Chapter 1 Introduction

The 2008 *Crisfield Strategic Revitalization Plan* (SRP) is a document that examines revitalization, economics, and policy and regulatory strategies for improving the City of Crisfield, Maryland. The Plan was guided by a steering committee, local elected and appointed officials, State and local government agencies, and the public.

GOALS & MISSION STATEMENT

Community goals have been articulated through the SRP planning process. These include the following:

1. Revitalizing Crisfield for sustainable long-term growth;
2. Preserving and strengthening existing City assets;
3. Enhancing economic development by improving opportunities for residents;
4. Creating housing that is affordable, consistent, and integrated with existing architectural designs;
5. Promoting infrastructure accommodations;
6. Proving public access to the waterfront, open spaces, and parks; and
7. Protecting the environment and land.

MISSION STATEMENT

"To make Crisfield a strong economic entity, support reasonable business growth and employment opportunities, and foster the historic heritage of the City of Crisfield."

OVERVIEW

As shown in Figure 1, the City of Crisfield is located in Somerset County, Maryland on the lower Eastern Shore. The SRP analyzes the issues facing Crisfield and describes strategies for addressing key topics of concern to the City. These are broadly characterized in the SRP as economic development; urban design; and public policy. The reasons for developing the SRP include the following:

- City population is decreasing;
- Chesapeake Bay fishing industries are disappearing;
- Employment in other traditional industries, such as manufacturing, is declining;
- High poverty and unemployment rates and low median household income;
- Loss of historic and cultural resources;
- Lack of affordable housing and declining housing conditions;
- New development displacing traditional buildings and structures and "walling off" the waterfront;
- Deteriorating infrastructure; and
- Unaddressed environmental challenges such as flooding and the loss of barrier islands.

FIGURE 1: LOCATION MAP

PURPOSE

The SRP planning process develops a public consensus on ways to improve the quality of life for City residents, without losing Crisfield's essential identity. The intended outcome is to adopt a publically sanctioned revitalization program that, among other things, guides the use of the City's limited resources. The SRP is a practical and realistic assessment of the issues, opportunities, and strategies for Crisfield.

The purpose of the SRP is to:

1. Develop public consensus on a path forward for revitalization by providing specific strategies to guide future growth;
2. Create an official and publicly sanctioned community revitalization program that provides for the protection and appropriate use of the City's limited resources;
3. Guide sound investment in community facilities and services; and
4. Implement the recommendations of the recently adopted *Crisfield Comprehensive Plan* and SRP.

"Appendix A: Strategic Revitalization Tasks" outlines goals, objectives, and recommended implementation strategies for 16 specific tasks that City officials and the SRP Steering Committee defined in their request for proposals. The detailed information contained in Appendix A was used to develop the SRP. Analysis focuses on the following subjects:

- City-owned properties, such as Somers Cove Motel;
- Public access, use, and enjoyment of the City's waterfront;
- Urban design and streetscape improvements for Uptown and Downtown Crisfield;
- Economic strategies for enhancing the mix of uses in the Uptown and Downtown Districts and recommendations to support existing industries and enhance the tourist economy;
- Environmental protection and enhancement;
- Protection and/or enhancement of key historic, cultural and heritage resources;
- Uses for land adjacent to the Housing Authority Land and streetscape;
- Landscape and building improvements to enhance the character and quality of units and grounds on lands owned by the Housing Authority;
- Infill and redevelopment strategies for vacant lots;
- Affordable and workforce housing;
- Retention, maintenance and enhancement of City port facilities to support the lives and livelihoods of both City and Island residents and businesses;
- Park system, green space, recreation and other community facilities;
- Motorized and non-motorized transportation systems including parking, pedestrian and bike systems and public transportation; and
- Changes to existing Zoning and related development management regulations (e.g. subdivision regulations) to implement the strategies and recommendations identified in the SRP.

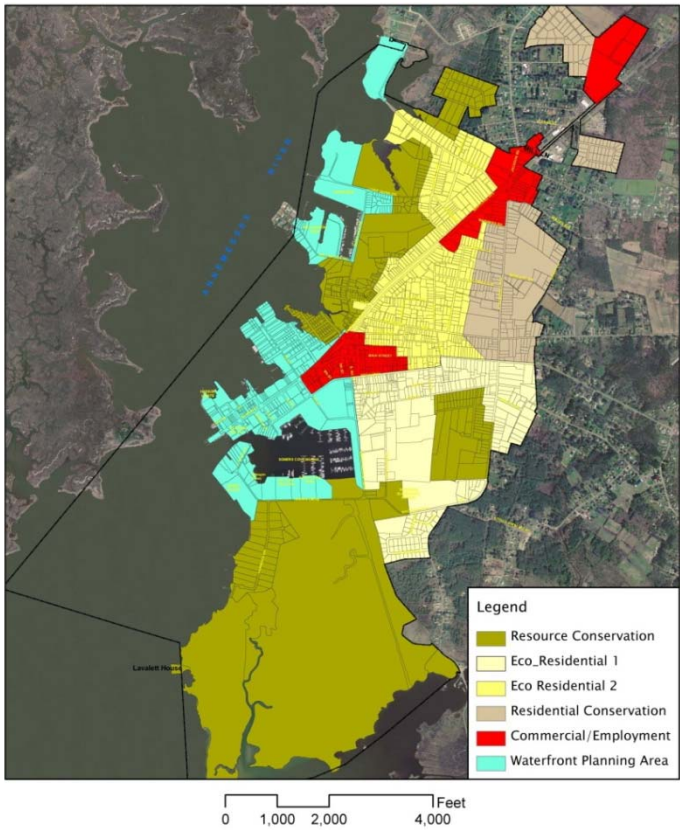
The *Crisfield Strategic Revitalization Plan* highlights four broad initiatives to spur the revitalization of the City through economic development and physical design.

Although, the intent of the SRP is to provide recommendations by defined topic areas, analysis by necessity takes into account the relationships affecting all aspects of the City. These include urban design, the Crisfield economy, and the role of public policy. Only by influencing outcomes in these three areas will the City be able to achieve its overall long term development and revitalization objectives for the benefit of its citizens.

THE SRP AS A CONTINUATION OF PLANNING EFFORTS

Crisfield's SRP is a continuation of the City's planning program. Recommendations from the recently adopted 2006 *City of Crisfield Comprehensive Plan* (the Comprehensive Plan) provide an important framework for the SRP. Policies first articulated in the Comprehensive Plan and reflected in the SRP include the following:

FIGURE 2: CRISFIELD LAND USE PLAN



- Crisfield's shoreline is a public resource and should be managed to benefit City residents.
- Extensive and coordinated physical and visual access to the water's edge should be provided.
- The "Waterfront Planning Area," as shown in the Comprehensive Plan, is recognized as a catalyst for economic development and the effective urban revitalization of the City.
- Water dependent uses should be given the highest priority in locating and expanding and these areas should be protected from incompatible non-water-related uses.
- Suitable sites for developing non-water related uses, including housing, should be identified.

As shown in Figure 2, the "Waterfront Planning Area" identified in the Comprehensive Plan's Land Use Plan, is a primary SRP focus area. According the Comprehensive Plan, "the waterfront planning area should be the subject of detailed planning as well as urban and environmental

design."[1] This includes improved design of standards for environmental management such as stormwater management, shoreline erosion, and flood control.

In regards to the physical design of the City, the Comprehensive Plan supports architectural design standards for new buildings. The Comprehensive Plan also emphasizes the following:

- Supporting the identification and preservation of scenic vistas;
- Providing recreational elements that provide for broad public access to parklands along the waterfront, including a public walkway plan;
- Linking the marina to the central business district (CBD) and the heart of the downtown area; and
- Developing a plan for the marina area that contains recommendations for broad public access to and throughout the site.

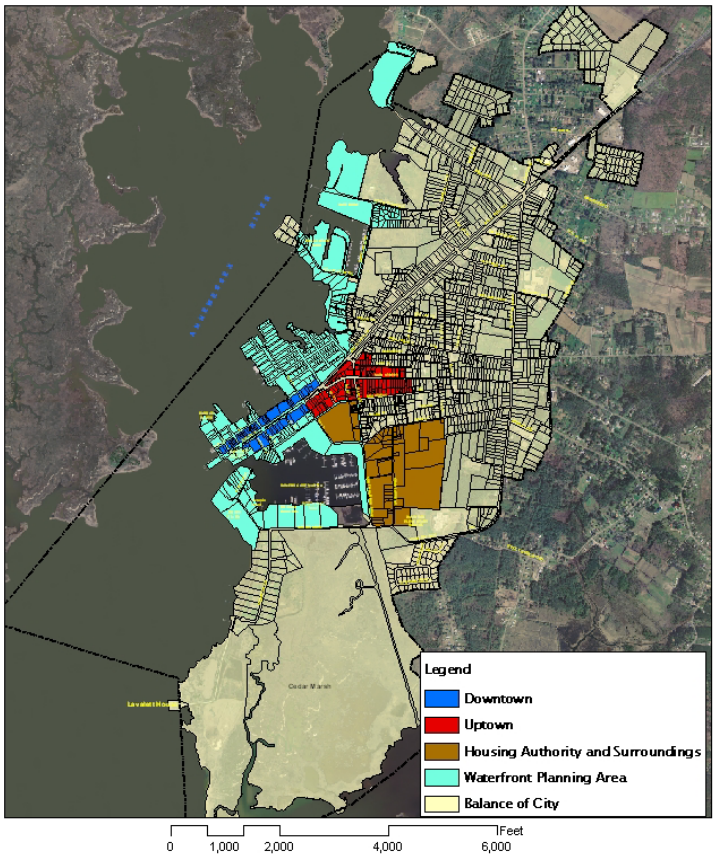
The Crisfield Study Area

Important geographic locations within the overall "Waterfront Planning Area" include the Downtown and Uptown business districts, the Public Housing Authority property, the Small Boat Harbor, the 7th and Main Street waterfront area, and McCready Hospital.

As shown in Figure 3, primarily, the SRP focuses on key areas of the City for economic development and revitalization. This includes the "Waterfront Planning Area" as well as the Downtown and Uptown business districts.

The SRP also focuses on the Somers Cove Marina and the Public Housing Authority holdings and their surroundings. These

FIGURE 3: CRISFIELD STUDY AREA



[1] *Comprehensive Plan: City of Crisfield, Maryland*; Jukubiak & Associates in coordination with the Crisfield Planning Commission and Crisfield Mayor and City Council; 2006, pg. 32.

were identified by the City as areas of interest. In some instances, recommendations affect the entire City including vacant land for infill and redevelopment strategies.

THE SRP PUBLIC PROCESS

The SRP was shaped by an extensive public participation effort, outlined in Appendix E of this document. A citizen advisory committee, the SRP Steering Committee (SRPC), was appointed by the Mayor and Council of Crisfield. The SRPC, consisting of concerned citizens and officials from within and outside the City, guided work on the SRP throughout the planning process.

Beginning in the summer of 2007, a series of public workshops were held by the City. These workshops involved the citizens of Crisfield and surrounding areas in the consideration of issues, opportunities, and implementation strategies. In addition, numerous key stakeholders were interviewed in order to get a more focused exploration of specific identified issues and opportunities related to the SRP's development. Interviewees included property owners, business people, civic organizations, developers, members of other special interest groups, Public Housing Authority representatives, and County and State officials.

Public Concerns for the City's Future

Primarily, citizen concerns emphasized the need for economic growth. In fact, many of the SRP issues such as jobs, real estate development, costs of providing services, etc. are essentially about Crisfield's economy or have a strong economic component. With these public concerns in mind, the SRP's strategies focus on ways to preserve and attract jobs, make Crisfield a year-round place, improve the retail environment, expand the local tourism economy, and make the best use of real estate.

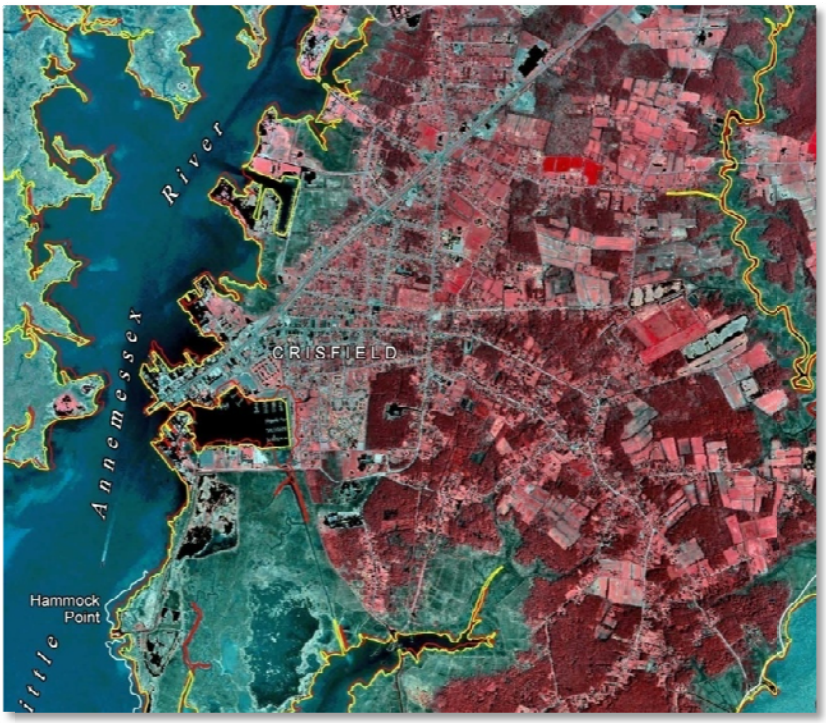
SRPC concerns centered on land use, design, infrastructure, and public policy issues. The committee expressed a heartfelt concern for how the City's built and natural environment will be used and sustained for economic development, while maintaining quality of life for residents. Strategic components of the built environment include existing water dependent facilities such as Somers Cove Marina, the qualities of buildings and the public realm, the mix of uses and services offered, and other quality of life factors.

Heritage & Natural Resources

No less important than its physical features is Crisfield's culture and heritage. This is reflected in the people and the place that is Crisfield. The City and its people are linked to a unique history that defines present public attitudes and perspectives regarding quality of life. Heritage resources in the City of Crisfield, including historic sites, structures, and natural areas, represent links to the past and provide an identity for the City and its residents. These resources are worthy of preservation, particularly Crisfield's landmark sites and structures. In regards to urban design, Crisfield's character and heritage can influence new and remodeled storefronts, land utilization, and streetscapes, where appropriate.

The City of Crisfield is defined by the Chesapeake Bay, the Little Annemessex River, and surrounding tidal marshes. Physiological changes affecting the Bay are also changing the City. As shown in Figure 4, issues like flooding and sea level rise are redefining the shoreline. Environmental changes threaten the existence of offshore islands, which buffer the City from adverse weather.

FIGURE 4: CHANGING SHORELINE



The Chesapeake Bay and its bounty, including finfish and shellfish, have defined Crisfield since its inception. The City's economy and livelihood depends on the protection of its environmental resources and natural features. Almost every aspect of Crisfield's environment presents challenges for the future.

The Impacts of New Development

Five and six story condominium buildings, placed at some of the most prominent waterfront locations in the City, represent a radical departure from the type, scale, and intensity of traditional waterfront uses that defined the City and its shoreline. A general decline in the seafood industry is partly to blame for this circumstance, along with demographic and market trends that are changing the economy of the Eastern Shore region.

In this regard, Crisfield has been marketed as a desirable and affordable second home resort community. These trends are reshaping "the look and feel" of the City based on a model for development seen in other resort communities like Ocean City. This model maximizes private enjoyment of the waterfront. Former seafood industry sites have been converted to mid-rise condominium units. The physical impact of this type of land conversion is most pronounced on the traditional views of the City from the water and from the City to the water.

The long term policy implications of the new Crisfield development trend are even more troubling. Mid-rise condo development in the City is unplanned growth. Essentially, it is growth not anticipated in the City's long range planning program. It is a dramatic change for which impacts have not been fully considered in advance.

Equally important, development that has occurred establishes precedents that create expectations for property owners of similarly situated properties. Any departure from these recent land use development precedents may impact the perceived value of waterfront land and be met with strong resistance. Yet, if the City is to capitalize on its built and natural assets for economic gain and public benefit, a sustainable program is required. This program will have direct implications for public policy and place greater limitations on how the land may be used in the future.

Considered together, all of these issues suggest strategies for the SRP that emphasize the conservation of the natural and built environment as well as sustainable, strategic, and long term planning for economic benefit and the general well-being of the City. Although, it is important to note that more full-time residents are needed in Crisfield therefore development offers an economic opportunity, as well as a challenge for integrating new citizens in the life of Crisfield.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CRISFIELD STRATEGIC REVITALIZATION PLAN

The SRP begins with a discussion of Crisfield's economy and local, regional, and national economic trends. The economic development of the City parallels its physical development and redevelopment. The economic development chapter of the SRP provides practical and realistic goals and solutions to provide jobs and build on opportunities for the City.

Economic development is followed by a discussion of urban design techniques. Urban design is important to the City's revitalization efforts and long-term sustainability. Urban design addresses place making principles and their relevance and application to the City's development and redevelopment. The Master Concept Plan, included in the SRP, provides a conceptual overview of the urban design recommendations and their application to specific areas and individual properties.

The public policy section discusses the City government's role in implementing the SRP. This includes regulatory initiatives. Policy and regulatory actions are particularly important in the short-term because these strategies set the stage for the effective implementation of the SRP. Implementation strategies are discussed in the final chapter of the SRP and are defined as short-term and long-term actions. An implementation schedule and matrix is provided to assist the City of Crisfield with these critical initiatives. The full implementation of the SRP will likely take 30 years or longer.