Chapter 4 Public Policy

Revitalizing Crisfield, so as to gain maximum 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 2006 *Crisfield Comprehensive Plan* (Comprehensive Plan) and the 2008 *Crisfield Strategic Revitalization Plan* (SRP). Full implementation of the SRP and the subsequent revitalization of the City, cannot be a one-time effort nor is it and-administrative initiative alone. Success requires public and private partnerships and must be sustained for decades. The full implementation of the SRP will take 30 years or longer.

City officials must be convinced that to sustain positive economic growth, Crisfield would be best served by building on its existing cherished assets and features. Building on these assets and features assists in making the City a memorable and desirable year-round place that serves its residents and visitors well, while also respecting nature, history, and market forces. This belief and commitment by City officials must be reflected in public actions, as well as policy- and decision-making. As a first step, the SRP should be given official status as a City planning and policy document through appropriate adoption procedures.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Public policy concerning sewer capacity allocation priorities and capacity expansion strategies are among the most critical infrastructure issues the City must address in the short-term. Sewer capacity is a limited resource. It is currently estimated at 650 equivalent dwelling units (EDUs) or approximately 162,500 gallons per day (GPD) of sewer capacity.

The City should determine sewer allocation priorities. Using public sentiment as a guide, sewer capacity should be set aside for economic development projects, including future users in the newly created City industrial park. Sewer allocation also may be used as an incentive for projects that implement the recommendations of the SRP, such as projects that solve critical flooding and stormwater management problems or assist in the redevelopment of Public Housing Authority lands. Replacing the 1936 sewer collector line should be a priority capital project that addresses environmental protection issues and potentially increases sewer capacity.

PARTNERSHIPS

Implementing the SRP's recommendations will benefit from partnerships with other public and private entities. The City can cooperate with "for-profit" and "nonprofit" institutions to redevelop neighborhoods, rehabilitate housing, and work on other community initiatives. Potential partners include Somerset County and the Maryland State Government, educational institutions, social services, utilities, libraries, and other agencies. Important nonprofit organizations that the City should support include the Lower Eastern Shore Heritage Council and the Crisfield Heritage Foundation. These organizations are instrumental in maintaining and promoting heritage tourism infrastructure.

Business development organizations such as the Crisfield Chamber of Commerce and the Somerset County Economic Development Council have a strong interest in the economic growth of the City. Their support for the recommendations contained in this SRP is critical. In addition, their long-term support will assist the City in realizing its economic development and revitalization objectives.

Basic health services provided at McCready Hospital, along with the convenience of a nearby airport (Crisfield Municipal Airport) and public golf course (Great Hope Golf Course), are attractive features to people and businesses considering relocation to the area. The City's policies should support the improvement, maintenance, and possible expansion of these facilities. Utilizing the airport facilities in conjunction with the proposed Crisfield Industrial Park will provide for the effective marketing of the site. Funding from the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED) as well as the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) can assist these initiatives.

An ongoing partnership with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to capitalize on the opportunities presented by Somers Cove Marina, Janes Island State Park, City and County docks, and Sunset Park is a key undertaking for the success of the SRP. Crisfield should work with the Somers Cove Marina Commission to ensure that the public purposes served by City revitalization are given full weight in DNR's future plans for Somers Cove Marina and surrounding State lands. This is a particularly important undertaking for the short-term, as DNR is about to begin updating the *Somers Cove Marina Facilities Master Plan*.

Partnering with private developers is another critical component of SRP implementation. As shown in Figure 3 below, potential infill and redevelopment areas within the City are numerous. These present real development possibilities and include a portion of the Public Housing Authority lands.

The City should continue to entertain such arrangements where the public benefit derived is based on a fair and equitable "give and take." Increasing the full-time residential population of the City is critical for economic development and revitalization efforts.

DEVELOPMENT CODES

FIGURE 2: CONCEPT MASTER PLAN

Development review and approval standards, to implement the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and SRP, must be reflected in zoning and other development codes, ordinances, and regulations. Development review processes must be rigorously adhered to and include adequate opportunity for public comment. People wishing to develop in the City of Crisfield will need clear rules and appropriate guidance concerning the City's expectations.

Variances from basic standards should not be allowed under any circumstances other than true hardship cases, where no reasonable use of the property may result. At the same time, development design standards and guidelines must be flexible enough to accommodate alternative proposals that accomplish the desired land use and urban design results. The current *Crisfield Zoning Code* will not suffice if the City expects to achieve its revitalization objectives. Amending the Code to provide adequate regulatory provisions and processes, consistent with State law, is a critical short-term objective.

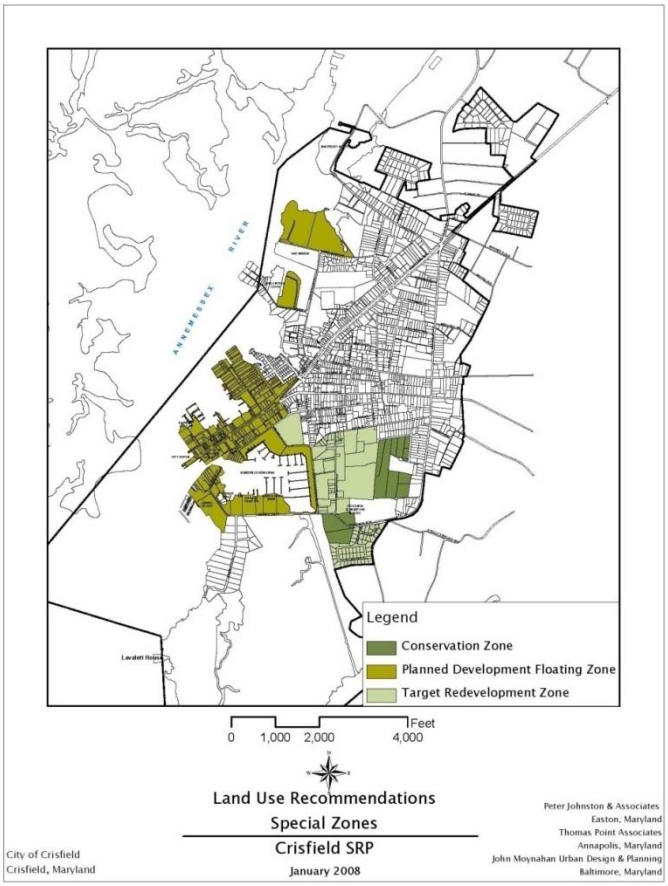
Implementing SRP Concepts

As shown in Figure 1 above, the "Concept Master Plan," along with the other detailed illustrations and recommendations in the SRP (see Chapter 3 and Appendix F) are intended to provide guidance to City officials in the review of proposed development projects. The degree to which development projects are consistent with SRP recommendations should be a determining factor in decisions. To be effective, the design guidance provided in the SRP should be formalized and made a part of the City's development codes.

The SRP strongly recommends that the City undertake additional design studies and eventually adopt a form-based Zoning Code. The many advantages of form-based zoning for the City are discussed in Appendix D.

More immediately and as the basis for judging future development projects, the City should incorporate the design recommendations embodied in the SRP's text, maps, and illustrations into the City Zoning Code. Whether or not a proposed building or land use is permitted in a designated redevelopment area, as shown in Figure 1 above, should be based on how well the proposal advances the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and the SRP.

FIGURE 2: LAND USE RECOMMENDATIONS



Establishing a fully articulated, design-based approach to development review for the City will take time to accomplish. Ultimately the Crisfield should adopt a form-based code applicable to the entire City and based on a detailed master development plan. In the short term, the City will need to put into place development standards, review processes, and design guidelines that achieve the principles, policies, and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan and the recommendations of this SRP. These interim provisions should include design guidelines derived from the SRP. In addition, the SRP and the Comprehensive Plan recommend strengthening the City's ability to conduct design review by including appropriate design professionals in the review of projects (e.g., architects, landscape architects, and urban planners).

It is recommended that the City create and adopt one or more floating zones, as shown in Figure 2 above, that would be applicable to planned development and redevelopment areas, e.g., a planned development district floating zone and a targeted redevelopment floating zone for the Public Housing Authority properties and their vicinity. These floating zones should establish incentives for design conforming to the SRP recommendations and concepts, e.g., height and density incentives. These districts would be considered for approval in a transparent public review process.

The floating zone legislative process could permit higher intensity uses in designated areas, pursuant to a master development plan approved by the City Council and at the time that the floating zone district is applied to the specific land(s). The criteria for judging project consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and SRP and findings for approval of the proposed master plan and floating zone should be included in the code. For example, review criteria may include the following:

- Implements the recommendations of the Crisfield Comprehensive Plan and the SRP;
- Promotes use of neighborhood greens, landscaped streets, boulevards, and drives woven into street and block patterns to provide space for social activity, parks, and visual enjoyment;
- Provides buildings for civic or religious assembly or for other common or institutional purposes that act as visual landmarks and symbols of identity;
- Promotes the location of dwellings, shops, and workplaces in close proximity to each other, the scale of which accommodate and promote pedestrian travel for trips within the community;
- Preserves open space, scenic waterfront vistas, and natural areas;
- Includes building designs appropriate to the City; and
- Provides for the efficient use of utilities and services.

Grandfathering

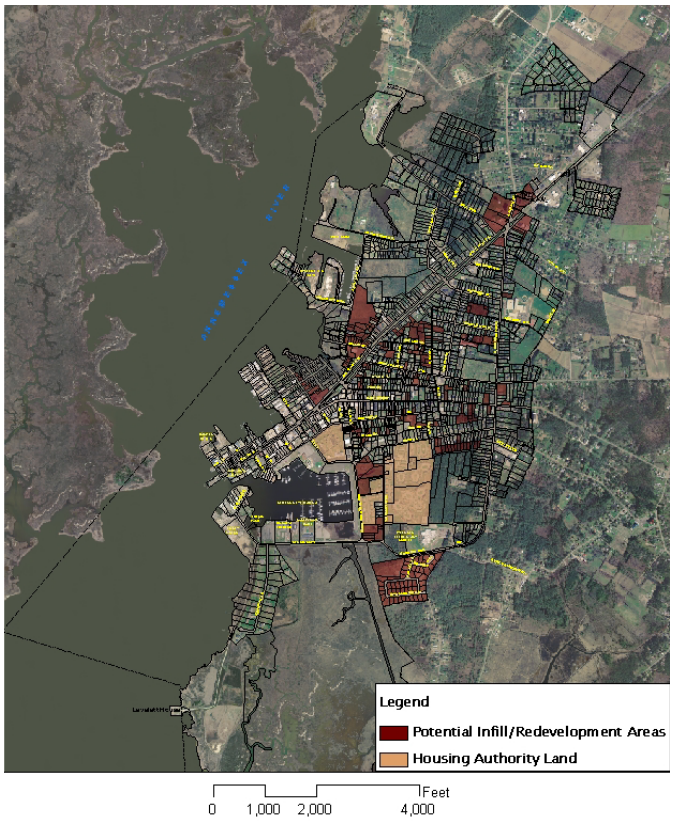
Some development projects in the City have been granted various development approvals. Commitments have been made by the City to provide utilities for these projects (e.g., Jersey Island, Reese family condominiums). These development projects may not be consistent with the SRP recommendations and may need to be reconsidered in the context of the SRP recommendations.

The City should adopt policy and code amendments to address project vesting. Development codes should specify when a project is immune from changes in the development codes and City policy (grandfathered). Although, ultimately a matter for the City's attorney to render advice on, it is believed that the City can define a project as being vested when substantial funding for improvements has been expended.

A similar approach can be taken with water and sewer allocations. Sewer allocations can be subject to "use it or lose it" policies. The City could define allocation policy to require that water or sewer allocations are used in a given period of time. If not, the allocations are no longer committed to the project.

Infill and Redevelopment

FIGURE 3: INFILL & REDEVELOPMENT



Housing conditions and affordability are important concerns for the City. As stated in the "Request for Proposals" for this SRP, "with a median household income of approximately $18,000, housing that is affordable takes on significant meaning." The SRP envisions the Housing Authority units being replaced partly at the same location and on sites scattered elsewhere in the City as shown in Figure 3. It also identifies potential infill and redevelopment sites located throughout the City.

Economic strategies, discussed in Chapter 2 of the SRP, suggest that the City and the Housing Authority aim for replacement of 50% to 70% of public housing units. This includes new units and renovated housing in the community to improve public housing, while rectifying the imbalance of concentrated public housing in one location that currently exists in Crisfield. Using infill and redevelopment of existing lots and small acreages to increase the supply of affordable housing should be part of the City's overall housing initiatives.

Infill and redevelopment refers to new development or redevelopment on vacant, bypassed, and underused land within built-up areas of the City, where infrastructure already is in place. The City should adopt special infill and redevelopment code provisions and incentivized processes applicable to the entire City. Development codes should encourage and facilitate new development on vacant, bypassed, and underused land, where such development is found to be compatible with the existing neighborhood. In doing so, the City will encourage efficient use of land and public services, stimulate economic investment and development in older established neighborhoods, and implement the goals, objectives, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and this SRP. Redevelopment of a portion of the Public Housing Authority lands as well as the development of infill sites within the City provide affordable housing and are a key component of the SRP's success both from an economic development and revitalization perspective.

Accessory Dwelling Units

Without State, Federal, and possibly private assistance, increasing the inventory of affordable housing in the City will be challenging. The City also should consider allowing accessory dwelling units in residential areas. Zoning standards that regulate the location, size, architectural characteristics, and ownership of accessory dwelling units will ensure that they are appropriate to the neighborhoods in which they are proposed.

Design Guidelines

In the past, the lack of appropriate development regulations has resulted in a trend among development projects that threatens the loss of the City's essential character. However, development codes alone will not be adequate to achieve the City's vision expressed in the Comprehensive Plan and the SRP. Design guidelines that reinforce the urban design principles discussed in Chapter 3 (Urban Design) of the SRP are needed. Among other things, design guidelines that include illustrations, performance criteria, photographs, and other useful tools make a clear statement of the City's expectations, more so than can be achieved in development codes alone.

Design guidelines are intended to be just that "guidelines," not regulations. That is, guidelines should not be so rigid as to dictate design outcomes. At the same time, neither should design guidelines be so unspecific or worse yet, ignored, so as to be meaningless. Development projects seeking special approvals or qualifying for incentives, such as those envisioned in a planned development floating zone, should be required to strictly adhere to appropriate design standards and guidelines. The City should allow local architecture and land planning firms to vet proposed design guidelines but be mindful of their role as advocates for their clients.

Official Maps

Official maps are one way the City can formalize its expected improvements to the public realm. For example, the Planning Commission may adopt official maps that show where street and pedestrian systems are planned and must be dedicated. §6.01 of Article 66B, Annotated Code of Maryland states:

A planning commission may, after adopting the "Transportation Element" of a Comprehensive Plan of the territory within its subdivision jurisdiction or of any major section or district of its jurisdiction, periodically:

(1) Conduct surveys to locate street lines and any other part of the transportation element;
(2) Make a plat of the area or district surveyed, showing the land which the planning commission recommends be reserved for future dedication or acquisition for public streets and any other part of the transportation element."

Some of the transportation improvements shown in the SRP, including pedestrian trail segments, should be included on an official Crisfield Transportation Map. Tax maps for the City indicate that street right-of-ways in older subdivisions may have been dedicated to the City at some time. The City should consider accepting unexpired dedicated right-of-ways, particularly those with street ends at the water's edge. Controlling these as public right-of-ways may provide the City with leverage to ensure that appropriate public access is provided in the design of new development or used as necessary to complete planned pedestrian systems.

Other mapped information in the SRP, such as park and view corridors, should be given City policy status. This can be achieved by giving the SRP official status through adoption as a part of the Comprehensive Plan. Detailed recommendations regarding public policy and regulatory actions are discussed in Chapter 5: Implementation of the SRP.