

**Recommendations and Comments on the Development of the 2023 Master Plan
Comment Set #1**

TO: Honorable Commission Members of the Mount Airy Planning Commission

FROM: Council Member Stephen L. Domotor 

DATE: November 27, 2023

As part of my campaign commitments to the citizens of Mount Airy, I pledged my dedication to their vision for the future of our town, and that I would work to ensure their vision is reflected in the updated Master Plan now underway.

By way of this memorandum, I am requesting that my comments and recommendations be considered and made part of the formal record. Comments on other elements of the plan will be provided as subsequent draft chapters become available.

Key Recommendation

The Town of Mount Airy 2023 Master Plan should be driven by and demonstrate a vision-focused approach to master planning. A policy, vision-focused approach should be based upon our citizens' wishes and ensure sustainability of their most valued quality of life attributes for the future of Mount Airy, as expressed by our citizens in response to Town Growth and Development Community Surveys. Town Surveys are the principal guiding light for our master planning process.

- There are many lenses of information available to us for understanding the sentiment and wishes of our citizens. Key among these are the growth and development community surveys officially commissioned by the town of Mount Airy. These are demonstrably relevant as a key source of information to guide the master planning process (see attachment 1).
- The Town has formally embraced the application of town survey results when making recommendations and decisions for the town and community we serve (see attachment 2). Also in an official town communication, it was stated that "The 2023 Master Plan is Underway! And YOUR input from the Town Survey will be used to create it!" (see attachment 3). Finally, reinforcing this point by going back to the 2013 Master Plan, it stated that "citizen involvement and participation are critical elements in the interactive plan update process. It is essential that local surveys and need assessments results be the basis for the first draft of the plan."
- The 2020 Community Survey provides strategic insight into the vision our citizens expressed for the future of Mount Airy. Indeed, the introduction of the survey stated that "town of Mount Airy citizens are the most important stakeholders in shaping the future of our community."
Unfortunately, our politicians have too often ignored the full wishes of the citizens expressed through this and previous surveys. They have denigrated recent (2020) and past (2007) surveys

and the individuals who promote them, and instead have pursued their own wishes and priorities counter to the wishes and vision expressed by the citizens.

- As a key example, through these surveys, our citizens have consistently expressed their strong sentiment for limiting residential growth and their opposition to high density growth (see attachment 4). Yet these and other wishes appear to have been ignored. If not so, why then, do we have a mixed use development ordinance embracing and promoting this aspect of growth, and why were certain properties zoned for such high density and mixed use?

A citizen-based, vision-focused approach to master planning has been well-applied and embraced by Frederick County, MD. Their Livable Frederick Master Plan (LFMP, 2019) should be studied for lessons learned that can be applied to our master plan.

- As stated in the LFMP: “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. First and foremost, the LFMP is a policy-focused, as opposed to a capacity-focused, document. It stems from a community-based vision, employed an unprecedented process to involve the participation of numerous community members in the development of the plan, and used a sophisticated scenario planning tool to evaluate possibilities for how we can shape our community in the future.” See Attachment 5 for additional details cited from the LFMP.

Other Comments and Recommendations Offered on Initial Drafts of Our Master Plan.

- Sometimes less is more. The 2013 Master Plan contains over 90 “strategic goals and implementation strategies.” Many of the strategic goals have no implementation strategy identified for them, implying that there is no tactical strategy to “get there” for those goals. This is too many performance elements to successfully manage, track, and make demonstrable progress on. I suggest that a smaller, essential set of goals be identified that are measurable and achievable. Limit implementation strategies to only the most essential tactical steps that need to be achieved to accomplish the stated goal. Do not “carry forward” all the goals and strategies from the 2013 plan. Include only those that support the current state and vision you put forth in this updated master plan. Make it current, relevant, and responsive to citizen wishes.
- In a recent Master Planning Work Session held this fall, it was mentioned that a goal should be responsible growth, and there was discussion around the town’s housing unit permit limits (e.g., 24 unit permits) per development. Two comments. First, it would be interesting to know what our neighboring municipalities use for such permit limits. Second, I recommend that you use this concept as a stated strategy to identify in our master plan for limiting the pace of growth and achieving responsible growth. Others have used this as a strategy. Consider the Westminster 2009 Master Plan that stated, “*Objective 4: Monitor the development and growth of the City of Westminster. a. Continue to limit the total number of residential building permits that can be issued on a per project basis. b. Create an accounting system to keep track of available buildable land and potential dwelling units in relation to community needs and population growth. c. Establish an active monitoring system to assure that community facility and public service performance standards are being met.*”

Relevancy of Town Growth and Development Surveys

Town of Mount Airy –

- Survey research indicates a typical survey response rate of 5-30% for written surveys, and that survey response rate can be impacted by the degree of complexity of a given survey. The 2020 Community Survey response rate of 26% is at the upper end of this range, which is very good considering the relative complexity (e.g., multiple choice, ranking questions; request for written suggestions) of this most recent survey. Every question in the survey was reviewed and approved by the former mayor and former town council president prior to its release.
- Many more citizens have expressed their views through town surveys (26% in 2020) compared to those that vote based on the typical Mount Airy voter turnout of 8-11%.
- Broad demographics information provided by survey respondents (e.g., neighborhoods where they reside; age; length of time living in town) indicates survey results reflect good representation of citizen views for neighborhoods spanning the town of Mount Airy.
- The 2020 survey is validated. Approximately 25% of survey questions on key growth and development issues facing Mount Airy in the 2020 Community Survey were crafted to be the same as those in the previous 2007 survey, done by design to gauge if citizen sentiment on these issues had changed or remained the same over the 13 year period. All responses to growth and development issues in 2007 and for 2020 were near-identical, validating that survey results and citizen sentiment over time have remained constant.
- In addition to formal responses to the survey question set, 834 written comments and suggestions were provided, many addressing topics such as over-development, residential growth and high density growth concerns, commercial business and desired mix, adequacy of public facilities and safety, and property annexation.

Other Towns –

Other towns have used community surveys as the cornerstone of their stakeholder input process for master planning. Consider the Westminster 2009 Master Plan and their subsequent plans: “The 2009 Comprehensive Plan update started with the coordination of the first Westminster resident survey in the summer of 2008. The survey was a success and triggered new initiatives within the city to improve residents’ access to information and enhance communication between local officials and residents. The survey was followed by a series of community workshops in the fall of 2008 that offered residents the opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns about the future of their community. In the winter of 2009, the planning staff combined the results of the survey and the feedback from the workshops, to create the 2008 Community Vision Report. This report served as the basis of the comprehensive plan update process. Each element in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan begins with a description from the 2008 Community Vision Report that relates to the element and an outline on how the element promotes a principle of Smart Growth and/or a State planning vision. “

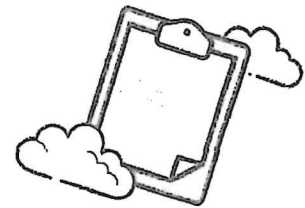
As a basis for developing Frederick County’s 2019 Livable Frederick Master Plan: “The LFMP is based on the ideas of many Frederick County residents, sharing their thoughts by responding to a survey that resulted in more than 15,000 comments about the county’s future.”

- The final 2023 Master Plan should be concurred on and signed by the town executive, documenting executive branch approval of the plan: its strategic vision, goals and strategies, overall content and assigned zoning of properties.
- Chapter 3, Natural Resources (or other appropriate chapter) must discuss the elevated PFAS contamination across our water wells and stations, the impact of this contamination on future land use planning and adequacy of public facilities, and a strategy for treatment to ensure public health and safety of our citizens.
- The Planning Commission should dedicate a working session (if not already done so) to come up with your version of overall mission and vision statements for the town relative to land use, development, and sustainability of these and our public facilities. This is key to arriving at the details of the plan.
- The Planning Commission may determine that an outside resource would be of benefit in assisting with the writing and production of the document. I believe this could be helpful, and if the Commission requested it, I would support funding for this in our upcoming budget cycle.
- The Master Plan is not to be used as a “door stop,” but rather as a touchstone and principal reference for guiding and prioritizing land use, zoning, annexation, and investment decisions. And it can and should be used by the citizens to judge if elected officials are following it. The plan (or I recommend the creation of a “brochure-style” executive summary highlighting key goals and strategies) should be at the tableside of every Council Member when deliberating and voting on land use planning and investment related issues. It should be reviewed at least semi-annually for monitoring progress toward stated goals and implementation strategies. As an example, consider this same emphasis within the Myersville 2020 Comprehensive Plan, with key text bolded and underlined as an emphasis: *“A Comprehensive Plan is valuable to Town staff, the Town Planning Commission, the elected officials, and the citizens. Town staff and the Planning Commission use the Plan to evaluate land use proposals, make recommendations and to advise property owners about appropriate areas for development. **Elected officials use the plan to make decisions, which are consistent with an adopted course of action and to make progress on issues, which are identified within the Plan. The citizens can use the Plan to judge the decisions of the planners and elected officials and to gauge the progress made in areas of concern.**”*

the town of



The Town Survey Results are In!



Michael G. Dixon
 Stephen L. Domotor
 Matthew McDonough
 Marc Mignogna
 Michael O'Brien
 Wendy Rimbey, Chair

While I was proud to be chairman of our original 2007 survey, this survey met and greatly exceeded data analysis from that survey. Yes, we improved! Several pending issues can now be addressed as noted by you our citizens. Our plan is to perform this detailed survey every 10 years to also assist with Master Planning updates due on a 10 year basis. It's important for all commission members and town leadership to read and use the survey results when making recommendations and decisions for the Town and the community we serve. The Town Council and I are proud and appreciate this outreach."

See more of Town of Mount Airy on Facebook



The 2023 Master Plan is Underway!

And YOUR input from the
Town Survey will be used
to create it!

**JOIN THE
ZOOM WEBINARS
THE 1ST
THURSDAY OF
EVERY MONTH
AT 6:00 PM**

If you would like
your property
considered for re-
zoning, email
2023masterplan@
mountairymd.gov

TOWN OF MOUNT AIRY, MARYLAND

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*"The opportunity for all of the town's
stakeholders to collaborate on a unified vision
for the future of the town is as important and
valuable as the changes prescribed by the
Comprehensive Master Plan itself."*

Excerpt from the Comprehensive Master Plan, 2013

Town staff are working on the new Town of Mount Airy Master Plan -2023 using the Growth Development Task Force distributed last year.

Town Survey Results will be used as a framework to build Mount Airy's future!

Thank you for the tremendous response we received from the survey!

[Click to View the 2013 Master Plan](#)

FROM: Executive Summary, Town of Mount Airy 2020 Community Survey Report, November 2020.

“Residential Growth and Views on the Need for Affordable Housing. When asked, “Which of the following affordable housing options would you support being expanded in Mount Airy,” respondents clearly selected *I do not support any additional affordable housing options* as their top choice. In addition, those that selected this option did so strongly, ranking it #1 as their most desired option 88% of the time. This view is reinforced by results from earlier questions in which lack of affordable housing, and existing level and pace of residential growth were the top two topics *not being an issue or needing any action*. Respondent choices, in rank order, were: (1) no additional affordable housing needed; (2) single family homes; (3) townhouses; (4) condominiums, and (5) apartment complexes. These results are nearly identical to those from the 2007 Survey.”



John Breeding, Director of Planning, will be inviting commission members to each Masterplan Workshop Session the 1st Thursday of every month at 6:00 PM. Currently all meetings are virtual.

The public is invited to attend in listen-only mode. Meetings will also be live on the [Town's Facebook page](#).

Commission members only may comment at the meetings.

If you are interested in joining a commission, please [email Mayor Patrick Rockinberg](#).

To see the current list of vacancies, visit the [Commission Vacancies webpage](#).

You are invited to a Zoom webinar.

Topic: 2023 Master Plan Work Session

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83634078127?pwd=b2VoWExyT1BoK3NnaGE0OTJBWFpGZz09>

Webinar ID: 836 3407 8127

Passcode: 946583

International numbers available:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/u/ktBkOAIPz>

Related 2023 Masterplan Workshop

Calendar

FROM: Livable Frederick Master Plan, September 2019, Frederick County, MD.

“A Policy-Focused Plan -

Comprehensive plans can address two aspects of planning: policy and capacity. Policy represents the values and ideas behind concrete actions and guides decision-makers in the day-to-day operation of a business, government, or other organization. Capacity deals with the finite ability of natural and artificial systems to absorb growth and the subsequent need to manage the supply and demand of roads, community facilities, watersheds, and wastewater treatment facilities. Both aspects are vitally important, but plans that focus on policy rather than capacity assessments are well-suited to implementing a community’s aspirations. Therefore, the important challenge addressed by the LFMP is not solely one of finding new land to designate for development, but primarily one of taking a step back, gaining some perspective, and re-evaluating the aspirations and intentions that drive how we will shape Frederick County.”

AND...

“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.”

