THE 2008 CRISFIELD STRATEGIC REVITALIZATION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Peter Johnston & Associates (PJA), Thomas Point Associates (TPA), and John Moynahan Urban Design and Planning were hired in 2007 by the City of Crisfield to prepare the *Crisfield Strategic Revitalization Plan* (SRP). The Plan was guided by the SRP Steering Committee, local elected and appointed officials, State and local government agencies, and the public.

Reasons for developing the SRP are simple:

Crisfield's maritime and seafood heritage provide the City with a unique identity, unlike any other place in the State of Maryland.

- 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.

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 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.

PURPOSE

The SRP is a practical and realistic assessment of the issues, opportunities, and strategies for Crisfield. The purpose of the SRP is to recommend actions for implementing the recommendations of the recently adopted 2006 *Crisfield Comprehensive Plan* as well as the implementation strategies developed in the SRP.

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.

BACKGROUND

The SRP outlines goals, objectives, and recommended implementation strategies for 16 specific tasks (the SRP tasks) that City officials and the SRP Steering Committee defined in their request for consultant proposals (see Appendix A). These tasks include:

1) <u>Somers Cove Motel & City Infrastructure</u>

The City's objective for the Somers Cove Motel site should be to promote the highest and best use of the property, consistent with the other recommendations of the SRP. In this case, multi-family residential (condominiums) are considered the highest and best use.

Key strategies concerning City infrastructure focus primarily on water and sewer facilities. The SRP recommends that the City establish appropriate policies concerning water and sewer usage and allocation priorities, upgrade the "1936 sewer collector line" to increase sewer capacity, and investigate the feasibility of a new wastewater treatment plant at an inland location.

2) <u>Somers Cove Marina & Adjoining Lands</u>

The SRP demonstrates how the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) can become a contributing partner in the revitalization of the City. Recommendations include reviewing ways to improve this relationship during the update of the *Somers Cove Marina Master Facilities Plan*.

3) <u>Waterfront Areas & Viewshed Protection</u>

Historically, public access and interaction with the waterfront has been a basic component of everyday life for Crisfield residents. Recent development projects on the City's waterfront have dramatically changed its character and raised concerns for future public access and enjoyment of the waterfront. The SRP identifies important view corridors and recommends the City adopt an "official" public space and pedestrian system map and require developers to provide public space and pedestrian systems in accordance with the official map. In addition, the SRP recommends the City limit building heights in certain locations and create incentives for developers to provide public waterfront spaces (e.g., parks, plazas, waterfront trails, promenades).

4) Uptown & Downtown

Redeveloping Crisfield's Uptown and Downtown areas presents opportunities to influence the City's urban form in an appropriate and sustainable manner. The SRP recommends reinforcing the urban form in the Uptown by adopting appropriate design guidelines for infill and redevelopment and encouraging retention of the existing building character along the street. Redevelopment and infill in the Downtown district should be required to adhere to design guidelines that reflect the urban design principles recommended in the SRP.

5) Economic Development

The SRP envisions a "four-part solution," which is complex and will take 20 years or more to implement. SRP recommendations address strategies for expanding job opportunities, making Crisfield a "place" to live ensuring more full-time residents, redeveloping buildings and neighborhoods (the physical redevelopment of the City), and enhancing tourism.

6) Environmental Protection

Protecting sensitive environmental features in and around the City is critical to sustaining the existing quality of life for residents and visitors. Protecting these attributes is a key to the long term health of the City and its economy. The SRP recommends that in areas where infill and redevelopment are to be encouraged the City employ flexible development requirements consistent with the recommendations of the SRP. In environmentally sensitive areas, such as those noted in the *Crisfield Comprehensive Plan*, the City should establish flexible requirements that allow some use of property, while minimizing loss of natural resources and adverse impacts to the environment.

7) Zoning

The SRP recommends a number of important revisions to the existing City Zoning Code. These code revisions and other recommended actions are intended to ensure that whatever is built or redeveloped in designated areas is consistent with the land use and urban design recommendations of the SRP. Many of the zoning code revisions recommended are incentive based standards that allow for more intense development, where proposed projects closely follow the recommendations of the SRP.

8) Heritage Resources

Crisfield's remaining historic buildings and structures, along with its cultural trappings and folk practices, are character defining elements of the City and its residents. The SRP outlines strategies for the City to pursue to ensure that these critical resources are recognized as community assets and used as models for the design of new buildings and spaces.

9) Lands Adjoining the Public Housing Authority

The City believes that land on and near the waterfront and the Housing Authority property are potential underutilized assets. Forest and wetland areas located east of the Housing Authority property have significant environmental constraints. The challenge will be to find an appropriate balance between reasonable use of the property and protection of sensitive environmental features.

10) Utilization of Housing Authority Lands

The Crisfield Housing Authority (CHA) public housing project, built between the 1960s and the 1980s, provides much-needed subsidized housing for the local population. However, the CHA facilities are now old and in need of maintenance and modernization. The SRP recommends that the CHA undertake strategies to improve living conditions for existing residents while at the same time capitalizing on the redevelopment value of the CHA property.

11) Vacant Lots in the Municipal Boundary

A consistent theme throughout the SRP is that the City should encourage context sensitive infill and redevelopment on vacant and underutilized properties as a way of, among other things, increasing the inventory of affordable and workforce housing. New units located on vacant lots also can be used for units relocated as part of the redevelopment of the Crisfield Public Housing Authority property.

12) Affordable Housing

Addressing the affordable housing needs in the community will require rehabilitation of the existing housing stock, infill and redevelopment of vacant and underutilized properties, and taking full advantage of State and Federal assistance programs.

13) <u>Outlet Port to Smith, Janes, and Tangier Islands - City of Crisfield as the "Outlet Port" to the Islands</u>

The SRP recommends strategies designed to maintain and strengthen Crisfield's role as the outlet port to Smith, Janes, and Tangier Islands. In addition, the SRP recommends the City support the concept of ferry service to the City, when found economically feasible.

14) <u>Parks, Recreation, & Open Space</u>

The SRP recommends a green space concept that utilizes a system of parks, trails, open space, and public plazas to enhance the appeal of the City for tourists and residents alike and provide enhanced access to the waterfront.

15) <u>Streets, Parking, & Other Infrastructure</u>

The SRP recommends that the City's focus be on the development of safe and efficient transportation systems that serve motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists equally well. Problems of periodic flooding of streets need to be addressed. Local transit services should be considered. Pedestrian and bike trails should augment existing sidewalks and provide access throughout the City. Existing on-street parking is adequate and need only be reconfigured to improve streetscape appearance. Large, open parking lots (especially those facing streets) should be dissolved and dispersed via mid-block locations.

16) <u>Mapping Resources</u>

The SRP recommends that the City of Crisfield improve its mapping capabilities. This includes developing a Geographic System Information (GIS) for the City, updating old hard-copy maps for inclusion in the GIS, and creating official City maps based on the recommendations of the SRP and Comprehensive Plan. Digital maps and mapping capabilities will improve Crisfield's coordination with public and private entities, enhance economic development, and assist with revitalization efforts.

GOALS & MISSION STATEMENT

Community goals have been articulated through the SRP planning process and 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."

THE CRISFIELD ECONOMY

The Crisfield Economy provides an overview of the City's economy, highlighting issues and opportunities that must be addressed in order to achieve revitalization objectives. Economic development is vital. It represents a significant and long-term investment by Crisfield. These include four broad strategies as defined in the SRP:

1) **Jobs:** Expanding businesses and industrial park opportunities to attract new jobs including retail; creating a high-tech waterfront business center; expanding maritime industries; and modernizing the digital and physical infrastructure of the City.

2) **Full-Time Residents:** Tapping incoming retirees ("Grayshore Phenomenon"), who are relevant to the challenge Crisfield is facing. The City should engage these new home owners in community initiatives and also seek to achieve a stable and growing residential population base.

3) **Tourism:** Expanding tourism linkages and opportunities, which are key issues in Crisfield. This includes marketing the City as a gateway to Smith, Janes, and Tangier Islands; expanding recreational boating and fishing; developing a Hotel/Conference Center; and supporting the concept of a Maryland Bay Discovery Center.

4) **<u>Physical Redevelopment</u>:** Acquiring public and private assistance in addressing the Crisfield housing crisis. This includes redevelopment in targeted areas such as the Public Housing Authority Lands, as well as utilizing marinas in the City to enhance economic development.

These are significant trends that will drive the redevelopment of Crisfield and fuel the implementation of plans to redevelop the City. Some short term gains are likely (3 to 5 years), the full implementation of the SRP will take approximately 20 years or longer.

From a broad economic perspective, more resident households with higher discretionary spending capacity can stimulate economic growth in the City. Tourism will grow with more intensive marketing of local attractions. There is the potential to market the City to defense industry contractors such as Virginia's Wallops Island. Recreational boating will continue to replace commercial fishing but there is still a viable fishing industry. This industry will remain at some scale for years to come and may expand to aqua-culture operations. There will be an opportunity to have office space on the waterfront as part of a mixed-use program (boat brokers, marine finance and insurance, engineers, etc.). New construction and the renovation of old-stock housing in Crisfield as well as commercial redevelopment are activities that have the potential to bring significant investment into the City and become local industries.

URBAN DESIGN

Urban Design outlines place making and sustainable development principles as well as their relevance and application to City revitalization efforts. The urban design recommendations in the SRP are based on the belief that in order to sustain positive economic growth, the City must build on its existing assets and features. This will assist Crisfield to become a memorable and desirable year-round place that serves its residents and visitors well, while respecting nature, history, and market forces. This is achieved by employing the following principles of urban design:

The Crisfield "City Dock/Depot" is the focal point of City life for both residents and visitors alike. Developing an attractive and functional atmosphere at this location is not only an important urban design objective but also an important economic development objective.

1. Defining neighborhoods with a center and edge;
2. Designing a walkable community, usually five-minutes from center to edge;
3. Containing a mix of uses and building types;
4. Having an integrated street network; and
5. Reserving special sites for special buildings

As shown in Figure 1 below, the "Concept Master Plan" in the SRP illustrates redevelopment concepts based on the principles of urban design, which is applied to the existing conditions in Crisfield. It serves as a visual reference for judging the quality of new projects. For the purposes of regulating development projects, the Concept Master Plan provides guidance on:

- Realistic building footprints that address the streets they face;
- The relative distribution of land use intensity;
- The distribution and type of open space;
- The mixing of uses;
- Efficient use of limited land resources for strengthening the City's economy;
- Improved parking and circulation; and
- General architectural design guidance, including building height and site disposition.

FIGURE 1: CONCEPT MASTER PLAN

PUBLIC POLICY

Revitalizing the City, so as to gain economic and social benefits for all residents in a sustainable manner, will require an unwavering public commitment to follow the principles and recommendations of the *City of Crisfield Comprehensive Plan* and the SRP.

> *"For the successful implementation of the SRP and the revitalization of the City, unwavering public commitment and long-term community support for the Plan is needed."*

The SRP recommends that the City revise public policies concerning infrastructure, public/private and public/public partnerships, as well as development standards and procedures to implement the recommendations of the Plans. Implementation will require continuing community support for public officials to implement the recommendations of the SRP.

Several key implementation strategies include the following:

- Implement the recommendations of the Crisfield SRP;
- Where possible, require approved development projects not yet constructed, to comply with the recommendations of the SRP; and
- Adopt the SRP as an "official" City document to ensure its continued revitalization.

Some key policy and regulatory considerations for the City of Crisfield include the following:

1. **Implementing the SRP Concepts:** Design Guidelines should be formalized and made part of the City's Development Codes.

2. **Form-Based Code:** Consider adopting a City-wide form based code.

3. **Grandfathering:** Review project vesting and water/sewer allocation structuring.

4. **Infill & Redevelopment:** Facilitate infill and redevelopment on vacant and underutilized land.

5. **Transferable Development Rights (TDR's):** Consider the use of TDR's as incentives for achieving SRP objectives.

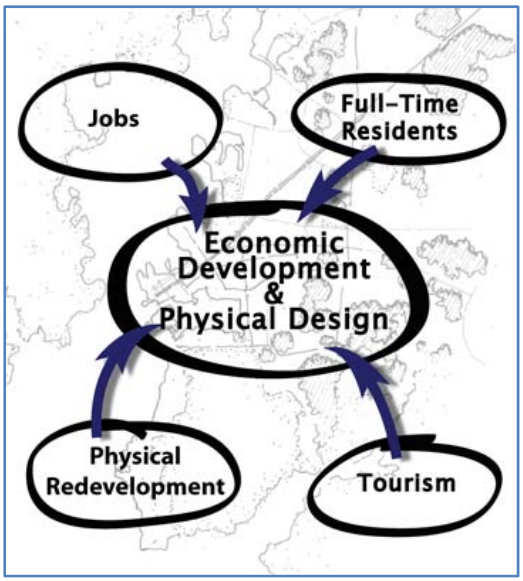
6. **<u>Accessory Dwelling Units</u>:** Allow accessory dwelling units to increase the supply of affordable housing.

7. **<u>Official Maps</u>:** Adopt "official" maps, showing the type and location of required public improvements, e.g. public spaces.

8. **<u>Targeted Redevelopment</u>:** Create incentives for redevelopment in targeted areas of the City, e.g. Downtown, Uptown, and Housing Authority Lands.

IMPLEMENTATION

Detailed implementation strategies are contained in Chapter 5: Implementation of the SRP. The success of the SRP depends heavily upon the effective implementation of these strategies, which have been organized and prioritized into short-term, mid-term, and long-term implementation actions. Actions span a segmented 20 year time period. Additional City staff and/or professional assistance and services may be required to achieve full implementation success.
It is recommended that the SRP be periodically updated every 3 to 5 years to maintain its relevancy, track and report progress, and take advantage of new opportunities that may occur. Future SRP revisions should be integrated with the 2006 *Crisfield Comprehensive Plan*.

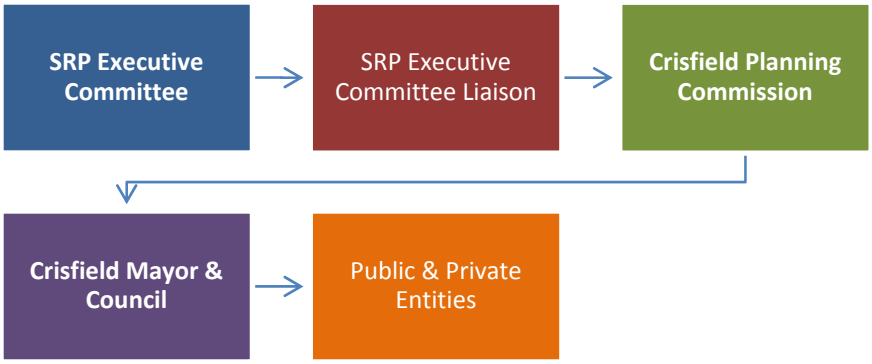


The *Crisfield Strategic Revitalization Plan* is divided into four broad strategies including expanding job opportunities, increasing full-time residents, enhancing tourism, and initiating the redevelopment of the City in targeted areas.

Organizing the SRP for Implementation

Economic development spans the entire length of the SRP's timeframe (20 years) and is vital for the revitalization of the City. It represents a significant and long-term investment by Crisfield. In addition, the physical redevelopment of the City will span the entire length of the SRP's timeframe (20 years), also representing a long-term investment. Redevelopment includes addressing design issues and opportunities raised in Chapter 2 (Urban Design) of the SRP. It also includes addressing affordable housing initiatives, particularly the proposed redevelopment of portions of the Public Housing Authority lands.

In order to effectively accomplish implementation, Crisfield should consider an "SRP Executive Oversight Committee" and an SRP Manager that can act as a liaison between the Committee and the Crisfield Planning Commission, Mayor and Council, and City Staff.



Additional staff for the SRP Executive Committee will likely be needed at some point within the first 10 years of implementation. This could include volunteers, assistant(s), a grants manager, and ongoing professional services. It also includes the need to secure Crisfield and/or City and Somerset County funding sources to ensure continued management and operations. Alternative sources of funding can be garnered through grants. Monthly progress reporting to the Crisfield Planning Commission and Mayor and City Council is important. This will ensure that the SRP is following the projected timeline and is consistent with other City plans.

Implementation Actions: Priority Timeline

It is important to note that many implementation actions overlap during the 20-year timeframe described in Chapter 5 of the SRP. Therefore, the City should be prepared to address issues and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. In addition, the SRP should be regularly revisited (every 3 to 5 years) to track progress, revise priorities, establish new actions, and modify the timeline.

The Implementation Schedule in Chapter 5 outlines the various tasks for the first 10 years of the SRP (Short and Mid-Term Actions). A detailed description of each of these Implementation Schedule tasks, as well as long-term tasks, is discussed in Chapter 5.

In regards to implementation, short and mid-term actions are the most important and span the first 10 years of the SRP's implementation life. These deal primarily with policy and regulatory actions but also include economic development and infrastructure initiatives as well as the Public Housing Authority Lands and the new Somerset County Library. Long-term implementation actions are dependent upon opportunities and timing, requiring partnerships for success both public and private. Long-term actions will likely require additional City staff, professional assistance, and/or enhanced funding.