

The Livable Frederick

Implementation Program

October 2019



Livable Frederick
Frederick County, Maryland

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The Livable Frederick Implementation Program (Program) describes a framework of potential planning efforts in the county, sets priorities among those efforts, establishes a work-plan and schedule for the completion of those priorities, and measures progress toward achieving the outcomes described in the Livable Frederick Master Plan (LFMP). A description of the process for updating the Livable Frederick Comprehensive Plan is provided in detail in the "Putting the Plan to Work" section of the LFMP.

Several important underlying objectives of the Program involve: fostering transparency and participation in the process of determining priorities; supporting greater agreement about those priorities amongst community leaders; and working to create a stable planning context that is resistant to capricious shifts in priority. Reaching consensus on which planning tasks and activities to prioritize will enhance Frederick County's ability to adequately plan for necessary growth-related infrastructure improvements, and is equally critical in setting realistic expectations - and maintaining certainty - for the private investment community which must make decisions that manage risk while ultimately leading to the creation livable places.

The process for the review and approval of the Program includes:

- Initial development of a Draft Program in partnership between Planning Staff and the County Executive's Office;
- Further development and review with the Frederick County Planning Commission;
- A Recommendation from the Frederick County Council; and,
- Final Approval by the County Executive

The Program will be reviewed and updated annually, prior to the start of the annual budgeting process.

One such measure is in place. The designation of the area as an Opportunity Zone – incentivizing development through the availability of investment tax credits – aligns with the County’s plan to encourage and support the redevelopment of areas currently supported by public infrastructure over the development of outlying vacant lands.

SUGARLOAF MOUNTAIN

Treasured Landscape Management Plan (Large Area Plan)

RATIONALE FOR PLANNING

The development of a comprehensive plan update for the Sugarloaf Mountain area would allow Frederick County to consider its options as it seeks to enhance, and in some cases protect, the natural, cultural, and historical characteristics that define this part of Frederick County. To a large extent, it has been the efforts of private foundations, thoughtful residents, and individual landowners that have maintained this largely undisturbed and intact place. Sugarloaf Mountain is a recognizable landmark to many in the region and serves as the centerpiece and defining feature of the southeastern portion of the county. It is in the best interest of both the local community, as well as the larger regional community, to make efforts now that will permit our grandchildren to appreciate this mountain and its surrounding forests, farmlands, and distinct settlements.

A planning process for the Sugarloaf Mountain District must include preparatory efforts including:

- Identification of key stakeholders including residents, landowners, businesses, institutional groups, such as Stronghold Incorporated
- A scoping document that establishes a conceptual study area
- Cultural and Historical Resources Identification Report
- Visual resources report to establish potential viewsheds of merit and local importance

In recent years at Sugarloaf Mountain, neighbors in the district have grappled with land use proposals that may have challenged the rural character of the area. Several of these permitted uses – and other uses allowed through the Special Exception process – could significantly alter the living environment for residents and visitors by introducing visual intrusions, traffic impacts, and sounds or noises audible across vast areas of the district. And while the mountain itself (approximately 3,000 acres within the district) is owned by the private non-profit Stronghold, Inc., the 1946 agreement struck by the original land aggregator, Gordon Strong, that permits public access to the mountain, includes a sunset date of 2045, after which ownership and public access is in question.

RATIONALE FOR TIMING

Perhaps the most pressing immediate issue for the Sugarloaf Mountain area remains that of land use incompatibility, as well as the specter of physical development that could significantly diminish the views from, and of, the mountains themselves. The concerns of local residents can best be addressed comprehensively, in a way that reduces the possibility for continued site-specific conflicts that are resource and time consumptive for landowners, neighbors, and county officials. A comprehensive approach to documenting issues and finding solutions should begin in the very near future so that planning for this district is undertaken before significant changes to the area threaten the character of the mountain and lands surrounding it.

THE AGRICULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

(Functional Plan)

An agricultural infrastructure plan is proposed in response to the Agricultural Infrastructure Sector identified in the Livable Frederick Master Plan. This sector is one of four main elements of the growth strategy articulated in the LFMP and is therefore an important aspect of implementation. Frederick County should make it a priority to do the planning necessary to create a fertile environment for successful agricultural businesses.