

1. Introduction

This document is an update to the 1996 Comprehensive Plan for the City of Cumberland, MD. Prepared through an extensive community participation process, the 1996 Plan set a significant new direction for Cumberland on the eve of the new millennium. Over the last seven years the City has closely followed the policies, programs, and actions laid out in the Comprehensive Plan and a related document, the Strategic Plan, which was prepared in 1996 following adoption of the Comprehensive Plan by City Council. Key accomplishments during that period include:

- A revised Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations have been adopted, implementing the regulatory recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan.
- Led by the Canal Place Preservation and Development Authority, significant progress has been made in building the Canal Place Heritage Area as a major tourism destination. The City has implemented a variety of programs to promote downtown revitalization in coordination with the Canal Place development.
- A City Economic Development Commission and Coordinator have been established, resulting in a new focus on economic development.
- The City has completed a number of planning initiatives, such as the Downtown Design and Development Plan, Feasibility Study for the South End Industrial Park, Comprehensive Plan for Parks and Recreation, and Cumberland Housing Needs and Conditions Survey. In addition, the Canal Place Preservation and Development Authority completed an update to the Canal Place Heritage Area Management Plan in 2002.

The purpose of the 2003 Comprehensive Plan Update is to set a new framework for city policy and action over the next five years and beyond based upon:

1. The progress made in implementing the 1996 Comprehensive Plan.
2. Changes in the City of Cumberland's internal and external environments over the last seven years.

The process used to prepare the 2003 Comprehensive Plan Update included interviews and meetings with city officials, stakeholders, and boards; analysis of information on current conditions and trends in Cumberland; and review of plans, proposals, and initiatives since 1996. The results of this process support the conclusion that the conceptual basis of the 1996 Comprehensive Plan remains largely valid today, requiring updating and adjustment rather than a major change of direction. Several key initiatives identified in the 1996 Plan, such as Canal Place and the City's housing and economic development strategies, are under development and are not likely to reach full fruition for several years. Hence this document does not dramatically rewrite the Comprehensive Plan, but rather revises it as necessary to address changing circumstances since 1996 and to modify the City's policies (objectives and actions) for the next five years and beyond based upon these changes.

Regional Context

The City of Cumberland is located in Allegany County, MD, approximately 140 miles west of Baltimore by automobile (see Figure 1). It has historically served as the free-standing center of the region encompassing Allegany and Garrett Counties in Maryland, Mineral County in West Virginia, and portions of Somerset and Bedford Counties in Pennsylvania. The closest city of comparable size is Hagerstown, MD, located about 70 miles east of Cumberland.

Cumberland's prominence as a regional center stems from its location along major transportation routes. Transportation has played a key role in the development of the City from the eighteenth century, when the Potomac River provided access to the west for pioneers. The Potomac River, the Old National Road, the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal, and major railroad lines helped to shape Cumberland's growth as a manufacturing center and establish its influence on the surrounding region.

In the twentieth century, Cumberland's importance as a transportation hub decreased as a result of the demise of the C&O Canal and diminished reliance on rail service. From 1940 to 2000, Cumberland's population declined from 39,483 to 21,518 and the City lost much of its traditional manufacturing base. Nevertheless, Cumberland continues to function as the urban center for the outlying area within about a 30 to 40 mile radius and is emerging as a visitor destination due to the development of the Canal Place Heritage Area.

Need for the Comprehensive Plan

In preparing and adopting a Comprehensive Plan, the City must be guided by the relevant statutes and ordinances of the State of Maryland. These statutes include the Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Act of 1992 (State Planning Act) and the Smart Growth Priority Funding Areas Act of 1997.

1992 State Planning Act: The Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Act was enacted to organize and direct comprehensive planning, regulation, and funding by state, county, and municipal governments in furtherance of a specific economic growth and resource protection policy. It requires each of the State's jurisdictions to work in concert with the State to encourage economic growth, to limit sprawl, and to protect natural resources. In addition, the jurisdictions are required to address the Seven Visions of the State of Maryland in their comprehensive plans:

1. *Development will be concentrated in suitable areas;*
2. *Sensitive areas are protected;*
3. *In rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected;*
4. *Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic;*
5. *Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption, is practiced;*
6. *To assure the achievement of 1 thru 5 above, economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined; and*
7. *Funding mechanisms are addressed to achieve these visions.*

A premise of the Act is that comprehensive plans prepared by counties, cities, and towns provide the best means by which local governments can establish priorities for growth and resource conservation.

Legend

 Allegany County

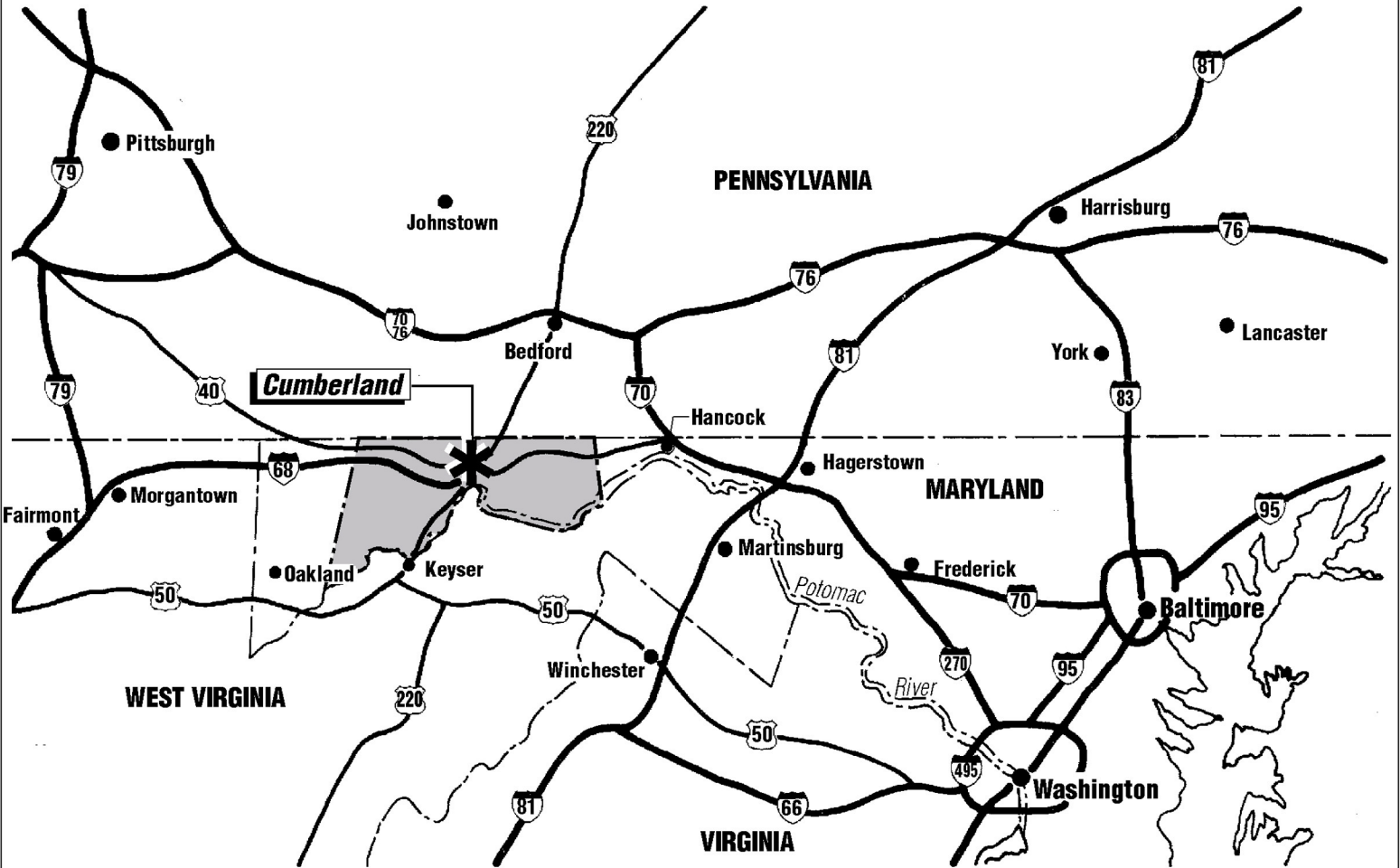


Figure 1

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Comprehensive Plan

City of Cumberland, Maryland
Allegany County

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Smart Growth Priority Funding Areas Act: In 1997 the Maryland General Assembly passed five pieces of legislation and budget initiatives that are collectively known as “Smart Growth.” These initiatives are:

- Priority Funding Areas
- Brownfields
- Live Near Your Work
- Job Creation Tax Credits
- Rural Legacy

Smart Growth directs the State to target programs and funding to support established communities and locally designated growth areas, and to protect rural areas. The Priority Funding Areas Act provides a geographic focus for the State’s investment in growth-related infrastructure. The remaining four components complement this geographic focus by targeting specific state resources to preserve land outside of Priority Funding Areas, to encourage growth inside Priority Funding Areas, and to ensure that existing communities continue to provide a high quality of life for their residents. The Smart Growth program is highly relevant to Cumberland because the City is designated as a Priority Growth Area.

In addition to describing how Cumberland will work to achieve the state's seven visions and related planning guidance, the Comprehensive Plan offers an opportunity to address issues that are unique to the City and its citizens. In the broadest terms, the Comprehensive Plan offers the people of Cumberland an opportunity to determine the future character and form of their community. This is accomplished by establishing a vision of what the City should be over a long-range time frame (i.e., by the year 2020) and identifying a comprehensive set of actions to achieve that vision. The primary purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to serve as a blueprint to guide City officials, their partners in the public and private sectors, and other decision-makers in shaping the desired future of Cumberland.

Planning Process

The following text describes the planning process used to prepare the 1996 Comprehensive Plan. Because the 2003 document represents an update rather than a complete rewrite, a less extensive planning process was used to reconfirm the conceptual basis of the 1996 Plan and to identify revisions needed to address current circumstances in the City of Cumberland. This process included:

1. Updating of background information and assessment of progress made in implementing the 1996 Comprehensive Plan through interviews with city officials and stakeholders and review of relevant plans and data. (This phase of work corresponds to Phase 1 of the planning process for the 1996 Comprehensive Plan, described below). The results are documented in the 2003 Comprehensive Plan Update Background Report, dated August 2003.
2. Review of the Vision Statement, Plan Concept, and Objectives contained in the 1996 Comprehensive Plan based upon the results of Phase 1 and additional interviews and meetings with city officials, stakeholders, and boards (corresponds to Phase 3 of the 1996 Comprehensive Plan planning process below).
3. Modification of the Comprehensive Plan Elements (Chapters 3 to 10) and Implementation Element (Chapter 11) based upon the results of the previous two phases (corresponds to Phase 4 below).

The 1996 Comprehensive Plan was prepared with the extensive involvement of City officials, other agency representatives, and Cumberland residents. The planning process was designed to ask and answer three basic questions:

- ***What should Cumberland be?*** That is, what kind of community do residents want to live in over the next twenty-five years?
- ***What can Cumberland be?*** That is, what are the realistic possibilities that will influence the City's future?
- ***How does Cumberland become what residents say it should be?*** That is, what actions must the City and its leaders take to secure the future which its citizens seek?

The planning process for the 1996 Plan involved the following four steps:

1. Collection and analysis of background information
2. Development and comparison of strategic concepts
3. Preparation of a concept plan with supporting goals and objectives
4. Identification of implementation strategies and incorporation into plan elements

Background Information: During this phase, extensive information regarding existing conditions, trends, and issues affecting Cumberland's future was gathered from published data sources, interviews with elected, civic, and business leaders, field surveys, a telephone survey of City residents (conducted by the City's Department of Community Development as part of the public participation process for preparation of the *Consolidated Plan*), and two public workshops. The culmination of this phase was preparation of a Background Report in March 1995. This report describes Cumberland as it has come to exist today and, in some cases, as it may exist in the future. In addition, the report identifies important community assets and issues to be addressed by the Comprehensive Plan. As noted, the Background Report has been revised as part of the 2003 Update.

During the background phase, several overarching themes emerged that define the essential character and potential of Cumberland. These themes emphasize that:

- ***Cumberland is a good place to live and visit.*** The widespread perception of the quality of life in Cumberland, nearly universal among people who know the City, is a major source of strength for the community.
- ***No matter how good life in Cumberland is, people still need to make a living to enjoy it.*** The City has experienced a long period of decline both in population and in its traditional manufacturing base. Therefore, reestablishing a sound and growing economy with ample employment opportunities is very important.
- ***Cumberland has many assets that need to be converted from potential to kinetic forces to generate both economic growth and employment.*** An example is the Canal Place initiative, which is building on the historic western terminus of the C&O Canal to create an experience attractive to both tourists and residents of the City and surrounding region.

Strategic Concepts: At the conclusion of the background phase, a "Blue Ribbon Commission" comprised of five residents was appointed by the City to guide development of an overall vision for Cumberland. In a series of workshops, Commission members reviewed the background information and identified three strategic statements that could shape the future of the City. In recognition of the overriding importance of a sound economy, these positions involved three different ways of promoting growth. As articulated by the Blue Ribbon Commission, the three statements were:

1. **Entrepreneurial**
Make Cumberland conducive to entrepreneurial activity (i.e., encourage entrepreneurs to start and develop businesses in the City).
2. **Quality of Life**
Base economic growth on attracting tourists and encouraging recent retirees to move from major metropolitan areas to live comfortably in Cumberland.
3. **Economic Opportunism**
Pursue all forms of development irrespective of other issues.

These three simple statements were developed into alternative concepts for Cumberland's future that were presented at two public meetings and a Blue Ribbon Commission workshop held in June 1995. The strategic concepts were designed to illustrate each future vision in its purest terms (i.e., as if the City would pursue it to the exclusion of all others). Because strategic choices are rarely so extreme, members of the public and the Commission were asked to identify a preferred position. After considering the merits and costs of each extreme, the consensus of both the public and the Blue Ribbon Commission was that the preferred position should combine features of both the Entrepreneurial and Quality of Life strategic concepts. In other words, elements of those two strategies that are mutually supporting should be emphasized in developing the Comprehensive Plan. Key to this choice was the understanding that combining the two strategic concepts represents a way to promote and focus economic development based upon Cumberland's intrinsic assets.

Concept Plan, Goals, and Objectives: In the next phase of the planning process, the preferred strategic concept was refined and developed through the participation of the Blue Ribbon Commission into a concept plan comprised of a vision statement for the year 2020, a series of maps characterizing in general terms the desired physical form of the City, and supporting goals and objectives. The goals and objectives addressed different subject areas corresponding to requirements of the State Planning Act and/or areas of City concern, such as sensitive areas, land use and cultural resources, and economic development. The vision, physical concept, and the key recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission in support of the vision were presented at a public meeting in October 1995.

The vision and concept plan are described in Chapter 2 of the Comprehensive Plan as modified through the 2003 Update.

Implementation and Plan Elements: The Comprehensive Plan is only as useful as the extent to which it is implemented. Implementation of the plan in turn depends upon identifying actions that can be taken to address specific issues affecting the City's ability to achieve its desired future vision. In this phase, a comprehensive series of actions designed to implement the

concept plan was developed and evaluated by the Blue Ribbon Commission and City officials. The actions address and integrate the seven visions of the State of Maryland and the requirements of the State Planning Act, important issues identified during the background phase, and the recommendations of two other key planning documents, the *Consolidated Plan* and the *Canal Place Management Plan*, with the steps necessary to achieve the concept plan.

The actions were organized with the goals and objectives in a series of plan elements that address the following subject areas:

1. Sensitive Areas
2. Land Use and Cultural Resources
3. Transportation
4. Community Facilities
5. Mineral Resources
6. Housing
7. Economic Development
8. Energy Conservation

The plan elements are contained in Chapters 3 through 10 as modified through the 2003 Update. Each element contains an introductory section summarizing significant existing conditions and issues, followed by goals, objectives, and the actions that the City and its partners can take with respect to the subject area to implement the overall plan vision. While the Comprehensive Plan is divided into discrete elements, these elements are interrelated and many of the actions they contain support goals and objectives contained in other elements. Therefore, cross-references are provided for closely related actions contained in different elements.

The final component of the planning process was to organize the actions identified in the various plan elements into a framework for plan implementation, presented in Chapter 11. The implementation framework has been significantly revised for the 2003 to present it in a simpler, user-friendly format.