

# 2004 Comprehensive Plan Amendment

## March 10, 2010

### Comprehensive Redevelopment & Adaptive Reuse of Large Abandoned Sites

#### I. INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this plan document is to amend the 2004 Cumberland Comprehensive Plan and the 2009 Municipal Growth Element to provide guidance for the comprehensive redevelopment and adaptive reuse of large abandoned development sites, which may include large parcels with one or multiple buildings that have been abandoned and pose complex issues for successful redevelopment. Since the 2004 plan was written, the City's two former hospitals, Sacred Heart on Seton Drive and Memorial Hospital on Memorial Avenue, have been consolidated by Western Maryland Health Systems into a new state-of-the-art regional medical center on Willowbrook Road. In combining these two facilities the former hospital sites have been abandoned and are currently vacant.

The City's current Zoning Ordinance provides little flexibility to address mixed use redevelopment opportunities on large properties (such as these two former hospital sites) that are not within the Central Business District Zone and not appropriate for such intensive zoning. Without a special zoning district to address these needs, these properties may remain unused for extensive periods of time, resulting in potential deterioration and blight conditions for neighboring properties. The City has determined that the effective redevelopment of these and other large abandoned properties may require a mix of smaller scale land uses, which would serve a wider range of public and neighborhood needs, from employment and commerce to housing. To accomplish mixed and adaptive reuse of these sites, a new floating zone should be designed that would promote better integration of these sites into the surrounding neighborhoods. This plan amendment is proposed to address this need and to provide guidance for the creation of a new Comprehensive Redevelopment and Adaptive Reuse Floating Zone.

#### II. PLAN CONCEPT:

Chapter 2 of the 2004 Comprehensive Plan (which begins on page 7) explains the City's vision for the year 2020 and how the plan document is designed to implement that vision. It provides a series of Concept Plans to show how the City intends to protect its cultural, historic, and open space resources, while achieving redevelopment of the City's various commercial, industrial, and residential districts. It identifies and targets specific several large commercial and industrial Redevelopment Opportunity areas (depicted in Figure 4 of the Plan) that serve as strategic development investment sites to revitalize the City's economy. They include the traditional downtown area and a number of former industrial areas of the City surrounding the Kelly-Springfield

headquarters area, the Rolling Mill and Klotts Mill sites along Maryland Avenue, and the former industrial district south of the CSX Railroad and west of Virginia Avenue. Prior to the closing of the Sacred Heart and Memorial Hospital sites in 2009, these areas represented the largest concentrations of abandoned and underutilized intensive commercial and large industrial uses in the City.

While the City's two hospital sites are somewhat smaller than the commercial and industrial redevelopment opportunity areas identified in Figure 4 of the 2004 Comprehensive Plan, they pose similar significant challenges to successful and sustainable redevelopment. They are relatively large properties (over 2 acres in size) and they include multiple large buildings that were specifically designed for medical use. The consolidation of these medical operations into the new Western Maryland Regional Medical Center on Willowbrook Road effectively reduces or eliminates extensive medical reuse of these properties. The buildings that remain on these sites are not conducive to single use occupancy by virtue of their large scale and design. In many ways, the patient rooms are generally designed for high density residential use, the medical offices may be best suited for office or service uses, and the examination and operating facilities might be conducive to research or technology uses. Without extensive and costly demolition and redesign, it would be difficult—if not infeasible—in the City's potential development market to find a single large user that would be well suited to these sites.

Given the presumption that a mix of uses will be desired and appropriate for these sites, the City currently lacks the zoning flexibility necessary to achieve a broad mix of land uses as part of a comprehensive redevelopment and adaptive reuse strategy for these sites, as well as for the other sites identified in the plan as commercial and industrial reinvestment opportunity areas. The predominately residential zones (including the Residential Office or R-O zone) have very limited, if any, nonresidential development options. The Central Business District (CBD) zone is one of three zoning classifications that currently allow a mix of commercial and high density residential development options. However, the CBD zone was specifically and sensitively designed to retain and strengthen the City's historic downtown area and contains provisions and density allowances that would not be appropriate to encourage in many of the City's larger residential areas. The only other zoning districts that allow a wide mix of commercial and residential uses, the Gateway Commercial and Industrial Zones, are limited in application to the Centre and Mechanic Street corridors and were designed to protect the sensitive gateway area to the City from the scenic Narrows.

The rest of the City's predominately commercial and industrial zones prohibit any meaningful residential development options. However, some balance of commercial and residential redevelopment on these former hospital sites would clearly help the future redevelopment of these sites provide a more compatible transition to the established residential uses surrounding them and help promote stronger and more stable residential property values in those neighborhoods. Such a mix of uses would be appropriate to encourage for ongoing redevelopment of the Rolling Mill site, as well as other areas abandoned sites in the City. While the City's Rehabilitation and Redevelopment (RR) Floating Zone offers some flexibility for the Mayor and City Council to define

specific uses that would be allowed by the zone, the intent for the district and the development standards it imposed were clearly defined to govern the reuse of individual buildings or small abandoned sites in intensive residential areas. Consequently, staff has determined that a new floating zone specifically designed to encourage the comprehensive redevelopment and adaptive reuse of larger sites and facilities is needed.

### **III. LAND USE AND CULTURAL RESOURCES:**

Chapter 4 of the 2004 Comprehensive Plan provides an analysis of the City's land development patterns and recent changes in land use and an assessment of the City's historic, cultural, and visual resources. The existing land use assessment on page 20 of the plan notes the various public, semi-public, and institutional land uses, including the Sacred Heart and Memorial Hospitals. These facilities were consolidated into the Western Maryland Regional Hospital on Willowbrook Road in 2009. As the employment and public health centerpieces of the thriving residential neighborhoods that surround them, the redevelopment of these facilities is critical to preserve neighborhood property values and the prevention of future blight.

In the list of land use issues discussed in the chapter (which begins on page 20 and continues onto page 22), the 2004 plan notes these problems caused by previously developed properties that have since become vacant and underutilized. The plan further suggests that, "[a] flexible land use strategy is needed to promote redevelopment of these properties, provided that effects on adjacent neighborhood uses are controlled" (page 21, bullet number 3). The 2004 plan further notes that the RR (Rehabilitation and Redevelopment) Floating Zone was adopted to address this issue, but it wasn't designed to address the needs of large properties or properties that would require a mixed use redevelopment plan for effective revitalization. Therefore, a new floating zone is needed to address the unique challenges posed by large redevelopment sites with mixed use development needs.

To address these special needs, this amendment document establishes a new land use action strategy for Objective 2.3 (page 23 of the 2004 plan), which states as follows:

#### **Action 2.3.4**

Design and adopt a new Comprehensive Redevelopment and Adaptive Reuse Floating Zone to provide standards and guidance for the revitalization and adaptive reuse of large properties (2 or more acres in size) that contain one or more principal use structures in excess of 50,000 square feet in gross floor area (either individually or combined) and would require a mix of land uses for successful redevelopment.

#### **IV. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Economic Development element (Chapter 9) of the 2004 Comprehensive Plan provides further guidance and support for the plan's Land Use recommendations from the perspective of revitalization of the City's economic base. This chapter assesses the historic declines in the City's economic base caused by the closure of most of the City's major industries and manufacturing plants. It further notes (in the first bullet at the bottom of page 68) the shifts in employment patterns that resulted from these losses, and notes the growing emergence of the Health Care sector as a dominant feature of the City's overall economy. However, the consolidation of the two former hospitals has created an additional need for redevelopment and revitalization that was not anticipated when the plan was written in 2004.

The second bulleted issue in the Economic Development Chapter (page 74 of the 2004 plan) identifies the RR (Rehabilitation and Redevelopment) Floating Zone as a zoning strategy that the City can use to encourage redevelopment of underutilized and vacant commercial and industrial buildings. However, as noted in this amendment document, an additional zoning option is needed to address the special needs of the larger and more intensively developed vacant properties. Consequently, a new Action Strategy (Action 8.2.10) is recommended to be added to Objective 8.2 of the 2004 Plan (page 78) to reinforce the new land use action strategy. This new action strategy would read as follows.

##### **Action 8.2.10**

Design and adopt a new Comprehensive Redevelopment and Adaptive Reuse Floating Zone to provide standards and guidance for the revitalization and adaptive reuse of large properties (2 or more acres in size) that contain one or more principal use structures in excess of 50,000 square feet in gross floor area (either individually or combined) and would require a mix of land uses for successful redevelopment.

#### **V. MUNICIPAL GROWTH ELEMENT (2009 Comprehensive Plan Amendment)**

In response to recent legislation passed by the Maryland Legislature in 2006 (House Bill 1141), The City of Cumberland adopted an update to the 2004 Comprehensive Plan to incorporate a new Municipal Growth Element. The primary purpose of this element was to evaluate the capacity of the City's public facilities and infrastructure and ensure that sufficient capacity exists to support the City's growth and development policies, or to make specific recommendations to improve those facilities and services as needed to ensure adequate capacity for desired growth. This new element, which begins on page 31 of the 2009 plan update, concluded that the City has adequate public facility and infrastructure capacity to support a desired growth rate of 20% over the subsequent 20 years.

The potential residential and economic development growth that would be generated by redevelopment of the abandoned former hospital sites was understood at the time the Municipal Growth Element was written and would not cause a material change in that assessment or a change

in the supplemental policies and recommendations advanced by that plan update. Any new residential units and or commercial/institutional uses that would be generated by the redevelopment and reuse of these properties would be absorbed as part of the City's planned 20-year growth rate. The redevelopment and reuse of these existing properties would constitute infill development, which is promoted by the Municipal Growth Element. Furthermore, these abandoned properties are already served by adequate municipal facilities and infrastructure that would be necessary to support the comprehensive redevelopment and adaptive reuse of the properties. Consequently, no substantive material changes to the 2009 Municipal Growth Element were determined to be necessary as a result of this Comprehensive Plan Amendment.