Preface

In 1968, the Town of Odessa Planning Commission contracted with the Delaware State Planning Office to prepare a Comprehensive Development Plan for the town. The preparation of that Plan was financed in part through a federal grant established through provisions of Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954. This Plan, known as a 701 Plan, was adopted by the Town Council in 1969 and has served as the guidance document for the Odessa Town Council, and Planning Commission for making land use decisions for the past 30 years.

In the fall of 1999, the Town Council and Planning Commission for Odessa contracted with the Institute for Public Administration (IPA) at the University of Delaware to prepare an update of Odessa’s 1969 Comprehensive Plan. A team was assembled consisting of professional staff and graduate research assistants. The planning team met several times with the Mayor, Planning Commissioners, and members of Town Council to discuss the preparation of this revised plan.

The planning team also assisted the Town in preparing an application to the State Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues for a grant of $5000 from the “Infrastructure Planning Grant” fund. These grants are available to municipalities to develop or update Comprehensive Plans. The Odessa grant request was approved at the October 20, 1999 meeting of the Cabinet Committee.

Purpose for Updating the Comprehensive Plan

There are two principle purposes for updating the Town of Odessa Comprehensive Plan. First, it provides the Town’s elected leaders with an updated document on issues and land use within the Town, thereby assisting them in making decisions that will shape the future of the municipality. Second, to satisfy the requirements of House Bill 396 recently passed by the Delaware General Assembly that establishes minimum standards for the contents of municipal comprehensive plans and standards for periodic review of these plans. The following excerpt is from H.B. 396:

“Comprehensive plan means 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 the 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.” “... the comprehensive plan shall have the force of law and no development shall be permitted except as consistent with the plan.”
H.B. 396 also requires that each municipality in Delaware review its Comprehensive Plan at least every five years to determine its relevance given changing conditions and the Plan must be revised and formally re-adopted at least every ten years. This bill established for the first time in Delaware a requirement to ensure that local government plans are coordinated with State planning efforts and remain up-to-date.

The 2001 Odessa Comprehensive Plan provides a guide to issues the Town will have to address in the near future. The area surrounding Odessa is developing rapidly. Lands that for decades were family owned and passed from “parents to children” for use in agricultural operations are now being sold to investors and developed for residential and commercial uses. As this conversion occurs, greater stress is placed on our natural resources and public facilities including roads, schools, water supply systems, and wastewater systems. Public officials are continually forced to face difficult and costly decisions concerning expansion of these public facilities, which in turn provides more justification for higher density development in what has until recently been a mostly low density, rural area.

Odessa will not have to face too many issues of new development on vacant lands within the town since there is a limited amount of vacant land within its boundaries. Most of the vacant land is either deed restricted or consists of relatively small lots. The Town has an extensive Zoning Ordinance with a Historic District zone which limits the range of development activities. However, there is vacant land surrounding the Town immediately adjacent to its boundaries. Development of these lands will have a range of impacts on the Town. The New Castle County Unified Development Code controls the use of these lands. One of the primary issues facing Odessa will be whether to consider annexation of some of these lands if requested by the landowners.

Odessa will need to address the redevelopment of lands within town, particularly the use of vacant commercial land. These properties are important for supporting the town budget and offer the only opportunities for the establishment of businesses that could support the daily activities of the residents of the town.

**Synopsis of the Planning Process & Community Involvement**

In August 1999, the Odessa Planning Commission held a meeting with staff from the Institute for Public Administration at the University of Delaware to discuss the proposal developed by the IPA at the request of the Planning Commission for updating the Town’s Comprehensive Plan. After reviewing the proposal, the meeting focused on a discussion of the Goals and Objectives for the revised Plan starting with a review of those goals listed in the previous Town Plan written 30 years ago.

In December 1999, the Planning Commission held a public meeting to discuss progress on the Plan. Included in the invitations to the meeting were the Office of State Planning Coordination and the Land Use Department of New Castle County. The meeting was sparsely attended, but it
included a lively discussion of the residents’ view for the future of Odessa and their opinions concerning future land use and potential annexations. It was recognized by all attending that the new limited access State Route 1 (SR1) with an interchange on the western edge of Odessa on State Route 299 would have both positive and negative impacts on their Town.

In May 2000, the Draft Comprehensive Plan 2001 for Odessa was delivered to the Town’s Council and Planning Commission and made available to the public. The Planning Commission held a meeting on August 30, 2000 to discuss this first draft and receive public comment. The IPA summarized the comments received both at the meeting and through correspondence and delivered this summary to the Planning Commission and Town Council for review and directions for the revisions necessitated by these comments. The Planning Commission held a public meeting on October 16, 2000 and developed its reply to the proposed revisions in a letter to the IPA dated October 19, 2000. A revised Draft Plan dated January 2001 was sent to the State Planning Coordination Office and the New Castle County Department of Land Use for review and comment. After the 20-day review period, comments received from the State and New Castle County were reviewed with the Town Planning Commission. The Planning Commission held a public meeting on the Final Draft Plan on March 22, 2001 to receive final comments from the public.


**Comprehensive Plan Goals**

Comprehensive plans usually start with the Town’s goals that serve as a general guide to the development of policies and programs. The following goals were developed referencing the previous Plan and comments from Town officials and residents.

To conserve, encourage, and promote the Town’s unique place in Delaware history, including its richness in historical buildings and museums.

To provide a healthy and safe town with neighborhoods consisting of attractive homes and commercial buildings.

Continue to provide necessary municipal services and facilities, including access to sanitary sewers, stormwater management, street lighting and refuse disposal.

To provide for the safe, efficient, and convenient movement of people and goods within the town by integrating the pattern of land uses with circulation routes within town and transportation facilities.

To provide sufficient park and recreational facilities for residents of the Town.
To provide recreational and cultural activities for all age groups and interests.

To coordinate with all local jurisdictions and the State on issues impacting Odessa from the development of areas in close proximity to the Town.

To encourage the development of land consistent with the interest of the Town.

To encourage the growth and/or redevelopment of Odessa’s commercial zone located along the Route 13 south corridor.

**Location**

The Town of Odessa is located in the portion of New Castle County situated south of the Chesapeake and Delaware (C& D) Canal. Both the northbound and southbound dual lanes of U.S. Route 13 cross through the town, intersecting with State Route 299. The newly constructed SR1 bypasses the town to the west and a SR 299 exit was built for easier access to Odessa and Middletown.

SR1 is a wide four-lane toll highway that now forms a sizable boundary just outside the western edge of Odessa. The Appoquinimink Creek forms a natural boundary to the east of town. To the north there is another natural boundary consisting of a ravine area of woods and wetlands. And to the south there is a combination of wetlands, wooded areas, and residential housing.

Map 1:
Odessa Location in New Castle County
Little can be found concerning the early history of the Odessa area except that the Dutch settled Appoquinimink in the 1660s and adopted the name “Apequinemy.” They were attracted to the area by its location along the river and had hopes of establishing a trading route with colonies to the west. Alexander DeHinijossa, upon his retirement as Vice-Director at New Castle, built a plantation on a tract of land given to him at Appoquinimink and intended to reside there and engage in trading.

During those years, the English began to colonize this new land and peacefully took over the Apequinemy area in 1664. A few months later, the estate of Mr. DeHinijossa was confiscated by the British and granted to Captain Edmund Cantwell—first sheriff of New Castle County under the government of William Penn. A roadway, called “Old Hermann’s Cartroad,” was established during these years connecting Bohemia Manor, Maryland with the village.

In 1731, permission was granted to Edmund Cantwell’s son, Richard, to erect a toll bridge over the Appoquinimink Creek at Appoquinimink Landing. It was called Cantwell’s Bridge and the Town gradually took the same name. In 1767, William Corbit opened the first industry in the town, a tannery, and it continued in operation until the 1850s. In 1817, a blacksmith shop was opened and in 1855, the New Castle County Bank was incorporated. Throughout the 1800s industries opened for the manufacture of fertilizers, the evaporation of fruits, and the canning of fruits and vegetables.

The first schoolhouse was erected at an early date by a Quaker group called “A Society of Friends,” but in 1817 it was closed. In 1855, the railroad was built with the route going through nearby Middletown. Town officials were worried about the effect the rail could have on the shipping business of the town and decided to again change its name from Cantwell’s Bridge to “Odessa” after the Ukrainian grain port Odessa located on the Black Sea. Shortly afterwards, the nationwide railroad network opened causing Odessa’s grain boats to become obsolete. In 1873, Odessa was incorporated as a town and endowed with corporate privileges.

From 1870 to 1917 a steamboat operated hauling mainly agricultural and industrial products. A newspaper, “The Odessa Herald” also operated in town around 1890, but in 1892 it relocated to the Town of New Castle as the “County Herald.” A second paper materialized in 1890 but that also soon failed. From 1903 to 1907, a trolley operated from Middletown to Odessa as an attempt to tie the railway with the riverfront. Up until the end of World War I, Odessa’s Main Street also served as a state highway. In 1923, the DuPont Highway was built thus allowing Main Street to go back to its single status as a main street and not a main highway.

In 1926, the Odessa Fire Company was established and the first vehicle purchased was a 1926 Hale Pumper. The Pumper was temporarily housed in the Red Man Lodge located on Main Street across the street from where
the current firehouse stands. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, carnivals, bingo’s, etc., were held to earn money to build a firehouse. The building was finally realized in 1936 through the carnival revenues, donations from town residents, land donated by Mr. Corbit, and a cash amount equal to Mr. Corbit’s land, given by Mr. Moxom.

In 1927, Odessa was provided with electricity for the first time. Street lighting was expanded using mercury-vapor lights in 1958.

**Historic Structures**

The historic atmosphere of Odessa is the Town’s most prominent characteristic. Even though the population is small, the Town has the following pre-1855 buildings which have historical or architectural interest.

The **Collins-Sharp House** is the oldest historic home in Odessa. This structure was built around 1700 as two frame houses which were joined together by a connecting hallway about 1730. Known in later years as the Collins-Johnson House, it was located at Delaware Bay near Taylor’s Bridge. In 1962, H. Rodney Sharp purchased the house and had it moved to Odessa. Today it is called the Collins-Sharp House and is a part of the Historic Houses of Odessa owned and operated by Winterthur Museum.

The next two oldest houses date back to 1740; these are the **Thomas House** and the **Frame & Log House**. The **Thomas House** was built with hand-hewn log, and hand-split shingles and laths. In later years, a white-frame addition was added. The **Frame & Log House** was built with white oak logs. The woodwork, floors and beaded beams in the kitchen are quite exceptional. In 1942, the house was restored by H. Rodney Sharp.

The next oldest house is the **Wilson-Warner House**. This structure was built by David Wilson in 1769 and is of brick construction. The house remained in the Wilson family until 1829 when David Wilson, Jr., sold it to William Polk as a result of business reversals. In 1901, the house was sold to Mary Corbit Warner, a granddaughter of David Wilson, Jr. Mrs. Warner died in 1923 and, under a provision of her will, the house became a museum under David Wilson Mansion, Inc. It is now a part of Historic Houses of Odessa, owned and operated by Winterthur Museum.

The **Corbit-Kabis House** was built by John Corbit in the mid-1700s. The construction date of the later front section is c.1820s. In the second half of the nineteenth century (c.1870s), the house was remodeled for John Corbit. The last member of the Corbit family, Daniel Corbit, died in 1941.

A section of the **Mailly House** was built about 1770, according to estimates, although the exact date is not known because the records were burned in a fire at the New Castle Court House. This section, now known as the rear
wing, is built of frame. The middle stucco-brick section was added in the
nineteenth century followed by the front red brick section in 1940.

The January House seems to have been built in several stages. The name is
derived from the earliest known owners, Peter and Janet January who
conveyed it to David Wilson on May 29, 1773. The house was later
completely restored by H. Rodney Sharp.

One of the main attractions in Odessa is the Corbit-Sharp House. This
house is one of the finest Georgian homes on the eastern seaboard. Located
near the banks of the Appoquinimink River, it is a two-story, twenty-two
room brick structure built between the years 1772 and 1774. It was built by
William Corbit, a Quaker who operated a tannery, which was the first
industry in Odessa. The last male Corbit to occupy this house died in 1922.
In 1938, the property was purchased by H. Rodney Sharp who restored the
house to its original state. In 1958, he endowed and presented the house to
Winterthur Museum and it is now part of Winterthur’s Historic Homes
of Odessa.

The John Janvier House was built in 1775 and is of brick construction. In
the nineteenth century a front porch was added but was later removed.
Since c. 1963, the house has served as a parsonage for St. Paul’s Methodist
Church. The paneled chimney section in the parlor has been restored and
the front bedroom on the second floor retains its original paneled fireplace
wall. The old stable, which dates from 1791, was moved to the Brick Hotel
lot. The present St. Paul’s Church stands on the ground where John Janvier
had his cabinet making shop.

The Judge Lore House was built in 1775 with logs and has a winding
stairway that climbs four floors. The cellar, which was used as a kitchen, is
paved with brick and has a large fireplace at one end. The name of the
house comes from its once famous owner, Chief Justice Charles B. Lore.

The Pump House was the middle section of a three-part row house built in 1780 and in
its earlier days was used as a store. In 1948, H. Rodney Sharp renovated the deteriorating
building and today, although it is a private residence, it is part of the Historic Houses of
Odessa. Adjoining it is another row house that Mr. Sharp converted to a garage. Mr.
Sharp demolished the third row house that was located to the left of the Pump House
because of its bad condition.

The Friends Meeting House, which was built in 1785, is a small brick building about
twenty feet square. It was built by David Wilson and deeded to four trustees for “A
Society of Friends” (called Quakers) in Appoquinimink. The “Society” waned for a
while but has presently been reactivated and has weekly meetings of about fifteen people. It is now under the jurisdiction of the Wilmington “Friends Society.”

The Davis Store was built from brick in 1821. It was remodeled in 1870 but no further renovation is known. In 1830, the Davis Residence was attached to the store.

The Brick Hotel was built for William Polk in 1822 and operated as a hotel for nearly one hundred years. In 1956, H. Rodney Sharp bought and restored the building. Today it is the Brick Hotel Gallery, part of the Historic Homes of Odessa and serves as a visitor reception area and exhibit space.

In 1846, William Polk built the Cyrus Polk House for his son Cyrus. This house is made of brick in the “Italian Villa” style. It is furnished with Chinese antiques dating from the Han Dynasty (200 A.D.) to the present.

The Old Academy Building was erected in 1844 and is the oldest surviving public school building in town. In 1846, a library was donated by William B. Corbit and housed here making it the earliest free library in Delaware. Later, the Corbit Library was moved to the Wilson-Warner House and then to its present location on High Street as the Corbit-Calloway Memorial Library. H. Rodney Sharp, who had once taught at the Academy, restored the building in 1938 and gave it to the Odessa Community Center Association which later gave it to the Town for public use.

The Miller-Polk House is a white, late Federal frame house built in 1850 by William Polk for his son Cyrus T. Polk. The house boasts an outstanding curly maple stairway.

Old St. Paul’s Church and Graveyard was built in 1851 and served as a Methodist Church for decades. When a new Methodist church was built, St. Paul’s was abandoned for years until the Women’s Club of Odessa eventually acquired it. The Club has been working for many years to restore it to its original condition and uses it for Club functions.

The Crouch House was built from brick in 1854 in the “Italian Villa” style. No renovations have been recorded since its construction.

The last of these historic buildings is the Bank of Delaware Building, built in 1855. This structure, which is also in the “Italian Villa” style, was originally chartered as the New Castle County National Bank of Odessa.
## Table 1: Major Historical Buildings in Odessa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historic Structure</th>
<th>Original Construction Date</th>
<th>Present Usage/Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collins-Sharp House</td>
<td>ca. 1730</td>
<td>Museum – 110 Second St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas House</td>
<td>1740</td>
<td>Residence – 628 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame &amp; Log House</td>
<td>1740</td>
<td>Residence – 114 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Corbit House</td>
<td>mid-1700s – 1870</td>
<td>Residence – 206 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson/Warner House</td>
<td>1769</td>
<td>Museum – 202 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailly House</td>
<td>1770</td>
<td>Residence – 300 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January House</td>
<td>1772</td>
<td>Residence – 2 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corbit-Sharp House</td>
<td>1774</td>
<td>Museum – 118 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Janvier House</td>
<td>1775</td>
<td>Residence – 400 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge Lore House</td>
<td>1775</td>
<td>Residence – 310 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pump House</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>Residence – 116 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends Meeting House</td>
<td>1785</td>
<td>Meeting House – 624 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis Store/Residence</td>
<td>1821</td>
<td>Residence – 205 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick Hotel</td>
<td>1822</td>
<td>Museum – 109 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyrus Polk House</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>Residence – 301 High St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Academy Building</td>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Town Hall – 315 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller-Polk House</td>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Residence – 303 High St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old St. Paul’s Church</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Odessa Women’s Club – 506 High St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crouch House</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>Residence – 203 Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank of Delaware</td>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Vacant – 201 Main St.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Comprehensive Development Plan for Odessa, Delaware, June 1969 which references the New Castle County Regional Planning Commission, Historical Development, 1966 and interview with Mr. Horace L. Hotchkiss, November 15, 1968. Additional updates provided by Mayor James Grant, November 1999 and Mr. Steve Pulinka, Winterthur Museum, February 2000.*