

Approved: February 1, 2010

Eastern Shore Land Conservancy Strategic Plan 2010 - 2015

I. The Challenge Ahead

In 1990, the founding Directors of the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC) shared a fervent dedication to the future of this matchless association of land, rivers, resources, and community called the Eastern Shore. And they shared a common concern that these special attributes of the Eastern Shore were being increasingly eroded by sprawling development patterns. The result of this creeping conversion was fragmentation of our wildlife habitat and environmentally sensitive areas, loss of productive farmland, alteration of our traditional small town settlement patterns, and deterioration of our resource based economies and high quality of life.

In this setting, ESLC's founding was structured toward creating a sound and professional organization capable of addressing land use issues over a broad region and providing permanent stewardship for conserved lands. Robust strategic and annual planning became bedrock components of ESLC's culture and remain so today. This planning regimen has brought tremendous success in this ESLC's 20th year with over 45,000 acres preserved, significant gains toward making this region one of the best planned areas in Maryland, and ESLC has become a durable organization up to the long term challenges.

As we embarked on this current strategic planning process, our Nation faces the toughest economic situation since ESLC's founding causing shrinking donations, unstable land markets, and crippled government conservation funding sources. And yet, new opportunities abound including state and federal leadership committed to our general goals, falling prices for poorly planned developments, and a growing awareness of conservation among a much broader segment of society.

In looking forward to 2010 through 2015, ESLC focused this current strategic planning process on inviting a much broader segment of Eastern Shore residents, friends, and supporters into our mission and work. This broadening work, called internally "Inviting the Whole Community," is critical to sustaining our past gains and achieving our 2050 vision of vibrant towns, thriving working landscapes, and conserved rural areas. Toward this end, 139 internal and external interviews were conducted with a focus on people and groups that we have not heard from in the past. Based on these interviews and significant Board and staff discussions, the following themes have emerged to guide ESLC over the next five years:

Towns. Towns play an increasingly critical role in shaping the landscape and character of the Eastern Shore. To ensure that towns are "thriving and well defined" as called for

in our 2050 vision, they need strong planning programs. ESLC can play a critical education and support role in helping towns with state of the art planning and engaging their residents in the process;

Access to Land. People of all ages and backgrounds deserve to benefit from ESLC's strategic land conservation efforts. ESLC will promote land conservation and planning which provides public access to open space including parks, the Chesapeake Bay, farmland, hiking trails, urban gardens, and other parts of the Eastern Shore's rich heritage;

Whole Communities. The Eastern Shore is made up of many different communities with diverse backgrounds and rich heritage. ESLC will proactively reach out to diverse communities to hear their priorities, engage them in projects, and educate them about ways to protect the Eastern Shore.

This background leads us to the central challenge of this strategic plan - that of expanding conservation and planning programs to serve towns and more diverse communities while in the midst of the greatest recession in our lifetime and significant contraction of traditional conservation and charitable funding sources. As with many challenges, the current economic crisis brings new clarity about our future path and new openness to the innovations necessary to get there.

II. Vision

Our Vision in 2050 is an Eastern Shore where:

- towns are vibrant and well defined;
- farms, forests, and fisheries are thriving; and
- scenic, historic, natural, and riverine landscapes are maintained.

III. Mission

The Eastern Shore Land Conservancy is committed to preserving and sustaining the vibrant communities of the Eastern Shore and the lands and waters that connect them.

IV. Strategic Plan Goals - 2010 - 2015

- 1 Save lands that are critical to all of our communities.

- 2 Serve as a leading resource for sound land use planning.
- 3 Build constituency for ESLC’s 2050 vision through partnerships, volunteerism, and education.
- 4 Advocate for effective public policy that advances ESLC’s 2050 vision.

V. Objectives

Goal 1 Save lands that are critical to all of our communities.

Objective A. Continue to protect critical farmland and habitat for perpetuity through an expanding toolbox of protection options and educating landowners about these choices.

Objective B. Increase the number of community based projects which provide public access to land.

Objective C. Protect greenbelts around towns and villages.

Objective D. Improve permanent stewardship of easements and lands held in fee including expanding “Best Management Practices” on conserved lands and providing public access where possible.

Goal 2 Serve as a leading resource for sound land use planning.

Objective A. Encourage planning that promotes growth in towns, creates greenbelts around towns, and preserves natural areas and farmland.

Objective B. Promote Eastern Shore Planning Academy as an outreach, education, research and professional development resource for professional and citizen planners and others involved in planning.

Objective C. Serve towns with increased planning support including broadly inclusive planning processes and constructive dialogues with counties and the state.

Objective D. Provide planning support in region which stimulates participation in land conservation including use of easements and similar mechanisms and the focus of these techniques on greenbelts around towns.

Goal 3 Build Constituency for ESLC’s 2050 vision through partnerships, volunteerism, and education.

Objective A. Develop and expand partnerships to deliver various education programs targeted to seniors and youth including outings to natural areas, poster / essay contests, tours of preserved lands, and other partnerships with schools.

Objective B. Target outreach on ESLC and involvement in our programs to churches, community organizations, specialized media, and the agri-business community.

Objective C. Expand signage on ESLC preserves to enhance aesthetics and include organizational and mission information.

Goal 4 Advocate for effective public policy that advances ESLC's 2050 vision.

Objective A. Engage regional leaders in creating a new vision that builds on the success of *Eastern Shore 2010* with particular attention, both in process and substance, to the cross cutting themes of towns, whole communities, and providing access to lands.

Objective B. Encourage proactive legislation at the town, county, regional, state, and federal level to achieve the goals and objectives of this strategic plan.

Objective C. Establish relationships with elected officials including the hosting of candidate forums.

Objective D. Engage broader communities in identifying policy priorities.

Organizational Capacity Objectives

Goal 1 Expand and diversify membership, engagement, and financial support for ESLC.

Objective A. Explore options for further diversification of revenue sources including fees for services, restricted funding for specific projects, corporate support, and reaching out beyond the Eastern Shore for funding.

Objective B. Engage town populations in town based projects to raise local awareness of ESLC and build these new constituencies into our long term support base.

Objective C. Conduct fundraising events at preserved lands to provide access and expand support base.

Objective D. Increase Stewardship Endowment to meet goals established in 2009 and adjust policies / protocols as needed to ensure that Stewardship Endowment grows preserves portfolio grows.

Objective E. Target small group engagement (10 ppl) to attract new members and starting with Board members as hosts.

Goal 2 Strengthen the capacity of the staff and Board of ESLC to preserve its successful programs and expand into new areas with a special focus on towns, access to the land, and engaging the whole community.

Objective A. Diversify staff and Board.

Objective B. Identify critical target audiences, messages, and media for ESLC communications, including social media, to expand understanding of and support for ESLC's mission and vision.

Objective C. Reassess staff and Board performance review systems.

Objective D. Reassess Board size and committee structure for optimal implementation of this strategic plan.

Objective E. Develop a succession plan for leadership positions.

Goal 3 Evaluate organizational and regional progress towards the goals of this strategic plan and the pillars of ESLC's 2050 vision for the Eastern Shore.

Objective A. Annually evaluate organizational progress towards the specific and measurable goals and objectives established in this plan. This annual evaluation to serve as the basis for preparation of the succeeding year's annual work plan and budget.

Objective B. ESLC will undergo professional evaluation through the Land Trust Alliance accreditation process in 2010, and through triennial review under Maryland Nonprofits' Standards For Excellence program in 2012 and 2015.

Objective C. In FY2011 ESLC will revisit next steps for the regional land use agreement *Eastern Shore 2010* and make changes as appropriate. Through 2015 ESLC will annually evaluate regional progress towards established goals of *Eastern Shore 2010*, report to the public on this evaluation, and make any recommendations needed to address shortfalls.

Objective D. During 2012, a "Mid Term Evaluation" committee will be established by the President to evaluate: 1. general organizational progress towards the goals of this plan; 2. Regional progress towards the *Eastern Shore 2010* goals; and 3. whether the goals of this plan and *Eastern Shore 2010* are advancing ESLC's vision for the Eastern Shore by the most direct and efficient means feasible. This committee will recommend any changes needed to this plan and/or a proposed schedule for a complete update to the full Board of Directors for approval.