

# 2040 Washington County Comprehensive Plan Recommendation Report

*as presented by*

**The Greater Hagerstown Committee, Inc.**

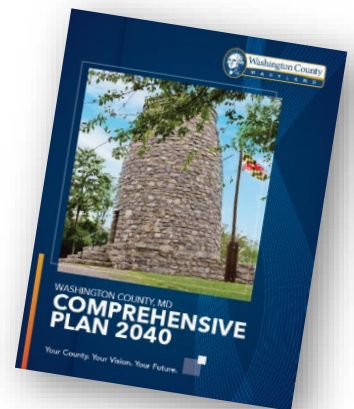
*and*

**GHC's Washington County Comprehensive Plan Task Force**

**This report serves as a compilation of recommendations derived from the collective efforts of dedicated committee members who have extensively reviewed the draft 2040 Washington County Comprehensive Plan.**



5 Public Square, Suite 601  
Hagerstown, MD 21740  
(301) 733-8811  
[www.GreaterHagerstown.org](http://www.GreaterHagerstown.org)



# Introduction

The Greater Hagerstown Committee, Inc., following the work of GHC's Washington County Comprehensive Plan Task Force, is pleased to present our 2040 Washington County Comprehensive Plan Recommendations Report. We greatly appreciate the time and effort that County staff, the Planning Commission, and other county officials put into the creation of this plan. This report serves as a compilation of recommendations to improve the draft 2040 Washington County Comprehensive Plan through the collective efforts of dedicated committee members who convened bi-weekly over three months to conduct a thorough review of the plan.

## **Who is the Greater Hagerstown Committee, Inc (GHC)?**

The Greater Hagerstown Committee (GHC), established in 1987, is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Its core mission is to bring together stakeholders and community leaders to address significant regional issues. While it primarily focuses on Washington County, MD, its influence extends along the I-81 corridor. GHC functions as a catalyst, recruiting individuals, gathering information, identifying resources, and fostering the discussions necessary to propel initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life in the region.

GHC collaborates with governmental bodies and community organizations to achieve established goals and objectives. It provides a platform for members and invited stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of regionally significant issues and develop visions for enhancing our community's well-being. GHC's purpose is not to execute specific projects or seek recognition. Instead, GHC serves as a community catalyst recruiting the people, gathering the information, identifying the resources, and crafting the conversation necessary to advance initiatives that make our region a better place to live, work and play.

The committee's success is attributed to its dedicated members, who actively engage in community affairs and stay informed on current issues. This enables GHC to intervene strategically and leverage the strengths and networks of its members to drive positive change in the region. With its 35-year history, GHC continues to attract business and professional leaders committed to enhancing the quality of life for all citizens in the region. A Full Membership List is included at the end of this report.

## **GHC's Washington County Comprehensive Plan Task Force**

GHC's Washington County Comprehensive Plan Task Force (CPTF) was established in August 2023 with the primary goal of assessing and commenting on the recently released draft of the County's 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Its core objective is to prepare a set of informed recommendations that will be presented to the Washington County Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners. The Greater Hagerstown Committee believes these recommendations should be incorporated into the plan before it is officially adopted in 2024. The report is broken down into five sections that include:

1. **Guiding principles** that helped shape our recommendations
2. **Primary recommendations** that are major themes that can be implemented throughout the plan
3. **Secondary recommendations** that provide more specific changes or additions for each chapter
4. **Additional Comments** that include smaller details such as grammar, comments on various sections, etc.
5. **Appendix** containing various resources, data, or informational slides that support our feedback

The task force's report was also distributed to the full membership of GHC where they were asked to provide their feedback before the report was approved for submission to the County.

# Members

**Members of Greater Hagerstown Committee's Washington County Comprehensive Plan Task Force include:**

Dr. Jacob Ashby  
USMH

Susan Grimes (Chair)  
Antietam Broadband

Peter Perini  
Retired GHC Member

Stacey Crawford  
WC Community Foundation

Ed Lough  
Northwestern Mutual

Greg Ratkowski  
ECS Mid-Atlantic, LLC

Rob Ferree  
Bowman Corporation

David Olson  
Family Healthcare of Hagerstown

Chris Smith  
Manor House Builders

Paul Frey  
Wash. Co. Chamber of Commerce

Shaun O'Neal  
ECS Mid-Atlantic, LLC

Brad Fulton  
AC&T Company

Debi Park  
Fulton Mortgage Company

## Guiding Principles

**The following principles helped guide the recommendations made throughout this report:**

- Protect the balanced character of Washington County, a region primarily rural in nature, enriched by a multitude of historic and recreational attractions, and vibrant urban centers that attract a diverse and upwardly mobile population.
- Create and maintain policies, regulations, and programs that support a healthy housing market that meets the market demand for all income levels and provides adequate and affordable housing for our workers, families, and generations to come.
- Grow and enhance a diverse economy that provides living wage jobs for citizens at all educational levels so that we maintain a strong and growing middle class.
- Properly plan and invest in our community's infrastructure so we keep pace with growth and are never forced to consider moratoriums.
- Encourage growth in the urban growth areas where we can most efficiently and affordably provide community and government services and guide growth away from our rural lands where development will use up our limited resources more quickly if not on public water or sewer and cost more to maintain.
  - Density in the 15% of land in our urban growth areas should average at or above state minimums for *Priority Funding Areas* (3.5 units per acre) so that we make our UGA's last longer and avoid the need to expand into the 85% of our rural lands.
  - Density is not inherently bad when combined with quality design, planning, and construction. It is also a critically important factor that can positively impact housing affordability.



# Primary Recommendations

The following are several primary recommendations that were common themes identified through the review of the drafted comprehensive plan. These major points should be incorporated throughout the plan.

## **Incorporate More Current Data**

Most of the data used throughout this plan to project growth and influence the implementation of various initiatives and recommendations was taken from the 2010 Census and 2020 Census. While this would be the data traditionally used in a comprehensive plan, we believe that the most recent three years, from 2021-2023, show an early trend for much more rapid growth than we've seen in the past, significant changes in our economic development (i.e., the proliferation of warehousing and logistics and the return of manufacturing), and a dramatic rise in housing and rental costs. These items as well as the growing migration from more affluent Maryland counties east of us are dramatically impacting the cost of living in our community and will have an impact on how we grow.

When looking at the historical growth in Frederick County, their growth, like ours, grew at a relatively stable rate for decades before it took a sharp turn upward. Similar growth trends occurred in Berkeley County, WV. We would recommend that either more recent data be used, or that a special section be added into Chapter 4 "Existing Conditions". In addition, a third, higher growth scenario should be incorporated into any pertinent chapters in the plan such as the chapters on Housing, Community Facilities, Water Resources, Land Use, and Implementation.


## **Projected Growth**

As stated above, we believe that we could be in the start of a rapid growth phase as occurred in Frederick in the late 70's, 80's, and 90's. Unlike the rapid artificial growth, we saw in 2005-2007, we do not believe the new growth we are seeing is due to another housing bubble. Instead, we see growth increasing due to a variety of factors including the citizens east of us being pushed out of more expensive markets, the impact of millions of dollars of new public and private investment in our county in recent years, changes following the pandemic in how people work including the rise of work-from-home options, and the demand for thousands of new jobs from major warehousing and manufacturing projects that are coming to our region.

As a result, we do not see the two growth scenarios included in the plan of 1% (traditional model) and 1.5% (high growth model) as high enough when accounting for recent trends. We would recommend that a third model be added to the plan accounting for at least a 2% or 2.25% growth rate (added 50% increase).

We do not see 2+% growth as unreasonable to expect when looking at growth patterns in Frederick County, MD as well as Berkeley County, WV (another strong commuter county for Baltimore/Washington). Frederick County's annual growth rate has been in the 2+% range for the past two years <sup>[1]</sup>. It is important for our decision makers to be prepared for a higher rate of growth by projecting its impact into sections of this plan such as the water resources element and the community facilities element. The possibility for this higher rate should also be considered in the recommendations made at the end of various chapters so that we are prepared to keep up with the impacts of growth. This would entail accelerating the progression of several medium and long-term strategies into short-term strategies.





## **Comparative Regional Data Along I-81 Corridor and Adjacent Counties**

Much of the comparative data, particularly in Chapter 4 Existing Conditions, only contains comparisons of our county to the entire State or other Maryland counties. With the very influential regional economy along I-81, we believe that the comprehensive plan should include comparative data for our regional neighbors along I-81 including Berkeley County, WV; Jefferson County, WV; and Franklin County, PA. Washington County has much in common both economically, educationally, and demographically with these adjoining counties, and the growth and land development patterns in these counties should be considered as we develop our plan for growth.

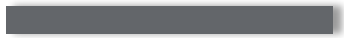
## **Workforce Housing and Housing for the Next Generation**

Over the last three years, like many counties in our nation, we've seen major changes in our housing market. Rents and housing prices have dramatically escalated as the demand for housing grows and our inventory of housing diminishes. In short, we are not producing enough housing to fulfill the needs of our market at multiple levels including low-income housing, workforce housing, and even high-income housing for the highly educated, high salaried professionals that some local companies seek.

A home is considered affordable when 30% or less of the household's income is used for housing costs including mortgage, taxes, and insurance. Our community needs to continuously track the home price that our median household income can afford and compare that to the median sales price of homes recently sold in our market. For most of the last 30 years, these two data points have been relatively the same. However, in 2005 during the housing bubble, the median home sales price soared to \$240K which was about \$40k more than what our 2005 median household could afford (\$200,250). The County commissioned a Workforce Housing Task Force in 2005 which made recommendations for various incentives and policy initiatives to help with this issue. However, home prices quickly dropped after the housing bubble burst, resolving housing concerns and returning home prices to affordable levels through 2019. Beginning in 2020, housing prices (and rental prices) began to soar once again, creating a challenging housing market for middle and low-income residents. In 2023, our median household could afford a \$260K home, but the median sales price for homes was over \$390K. This \$130K gap is more than 3 times higher than it was in 2005, and the largest gap in our history. We are currently experiencing our most challenging housing market for working families and this requires our immediate attention. Similar double-digit increases have hit our rental market creating more housing pressure for families desiring to rent their home.

Unlike in 2007, experts do not expect another housing market crash and are projecting housing and rental costs to remain high due to low housing inventory created when home production continuously fell short of demand following the housing crash over a decade ago. Most agree it will take years for the market to increase the national housing inventory to the level required to temper the housing market and make homes more affordable. Even with the sharp rise in interest rates, home prices have remained steady due to the low inventories, and a recent [bankrate.com article \(Oct. 22, 2023\)](#) projected housing prices will continue to rise into 2024.

We need to quickly implement aggressive workforce housing strategies across multiple fronts in order to ensure the availability of workforce housing for the thousands of new jobs projected for our region and housing for the next generation.



Recommendations from the 2005 Workforce Housing Commission included:

- **Tax credits** - 5-year Property tax rebates (*incremental income that does not hurt existing tax base*)
- **In-fill development** – use land trusts and/or public dollars to support programs that convert underutilized buildings into workforce housing
- Incorporate **Inclusionary zoning, moderately priced dwelling units (MPDU's), and Bonus density** to incentivize more workforce housing
- **Tiered Excise Tax rates** based on size of home
- Consider allowing the **financing of excise taxes** as part of a mortgage (as done in Charles Co.)
- **Hire consultant services** to find nationwide best practices used to create workforce housing as well as implement ordinance changes that provide for inclusionary zoning, MPDU's, etc.

The Commissioners should again consider creating another Workforce Housing Task Force and/or hiring a consultant to investigate workforce housing best practices that can be implemented in our county. Most of the workforce housing initiatives we've researched require increased density in our UGA's, smaller house sizes, more flexible zoning ordinances, and streamlined planning approval processes for the housing market to be able to produce enough inventory of housing in an affordable range. These types of considerations should be included as short-term recommendations in Chapter 6 *Housing* as well as in Chapter 15 *Implementation*.

### **Protecting our Rural Character Using Density in our UGA's**

We believe the vast majority of county residents, like GHC, want our county to maintain its rural character as we grow. We also recognize that vibrant urban centers are critical to retaining and attracting a young, educated, upwardly mobile workforce which must be a priority if we are to grow and diversify our local economy.

We consider it essential to recognize and address the dynamic relationship between rural preservation and urban development. Striking a harmonious balance between these two seemingly contrasting facets of land use and community planning is imperative for the overall well-being and sustainability of our county.

The high value we place on our rural character is demonstrated by the fact that 85% of our county's land is rurally zoned, which limits the amount of development that can take place there. The downzoning of rural land approved in the early 2000's further protected this area as has the county's investments in permanent easements. The best way we can continue protecting our rural heritage is to ensure our land use policy encourages growth in the urban growth areas so that we can efficiently and affordably provide community and government services. We must guide growth away from our rural areas, as growth in these regions depletes our finite resources at a faster rate and demands higher maintenance costs - particularly when not on public water or sewer. In short, we need to make the 15% of our land in the UGA's last as long as possible so growth pressures do not force us to expand our UGA's into our rural areas.

For that to happen our planning and development regulations must allow for sufficient density in the UGA's to make that limited land last. These are the areas with public water/sewer, schools, commercial districts, and other private and public amenities that people need to access every day. The overall density in our UGA's should average near or above state minimums for Priority Funding Areas, which is 3.5 units per acre.



Note: this does not mean that every development has a density of 3.5 units/acre – but when you combine the parcels with lower densities and the parcels that have higher densities, they average out to around 3.5 units per acre. This density level should be a benchmark used in our UGA’s to ensure we are developing this limited land with enough density to allow growth to occur in our UGA’s for as many years as possible.

We reviewed table 14-3 on page 344 in the *Growth Management* chapter which projects our total capacity for the remaining undeveloped, residentially zoned lands in our UGA’s. This chart assumes that development patterns will remain similar to past years where residential land yielded about 75% of its total potential based on current zoning and densities allowed. From this table, if we continue similar development patterns, the 24,000 acres of vacant land in our UGA’s is only projected to yield 35,000 units. This calculates to an average density of just 1.3 units per acre which is less than half of what is recommended for Priority Funding Areas. Even the RM zoned land (which is our highest density, multi-family zoning) only averages out to 3.2 units/acre – still less than the 3.5 units/acre PFA recommendation. If we continue to have zoning that encourages these same historical development patterns, we will use up our remaining residentially zoned land too quickly and be forced to consider expanding our UGA’s into our rural growth areas. We recommend that the new comprehensive plan recognizes the need for more density in our UGA’s and that subsequent changes to our zoning regulations add more density where appropriate.

Table 14-3: Residential Capacity Analysis by Growth Area

Estimated Residential Capacity Analysis by Growth Area - Current										
	RT		RS		RU		RM		Overall	
Growth Area	Vacant Land (Acres)	Yield (in units)	Vacant Land (Acres)	Yield (in units)	Vacant Land (Acres)	Yield (in units)	Vacant Land (Acres)	Yield (in units)	Vacant Land (acres)	Yield (in units)
Urban (Hagerstown, Funkstown & Williamsport)	5,889	10,807	3,736	6,959	8,789	2,806	404	1,289	18,818	21,861
Boonsboro	594	1,231							594	1,231
Clear Spring	100	205			23	128			123	333
Hancock	282	822			33	166			315	988
Smithsburg	938	1,750	89	192	2,806	8,789			3,833	10,731
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>7,803</b>	<b>14,815</b>	<b>3,825</b>	<b>7,151</b>	<b>11,651</b>	<b>11,889</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>1,289</b>	<b>23,683</b>	<b>35,144</b>

**Note: The “Overall” density is below 3.5 units/acre, the minimum density recommended for PFA’s. Even RU and RM zoned parcels (zoning intended to be the densest) is projected to be below 3.5 units/acre.**

1.9 units/acre      1.9 units/acre      1.0 units/acre      3.2 units/acre      1.3 units/acre

Please note that the recommendations provided above do not advocate for high population densities across all residential areas within the UGA's boundaries. Instead, we are stating that based on past development patterns, our current policies are not allowing enough houses to be built on the limited land we still have available in our UGA’s. Therefore, higher densities need to be considered where appropriate, so we are more in line with PFA guidelines and land in our UGA’s can last longer.



## **Density, Quality Design, and Development Standards**

Density is not inherently bad when combined with quality design, planning, and construction. As we increase densities where appropriate as recommended above, we need to have local design and development standards that ensure these developments create quality places for people to live as well as create developments that do not unnecessarily impact adjoining properties or community services in a negative way. There are many examples of quality developments in more urban areas in the region where “quality of place” has been incorporated into their design standards. These developments utilize sidewalks, lighting, community centers, recreational amenities, school sites, as well as limited commercial sites to create denser developments that people enjoy. Many of these communities use “Integrated Zoning” or “Blended Zoning” which allows for more flexibility and density to develop these types of projects.

We need to consider zoning regulations that help us find the “missing middle” or “gentle densities” – not just developments with all single-family homes or ones with high-rise apartments.

We recommend that the Comprehensive Plan recognize the need to incorporate quality design and development standards as well as blended zoning as part of a process to create more density in our UGA’s and include appropriate strategies in its *recommendations* and *implementation* sections.

## **Aggressive Infrastructure Enhancement**

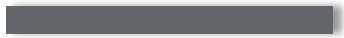

Similar to housing, the impact of a faster rate of growth will put a strain on our community’s infrastructure from roads to schools, water, wastewater, and recreational amenities. We need to undertake aggressive measures to enhance and grow our public infrastructure so that we can keep pace with growth and never be forced to consider a moratorium due to overcrowded schools or insufficient water and wastewater, or other environmental caps placed on us by the State and Federal government.

Keeping up with growth and using our limited resources efficiently will require proper planning, policy considerations, more aggressive investment, and other timely efforts such as redistricting school populations when one area is overcrowded, and an adjacent district has capacity. It takes years to build a school, or upgrade water and sewer infrastructure. We cannot wait until we are at capacity to start a project.

Overall, we believe many of the recommendations at the end of the infrastructure chapters can be enhanced and should be moved up in the timeline. Of particular concern is our water and wastewater infrastructure. The current draft plan shows significant deficiencies by 2040 if we grow at projected rates of 1% or 1.5%. However, we believe that growth rate could easily be higher than 1.5% - creating capacity and environmental deficiencies as early as 2030.

We are recommending many of the water/wastewater recommendations get moved up and that a long-term water and wastewater study be completed ASAP that maps out infrastructure improvements and estimated costs so we can begin identifying the revenue needed to complete these projects. We also want to recommend that a redundant water system be considered in any infrastructure planning such as the groundwater plant suggested in this draft plan. Any new water system should also consider tying into existing systems such as was done with the County’s interconnector for wastewater. Then we can have redundancy in our water supply. However, we recognize there will be contamination and other logistical issues to reconcile between systems that use different water sources or that are separately owned.





Other areas of concern include the need to be prepared for more aggressive school construction should growth continue to escalate. A priority should be identifying a plan for a new high school in the eastern section of our UGA to pull capacity from South High, North High, Smithsburg, Boonsboro, and Williamsport districts. High school sites require the largest amount of land which will be harder to come by as development pressure increases. If possible, utilizing one piece of land for a middle and high school site as in other areas of the county would be ideal.

### **UGA and MRGA**

From a planning perspective, we recognize the need to have an urban growth area correctly sized so that it can be fully developed using the water and wastewater resources we believe are realistically available. If that is the case, then our UGA and MRGA boundaries should be the same. Having two different boundary lines, as it stands presently, creates friction between our two elected bodies and makes it difficult for developers to invest in land where it is not clear when, or if, public water/sewer will be available. Therefore, we recognize the need for both entities to collaboratively work together to identify the best way to shrink the current UGA and merge these two boundaries.

We also recognize that the land being taken out of the new UGA will be substantially impacted in a negative way. In addition, if our county is entering into a period of significant growth, we may find ourselves in a position where a smaller UGA is insufficient to accommodate this new growth through 2040.

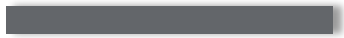

We previously recommended the need for more aggressive infrastructure investment, particularly regarding water and wastewater infrastructure. As this new infrastructure comes online and more resources become available, the first priority should be to enlarge the UGA/MRGA back to its former designation as well as identify any new targeted areas for economic development. The County and the City should work collaboratively to expand their water/wastewater resources so this can be done as quickly as possible, regardless of the next scheduled time for an updated Comprehensive Plan.

### **Permanent Easements**

Washington County has successfully used Historic and Preservation Easements to permanently protect targeted parcels in our rural growth areas such as our best agricultural land or land around national parks like the C&O Canal or Antietam Battlefield. Easements can be a useful tool in long-term growth planning.

However, we caution the county to take a thoughtful, conservative approach when deciding where these easements should go. Preservation easements last forever by design and there is currently no legal process that allows a government body to change its mind and remove these restrictions – even in extreme cases where there is unanimous support from the public and private sector. There is no way we can predict what may happen in the world around us that could create a situation where we regret past decisions to permanently prevent a major parcel from being developed – even if it made perfect sense at that time. Technology, climate change, advancements in agricultural production, or other major disrupters we haven't envisioned could completely change how future generations want to see our county grow and develop. Therefore, we need to be very careful where easements are placed so we can maintain flexibility for future growth while still taking steps to protect our rural character and quality of life.

We would highly discourage placing permanent easements around growth area boundaries as future conditions may cause a need for those areas to expand. If the goal of the community at any given time is to



keep UGA's from expanding, then we would be better served by placing rural zoning designations around a UGA requiring very low densities on these parcels (greater than 1 unit/25 acres). These long-term zoning designations are difficult to change without broad public support and would prevent development in these areas while allowing for long-term flexibility. We recommend these points are included in Chapter 11.

### **Economic Diversity and Middle-Class Jobs**

Fostering a diverse economy that generates employment opportunities for all education levels, ultimately strengthens our middle-class. Particular attention should be given to how our land use planning and zoning encourages diversity in our economy and whether it is helping us attract jobs that pay middle class wages and above. As our cost-of-living increases, the wages provided by the jobs we are retaining and attracting must be at the levels needed to sustain a middle-class lifestyle.

We cannot create more land, particularly land that has access to water, sewer, highway, and rail infrastructure. In addition, the demand for land by market forces may not align with the types of jobs we are trying to attract. It is important we think of the best ways to fulfill our short-term as well as our long-term economic needs. Therefore, we should constantly be adjusting our economic development strategies to attract jobs at or above the "living wage" for Washington County. *(Note: M.I.T. has a "Living Wage Calculator which calculates this figure for every county - <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/24043>)*

The County has secured funding and is preparing to complete a new strategic plan in 2024 for economic development that should identify target industries for us to pursue. The information in this report should be considered as we develop our land use policy for the economic development areas in our county. We should follow the adoption of this new comprehensive plan with an evaluation of the land use and zoning designations on existing land inside our UGA, determine the types of jobs and wages our land use policy is attracting, and make any changes necessary so that a diverse economy with healthy wage levels can be achieved. This should be included in the short- or medium-term recommendations for that section.

### **Electric Infrastructure and Green Energy**

Maryland has aggressive plans related to climate change and green energy that will transition our cars and commercial fleets to electric vehicles as well as require heating and cooling systems to rely more on electric, specifically geothermal (ground source) heat pumps, in place of traditional fossil fuels. This will require major electric grid expansion as well as the need for more redundancy built into the overall system (interconnecting grids, substations, etc.). In addition, as electric vehicles (EV's) and hybrids increase, car and truck charging stations will be needed throughout the County and in non-traditional locations instead of gas stations as people need to wait longer times for vehicles to charge.

We recognize our state's energy policy is still being debated and could change. Many major automakers are shifting to hybrids and moving away from EV production due to consumer demand, battery production challenges, and global politics. However, the plan should still include a section on electric power with an overview of our existing infrastructure and some high-level guidance on how best to balance installation of new infrastructure with our household and commercial needs based on national best practices.

Finally, a section should be added on green energy. Maryland has set aggressive green energy goals in wind, solar, and geothermal. This section should discuss our county's current green energy initiatives and how we plan to handle various things like solar, wind, and geothermal. For example, our design standards could encourage all large industrial and public-school projects be designed for rooftop solar panels.

# Secondary Recommendations by Chapter

**Chapters 1-3** – no major comments

## **Chapters 4 – Existing Conditions**

- Include data from 2021-2023 when possible or add a special section discussing the growth, housing, and economic trends we experienced in the last 3 years. *(Do same throughout document as needed)*.
- Add regional comparative data for counties along I-81 (Franklin County, PA; Berkeley County, WV; Franklin County, PA, Frederick County, MD).
- Overall, there is little mentioned about immigration in the Comprehensive Plan and how our county is being impacted. Also, there is little discussion about what we are doing to be an inclusive county that incorporates all nationalities living here – applies to multiple sections.

## **Chapter 5 – Historic Elements** (Pg. 28-63)

- *Due to limited time, the task force did not fully research this chapter.*
- Under recommendations section (Pg. 63) we suggest adding a bullet point that reads “Work to create diversity and balance on historic preservation boards so that they include more business and minority perspectives”.

## **Chapter 6 – Housing Element** (Pg. 64-95):

- Workforce Housing initiatives to consider *(taken from 2005 Workforce Housing task force. Some already in plan)*
  - Commission a Workforce Housing task force as done in 2005 to research initiatives and best practices that can assist with our shortage of workforce housing.
  - Implement a density bonus for developments with workforce housing.
  - Introduce "by-right development" for PUD's to streamline planning, permitting, and development processes. PUD's add density and create better quality design and development standards.
  - Incentivize, prioritize, and express approve projects with workforce housing components.
  - Increase residential density in previously single-family zoned neighborhoods by reforming zoning ordinances and building codes to allow duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes.
  - Allow for the adaptation of underutilized commercial properties for residential use.
  - Provide government incentives for projects that convert underperforming vacant office space to residential units where appropriate.
  - Allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) within the county to aid in the affordable housing crisis.
- We support the efforts to create mixed-income communities through flexible land use regulations.
- We support the recommendations in the current draft to create mixed-use communities through flexible land use regulations to create more live-where-you-work opportunities and reduce the need for people to drive to find daily services needed (gas, food, etc.).
- APFO Section Pg. 88: should be updated to include:
  - Coordinate with surrounding towns in housing planning and uniform enforcement of an APFO. This will require the County to be proactive in funding school construction in a timely manner as Municipalities' primary source of revenue is property taxes – so delaying new development has significant financial implications on their operational budgets.
  - Work with WCPS to create data triggers where redistricting considerations must automatically begin. This will help combat political forces that prevent decision makers from taking this on.

- With current data showing multiple schools that exceed capacity (SRC and LRC), the report should recommend more aggressive efforts be put in place to build schools to meet these deficiencies and allow for projected future growth. If we are planning and investing in infrastructure correctly, APFO delays would be minimized.
- *Pg. 90* Section on projected future dwelling units appears insufficient in light of recent growth trends.
- *Pg. 90* Notes that the County is projecting households will increase from 63,790 in 2020 to 85,559 in 2045. This will require new schools to meet these households as well as a solution to the water service outside of the medium growth boundary. These statistics contradict the stated conclusion that “there is every indication to believe that the County has sufficient capacity to meet its future housing needs.” This section should follow this sentence with a statement saying “However, this will require more robust infrastructure investments for schools and water/wastewater to prevent APFO delays.”
- RECOMMENDATIONS Section
  - We support the proposed list of recommendations.
  - *Pg. 93* Could consider using the percentage of multi-family units allowed to distinguish new zonings that allow mixed use. For example: “Mixed Use 20” – Allows up to 20% multi-family units, “Mixed Use 50” – up to 50% multi-family units, etc.

**Chapter 7 – Transportation Element (*Pg. 91-143*):**

- *Pg. 100* Address the fiscal constraints in the MD Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP). Beginning this year, the State did not release a balanced CTP and plan to use a more transparent process where MDOT works with the General Assembly to balance the CTP before adoption (instead of them doing it on their own).
- *Pg. 100* May want to add a section on the MD TRAIN Commission which is working to restructure how the state funds transportation and how it prioritizes projects for funding.
- Expand transit services, explore ride-share programs, and plan for electric charging infrastructure.
- Enhance bicycle/pedestrian facilities and consider the South Mtn. Rail Trail.
- *Pg. 132* Freight Movement Section – does not include information from the recent regional freight study. That had nice graphics on items like truck parking, truck traffic, etc.
- *Pg. 132* Highway Freight Issues & Chart 7-6: Projected Volume of Freight by Travel Mode (2017-2050)
  - Comparing estimates of freight increases, the report projects 2.5%/yr. which seems low. No mention of the 8M+ sq. ft. of warehouse space that is in the planning process. Consider adjusting freight growth projections using information from the recent regional freight study completed by HEPMPO.
- *Pg. 136* Recommend updating the Airport section to include several new expansion and strategic planning initiatives to expand air service in the county.
- RECOMMENDATIONS Section
  - Roads – Add bullet on incorporating Ride-share pickup and drop off spaces at locations that have high amount of visits (hospitals, stadium, concert facilities, etc.). Add bullet on preparing for the conversion to electric vehicles which will require significantly more charging infrastructure. Furthermore, charging electric vehicles takes time, and drivers seek activities during this waiting period. Locations like malls and other non-traditional facilities may be where this new infrastructure is needed.

- Transit – Remove bullet #3 on providing bus service to towns in rural areas - this is not cost efficient and ride sharing companies are better to address this issue. Add bullet to work with adjoining states to consider feasibility of transit plan that would move commuters along I-81 employment corridor from Chambersburg to Winchester.
- Bicycle, Trails E. Ped Other – Add bullet to develop a water trail master plan which includes a priority list of CIP projects to create a trail system using our creeks (where appropriate).
- Airport – Add bullet on dedicated bus service for a specific airline from HGR to their regional Hub like Dulles/American Airlines. HGR is currently working with “Landline” on this. Mention the need to relocate control tower. County should identify land adjacent to the airport to expand HGR and apply flexible zoning that supports this. Special attention should be given to lands to the north and east of the site as these undeveloped parcels are close to grade and could house new hangers or aircraft parking facilities that require access to the runway. The land to the east is also the only land available for a future extension of our runway should that ever be needed. Avoid steering other types of land uses that could impair airport operations or HGR’s future development into these areas around the airport.

## **Chapter 8 – Community Facilities (Pg. 144-179):**

- *Pg. 147* APFO Section – should be updated to include:
  - Provide a clearer depiction of each school’s capacity in the Enrollment Projection section.
  - Coordinate with surrounding towns in housing planning and uniform enforcement of an APFO. This will require the County to be proactive in funding school construction in a timely manner as Municipalities’ primary source of revenue is property taxes – so delaying new development has significant financial implications on their operational budgets.
  - Work with WCPS to create data triggers that initiate redistricting automatically. This proactive approach will combat political forces that often deter decision-makers from taking on this task.
  - With current data showing multiple schools that exceed capacity (SRC and LRC), the report should recommend more aggressive efforts be put in place to build schools to meet these deficiencies and allow for projected future growth. If we are planning and investing in infrastructure correctly, APFO delays would be minimized.
- Immediately identify funding to conduct a Long-Range Water/Sewer Infrastructure Study that utilizes growth projections to develop a list of water and wastewater infrastructure projects needed to keep up with the pace of new growth.
- *Pg. 170* No mention of Q-Loop broadband project in Frederick that has direct connection to Ashburn, VA.
  - Quantum Loophole Project – 43-mile hyper scale fiber ring.
  - No mention of new fiber companies coming into the County
  - Need a plan to manage multiple companies’ infrastructure buildout so parcels aren’t broken out piece by piece.
- Communication Towers *Pg. 171* – Update this section. The demand for wireless communication infrastructure continues to grow and transform. The new 5G towers (and above) are shorter but require different setups where they need to be closer so they can interconnect. Our current regulations may not align with the needs of this new technology (for example, shorter, smaller, 5G towers may be needed in residential areas). We did not have the expertise on 5G technology to offer specific recommendations, but we feel staff should research this more and update this section.
- *Pg. 175* Add Mental Health Center of Western MD to this section.



- *Pg. 176* Mention expansion planned for Washington Co. Museum of Fine Arts.
- Mention of \$85M New Stadium – largest downtown state funded project in our history generating over 250k visitors per year and plans for the Hagerstown Fieldhouse Turf Facility.
- RECOMMENDATIONS Section – Overall this section should be revisited and improved.
  - Add bullet to conduct a full recreational infrastructure needs study that reviews the regional and local demand for court, turf, ice, and aquatic sports infrastructure, identifies tourism demand, estimates costs of capital projects needed, and prioritizes which ones we should focus on first based on demand and ROI. Similar studies have been conducted in counties to our east.
  - Add a bullet to develop a plan to address how multiple broadband companies will share the county's right of way without unduly tearing up local road infrastructure.

### Chapter 9 – Economic Development Element (*Pg. 180-213*):

- Household Income *Pg. 189*: Show changes in household income across counties within the region for comparison.
- Poverty Rates *Pg. 190*: Include regional comparisons for poverty rates.
- Chart 9-6 Poverty Rates *Pg. 190*: Add narrative recognizing the poverty gap is widening between county and state and that our trend line is up vs down for the state. Possible reasons why such as our cost of living is rising faster than wages, west migration of lower income families into our community due to housing costs, etc. (This is another data point we should keep track of)
- Table 9-6 *Pg. 194* - Correct the heading year in Table 9-6 to 2010 - heading currently says 2000 but title says the chart is from 2010-2020.
- "Sports Tourism" *Pg. 196* should be added to existing economic strategies (9<sup>th</sup> bullet).
- Economic Strategies *Pg. 196* should also include "Expanding affordable housing for our workforce" – not sure if this goes in this section but needs to be a priority.
- Targeted Economic Sectors *Pg. 197* need to also include:
  - "Entrepreneurialism" – Mention success of incubator, rise of entrepreneurship following pandemic, and discuss the need for a healthy entrepreneurial ecosystem to grow jobs from within.
  - "**Health Care**" – Health care continues to be a major driver nationally. People's growing desire to be healthier is creating new markets in healthcare related industries. In this narrative also mention the new Meritus Medical School which will be a major driver for this community. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/feeling-good-the-future-of-the-1-5-trillion-wellness-market>
  - "**I.T.**" – is another major driver not mentioned.
- Economic Development Initiatives *Pg. 199*: Consider adding more to this section other than just "Commissioner Visitations" – that one item is not impressive to outsiders reading the document if that's all they think we are doing. We have the business incubator and other promotion of entrepreneurship, county marketing and promotion (airport, etc.), no sales tax on aircraft parts in MD, CHIEF and Mt. Aetna Farms willing to provide below market land for right company, etc.
- Foreign Trade Zone *Pg. 200*: This section should be updated and beefed up with the work County's Dept of Business Development is doing to expand this incentive.
- OnTrack *Pg. 202*: Remove OnTrack section as this entity has been suspended and not sure it will return.



- *Pg. 203* Change headings for "Washington Co. Board of Education" to "Washington Co. Public Schools" and correct in narrative.
- HCC *Pg. 204*: Discuss their expansion project and high percentage of students getting hired at graduation (90+%).
- Barr Construction Institute *Pg. 204*: This facility is closing and is up for sale. It will soon enter into a partnership with HCC for their upcoming training academy located on Northern Avenue.
- PIA *Pg. 203* - downtown stadium in the Urban Revitalizations section.
- "Identifying Areas for Economic Growth *Pg. 205-210* - Section": Must mention Mt. Aetna Farms and work of CHIEF.
- Urban Revitalizations section *Pg. 203*: Narrative must include a new \$90M multi-use stadium – largest downtown state investment in our history. Should also mention C&O Canal projects and new NPS Headquarters in Williamsport as an example of urban revitalization in a smaller town.
- Friendship Technology Park *Pg 208-209*: Areas around this development park and any residential land around it should be at higher densities due to closeness to the highway interchange. This is an ideal location for a "live-near-your-work" community.
- Reinvest Maryland *Pg. 212*: Need to highlight new \$90M multi-use stadium, \$24M Indoor Turf and Court Facility (Hagerstown Field House) and C&O Canal investments including new NPS headquarters.
- RECOMMENDATIONS Section – Add:
  - Identify land adjacent to the airport to expand HGR and apply flexible zoning that supports this. Special attention should be given to lands to the north and east of the site as these undeveloped parcels are close to grade and could house new hangers or aircraft parking facilities that require access to the runway. The land to the east is also the only land available for a future extension of our runway should that ever be needed. Avoid steering other types of land uses that could impair airport operations or HGR's future development into these areas around the airport.
  - Consider initiative, incentives and infrastructure that fosters and supports entrepreneurship in the county and a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem.
  - Identify economic development areas that would be conducive to "live-near-your-work" mixed use communities and make adjustments to zoning ordinances as needed.

**Chapters 10-12** – *Note the task force did not closely review these chapters due to time limitations.*

**Chapter 13 – Water Resources Element** (*Pg. 291-329*):

- Capacity projection tables – A higher growth scenario as previously discussed should be incorporated into the charts showing our capacity to provide water and wastewater over the term of this plan. If growth occurs higher than the two models currently used (1% and 1.5%), than calculations with a third growth rate of 2+% will show how quickly we may reach our capacity, pressing the need for immediate action in upgrading our water and wastewater infrastructure (both for quantity and nutrient caps).
- RECOMMENDATIONS Section – Add:
  - Work in collaboration with the City to conduct a long-term comprehensive water and wastewater infrastructure plan as soon as possible to identify estimated costs and priorities to accommodate growth. Plan should identify:
    - Infrastructure needed for water and wastewater in all systems over the next 30 years.
    - Estimated costs for upgrades needed.

- Prioritization of which upgrades to do first to best handle growth.
- Relook at capacity and estimates of current system used to limit size of current MRGA – update if needed.
- Develop a plan to handle projected growth in current MRGA using a couple projected growth models (higher than in plan). In addition, show what would be needed to have the capacity to handle our preferred UGA (old version and any new areas targeted for inclusion).
- Make sure Breichner Reservoir is included in the study including cost and whether it should be reopened.
- Make sure water pressure is also considered in the plan as well as the traditional capacity issues and nutrient loading limitations (to account for areas of low pressure like in Beaver Creek area).
- Following any zoning changes that add density to our UGA/MRGA, reevaluate capacity of our current system, plans for new infrastructure and capacity from the long-term study, and how our UGA/MRGA should be adjusted. Prioritize land recently removed from the UGA to make it match the MRGA.
- We are supportive of other recommendations staff included in the plan, notably the need to examine building a new county water system (or city system) to be a backup system and expand our capacity to handle growth and development inside or outside of the MRGA.
  - If feasible, we should consider a water interconnector line that connects a new county water system to the city’s system (like we have for sewer) to create redundancy and more flexibility in handling growth. *Note: We discussed interconnection with a larger regional company that specializes in water and wastewater projects. They claimed connecting water systems are easier than connecting sewer systems as water does not need gravity or pumping stations – so interconnection is physically reasonable to do. Also, while cross contamination is always a possibility if two systems are connected, both systems, whether groundwater or surface water, are publicly regulated and advanced systems that are regularly tested. In addition, the interconnector does not have to always be “on” and could just have a closed connection that could be turned on in extreme conditions. The biggest hurdles to overcome if systems were separately owned would be political, governance, and control issues. However, that should not prevent interconnection from being strongly considered.*
- Increase resources for public education on water conservation efforts in collaboration with the city. We have not put enough effort into water conservation and education.

#### **Chapter 14 – Growth Management and Land Use Element (Pg. 330-360)**

- Chart 14-1 Pg 332 should be updated to show land use trends of more current years (2020) to get a better understanding of the impact of downzoning in 2005.
- Reduction of the UGA Pg. 333-347: The areas being removed from the UGA as it is matched to the MRGA should be evaluated to maximize its ability to develop with public sewer and private wells.
- Easements Pg. 335: Currently 38K Acres of our lands are permanently protected by easements. While easements can be a valuable tool, we advise the County to carefully think where permanent easements are placed. These forever decisions cannot be changed, and we have no idea what technology, climate change, new transit projects, advancements in agricultural production, or other major disrupters we haven’t envisioned yet will have on how future generations want to see our county grow and develop.

- Growth Goals in UGA Pg. 337: Set a goal higher than 80% for growth in our UGA or TGA's (85% - 90%) due to cost to taxpayers to service rural lands, higher use per household on our limited nutrient caps for wastewater (septic's use up 2-3 times more per house than if on public sewer).
- Manufacturing comments Pg. 347: Adjust narrative stating manufacturing has lost employment nationally in recent years as manufacturing is soaring from 2021-today and added 830K jobs nationally (another example of 2020 data vs current).
- Population Projections Pg. 349: Believe projections are low through 2040 as stated in primary recommendations. It is better to over prepare than under prepare if annual growth ends up being above 2%. See historical growth in Frederick below (our #1 "net positive" – migration county)



- Pg. 352 Capacity/Density in Residential land remaining in UGA: As stated as one of our Primary Recommendations, our past development patterns do not provide enough density in our UGA's which means we will use up our remaining lands quicker than we should, and development pressure will be pushed to our rural areas. Tables show an overall density of only 1.3 units/acre. Washington County is below MD PFA minimum of 3.5 units/acre in remaining lands if we continue our past patterns. All zoning (even RM which should be much higher) has an average of under 3.5 units/acre. In the narrative of this section express the concern for lower densities in our UGA and impact on housing affordability and update the tables to show the average densities if we remain at historical patterns. Also, make recommendations that we adjust our land use policies to encourage more density (where appropriate) so we can better preserve our rural areas and the rural character of our county.
- Pg. 355 Need more well designed and constructed PUD's and MUD's
  - Our boundaries should align with City's MGRA – if we need more capacity that should be handled through collaboration on infrastructure, nutrient loading, and transfer (County Collector) Downzone rural areas from 1:5 to 1:10 or 1:20.

- Need sidewalks and urban design to better match city sidewalks.
- Land Use Pgs. 354-355. Concerns were expressed about the need for more flexibility in permitted uses for large parcels around interstates and whether mixed use developments that include various commercial, retail, hospitality, and light industrial uses would still be allowed. We have examples of existing parks that show how mixed use can work (Bowman Business Park). The plan should allow for zoning that accommodates these types of mixed uses as well as “live-near-your-work” options.
- Implement zoning flexibility that creates mixed use neighborhoods with the ability for nearby amenities or work centers that will reduce vehicle miles traveled.
- Design Standards:
  - Considering that current annexation policies that will eventually annex new developments that need water, the county should work to align their design standards with city design standards wherever annexation is anticipated (sidewalks, street design, etc.).
  - Introduce new design standards to accommodate changing transportation models. Electric vehicle mandates will call for home charging systems, while ride-sharing and future autonomous vehicles will need designated drop-off points at popular locations (stadiums, concert venues, downtown districts, etc.).
- Agriculture Pg 356-357 – Plan should discuss advancements in “vertical farming” - Where should it go? How does it impact our current land use plans for Agriculture? etc.
- Adjust narrative in appropriate sections and state the need to preserve the eastern county's ability to attract higher tech businesses by concentrating more industrial and warehouse zones on the western side along I-81.
- RECOMMENDATIONS Section
  - Densities under the updates to the Subdivision Ordinance should be reviewed and adjusted based on our comments concerning more density in our UGA’s. Or, change wording to be more general and recommend a comprehensive update to our zoning ordinance that recommends increased densities to encourage future development to be more In line with PFA minimum density recommendations (3.5 units/acre overall average – not every development parcel).
  - Zoning should encourage more industrial development along I-81 and the west side of county and use zoning in the east side of county to better attract more high-tech service industries.
  - For “Improve Community Design Standards” include comments to align better with Hagerstown’s design elements as most of new development needing water will eventually be annexed and designs should be consistent.
  - Note need to work with municipalities on more uniform application of County’s APFO.

## Chapter 15 – Implementation Plan (Pgs. 361-379)

Please note that some changes, additions, and edits to the implementation chapter are also incorporated into the Secondary Recommendations section of this report. Items included in the draft plan were all supported unless noted below.

**GOAL #1:** *Provide a diverse range of housing for citizens that promotes sustainable, livable, and affordable opportunities; Housing. (Pg. 363)*

- Housing Pg. 363:
  - Move up all Medium-Term strategies to Short-Term except for “incentivizing energy efficient improvements...” All these items should be part of an aggressive, comprehensive effort to encourage more work force housing that is affordable to the workforce based on median household incomes. We cannot wait 5 years to start workforce housing initiatives.

**GOAL #2:** Promote a balanced and diversified economy; Economic Development (Pg. 364)

- Economic Development Pg. 364:
  - Short-Term section:
    - Add “Complete an Economic Development Strategic Plan” (*County is preparing RFP now*).
    - Complete a long-term water/sewer infrastructure study (*as noted in our comments*).
    - Aggressively pursue water/sewer infrastructure to add capacity as identified in the completed infrastructure study.
  - Medium-Term section:
    - Add “Align land use and development standards to support economic development goals and target markets identified in the updated strategic plan.”
  - Long-Term section:
    - Move up first strategy on aligning transportation expenditures to Medium-Term.

**GOAL #3:** Provide a safe, efficient, and interconnected multi-modal transportation system

- Transportation Pg. 365
  - Short-Term section:
    - As you adopt the “Complete Streets Policy” be mindful of some of the negative items experienced with the bicycle lanes added on City streets where they have been used incorrectly by some citizens to ride wrong direction, push strollers, as pedestrian paths, or paths for electric wheelchairs.
    - Recommendation to study the expansion of county commuter hours should be part of a larger, broader review of our transit operations.
    - Take a balanced approach when reviewing parking requirements.
  - Medium-Term section:
    - In the last strategy on Pg. 366 add a sentence “Incorporate Ride Sharing” infrastructure into design standards where appropriate.
    - Pg. 367: We question the return on investment to expand transit to rural towns due to the growth of ride sharing apps to handle this need, cost of service for minimal riders, and other transit needs that would be of higher priority – expanded transit to employment zones options, educational facilities, etc.
    - Pg. 367: Last item on easements – Need to take a conservative approach - refer to comments made in our primary recommendations.

- Long-Term section:
  - Add Cumberland Valley Rail Trail and Sept 11<sup>th</sup> National Memorial Trail to first strategy on Pg. 368. *See details of both trails in appendix.*
  - Move up “future needs to expand airport” Pg. 369 to Short-Term.
  - Water Trails Pg. 369: Change 4<sup>th</sup> recommendation to Medium-Term and add a recommendation to Complete a Long-Term capital water trail plan that identifies and prioritizes capital projects and estimates costs of investments that will support water trail expansion.
  - Add item to “Convene a regional discussion on feasibility of multi-state, regional transit service from Chambersburg, PA to Winchester, VA to serve businesses along I-81.” (Could be rail or bus).

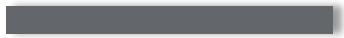

**GOAL #4:** *Maintain policies and strategies that direct growth to areas where the County can “efficiently” provide adequate infrastructure and community resources for existing and future development.*

- Add “efficiently” to the wording of Goal #4 (as in *red* above)
- Community Facilities Pg. 371:
  - Short-Term section:
    - Remove APFO fee recommendation – this consideration should be part of a more comprehensive discussion on APFO fees and impact fees as it relates to this issue as well as workforce housing, adequate infrastructure, etc.
    - ADD “Conduct a long-term use and priority study for new recreation infrastructure, focusing on regional demand and ROI for adding new courts, turf, ice, and aquatic facilities.”
  - Medium-Term section:
    - Move up cost benefit analysis in first item to Short-Term.
  - Long-Term section:
    - Do not understand why the item on use of APFO is Long-Term or why it’s even in this section. This is a process we continually use.

**GOAL #5:** *Provide residents with a high quality of life through the impactful planning and delivery of fundamental community facilities and services. Water Resources and Community Facilities (Pg. 372).*

- Water Resources and Community Facilities
  - Short-Term section:
    - Complete a long-term water/sewer infrastructure study (as noted in our comments).
    - Aggressively pursue water/sewer infrastructure to add capacity as identified in the completed infrastructure study.
    - Add “Coordinate with WCPS to buy land and construct schools needed to support growth.”
  - Long-Term section:
    - ADD “Conduct a long-term use and priority study for new recreation infrastructure, focusing on regional demand and ROI for adding new courts, turf, ice, and aquatic facilities.”
    - Expansion of Public Safety Training Center needs to better include collaboration with Hagerstown and other municipalities. (There is not a need to have two burn buildings in the same county when financial resources are limited.)
    - Recommendation to explore new water supply opportunities should be moved to Short-Term and be part of our recommended infrastructure study.





**GOAL #6:** *Enhance the County’s rich historic and cultural heritage through land preservation and historic preservation efforts. Agricultural and Forest Resources (Pg. 374).*

- Long-Term section:
  - Refer to our comments on permanent easements and advancements in vertical farming as we work toward our goal of preserving 50,000 acres of agricultural land. Technological advancements in farming may change how we farm and limit the demand for agricultural land as we currently do. It may be premature to place easements that make this land undevelopable in the future. Downzoning targeted parcels may be a better, less permanent option.

**GOAL #7:** *Provide adequate protections for, and enhanced stewardship of, environmental resources and sensitive areas. Water Resources (Pg. 377)*

- Medium-Term section:
  - Move “Implement a water conservation education program.” to Short-Term.
  - Identify locations for new truck parking.
  - Conduct a long-term use and priority study for parks and recreation, focusing on regional demand and ROI.

# Additional Comments

The ensuing comments represent insights provided by members of the Task Force during comprehensive plan review meetings from August 10<sup>th</sup> to October 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## Chapters 1-3 (Pg. 1-24) – No additional comments

### Chapter 4 – Existing Conditions (Pg. 24-28)

- Table 4-3 Pg. 27: Having this table on household income may be more valuable if the figures were inflation adjusted (i.e., all in 2020 dollars). These results may change the narrative in the preceding paragraph.

### Chapter 5 – Historic Elements (Pg. 28-63) – Due to limited time, the task force did not fully research this chapter.

- No additional comments.

### Chapter 6 – Housing Element (Pg. 64-95)

- Census Data and Recent Development: The report relies on 2020 census data. However, there's been noticeable growth in development in the last two years. This expansion differs significantly from the census figures, potentially causing gaps in future residential planning.
- Housing Construction Trend: Housing construction dropped by half in the later part of the decade, a noteworthy trend that merits examination.
- Housing Price Increase: Housing prices have risen significantly in the last three years which is not reflected in the current plan using 2020 data. This data should be updated as the median price of a new home is well over \$100K more than in 2020, creating a much different housing market. Rental prices are also outdated in the plan. For instance, the average 2-bedroom house rent in Washington County is \$1,306 <sup>[2]</sup>, surpassing the census-based fair market rent of \$972 <sup>[3]</sup> for a similar household.
- Recommendations and Implementation Time: The recommendations section should detail when improvements will be carried out, offering a complete view of the proposed changes.
- Impact of APFO on Housing Costs: Housing development could transfer costs from the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) to buyers, elevating housing expenses. County funding should address this concern.
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs): While the concept of using ADUs to alleviate housing shortages is introduced, current regulations across the county forbid them.
- House Bill 1045: passed in 2019, mandates workforce housing in plans post June 1, 2022. Collaborating with neighboring towns for housing planning is stressed by the group.
- Comprehensive Housing Assessment: Performing a comprehensive housing assessment is crucial to analyze construction trends of the past decade, offering insights into the current housing situation.
- Timelines for Implementation: To gain clarity on the practical impact of recommendations, it's important to include specific timelines for the implementation of each section. This will help in understanding when the proposed actions will be executed.
- APFO Enhancement: Consider introducing a stipulation within the APFO (Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance) that requires proactive improvements for existing conditions when new projects meeting certain criteria are initiated.
- Density Bonus for Workforce Housing: Encourage the inclusion of workforce housing units by offering density bonuses to developers who incorporate such units in their projects. This will incentivize the creation of housing for the workforce.



- Table 6-2 Pg. 67: May be beneficial to add a column showing the avg # of homes built per year during each period (2020 column/10 years).
- Chart 6-2 Pg. 71: A good example where the 2020 Census Data reflects an inaccurate picture of where we are today regarding monthly housing costs after major price and mortgage increases in 2021-2023. This should show 2023 figures. Charts 6-3 & 6-4 (Pgs. 23-24) have similar outdated pictures of home and rent values vs today.
- Map 6-2 Pg. 82: It would be more informative to include two maps displaying development trends from 1994-2010 and from 2010-present day, illustrating the effects of the downzoning measures.
- Short-Term Rentals Pg. 87: Section needs updated using more current information. The last sentence on page states housing costs are “not prohibitive” but they are today.
- Streamlined "By-Right Development": Introduce a "by-right development" approach to simplify the permitting and development processes. This would eliminate the need for public hearings for projects that meet specific criteria, making the process more efficient.
- Workforce Housing Priority: Prioritize projects that include workforce housing components, providing incentives for developers to focus on this important aspect of housing.
- Mixed-Income Communities: Foster the creation of mixed-income communities by implementing flexible land use regulations, particularly focusing on integrating mixed-use developments in downtown areas.
- Collaboration with Surrounding Towns: Ensure coordination with neighboring towns in housing planning, considering the implications of House Bill 1045 passed in 2019. This will lead to more cohesive and effective housing strategies.
- Urban Growth Area (UGA) Adjustment: Address the issue of housing demand by decreasing the size of the Urban Growth Area (UGA). This adjustment should be in line with housing demand to ensure sufficient land availability.
- Property Tax Abatement Concept Pg. 94: Introduce property tax abatement to reduce construction costs during the building phase. This strategy involves offering tax relief during construction and rezoning properties to residential status upon completion. This prevents unnecessary expenses being passed on to property owners and renters.
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) Inclusion: Allow the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) within the county. ADUs can provide additional living spaces within existing structures, accommodating more families, and adding housing options.

## **Chapter 7 – Transportation Element (Pg. 91-143)**

- Complete Streets Approach Pg. 98: members noted the need to incorporate a "multimodal" perspective into the definition of complete streets and align them with the county's land use plans. As this is implemented, keep in mind some of the negative items experienced with the bicycle lanes added on City streets where they have been used incorrectly by some citizens to ride the wrong direction, push strollers, as pedestrian paths, or paths for electric wheelchairs.
- Modes of Transportation Pgs. 101-103: concerns were raised about the accuracy of the data in Charts 7-1, 7-2, and 7-3, particularly on the projected increase in "Worked at Home" percentages and the rising commute times.
- Map 7-2 Pg. 105: Need to add the year this data comes from.



- Transportation Costs Pgs. 105-106: group examined Map 7-2 and data related to transportation costs as a percentage of household income. Recommendations were made to ensure accurate data collection for 2023 and to provide context for the lower transportation costs in certain areas. For example, a high percentage of people in the urban core are on federal assistance and many do not have cars or work. Therefore, transportation costs/household are less than other places. On pg. 106 it uses 26% as the amount spent on housing costs which is much higher in 2023 (than in 2020).
- Traffic Trends and Projections Pgs. 108-110: group emphasized the need for more current data in Charts 7-4, 7-5, and Map 7-4. They also discussed the disproportionate impact of I-70 and I-81 on VMT and TTI, suggesting further analysis due to increased truck traffic since warehousing online.
- Priority Corridors and Safety Pg. 112: highlighted concerns about the scheduling of safety improvements on I-81, which appeared in Phase 3 beyond 2028.
- Functional Classifications and Highway Standards Pgs. 113-115: discrepancies were noted between functional classifications and expressed priorities, emphasizing the importance of aligning road categorizations with future expansion and development needs.
- Highway Plan and HEMPO Fiscal Constraint Pgs. 116-118: discussed the importance of ensuring accurate prioritization in the Highway Plan, highlighting discrepancies in the priorities assigned to MD 65/I-70. Recommendations - MD65/I-70 should be listed as a HIGH priority as it was the #2 priority in the last several priority letters sent to MDOT (I-81 was #1). Where is Eastern BLVD on this chart?
- County Transit Plans: No mention of MARC Train Study underway or transit ideas along I-81 using W&W Rail line.
- Transit Network Pgs. 119-123: The omission of ride-share programs and their impact was also raised for further consideration.
- Bicycles/Pedestrian/Trails Pgs. 124-132: group considered the merits of city bike lanes while considering safety implications. Recommendations were made regarding signage for bicycle routes, sidewalk requirements in residential areas, and the potential expansion of the South Mtn. Rail Trail.
- Freight Transportation Pgs. 132-141: members discussed the freight growth projection's linearity and recommended adjustments. They noted the discrepancy between freight estimates and actual economic projections and emphasized the significance of accommodating electric charging infrastructure.
- Other Transportation Modes Pg. 136: group discussed the implications of the Howard Street tunnel project on logistics and the forthcoming Freight Study. They also suggested innovative transit options involving Hagerstown Regional Airport, such as dedicated bus services to other regional airports.
- Future Planning Considerations Pgs. 138-140: the need to anticipate future challenges such as increased truck traffic and ride-sharing impacts was addressed. They recommended exploring solutions like the Northeast Bypass and formulating a transit plan for regional connectivity.

## **Chapter 8 – Community Facilities (Pg. 144-179)**

- Education Facilities Pg. 153: identified the need for more frequent reexamination of education facilities plans, especially regarding redistricting and addressing capacity concerns.
- Enrollment Projection and School Capacities Pg. 159: Recommend revising the Enrollment Projection section to provide a clearer depiction of school capacities by including specific data for each school. The WCPS Summary used in the Chamber Slide was suggested as a reference for a more precise representation.

- MD Blueprint Initiative and School Investments *Pg. 158*: Plan should highlight the significance of the MD Blueprint initiative and its impact on elementary and high school space. We've seen a significant increase in enrollment for post-secondary credits at HCC while in High School. Funding for free pre-K has used up space in elementary schools to provide these services.


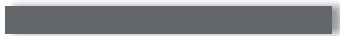
### **Chapter 9 – Economic Development Element (*Pg. 180-213*)**

- Jobs *pg. 182* – Discussion on projections for 9,000 new jobs may be too low. Concerns were raised about whether these projections include the recent warehouses completed or in the design stages and whether these positions are included in the plan's projections.
- Shift Share Analysis *pg. 191-193* – Discussed the importance of analyzing growth trends, both national and regional. This is another section where only using up to 2020 data produced conclusions that have changed since the pandemic. For example, while manufacturing declined over that period, it is now rapidly growing as companies bring back operations into the U.S. Should adjust the narratives in this section to more current information.
- Economic Strategies *pg. 196-198*: The group noted the absence of the needs and objectives and activities of our small towns and their economic development efforts.
- Enterprise Zones *pg. 199*: Highlighted the prevalence of warehouses in enterprise zones and their exemption from excise tax. Suggested reviewing incentive policies and taxing structure to attract the types of industries we are targeting and de-incentivize the industries we are not interested in.
- Workforce Development: Emphasized the need to continue to promote education as a priority if we are to produce the workforce needed to diversify our economy with higher tech industries. Highlighted the importance of inclusive quality of life and support for diverse nationalities.

**Chapters 10-12** – *Note the task force did not closely review these chapters due to time limitations.*

### **Chapter 13 – Water Resources Element (*Pgs. 291-329*)**

- Quality and Quantity Assessment *pg. 293*: The importance of conducting a comprehensive assessment that addresses both the quality and quantity of drinking water was emphasized. The Task Force members stressed the need for robust data and evaluation in this regard.
- Prioritizing Resources: Throughout the discussions, the critical need to prioritize water resources within budget constraints was highlighted. Task Force members emphasized the significance of factors such as nutrient levels and pipe capacity in guiding resource allocation. Considering a new septic system uses up 2-3 times of our loading capacity vs a public sewer system – we should direct as much growth as possible into our urban areas where public sewer is available. This is also supported by the contamination issues many of our rural wells have due to our karst geology and higher rates of contamination from surface pollution. As evidenced by areas where the public has had to foot the bill to bring public sewer to pockets of rural development where wells had high contamination levels.
- Nutrient Loading Caps: Members expressed concern that the loading caps could impact our capacity to keep up with growth worse than water quantity does, particularly if the state ramps up its environmental efforts. Unlike water quantity where money can purchase new infrastructure and there is still capacity in the river for additional allocations, nutrient loading is capped, and technology is limited on what we could do to decrease our current loading levels.

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- Capacity Enhancement Alternatives pgs. 310-313: Diverse alternative options to address capacity shortfalls and increase capacity were explored. These encompassed Inflow and Infiltration and Enhanced Nutrient Removal treatment methods, nutrient trading, septic disconnection, land application of treated wastewater, and water reuse.

#### **Chapter 14 – Growth Management and Land Use Element (Pgs. 330-360)**

- Comp Plan Updates: Concerns were raised about the time between updates to the comprehensive plan should we be at the start of much higher rates of growth. Should that occur, we may need to update sooner than we have done in the past.
- Change in Agricultural Land: The plan reports that the most significant change in land use is the decrease in agricultural land with a reduction of more than 15%. Downzoning in 2005 appeared to help slow the loss of ag land but the chart provided only went to 2011 – need to see more recent land use data. Concerns were expressed that the current 1 unit per 5 acres zoning of our agriculturally zoned land may not be high enough to push back growth pressure in our rural areas as our growth rate increases and more people migrate for urban areas east of us. Frederick’s agricultural zoned land is over 1 unit/20 acres. Recognition was made of the political challenges associated with downzoning in 2005 and its likelihood to be reconsidered.
- Water Availability and Shrinking UGA: Concerns were raised about development occurring in the current UGA without access to water if outside the MRGA. Consideration should be given to maximize density on land in current UGA even if it must use wells and public sewer. Example: Cushwa farm, which was approved for development using wells.
- Population Growth Projections: There was concern about the accuracy of population growth figures. The more aggressive projection was favored as it aligns with current trends. The worst-case scenario, leading to a development moratorium, was discussed, emphasizing the need for aggressive planning, for capacity and nutrient management.

#### **Chapter 15 – Implementation Plan (Pgs. 361-379)**

- *No additional comments for this section.*



# References

## [1] Frederick County vs. Maryland Comparative Trends Analysis:

<https://maryland.reaproject.org/analysis/comparative-trends-analysis/population/tools/240021/240000/#:~:text=On%20average%2C%20Frederick%20County%27s%20population%20grew%20at%20an,an%20recorded%20its%20lowest%20growth%20in%202009%20%280.72%25%29.>

## [2] Rental Market Trends in Hagerstown, MD:

<https://www.rent.com/maryland/hagerstown-apartments/rent-trends>

## [3] Fair Market Rent Documentation System:

[https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2023\\_code/2023summary.odn](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2023_code/2023summary.odn)

## [4] Is the housing market going to crash? What the experts are saying:

<https://www.bankrate.com/real-estate/is-the-housing-market-about-to-crash/>

## [5] Washington County, MD U.S. Census Data:

[https://data.census.gov/profile/Washington County, Maryland?g=050XX00US24043](https://data.census.gov/profile/Washington%20County,%20Maryland?g=050XX00US24043)

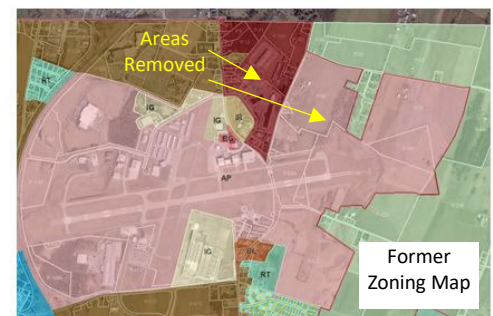
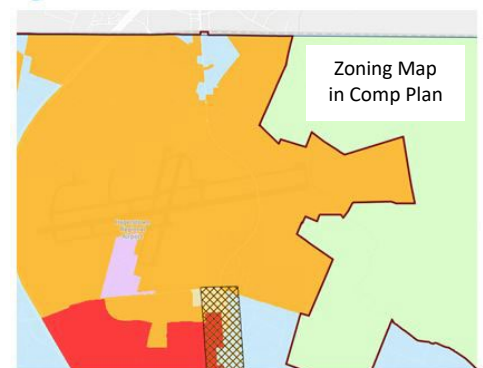
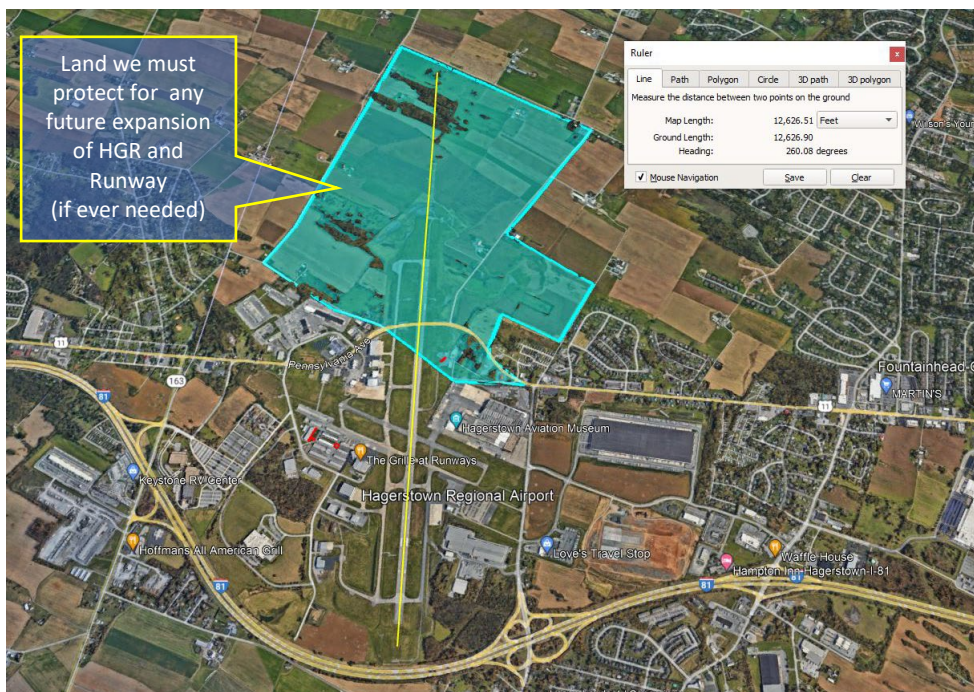
## [6] Rent.com - Rental market trends in Hagerstown, MD

<https://www.rent.com/maryland/hagerstown-apartments/rent-trends>

## [7] "Washington County's Booming Economy – How Do We Prepare" – Presentation by Chamber Talent Attraction & Retention Workgroup and GHC -June 2023

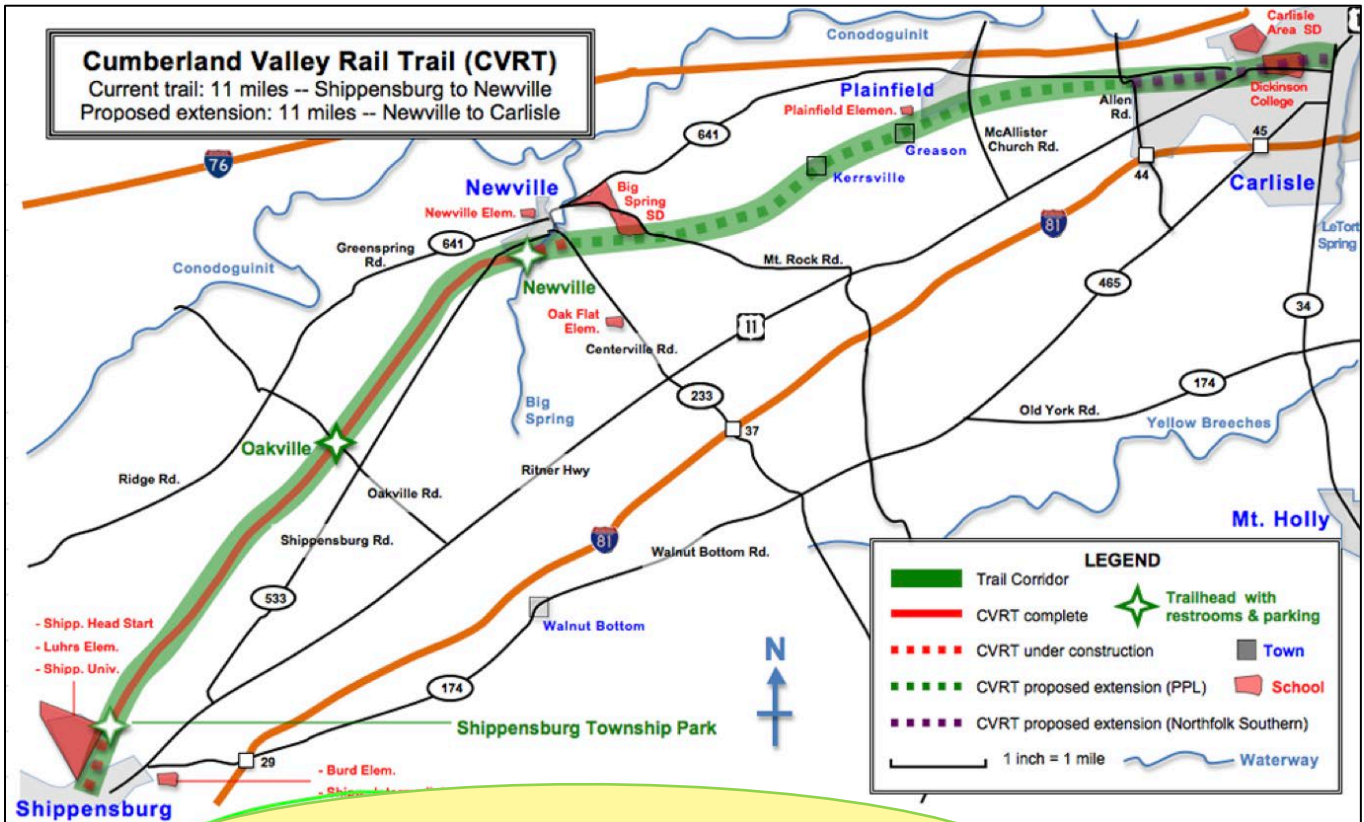
<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/nro7aa0uesmlk0zn1ryn/Chamber-Workgroup-GHC-Presentation-Govt-Staff-6-1-23.pptx?rlkey=csckby5jaadiv309sxlgz6l9s&dl=0>

# Maps:

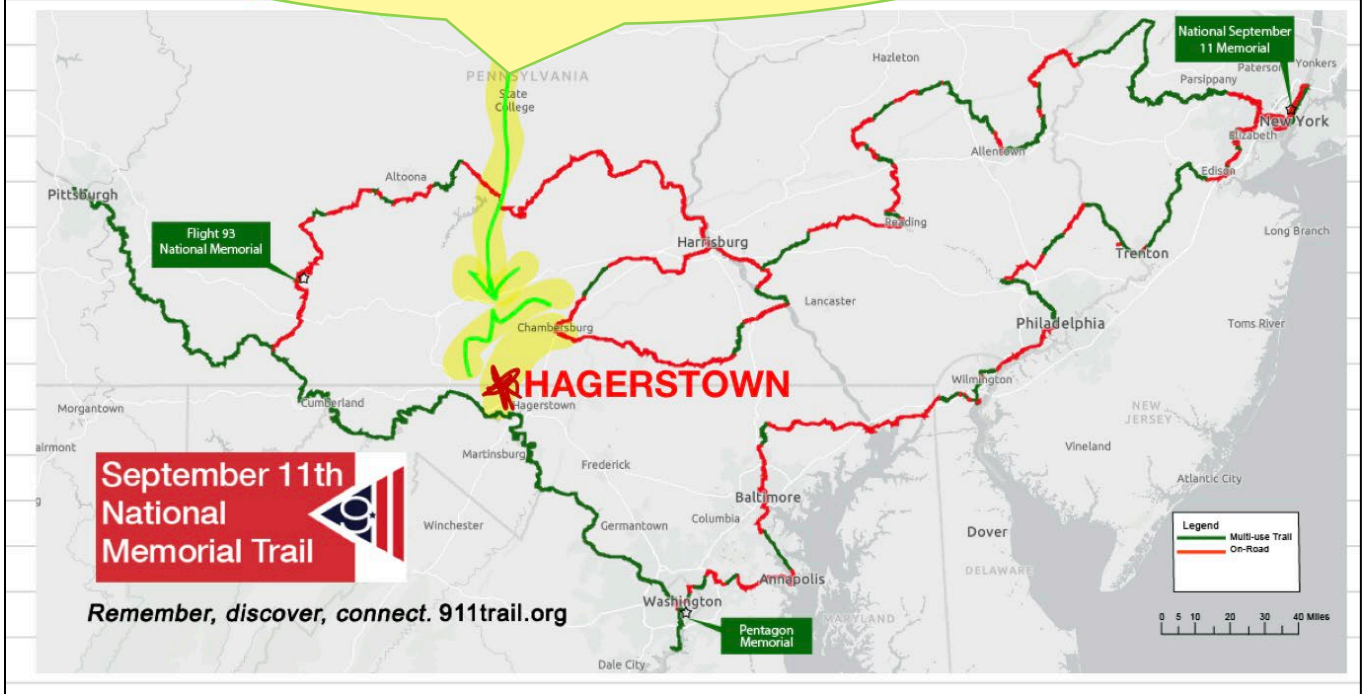


**Connection to September 11<sup>th</sup> National Memorial Trail:**

Note: Chambersburg, PA is currently working on connecting to the CVRT in Shippensburg



Washington County could work with Franklin County, PA to connect to the Cumberland Valley Rail Trail and eventually hook into the southwest portion of the 9/11 National Memorial Trail





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A Catalyst for  
**GROWTH  
& PROGRESS**

# 2040 Washington County Comprehensive Plan Recommendation Report

The Greater Hagerstown Committee, Inc.  
*and*  
GHC's Washington County Comprehensive Plan Task Force