

A full-page background image showing a vibrant sunset. The sky is filled with large, billowing clouds in shades of orange, red, and purple, with a bright yellow and orange glow from the sun just below the horizon. The foreground is a lush green field, and the middle ground shows a line of trees and distant hills under the colorful sky.

The Livable Frederick Master Plan

Frederick County, Maryland

Adopted September 3, 2019



A Letter from the County Executive

Dear Citizens,

For decades, Frederick County has grappled with questions about how and where we should grow as a community. Livable Frederick presents a new approach to answering these questions. The purpose of the Livable Frederick Comprehensive Plan is to identify what citizens value about Frederick County, to build on citizens' shared vision, and to lay out a framework for growth that allows us to retain those elements that make Frederick so special.

Livable Frederick is about growing the county well. The process has been vision-focused, not zoning-driven as in years past. This dynamic approach has allowed us to move beyond contentious topics and instead focus on putting in place the community's vision for a sustainable, high quality of life over the next 10 to 25 years. This plan considers how people will want to live, work and recreate. It links transportation, public health, and jobs to land use decisions, and considers what we want to preserve for future generations. Frederick County residents have expressed a strong desire to ensure the future viability of agriculture and the protection of our environment and historic and cultural assets. Throughout the process, the county has actively sought engagement from the community through surveys, social media, steering committee meetings, and other outreach methods.

The final result is a Comprehensive Plan document that reflects the community's vision and sets the stage for an equitable, sustainable, healthy, and most of all livable Frederick County. Now it is up to all of us to take action and implement the plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jan H. Gardner", is written over a horizontal line.

Jan H. Gardner

Frederick County Executive

The Green Infrastructure Sector

As the amount of developed land has increased, natural areas have not only decreased in quality and quantity, but have undergone significant fragmentation. Locally, this can negatively impact the vitality of the ecosystem and the health and happiness of county residents. At a regional and state level, the ability of Frederick County to protect its green infrastructure will benefit the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. The Green Infrastructure Sector is therefore identified to support the conservation of natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas in the county, to direct urban/suburban growth away from green infrastructure and sensitive areas, and to ensure the protection and integration of green infrastructure where it exists within areas targeted for growth. (Figure 6) This sector will be further implemented through the development of a Livable Frederick Green Infrastructure Sector Plan.

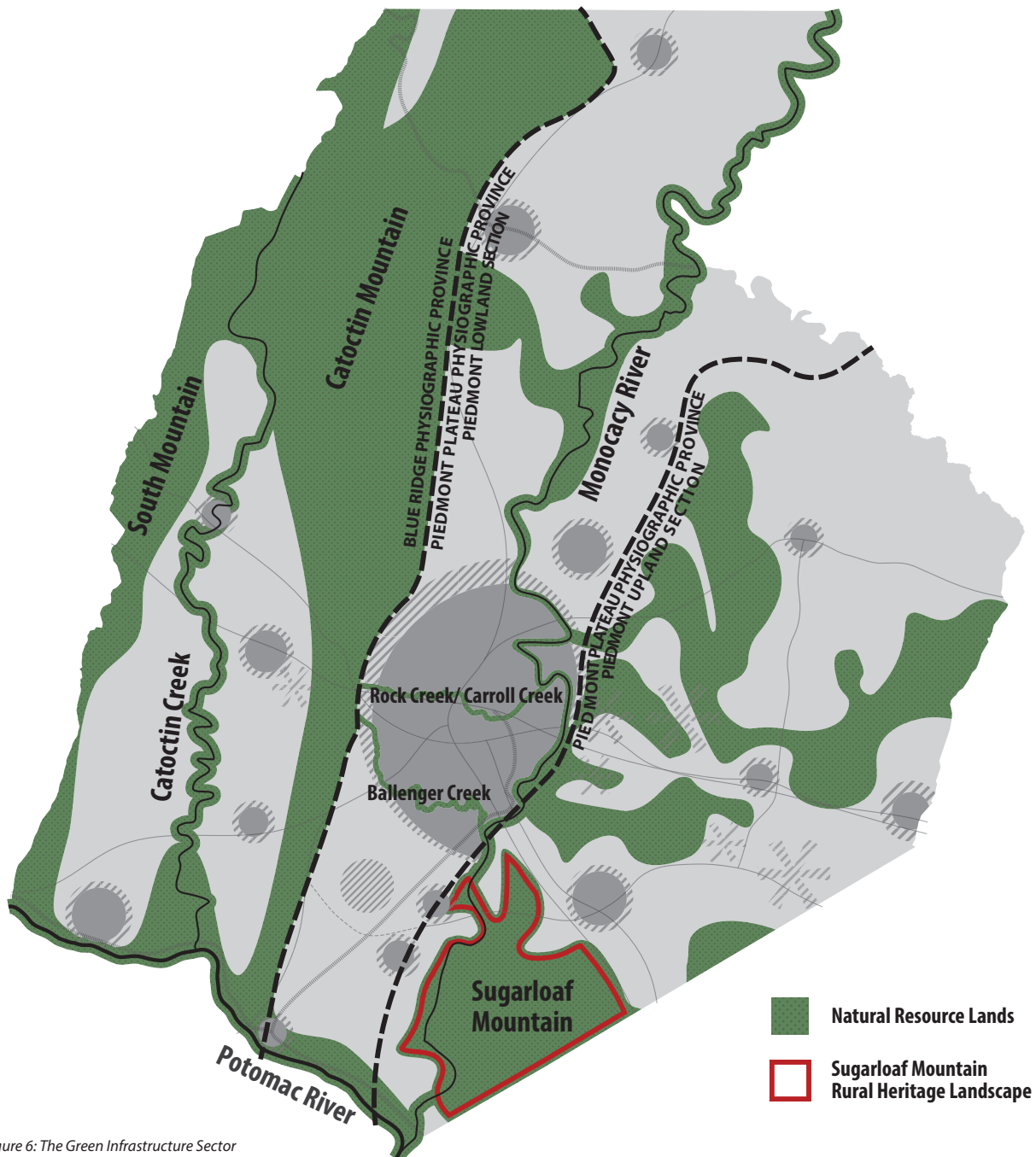


Figure 6: The Green Infrastructure Sector

Wellhead Protection Ordinance: In 2007 the county adopted wellhead protection legislation that regulate hazardous substance storage tanks. Any tank within certain distances of community groundwater supply wells must be above ground with 100% catchment basins or double-walled containment and spill protection alarms. The wellhead protection regulations also prohibit certain land uses and activities within wellhead protection areas.

Forest Resource Ordinance: The county's Forest Resource Ordinance (FRO) was adopted in 1992 and is applied through the development review process to subdivisions and site plans. The FRO allows for on-site or off-site afforestation, purchase of forest banking credits, or a fee-in-lieu payment into the forest fund. The highest priority for meeting FRO requirements is the afforestation of stream valleys within the particular development or at least within the same watershed. Further, FRO afforestation and forest 'banking' priority areas are stream valleys on agriculturally-zoned land.

Resource Conservation Zoning: The Resource Conservation (RC) Zoning District is applied throughout the county, with the largest portion comprised of the forestlands on and around Catoclin Mountain, South Mountain and Sugarloaf Mountain. The RC Zone limits new residential subdivision lots to 10 acres in size and prohibits development on slopes of 25% or more. The RC zone does not permit the construction of new public streets as part of residential subdivisions. Timber harvesting is permitted in all zoning districts with an approved logging permit. The Frederick County Forestry Board must also review and approve proposals for timber harvesting in the Resource Conservation zone to ensure sound forestry best management practices are employed.

Development Review Process: The Maryland Department of Natural Resources has an opportunity to review proposed subdivision and site plan applications to determine the existence of threatened and rare species on a subject site.

Stream Restoration: The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Program (also known as the county's stormwater permit) requires water monitoring, watershed assessment, public education, and the restoration of degraded stream corridors. The county's first restoration project was completed in 2007 and involved stream channel rehabilitation and riparian buffer plantings along a portion of Ballenger Creek at the Ballenger Creek Elementary School.

Natural Resource Comprehensive Plan Designation: The Natural Resource land use plan designation is applied in the county to mountain areas with contiguous forests and to stream corridors. Stream corridors include major streams defining the county's 20 subwatersheds. Also included within mountain/forestlands and stream corridors are 100-year floodplain, plant/animal habitats, steep slopes, and wetlands. A purpose of the land use plan designation is to identify and highlight these features relative to growth areas. The plan designation itself is not a regulation, but it does provide the basis for considering the application of Resource Conservation zoning.

Public Ownership: Public ownership of parks and natural resource protection areas provides the greatest degree of protection for any sensitive area feature. There are over 25,000 acres of predominantly forested land under municipal, state, and federal ownership. Municipal ownership is comprised of watershed protection lands primarily in the Catoclin Mountains. State lands include Catoclin and South Mountains. While forestland is the predominant feature under public ownership, also included within these areas are steep slopes, streams, habitat of threatened and endangered species, and wetlands.

Sugarloaf Mountain Rural Heritage Landscape

The area surrounding, and including, Sugarloaf Mountain – located along Frederick County's southern edge in the largely undeveloped wedge of land between the Interstate 270 corridor and the CSX Rail line (Frederick spur) – continues to maintain its locally iconic status. This valued rural preserve, punctuated by the visual prominence of the mountain's dual peaks, and grounded by the beauty and history in the surrounding fields and forests, is recognized as a special place even in a county that is home to many special places.

The Sugarloaf area has already been demarcated as the Sugarloaf Mountain Historic Survey District which covers approximately 10,500 acres of land including the 3,200 acres which make up the mountain itself and have been preserved by Gordon Strong and his heirs under the Stronghold Trust. Immediately west of the Sugarloaf district is the Carrollton Manor Rural Historic District (9,300 acres), the Washington Run Rural Area (2,715 acres) and, across the Potomac River in Loudoun County, Virginia, the Catoclin Rural Historic District, a 25,000-acre National

Register District. In addition, Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve district – with its tens of thousands of acres of permanently protected farmland is located along the Frederick-Montgomery County line, immediately adjacent to the Sugarloaf area.

Several long-term protective easements have also been established in and around the Sugarloaf area including those held by the Maryland Environmental Trust, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, the U.S. Government, and Frederick County, through its Installment Purchase Program (IPP).

As a cherished Frederick County locale, the Sugarloaf Mountain area highlights the natural, historical, and cultural features that are closely associated with the rural pace, majestic beauty, and quality of life that is one of the centerpieces of Our Vision. However, the area remains vulnerable on several fronts:

Land Protection: Much of the acreage in and around the mountain is not protected by long-term easements. While the underlying zoning laws provide some protection from intense residential construction, equally disruptive possibilities exist to forever alter the area through insensitive, large-lot development, fragmentation of agricultural or environmental resources, or operations and uses available to landowners under the current regulatory regime.

Environmental Disruption: Some land uses available to property owners may still allow for impacts that fragment and degrade natural resources and that could greatly diminish the quality of the natural environment. Environmental degradation can include noise pollution, rural road overload, and development.

Viewshed Degradation: Even low-density, low-intensity development could result in the degradation or destruction of cherished views and vistas that have been enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of citizens over the decades.

One approach to the challenge of maintaining the Sugarloaf Mountain region as a truly special place in Frederick County for ourselves and for future generations may involve the establishment of an overlay district. Such a district – established in the Zoning Ordinance – would be drawn and constructed based on environmental stewardship and the Sugarloaf area residents' vision for this area. This might include: Restrictions on building size or height; Standards or guidelines for building location so as to minimize visibility from prominent locations on or around the mountain; Standards for environmental quality related to livability such as noise, vibration, traffic impacts, or forest removal; Standards for new development to allow for a more traditional pattern based on small crossroads villages and hamlets; Prohibition of certain land uses otherwise available in the Agricultural, Residential, Village Center, and Resource Conservation zoning districts; and Maintaining and protecting the ecological integrity and functionality of the area.

A thorough analysis of the Sugarloaf Mountain area – beginning with the completion of a visual resources analysis and a natural resources inventory – would set the stage for any discussion regarding the drafting of specific guidelines, policies, or regulations.