

Downtown

Introduction

Downtown Hagerstown is the institutional and cultural heart of Washington County, the Long-Range Growth Area, and the surrounding tri-state region. This chapter addresses the downtown's role and establishes policies to strengthen the downtown. The goals, issues, policies, and actions in this chapter of *visionHagerstown 2035* supplement the issues, goals, policies, and actions of the 2014 Community's City Center Plan.

Goals

1. Reinforce downtown Hagerstown's role as the region's government, economic, educational, institutional, and cultural center.
2. Enlarge the city's share of regional retail and tourist revenue by concentrating specialized businesses and cultural amenities in the downtown.
3. Encourage a greater level of income diversity among residents choosing to live downtown by exploring opportunities for middle- and upper-income housing to balance the lower income base.
4. Renovate downtown buildings to make them more attractive for users.

Issues Addressed by this Element

1. Sustaining the momentum for long-term downtown revitalization.
2. Downtown's limited share of overall regional, retail and, tourist spending.
3. A limited supply of housing in downtown with amenities to attract a more diverse population.
4. A limited supply of Class-A office space that makes it difficult for downtown to compete within the regional market.

Downtown Boundaries

VisionHagerstown 2035 defines the Downtown as shown below in Figure 6-1 (also in Map 6-1).



Downtown Then

The city initially developed in the early 19th century as a crossroads town for the surrounding agricultural community. In the late 19th and early 20th century, Downtown Hagerstown redeveloped as the heart of a mighty economic engine, as the city became a railroad hub which drew industries and additional commerce to the downtown area. Residential housing grew exponentially from the late 19th century to the early 20th century to keep pace with the demand for employment in the city's booming economy.



Public Square, circa 1900

During this time downtown was the home of many retail establishments, including a number of department stores, as well as hotels and restaurants.

Suburbanization trends beginning in the mid-20th century witnessed a great deal of development and relocation of investment dollars away from the downtown and Hagerstown, which depleted the vitality of the city. An indicator of this trend is the fact that the City's population increased by only 1%

between 1950 and 2000, while the suburban fringe around Hagerstown quadrupled in population in the same time period.

Downtown Now

Despite these economic struggles for the city, the downtown still contains a wealth of historic architecture and community assets surrounded by a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere. Of the 525 buildings located in downtown, 43% are commercial or mixed-use, 50% are residential (currently there are approximately 1,400 habitable dwelling units), 6% are public or private institutions, and less than 2% are industrial.

Because Hagerstown is the county seat, the City Center maintains a sizeable share of government offices and government-related services. In 2012 there were 3,293 employees working in the City Center with 35% of them in public administration and 21% in professional services.

The downtown area contains the most significant concentration of arts, culture, education, and entertainment facilities in the region, being home to the Maryland Theatre, Maryland Symphony Orchestra, University System of Maryland Center at Hagerstown (USMH), Barbara Ingram School for the Arts (BISFA), Washington County Arts Council, and the Fletcher Branch of the Washington County Free Library. Additionally, the downtown hosts many popular special events, including the Western Maryland Blues Fest and Augustoberfest (Hagerstown's German heritage festival).



View of Downtown from Potomac Towers

The City, its downtown partners, and private sector investors have been engaged in much positive activity over the past ten years to make the downtown more vital. This investment activity over the past decade resulted in \$71.8 million of public and private investment in capital projects completed and \$7.57 million under construction by the end of 2013. Significant projects during this period include the University System of Maryland Center at Hagerstown (\$13.5 million), Barbara Ingram School of Fine Arts (\$10.6 million), Washington County Free Library Central Branch and Western Maryland Library (\$22 million), and private building renovations through the Partners in Economic Progress (PEP) Program (\$9.3 million in completed projects and \$11 million in projects underway).

The entire commercial core is both a National Register and locally-designated historic district. Much of the downtown contains Main Street Maryland designation and is encompassed by a State-recognized Arts & Entertainment District.

Plans Supporting Downtown

The Community's City Center Plan

In 2013 the City hired Urban Partners, an economic and planning consultant, to do an economic analysis of the City's 2012 Sustainable Community Action Plan and identify catalytic projects to help spur downtown redevelopment.

The Plan and catalytic project list was developed and identified with the help of the following: extensive reviews of past City reports and plans for downtown; interviews of key stakeholders within the community; public outreach that included input from nine focus groups, a housing survey that yielded over 400 responses, and a community input meeting; and a market and physical analysis of the downtown.

The final report became the Community's City Center Plan, which is a 10-year roadmap for eight catalyst projects that will spur development in downtown Hagerstown. The Plan includes detailed annual steps for making these concepts a reality. It creates at least 875 new permanent jobs and bringing \$125 million in new investment downtown. This is a public-private partnership, where private developers invest 75% of the cost while funding from all levels of government will cover the rest. The City's consultants, Urban Partners, conclude that all of these projects are feasible based on their economic analysis.

The Community's City Center Plan final report was presented to and endorsed by the Mayor & Council in June 2014 with the following catalytic projects:

- 1 - A Strategy for Office Development & Recruitment
- 2 - Maryland Theatre Expansion Project
- 3 - USMH Expansion Support Strategy
- 4 - Hotel / Conference Center & Heritage Center / Commemorative Park
- 5 - Linking City Park and A&E District with Trail and New Housing
- 6 - Expanded Downtown Arts/Events Programming Strategy
- 7 - Expanded Operations of the City Farmers Market
- 8 - Expanded & Targeted Home Ownership Support Strategies

Along with these catalytic projects, the plan presented specific action steps, including funding options, over the next 10 years. The action steps are within the scope and implementation and timeframe of *visionHagerstown 2035*.



Downtown Office Building Concept
Source: Bushey Feight Morin
Architects

Other Plans

Plans preceding the Community's City Center Plan that have supported downtown revitalization include the Downtown Enhancement Plan, 2008 Comprehensive Plan, Strategic Plan for the City Center Plan, Downtown Parking Management Plan, and the Sustainable Community Plan. These plans are discussed in more detail in Planning History section in Chapter 1, Introduction of *visionHagerstown 2035*.

Downtown Land Use and Design Principles

The principle land-use issues in this area will continue to be the following:

- Calm traffic and enhance pedestrian environment.
- The promotion of residential revitalization.
- Retention of existing and recruitment of new enterprises that support the downtown vision.
- Development of the catalytic projects identified in the Community's City Center Plan.
- The identification and attraction of additional economic activity. A good overall strategy in downtown revitalization is to upgrade the business environment, which will have a positive effect on neighborhoods surrounding downtown.
- The development of infill sites and the adaptive reuse of large vacant or underutilized parcels.
- Monitor increases in downtown parking demand as revitalization occurs, and implement recommendations of the Downtown Parking Management Plan

A full range of physical improvements should continue to be made on an incremental basis to the downtown area, in accordance with previous plans. These should be aimed at improving the downtown's image and attractiveness through traffic calming measures, gateway and pedestrian enhancements, and improvement of public parking facilities. The City should support and encourage activities that bring people downtown, such as appropriate retail, dining, and office/employment facilities (see the Chapter 3, Economic Development), as well as additional educational facilities and cultural/arts and entertainment venues in the Arts and Entertainment District.

The quality of the downtown housing stock must be improved. Additional downtown residences should be encouraged: rehabilitated townhouses, conversions of larger non-residential buildings to apartments and/or condominiums, upgrades to existing vacant upper floor apartments, and creation of mixed-use buildings with apartments over retail and service uses. As recommended in the Community's City Center Plan, opportunities for middle- and upper-income housing should be explored to balance the existing lower-income housing base. Opportunities to create more artist housing in the Arts and Entertainment District should be continued.

A prime task for the downtown is to establish and maintain an attractive image. This includes the actions discussed above, additional landscaping and streetscaping, the development of distinct

downtown gateways—especially on Route 40—and continued restoration of historic buildings and spaces. Uniform signage throughout the downtown would also improve the downtown’s appearance (see Action 8-5).

Downtown Revitalization Program Efforts

Downtown has made positive strides in the recent past, and continuation of a more focused approach will strengthen revitalization efforts. Hagerstown has had a number of organizations with a mission to renew the downtown, but better coordination of these efforts is necessary to achieve the desired result.

Main Street Maryland Program

In 2014 the City received Main Street Designation from the State of Maryland. The Main Street designation is a nationally recognized symbol that a community seeks to strengthen its downtown and that grassroots promotion and events, unique business incentive programs, and community pride are important to the downtown’s vitality. One such example is the Downtown Movement’s Pop-Up-Shops Weekends, which temporarily recruits businesses into vacant storefronts in order to generate interest and activity in downtown.

Main Street Maryland has five focus areas: design, organization, promotion, economic restructuring, and clean, safe, and green. The Program requires the formation of Main Street Work Groups, whose purpose is to work on those five focus areas – this is accomplished through designing and providing technical and financial assistance, raising funds for activities and administration, developing marketing strategies and enhancing the Main Street district’s image, and developing business retention, expansion, and recruitment strategies. Having a Main Street Program working in these areas also helps to instill investor confidence in the downtown.

Initial revitalization projects should include making “quality of shopping experience” improvements and developing a marketing plan for downtown. The perceived “parking problem” can be solved through promotion and other programs that educate customers about the availability of plentiful parking. The perception and reality of crime can be addressed with programs like safety ambassadors, bike patrols, and town watch groups. Because the presence of more people on the street deters crime and makes people feel safer, the City needs to promote the existing stores and attract new ones. From a marketing standpoint, special promotions and way-finding signage can be created to increase market penetration (selling more to current customers) and to improve market development (cultivating new customers already in the region). As more customers shop downtown, additional stores need to be added to broaden the variety of stores in a cluster. Recruitment promotions can include special lease rates for targeted businesses, direct mailing about the new downtown, and receptions for prospective merchants.

Parking

The downtown has a large supply of on- and off-street parking spaces to serve the needs of downtown residents and patrons. In the business district area of the downtown, the supply is in

a combination of types: 379 on-street metered spaces, 1,498 publicly available off-street spaces (metered, permitted, or ticketed), and 2,647 privately controlled spaces (for their own users). On the residential fringes of the business district area, the parking supply is in the form of metered and unmetered on-street spaces and formal and informal street- and alley-access spaces. A recent parking study found that only 48% of the downtown business district parking supply is occupied at peak time¹.

As the economy of downtown improves, the demand for parking will increase. New parking facilities should be developed in the center of city blocks to eliminate interference with the street facades. The City's existing Central Parking Lot and new Arts & Entertainment District parking deck are examples of such facilities. The 2012 Downtown Parking Management Plan concluded that, assuming a 25% increase in parking demand, the southwestern and southeastern portions of the downtown would experience deficits in available parking. The Parking Management Plan also recommended exploring possible locations for structured parking in these areas as commitments are made for redevelopment.

Housing

The City's 2013 State of the Downtown Report revealed that there are approximately 1,400 units in downtown that can be occupied. About 11% of the units are vacant and 43% of occupied units are subsidized in some manner for low-income residents. The average median family household income in the three census tracts which contain the downtown is \$31,331. (Per the Census, the average median household income in census tracts 4, 5 and 7 in the 2013 5 year estimate was \$25,012.) On average, 74% of the occupied units in the three census tracts which contain downtown



200 Block of South Potomac Street

are rental units. The average median rent in the three census tracts which contain the downtown is \$669. In the past 10 years, four downtown development projects have created upscale housing units, including 27 condominiums in an old school, an owner-occupied unit over the owners' restaurant, a penthouse apartment in the A&E District, and four newly created artist lofts.

To attract and support additional activity, downtown needs to have a more income-diverse population. Strategies to attract an income-diversified population include investing in additional amenities downtown and encouraging the redevelopment of existing space into quality housing. The 2014 Community's City Center Plan recommended developing public-private partnerships with USMH and private property owners to develop housing for students in existing downtown buildings. In spring 2015, the City and USMH formed a partnership with a private developer to renovate the upper floors of a mixed-use building for 4 student housing units - they were completed and occupied in August 2015. The 2014 Community's City Center Plan also examined

¹ Source: 2013 State of the Downtown Report, City of Hagerstown

the greater downtown area of homeownership patterns and of recent pricing for homes being purchased by owner-occupants found several compact areas for focus of this effort: 1) the 100 and 200 blocks of S. Prospect and Summit; 2) the 200 block of S. Potomac; the unit, 100, and 200 blocks of E. Antietam; the 100 block of S. Mulberry; and King St.; and 3) the area bounded by Cramer Alley, N. Mulberry, and East Ave. The Community City Center Plan's recommendations for these areas included aggressively marketing the City's incentive programs, acquisition and rehabilitation of problem properties, and increased nuisance enforcement activities. These areas are shown as "Targeted Area for Homeownership Strategies" on Map 7-2.

Tourism Promotion

Tourism is an important economic activity that can support both general economic prosperity and the renewal of the downtown area. Currently Hagerstown's share of tourism for Washington County is limited, as evidenced by the city's share of hotel/motel tax revenue (See Chapter 3, Economic Development element).

The State of Maryland has emphasized the importance of tourism in the State's economy by instituting the Maryland Scenic Byways Program in 1988 and the Maryland Heritage Area Program in 1995. These programs encourages communities to identify, protect, and promote their unique heritage and to capitalize on that heritage through economic development tourism initiatives. State funds and assistance will be made available for interpretive and infrastructure improvements in State-approved heritage areas.

In the winter of 2005-2006, the jurisdictions in the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area (HCWHA) in Washington, Frederick, and Carroll Counties endorsed submission of a Management Plan for certification by the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority. The Management Plan for the three-county heritage area outlines the heritage resources in the three counties and recommended interpretative programs, coordination strategies for program providers, conservation strategies for resources, and economic development strategies for intended Target Investment Zones. With certification of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area by the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority in 2006, State heritage tax credits and special funding programs are available to implement the heritage tourism projects and strategies identified in the Management Plan. The HCWHA Management Plan was amended in 2015 to modify the terms of the management entity for the HCWHA, shifting away from the Tourism Council of Frederick County, Inc. to the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Areas Inc., a new 501(c)3 non-profit corporation, that will be supported by the three Counties.

VisionHagerstown 2035 adopts the boundaries established in the Maryland Civil War Heritage Area Management Plan for the Heritage Area in Washington County, which incorporates the City of Hagerstown, and for the Target Investment Zone in Hagerstown, which overlays a portion of the downtown (See Figure 6-2). The Comprehensive Plan adopts the following revitalization strategies for the Target Investment Zone (TIZ) which are identified in the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area Management Plan:

- **Strategy #1 - Focus Revitalization on the Square and its immediate surrounding area.** Encourage outdoor dining and other street-level activity in the Public Square. The park-like property adjacent to The Plum could be utilized for outdoor seating for diners, bench seating for pedestrians, interpretive panels on Hagerstown history, or other uses that could draw people into the space. Create pocket parks where appropriate, such as University Plaza on W. Washington Street. Exhibit space for heritage exhibits could be incorporated into the downtown's core area to bring greater activity to the Square. Vacant storefronts could be used to display Civil War Heritage Area exhibits.
- **Strategy #2 - Bring life to downtown after business hours.** Special evening hours or events could begin to draw evening crowds downtown and could offer businesses a growing base of evening customers to facilitate their staying open later. Encouraging market-rate housing and accommodations would provide a captive audience for downtown restaurants and other businesses after hours. Expanded offerings at the Maryland Theatre could also draw greater crowds of patrons downtown. This is also consistent with the following two catalyst projects recommended in the Community's City Center Plan: #2 - Expanding and improving The Maryland Theatre facility, and grow from 150 to 225 performance days per year, increasing the audience by 60,000 annually; and #6 - Leveraging resources to produce more frequent events and build upon atmosphere created by popular downtown events.
- **Strategy #3 - Encourage the creation of downtown accommodations.** The city currently lacks both a downtown hotel for visitors and a conference center. Visitors to Hagerstown must stay in hotels in the outskirts of the city, increasing the likelihood that they will eat and shop out of town as well. The city needs a downtown hotel—a small inn and/or a hotel with enough conference space to support small regional and State meetings. It should provide incentives for the development of downtown hotel facilities, for example, by rehabilitation and upgrading of older facilities. However, for a downtown hotel to be



Figure 6-2: Hagerstown Target Investment Zone

economically viable, the City would need to promote and create additional downtown tourism destinations. This is consistent with Catalyst Project #4 in the Community's City Center Plan, which calls for the construction of a 200-room "upper upscale" hotel with an adjacent 20,000 square foot conference center as well as development of Civil War Heritage Center and Commemorative Park on the former hospital site. In addition, emphasis should be placed on development on more bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) in downtown and the neighborhoods surrounding downtown.

- **Strategy #4 – Focus on education, history, arts, and culture.** A genealogy center, museums, and historical markers program are all recommended in downtown Hagerstown planning documents. When coupled with existing projects, such as the Library, USMH, and the Barbara Ingram School for the Arts, there is an opportunity to create a special identity for downtown. With these uses and some specialty retail, such as antiques, the downtown could be a major draw for the heritage area. It is important to highlight the arts portion of downtown with streetscape elements (banners), sculpture, and murals that announce the arts district. As of 2016 construction is underway of The Hagerstown Cultural Trail (Catalyst Project #5 from Community's City Center Plan) – a multi-use path that will connect the Arts & Entertainment District to City Park and the Museum of Fine Arts and will also have art amenities along its path. The development of a Civil War Heritage and Commemorative Park (Catalyst Project #4 of Community's City Center Plan) on the former hospital site will also contribute to making downtown a focal point for history and culture.

In 2001, the State of Maryland designated the multiple block area around Public Square as a *Smart Growth Arts & Entertainment District*. The intent of this program is to create and nurture an environment attractive to artists, arts and entertainment enterprises, shoppers, cultural patrons, and visitors. The program encourages this activity by providing certain tax incentives for eligible artists, development projects, and arts and entertainment enterprises. The School for the Arts are downtown development projects that are consistent with the goals of this program, and would help to establish the district as a destination. Other eligible enterprises that would contribute to establishing an arts and entertainment destination in the downtown include art galleries, music and art stores, recording studios, dance companies, orchestras, theaters, etc.

The Historic National Road Scenic Byway, the nation's first federally funded interstate highway, passes through the downtown along ALT 40 and US 40 and the historic resources along the byway have significant impact on heritage tourism. The City has implemented a variety of strategies to interpret and protect the resources in the downtown through local historic district designation and through implementation of goals in the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area Management Plan.

The Hagerstown community has worked to strengthen the arts and education in downtown. In 2009 Washington County Public Schools (WCPS) opened the Barbara Ingram School of the Arts (BISFA), a college preparatory high school that teaches pre-professional training in the arts. In

2013 the Washington County Arts Council relocated its office and art gallery to the heart of the A&E District on South Potomac Street. In 2012-2013 the City acquired a mixed-use building on North Potomac Street and rehabilitated the building for two ground-level retail spaces and artist housing on the upper two floors.

Downtown is also home to The University System of Maryland at Hagerstown (USMH), which offers numerous undergraduate and graduate programs from various universities in the University of Maryland system. USMH opened its campus in 2005 and is located in the historic Baldwin complex at 32 West Washington Street with additional class space in 60 West Washington Street. In 2015, the total enrollment was 549, 16 percent increase from previous year. As USMH continues to expand, more classroom space will be needed in existing nearby buildings.

Downtown Implementation Actions

- Action 6-1.** Support the implementation of the catalyst projects identified in the Community's City Center Plan, including completion of the Hagerstown Cultural Trail to W. Washington Street and completion of the Urban Improvement Project (expansions of Maryland Theatre, Board of Education, and University System of Maryland Center at Hagerstown).
- Action 6-2.** Encourage the continued location and expansion of all levels of government and public uses in the downtown.
- Action 6-3.** Encourage revitalized and new education, professional offices, and downtown housing development with a diversity of price ranges.
- Action 6-4.** Continue the City's Main Street Program.
- Action 6-5.** Strengthen downtown's role as a regional tourist destination by implementing the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area recommendations for new tourism support facilities, interpretive programs, infrastructure enhancements, and marketing endeavors.

