

Community History and Character

Community History

Historically, the Woodland Beach area of Edgewater was the site of London Town, the Anne Arundel County seat from 1684 to 1695. Designated by the "Town Act of 1683," it became an important trade and tobacco shipping center and was considered as the potential site of the colonial capital of Maryland. The town was laid out on 100 acres of land obtained from William Burgess. By 1720, London Town was thriving with several houses, taverns, warehouses, and shipyards. It had reached a size and economic vitality that rivaled the colonial capitals of Williamsburg and Annapolis.

The town's excellent geographic location was perhaps the main reason for its success as a commercial center. It was situated along a deep, freshwater river that could admit large vessels, usually transatlantic ships that arrived to deliver goods and pick up tobacco shipments. In addition, London Town served as a focal point for overland traffic on the colonial road network. Several early roads converged at its ferry crossing on the South River which served as a vital link in north-south travel. A second, "upper" crossing of the South River was established in the mid-18th century at the present location of Riva Road.

In 1747 the Maryland General Assembly limited tobacco export to designated ports and did not include London Town among them. This resulted in the decline of the area's economy and population in the 1760s and 1770s, which was exacerbated by an economic depression during the American Revolutionary War. By the end of the war, London Town was nearly abandoned. However, it continued to function as a ferry crossing to and from Annapolis well into the mid-19th century.

Today, Anne Arundel County owns 25 acres of London Town which is operated as part of the county park system in partnership with the London Town Foundation. The William Brown House, built between 1758 and 1764 by William Brown, a ferry-master, tavern-keeper, and cabinetmaker, is designated as a National Historic Landmark. The William Brown House was purchased by Anne Arundel County in 1824 for use as an almshouse, a use which continued until 1965. Almshouse Creek was named after this historic structure. Extensive archaeological investigations, conducted by Anne Arundel County, are underway in search of the lost town. Future plans include reconstruction of some of the buildings, including Rumney's Tavern as well as an archaeological learning center. Funding is being provided by the State of Maryland and Anne Arundel County.

While London Town served as the market and trade center for the parish, All Hallows Church, located at the intersection of MD 2 and Brick Church Road, was the religious center of parish life. Built in 1727, All Hallows is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Nearby, on South River Clubhouse Road, is a small building from which the road derives its name. The South River Club, established in the late 17th century by local planters and merchants from London Town, is the oldest operating social club in America.

Several plantations stretched along the Edgewater and Mayo peninsula. Early occupants included the families of Brewer, Beard, Lee, Burgess, Collinson, Linthicum, Mayo, and Selby. The community of Mayo derives its name from that family, the most noted of which was Captain Isaac Mayo who was influential in locating the U. S. Naval Academy in Annapolis in 1845. African Americans were also early settlers of the region, first as slaves and some free blacks, working on neighboring plantations. After the Civil War, they made their living as farmers and watermen. Hope Memorial Methodist Church, located on Muddy Creek Road, was established after the Civil War. The present structure, built in 1960, is the third church building on the site.

By the late 1800s, steamboats plied the Chesapeake Bay, transporting produce, oysters, crabs and fish to commercial markets and passengers to recreational opportunities. Many wharfs were established on the County's waterways, one of which was located at White's Point in Riva on the South River. Another, on the Rhode River at Carr's Wharf, served the Mayo area. Germantown, on Whitemarsh and Bear Neck Creeks, was established in the 1880s and 1890s by German immigrants who made their livelihood as watermen. Many of the waterfront communities that line the shores of the Edgewater and Mayo peninsula today had their origins as summer recreational communities of small cottages and houses.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the seafood industry and truck farming, a method of farming using seasonal immigrant labor, were the main economic activities in the area. The popularity of the automobile and the construction and improvement of highways greatly added to the influx of people from urban areas, particularly Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Beaches, such as Beverly and Triton were developed in the 1930s as family amusement centers. Today this large waterfront area is part of the County park system.

Lee Airport, a prominent place in the heart of Edgewater, was established in the late 1930's and early 1940's. According to Lee family legend, a pilot landed in their cornfield and proclaimed it a good place for an airport. The Lees complied. Florence Parlett, an early female aviator, started the flying school at the airport. Lee Airport still maintains an important role today in providing a strategic location for general aviation in the County.

Community Character

The communities of Edgewater and Mayo lie south of Annapolis on a narrow peninsula bounded by the South and Rhode Rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. Populated by approximately 9,800 residents, Edgewater is located on the south shore of the South River. Its commercial core is situated in the triangle formed by MD 2, MD 214 and MD 253. The residential community associated with Edgewater is concentrated on the nearby peninsulas extending into the South River. Mayo, a dispersed residential community of nearly 6,000 people, is located southeast of Edgewater where the peninsula begins to narrow. The center of Mayo is marked by the post office and elementary school on Central Avenue (MD 214).

The Edgewater/Mayo Small Planning Area extends along both sides of Riva Road to the west

to the tip of the Mayo peninsula to the east. The northern boundary of the planning area is the South River while the southern boundary is formed by Central Avenue, extending south of MD 214 to include the South River Colony residential planned development. A large portion of the planning area is located on or near the South River, Rhode River and the many creeks that extend into the communities on the peninsula.

The Riva Road area includes the residential communities of Sylvan Shores, Hambleton Estates, South River Heights Annapolis Landing, Aisquith Farms, and Waterford. This area also contains the Riva Post Office, the Riva Fire Station and a small local neighborhood convenience store.

Along Central Avenue, in the western part of the planning area, is the residential community of Withernsea. In the area south and east of Beards Creek and west of MD 2, are the residential communities of Edgewater Beach, Chestnut Hills, Southdown Shores, Southdown Estates, Hazelwood and Steuart Level. The Southern District Police Station, Lee Airport and numerous commercial enterprises are also located within this area.

East of MD 2 to Glebe Creek is the largest concentration of housing in the planning area. This area includes the communities of London Towne, South River Landing, Pine Whiff Beach, South River Park, Londontown and South River Colony. South River Colony includes townhouses as well as a community shopping center with a grocery store, discount department store and various convenience shops. Commercial businesses are located along MD 2 and MD 253 (Mayo Road). The Mayo Road commercial area includes many small businesses such as restaurants and service oriented uses. A government complex, including the Edgewater Library, Senior Center, and Post Office is located in this area along Stepney's Lane. The Edgewater Elementary School and Edgewater Park are located near the intersection of Mayo Road and Oakwood Road.

South of Central Avenue is the single family component of the South River Colony development, which also includes an 18-hole golf course. The South River Educational complex is also located in this area and includes Central Elementary School, Central Middle School and South River High School.

In the area east of Muddy Creek Road (MD 468) to Loch Haven Road are the communities of Glebe Heights, Turnbull Estates, Loch Haven Beach, Cape Loch Haven, and Coxby Estates. This area also includes the Loch Haven Park and South River Farm Park. A small commercial area is located at the intersection of Loch Haven Road and Central Avenue.

East of Loch Haven Road to the end of the Mayo peninsula are the communities of Selby on the Bay, River Club Estates, Holly Hill Harbor, Ponder Cove, Carrs Wharf, Turkey Point, Shoreham Beach, Saunders Point, Mayo Beach and Beverly Beach. There are many marinas in this part of the peninsula, especially in Turkey Point, due to the large number of creeks and coves located there. A small commercial area is located at the intersection of Mayo Road and Triton Beach Road. One of the County's largest parks, the Beverly-Triton Beach park, is also located in this area.

Overall, the Edgewater/Mayo Planning Area may be characterized as a blend of rural and small town uses, with several water-oriented communities and moderately accessible community commercial uses.