



BACK TO THE FUTURE

The Report of the Chestertown Revitalization Task Force

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Prologue:

When Chestertown was founded in 1706, it was populated by young immigrants in their late teens and early 20s from post-Medieval England drawn here by the promise of a four-year exemption from taxes for skilled craftsmen. Free from living in a society marked by strict religious and societal structure and close living conditions, the early settlers were a rowdy and entrepreneurial crowd, forced to adapt and exploit the lands and the river they now inhabited. They succeeded.

By the 1730s, Chestertown was thriving and was designated as one of Maryland's six Royal Ports of Entry; second only to Annapolis in size and international in scope. Due to its midway location between Philadelphia and Virginia and its magnificent river, the town became a hub of agricultural, maritime, and commercial activity. Generations after the rambunctious young settlers settled down and raised families, the populace was prosperous and educated. Revolutionary Era leaders, notably George Washington, traveled through Chestertown frequently. And William Smith, drawn to the area's proximate location and wealth, built the Nation's 10th oldest College and named it after the Nation's founding father who sat on the College's board.

Historically, the center of population has followed a trail that reflects the sweep of the nation's brush stroke across America's population canvas. The sweep reflects the settling of the frontier, waves of immigration and the migration west and south. The Census of 1790 identified the center of our Nation's population as Chestertown.

Coming up on three centuries later, Chestertown and the world are very different places. While much has changed some things have not. Our natural environment remains remarkably untouched compared to other colonial era towns. Our river still flows. Our relative proximity to some of the largest population centers on the east coast remains the same. And, the intellectual capacity of the town remains strong. These four assets need to be exploited; but to do so we need to call on the attributes of Chestertown's earliest settlers' character, courage, and entrepreneurialism.

"If you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything." Marty McFly, from Back to the Future.

1.0 Task Force Background:

The Chestertown Revitalization Task Force was formed in early 2013 as a joint effort of the Town and Washington College to conduct a comprehensive review of Chestertown and to provide recommendations concerning its revitalization. [See Appendix 1] Four members were appointed by Mayor Margo Bailey: Rebecca Flora, Linda Kuiper, Al Massoni, and Matthew Tobriner. And four were appointed by Washington College President Mitchell Reiss: Ron Athey, Richard Grieves, Chris Havemeyer, and John Moag. Mr. Moag was asked to Chair the Committee. All eight members own property and pay taxes in Kent County. Cumulatively, the Task Force has 223 years of residency. The occupations of the Task Force Members are planner, quality assurance/contract compliance officer, federal lobbyist, engineer, developer, investor, farmer and business owner, and lawyer/investment banker. One of our members is a member of the Board of Visitors and Governors at Washington College, two are emeritus members, and one is a Chestertown Councilperson. Rebecca Flora resigned from the Task Force in December.

The Task Force has met on 12 occasions for several hours each meeting. We have conversed with a broad group of people from virtually all segments of the community. In all, we have spoken with well over 150 people who came before the Task Force or who spoke to us privately. [See Appendix 2] All conversations were confidential and no individual will be named in this report. We are very grateful for those who took time to visit with us and share their ideas.

While our charge was to focus on the overall revitalization of Chestertown, over time our conversations led us to a focus on economic development and on downtown and the waterfront where, we believe, most of the near-term improvements in the town can take place.

We are grateful for the staffing support, refreshments, and meeting space provided by Washington College. We thank the River Club for allowing us to use their quarters for meetings as well. Thanks also to Maureen McIntyre for the use of Occasions Catering and her excellent food. We thank Bernadette Bowman at the Kent County Office of Economic Development and Tourism for her assistance in identifying funds from the State of Maryland to partially pay for planning assistance we have received from an urban planning firm, Ayers, Saint, Gross (ASG). And finally we would like to thank the Chestertown Town Council, which similarly supported this planning assistance.

Having completed the assignment set out for us, the Task Force now leaves it to Kent County, Chestertown, and the various constituencies of our community to digest our observations and recommendations and take whatever steps they deem advisable to provide our current and future residents a vibrant and sustainable working and living environment.

2.0 The Challenges:

With a population base of roughly 20,000, Kent County is the smallest county in the State; almost 30% smaller than Somerset, the next smallest county. While the State's population grew 2% between 2010 and 2012, Kent County saw no growth. Chestertown's population is 5,252. Though our size is not necessarily a negative in and of itself, other demographic data is more disturbing.

As of 2011 Chestertown and Kent County have almost twice the fraction of population in the 65 and older age category (24%) compared to that of Maryland and Queen Anne's County (both with 13%), and the U.S. average of 12%. In the under 18 years category Chestertown (at 12%) has about one half the state-wide fraction (23%). The conclusion is that Chestertown and Kent County are markedly over-represented in older people and under-represented in younger people relative to state-wide averages. [See Appendix 3]

The Task Force believes that the impacts of these age disparities flow into the public education system, the job market, and the revenue/fiscal policies and attitudes of the local municipalities and counties.

With respect to economic comparisons the census data also indicate:

- Home ownership within Chestertown proper is well below all the other entities. (47% for Chestertown vs. 75% for Kent County, 86% for Queen Anne's County, and 69% for Maryland)
- The median value of owner-occupied housing within Chestertown and Kent County ranges from 10% to 25% below the values in Queen Anne's County and the state-wide average.
- The per capita income of Chestertown is 30% to 40% below that of the other three entities, and the median household income ranges between 40% and 65% below the others.
- Chestertown (at 27%) and to a lesser extent Kent County (at 13%) have significantly larger fractions of their populations living below the poverty level than Queen Anne's County (6%), the state of Maryland (9%), and Baltimore City (22%).
- Kent County has 26% lower retail sales per capita than the state-wide average or that of Queen Anne's County.

Both the business and employment base in the County have shrunk. At the conclusion of the 2000 census, Kent County had 469 businesses and 5,990 employees. Ten years later, the County had 457 businesses and 5,933 employees.

While State income tax revenue rose 4.7% on average between 2010 and 2012, in Kent County it fell a dramatic 13.8%. Local tax revenues rose 2.0% across the State, but Kent

was the largest loser with a 3% drop. The recordation tax, which is a barometer of real estate activity, rose 4.1% during the same period, but Kent leads the State in the losing category with a drop of 29.6% while our neighbor to the south, Queen Anne's, remained flat. After Somerset and Caroline counties, Kent has the third lowest real estate tax base in the State.

Neither Kent County nor Chestertown have the public resources to properly invest in their infrastructure or in their future. Yet, despite its rural nature and small population (72.9 people per square mile versus the statewide average of 594 people per square mile), Kent County citizens are taxed at a high rate for the most basic of governmental services. Kent residents are faced with the fourth highest real estate tax rates in the State. Of the 149 towns and municipalities with taxation power, Chestertown ranks among the 20 highest taxing towns or cities. We do not believe the County, whose tax rate is roughly 20% higher than Queen Anne's, or Chestertown, can afford to increase taxes to improve services and infrastructure.

For some of the very reasons we love Chestertown and the County, anecdotal stories relayed to the Task Force also indicate that the data above is detrimental. We have seen businesses close as one generation passes on and a younger generation is not there to pick up the reins. We hear of all too many young residents going off to College and not returning. The young people who do return talked to us about the difficulty of finding a job, of having insufficient activities and businesses to purchase from, of the lack of basic diversions for their children (like a playground), and the scarcity of other young people in the area with whom to socialize.

The three largest employers in Kent County are located in Chestertown. The largest, Shore Regional Health, is shrinking locally. Washington College, the second largest, reports that half of its faculty and employees have opted to reside outside Kent County. The third largest, Dixon Valve and Coupling, has no intention of growing its business in Chestertown due to the business climate and its inability to find quality employees who live here, or are willing to come here.

The chief reasons that these three employers have difficulty finding employees who would otherwise be attracted to a rural area is the County's education system (which we will return to) and the difficulty in finding a job for a spouse. Those who do come to Chestertown for employment tend to gravitate to Delaware or Queen Anne's to live due to superior schools, proximity to jobs for a spouse, and lower taxes.

3.0 Growth:

Succinctly, the Task Force believes that the answer to many, if not most, of the challenges the County and Town face is growth. And, we believe that growth needs to occur in a controlled and well-planned manner consistent with the historic and architectural characteristics of the Chestertown. This report will provide some specific recommendations on how to grow our economy. We recall what one realtor said to us, “We don’t need big growth, but several hundred can make an enormous difference.” We strongly endorse this sentiment.

4.0 The Good News:

The conditions that made Chestertown a boom town in the 18th Century, the river, the land, our proximity, and our brain power are still intact. Within a 150 miles radius of Chestertown is one of the largest population centers in the world; yet we are worlds apart. That very dichotomy between our rural nature and the surrounding population centers may indeed be one of our greatest assets.

Consider also that the region has the following superb assets:

- A vibrant and evolving arts and humanities community, driven by Washington College and numerous citizen groups and individuals.
- A legacy of well-preserved 18th and 19th historic buildings that set the stage for potential growth.
- A number of small and medium-sized professional and trade service firms, and manufacturing, hospitality, health care, and retail businesses.
- A historically important and thriving liberal arts college with a growth agenda and a willingness to help the region.
- An environment that, if improved, could provide wider access to outdoor recreational opportunities for young and old alike, including water sports, biking, walking, and running.
- A population of well-educated retirees willing to contribute time, money, and experience to others.
- A significant number of non-profit, public service organizations, many with a focus on youth education, conservation, preservation, and the arts--all managed and overseen by civic-minded volunteers. These organizations sponsor and manage many public events that draw visitors and raise funds that are spent in the area. (*A few examples include the Chestertown Tea Party, Sultana Education Foundation, Sandbox, GAR, Echo Hill, Shared Opportunity Service, The Garfield Center for the Arts, Horizons at Radcliffe Creek School, Kent Youth Inc., the Chester River Association, Character Counts, the Kent County Historical Society, Eastern Shore Heritage, Inc., the National Music Festival at Washington College, the Jazz Festival, and the Chestertown Book Festival.*)
- A well-developed, environmentally sensitive and productive agricultural economy that participates in the town through the Farmer’s Market.

- A major scenic river that provides access for visiting and local recreational boaters and limited commercial and sport fishing.
- Governments, a college, and local organizations that are seeking to make positive change in an organized way.

These are the ingredients for potentially transformational changes for Chestertown and Kent County.

5.0 Observations and Recommendations for Key Chestertown Constituencies:

As mentioned above, the Task Force met with a broad array of Chestertown constituencies. While our key recommendations will concern the waterfront and potential development of the Stepne land tract, we would now like to make some observations about those meetings and offer some specific recommendations.

5.1 The Public School System: The Task Force believes that the state of the County’s school system is a serious impediment to the growth and retention of residents. The three largest employers in Chestertown, Dixon Valve, the College, and Chester River Hospital have banded together to assist the school system move from the bottom five systems in the State to the top five within 5 years. This is incredibly important, as the school system has a major impact on the hiring and retention of working families in the region. We applaud initiatives to improve the public school systems. The recent hiring of a new superintendent, who is already making her mark on the system, is a positive first step.

Recommendation #1: To help our local schools we urge all Kent County employers, citizens, associations, non-profits and Town and County officials to embrace and support the Kent Forward initiative. To learn more, contact Kent Forward at kentforward@gmail.com

5.2 Government: A number of area businesses believe there is “a culture of *no*” that exists in town hall. Many spoke of the time delays, costs, complexities, and contradiction in dealing with the three silos of planning, zoning, and the Historic District Commission. One government official opined that this often has been the case. We also heard examples of situations where subjectivity instead of ordinance controlled consideration of a project. We received examples of projects undertaken by the Town without communicating with, or considering the impacts on local businesses. Finally, there was an *ex post facto* change in zoning while a business was actively engaged in trying to locate in Chestertown which resulted in their decision to grow elsewhere. The flip side of the coin is that we also heard examples of quick and decisive action by the Town and a willingness to do whatever they could to help a new business. We were also told of tensions between the County and the Town that arose over differing views on sewer extensions.

Finally, Section 6(h) of the Chestertown's Public Ethics Law has the perverse impact of precluding conversations between elected officials and businesses or individuals who have a current or potential interest in a town project, application for a permit, etc. This section, for example, would preclude a conversation between an elected official and someone considering locating a business in Chestertown. It would even preclude a conversation between a business owner interested in seeing road or sidewalk repairs and their councilperson. Instead, anyone potentially affected by a town action would be restricted to a conversation with the Town Manager or other town employee. We believe this is counter-productive to embracing business and places too much power in the hands of the Town Manager.

Recommendation #2: The Task Force, recognizing that perception is reality, believes the Town needs to embrace the business community more effectively. Inviting the business community to meet with the Council once a year would be a good idea. The next Mayor should be a champion for soliciting business to come to Chestertown and checking in often with the local businesses. We urge immediate consideration of a new streamlined process for planning, zoning, and historic review. Finally, we believe citizens appointed to these three boards should receive training.

Recommendation #3: It is imperative that both the Town and County governments cooperate and collaborate with each other. Therefore, the Task Force also recommends that the relevant officials from the County and Town sit down to resolve whatever differences exist between them.

Recommendation #4: The Task Force recommends that the Town Council amend Section 6(h) of the Public Ethics Law.

5.3 Signage: A number of retailers expressed dissatisfaction with the sign ordinances in the historic district. We express no view on this issue since the signage ordinance is currently under review. However, we take note of the lack of historical markers and directional signage (to the park, the marina, the river, etc.) Attractive and architecturally consistent signage is an important consideration for any town and such signage will be even more important with some of the changes we will recommend later in this report.

Recommendation #5: The Town, with help from the DCA and the arts community, should develop a plan to place directional signage and historical markers in the Town and report back to the Council within 6 months on its proposed plan.

5.4 The Hospital: Many have bemoaned the loss of obstetrics at Chester River Hospital Center, but the action reflects a demographic with too few young people raising families and the nation-wide consolidation of hospitals and changes in health care. Yet, the Hospital remains a vital part of our community and our support for it is imperative.

Recommendation #6: The Town and the Hospital should set up a mechanism to communicate frequently and systematically.

5.5 Sultana: The Sultana Education Foundation is one of Chestertown's prized assets. Not only is it an attractive addition to our waterfront and a draw for tourists, it is an important driver of economic activity. The boat brings thousands of young people, teachers, and parents through its program and they are left with permanent and wonderful memories of the Sultana and Chestertown. Down-rigging Weekend alone brings 7,000-10,000 people into Chestertown; larger than the annual Chestertown Tea Party. And, Sultana plans on building a new facility in town which will only further enhance the downtown landscape.

Recommendation #7: The Sultana Education Foundation should keep up the good work and collaborate with the Town's businesses and other non-profit organizations to promote and enhance the annual Downrigging Weekend event and its contribution to the Town's economy.

5.6 The Arts: Both the not-for-profit and for-profit segments of the arts community are critical ingredients of our community and our culture. The galleries and studios, the Garfield Theatre, the music, drama, and the Kohl Gallery at Washington College, the new Sandbox project, the National Music Festival at Washington College, *Plein Air*, the Jazz Festival, the studios, and many others combine to give our town character, interest, and income. Art draws tourists, and it is in our interest to grow the size of this community.

Recommendation #8: We urge that the Kent County Arts Council and the County's Tourism Office work together to pinpoint marketing efforts that can draw more art-driven tourism and encourage more artists to locate to Chestertown. We also believe that the Arts Council, River Arts, and Washington College should consider ways that they can co-market content. Finally, we urge more careful scheduling of events (e.g., Weekend Open Studios conflicting with Downrigging Weekend.) We will also have specific thoughts later in this report on the public display of art.

5.7 Washington College Students: Since 1782, Washington College has been Chestertown's most prized asset. Without it, we would be a very different place. The College provides the town with beautiful campus views, culture, sports, adult continued learning, intellectual activity, performances, lectures, and the list goes on.... Too many, however, told the Task Force that Chestertown is "a town with a College" and not "a College town". We heard this not only from members of the College community, but from many non-affiliated residents as well. There is little evidence in town that a College is up the street. If students, faculty, and staff were counted in the census (and students are not), they would make up 40% of the Town's population. The downtown merchants need to do a better job of capturing the student body's discretionary income. To do that, they need to make the town more hospitable and inviting to 18-22 year olds. Students are not only potential customers, they are also potential residents post-graduation who

may contribute great ideas, start businesses, and raise families in our community. In fact, the College counts 412 alumni with a Chestertown mailing address.

Students should be considered an asset. One student told the Task Force that outside of Evergrain, Sam's and Fish Whistle, there is little the town has to offer students. He commented that most students will visit shops during hours when ours have closed. He also commented on the lack of "student specials" or "student nights" at retail establishments which he believed would be very effective at generating customers.

The presence of the Starr Center, the Center for the Study of the Environment & Society downtown, and Sandbox are a big plus in that they bring students, professors, and intellectual activity and spending into the heart of the Town. More of this type of presence is a good thing.

In the past couple of years, the College has made a concerted effort to introduce the students and their parents to the town by bringing events off campus and to the waterfront. Students and parents are much more visible in downtown shops and eateries than the past. We applaud the College's efforts.

Recommendation #9 for the Downtown Chestertown Association (DCA): The Task Force believes that integrating the College more into your businesses and offering appropriate student special pricing can increase traffic downtown from students and their parents. We also suggest giving new birth to the old tradition of having a welcome party for students in Fountain Park each year.

Recommendation #10 for Washington College: We would urge the College to study the feasibility of systems that would allow students to "swipe" their College card at downtown establishments. We note that Chesapeake Bank and Trust offered a variation of this concept, but many students did not know of its existence. We also urge the College to consider, when leasing additional office space that is not campus-critical, to assess the alternatives for using downtown space.

5.8 Downtown Retail: The gem of Chestertown is its beautiful downtown and historic district; it is a major reason why we attract visitors. Yet there are flaws. We have already spoken of the lack of directional signage and historical markers. The merchants, who too often are under-appreciated for their hard work in keeping the town green and beautiful, presented us with some excellent ideas, and we do adopt a number of them. Some of them are the province of the private sector and yet-to-be-identified entrepreneurs. One individual suggested "Why not First Fridays every Friday?" Good question! At the same time, none of us can help but notice that Chestertown is dead after Noon on Saturdays, dead on Sunday, and dead at night. One merchant, when asked why he didn't have Sunday or evening hours explained that there were no customers then. That question can be turned on its head by the counter, "Perhaps that's because no one is open!" The Task Force believes that retail establishments that are closed on Sunday hamper tourism because the lack of activity leads one to conclude we are a "one night town".

One committed downtown studio owner conducted several surveys of downtown establishments this past summer. Only 26% were open on Sunday. But the most important finding of his survey was that of 78 active storefronts, 50 were occupied by legal or service businesses and 28 by retail businesses. There were also 12 empty stores. The community, downtown landlords, and downtown businesses would be well served by working collectively to eliminate empty storefront and reversing the current services to retail ratio.

Recommendation #11 for the DCA: The Task Force believes the Association, as a group, should begin examining some evening hours as well as remaining open on Sunday. We recommend working with the Chestertown Arts Council on ways to have musicians, mimes, etc. on the streets during First Fridays (or every Friday!). We also recommend the DCA reach out to the many landscapers and growers in the County and ask for donations for trees and plants to further beautify downtown. Flags, pennants, and color liven up any central district, and we encourage you not to be shy in showing your colors and flying your flags. Finally, we ask merchants to participate in recruiting others to expand their current businesses elsewhere into Chestertown. (i.e., The next time you are in Easton, Annapolis, Baltimore or wherever and you visit an establishment that might fit in Chestertown, seek out the owner and encourage them to consider Chestertown.)

Recommendation #12 for the Town: We recommend the Town, working with the DCA, consider closing High Street between Water St. and Lawyers Row (and possibly Cross St. between High and Cannon as well) on First Fridays to allow more of a “street party” atmosphere with entertainment. We recommend liberally allowing—even encouraging—al fresco dining outside restaurants and cafes.

5.9 Downtown Real Estate: The quaint and distinct nature of Chestertown is somewhat marred by the 300 block of High Street where some store frontage is simply out of sync with the rest of the town and some buildings are, quite literally, dilapidated. There seems to be a disconnect at times between the bid and ask on rents, often because either the commercial property owner is undercapitalized or the potential tenant is. There is nothing we can do about that. The market will eventually rectify the empty storefronts. In the meantime, the moves of Mimi’s Closet, the Lemon Leaf and the new JR’s Pub are much welcome additions to that block and may encourage other development.

Recommendations #13 for the Town: Enforce building codes on dilapidated structures and reexamine ordinances that deal with property neglect.

5.10 Festivals: The Tea Party and Down-rigging are important and fun events for our community. So too are the Jazz Festival, Colonial Days, and the Book Festival. The National Musical Festival at Washington College, which has surprised the most discerning of music lovers with its high quality, will continue to grow. These are important economic drivers for our town.

Recommendations #14: The Mayor should appoint a small task force with representatives of the College, the Arts Council, the business community and others to brain-storm other festivals or “destination-type” events for the Town with a focus on winter events to fill existing calendar gaps.

Recommendations #15 for the National Music Festival at Washington College: We feel it would be exciting to see more musicians on the streets playing their music.

5.11 Rails to Trails: The trail has been a wonderful addition to our community and is well-used.

Recommendation #16 for the County and Town: Examine potential sources of funding for extending the rail-trail. And, back to signage, letting visitors know we have a trail would be helpful.

5.12 Agriculture and Food: Agriculture is a bedrock economic force in our community. Yet it is an asset that remains underexploited in some respects. A very large farmer and a smaller one who met with the Task Force both agreed that an opportunity exists to exploit the growing demand for locally grown and organic foods. While the County’s crops have traditionally been corn and soybeans, we are seeing a growing number of farmers taking advantage of the “foodie” movement. In Sudlersville, a specialty lettuce farmer has been very successful selling high quality lettuce into the big city restaurants. A farm in Worton sells seasonal vegetables and fruits but now sells ice cream as well. There are three vineyards within minutes of Chestertown. Some farmers have invested in agri-tourism by running a bed and breakfast to help augment and diversify their business. A stroll through the busy downtown Farmers Market on Saturday is visual evidence of the popularity of “locally grown” food of all types.

Recommendation #17 for the County Office on Economic Development and Tourism: We recommend that the County consider assembling a group of entrepreneurial farmers to discuss the possibility of a marketing campaign that would target Kent County food products as well as agri-tourism, and “farm days”.

Recommendation #18: We recommend that the Town in conjunction with the management of the Farmers Market consider moving the market to a permanent sheltered location closer to the River near Wilmer Park and Stepne Station, increasing its frequency of operation and improving its access to parking.

5.13 Transportation: As our sister town Rock Hall dealt with the decline in the seafood industry, the very entrepreneurial town filled the void with the maritime industry and today there are more marine slips than residents of Rock Hall. The town helped the industry grow by purchasing two jeeps and 13-passenger vans and subsidizing their operation thereby allowing passengers to ride free. The result is that previously marina and boat-bound visitors are now able to access town easily and spend their money in town. Chestertown has no form of public transportation. A trolley or bus of some sort might also encourage the notoriously walking-averse students at the College to visit town more frequently. And, a trolley could provide transient boaters with access to wider shopping and dining opportunities as well. Encouraging bicycling is also important and having a bike sharing program, which many towns and cities have now implemented, would be an amenity for the town and helpful for tourists.

Recommendation #19: The Task Force recommends that the Town, on a 6-month experimental basis beginning this spring (before the College lets out) and through Downrigging Weekend in 2014, run a free shuttle that it can lease on a short term basis before deciding whether to continue the program. A driver could be paid minimum wage (plus tips) so that the experiment would not be that expensive.

Recommendation #20: We also recommend that Town purchase and install bike racks in logical places to encourage more bicycle use as well as consider implementing a bike sharing program. [See www.bikeshares.com] There should also be designated bike lanes.

5.14 Recreation: Unless you are a College student and have access to the College's facilities, or are a member of the Rowing Club, own a boat or ride a bike you have no access to recreation within Chestertown. It is a sad commentary that we have no fields or playgrounds for our young families. It's also unfortunate that residents and visitors alike have no public place to rent a kayak, a paddleboat, a sailfish, or a paddleboard. There is a wonderful new dog park at Rolling Road for our four-legged friends, that many enjoy, but it's time we have a park for our children. It should also be noted that there is no public transportation available to the fields, the park and the community center in Worton.

Our recommendations on recreation will come later in this report.

5.15 The River: We probably already knew of the River's importance, but its strongest supporters drove it home with us. Just as Chestertown should be thankful it is a college town, we should be thankful we are a river town. While it is no longer suitable as the international shipping port it was founded as, the river is a tool that can drive tourism and recreation. Yet, the current condition of the marina discourages visits and recreational access to the river is difficult unless one owns a boat. We will deal with these two issues later in our report. The health of the river and the rise of our Chesapeake basin will be of on-going concern and, unfortunately, out of the ability of many of us to impact. There are some things in our control, and we believe they should be tackled.

Recommendation #21: In order to prevent run-off, we believe the Town and/or County should remove some parking spaces at the foot of High Street as well as at the foot of Cannon Street, and replace them with green space that can absorb water. We also believe that the marina area needs to be raised and sealed from the frequently invading river. The rise of the river will be discussed in Sections 8.5 and 9.1 below.

5.16 Economic Development: The County's commitment to economic development can best be summed up by the merger of its economic development and tourism offices. The message is clear—as summed up by the Realtors Association—Kent County appears to be anti-growth. Due to a lack of personnel and resources, we believe that the economic development of the County is almost futile. Indeed, the Director of Tourism and Economic Development is ham-strung by the lack of resources.

Recommendation #22 for the County: Provide increased resources for Economic Development and improve coordination between the County and Town. Adequately fund the tourism effort. Ensure that the occupancy tax is indeed going to economic development and tourism. Consider raising the occupancy tax from 5% to 7% (the State average) and dedicate the additional funds to development and tourism.

Recommendation #23: The Town, Kent County, and Washington College should jointly study and then institute new regional economic incentives and small business assistance programs. The possibilities include tax and fee relief; regulatory and zoning relief; financing assistance; assistance in structuring private/public partnerships, enterprise zones, and business incubators; improvements to high speed internet service; and small business development, planning, and training programs.

5.17 Marketing: Again, because of the lack of resources, neither the Town's or the County's marketing efforts are anything other than marginal. In fact, outside of the Visitors Center, Chestertown does not have a marketing or development budget. The handout for Chestertown's walking tour, which covers only historic homes, hasn't changed in years. There is no map or directory for commercial establishments. Once in Town, there is no signage to show a visitor what is where. The County and Town websites are dated and staid.

Recommendation #24: Revamp the Kent County and Chestertown websites. Engage a professional webmaster for help in revamping the sites. Consider target marketing instead of participating in mass advertising where we can get lost. For example, partner with those in the hunting and fishing business and target sporting clubs and websites. Or, partner with the hotels and inns and target bicycle clubs. Target the LGBT community as potential tourists and residents. Our wedding trade continues to grow and, again, in partnership with hotels, inns, planners, restaurants, caterers, tent suppliers, etc., we should target that audience.

Establish a separate website for businesses possibly entitled:

www:chestertownisopenforbusiness.com

This site would be dedicated to FAQs for existing businesses, a help desk, and more importantly, to soliciting and enticing new businesses.

Marketing should focus on 2-3 day visits with specific ideas offered on how a visitor can spend a morning, an afternoon, and an evening each day.

5.18 Entrepreneurialism: The Boomtown Institute, a firm dedicated to the development of small town America talks of the importance of entrepreneurs to the sustainability of the “agurbs”. The Rural Policy Institute reports that “the four areas of economic growth for small towns are: 1) entrepreneurship, 2) value-added processing and finishing (e.g. , product agriculture, 3) tapping the digital economy, and 4) marketing the amenities of scenery and space.”

We believe that high-speed internet connectivity is imperative in Chestertown and the lack of it is a road-block to the increasingly digital economy that permits entrepreneurs to conduct business from places they previously couldn’t. For example, 750,000 Americans now earn their living on eBay.

Entrepreneurs are not created--they are born and then encouraged. Not everyone has the stomach for it. Washington College’s excellent Business Management Department offers a class in entrepreneurship as well as a Business Plan Capstone project in which students build a business plan with all of the required elements.

5.19 Leadership: It is critical that the next generation of our political and business leaders take their responsibilities to heart. We understand that serving as Mayor or on the Town Council is a sacrifice. These public servants are paid little and have other full-time employment and families to raise. Nonetheless, identifying individuals both in and out of government who will make the sacrifice and lead is essential.

Recommendation #25: The Mayor must be creative and dogged in recruiting business to Town. Something as simple as a business card that reads, “Chestertown--Open for Business! Feel free to call me directly on my cell.” can be a very effective tool. The

Town's leadership needs a clearly defined and streamlined process for how to do business in town. They should embrace controlled and architecturally consistent growth and must have the tough skin that is sometimes comes required when living in a small town. Those who lead may not always be respected or supported. The leaders should draw on the intellectual resources of the community as much as possible.

6.0 The Critical Role of Retirees and Tourism:

The Task Force believes the quickest way to jump start economic activity in Chestertown is to focus on its strongest points. We believe them to be retirees and tourism.

6.1 Retiree Residential Community: According to the AARP, 37% of those nearing retirement age express a preference for life in a small town. They also estimate that one relocating retiree can have as great an impact on a community as three to four factory workers. The logic is simple: “retirees are, in general, wealthier than working people, and therefore spend more money in the community.” (*Robert Shively, Economic Development for Smaller Communities*)

At the risk of appearing that we don't grasp the demographic imbalance of our region and the shortcomings of Chestertown for our young people, we believe that focusing near term on the older demographic is sensible.

As one comes into Centreville off of Route 301, they pass Symphony Village—a 55 and older community that, despite the recession, has continued to flourish with on-going construction. The success of the community is somewhat bewildering in that it is bounded by Routes 301 and 213 and requires a car to go anywhere. Now consider Chestertown...a walkable town with art, college education programs, a river, a hospital, a country club, an attractive downtown, etc.

A prior plan for the development of Stepne showed dense and voluminous spec residential units. This plan was probably not realistic in the best of times, let alone during the recession. A more targeted community may very well be successful.

We believe that a community, marketed foremost to the age 55 and older demographic (but also to others), is the quickest jump-start growth in Chestertown and would have an enormous positive impact on the community. We believe it would be best located on part of the Stepne Manor tract, which is owned by the college (with the exception of the Manor House).

We further believe that such a residential community would be the highest and best use of the land. There have been conversations between a Task Force member and several developers testing the concept. All of the developers were bullish. The attraction of living in a walkable town, being on the waterfront, and having a college, a hospital, and a golf course all a half mile away from their home, were viewed by the developers as extremely strong, almost unique, assets.

Recommendation #27 for the College: We recommend that Washington College dedicate that portion of Stepne closest to Cross Street for a residential community. Since the College holds this land in its endowment, we recommend the College consider participating in part or in whole as an equity participant in the project which, we believe, would make the project more viable in a near-term time frame.

Recommendation #28: We recommend that the College immediately begin soliciting developers.

Recommendation #29: We recommend that layout for the development be on a grid system and consistent with the existing layout and architecture of the town to ensure seamless incorporation of the development into the existing town.

Recommendation #30: We recommend that the Town work cooperatively with the College on all zoning issues to enable such a project, and, eventually, work cooperatively with a developer on all infrastructure, licensing, architectural, and permitting issues.



6.2 Tourism: For all we have to offer tourists, we make it awfully difficult for them to enjoy it. Our websites are unattractive and difficult to move through. Unless one goes to the College website, a visitor knows nothing about the Kohl Gallery or any other activity they can take in on campus. All activity calendars should be merged. We should have heritage and history tours. There is no handout for downtown businesses. Our waterfront is visible only from the foot of High Street, from the boardwalk across the lagoon, and Wilmer Park, if one happens to find it. There is no directional signage. Our marina is cluttered, uninviting, difficult to traverse, and crumbling. We do not “direct” visitors unless they ask. The rest of our waterfront is private. We don’t give potential visitors 2-day and 3- day formatting of activities. The list goes on. Perhaps some of this

explains that while we have experienced a 26% increase in visitors to the County since 2011, we are not seeing increases in their spending.

Recommendation #31: *We will have several changes that focus on enhancements to tourism that are physical in nature later in this report. We believe these changes will be transformational. But, fundamental structural changes need to be made in the way we entice and manage tourists. We recommend the Mayor appoint a Tourism Task Force, with County representation, to study and recommend specific changes, some of which we outline above. This task force should report back to the Town Council and County Commissioners with their report in 60 days to be implemented for the Spring and Summer seasons in 2014.*

7.0 Guiding Principles for the Waterfront Area Development:

Chestertown's strongest physical asset is the Chester River, yet it remains remarkably inaccessible and difficult to view for residents and visitors alike. The Town itself comes to an abrupt halt at the end of Cross Street where a line of trees blocks views of the river and the iconic Stepne Mansion. The Stepne land, largely owned by the College, is the most logical and symbiotic parcel to entertain the town's growth and to generate new residents, visitors, and income for Chestertown and Kent County. A unique opportunity is at hand to provide an experience that would celebrate the river and which could be unmatched on the eastern shore. We believe the following principles should guide the waterfront's development.



7.1 Green Infrastructure: The Task Force believes it is critical that the land along the periphery of the waterfront be used in a way that preserves and enhances the natural

environment, but allows the public to experience and learn about the natural beauty of the river and its shores. Because Chestertown as a port has such an eclectic history, it is important that the history of the river, its first citizens and its early native inhabitants also be part of the experience, through the use of historic and natural history interpretive displays. The Task Force envisions walking trails and boardwalks with occasional sitting areas that trace the river's edge continuously from the foot of High street down the river to Radcliffe Creek, and circling back to a new Quaker Neck promenade and the existing rail-trail. This trail would tie together the various elements of the entire waterfront including the Marina, Wilmer Park, all of Washington College's properties, potentially the point at Radcliffe Creek, part of the up-creek banks of Radcliffe Creek, and possibly the open lands of Stepne Manor. Public parks and venues for the display of public art, a new children's play-area, and locations for the use of bicycles and joggers along the Quaker Neck promenade should be incorporated. All changes and improvements associated with this trail must satisfy storm water management, the Army Corps of Engineers, Maryland Department of Environment, and Critical Area regulations.

7.2 Commercial Development: The Task Force believes that the business case for development of the waterfront properties fundamentally requires that there be commercial enterprises integrated into the development plan. The most likely mechanisms to finance improvements will be a combined use of public and private resources, along with the modification of local zoning restrictions to allow mixed use of the various lands-- for example as a Planned Unit Development . The Task Force has identified several opportunities for compatible commercial development on the waterfront lands. We believe these uses can protect the land, accommodate the historic nature of Chestertown, and bring new people, energy, and business to the region. Specific examples discussed elsewhere include: 1) a destination inn, including a business conference facility, and a restaurant with produce garden, 2) retail spaces, 3) a permanent indoor/outdoor facility for an expanded farmers market, 4) a significant residential development with amenities within easy walking distance of downtown, and 5) marine-related businesses on the periphery of the Marina parcel. It is obviously important in planning these developments that future flood plain issues be addressed.

7.3 Public Access and Connectivity to Downtown: Because the waterfront area is seen to be a critical element of Chestertown's revitalization, the Task Force believes that enhanced public access is essential to the program's success. The design must assure that it is easy, natural, and inviting for newcomers on land and from boats, as well as local citizens, nearby residents, and students to access the waterfront facilities, the downtown commercial district, and the college on foot. This entails the thoughtful location of linking paths, sidewalks, and signage. It also implies that the location of public parking within a reasonable distance of the waterfront and downtown will be essential. Furthermore it is obvious that there needs to be limited vehicular access to existing homes, college facilities, and any new residential and/or commercial facilities located on the lands along Quaker Neck Road. The fundamental idea is that the waterfront will draw visitors, many of whom will arrive in automobiles and boats. Those visitors should have convenient access to both downtown businesses and the waterfront. Furthermore, if additional residences or commercial structures are located on the Stepne land then they too should have similar access.

7.4 Maintenance of Context, Density and Historic Character: It is important to have an over-arching aesthetic philosophy in the design process. The Task Force believes that this project's success depends on an understanding of the subtleties inherent in design of this sort. Imposing a broad uniform design on the area is not the solution. What is needed first is an in-depth understanding of the texture of Chestertown, and then a weaving of what has historically worked here with new components that don't alter the existing fabric. To design a new situation, with an altogether different feeling is asking for dysfunction. If we go with our strengths, understand them and augment them, then we will have exponentially enhanced the town. Otherwise we will be left with a series of unrelated parts and expensive developments that will do little to address the economic challenges of the town and the county.

More specifically, the Town's physical periphery is currently defined by the bend in Cross Street where the rail/trail terminates, by the Stepne Station building itself, and by the row of trees behind the Station. If the Town is to grow in the direction of Stepne, this unintended demarcation should be softened or eliminated in order to allow a natural extension of Cross Street and the expansion of the town grid and sight lines toward the southwest. The traffic and parking patterns must provide for pedestrian and vehicular access to housing and other amenities that could eventually be built on the Stepne lands, as well as higher density traffic to Quaker Neck Road extended. The sight line along this new Cross Street axis (parallel to the river) should be an invitation to walk to and from the Stepne tract while preserving a view of the historically important Manor. Sight lines toward the river should also be maintained from within such a development so that the river view forms a backdrop.

7.5 Marina Facilities: The two-plus acre Chestertown Marina, now owned by Chestertown, is in a deteriorated state. It is evident that the facility should be redesigned to handle more and larger boats in slips, upgraded with floating docks and new dock utilities, new bulkheads, and dredged throughout. Additionally, new bathroom and shower facilities for boaters and a new office and store should be added. Furthermore, the terrain should be re-graded to ameliorate monthly tidal flooding.

An important program design trade-off was addressed by the Task Force, caused by the limited area available on the Chestertown Marina property. The issue is: Should the marina be maintained as a full-service working marina to include winter boat storage, a large volume enclosed workshop, travel lift, ramp for trailered boats, and extensive parking? Or alternatively, should it be redesigned to become a more park-like, less congested area with docks and amenities for boaters, visitors and citizens, but no full-service functions, limited parking, and no winter boat storage space. In the former configuration the marina generates winter boat storage fees for the town and creates income and jobs for a small marine business. In the latter configuration various one and two story structures (both commercial and public) around the periphery could be incorporated to provide rentable sites for marine-related commercial businesses that could replace the lost storage income, as well as a location for much need public bathroom facilities. In any event, we believe a rebuilt marina with expanded and modern floating docks will have a major impact on the number of boaters and tourists that will visit Chestertown.

8.0 Specific Recommendations Regarding the Waterfront Area:

8.1 Chestertown Marina Options: What we know as “the marina” is actually two parcels; the town-owned marina operations portion and the privately-owned Fish Whistle and surrounding property. After carefully considering the tradeoffs discussed in the preceding section, the Task Force has concluded that a dramatic make-over of the marina is in order. Furthermore, we believe the property has incredible potential as a “town green” for entertainment and events. We believe an entirely new infrastructure with new bulkheads that raise the entire parcel and seal the site from its frequent flooding, an increased number of floating docks and related utilities, and attractive publically available support facilities, can have a dramatic impact on the volume of boaters and other visitors that come to Chestertown. We also believe the marina needs to offer residents and tourists the ability to access the water for recreational activities such as kayaking or sailing.

Recommendations #32 to #37:

#32: The Town should immediately begin applying for grants under the federal government's Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) program and other programs and develop an implementation schedule to dredge the harbor basin, rebuild most of the bulkheads, elevate the site, and replace and increase the number of fixed docks with floating docks to accommodate about 90 slips.

#33: The marina should be closed to vehicular traffic and turned largely into a green space. The Town should consider working with the private land-owner on relocating or rebuilding the Fish Whistle further back on the site to allow broad open views.

#34: The Town should reroute traffic and access by connecting Front Street and Queen Street at Wilmer Park, and route parking to a new parking lot to be discussed later in the report.

#35: The marina needs kayak or paddleboat rental station, new public restrooms and showers for boaters and visitors, a supply and convenience store, a harbor master's office and other commercial buildings and amenities for the public's use.. These too should be placed toward the rear of the site.

#36: After a new marina is constructed the town should develop an RFP to contract-out marina operations. A newly constructed marina could very well result in bids from marina operators that would cover the town's bond payments.

#37: The Task Force recommends that the Town contract with an engineer/architect to design the marina space, based on the above guidelines.



8.2 Wilmer Park: Wilmer Park badly needs a playground for children. Aside from the usual swing sets and slides, other more creative attractions should be considered. Using art (sculpture) for play and water attractions such as interactive fountains can bring new life and new visitors to the park.

Recommendation #38: The Town should proceed on a pending grant that would provide funds for studying the potential for using sculpture for fun. The Town should also reduce the current parking lot at Wilmer and expand the park, and consider restricting the reduced parking lot for use by marina patrons.



8.3 “The Hub” at Wilmer Park: We envision a central “hub” around the entrance to Wilmer Park connecting the park, a new walking promenade, a new parking lot, and new retail and attractions. The barn structure with the train cars (also known as Stepne Station and the old Southern States building) is privately owned and currently leased. We believe it could be a unique site for the Kent Museum which is currently open two Saturdays a month and does not see much traffic due to its Turner Creek location. We believe a move to this building, if economically feasible, would be a unique addition to the two and fit in well with the current call to the past that the rail cars provide. We also believe that Cliff School, which also does not see much traffic due to its location, could also be a wonderful attraction for this “hub”, as would a facility for an expanded Farmers Market.



8.4 The College’s Open Waterfront (from the College’s current boat house to Stepne): Without a doubt, the most valuable property in Chestertown is the 11.3 acres the College owns on the river stretching from the current boathouse down to and including the Armory. Those of us who drive out Quaker Neck Road have been delighted by the new open vistas to the river. The site is currently planned to house a new 3-building boat house complex (incorporating the current boathouse) for the College and a new campus for the College’s Center for the Environment and Society (CES), both of which would fill the site. The college has invested \$16 million to purchase the waterfront and Stepne, both of which are zoned institutional.

Recommendation #39: We recommend the College raze the current boathouse and build an iconic structure in its place.

Recommendation #40: Until such time as the College is able to afford building a new CES complex on the waterfront or at Stepne, we encourage the College to leave the land between the boat house and the armory as open and partially-publicly accessible land for Washington College students and the public. We view the land to be a connection of the waterfront starting at the foot of High Street and ending at the bridge over Radcliffe Creek. This new “park” could be the depository of art from the Sandbox project, the location of fairs and festivals, and the home for an amphitheater for concerts with the river as a backdrop, or the locational coda for the National Music Festival at Washington College. Fire pits and volleyball courts could entice more students into the downtown and more interaction with residents.

8.5 Expanding the Town, Moving the Road, and Creating a Promenade: Elimination of the tree line at the end of Cross Street, will immediately visually expand the town and the river comes into view for those on Cross Street. That transformation alone will be tremendous, but just as quickly, one can now envision an expansion of the town consistent with its current grid and architecture and open to river views.

It seems natural that Cross Street would continue straight across Stepne and then curve onto Quaker Neck after the armory and before the bridge across Radcliffe Creek. We envision doing just that. And, we envision eliminating Quaker Neck Road as we know it down to the armory and replace it with a wide, brick-paved promenade framed by trees and gas lamps. Stepne, indeed, is a critical ingredient in Chestertown’s future and the college has the ability to be the change agent by viewing Stepne as a Planned Unit Development (PUD).

Recommendations #41 to #46: We recommend that:

#41: The tree line bordering Stepne that acts as wall that hides the river and physically signals the end of town, should be removed immediately.

#42: The Town and College should immediately begin discussions on the rezoning of Stepne which we believe should be mixed use.

#43: The College should issue an RFP for residential development on that part of Stepne closest to downtown and rails to trails specifically focused on a 55 and older community, but that other parts of the property be set aside for more moderately priced housing.

#44: The College should consider donating a piece of property along the new extended Cross Street for a new police station if the Town finds such a location to be advantageous.

#45: The College should donate an easement across Stepne for a new State road to tie into Quaker Neck beyond the armory and additional easements for the condominiums next to Wilmer Park and other access.

#46: Concurrent with discussions with the State on a new road, the Town and County should take steps to identify funding for transforming the existing S curve on Cross Street into a walking promenade.

8.6 Parking: We believe the most appropriate and proximate location for parking that brings one through the Cross Street shopping corridor, is close to the marina, river, and park. It would be the area immediately to the left of the new Cross Street extension on the other side of the rails-to-trails. This is currently private property.

Recommendation #47: The Town should investigate funding mechanisms for a new parking lot and subsequently enter discussions with the property landowner on leasing or purchasing the property.

8.7 Riverside Walking Trail: In addition to the promenade that replaces Quaker Neck Road we envision a continuous walking trail starting from the boardwalk at the foot of High Street, along the river's edge all the way to Radcliffe Creek, and then possibly across Quaker Neck Road and along part of Radcliffe Creek-- ultimately tying into rails to trails or upriver to Brookes Mill. We believe this trail could be a combination of elevated boardwalk, ground-based gravel, and other constructed material where necessary. The path should have occasional observational platforms, sitting areas, signage, and interpretive displays along the way.

Recommendation #48: We recommend that the Town initiate an effort to design and obtain appropriate government approvals and easements across those parts of the shoreline not currently owned by the town, including the privately-owned land at the junction of the Chester River and Radcliffe Creek. The Town should seek public and institutional funding sources for this project.

8.8 A New Academic Center, a New Destination Inn and Resolution of the Armory Building and Lands – All on the Waterfront Center for Environment and Society: The College should consider using part of the Armory parking lot and adjacent remediated land to build a new Academic Center on the Waterfront that will be the future home of the Center for Environment and Society (CES). There is sufficient buildable land on the northern-most parking lot of the Armory to build a new academic building that could eventually be connected to the Armory, if the College were to use the Armory for another academic department or program, such as the Art Department. Building on the Armory parking lot land would allow some of the EPA remediated land (former Alger Oil lands) to remain as open space for both recreational usage and for CES outdoor program activities.

Should it not be feasible to build the CES center on the parking lot as suggested, then the College should consider siting a new academic building on the remediated land in a way that protects some of the open vistas of the land to the water's edge.

Inn and Conference Center: One Chestertown innkeeper told the Task Force that the best thing that could happen to his business would be the opening of a new larger inn. This prescient view reflects what we believe to be the accurate logic that “more is better for everybody” even if that business would seem to be a competitor. Similarly, one successful restaurateur told us their business would benefit by more restaurants.

A new destination inn is one of the most important vehicles to drive tourism and the burgeoning wedding trade in Kent County. An inn, which has the ability to host conferences and business retreats, can also bring business to Chestertown during the slower winter months.

We believe an architecturally significant inn that sits between the new Cross Street extension and a new waterfront promenade would be a significant contribution to the town. We spoke with one developer who had strong interest in doing just that. This particular developer envisioned a 60-room inn with a high-end restaurant, wedding facilities, gourmet store, and a garden for growing their own produce.



Armory: The Task Force toured the armory and was struck by its deteriorated state. It is believed that millions of dollars will be required for the most basic of repairs and it may not be financially feasible to restore the entire armory with all that would be required. The Task Force suggests that the College consider restoring only the main building of the Armory, removing the less historic additions, and converting the building to Art Department facilities and studio space. Under this approach the large open space in the Armory could be retained for exhibitions, lectures, and public events-- thereby fulfilling the College’s obligation to allow the Town to use this space occasionally for special cultural programs and activities.

Recommendations #49 to #52:

#49: We recommend that the College reconsider the location and architecture of the proposed academic building on the waterfront to house the Center for Environment and Society, with consideration of some permanent open space for protected vistas as well as outdoor programmatic opportunities associated with the CES and other college programs.

#50: We recommend that the College and Town consider a Conference Center Inn and revise the zoning for Stepne as a Planned Unit Development (PUD). We urge the College to then immediately issue an RFP for the said development of a Conference Center Inn.

#51: We recommend that the College seek counsel to determine if the armory can legally be replaced by another more suitable and efficient structure. If that is not possible, we recommend that the College consider either using the Armory for a future educational program initiative, or working with a developer to incorporate the Armory as part of a commercial development plan.

#52: We recommend that the College entertain the possibility of taking an equity interest in an inn project to help improve the likelihood of its development. We also believe that a minor special fee dedicated to the Chestertown Foundation should be levied on inn guests.

9.0 Financing Mechanisms: (forthcoming)

Appendix 1

Letters Establishing the Task Force



January 11, 2013

The Honorable Margo Bailey
Mayor
Town Hall
106 South Cross Street
Chestertown, MD 21620

Dear Margo:

Thank you again for coming in this morning and discussing the future of the marina, the waterfront, rails to trails and the town with John and me. I think we are now in a very good place.

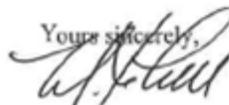
As for next steps, I look forward to receiving a letter from you informing me of your decision to create a Task Force to examine these interrelated issues. As we agreed, the Task Force would do the following:

- contain no more than eight people, of which you would select four and we would select four;
- be chaired by John Moag;
- be directed to solicit proposals from private developers and to gauge the feasibility of receiving public funds and philanthropic gifts
- adopt a comprehensive approach to this assignment, understanding that the Town as a whole would need to benefit;
- be assigned a budget, preferably out of the funds that the College would "donate" to the Town in return for ownership of the Armory;
- be available for interim updates to the Town Council, as requested;
- be instructed to present back to the Town Council no later than [June 15, 2013] a report with options for the Council's consideration.

I have attached a draft letter with these terms for you to amend and revise, as you judge best. As a practical matter, I will leave it to you to inform the other members of the Town Council in advance of my receipt.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if there is any additional information or assistance I can provide. With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Mitchell B. Reiss
President

Attachment



300 WASHINGTON AVENUE, CHESTERTOWN, MD 21620-1197
800-621-1782 410-778-2800
WWW.WASHCOLLEGE.EDU

January xx, 2013

Dr. Mitchell B. Reiss
President
Washington College
300 Washington Avenue
Chestertown, MD 21620

Dear Mitchell,

I appreciated the opportunity to meet with you last Friday to discuss our mutual interest in the future prosperity of Chestertown and to explore ways in which we might work collaboratively to realize that future. As we discussed, the formation of a public-private task force, with a precise mission and limited timeframe, is a good first step. I suggest that we each identify, recruit, and appoint four individuals to serve on the task force. We are in agreement that we will jointly ask John Moag to serve as chair.

The task force will adopt a comprehensive view of Chestertown to include the waterfront from the foot of High Street to Radcliffe Creek, the rails-to-trails network (both the existing spurs as well as those that have been planned but not yet built), and the two business districts (downtown and the two shopping centers north of Morgne Road). We will also ask the task force to consider Washington College and how the students, faculty, and staff could make even greater contributions to economic activity and civic engagement, as well as the ever-growing number of arts organizations and businesses to see how the development of this unique community can serve the future growth and development of Chestertown. Recognizing the limited ability of either the Town or the College to contribute financing to build out what will be recommended, the task force will be asked to solicit proposals from private investors and to gauge the feasibility of securing State and Federal grants and philanthropic gifts to realize the options they propose.

We agree that the task force will be permitted to propose a budget for its operations and that the College's donation of \$200,000 would be a source of this funding so as not to adversely affect either the Town's or the College's operating budgets. The Town Council will have the final say on how much of these funds will be dedicated to the task force's planning efforts. The task force will be asked to present to the Town Council no later than June 15, 2013, a preliminary report on options for the Council's consideration. In the interim, the task force will be available to provide updates to the Town Council.

Sincerely,

Margo Bailey
Mayor

Appendix 2

Entities represented by one or more individuals before the Task Force

Mayor and Town Council

Town Managers Office

Office of Planning and Zoning

Chestertown Visitors Center

Kent County Commissioners (2)

Kent County Office of Tourism and Economic Development

Rock Hall Town Managers Office

Washington College:

- Washington College Student Government Association
- WC Center for the Study of the American Experience
- WC Center for the Environment and Society
- WC C.V. Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience

Downtown Chestertown Association

Waterfront Study Committee

Panel of 25-35 year olds who grew up in Chestertown, left for College, and returned

Chester River Association and Riverkeepers

Agricultural Community (farm owners)

Chester River Hospital

Chestertown Realtors

Chestertown Rowing Club

Kent County Chamber of Commerce

Kent Forward

Sultana Educational Foundation

Kent Museum

Port of Chester Questers (Cliff's School)

Businesses:

- Dixon Valve
- LaMotte Chemical
- Chesapeake Bank
- Brampton Inn
- Evergrain Bakery
- Brooks Tavern
- Fish Whistle
- Chestertown Marina
- Heron Point

Arts:

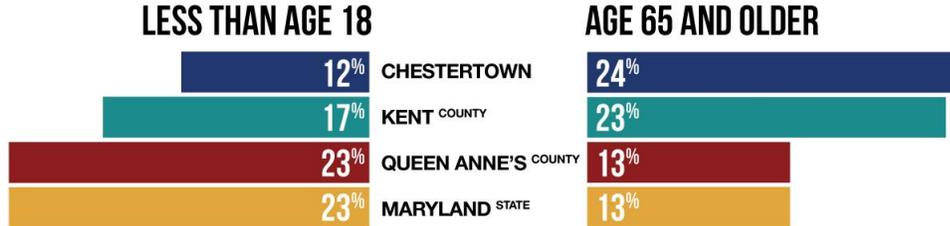
- Kent County Arts Council
- Garfield Center
- Sandbox
- River Arts
- Ortiz Studio
- Massoni Art Gallery
- Hegland Studio

Appendix 3

Demographic and Economic Data for Chestertown, Queen Anne's and Kent Counties, and Maryland

AGE DISTRIBUTION

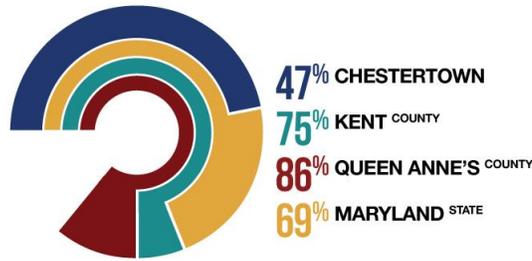
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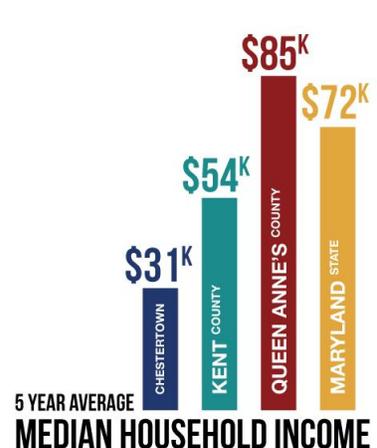
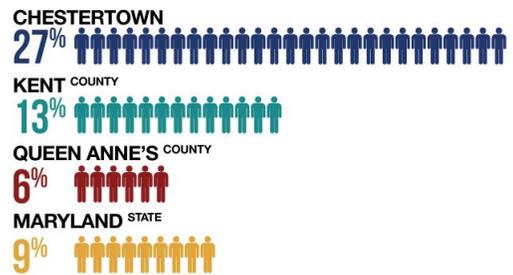
HOUSEHOLDS AND RELATED INCOMES.

The following charts compare various economic data for the four entities of interest for the years 2007 through 2011.

5 YEAR AVERAGE HOME OWNERSHIP RATE



5 YEAR AVERAGE % OF POPULATION BELOW POVERTY LEVEL



Appendix 4

Recommendations Parsed by Action Organization

This appendix allocates the Task Force recommendations to the organization(s) that would have the primary responsibility for executing them. Many of the recommendations involve the cooperation of several organizations, so a number of recommendations are listed several times.

The primary recipients are:

- The Government of Chestertown - Appendix 4.1
- Washington College - Appendix 4.2
- The Regional Arts Community & Downtown Chestertown Association - Appendix 4.3
- The Government of Kent County - Appendix 4.4

Appendix 4.1

Recommendations for Chestertown's Government

The following section lists the specific Task Force recommendations for actions that involve the Town, either solely or jointly.

Recommendation #1: To help our local schools we urge all Kent County employers, citizens, associations, non-profits and Town and County officials to embrace and support the Kent Forward initiative.

Recommendation #2: The Task Force, recognizing that perception is reality, believes the Town needs to embrace the business community more effectively. Inviting the business community to meet with the Council once a year would be a good idea. The next Mayor should be a champion for soliciting business to come to Chestertown and checking in often with the local businesses. We urge immediate consideration of a new streamlined process for planning, zoning, and historic review. Finally, we believe citizens appointed to these three boards should receive training.

Recommendation #3: It is imperative that both governments cooperate and collaborate with each other. Therefore, the Task Force also recommends that the relevant officials from the County and Town sit down to resolve whatever differences exist between them.

Recommendation #4: The Task Force recommends that the Town Council amend Section 6(h) of the Public Ethics Law.

Recommendation #5: The Town, with help from the DBA and the arts community, should develop a plan to place directional signage and historical markers in the Town and report back to the Council within 6 months on its proposed plan.

Recommendation #6: The Town and the Hospital should set up a mechanism to communicate frequently and systematically.

Recommendation #7: The Sultana Education Foundation should keep up the good work and collaborate with the Town's businesses and other non-profit organizations to promote and enhance the annual Downrigging Weekend event and its contribution to the Town's economy.

Recommendation #12: We recommend the Town, working with the DCA, consider closing High Street between Water St. and Lawyers Row (and possibly Cross St. between High and Cannon as well) on First Fridays to allow more of a "street party" atmosphere with entertainment. We recommend liberally allowing—even encouraging—al fresco dining outside restaurants and cafes.

Recommendations #13: Enforce building codes on dilapidated structures and reexamine ordinances that deal with property neglect.

Recommendations #14: The Mayor should appoint a small task force with representatives of the College, the Arts Council, the business community and others to brain-storm other festivals or “destination-type” events for the Town with a focus on winter events to fill existing calendar gaps.

Recommendation #16 for the County and Town: Examine potential sources of funding for extending the rail-trail. And, back to signage, letting visitors know we have a trail would be helpful.

Recommendation #18: We recommend that the Town in conjunction with the management of the Farmers Market consider moving the market to a permanent sheltered location closer to the River near Wilmer Park and Stepne Station, increasing its frequency of operation and improving its access to parking.

Recommendation #19: The Task Force recommends that the Town, on a 6-month experimental basis beginning this Spring (before the College lets out) and through Downrigging Weekend in 2014, run a free shuttle that it can lease on a short term basis before deciding whether to continue the program. A driver could be paid minimum wage (plus tips) so that the experiment would not be that expensive.

Recommendation #20: We also recommend that the Town purchase and install bike racks in logical places to encourage more bicycle use as well as consider implementing a bike sharing program. There should also be designated bike lanes.

Recommendation #21: In order to prevent run-off, we believe the Town and/or County should remove some parking spaces at the foot of High Street as well as at the foot of Cannon Street, and replace them with green space that can absorb water. We also believe that the marina area needs to be raised and sealed from the frequently invading river.

Recommendation #23: The Town, the County, and Washington College should jointly study and then institute new regional economic incentives and small business assistance programs. The possibilities include tax and fee relief; regulatory and zoning relief; financing assistance; assistance in structuring private/public partnerships, enterprise zones, and business incubators; improvements to high speed internet service; and small business development, planning, and training programs.

Recommendation #24: Revamp the Kent County and Chestertown websites. Engage a professional webmaster for help in revamping the sites. Consider target marketing instead of participating in mass advertising where we can get lost. For example, partner with those in the hunting and fishing business and target sporting clubs and websites. Or, partner with the hotels and inns and target bicycle clubs. Target the LGBT community as potential tourists and residents.

Our wedding trade continues to grow and, again, in partnership with hotels, inns, planners, restaurants, caterers, tent suppliers, etc., we should target that audience.

Establish a separate website for businesses, possibly entitled:
www.chestertownisopenforbusiness.com

This site would be dedicated to FAQs for existing businesses, a help desk, and more importantly, to soliciting and enticing new businesses.

Marketing should focus on 2-3 day visits with specific ideas offered on how a visitor can spend a morning, an afternoon, and an evening each day.

Recommendation #25: The Mayor must be creative and dogged in recruiting business to town. Something as simple as a business card that reads, “Chestertown--Open for Business! Feel free to call me directly on my cell.” can be a very effective tool. The Town’s leadership needs a clearly defined and streamlined process for how to do business in Chestertown. They should embrace controlled and architecturally consistent growth and must have the tough skin that is sometimes required when living in a small town. Those who lead may not always be respected or supported. The leaders should draw on the intellectual resources of the community as much as possible.

Recommendation #30: We recommend that the Town work cooperatively with the College on all zoning issues to enable such a project, and, eventually, work cooperatively with a developer on all infrastructure, licensing, architectural, and permitting issues.

Recommendation #31: We will have several changes that focus on enhancements to tourism that are physical in nature later in this report. We believe these changes will be transformational. But, fundamental structural changes need to be made in the way we entice and manage tourists. We recommend the Mayor appoint a Tourism Task Force, with County representation, to study and recommend specific changes, some of which we outline above. This task force should report back to the Town Council and County Commissioners with their report in 60 days to be implemented for the Spring and Summer seasons in 2014

Recommendation #32: The Town should immediately begin applying for grants under the federal government’s Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) program and other programs, and develop an implementation schedule to dredge the harbor basin, rebuild most of the bulkheads, elevate the site, and replace and increase the number of fixed docks with floating docks to accommodate about 90 slips.

Recommendation #33: The Chestertown Marina should be closed to vehicular traffic and turned largely into a green space. The Town should consider working with the private land-owner on relocating or rebuilding the Fish Whistle further back on the site to allow broad open views.

Recommendation #34: The Town should reroute traffic and access by connecting Front Street and Queen Street at Wilmer Park, and route parking to a new parking lot to be discussed later in the report.

Recommendation #35: The marina needs a kayak or paddleboat rental station, new public restrooms and showers for boaters and visitors, a supply and convenience store, a harbor master’s office and other commercial buildings, and amenities for the public’s use.. These too should be placed toward the rear of the site.

Recommendation #36: After a new marina is constructed the Town should develop an RFP to contract-out marina operations. A newly constructed marina could very well result in bids from marina operators that would cover the town's bond payments.

Recommendation #37: The Task Force recommends that the Town contract with an engineer/architect to design the marina space, based on the above guidelines.

Recommendation #38: The Town should proceed on a pending grant that would provide funds for studying the potential for using sculpture for fun. The Town should also reduce the current parking lot at Wilmer and expand the park, and consider restricting the reduced parking lot for use by marina patrons.

Recommendation #42: The Town and College immediately begin discussions on the rezoning of Stepne which we believe should be mixed use.

Recommendation #46: Concurrent with discussions with the State on a new road, the Town and County should take steps to identify funding for transforming the existing S curve into a walking promenade.

Recommendation #47: The Town should investigate funding mechanisms for a new parking lot and subsequently enter discussions with the property landowner on leasing or purchasing the property.

Recommendation #48: We recommend that the Town initiate an effort to design and obtain appropriate government approvals and easements across those parts of the Chester River and Radcliffe Creek shoreline not currently owned by the Town, including the privately-owned land at the junction of the Chester River and Radcliffe Creek. The Town should seek public and institutional funding sources for this project.

Recommendation #50: We recommend that the College and Town consider a Conference Center Inn and revise the zoning for Stepne as a Planned Unit Development (PUD). We urge the College to then immediately issue an RFP for the said development of a Conference Center Inn.

Appendix 4.2

Recommendations for Washington College

The following section lists the specific Task Force recommendations for actions that involve Washington College, either solely or jointly.

Recommendation #1: To help our local schools we urge all Kent County employers, citizens, associations, non-profits and Town and County officials to embrace and support the Kent Forward initiative.

Recommendation #8: We urge that the Kent County Arts Council and the County's Tourism Office work together to pinpoint marketing efforts that can draw more art-driven tourism and encourage more artists to locate to Chestertown. We also believe that the Arts Council, River Arts, and Washington College should consider ways that they can co-market content. Finally, we urge more careful scheduling of events (e.g., Weekend Open Studios conflicting with Downrigging Weekend.) We will also have specific thoughts later in this report on the public display of art.

Recommendation #10: We would urge the College to study the feasibility of systems that would allow students to "swipe" their College card at downtown establishments. We note that Chesapeake Bank and Trust offered a variation of this concept, but many students did not know of its existence. We also urge the College to consider, when leasing additional office space that is not campus-critical, to assess the alternatives for using downtown space.

Recommendations #14: The Mayor should appoint a small task force with representatives of the College, the Arts Council, the business community and others to brain-storm other festivals or "destination-type" events for the Town with a focus on winter events to fill existing calendar gaps.

Recommendation #23: The Town, Kent County, and Washington College should jointly study and then institute new regional economic incentives and small business assistance programs. The possibilities include tax and fee relief; regulatory and zoning relief; financing assistance; assistance in structuring private/public partnerships, enterprise zones, and business incubators; improvements to high speed internet service; and small business development, planning, and training programs.

Recommendation #27: We recommend that Washington College dedicate that portion of Stepne closest to Cross Street for a residential community. Since the College holds this land in its endowment, we recommend the College consider participating in part or in whole as an equity participant in the project which, we believe, would make the project more viable in a near-term time frame.

Recommendation #28: We recommend that the College immediately begin soliciting developers.

Recommendation #29: We recommend that layout for the development be on a grid system and consistent with the existing layout and architecture of the town to ensure seamless incorporation of the development into the existing town.

Recommendation #30: We recommend that the Town work cooperatively with the College on all zoning issues to enable such a project, and, eventually, work cooperatively with a developer on all infrastructure, licensing, architectural, and permitting issues.

Recommendation #39: We recommend the College raze the current boathouse and build an iconic structure in its place.

Recommendation #40: Until such time as the College is able to afford building a new CES complex on the waterfront or at Stepne, we encourage the College to leave the land between the boat house and the armory as open and partially-publicly accessible land for Washington College students and the public. We view the land to be a connection of the waterfront starting at the foot of High Street and ending at the bridge over Radcliffe Creek. This new “park” could be the depository of art from the Sandbox project, the location of fairs and festivals, and the home for an amphitheater for concerts with the river as a backdrop, or the locational coda for the National Music Festival at Washington College. Fire pits and volleyball courts could entice more students into the downtown and more interaction with residents.

Recommendation #41: The tree line bordering Stepne that acts as wall that hides the river and physically signals the end of town, should be removed immediately.

Recommendation #42: The Town and College should immediately begin discussions on the rezoning of Stepne which we believe should be mixed use.

Recommendation #43: The College should issue an RFP for residential development on that part of Stepne closest to downtown and rails to trails specifically focused on a 55 and older community, but that other parts of the property be set aside for more moderately priced housing.

Recommendation #44: The College should consider donating a piece of property along the new extended Cross Street for a new police station if the Town finds such a location to be advantageous.

Recommendation #45: The College should donate an easement across Stepne for a new state road to tie into Quaker Neck beyond the armory and additional easements for the condominiums next to Wilmer Park and other access.

Recommendation #49: We recommend that the College reconsider the location and architecture of the proposed academic building on the waterfront to house the Center for Environment and Society, with consideration of some permanent open space for protected vistas as well as outdoor programmatic opportunities associated with the CES and other college programs.

Recommendation #50: We recommend that the College and Town consider a Conference Center Inn and revise the zoning for Stepne as a Planned Unit Development (PUD). We urge the College to then immediately issue an RFP for said development of a Conference Center Inn.

Recommendation #51: We recommend that the College seek counsel to determine if the armory can legally be replaced by another more suitable and efficient structure. If that is not possible, we recommend that the College consider either using the Armory for a future educational program initiative, or working with a developer to incorporate the Armory as part of a commercial development plan.

Recommendation #52: We recommend that the College entertain the possibility of taking an equity interest in an inn project to help improve the likelihood of its development. We also believe that a minor special fee dedicated to the Chestertown Foundation should be levied on inn guests.

Appendix 4.3

Recommendations for the Regional Arts Community and the Downtown Chestertown Association (DCA)

The following section lists the specific Task Force recommendations for actions that involve the regional arts community and the DCA, either solely or jointly.

Recommendation #1: To help our local schools we urge all Kent County employers, citizens, associations, non-profits and Town and County officials to embrace and support the Kent Forward initiative.

Recommendation #2: The Task Force, recognizing that perception is reality, believes the Town needs to embrace the business community more effectively. Inviting the business community to meet with the Council once a year would be a good idea. The next Mayor should be a champion for soliciting business to come to Chestertown and checking in often with the local businesses. We urge immediate consideration of a new streamlined process for planning, zoning, and historic review. Finally, we believe citizens appointed to these three boards should receive training.

Recommendation #5: The Town, with help from the DCA and the arts community, should develop a plan to place directional signage and historical markers in the Town and report back to the Council within 6 months on its proposed plan.

Recommendation #7: The Sultana Education Foundation should keep up the good work and continue to collaborate with the Town's businesses and other non-profit organizations to promote and enhance the annual Downrigging Weekend event and its contribution to the Town's economy.

Recommendation #8: We urge that the Kent County Arts Council and the County's Tourism Office work together to pinpoint marketing efforts that can draw more art-driven tourism and encourage more artists to locate to Chestertown. We also believe that the Arts Council, River Arts, and Washington College should consider ways that they can co-market content. Finally, we urge more careful scheduling of events (e.g., Weekend Open Studios conflicting with Downrigging Weekend.) We will also have specific thoughts later in this report on the public display of art.

Recommendation #9: The Task Force believes that integrating the College more into your businesses and offering appropriate student special pricing can increase traffic downtown from students and their parents. We also suggest giving new birth to the old tradition of having a welcome party for students in Fountain Park each year.

Recommendation #11: The Task Force believes the Association, as a group, should begin examining some evening hours as well as remaining open on Sunday. We recommend working with the Chestertown Arts Council on ways to have musicians, mimes, etc. on the streets during First Fridays (or every Friday!). We also recommend

the DCA reach out to the many landscapers and growers in the County and ask for donations for trees and plants to further beautify downtown. Flags, pennants, and color liven up any central district, and we encourage you not to be shy in showing your colors and flying your flags. Finally, we ask merchants to participate in recruiting others to expand their current businesses elsewhere into Chestertown. (i.e., The next time you are in Easton, Annapolis, Baltimore or wherever and you visit an establishment that might fit in Chestertown, seek out the owner and encourage them to consider Chestertown.)

Recommendation #12 for the Town and DCA: We recommend the Town, working with the DCA, consider closing High Street between Water St. and Lawyers Row (and possibly Cross St. between High and Cannon as well) on First Fridays to allow more of a “street party” atmosphere with entertainment. We recommend liberally allowing—even encouraging—al fresco dining outside restaurants and cafes.

Recommendations #14: The Mayor should appoint a small task force with representatives of the College, the Arts Council, the business community and others to brain-storm other festivals or “destination-type” events for the town with a focus on winter events to fill existing calendar gaps.

Recommendations #15 for the National Music Festival at Washington College: We feel it would be exciting to see more musicians on the streets playing their music.

Appendix 4.4

Recommendations for the Kent County Government

The following section lists the specific Task Force recommendations for actions that involve the Kent County Government, either solely or jointly.

Recommendation #1: To help our local schools we urge all Kent County employers, citizens, associations, non-profits and Town and County officials to embrace and support the Kent Forward initiative.

Recommendation #3: It is imperative that both the Town and County governments cooperate and collaborate with each other. Therefore, the Task Force recommends that the relevant officials from the County and Town sit down to resolve whatever differences exist between them.

Recommendation #8: We urge that the Kent County Arts Council and the County's Tourism Office work together to pinpoint marketing efforts that can draw more art-driven tourism and encourage more artists to locate to Chestertown. We also believe that the Arts Council, River Arts, and Washington College should consider ways that they can co-market content. Finally, we urge more careful scheduling of events (e.g., Weekend Open Studios conflicting with Downrigging Weekend.) We will also have specific thoughts later in this report on the public display of art.

Recommendation #16 for the County and Town: Examine potential sources of funding for extending the rail-trail. And, back to signage, letting visitors know we have a trail would be helpful.

Recommendation #17 for the County Office of Economic Development and Tourism: We recommend that the County consider assembling a group of entrepreneurial farmers to discuss the possibility of a marketing campaign that would target Kent County food products as well as agri-tourism, and "farm days".

Recommendation #21: In order to prevent run-off, we believe the Town and/or County should remove some parking spaces at the foot of High Street as well as at the foot of Cannon Street, and replace them with green space that can absorb water. We also believe that the marina area needs to be raised and sealed from the frequently invading river.

Recommendation #22 for the County: Provide increased resources for Economic Development and improve coordination between the County and Town. Adequately fund the tourism effort. Ensure that the occupancy tax is indeed going to economic development and tourism. Consider raising the occupancy tax from 5% to 7% (the State average) and dedicate the additional funds to development and tourism.

Recommendation #23: The Town, Kent County, and Washington College should jointly study and then institute new regional economic incentives and small business assistance programs. The possibilities include tax and fee relief; regulatory and zoning relief; financing assistance; assistance in structuring private/public partnerships, enterprise zones, and business incubators; improvements to high speed internet service; and small business development, planning, and training programs.

Recommendation #24: Revamp the Kent County and Chestertown websites. Engage a professional webmaster for help in revamping the sites. Consider target marketing instead of participating in mass advertising where we can get lost. For example, partner with those in the hunting and fishing business and target sporting clubs and websites. Or, partner with the hotels and inns and target bicycle clubs. Target the LGBT community as potential tourists and residents.

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Marketing should focus on 2 to 3 day visits with specific ideas offered on how a visitor can spend a morning, an afternoon, and an evening each day.

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Recommendation #46: Concurrent with discussions with the State on a new road, the Town and County should take steps to identify funding for transforming the existing S curve on Cross Street into a walking promenade.