

Executive Summary

This document updates the 1996 Comprehensive Plan for the City of Cumberland, MD, providing a new focus for the City's efforts to build a better community for its citizens over the next five years and beyond. The 2004 Update reaffirms the basic principles of the Vision Statement and Plan Concept from the 1996 Plan while incorporating revisions to address current conditions and trends, as well as the City's progress over the last seven years in implementing the original plan.

The 2004 Comprehensive Plan Update (the Plan) establishes a future vision for Cumberland in the year 2020 and describes the actions that City decision-makers and partners at all levels of government and in the private sector can take to achieve the vision. The Plan was prepared in conformance with Maryland's Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992, which requires local jurisdictions to amend their comprehensive plans to address seven visions established by the state to encourage economic growth, to limit sprawl, and to protect natural resources. The Plan is consistent with the Smart Growth Priority Funding Areas Act of 1997, which directs public investment in growth-related infrastructure to established communities such as Cumberland. Within the framework established by Maryland's seven visions and Smart Growth program, the Plan addresses many issues that are unique to Cumberland and its citizens.

In the Plan's Vision for the Year 2020, the City of Cumberland is recognized as:

Cumberland: A City that is an excellent place to live, an enjoyable place to visit, and a supportive place to build a profitable business.

The City's special resources - a strong sense of community, safe environment, rich history, and splendid natural setting - provide the key to a vital and prosperous future.

Canal Place and the downtown draw visitors to Cumberland to experience the historic C&O Canal, Arts and Cultural District, and other local and regional attractions, spurring economic development.

Economic opportunity is further expanded by public and private sector cooperation, state-of-the art telecommunications, and a spirit of entrepreneurship harkening back to Cumberland's industrial heritage.

The City's actions to strengthen existing neighborhoods, provide new housing choices, and preserve key environmental resources make it an ever more desirable place to live for current and new residents alike.

The Plan elaborates on this vision in a physical concept acknowledging the City's key historic, visual, natural, and recreational resources. Equally important are more intangible qualities such as a positive community identity, low crime rate, active and supportive social institutions, and

a hardworking, skilled, and productive workforce. In the Vision for 2020, the City builds upon these and other community assets to make Cumberland an exceptional place to live, visit, and build a business.

The Plan is an *issue* and *action-oriented* document. Important issues affecting Cumberland's future and actions recommended to address these issues are presented in plan elements dealing with topics such as sensitive natural areas, land use and cultural resources, transportation, and community facilities. The actions include initiatives requiring the commitment of city resources as well as policy directives to guide ongoing city operations and decision-making. The interrelated topics of economic development and housing are considered key to Cumberland's future and thus are a major focus of the recommended actions. Key recommendations of the Plan include:

- Building on progress made since the 1996 Comprehensive Plan, define and implement a comprehensive economic development strategy, including identification of appropriate target “niches” for the City of Cumberland.
- Continue to promote downtown revitalization, including:
 - physical and programmatic linkages to Canal Place and to adjacent gateway commercial areas;
 - new viable uses such as upper story residential; and
 - updating the traffic, parking, and pedestrian circulation recommendations of the Downtown Design and Development Plan.
- Complete the Allegheny Highlands Trail with clear connections to Canal Place and the downtown.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive housing improvement strategy for the City to promote:
 - renovation of existing housing;
 - development of new infill housing in established neighborhoods; and
 - new housing construction on vacant (undeveloped) property.
- Implement a phased neighborhood revitalization/improvement strategy.
- Implement a targeted marketing plan to promote Cumberland as a great place to live, visit, and build a business.
- Use the provision of water and sewer service to reinforce the City's position as a regional center.
- Develop a plan and action strategy to establish the Narrows as a scenic attraction and Alternate US Route 40 as the "Narrows Parkway" (possibly including annexation).
- Implement a gateway improvement program to improve the visual character of roadways leading to the downtown, starting with Baltimore Avenue and North Mechanic Street/North Centre Street as priorities.

- Implement the 2002 Comprehensive Plan for Parks and Recreation, including repairs and improvements at major facilities such as Constitution Park and deactivation of least used facilities.

To provide a focus for implementing the recommendations in coordination with other ongoing city planning initiatives (e.g., the Strategic Plan and Community Legacy Plan), the final chapter of the Plan synthesizes the actions contained in the plan elements into a series of “action initiatives.” These initiatives will require the commitment of city resources to carry out, either as discrete projects or as programs to be phased over a multi-year period. Relative priorities are provided for the action initiatives.

The primary purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to serve as a guide for the City's leaders and their partners in the public and private sectors as they strive to secure the best possible future for the City of Cumberland. In the Vision for the Year 2020, this will be nothing less than the best of the past merged with the best of the future, where all residents can grow and prosper together.

