not counted. During the 1990s, the housing stock of Blades grew by 12.6 percent. This was less than half the growth rate of Sussex County (25.3%), and significantly less than that of the state (18.3%).

The following two tables detail the changes in Blades' housing stock from 1970 to 2000.

**Table 8. Dwelling Units in Blades, Sussex County, and Delaware, 1970-2000**

Year	Blades	Change	Sussex County	Change	Delaware	Change
1970	243	***	34,287	***	180,233	***
1980	261	7.4%	54,694	59.5%	238,611	32.4%
1990	303	13.8%	74,253	35.8%	289,919	21.5%
2000	353	16.5%	93,070	25.3%	343,072	18.3%

Sources: U.S. Census 1960 – 2000. Compiled by IPA.

Permit activity in Blades indicates that 82 new Certificates of Occupancy have been issued for residential units within the town limits since the year 2000. This would bring the total number of residential housing units to 435.

**Table 9. Net Dwelling-Unit Increase in Blades, 1990 to 2000**

<b>Unit Type</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Number of Units</b>
Single Family Detached	Constructed	34
Single Family Detached	Annexed	0
Single Family Detached	Demolished	1
Single Family Attached	Constructed	0
Apartments	Constructed	0
Apartments	Annexed	0
<i>Net Increase, 1990 to 2000</i>		33*

Source: 2000 data for the town of Blades is derived from the town of Blades building permit and annexation records. Compiled by IPA.

### **Housing Stock Inventory**

Single-family homes are the predominant type of dwelling in Blades. In 2000, 83.3 percent of all housing units in Blades were single-family detached or attached dwelling units. This number is higher than that in Sussex County and Delaware. The corresponding percentage of single-family homes is 64.1 percent for Sussex County and 70.0 percent for the state. During the 1990s, 34 new single-family units were constructed in the town.

The other significant style of housing in Blades is multi-family units (apartments and condominiums). In 2000, there were 54 apartment units in the town, 13.8 percent of the housing stock. This is a reduction in the number of multi-family units in Blades shown in the 1990 U.S. Census. Though Blades envisions, and plans for, the construction of a significant number of new, single-family homes, it also anticipates new condominium construction. Taken together, the new development activities should serve to stabilize the proportion of multi-family units.

Census 2000 data suggest that there are 11 mobile home units in Blades. The 1990 Census suggested that there were 12 mobile homes present. The town questions the 1990 Census determination that there were 12 mobile homes within the town boundaries and also the 2000 Census inclusion of 11 mobile homes. Town records do not indicate the presence of these units, nor were they located during the land use survey conducted by IPA in 2007. There is a community of mobile homes just west of the town on River Road, and it is possible that these units were mistakenly calculated inside of the municipal boundaries by the 2000 U.S. Census.

**Table 10. Composition of Housing Stock: Blades, Sussex County, and Delaware in 1990**

Housing Type	Blades	% of total	Sussex County	% of total	Delaware	% of total
Single Family Detached	269	77.1	42,525	57.3	155805	53.7
Single Family, Attached	3	<1	3,381	4.6	40576	14.0
Multi-Family	60	17.2	6,765	8.9	56679	19.5
Mobile Homes★	12	3.4	21,140	28.5	34726	12.0
Other	5	1.4	442	<1	2133	<1
<b>Total</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>74253</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>289919</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: 1990 U.S. Census.

★ The presence of these 12 mobile homes within the town boundaries is disputed.

**Table 11. Composition of Housing Stock: Blades, Seaford, Sussex County, and Delaware 2000**

Housing Type	Blades		Seaford		Sussex		Delaware	
	Units	% of Total	Units	% of Total	Units	% of Total	Units	% of Total
Single Family, Detached	325	83.1	1572	56.9	55171	59.3	191688	55.9
Single Family, Attached	1	0.2	148	5.4	4501	4.8	48340	14.1
Multi-Family	54	13.8	1023	37.0	8986	9.6	64128	18.7
Mobile Homes	11	2.8	17	0.6	23817	25.6	38281	11.1
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	595	0.6	635	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2760</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>93070</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>343072</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000 SF3 Compiled By IPA

### Age of Housing Stock

Table 12 compares the age of Blades' housing stock with that of Sussex County, Seaford, and Delaware. As this chart shows, a little more than 22 percent of Blades' housing stock was built before 1940. Another 24.5 percent was constructed between 1980 and 1990, and 13.3 percent has been built since. Generally speaking, the Blades area has a higher proportion of both very new and very old houses than do either the county or the state.

**Table 12. Age of Blades Housing Stock, 2000**

Built	Blades %	Seaford %	Sussex County %	State of Delaware %
Prior to 1940	22.5	16.0	8.2	10.7
1940-1949	15.3	11.1	4.3	6.5
1950-1959	6.9	16.9	6.7	13.0
1960-1969	8.7	11.9	9.8	14.4
1970-1979	8.7	19.4	18.3	16.5
1980-1989	24.5	8.7	23.7	17.7
1990-March 2000	13.3	15.9	28.9	21.2

Source: U.S. Census 2000 SF 3 Compiled by IPA

## Housing Value

Table 13 compares Blades' 2000 median housing value with values in Seaford, Sussex County, and the state of Delaware. With a median value of owner-occupied housing units of \$63,800 in 2000, Blades has lower median housing values than do Seaford (\$87,000), the county (\$122,400), and the state (\$130,400). Generally, the median housing value in Blades has increased at the same rate as the surrounding areas, with the exception of Sussex County, which has seen remarkable growth in value. More recent, though somewhat anecdotal, data suggest housing values in Blades may have increased significantly since the 2000 U.S. Census, possibly even outstripping corresponding increases in Sussex County (see 2-7, Housing Plan).

**Table 13. Median Housing Values, 1990 and 2000\***

Jurisdiction	1990 Median Value	2000 Median Value	Percent Change
Blades	\$47,100	\$63,800	35.5
Seaford	\$65,600	\$87,000	32.6
Sussex County	\$79,800	\$122,400	53.4
State of Delaware	\$100,100	\$130,400	30.3

Source: U.S. Census 2000 SF3 and 1990 STF 3 Compiled by IPA

\*No adjustments were made for inflation

## Ownership and Vacancy

Table 14 compares the vacant, owner-occupied, and renter-occupied units in Blades from 1990 to 2000.

From 1990 to 2000, there was a 27.3 percent decrease in vacant housing in Blades. Owner-occupied and renter-occupied housing markedly increased. Home ownership increased by nearly 25 percent. Occupied rental units increased by 14 percent, a possible sign that Blades is transitioning to a predominantly owner-occupied community. At the same time, the number of housing units in the municipality increased by 12.6 percent.

**Table 14. Change in Ownership & Vacancy Rates in Blades 1990-2000**

Status	1990		2000		Change
	Number	%	Number	%	% Change
Vacant	55	15.7	40	10.2	-27.3
Owner Occupied	166	47.6	207	52.7	24.7
Renter Occupied	128	36.7	146	37.2	14.1
Total	349	100.0	393	100.0	12.6

Source: 2000 U.S. Census SF3, 1990 Census STF 3, Compiled by IPA

## Economic Profile

Table 15 provides selected income information for Blades, Sussex County, and Delaware. The 2000 median household income in Blades was \$28,864, 26.4 percent lower than the \$39,208 median household income in Sussex County and 39.1 percent lower than the \$47,381 median household income of the state as a whole. At the same time, the proportion of Blades residents who received public assistance (6.1%) was higher than that of the state (2.7%) or the county (3.2%). However, the mean public-assistance income received in Blades (\$1,781) is lower than that of Sussex County (\$2,605) or the state of Delaware (\$2,515). This was not the case in the 1990 Census, when the percentage of the population of Blades living beneath poverty level was 14.0 percent. This number has risen to 20.3 percent, which represents a 45 percent increase since the last census. This is compared to the 10.5 percent of Sussex County and 9.2 percent of the state of Delaware who live in poverty. Interestingly, Blades has seen the percentage of seniors living in poverty drop by almost the same amount. In 1990, nearly 22 percent of seniors in Blades were living in poverty. The 2000 Census indicates that this number had dropped to 11.7 percent. By comparison, 9.1 percent of Sussex County seniors and 8.5 percent of Delaware seniors live below the poverty line.

**Table 15. Income Data for Blades, Sussex County and Delaware, 1990 and 2000**

Item	Blades			Sussex County			Delaware		
	1990	2000	% Change	1990	2000	% Change	1990	2000	% Change
Median Household Income	\$21,094	\$28,864	38.6	\$26,904	\$39,208	45.7	\$34,875	\$47,381	35.8
Mean Household Income	\$24,576	\$30,852	25.5	\$32,613	\$35,228	8.0	\$42,069	\$48,060	14.2
% of Households with Wage or Salary Income	78.2	77.2	-1.3	72.7	70.8	-2.6	80.8	79.4	-1.7
Mean Wage or Salary Income	\$25,615	\$34,969	36.5	\$31,028	\$45,298	46.0	\$40,493	\$57,407	41.7
% of Households with Social Security Income	26.3	23.6	-10.2	34.9	35.9	2.8	23.8	26.9	13.0
Mean Social Security Income	\$7,584	\$10,871	43.3	\$7,893	\$11,785	49.3	\$8,083	\$11,997	48.4
% of Households with Retirement Income	11.4	12.5	9.6	21.5	26.7	24.2	5.2	21.0	303.8
Mean Retirement Income	\$4,577	\$10,133	121.4	\$9,843	\$18,133	84.2	\$9,987	\$17,871	78.9
% of Households with Public Assistance Income	8.7	6.1	-29.9	6.8	3.2	-52.9	5.2	2.7	-48.1
Mean Public Assistance Income	\$5,219	\$1,781	-68.9	\$3,707	\$2,605	-29.7	\$4,012	\$2,515	-37.3
% of Population Below Poverty Level	14.0	20.3	45.0	10.7	10.5	-1.8	8.7	9.2	5.7
% of Seniors Below Poverty Level	21.5	11.7	-45.6	12.2	9.1	-25.4	10.1	8.5	-15.8

Source: 1990 U.S. Census STF3, 2000 U.S. Census SF3, Compiled by IPA

## Blades Workforce

Since 1990, the workforce population of Blades has increased nearly 14 percent to 443 workers. The workforce appears to be more diverse in its occupations than the 1990 U.S. Census reflected. Previously, the main occupations of Blades residents were in the manufacturing, trade, and professional services areas. The 2000 Census shows decreases in the manufacturing, trade, and business services industries and growth in areas such as transportation, communication and public utilities, personal services, and agricultural, or forestry-related fields.



**Table 16. Employing Industry of Blades Residents**

Industry	1990		2000		% Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Agriculture, Forestry, Mining and related fields	6	1.5	13	2.9	116.6
Construction	43	11.1	60	13.5	39.5
Manufacturing	97	25.0	77	17.4	-20.6
Transportation, Communications and Public Utilities**	28	7.2	44	9.9	57.1
Wholesale Trade	23	5.9	21	4.7	-8.7
Retail Trade	83	21.4	57	12.9	31.3
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	11	2.8	14	3.1	27.3
Business and Other Services	19	4.9	9	2.0	-52.6
Personal Services*	16	4.1	52	11.7	225.0
Professional Services	52	13.4	88	19.8	69.2
Public Administration	10	2.6	8	1.8	-20.0
Total	388	100.0	443	100.0	14.20

Source: 2000 U.S. Census SF3, 1990 U.S. Census SF3

\* This category includes entertainment and recreational services

\*\* This category includes Information Services

## **Chapter 1-3 Government Services and Resources**

### **Town Government**

The formal title of the legislative body of the town is the “Mayor and Council of Blades.” This body is made up of the mayor and four other councilpersons. The mayor serves as chief executive of the town, as specified in the Town Charter. The registered voters in the town elect all council members at-large. Each year either three councilpersons or two councilpersons and the mayor stand for election. Each elected candidate serves a two-year term in office.

After the election, the mayor appoints each councilperson to one of the town’s commissioner positions. Each commissioner is responsible for a different function of government (e.g., parks & cemeteries, police, water, streets, or housing) and reports to the council on activities in his/her particular area.

### **Public Safety**

#### **Blades Police Department**

The Blades Police Department provides the majority of police service to Blades residents. The department employs three full-time officers, including the police chief. Officers work variable shifts in order to ensure that an officer is on duty during peak times in the municipality. All officers have their own vehicle, which is used for patrol purposes. Because there is a maximum of a single officer on duty in the town at any given time, the Blades Police Department has

entered into a mutual-aid agreement with the Seaford Police Department. If the Blades officer on duty needs assistance with a complaint, a Seaford officer will respond to a request.

All officers are trained and certified at the Delaware State Police Academy. The police department's operating budget is derived mainly from town revenues. However, approximately 15 percent of funds are obtained from various state and federal funding programs.

### **State Police**

When a local officer is not on duty, Delaware State Police responds to complaints in the Blades area. Located in the greater Blades area, Troop 5 of the Delaware State Police consists of 31 sworn officers, a criminal investigative unit, and a variety of other law-enforcement resources available to Delaware residents.

### **Fire Company**

The Blades Volunteer Fire Company operates out of the Fire Station 71, located at 200 East Fifth Street. The company houses approximately 63 active members, who are all volunteers from the local community. The company is fully equipped with three engines, two brush trucks, a tanker, a rescue truck, a boat, and two ambulances. The company's dive team has 16 members, and is trained in underwater search and rescue. The Fire Company serves Blades and surrounding areas.

### **Library Facilities**

The Seaford Public Library provides library services for the town of Blades. The Seaford Public Library, located at 402 North Porter Street in Seaford, Delaware, was established in 1902 and is a member of the Sussex County Department of Libraries. Member libraries are connected via the Internet and participate in a county-wide interlibrary loan program. The library is supported by state and county funding and currently employs seven full-time and four part-time employees. The library houses over 59,000 books, including a special Delaware collection containing historical information and documents.

### **Health Care**

Medical service is available for Blades residents at Nanticoke Memorial Hospital in Seaford, which offers emergency, in-patient, and outpatient care. Additionally, Sussex Medical Center of Blades, which houses two medical doctors, is located in town. This facility has an in-house pharmacy and x-ray capabilities. The doctors can perform minor surgery at the center.

### **State Service Center**

Public-assistance services are available to Blades residents via the Anna C. Shipley State Service Center, located at 350 Virginia Avenue in Seaford, Delaware. The State Service Center houses satellite offices of the Division of Probation and Parole, the Department of Health and Social Services, the Division of Public Health, and Child Protective Services. The center also offers access to the Medicaid, Welfare/food stamp, Well Child, Blood Pressure Screening, and WIC programs. Additionally, clients can obtain access to emergency assistance, psychological

counseling, rental assistance, vocational rehabilitation, access to group therapies, and a children's dental clinic. The building contains approximately 90 staff members.

## **Postal Service**

The U.S. Postal Service operates a full service post office at its facility located at 2001 Bridgeville Highway in Seaford, Delaware. The Seaford Post Office has serviced Blades residents since the Blades/Seaford post office merger in 1929.

## **Chapter 1-4 Public Participation**

IPA staff met regularly with the Blades Planning Commission throughout the spring and summer of 2007. Commissioners and town residents were given a planning training session in March. A public outreach workshop was held in April to gather input from Blades citizens and committee members on the plan's goals and principles.

Similarly, comments were heard and recorded at subsequent meetings in June, August, September, October, and November of 2007. The plan was also discussed at a planning commission meeting in March of 2008 and presented at a public hearing in April 2008. Meeting agendas and minutes for most can be found in the plan appendix. Turnout for most sessions was modest. Typical meetings drew a handful of community members. Most comments regarding the plan came from the planning commission, though several interested citizens were invaluable in pointing out minor errors in the draft plans.

In General, input from the planning commission and the interested public indicated that the town was happy with the direction and vision set forth in the 2002 Blades Comprehensive Plan, and sought only to update the data, land use, and annexation portions of the existing plan, while continuing to pursue the goals and principles already set forth.

## **The Planning Principles**

The following general planning principles were derived from the public participation exercises utilized during the updating of this plan. These principles will guide the development of the Blades Comprehensive Plan.

- 1) The community considers the Market Street and High Street area to be the downtown center of the town. The redevelopment efforts that have taken place since the 2002 Comprehensive Plan have created opportunities for expansion of commercial, institutional, and recreational uses that benefit the community as a whole and complement the marina. These efforts should be continued. The community would like to see more emphasis on recreational uses in redevelopment in the future.
- 2) The Town should continue to enhance the enforcement of building and property maintenance codes in order to protect the health, safety, and welfare of town residents, enhance the image of the town, and protect property values for all property owners.

- 3) The Town should enhance enforcement of residential-development requirements for pedestrian-friendly development. In this way, new development may be compatible with the existing patterns of Blades neighborhoods, and include street patterns that link to the existing street system, sidewalks, and parks and open-space areas.
- 4) The Delaware Department of Transportation and the Town of Blades should work together to solve transportation issues and improve the function and safety of all transportation corridors. Of particular concern is the high volume of heavy truck traffic. Additionally, this coordination needs to address multi-modal transportation needs and not only automotive needs. The comprehensive plan should develop land use strategies that are compatible with realistic transportation options.
- 5) Blades should seek to preserve the character and integrity of its existing neighborhoods while encouraging new development that is compatible with the town's existing character and improves housing choice, as it serves a broad range of people in the community.
- 6) The Town should continue to work with the Blades Economic Development Corporation (BEDCO) to implement economic development initiatives in Blades.
- 7) The Town should seek to attract land uses that will complement the marina and encourage economic development.
- 8) Blades should pursue a development strategy that complements the small-town atmosphere.
- 9) Blades is a part of the larger region and is influenced by what happens in Seaford, Laurel, and the outlying areas of Sussex County. The Town should coordinate planning, development, and other policies with these other government entities.
- 10) The Nanticoke River is a very important environmental feature that greatly increases the quality of life for area residents. Blades should seek to protect the river by adopting appropriate development practices and land use strategies adjacent to the river and its wetlands. Opportunities for low-intensity recreational and educational uses of the Nanticoke and its shoreline should be expanded, provided that they conform to environmental standards that maintain protection of these resources.

## **Chapter 2-1 Land Use Plan**

### **Background – Land Use**

Map 6 depicts the existing land use pattern in Blades. This pattern has resulted largely from the town's historic patterns of development and role as a small commercial and residential river town. Blades is connected to Seaford by the Nanticoke River Bridge, and early development of the town appears to have been focused along Market Street, which connected the two communities. Today the riverfront area of Blades near the bridge is dominated by Peninsula Oil Company, and includes storage tanks, offices, and an Uncle Willey's convenience store and gas station. The remainder of Market Street developed as a mixture of commercial, industrial, and residential uses.

The other main transportation route in Blades is High Street/Concord Road, which connects Market Street to U.S. Route 13. Historically, this street was dominated by residential uses, but that is changing. A number of small commercial establishments and a large doctor's office have located along High Street. Toward U.S. Route 13 there are many stately homes that overlook the Nanticoke River. However, most of these homes are outside of the municipal boundaries.

The Norfolk Southern railroad traverses the western edge of Blades. Numerous manufacturing uses have located along this rail line over the years. To the east of the rail line (which is within Blades' town boundaries), there are a number of industrial uses involving plating, storage, welding, and auto repair. Notably, there is also the vacant Peninsula Plating site that was identified as a "brownfield" and designated for redevelopment. As of August 2007, plans for a residential redevelopment had been approved for the site. To the west of the rail line (outside Blades current boundaries), is the Wyoming Concrete Company and a company that ships and receives bulk stone via the Nanticoke River.

Blades primary residential neighborhood is located southeast of the Market/High Street intersection. This neighborhood comprises a large portion of the land area in the town and is made up of mostly single-family detached residences. This neighborhood is interspersed with a few institutional uses, notably the Blades Fire Company, as well as a large park. The Blades Elementary School is located in this area. The school is part of the Seaford School District and is the only school located in the town. Additional residential uses can be found along both Market and High Streets and include single-family homes as well as the Hunters Court apartment complex.

Institutional uses are interspersed throughout the neighborhoods. There is a cluster of institutional uses along West Fourth Street, which is the location of the town hall, a meeting hall that was previously a church property, and some vacant property owned by the town.

The Nanticoke River represents the most significant natural feature in the area and is an outstanding aesthetic, environmental, and recreational resource for the town. Previously, the river was fairly inaccessible to the town, as the shoreline was dominated by industrial uses, woodlands, and wetland areas. This situation changed with the opening of the Blades Marine Park that includes an 87 slip marina, boat ramp, and other amenities for the general public. This

marina and park have prompted some redevelopment in the surrounding area. The Town hopes to encourage and continue this trend. One idea is the development of a greenway trail east of Market Street and north of East High Street, roughly following the contours of the river. The area is environmentally constrained and within the floodplain. Accordingly, the town would not allow the construction of freestanding structures. However, it is hoped that increasing the foot traffic in the area would benefit the nearby businesses.

There are two other parks in Blades—the large Blades Park and the smaller Triangle Park. There are also some recreational facilities located on South Arch Street at the Blades Elementary School.

Table 17 summarizes the amount of land in the various land use categories, based on the existing land use as depicted in the current land use map:

**Table 17. Existing Land Use in Blades**

Land Use Type	Parcels	Acres	% of Total
Residential	469	131.2	40.95
Commercial	20	26.9	8.42
Industrial	9	9.4	2.95
Institutional	5	13.1	4.08
Public Utilities	4	0.97	0.30
Recreation and Open Space	19	30.5	9.51
Redevelopment	1	5.8	1.81
Vacant	25	108.0	33.73
Right of Way/Unclassified	11	0.2	0.05
<b>Total</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>326.0</b>	

Source: IPA / WRA GIS Analysis of Blades Existing Land Use Survey (completed in June, 2007).

\* All acreages are approximate.

### ***Relevant Planning Principles***

- The community considers the Market Street and High Street area to be the downtown center of the town. The redevelopment efforts that have taken place since the 2002 Comprehensive Plan have created opportunities for expansion of commercial, institutional, and recreational uses that benefit the community as a whole and complement the new marina. These efforts should be continued. The community would like to see more emphasis on recreational uses in redevelopment in the future.
- The Town should enhance enforcement of residential-development requirements for pedestrian-friendly development. In this way, new development may be compatible with the existing patterns of Blades neighborhoods, and include street patterns that link to the existing street system, sidewalks, and parks and open-space areas.

- Blades should seek to preserve the character and integrity of its existing neighborhoods while encouraging new development that is compatible with the town's existing character and improves housing choice, as it serves a broad range of people in the community.
- The Town should continue to work with the Blades Economic Development Corporation (BEDCO) to implement economic development initiatives in Blades. The town's stalled greenway project has been discussed as a strong possibility. See further discussion in Chapters 2-5 and 2-6.
- 7) The Town should seek to attract land uses that will complement the marina and encourage economic development.
- Blades should pursue a development strategy that complements its small-town atmosphere. See further discussion in Chapters 2-5 and 2-6.
- The Nanticoke River is a very important environmental feature that greatly increases the quality of life for area residents. Blades should seek to protect the river by adopting appropriate development practices and land use strategies adjacent to the river and its wetlands. Opportunities for low-intensity recreational and educational uses of the Nanticoke and its shoreline should be expanded, provided that they conform to environmental standards that maintain protection of these resources. See further discussion in Chapters 2-5 and 2-6.

### ***Goal Statement – Land Use***

Blades should encourage economic development and land use changes that preserve and improve the small-town atmosphere of the community while capitalizing on the town's advantageous location on the shores of the Nanticoke River and in the larger Seaford region.

### **Plan Recommendations – Land Use**

There are currently few, if any, serious land use conflicts in Blades, and the land use plan suggests that many of the existing land uses continue or change to similar uses. Two areas, described below as the Blades Downtown / Marine District and the Blades Neighborhood Business District, are recommended to evolve over time into new combinations of uses to enhance economic activities and services for Blades residents. There are also a number of properties in Blades that are currently vacant and available for development. Future land uses for these properties have been designated that are compatible with the existing patterns of growth in the town and consistent with the town's vision for future growth. Map 7 shows the anticipated future land uses for the town's currently incorporated areas. Six areas are identified by number. Areas one, two, and four are parcel-specific. Area one is anticipated to host commercial development within 500 to 1000 feet of the highway. The eastern remainder is slated for residential use. Area two refers to the former brownfield adjacent to the town hall. It is slated for residential use. Currently, plans for a medium-density development are pending final approval. Area three, termed "emerging residential," generally refers to the area of the Little Meadows subdivision and extends east to U.S. Rt. 13. The town anticipates the short-term build-

out of this area, likely within five to ten years. Area four refers to the parcel, shown in red, adjacent to U.S. Rt. 13. The town anticipates commercial uses here.

Area five refers to the Marina district and the Neighborhood Business district in the northwest quadrant of town. Here the town plans for comparably higher densities and a mix of uses.

Finally, area six refers to the older, existing residential core of the town. The town anticipates preserving the character of these established neighborhoods.

The following recommendations describe the proposed future land use categories and specific policies for lands inside the current town limits of Blades.

#### Recommendation 1: The Blades Downtown/Marina District

Blades does not have a well-defined “downtown” district. Market Street, from the Nanticoke River Bridge to the intersection with High Street, is the area that most residents seem to identify as the town’s business district. Historically, this area was a combination of industrial, commercial, and residential uses. However, the completion of the Blades Marine Park and the area’s identification and codification as a Marina District have already started to have an impact on redevelopment activities in the surrounding area.

The concept behind the Blades Downtown/Marina District is to encourage development and redevelopment of this area with a mixture of uses that will complement and enhance the marina and the community in general. This area should redevelop with a downtown scale, including sidewalks and buildings situated close to the street and to each other.

The following are some guidelines for town officials to use when considering new development or redevelopment activities in this area:

- The development of this area should be designed to minimize the impact on sensitive natural areas and the river itself. As Map 7 shows, large portions of the lands designated as the Blades Downtown/Marina District are impacted by wetlands and floodplains. Blades Flood Hazard Ordinance may govern construction in this area. There may also be other permitting requirements for construction through the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and/or the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. See Chapter 2-8 Environmental Protection for more information.
- Appropriate uses in this area include commercial uses (stores and restaurants), light industrial uses that cater to marine operations (such as boat repair or fabrication of marine hardware), institutional uses, and residential uses developed in conjunction with other projects.
- Sidewalks and other pedestrian connections should be provided along Market Street and to other uses in the area that will attract pedestrians. It is important to create an environment in which people will feel comfortable walking and shopping. This is critical if the area is to be friendly to visiting boaters.
- Design guidelines should be adopted to encourage the development of a consistent streetscape along Market Street. In general, parking should be located behind storefronts. A consistent landscaping theme is also desirable.
- Wherever possible, parking should be consolidated behind structures. Ideally, a number of smaller parcels should collaborate to provide one central parking facility to serve all uses. In



this way the number of spaces can be maximized, while the number of entrances can be reduced.

- The town should consider the establishment of public parking in this area to allow the most efficient use of land.

### Recommendation 2: Blades Neighborhood Business District

Historically, businesses and homes have coexisted along Market and High Street. The Blades Neighborhood Business District formalized this combination of land uses while providing guidelines to address common issues such as parking, entrances, and sidewalks. The following are some guidelines for town officials to use when considering new development or redevelopment activities in this area:

- Residential and community-scaled commercial establishments should be allowed to locate in this area. Community-scaled commercial can be interpreted to mean small stores, shops, café-style restaurants, personal services, professional offices, and home businesses.
- The overall size of any one non-residential establishment should be limited to no more than 2,500 or 3,000 square feet. This will discourage the consolidation of smaller parcels into large development sites, which could result in an erosion of the neighborhood character.
- Sidewalks and other pedestrian connections should be provided along Market Street and to other uses in the area that will attract pedestrians. It is important to create an environment where people will feel comfortable walking and shopping.
- Wherever possible, parking should be consolidated behind structures. Ideally, a number of smaller parcels should collaborate to provide one central parking facility to serve all uses. In this way the number of spaces can be maximized while reducing the number of entrances.
- The Town should consider the establishment of public parking in this area to allow the most efficient use of land.

### Recommendation 3: Large Vacant Parcels

Within the Blades town limits there are some parcels of vacant land that could be the site of future large-scale development projects, specifically the two parcels fronting the western right of way of Brickyard Road (shown as areas 3 and 4 on Map 7) and the newly incorporated area east of U.S. Rt. 13 (shown as number 1 on Map 7). The following are some specific guidelines that can be used by town officials when considering large-scale development activities on these parcels.

- The large parcels east of the currently developed area and the Little Meadows subdivision, west of U.S. Rt. 13, should be used for residential purposes. The density of these new developments should be consistent with the existing neighborhoods. However, a mixture of housing types (including townhouses, duplexes, or condominiums) could be desirable as long as they are attractively designed and well integrated into the fabric of the neighborhood. For more information see Chapter 2-7, the Housing Plan.
- There is an opportunity to connect the new residential developments to the existing town street pattern. These connections should be sought and encouraged, in order to infuse the pattern and character of Blades within the new developments. This will provide the new

residents with multiple points of access to the town and nearby services; allow emergency, service, transit, and school buses better access to the new neighborhoods; and reduce traffic congestion along High Street.

#### Recommendation 4: Infill/Vacant Lots

An infill lot is an undeveloped or underutilized parcel located in a built-up area. As the Existing Land Use map shows, a number of these types of lots are scattered throughout the town. It is recommended that these lots be developed in a manner consistent with their surrounding neighborhoods and land uses. The Future Land Use Map illustrates the Town's desire to retain a residential character in the core of the town, as nearly all of the small vacant parcels were assigned a residential classification. The area labeled *number two* on the Future Land Use Map is slated for, and is now undergoing, redevelopment. Once an industrial use and later a borderline brownfield, the lot was being improved at the time of this document's publication. The town has received and approved plans for the parcel's conversion into medium-density condominiums. This change is reflected on the Future Land Use Map.

#### Recommendation 5: Recent U.S. 13 Annexation

The newly annexed parcel east of U.S. Route 13 (the red and blue area labeled *number one* on the Future Land Use Map) is anticipated to contain some commercial uses fronting the highway, with residential uses further east. Access to this site should be coordinated with the Delaware Department of Transportation and specifically with the Corridor Capacity Preservation Program. This is a sizable area of approximately 66 acres. At the time of this document's publication, the town had yet to receive any concrete plans or proposals for this area, though officials had seen a sketch up of the developer's intent. The Town envisions this area containing between 500 and 1000 feet of commercial frontage along its western edge, bordering U.S. Rt. 13. The Future Land Use map shows a 500-foot strip, but it should not be construed as a binding measure. The intent is to show commercial along the highway with residential uses east. Town officials characterized the type of desirable residential uses as moderate- to possibly higher-density residential—consistent with townhomes or possibly an assisted-living facility.

- This area presents the Town with some challenges and opportunities. Any development in this area will require coordination with DelDOT, as it falls within the jurisdiction of the Corridor Capacity Preservation Program. The Town should seek out the department's input early on in any development-review process. The Town should also work to ensure safe, attractive, and convenient crosswalks to connect this area to the town's core.
- Residents (particularly if a large number of senior citizens one day reside in an assisted-living facility) could potentially be cut off from the rest of the Blades community. U.S. Route 13 is an obvious barrier; however, the design of the proposed commercial uses along the highway could either improve or exacerbate the situation. Given that the Town envisions some level of density, it would be highly desirable to design and construct the commercial uses so as not to constitute an even greater obstacle. Better yet would be to encourage uses that could serve this residential community as well as automotive traffic on U.S. Rt. 13. Sidewalks along the highway and connecting the residential and commercial components of this area are extremely important. Commercial uses with secondary entrances to the side or

rear could also serve to generate foot traffic for these enterprises. In any event, landscaping, trees, and carefully designed and located parking could help to improve the view and aesthetics for this residential area, as opposed to a view of the back of an imposing commercial structure.

## **Chapter 2-2 Growth and Annexation Plan**

### **Background – Growth and Annexation**

#### **Recent Annexations**

Historically, Blades had very static boundaries. However, there have been sizable annexations since the mid 1990s. Most recently, Blades annexed a large parcel east of U.S. Route 13, concurrently amending the meets and bounds of its charter through the state legislature. The Town also annexed two fairly large properties to the east of what were the town boundaries in 1995. One of these properties is under development now as the Little Meadows housing development. The other property has been zoned commercial and has frontage along U.S. Route 13.

#### **Growth Trends**

The town of Blades has grown slowly over the years, but there are indicators that the pace of growth has been increasing recently. Blades grew at a particularly high rate during the 1980s, and that growth continued through the year 2000. Blades' population increased more than 25 percent between 1980 and 1990, a rate that exceeded those of the state and the county. Although the rate of growth slowed somewhat during the 1990s, by the year 2000 Blades population was 956, a historic high for the community. Judging from the number of certificates of occupancy issued for new residential structures since 2000 (82), it is likely Blades has added at least 222 new residents since that time, for a total of 1,178. This is noteworthy because many small towns in Delaware have shown negligible increases during the same periods and are today well below historic peak populations reached earlier in the past century.

#### **Area Growth Trends**

The population growth and residential construction activity that is being experienced by Blades is representative of the growth occurring in the greater Blades/Seaford area. This area is the largest urban area in western Sussex County and the center of a great deal of economic activity. Blades cannot be considered an isolated rural small town. Rather, it must be considered in context as a small municipality in the center of a very active and growing urban area.

#### **Town Services**

Blades owns and maintains a town water system that has capacity to expand into adjacent areas. The town has the infrastructure and equipment to be the primary water service provider for the area south of the Nanticoke River. The Town of Blades is committed to protecting the long-term viability of its sources of water. The town's sewer service is provided through a collaborative agreement between Sussex County (the transmission system) and Seaford (waste treatment). These two entities will have to be consulted prior to any town expansion that will require sewer,

as sewerage, in particular, is the most notable constraint on the town's growth, development, and its ability to adequately service identified and potential areas of annexation. Water and sewer service and capacities are described more fully in Chapter 2-3, Infrastructure Plan.

The Town also provides a number of other services that will benefit new residents if and when it expands its boundaries. Blades has a police department, an active fire company, and operates several parks.

### **Areas of Concern**

Areas of Concern are lands in or around a municipality that it has no immediate ambitions to annex but would like the opportunity to comment on potential developments or significant state investments. Often, these lands receive services from the interested municipality. Blades, through a series of mutual-aid agreements, provides fire protection to a sizable area south of the town. Accordingly, the town has identified the serviced area as its area of concern. Discussions with town officials tended to characterize this area more as a service concern than a likely future annexation. The town's area of concern is bounded by the northernmost tip of Laurel to the south at Mt. Zion Road. To the east it extends approximately to the intersection of State Route (SR) 9 and SR 20. The western boundary is just northwest of the confluence of Woodland Ferry Road and the Nanticoke River. The town will likely wish to formalize this agreement through a memorandum of understanding with Sussex County.

### **Strategies for State Policies and Spending**

With the formation of the Governor's Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues, the state of Delaware has adopted an active role in land-use planning issues. The current state policies for coordinating spending are described in the document *Managing Growth in 21st Century Delaware: Strategies for State Policies and Spending*. This strategy document was adopted by the Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues on December 23, 1999, after an extensive process of public consultation with citizens and municipal leaders. They were updated in 2004. The strategies are predicated on the fact that, while local governments exercise control over land use decisions in their own jurisdictions, state investment and policy decisions can influence land use and the pattern and pace of growth. The strategies were created as a tool to help manage new growth in Delaware while revitalizing existing towns and cities and protecting the state's environment and unique quality of life. The Strategies map for the Blades area may be found as Map 3 in the Map Appendix at the end of this document.

The strategies map designates virtually all of Blades as Level 1 and Level 2, the highest priority areas for state investment and spending. The strategies indicate that the state will invest in infrastructure and public facilities. As such, the state should be supportive of additional development within Blades boundaries.

The lands west of Blades along River Road are also designated Level 1. Small portions fall within Level 2. This area encompasses existing industrial uses, as well as an existing trailer park on the western edge of the town of Blades. The remaining lands immediately adjacent to the town's southern limits are also designated Level 2. However, south of Morgan Branch, the designation quickly changes to Level 4, meaning growth is discouraged and the state would be unlikely to invest infrastructure monies. East of the town limits, the lands along Concord Road

are designated Level 3. The strategies recognize that growth is occurring in this suburban area and supports infrastructure investments that enhance the quality and viability of new development in these areas, provided it is well planned, developed only after any adjacent Level 1 or 2 areas, and the expense associated with provision of services is reasonable.

### **Relevant Planning Principles – Growth and Annexation**

- The Town should enhance enforcement of residential-development requirements for pedestrian-friendly development. In this way, new development may be compatible with the existing patterns of Blades neighborhoods, and include street patterns that link to the existing street system, sidewalks, and parks and open-space areas.
- The Town should continue to work with the Blades Economic Development Corporation (BEDCO) to implement economic development initiatives in Blades.
- The Town should seek to attract land uses that will complement the marina and encourage economic development.
- Blades should pursue a development strategy that complements the small-town atmosphere.
- Blades is a part of the larger region and is influenced by what happens in Seaford, Laurel, and the outlying areas of Sussex County. The Town should coordinate planning, development, and other policies with these other government entities.

### **Goal Statement – Growth and Annexation**

The Town of Blades should encourage the development and redevelopment of lands within the town boundaries and annexation of areas south of the Nanticoke River that are adjacent to the existing town boundaries, which are functionally related to the community, its infrastructure, and services.

### **Recommendations – Growth and Annexation**

#### **The Role of the Planning Commission and Town Council**

The Growth and Annexation Plan identifies a number of parcels that the town is interested in annexing. These parcels are currently under the jurisdiction of Sussex County and, as such, the Town Council has no authority to regulate land use on these parcels unless they are annexed into the town. Regardless of whether or not the town annexes the property, it is concerned about the future type, scale, and intensity of land use.

This chapter is meant to serve as a set of guidelines for the town when faced with development in these areas. Specifically, the recommendations may prove useful in the following circumstances:

- When a development or rezoning is proposed in Sussex County's jurisdiction, these recommendations may allow the town to make informed comments through the County's land use review process.

- These recommendations may assist the town in preparing plans for utility services in the adjacent areas, and they may also be useful when negotiating with developers in these areas.
- If annexation is proposed, these recommendations will be available to guide the town as to the appropriate types of land uses and scale of development.

## Proposed Annexation Areas

The Town has identified the area on the southern shore of the Nanticoke River as its priority annexation area. For purposes of analysis, this plan identifies eight distinct annexation areas totaling roughly 275.5 acres. These annexation areas are shown in more detail on Map 4, Growth and Annexation Areas, which may be found in the map appendix. All of these areas are either in Level 1, 2, or 3 areas, as depicted on the State Strategies for Policies and Spending map, which was adopted on December 22, 1999, by the Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues and updated in 2004. They are also shown as “growth areas” on the 1996 Sussex County Comprehensive Plan, although that plan was being revised concurrently with the town’s plan. Table 18 summarizes these areas. The numbers correspond to the labels on Map 4.

**Table 18. Blades Growth and Annexation Calculations**

Area #	Total Acres	Existing Uses
1	18.22	23 houses
2	45.07	None
3	81.84	50 houses (trailers and single family)
4	78.65	7 commercial uses
5	46.67	2 industrial uses
6	5.09	Several residential uses
Totals		

Source: IPA-WRA GIS Analysis of Land Use/Land Cover data and available aerial photography. Annexation areas selected by the Town of Blades Planning Commission at their meeting of May 20, 2002, and reaffirmed in June, 2007.

Table 18 demonstrates that the total growth area proposed by the Blades plan is approximately 275.5 acres, including all annexation areas. The figure jumps to 371.54, counting the recently annexed, 96-acre parcel east of U.S. Rt. 13.

According to the existing land use survey described in Table 17, Chapter 2-1, the existing land use in the developed area of the town of Blades is approximately 41 percent residential, 8.5 percent commercial, 9.5 percent open space, and 34 percent vacant. Industrial, institutional, utilities, redevelopment, and unclassified lands accounted for the remaining 7 percent. It is important to realize that these numbers are not historically indicative of Blades’ pattern of development. The recent annexation of 90-some acres, nearly 50 of which are vacant, east of U.S. Rt. 13 has acted to skew the land use ratios. Though no finalized plans for the parcel in question had been presented to the town, it is envisioned to contain residential and commercial uses that will significantly reduce the vacant acreage and bolster the residential and commercial figures.

## **Growth and Annexation Area Descriptions**

Map 4 in the map appendix shows the six individual annexation areas and assigns future land uses to them. The following section provides more details about these areas:

### Annexation Area 1 – Concord Road Corridor

This annexation area consists of approximately 18 acres of mostly developed land along both sides of Concord Road between the town limits and U.S. Route 13. The majority of land in this corridor is currently in residential use, and the Growth and Annexation Plan recommends that it remain residential through the balance of the planning period. Many existing homeowners in this area have expressed an interest into annexing into town to obtain sewer and water service. Technically speaking, there is some undeveloped land in this area. However, the street network, the size of the existing lots, and 3.5 acres of tidal wetlands make it somewhat unlikely that more than a handful of new residences could be built.

### Annexation Area 2 – Southern Town Extension

This annexation area consists of about 45 acres immediately adjacent to the southern town boundaries. Approximately 35 acres are suitable for future development. The Growth and Annexation Plan recommends that this area be developed with residential uses. Because access to this property is limited, it is most likely that these lands will need to be developed in conjunction with, or connected to, the adjacent lands to the north, which are currently within the town boundaries.

### Annexation Area 3 – Western Town Extension

This annexation area consists of roughly 82 acres of land along the River Road corridor west of Blades. The area contains more than 50 homes, including a neighborhood of mobile homes (single-wide “trailers”) and several subdivisions of conventional single-family homes. These neighborhoods are currently served with septic systems and wells, and it is anticipated that in the future it will be desirable for them to annex into the town to obtain sewer, water, and other municipal services. Providing sewer service would be a notable environmental improvement, considering that these properties are in close proximity to the Nanticoke River. The remaining vacant land in this area suitable for development (25 +/- acres) is designated by this plan for future residential use.

### Annexation Area 4 – Highway Corridor

This annexation area consists of just under 80 acres, following U.S. Rt. 13, from north to south, the length of the town. North of its intersection with the town boundary, it encompasses the red area west of the highway. South of that point, it extends roughly to the Morgan Branch west to area two and east from U.S. Route 13 to the current town boundary. The majority of the area is developed as commercial businesses, including a restaurant along the river. These businesses have long expressed a desire to annex into the town to obtain sewer and water service, and, as in Area 3, the provision of this service would be an environmental improvement for the river. The rectangular lot, surrounded by the town to the north, west, and south, is designated by this plan

for commercial use, as is the potentially developable area between annexation area two and Sussex highway.

#### Annexation Area 5 – Industrial Area

This area consists of approximately 47 acres of industrial land west of the town limits along River Road. The area is dominated by two existing industrial uses: Wyoming Concrete and the Arundle Corporation's stone depot. This area is virtually built-out.

#### Annexation Area 6 – NorthEast Pocket

This area consists of just over five acres of land along concord Road. It is residential in character and hosts a handful of homes. Originally included in the town's approved 2002 annexation area, these property owners did not wish to be annexed when the large parcels due south of them came into town in 2007. While Blades has no interest in aggressively pursuing these parcels, it wishes to retain them as an area of annexation should the owners change their minds.

### **Plan Recommendations**

#### Recommendation 1 – Reserve Sewer Allocation for Town Use Before Annexation

The Infrastructure Plan, Chapter 2-3, indicates that sewer capacity is currently a limiting factor in Blades' growth. The town currently meets or exceeds the agreed-upon allocation for treatment capacity, although the county and the City of Seaford are currently in negotiations to upgrade that capacity. However, even under the most optimistic scenario being discussed, there will only be excess capacity for about 100 new homes or some combination of new homes and other businesses. Considering the size of recent annexations, the ongoing build-out of Little Meadows, and the imminent redevelopment of the former brownfield near town hall, the town will likely need all of its allocation to accommodate lands currently in the town boundaries. The Town of Blades should work collaboratively with Sussex County and the City of Seaford to secure additional sewer capacity prior to annexation. The Town should not annex unless it has adequate capacity to serve the areas within the town as well as the new areas. The Town should also engage the Office of State Planning Coordination in a dialogue about sewer capacity and the associated plan of services for impending annexations.

#### Recommendation 2 – Annexation Strategy

The Town Council may utilize the following policies when considering annexation requests:

- The Town should put the highest priority on annexing properties that are directly adjacent to the current town boundaries and properties that are partially within the town boundaries.
- Properties that are partially or minimally adjacent to the town boundaries should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. These parcels may range from small lots to large



vacant tracts that are the subject of sizable development proposals. The Town should avoid creating enclaves of unincorporated land.

- The Town may wish to require at least a conceptual development plan, showing the street network, location of major structures, sidewalk connectivity, open space, and major environmental features as a condition of, and formally attached to, an annexation agreement. This would not only facilitate in the efficient rezoning of said parcels, but also gives the town some negotiating power early in any potential annexation discussion.
- Through annexation, the Town may take control of areas that have not traditionally been served by town services. Each annexation request should be evaluated to determine the project's impact on town services. The evaluation of these annexation proposals may include:
  - The potential benefit to the town in terms of tax revenue, jobs, services, or facilities to be provided.
  - The desirability of controlling the type and style of development using town codes if development is imminent.
  - The impact of the development on town services and utilities. These impacts include sewer, water, fire service, police service, administrative costs, long-term maintenance of infrastructure, impact of the development on town facilities, as well as other criteria to be defined by the Town Council.
  - The property's location within the State Investment Strategies Map. Parcels within the Level 1 or 2 classifications should be considered favorably. The State has defined these areas for growth in the near term future and will be most likely to commit to infrastructure improvements in the area. Proposed annexations in Level 3 areas should generally be pursued only when bordering areas within the municipal boundary are already built-out, or when the annexation would involve a clear, logical extension of services. Level 4 areas should be approached cautiously. None of the annexation areas currently fall within the Level 4 designation, but the Town should monitor changes to the State Strategies for Policies and Spending maps and the Sussex County Comprehensive Plan. State resources are unlikely to be available in Level 4 areas. Unless the intent is to preserve open space or agricultural uses, the Town should carefully consider such requests as development in these areas may greatly increase the financial burden on the town.

### Recommendation 3: Sprawl Avoidance Strategies

The following are some specific policies the Town Council could consider when, and if, they have any role in reviewing development proposals or providing utilities in areas adjacent to the town:

- Parcels that are adjacent to the current town boundaries should be annexed and developed first, before the annexation of more remote parcels is considered.
- Utility services should be extended only to areas that are anticipated for development and are consistent with the location and goals for the annexation areas. Utilities should not be extended to remote areas without a full evaluation of the costs and the benefits to the town.

## **Chapter 2-3    Infrastructure Plan**

### **Background – Infrastructure**

The major infrastructure components essential to the functioning of the Town of Blades are the water and sewer systems and the public schools. This public-utility infrastructure is essential to serve the basic needs of the population, and the schools of a community are essential to educating the citizens and enabling them to become active and productive.

#### **Sanitary Sewer**

The Town of Blades does not operate its own wastewater-treatment facility, but is part of Sussex County's Blades Sanitary Sewer District, created in the late 1970s. The original boundaries of this district were the limits of the Town of Blades. The County installed the sewer-collection and -transmission infrastructure, but decided to enter into an agreement with the City of Seaford to treat the waste from the district, rather than construct a freestanding treatment plant for Blades. The original agreement with Seaford limited the district to a flow of approximately 80,000 gallons per day (gpd), and contained provisions limiting the type and intensity of wastes to be treated by the plant.

Since the inception of the district, Seaford has upgraded its sewer-treatment plant. The plant now uses Biological Nutrient Removal (BNR) technology to treat waste, with maximum permitted outflows of 8mg/L nitrogen and 3mg/L phosphorous. Seaford's facility currently has the capacity to treat two million gallons per day and is currently operating at about half capacity, with averages around one million gallons per day of waste treated. The Blades District has been expanded to include areas that have been annexed into Blades and is currently contiguous with the town boundaries.

The incorporation of BNR technology in the wastewater-treatment plant was one part of the requirements set out in the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program for the Nanticoke River Watershed. The TMDL program required the Seaford, Laurel, and Bridgeville wastewater-treatment plants to adopt this technology while capping all remaining wastewater-treatment plant outputs at the levels established in 1998. By adopting this technology, the Seaford treatment plant has complied with the state-level requirements.

Sussex County, on behalf of Blades and the City of Seaford, has since updated the agreement and wastewater-flow allocations. Blades is currently allocated a maximum flow of 120,000 gpd.

According to Sussex County Engineering, the average house generates 300 gpd<sup>2</sup> of waste. Considering that the Blades district is currently operating at an average of approximately 103,664 gpd, an increase to the maximum being considered.

The current allocation of 120,000 gpd will allow only 17,000 gpd for growth in Blades. This is only enough capacity for approximately 60 new homes, and much of this extra capacity could be used by new commercial or industrial users. It is, however, possible that Blades uses somewhat less sewer capacity per household than the county average. Blades' records indicate the average household pumps only 200 gpd. Town officials felt private wells and possible infiltration were unlikely to account for so significant a difference. This should be explored in the proposed sewer study. Either way, Blades will most likely want to consider re-negotiating its agreement with Seaford to allow for further development in the near future. Given that Seaford is the town's only source of sewer service and likely will be for the foreseeable future, it is imperative that Blades coordinate annexation and large-scale development decisions with available sewer capacity in mind. Though Seaford's plant, at present, has capacity to spare, this may not always be the case. New development or annexations in or around Seaford could dramatically affect how much capacity the facility has left for Blades.

Sanitary-sewer capacity is the most limiting factor in Blades' growth. This situation is complicated by the fact that Blades has little direct control over the provision of wastewater capacity for the town. Collaboration with the county and Seaford will be very important for the future growth of the Town of Blades. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Seaford and the county to periodically review sewer capacity in the area and discuss future capacity allotments could help to alleviate any unanticipated shortfalls.

### Public Water System

The Town of Blades owns and maintains a public water system that serves the area currently within the town boundaries. The water system consists of two wells located behind the town hall on West Fourth Street and a 150,000-gallon storage tank located on the corner of Seventh and Arch Streets. Table 19 below provides some details about the town's wells:

**Table 19. Water Supply Wells in the Blades Municipal Water Service**

Well # - ID #	Date Drilled	Screen Interval	Aquifer	Pumping Rate
1 - 40024	June 1978	66-96 feet	Columbia	150 gpm
2 - 40025	June 1978	66-96 feet	Columbia	150 gpm

Source: DNREC, Division of Water Resources, 2007

The system currently has permits from the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control to withdraw up to 320,000 gallons per day from the aquifer (160,000 gallons per well). The current system usage is approximately 90,000 gallons per day, well under the permitted limit.

A major system upgrade, undertaken in 2002, provided a new pump building, filters, piping, and controls at the town hall location. The new system includes a 300 gallon per minute filter, which

<sup>2</sup> This is an accepted engineering estimate for the average amount of wastewater used per household per day. Source: Russell W. Archut, Assistant County Engineer, Sussex County.

will allow the system to pump up to 432,000 gallons per day, if permitted by DNREC in the future. Another potential upgrade includes the drilling of a third well, which would add significant extra capacity to Blades' water system.

Considering that the average daily usage is currently approximately 90,000 gallons per day, or 200 gpd<sup>3</sup> per household, the system has more than adequate capacity given the current water-withdrawal permit to allow for considerable population growth. Therefore, there is sufficient excess capacity in the water system to serve any foreseeable expansion of the Town of Blades and should not be seen as a limiting factor to the town's growth.

In 1992 the Town of Blades was issued a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) by DNREC to serve the town and an area outside of the town with water. Town officials indicate it has since been updated to include all lands currently within the town's boundary. The authority governing the granting of CPCNs was transferred to the Public Service Commission (PSC) in 2001. The PSC also adopted some additional regulations regarding CPCNs at that time.

The Town of Blades is committed to ensuring the long-term viability of its public water supply. To this end, the town has provided for a section of its Land Development Ordinance to be devoted to the protection of its water supply and is, as of February 2008, also drafting its Water Ordinance, which is intended to address concerns relating to source water issues.

### **Schools**

The Town of Blades is located in the Seaford School District. This school district serves an area of about 82 square miles and services approximately 3,300 students in Seaford, Blades, and the surrounding areas. It is rated a "Commendable District" for its performance by the Delaware Department of Education. Though the buildings tend to be older, each has been renovated in past decade. It should also be noted that the Seaford School District was rated the most energy-efficient in Delaware, receiving an Energy Star Partner of the Year award from the EPA in 2007. Table 20 details the schools operated by the district.

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<sup>3</sup> This is the average amount of water used per household, per day in the Blades municipal water system. This estimate was derived through a review of water billing records. Source: Julie Chelton, former Blades Town Administrator.

**Table 20. Public Schools Operated by the Seaford School District**

School Name	Location	Date Built/ Renovated	Design Capacity	Enrollment (2005-06)
Seaford Senior High School	Seaford	1966/2006	1,166	846
Frederick Douglas Intermediate School	Seaford	1922/2006	592	437
Seaford Central Elementary School	Seaford	1959/2000	447	356
Blades (Seaford) Elementary	Blades	1954/2006	410	430
West Seaford Elementary School	Seaford	1953/2001	532	427
Seaford Middle School*	Seaford	1928/2006	1,019	808
<i>Totals (design capacity / enrollment)</i>			3,908	3,304

Source: Seaford School District, Delaware Department of Education. Compiled by IPA.

\*This building also houses the Sussex Orthopedic Facility which serves special needs students.

All but one of the Seaford School District schools are located within limits of the City of Seaford, the exception being Blades (Seaford) Elementary, which is located at 900 S. Arch Street in Blades. This school is located in the heart of a quiet residential neighborhood, providing excellent opportunities for children from the neighborhood to walk to school. Interestingly, this is the only school that currently holds more students than its design capacity, a situation that is potentially a result of the high number of students in this school by choice. This situation shows the need for increased intergovernmental coordination between Blades, the Delaware Department of Education and the Seaford School District.

### Trash Service

Blades does not provide regular trash collection service. Each resident and business in the town contracts with a private trash collection service for regular waste removal. The Town periodically pays for waste removal through town cleanups.

### Relevant Planning Principles – Infrastructure

- Blades is a part of the larger region and is influenced by what happens in Seaford, Laurel, and the outlying areas of Sussex County. The Town should coordinate planning, development, and other policies with these other government entities.

### Goal Statement – Infrastructure

Blades' public utility infrastructure and schools should be maintained and expanded to meet the needs of current residents and serve anticipated growth and annexation areas. Maintaining an adequate system of public utilities and schools will make Blades a desirable place to live and work, attract economic development, and protect the environment.

## **Recommendations – Infrastructure**

### Recommendation 1: Blades Sewer District Sewer Needs Study

It is recommended that the town of Blades collaborate with Sussex County to develop/update a sewer capacity–needs study for the Blades sewer district. The study should evaluate both the current needs of the district and the future needs based on the annexation areas described in Chapter 2-2. The study should also analyze various alternatives for providing sewer service to the Blades district, including but not limited to: continuing to purchase sewer capacity from Seaford, developing a regional county sewer-treatment plant, developing a municipal treatment plant for Blades, or exploring spray irrigation.

### Recommendation 2: Future Sewer-Treatment Allocation

The Town of Blades should continue to collaborate with Sussex County and the City of Seaford to acquire an adequate sewer-treatment allocation for the town and the future growth areas identified in Chapter 2-2. The sewer capacity needs study described above should provide the relevant data to set realistic capacity needs for the Blades District. This, combined with recommendation one, would allow the town to at least estimate, if not handle internally, the plan of services for annexation areas, as required under state code.

### Recommendation 3: Growth Coordination with Sussex County and Seaford

Sewer-treatment capacity is a limiting factor in Blades' growth and annexation potential, at least in the short term, before recommendations 1 and 2 above are completed. Blades should develop a formal procedure for reviewing the sewer-treatment capacity with the county and the city of Seaford prior to any municipal annexation or new development project within the current town limits. The capacity of the system should also be reviewed whenever there is a new industrial user or process in an existing facility that may generate additional wastewater discharges.

### Recommendation 4: Proactively Acquire a CPCN for Growth Areas

The Town of Blades should apply to the Public Service Commission to acquire a CPCN to include the proposed growth and annexation areas shown on Map 4. Town officials indicated this had already been done for all areas within town. Proactively acquiring the CPCN will give the Town of Blades the legal authority to provide water service in those areas.

### Recommendation 5: Policies for Utility Expansion

The Town should review its policies for providing water and, through Sussex County, sewer service to properties outside of the town boundaries. Having a consistent policy in place will make it much easier to deal with requests from out-of-town property owners. Two policies the town might consider: 1) only provide water service to properties willing to annex into the town or 2) develop a different rate structure for users outside the town boundaries. The Town should work with Sussex County to ensure that the County's policies for providing sewer service are

consistent with the town's policies for providing water service. Ideally, no property should get water service without also receiving sewer service and vice-versa.

#### Recommendation 6: Annexation Agreements

It should be the policy of the town to annex areas for which utility service is provided; however, this is not always possible, because some areas are not immediately adjacent to the town boundaries, although they are within the growth and annexation areas described in Chapter 2-2. In cases where it is deemed desirable to provide such service to non-adjacent areas, it is recommended that the service be provided only if the property owner enters into an "annexation agreement" with the town of Blades. The annexation agreement would stipulate that the property owner will agree to annex into the town of Blades when the town boundaries become adjacent. The Town should work with its solicitor to draft model language for the agreements.

#### Recommendation 7: Sprawl Avoidance Through Utility Expansion Policy

The Town should not extend utilities past the areas identified for annexation on Map 4, especially until all of these areas are developed and served with water and sewer service. This policy will avoid "leapfrog" development and allow the town to leverage public investments in the areas designated for growth.

#### Recommendation 8: Consider Contracting for Residential Municipal Trash Pick-Up

Blades should consider contracting with a waste-hauling company to provide a consistent residential trash pick-up program for the town. Such a contract could be negotiated by the town and billed directly to residents through tax-billing mechanisms already in place. There would be a number of benefits of this system. First, the town may be able to negotiate a better rate for residents than they are currently paying as individuals. Second, the presence of a consistent system of trash removal may alleviate instances of residents not removing trash and debris in a timely manner. Third, a consolidated trash service may result in fewer trash vehicles driving through the town. Finally, this service may be a feature that will appeal to future residents as they consider buying a home in Blades.

## **Chapter 2-4 Transportation Plan**

### **Background – Transportation**

As is the case with most small towns in Delaware, Blades developed because of its location in relation to important transportation routes. The most significant transportation resources in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Blades were the Nanticoke River and the causeway to Seaford. Historically, the town developed along the waterfront, the causeway, and the road that is today known as Market Street. The railroad, which was extended to the town in the mid-1800s, is another important transportation resource that enabled industrial development along the western end of town.

#### **Overview of Transportation Network**

Today there are no commercial-shipping activities in Blades, although shipping activities are still prominent in Seaford and elsewhere along the Nanticoke. There are two major roads that run through Blades. Market Street connects Blades to Seaford at the Nanticoke River Bridge and continues through to the town in a southerly direction. River Road intersects Market Street and continues west out of town and along the shores of the Nanticoke. The other major road is known as High Street. It connects Market Street to U.S. Route 13 in the northerly portion of the town. After High Street leaves Blades, it is known as Concord Road. These roads are depicted on Map 2 in the Map Appendix.

These roadways provide access to Blades, but they are also significant through-traffic routes. These routes are used by a significant number of residents and businesses located to the west and south of town. Most troubling to the town is the truck traffic that is generated by Wyoming Concrete and The Arundel Corporation, both located just west of town along River Road. Trucks from these two businesses continually use River Road, Market Street, and High Street/Concord Road to access U.S. Route 13. Blades residents have noted that traffic volumes and truck traffic cause delays, especially during peak periods. The Market Street/High Street intersection is noted as particularly problematic. It is not signalized. The major roads through the town (Market Street, High Street, and River Road) are owned and maintained by the Delaware Department of Transportation. The Town of Blades owns and maintains all local streets within the town boundaries.

#### **US 13–Corridor Capacity–Preservation Program**

As a part of a 1995 annexation, Blades acquired property east of the traditional town limits. A portion of this property was zoned for commercial uses and has frontage along U.S. Route 13. Shortly after the 2002 Town of Blades Comprehensive Plan, the Town annexed a large parcel east of U.S. Route 13 (Sussex Highway). Though plans for this parcel were not yet complete at the time of this publication, the Town anticipates commercial uses fronting U.S. Route 13.

U.S. Route 13 is part of the Delaware Department of Transportation’s Corridor Capacity–Preservation Program. The Corridor Capacity–Preservation Program was established in 1996 under Title 17, Section 145 of the *Delaware Code* to preserve selected existing transportation facilities. Four corridors are currently identified for the Program: SR 48, SR 1, U.S. Rt. 113, and



U.S. Rt. 13. The limits of the Program on U.S. Rt. 13 are SR 10 south of Dover to the Maryland State line, including the portion of U.S. Rt. 13 adjacent to the properties recently annexed into Blades.

The Program has five primary goals:

- Maintain an existing road's ability to handle traffic safely and efficiently.
- Coordinate the transportation impacts of increased economic growth.
- Preserve the ability to make future transportation-related improvements.
- Minimize the need to build an entirely new road on new alignment.
- Sort local and through traffic.

In addition to these goals, the program is designed to maintain the regional significance and intended function of the existing designated routes. The social, environmental, and, in particular, economic benefits gained through a management-and-preservation program outweigh the impacts associated with the construction of a new route on a new alignment.

The coordination between land use and transportation planning is critical in order to preserve the U.S. Rt. 13 corridor. Governor Minner's Livable Delaware initiatives along with the Delaware Strategies for State Policies and Spending further indicate the need for coordinated growth. The Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) has coordinated its preservation strategies for the program with the investment areas identified in the document *Managing Growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Strategies for State*

*Policies and Spending* adopted in 1999 by Governor Carper and the Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues, and reaffirmed by Governor Minner under Executive Order 14, and updated in 2004.

These strategies identify key investment areas across the state and define each area as level one, two, three, or four. Generally speaking, areas in levels one and two are preferred for growth, while growth is discouraged or would require careful planning in the higher levels. The strategies are updated every five years, most recently in 2004.

Blades should coordinate any intended development of this or other property along U.S. Rt. 13 with DelDOT and this program.

### **Traffic-Data Analysis**

DelDOT monitors traffic on these roads on a yearly basis. The most recent traffic counts available are from the 2006 Annual Traffic Survey available from the department, and are shown in Table 21 compared to counts from 1994, 2000, and 2006. The traffic counts are averages known as "Annual Average Daily Traffic" (AADT). The percentage change shown is from the 1994 counts to those from 2006.

**Table 21. AADT – Major Roads in Blades 1994, 2000, and 2007**

Roadway Segment	AADT 1994	AADT 2000	AADT 2006	YLC	% Change
Market St., High St. (Seaford) to High St. (Blades)	12,456	17,311	12,107	2004	-2.80
Market St., from High St. to S. Blades limits	12,456	8,179	13,030	2002	4.61
High St. from Market St. to E. Blades limits	4,067	4,377	4,736	2006	16.45
River Rd. from Market St. to W. Blades limits	2,664	2,521	2,210	2005	-17.04

Source: Delaware Department of Transportation, 2006 Annual Traffic Survey

YLC = Year of last count

The AADT figures depicted above do not indicate great increases in traffic volume along the major roads in Blades. In fact, two road segments indicate a decrease in traffic volume over the period. This may indicate that there are more trips that start and end in the town, rather than traveling through. The most notable trends are a modest increase in traffic traversing the town from east to west on High Street and a similar reduction in traffic along River Road. It is possible that new development in town (Little Meadows) is responsible for the increases seen on High Street. At present, it is the only road providing these new residents ready access to U.S. Rt. 13. A connection is planned for the latter phases of this development and may offset this trend. The other two road segments measured stayed about the same from 1994 through 2006. Market Street, connecting Blades to Seaford, showed a dramatic rise from 1994 to 2000, but appears to have normalized.

It is important to note that these AADT figures represent extrapolations of actual traffic counts taken years earlier, and may, in fact, not represent actual conditions being experienced in Blades today. However, the trends noted by the figures may have several possible explanations. Through travelers may be choosing to take U.S. Rt. 13 rather than Market Street through Blades. In the past decade, there has been a great intensification of land uses along the U.S. Rt. 13 corridor, and more travelers may be utilizing those services rather than driving through Blades into Seaford. A second trend may be the intensification of land uses in Blades itself. As more people live and work in Blades, fewer through-trips are being recorded.

### **Pedestrian Network**

There are sidewalks along some of the main streets in Blades, including Market Street. However, the sidewalk network is not continuous, and the sidewalks themselves, in many locations, are not very wide. There are few sidewalks along the local streets in Blades. However, the low traffic along many neighborhood streets makes them conducive to pedestrians and vehicles sharing the roadway, except during peak hours. Unfortunately, the narrow rights-of-way would appear to make the installation of sidewalks along some of the local streets challenging. The Town requires sidewalks and right-of-way dedication per section 10-1F3a of the Land Development Ordinance. A conscientious effort to connect these new pedestrian-network additions to the existing system may incrementally improve non-automotive mobility in the town over time.

## **Public Transit**

There is currently no local public transit service available to serve Blades residents. The Delaware Transit Corporation (DTC) operates DART First State regional transit service with stops in nearby Seaford. DART First State Route 212 links Laurel, Seaford, Bridgeville, and Georgetown. From Georgetown, riders can take other routes to Milford or the beach resorts. In Seaford, this route has stops at the Nanticoke Memorial Hospital, the Shipley State Service Center, and the Seaford Wal-Mart. There is a bus stop located on Market Street in Blades in the vicinity of the Hunter's Court apartment complex. In addition to the DART First State service, DTC offers paratransit service in Blades. Paratransit provides door-to-door service to those with disabilities.

## **Relevant Planning Principles – Transportation**

- The Town should enhance enforcement of residential-development requirements for pedestrian-friendly development. In this way, new development may be compatible with the existing patterns of Blades neighborhoods and include street patterns that link to the existing street system, sidewalks, and parks and open-space areas.
- The Delaware Department of Transportation and the Town of Blades should work together to solve transportation issues and improve the function and safety of all transportation corridors. Of particular concern is the high volume of heavy-truck traffic. Additionally, this coordination needs to address multi-modal transportation needs and not only automotive needs. The comprehensive plan should develop land use strategies that are compatible with realistic transportation options.

## **Goal Statement – Transportation**

The Town of Blades should work with the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) to improve public transportation options by providing for a park-and-ride lot. Additionally, the road network in Blades needs to balance the needs of vehicles, pedestrians, transit riders, and bicyclists while providing adequate capacity to manage anticipated economic growth and redevelopment. The volume of heavy-truck traffic needs to be addressed due to the strain that it places on transportation infrastructure and the impacts it has on residents' quality of life.

## **Recommendations – Transportation**

### Recommendation 1: Coordination of Transportation and Land Use

The Town should carefully review future land use decisions to ensure that the existing and planned roadway improvements can accommodate future traffic. In order to accomplish this recommendation, it will be necessary to coordinate with DelDOT on larger proposals and possibly require traffic-impact studies for larger projects.

### Recommendation 2: Truck and Traffic Study for Blades

The existing traffic data are somewhat dated, and it is not clear that there has ever been a complete study of the impact of traffic, particularly truck traffic, in Blades. The Town of Blades should work with DelDOT to prepare a study that accurately reflects the traffic volumes using Market Street, High Street, and River Road. This study should evaluate

the impact of truck traffic and suggest improvements to accommodate anticipated traffic volumes and types. Such a dialogue would allow discussions of a possible truck route, or bypass, suggested by residents during the public-outreach sessions to be more fully explored.

#### Recommendation 3: Intersection Improvements

The Town of Blades should work with DelDOT to evaluate the Market Street / High Street intersection and develop a plan for improving the intersection. Currently, the intersection lacks clear pedestrian crossings or sidewalks on all approaches. It is also a very busy intersection that handles a great deal of truck traffic. The study should consider geometric improvements for truck-turning movements, pedestrian/bicycle access, and the feasibility and desirability of installing a traffic signal.

#### Recommendation 4: Pedestrian and Bicycle Study for Blades

It is recommended that the Town of Blades work to undertake a pedestrian and bicycle study to identify key improvements that could lead to a more continuous system of sidewalks and bike paths in the town. Particular attention should be paid in this study to the Downtown/Marina District that is more fully described in Chapter 2-1.

#### Recommendation 5: Encourage the Construction of Sidewalks in New Developments

The Town requires sidewalks and right-of-way dedication per section 10-1F3a of the Land Development Ordinance. A conscientious effort to connect these new pedestrian-network additions to the existing system may incrementally improve non-automotive mobility in the town over time.

#### Recommendation 6: Corridor Capacity Preservation

Land use decisions made by the town could have a significant impact on the regional traffic capacity of U.S. Rt. 13. Any development activity that occurs along U.S. Rt. 13 should be coordinated with DelDOT's Corridor Capacity Preservation Program. This is particularly important as the town has annexed additional property along the corridor.

#### Recommendation 7: Interconnected Street System

In new development, street patterns should be linked in with the existing town's street pattern wherever practical. At a minimum, pedestrian and bicycle connections should be provided. The street and circulation patterns of the new development can be designed to minimize the possibility of through traffic while giving the new residents multiple connections to the town and regional street pattern.

### Recommendation 8: Review Transit Service Levels Periodically

As Blades and Seaford grow, there will undoubtedly be the need for additional public transit services to serve residents and employees. The Town of Blades should work with the Delaware Transit Corporation to help identify these future needs.

## **Chapter 2-5    *Historic and Cultural Resources Plan***

### **Background – Historic and Cultural Resources**

Although Blades was one of the most recent municipalities in Delaware to be incorporated, the town has a long and distinguished history dating back at least to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The town's history is more fully described in Chapter 1-1. The general layout of the town and existing land use patterns are a legacy of Blades' historic connection to Seaford across the Nanticoke River. There are also many structures in the town that date back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1999 the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office evaluated the town and determined that there is a collection of structures that would be eligible for inclusion in a National Register Historic District. This area is roughly bounded on the north by High Street, on the east by Arch Street, on the south by Eighth Street, and on the west by the railroad tracks. This collection of residences and churches has retained enough structural integrity to convey the history of the community as it grew from the 1880s through the 1940s. Unfortunately, many of the structures have been altered and some are in very poor repair.

Clearly these structures are very important to the character of the community and, if repaired and/or restored, could enhance Blades' unique, small-town atmosphere. The revitalization of structures in poor repair is a priority, and the preservation of some significant individual structures may result from a combination of increased code enforcement, private investment, and economic development activities. Blades has made some progress on this front in recent years, as it has facilitated HUD grants to assist homeowners with repairs and maintenance. The Town is also considering the construction of a greenway trail (see Chapter 2-1 and 2-6).

#### ***Relevant Planning Principles – Historic and Cultural Resources***

- Blades should seek to preserve the character and integrity of its existing neighborhoods while encouraging new development that is compatible with the town's existing character and improves housing choice, as it serves a broad range of people in the community.
- Blades should pursue a development strategy that complements the small-town atmosphere.

#### ***Goal Statement – Historic and Cultural Resources***

It is the goal of the Town of Blades to balance the preservation and enhancement of significant historical and cultural features in the town with appropriate revitalization and economic development activities in order to create a unique and vital small town.

## Recommendations – Historic and Cultural Resources

### Recommendation 1: Encourage Stabilization and Repair of Older Structures

As noted above, there are some old and potentially historic structures that are in poor repair. The Town should encourage and enable the stabilization and repair of these structures in order to bring them back into productive economic use and to improve housing conditions for those who live in them. Some methods for accomplishing this recommendation may include increased code enforcement, the acquisition of CDBG funds for rehabilitation through Sussex County or the state of Delaware, and perhaps working with real estate developers interesting in repairing and reselling older homes. Chapter 2-7 has some additional recommendations for how the town can assist homeowners maintain and repair their homes.

### Recommendation 2: Consider Pursuing a National Register District

Town officials should discuss the creation of a historic district with the staff of the State Historic Preservation Office. There may be some advantages to creating such a district that would enhance economic development and revitalization activities in Blades.

### Recommendation 3: Identify and Protect Important Historic and Cultural Sites in Blades

There may be many sites and features in the town that are important to the community. Some may have been constructed long ago and be worthy of designation as historic sites. There may also be sites that are important culturally but are not historical in nature (the marina, for example). The Town should undertake a community-based process to identify and document these sites. Once identified, it may become apparent that some of the sites might need protection or enhancement.

## **Chapter 2-6     *Economic Development Plan***

### **Background – Economic Development**

The economy of Blades has developed around its traditional role as a historic host to artisans and its geographic proximity to Seaford's bustling commercial center. The Nanticoke River has proven to be a valuable source of economic development and support in the past, and the river will certainly play a role in the economic future of the town. Industrial and commercial institutions are both situated in and around Blades, providing employment to many of the town's residents. The most developed commercial area of Blades is the western half of the portion of the town north of High Street. Home business offices and residential commercial establishments are also scattered throughout the town but seem to play a smaller role in the economic development of Blades.

Secondary areas of potential commercial vitality in Blades include the area along High Street from its Market Street intersection to its U.S. Rt. 13 intersection and the area along the U.S. Rt.

13 corridor itself. Each of these areas seems to have unique potential for economic development as well as the necessary infrastructure to support it.

Input from the residents of Blades has indicated that those in the town would like to see the area of town around the northern section of Market Street, as mentioned above, be redeveloped, with the goal of creating a mostly commercial district in which residential uses are permitted only when mixed with commercial uses. Residents clearly identified this area of town as having the most potential for commercial uses and other applicable economic development projects. This area currently serves as the most commercially developed portion of the town.

A second important concept from residents of Blades is that the Blades marina should play a central role in the future economic development of the town. The marina has been successful in bringing new economic and social opportunities to the Blades community and will continue to do so in the future. Economic development in Blades should complement the marina and its users as well as accommodate the various types of consumers and merchants who will come to the town as a result of the marina. The successful operation of the marina has provided a way for the town to diversify its economic structure and secure its success for the future.

Past industrial and commercial establishments situated directly to the south of the Blades town hall have left a large, vacant, contaminated site in the center of the town. This “brownfield” site was acquired by the town so that it could be brought to a usable state for redevelopment, as it was identified by both residents and town officials as a targeted area for redevelopment. The Town demolished the structures and coordinated with the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control as well as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to decontaminate the site, and it has since been sold to a developer. The currently proposed plan for the parcels is to develop one tract as a residential area and the other as mixed use, commercial and residential. This collaborative project demonstrates how coordination between Blades and agencies on both the state and national levels has helped the economic development of the town.

The town’s 2002 Comprehensive Plan, and subsequent unified development code, laid a solid foundation for future economic development in Blades. Two districts, Marina and Neighborhood Business, were created. The intent of the Marina district was to encourage thematic, commercially viable businesses to build upon the town’s most invaluable asset, the river. The Neighborhood Business district was realized by revamping the Neighborhood Commercial zone. Its goal was to promote a town-center pattern of development and redevelopment along High Street and the northern half of Market Street.

Within five years, the town has seen considerable results in both targeted areas. Still, town officials and interested members of the public repeatedly stressed their desire to see this growth and development continue, particularly in the Marina district.

The Town of Blades is generally located in a region that has been historically characterized by agricultural uses. As the area has developed, these agricultural uses and the lifestyle that it represents have faced increasing hardships. In order to try and ensure continued prosperity for the region’s agricultural community, the Town of Blades should look for opportunities to promote agricultural business and related endeavors. The state Department of Agriculture has a

fully functioning economic development team that may be utilized in order to facilitate these efforts, and the Town of Blades may want to consider coordinating activities with it.

Finally, it must be mentioned that the town of Blades has an able partner in the pursuit of its successful economic development—the Blades Economic Development Corporation (BEDCO). This organization holds a vested interest in the economic development of the town of Blades and has successfully cooperated with the town in the past in order to advance the town's marina project. The Town and BEDCO should continue to work together in order to ensure the ongoing development and improvement of Blades' economy.

Town officials have suggested that BEDCO is eager to take on a new project since the completion of the marina. The resurrection of the currently dormant greenway project on the Nanticoke River is an excellent candidate. It is highly unlikely such a project would result in new construction, as the proposed area is environmentally constrained. However, increased foot traffic in proximity to Blades' Marina and Neighborhood Business district could only bolster business.

### **Goal Statement – Economic Development**

Blades, in cooperation with the Blades Economic Development Corporation, should seek to establish a well-defined area of economic development in the town while promoting the establishment of commercial and service projects that complement both the town's residents and the new consumers brought to Blades by the Blades marina.

### **Relevant Planning Principles**

- The community considers the Market Street and High Street area to be the downtown center of the town. The redevelopment efforts that have taken place since the 2002 Comprehensive Plan have created opportunities for expansion of commercial, institutional, and recreational uses that benefit the community as a whole and complement the marina. These efforts should be continued. The community would like to see more emphasis on recreational uses in redevelopment in the future.
- The Town should continue to work with the Blades Economic Development Corporation (BEDCO) to implement economic development initiatives in Blades.
- The Town should seek to attract land uses that will complement the marina and encourage economic development.

### **Recommendations – Economic Development**

#### Recommendation 1: Secure Adequate Utility Capacity for Growth

Growth of the town may be limited due a shortage in sewer allocation, which is discussed in detail in Chapters 2-2 and 2-3. Blades will need to resolve this issue before any substantial redevelopment or annexation into new areas can occur. Suggestions for how to resolve these issues may be found in Chapter 2-3.



Recommendation 2: Create an economic environment that welcomes new commercial and institutional projects that complement the Blades marina.

The marina promises to be an economic benefit to Blades in a few ways. First, the very existence of the marina has brought and will continue to bring new consumers and visitors into the town. Second, new commercial ventures will continue to be established in response to these new consumers and their need for more numerous and diverse goods and services. Third, the marina is geographically situated along the area of Market Street that has previously been identified as the prime location for Blades' town center.

Recommendation 3: Include the Blades Economic Development Corporation (BEDCO) in all town activities that deal with economic development.

Special interest corporations such as BEDCO tend to have access to resources and information that the town government may not readily have available. By working cooperatively with and including the BEDCO in the town's economic development activities, decisions promise to be more focused, clearer, and better supported. One possible activity in the near term could be BEDCO's involvement with the creation of a greenway trail system.

## **Chapter 2-7      Housing Plan**

### **Background – Housing**

Blades' housing stock consists primarily of single-family detached homes, with several multi-family apartment buildings also in town. The 2000 census reported there were a total of 302 single-family homes in the town (79% of the total housing stock) and 60 multi-family units (16% of the total housing stock). The 2000 U.S. Census also reported that there are 12 mobile homes in Blades, but this appears to be an error. The mobile home park adjacent to Blades' western boundary may have been mistakenly included. There is one subsidized, low-to moderate-income apartment complex located within the town boundaries. The Hunters Court apartment complex on Market Street is a 33-unit project funded by the USDA Rural Housing Service.

About 28 percent of Blades' housing stock was built before 1940. However, as noted in Chapter 2-2 Growth and Annexation, there was a significant amount of new construction in Blades since the 1980s, and more is planned for the future. About a third of the housing stock has been built since 1980.

Housing in Blades is not particularly expensive in relation to Sussex County or the state of Delaware as a whole. The 2000 U.S. Census reports that 100 percent of the housing values were below \$150,000, with nearly 94 percent under \$100,000 and 24.4 percent under \$50,000. These data are useful to a degree, but it is important to note that housing values have rapidly increased since the 2000 census.

More recent data from the Delaware State Housing Authority indicate that Blades still ranks among the most affordable places to live in Sussex County and the state of Delaware, despite steadily rising home prices

**Table 22: Median Housing Values**

County or Area	Median 2000	Average Median 2005	Percentage Change 2000-2005
New Castle County	\$ 136,000.00	\$ 214,000.00	57.35
Kent County	\$ 114,100.00	\$ 179,000.00	56.88
Sussex County	\$ 122,400.00	\$ 243,750.00	99.14
Seaford Area	\$ 75,400.00	\$ 171,750.00	127.79
State of Delaware	\$ 124,166.67	\$ 212,250.00	70.94

Sources: Delaware State Housing Authority; 2000 U.S. Census Data

The Delaware State Housing Authority counts Blades as part of the “Seaford Area.” Unfortunately, entirely Blades-specific data are not available. However, home values in Blades and Seaford are very similar.

Housing prices in Sussex County increased more rapidly than did prices in Kent or New Castle during this time period, and housing prices in the Seaford area increased at a more rapid rate than those of the county during this time. This trend is most likely due to the substantial amount of new construction in the area. Simply put, newer, larger homes cost more. There is no evidence to suggest that the existing housing stock has appreciated at a similarly accelerated rate. Fortunately, the Seaford area, especially Blades, still boasts a considerable inventory of modestly sized, older homes. Not only do these homes tend to cost far less, well within accepted affordability indicators, they also tend to be nearer centers of commerce, employment, and government services. In many cases, households could make do with one fewer automobile, increasing their home-buying and saving potential.

Extrapolating from the 1990 and 2000 Census data income figures, the current (2006) median income in Blades was approximately \$42,064. The Census Bureau’s 2004 estimate of \$41,161 tells us that this figure is reasonably accurate for 2007.

Fannie Mae’s online “How Much House Can You Afford?”<sup>4</sup> calculator was used to estimate the affordability of housing in Blades once this income figure was derived. The income figure (\$42,064), along with an estimate of \$300 in other debt payments per month, and a figure of \$5,000 for money available for closing costs, down payment, etc., with a 30-year fixed interest rate of 5.75 percent, was input. These calculations revealed that an individual earning the median income in Blades would be able to afford a home up to a sale price of \$174,270, which includes the median-value (\$171,750) home in Blades.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mortgagecontent.net/scApplication/fanniemaef/affordability.do?p=Resources&s=Calculators&t=How+Much+House+Can+You+Afford>

The next subject for examination to determine the affordability of housing in Blades was whether an individual earning 80 percent of the median income could afford a home in Blades. Using the same calculator that was used before, but with an income of \$33,651 (80% of \$42,064) and a reduction of monthly debt payments to \$250, and money available for down payment and closing costs was reduced to \$3,000, this individual was calculated to be able to afford a home of \$138,215 with the same interest rate (5.75%) as above. A brief examination of real estate listings confirmed that there were in fact several homes available in Blades for a person of this income level, a few even below \$100,000. Though not ideal, it is clear that despite rising home costs in the Blades/Seaford area, the town remains an attractive, affordable place to live for the county's teachers, law-enforcement officers, and the like, particularly when compared to the county's eastern towns.

An additional housing issue brought up by the public in Blades is the need for increased enforcement of property-maintenance codes. This has been a concern since the 1978 Blades Comprehensive Plan and is clearly an important issue to the community and should continue to be addressed as such. Improvements in this area, along with the town's continued involvement facilitating HUD home-improvement finances, should help ensure the viability of its moderately priced housing stock. Blades' housing code was adopted in 1978. In March of 2007, the Town hired a full-time code-enforcement officer. In the future, Blades may wish to consider development standards that require a set percentage of smaller, more affordable homes in new construction. It could also explore allowing accessory dwelling units, particularly as the demographics of the state, and particularly Sussex County, skew towards a more mature, empty-nester population.

### **Relevant Planning Principles – Housing**

- The Town should continue to enhance the enforcement of building- and -property maintenance codes in order to protect the health, safety, and welfare of town residents, enhance the image of the town, and protect property values for all property owners.
- The Town should enhance enforcement of residential-development requirements for pedestrian-friendly development. In this way, new development may be compatible with the existing patterns of Blades neighborhoods and include street patterns that link to the existing street system, sidewalks, and parks and open-space areas.
- Blades should seek to preserve the character and integrity of its existing neighborhoods while encouraging new development that is compatible with the town's existing character and improves housing choice, as it serves a broad range of people in the community.
- Blades should pursue a development strategy that complements the small-town atmosphere.

## **Goal Statement – Housing**

The Town of Blades should seek to provide new housing opportunities consistent with the character of the town, while using proven code-enforcement and housing-revitalization strategies to improve housing conditions for all residents of Blades.

## **Recommendations – Housing**

### Recommendation 1: Property Maintenance and Housing-Code Enforcement

It is recommended that the Town continue to review its property-maintenance codes and, if necessary, develop new codes and a comprehensive strategy for enforcing property maintenance and housing codes. The code-enforcement strategy should be comprehensive and consistent in order to be effective. Successful implementation of this recommendation will improve housing conditions for all residents and has the opportunity to increase property values throughout Blades neighborhoods and ensure the livability of lower cost homes and rental units.

### Recommendation 2: Assist Homeowners with Maintenance and Repair

There may be some homeowners in town who lack the expertise and funding to properly maintain their older homes. The Town or a local, community-oriented group may be able to develop local resources to assist these homeowners. Here are some suggestions that might be useful for the Town to consider:

- Keep a library of information on maintaining older homes.
- Publicly recognize well-maintained structures and newly renovated structures.
- Keep a list of registered contractors; elderly residents in particular are more likely to be victims of home-repair scams.
- Keep a warehouse of donated building materials available for free or low cost to residents (such as lumber, paint, carpet, doors, hardware). Solicit donations from local contractors (see the list above) and others in the business of doing home repairs.
- Investigate low- or no-cost loans for repairs to historic homes or for elderly, disabled or low-income homeowners. Advertise that these resources are available, and bring in the providers once a year for a workshop.
- Distribute a brochure to all property owners explaining the code requirements for maintenance.

### Recommendation 3: Diversify Housing Opportunities.

In order to provide a range of housing opportunities for all ages and economic groups, it is recommended that Blades encourage the construction of some townhomes, duplexes, or condominium units in new developments. These housing types are less prevalent in Blades' housing stock but do represent important housing choices that can be an asset to the community. For example, townhouses and duplexes allow singles and young couples who cannot afford a single-family home to purchase a home and build equity. These types of units can be

incorporated into new developments without increasing the overall density. This concept is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2-2.

## **Chapter 2-8 Environmental Protection Plan**

### **Background – Environmental Protection**

#### **General Environment**

The Town of Blades is located on the southern shore of the Nanticoke River, a tributary to the Chesapeake Bay. The Nanticoke watershed drains a portion of southwestern Sussex County and a large area of Maryland's eastern shore. The Nanticoke River is known as one of the least developed and most scenic of the Chesapeake Bay's major tributaries.

The river is the most significant environmental feature in the town. There are approximately 3,800 linear feet of shoreline along the Nanticoke River. Development along the Nanticoke is mixed. The marina and the Marina District account for the most intensive development along the riverfront. Low-density residential uses account for the remaining existing development for those areas immediately adjacent to the Nanticoke and associated wetlands. Development, redevelopment, and any intensification of uses in this area must be sure to provide adequate protection to these natural resources and the Nanticoke, in particular.

#### **Floodplain**

Blades' position along the Nanticoke River increases the potential for flood events to affect normal life in the town. The 100-year floodplain generally occurs around ten feet above sea level. Approximately 45 parcels, including the marina, lie wholly or partially within the 100-year floodplain. Ideally, floodplains should remain free from obstructions and structures in order to preserve the capacity of the river system to transmit and store water during storm events. However, in Blades some of this area has been built on, notably the Market Street corridor. New development within the 100-year floodplain must meet certain guidelines in order to protect property from the effects of flooding. The town currently has a flood-hazard ordinance that regulates construction in these areas. Additional permitting for construction in the floodplain is required through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC). The Town of Blades should continue to coordinate its efforts in addressing development within flood-prone areas with those of DNREC.

#### **Wetlands**

Wetland systems in Blades are generally found along the Nanticoke River in areas of low relief. Within Blades, there are approximately 61 acres of wetlands delineated in the Statewide Wetlands Mapping Project. These wetland systems are characterized by three distinct variables: the presence of hydrophytic vegetation (those plants suited to wetter soils), hydric soils (those soils that are seasonally to permanently saturated), and hydrologic connection. Wetlands play an important role in the natural environment. These areas function to remove sediment and

pollutants from stormwater, act as habitat for diverse species of animals, and provide storage for water during flood events. The permitting authorities for wetland disturbances are the Army Corps of Engineers as well as DNREC. Blades should continue to support the protection of these wetland resources and also encourage citizen interaction and education with natural areas. The Town should consider creating wetland buffers in order to promote the long-term viability of these systems and for the protection of water quality in general.

In order to increase connectivity to the natural world and, more specifically, to the Nanticoke, the Town of Blades should continue to pursue the creation of a greenway trail system that encourages residents to appreciate their natural surroundings while also educating the citizens as to the threats that these resources face. This greenway system shall utilize the most environmentally benign methods in construction of the trail. Coordination with local, state, and federal permitting agencies will be required in order to ensure that all requirements for permitting such an activity will be met.

### **Soils**

The majority of the soils in the town are of the Evesboro-Rumsford Association and are defined as “excessively drained and somewhat excessively drained soils with permeable subsoils of sand and sandy loam.” The upland areas of the town are mostly Evesboro loamy sand, which drains rapidly and has low moisture-holding capabilities. These soils do not have many constraints for urban development, although the rapid permeability of the soils may allow septic systems to contaminate shallow wells and the river system. This was one important stimulus for the creation of the Blades sewer district in the late 1970s. In order to prevent future contamination of wells and natural waterways from improperly functioning septic systems, the Town of Blades should encourage and, where applicable, require residents to connect to the municipal sewer service. There are some small areas of tidal marsh and swamp soils that are associated with the wetlands along the river shoreline.

### **Water-Resource Protection**

As development and population expand within the Sussex County area, particularly within Blades, the need to ensure that future water supplies remain secure increases. To this end, the state of Delaware was required to create a guidance document to account for the protection of water resources. This document was completed in April of 2005 and provides the information necessary for policy makers to create regulatory standards for the protection of water resources. Generally, water-resource protection standards address three main areas: surface-water protection, wellhead protection, and groundwater-recharge protection. The state of Delaware’s guidance document for the protection of these resources can be found online ([http://www.wr.udel.edu/swaphome/Publications/swapp\\_manual\\_final/swapp\\_guidance\\_manual\\_final\\_2005\\_05\\_02.pdf](http://www.wr.udel.edu/swaphome/Publications/swapp_manual_final/swapp_guidance_manual_final_2005_05_02.pdf)).

The Town of Blades is currently considering adopting a Water Ordinance that would seek to address surface-water protection, wellhead areas, and recharge areas. The Town should look at incorporating many of the provisions of the University of Delaware’s guidance documents referenced above during this process. Also, the Town should continue to communicate with DNREC in order to ensure the incorporation of the current best management practices (BMPs) associated with the protection of these resources.

Generally, the regulations for the protection of water resources seek to minimize the impacts of land use on the aquifers recharging ability, primarily by limiting the degree to which impervious surfaces—those surfaces that prevent water from infiltrating the ground below—may be placed on the land. This may include some form of limitation on impervious surfaces allowed per lot or may be more tailored to require increased infiltration of stormwater into the ground through advanced BMPs relating to stormwater management. Additionally, these regulations may include limitations on the storage of materials that may contaminate the aquifer within the recharge areas or wellhead-protection zones or may call for advanced emergency-spill-response plans for those parties that may operate currently within these areas. By utilizing the state's guidance document, the Town of Blades may provide for the continued security and quality of its municipal water.

Map 7 illustrates the location of the Excellent Recharge Areas and Wellhead Protection Areas within the vicinity of the town of Blades. The Excellent Recharge Areas are those areas that have been found to allow for high rates of infiltration of surface water into the aquifers used for drinking water supplies. These Excellent Recharge Areas primarily occur in a small band located near the U.S. Route 13 corridor. Within the town of Blades, approximately 32 acres of land are characterized as Excellent Recharge Areas. Wellhead Protection Areas are those areas that occur within the immediate drainage area to a public wellhead. The land uses in this area have been found to have a higher potential to impact the quantity and quality of the water withdrawn by these wells. Within the town of Blades, the primary Wellhead Protection Area occupies a large area near the southern section of the town. Within the town boundary, approximately 65 acres of land are considered to be Wellhead Protection Areas.

## **Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)**

Under the Clean Water Act and its amendments, the United States Environmental Protection Agency has the responsibility to ensure that the waters of the United States meet certain thresholds for fishing, swimming, and drinking uses. These use categories require that waterways are not overly polluted. In order to meet these requirements, the EPA has required states to develop Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for those waterways that do not meet their use-classifications' water-quality standards. TMDL programs seek to reduce the overall level of pollution flowing into waterways through various applications of best management practices (BMP). These BMPs include construction and development-related requirements (which may include stormwater-quality management or sediment- and erosion-control requirements), agricultural requirements (which may include requirements for nutrient-management plans), and other discharge-related requirements (such as increasing pollutant-removal technologies at wastewater-treatment plants). By addressing water pollution in a comprehensive manner and across all activities, Delaware may begin to make positive progress in remediating the quality of its waters.

The town of Blades is located within the Nanticoke River Watershed. The organization responsible for establishing the town's responsibilities for pollution-reduction strategies is the Nanticoke Tributary Action Team. Blades' role in the implementation of TMDL programs becomes more evident when the recommendations from the Nanticoke Tributary Action Team

are examined. As per Secretary's Order Number 98-W-0045, effective as of December 10, 1998, the Nanticoke River watershed was declared to not meet the water-quality standards established for this section of water. Specifically, the Nanticoke showed excessive levels of nutrients, primarily nitrogen and phosphorus, as well as low levels of dissolved oxygen. This declaration placed the Nanticoke on the 303(d) list of impaired waters. Also contained in the Secretary's announcement are the three main components of the TMDL program as crafted for the Nanticoke.

The first goal is the implementation of Biological Nutrient Reduction (BNR) technologies at the Seaford, Laurel, and Bridgeville wastewater-treatment plants. BNR refers to a process of treating sewage waste that enables a greater removal of nutrients and bacteria than was previously possible. The reductions made possible from the incorporation of this technology will enable the point-source emissions from these three plants to drop from 199 kilograms per day to 100 kilograms per day of nitrogen and from 33 kilograms per day to 25 kilograms per day of phosphorus. The second goal of the TMDL program for the Nanticoke River is to limit the remaining wastewater-treatment plants' discharges to their 1998 levels. This limitation establishes a firm cap of 568 kilograms per day of nitrogen and 1.0 kilograms per day of phosphorus for all other treatment plants. The last strategy for implementation of the TMDL program for the Nanticoke River involves the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for the entire subbasin containing the Nanticoke River Watershed. These BMPs include such activities as requiring stormwater management for new development, requirements for increased standards on sediment and erosion control, and the utilization of conservation design standards. Other requirements established by the Nanticoke Tributary Action Team include reductions to the baseline amount of bacterial contaminants. The Town of Blades should continue to coordinate its environmental-protection strategies with DNREC as well enforce the provisions of the Blades Land Development Ordinance, or subsequent water-protection ordinance, to protect sensitive areas that require stormwater management for development. Additionally, Blades should increase its citizens' connection to natural areas in order to establish a greater sense of stewardship of the land.

### **Surface-Water Protection**

Surface-water-protection programs are often a necessary component of environmental-protection initiatives. This is due to the relationship between the water quality found in streams and other waterbodies and that which flows into streams from our built environment. Often times, the water that runs off our built environment has accumulated many pollutants including excessive amounts of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus, heavy metals like copper or lead, or petrochemicals resulting from oil and gas spills. These pollutants, unless they are properly treated, can significantly degrade the quality of our natural environment. This degradation has led to various strategies to address these problems. One of the more common means of addressing this problem is through the use of stormwater-management programs. These programs seek to treat water runoff and remove much of the pollution before it can contaminate other water bodies.

The town of Blades, and primarily the area considered the center of town, was developed long before the creation of stormwater-control technologies. Therefore, when it rains, stormwater runs off of impervious surfaces, including parking lots and rooftops, into the local drainage networks. During this movement, stormwater will pick up pollutants and sediments from those



impervious areas. The polluted waters then feed into the nearby stream systems, including the Nanticoke River. As many of the waterways in this area are considered polluted, it may be necessary for the town to consider addressing this untreated runoff in a systematic fashion. Various methods of addressing this problem exist and include the creation of a stormwater-utility district, the incorporation of stream- and wetland-buffer regulations, the integration of “green” development methodologies such as Low-Impact Development, limitations on impervious surface levels in new development and redevelopment, increased requirements for woodland preservation and retention, and increased stormwater-management requirements for redevelopment of properties. The Town of Blades will continue to work with the state of Delaware and all its agencies in order to try and identify a strategy that will work with the goals of the town as well as with the needs of the surrounding ecosystem.

The town of Blades is aware that there is an ongoing Level of Service Review within Sussex County for surface-water-management programs. This study is being conducted by URS Corporation. The Town of Blades will consider the recommendations that are proposed as a result of this study.

## **Recommendations – Environmental Protection**

### Recommendation 1: Protection of Wetlands and Woodlands

It is recommended that Blades continue to protect the wetlands and woodlands that line the shore of the Nanticoke River as well as those elsewhere throughout the town. These areas have ecological values associated with flood protection, nutrient removal, and wildlife habitat. Alteration or development of these areas may be under the jurisdiction of other state or federal agencies, notably DNREC and/or the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Town should consider adopting wetland- and stream-buffer regulations so as to provide for the long-term viability of these natural resources. Additionally, while the Town has incorporated street tree requirements and some forest protection standards, the Town should consider adopting more restrictive forest resource-protection standards during the next review of its Land Development Ordinance.

### Recommendation 2: Enhance Citizen Connection to and Education on Environmental Features

It is recommended that the Town of Blades continue its efforts to install some form of greenway trail in order to provide pedestrian access to the Nanticoke River. Included in this trail should be educational stands, which offer citizens the opportunity to learn about their surroundings. Any trail system shall utilize relevant BMPs to minimize impacts to natural resources found in the area. This connection will help foster environmental stewardship as well as promote environmental education among the citizens.

### Recommendation 3: Construction Standards in the Floodplain

The Town has enacted a Flood Hazard Ordinance regulating building activity in the floodplain. Ideally, structures should not be located in the floodplain. However, if construction of structures

is unavoidable, conformance to the Flood Hazard Ordinance—as it relates to development of structures in the Floodplain—shall be adhered to.

The Town should continue to utilize the Flood Hazard Ordinance and amend it if necessary as new information and techniques become available.

#### Recommendation 4: Best Management Practices for Development

The Town of Blades has established development guidelines that are consistent with the state of Delaware's guidance documents for the protection of natural resources including, but not limited to, wetlands, forest resources, streams, and steep slopes. However, these protections may not be sufficient to fully protect the area's natural resources. Therefore, the Town of Blades should consider revising its Land Development Ordinance, or passing other acts of legislation, in order to adopt some advanced protection strategies, such as low-impact development guidelines, conservation design guidelines, limitations on impervious surfaces, regional stormwater-management utilities, or other strategies designed to minimize the built environment's impacts on the natural world.

#### Recommendation 5: Aquifer Recharge

The Town of Blades should incorporate the recommendations of the state of Delaware for the protection of Excellent Recharge areas into its Land Development Ordinance or through municipal ordinance. The recommendations of the state of Delaware for protection of aquifers include limitations on the amount of impervious surfaces in excellent recharge areas, limitations on the storage of hazardous materials in recharge areas, and the promotion of natural vegetation-based infiltration of stormwater, to name a few.

#### Recommendation 6: Wellhead-Protection District

The Town of Blades should incorporate the recommendations of the state of Delaware for the protection of wellheads into its land-development ordinance or through municipal ordinance. The recommendations of the state of Delaware for the protection of wellhead areas include the limitation of impervious surfaces in the protection district, hazardous-material prohibitions, and the promotion of afforestation and reforestation in these districts, to name a few.

## **Chapter 2-9    Open Space and Recreation Plan**

### **Background – Open Space and Recreation**

There are two municipal parks in the town of Blades. Blades Public Park consists of approximately two acres of land located in the vicinity of Fifth and Arch Streets in the south central portion of the town. This park was constructed in part with funding from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund and includes playground equipment, a picnic area, and

public restrooms. This park is conveniently located in the middle of Blades' largest residential neighborhood.

Triangle Park is the other municipal park in Blades. It is a small, triangular piece of land located along River Road at the western boundary of the town. This park contains some picnic tables and a swing set.

In addition to these two municipal parks, there is some recreational space available that is associated with the Seaford Elementary, which is located on South Arch Street in Blades.

Another important recreation resource is the public marina in the northwestern portion of the town. It provides boating and fishing opportunities for boat owners and residents of Blades and the surrounding areas.

Blades' 2004 Land Development Ordinance requires that new developments either dedicate land for open space or make a cash payment in lieu of dedication to the town. The land or fees must be used to provide open space, park, and recreational facilities to serve residents of the subdivision for which the land was dedicated or the fee was collected.

In addition to the recreational facilities located in Blades, the City of Seaford manages a fairly extensive system of parks. Their facilities include tennis courts, playgrounds, ball fields, picnic areas, a boat ramp, and picnic areas. The city of Seaford's parks total more than 40 acres. Because of the proximity of these two communities, it is reasonable to assume that Blades residents could take advantage of facilities and programs in Seaford, especially those that are not offered in Blades.

### **Relevant Planning Principles – Open Space and Recreation**

- The community considers the Market Street and High Street area to be the downtown center of the town. The redevelopment efforts that have taken place since the 2002 Comprehensive Plan have created opportunities for expansion of commercial, institutional, and recreational uses that benefit the community as a whole and complement the marina. These efforts should be continued. The community would like to see more emphasis on recreational uses in redevelopment in the future.
- The Town should enhance enforcement of residential-development requirements for pedestrian-friendly development. In this way, new development may be compatible with the existing patterns of Blades neighborhoods, and include street patterns that link to the existing street system, sidewalks, and parks and open-space areas.
- The Nanticoke River is a very important environmental feature that greatly increases the quality of life for area residents. Blades should seek to protect the river by adopting appropriate development practices and land use strategies adjacent to the river and its wetlands. Opportunities for low-intensity recreational and educational uses of the Nanticoke and its shoreline should be expanded, provided that they conform to environmental standards that maintain protection of these resources.

## **Goal Statement – Open Space and Recreation**

The goal of the Town of Blades is to provide attractive, safe, and accessible recreational opportunities to town residents.

## **Recommendations – Open Space and Recreation**

### Recommendation 1: Evaluate Condition of Parks and Equipment

The Town should evaluate the condition of the existing parks and the associated playground equipment to ensure that they are up to current standards. If any upgrades are needed, funding may be available from the Delaware Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund or from fees in lieu of dedication paid by developers. Inquiries about this funding source should be made through DNREC.

### Recommendation 2: Coordinate Parks Programming with Seaford

Blades may be too small to have an extensive municipal parks and recreation program, but the town's proximity to Seaford can be an advantage. The Town should evaluate collaboration with Seaford's programs to allow Blades' residents to fully participate in sports, after school programs, and the like. This need not be a one-way street, as perhaps facilities in Blades (Blades Park or the Marina) could be used as the venue for some of these programs.

### Recommendation 3: Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections

The Town should explore opportunities to provide pedestrian and bicycle connections among parks, public and cultural facilities, and residential neighborhoods.

### Recommendation 4: Nanticoke River Protection

The Nanticoke River is the largest, most visible, and most important natural resource in Blades. The marina provides a previously unprecedented opportunity for members of the community to have access to the river for boating, fishing, canoeing, and kayaking. The Town should protect the water quality of the river and the woodlands and wetlands on its shore by only permitting environmentally responsible development in sensitive areas. Chapter 2-8, Environmental Protection, contains additional information about how this might be accomplished.

### Recommendation 5: Open-Space Regulations

The Town of Blades should review its Land Development Ordinance in order to address issues that may reduce the amount of land provided as open space for the community. Specifically, the Town should prohibit stormwater-management facilities, wastewater-treatment facilities, or other structural Best Management Practices from being included as open space.

## **Chapter 3-1 Intergovernmental Coordination**

Intergovernmental coordination is essential to accomplish the goals identified through the planning process. The coordination of planning and other activities with those of Seaford, Sussex County, and the state of Delaware will have a direct impact on the well-being and quality of life for all residents living in or near Blades.

### **Coordination with Agencies**

- For land use planning and transportation, establishing and maintaining close coordination with the Office of State Planning Coordination, the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT), the city of Seaford, and Sussex County is crucial. Other important state agencies, the actions of which may interact with the town's activities, are the State Historic Preservation office (SHPO), the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), the Delaware Economic Development Office (DEDO), the Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA), and the Office of the State Fire Marshal.
- Coordination with the state is also relevant with respect to various funding opportunities. Administered through DelDOT, federal TEA 21 grants may be available for improving local streets. Infrastructure grants, which can be significant sources of funding for the town, are administered by the state.
- The Quality of Life Act requires counties to adopt procedures for coordination of land use planning in neighboring jurisdictions. Therefore, Sussex County is an important partner for the town, particularly with regard to annexation and development in peripheral areas and for economic development in general. The Town should work closely with the Sussex County Planning Department and Economic Development Department regarding issues surrounding Blades.
- The Town of Blades should continue to coordinate with the State Fire Marshal's Office in the event of any future updates to the Town's Land Development Ordinance or other similar legislative updates to the town's Fire Code. The Town formalized a MOU with this office early in 2008.

Development that is occurring outside the town limits is highly relevant to Blades, because land uses outside the town have economic and social impacts on the town.

- The Town should make an effort to keep itself apprised of land use applications in nearby areas that will impact the town. The Town should comment through the state's PLUS review process, the county's planning process, or the city of Seaford's planning process where applicable. It would be advisable for the town to seek a MOU with said agencies, to be contacted, and afforded the ability to comment on any developments within its proposed area of concern.
  - It is recommended that Blades develop a coordination strategy with the county regarding zoning, subdivision plans, and the type of development occurring in

- neighboring areas. The recommendations found in Chapter 2-2 of this plan can form the basis for discussions with the county. A formal memorandum of agreement with the county may be one mechanism to define the process for coordination and interaction.
- It is recommended that Blades develop a coordination strategy with the city of Seaford regarding zoning, subdivision plans, and the type of development occurring in neighboring areas. The recommendations found in Chapter 2-2 of this plan can form the basis for discussions with the city. A formal memorandum of agreement with Seaford may be one mechanism to define the process for coordination and interaction.

## **Coordination with Planning Activities**

The Town should become involved in planning activities of other agencies when said activities address land use, transportation, infrastructure, or service delivery in and around the Blades area. The Town should provide representatives to serve on committees drafting and reviewing plans. The Town should also review and comment on draft plans and otherwise become an active participant in planning activities that impact Blades' future.

The following are some current or intended planning activities in which the town should participate:

- The Sussex County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 update
- The Sussex County Long Range Transportation Plan (DelDOT)
- The Delaware Transit Corporation Strategic Plan (DelDOT)
- The City of Seaford Comprehensive Plan
- Livable Delaware and the Governor's Advisory Panel on Planning Coordination

## **Chapter 3-2 Implementation Policies and Projects**

The "Blades Plan" section of this document recommends a number of implementation actions in each section. These recommendations come in two forms: Town Policies and Implementation Projects. The policies are intended to serve as guidelines that the Planning Commission and the Town Commission should use to direct and encourage future growth, development, and town revitalization. The implementation projects include code revisions, additional planning studies, and physical projects that are intended to allow the town to meet the goals envisioned by the plan.

Throughout the plan-update process, town officials and interested members of the public expressed satisfaction with the direction set forth by, and goals of, the 2002 Comprehensive Plan. Accordingly, this plan proposes no major changes in land use. However, the Town Council must amend the zoning map to rezone every parcel in Blades within 18 months of this document's adoption as required in Title 7, Section 702(c) of the Delaware Code.

## Town Policies

The following are the most significant of the town policies that have been identified in the “Blades Plan” section of this document.

- 1) The Land Use Plan—Chapter 2-1 establishes policies to guide and direct future land use. The Planning Commission and the Town Council should utilize Chapter 2-1 as part of its decision-making process on land use applications.
- 2) The Growth and Annexation Plan—Chapter 2-2 is very similar to Chapter 2-1 in that it establishes policies for guidance on annexations or land use issues in adjacent areas.
- 3) Utility Capacity and Expansion—The Town should continue to monitor the capacity of the water and sewer system, especially in regard to the limited sewer capacity described in Chapter 2-3. Utilities should be expanded only to identified areas where future growth is desirable, described in Chapters 2-1 and 2-2, and depicted on map 4.
- 4) Adequate Sewer Capacity—As discussed in Chapter 2-3, the Town should work collaboratively with Sussex County and the city of Seaford to assure that adequate sewer capacity exists for the town prior to annexation.
- 5) Land Use and Transportation Coordination—The Town should coordinate land use decisions with transportation infrastructure, as suggested in Chapter 2-4.
- 6) Sidewalks and Bicycle Paths—The Town should continue to look for opportunities to provide sidewalks and bicycle paths and should require these amenities in new developments where practical.
- 7) Economic Development—As discussed in Chapter 2-6, the Town should continue to work with the Blades Economic Development Corporation (BEDCO) to develop future economic development initiatives.
- 8) Housing Opportunities—The Town of Blades should support the construction of some townhouses, duplexes, condominiums or other types of residential structures to diversify the housing stock in the town. As discussed in Chapter 2-7, the housing stock in Blades is currently skewed towards single-family homes and apartments.
- 9) Open Space—Blades should evaluate the condition of its open spaces and recreational opportunities. It should evaluate the effectiveness of its open-space dedication/fee in lieu of dedication regulations and make any adjustments deemed necessary.
- 10) Environmental Protection—The town’s 2004 Land Development Ordinance purposefully left space for what were, at the time, impending environmental controls suggested by the state. Now that model language is available for wellhead- and sourcewater-protection ordinances, the Town should act to draft and include appropriate provisions in its unified code or through the adoption of separate ordinances.

## Implementation Projects

During the past five-year planning period, Blades comprehensively rezoned the town to reflect the land uses identified in the 2002 Comprehensive Plan. The Town has also developed and adopted a Land Development Ordinance that incorporates zoning and subdivision regulations in a single ordinance. In addition, it has finalized a plan to redevelop a prominent brownfield, begun reviewing its housing code, hired a code enforcement officer, and acquired a CPCN for areas within town—certainly considerable accomplishments. Further, the Town has also overseen a detailed flood study of the area, evaluated its sewer capacity, and obtained an increased allocation from the Seaford treatment plant. The following implementation projects are achievable over the next ten years.

- 1) Revisit Blades Sewer District needs study. Blades should work with Sussex County to complete a study to determine the future sewer-service needs for the Blades Sewer District, as discussed in Chapter 2-3.
- 2) Acquire a CPCN for annexation area. Blades should proactively acquire a CPCN to permit the town to be the water utility of record for the areas designated by this plan for annexation in Chapter 2-2.
- 3) Consider contracting for residential trash service. Blades should consider contracting for residential trash service for all residents.
- 4) Traffic Study for Blades—Blades should work with DeIDOT to complete a traffic study for the town that includes a review of truck traffic volumes and routes.
- 5) Market Street / High Street Intersection Evaluation—Blades should work with DeIDOT to evaluate design improvements to this busy intersection. This project may, and probably should, be combined with the overall traffic study listed above.
- 6) Pedestrian and Bicycle Study for Blades—Blades should work with DeIDOT to complete a pedestrian and bicycle study for the town.
- 7) Community History and Culture Project—The Town should work with citizens to determine important historical and cultural places in the town, as discussed in Chapter 2-5.
- 8) Continue to review and improve property-maintenance and housing-code Enforcement. Blades should review its procedures for enforcement of property maintenance and housing codes and develop a strategy to provide more consistent enforcement.
- 9) Environmental Protection Regulations and Practices—Blades should adopt appropriate regulations to protect sensitive wetlands and woodlands along the Nanticoke River. Also, it is recommended that the Town work with DNREC to develop “best management practices” for urban uses, which will further the goals of the TMDL program.
- 10) Evaluate condition of parks and equipment. The Town should evaluate the condition of its parks and apply for grants, where available, to upgrade equipment.



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## **Appendix – Maps and Planning & Zoning Commission Minutes**

- Map 1.       Aerial View**
- Map 2.       Roads and Boundaries**
- Map 3.       State Investment Strategies**
- Map 4.       Growth and Annexation Areas**
- Map 5.       Areas of Concern**
- Map 6.       Existing Land Use**
- Map 7.       Environmental Features**
- Map 8.       Future Land Use**

### **Blades Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting Minutes:**

- March 13, 2007**
- April 10, 2007**
- May 8, 2007**
- June 12, 2007**
- October 9, 2007**
- April 7, 2008**
- October 20, 2008**