



Maryland Department of Planning

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November 26, 2013

Ms. Monika Weierbach, Town Administrator  
Town of Mount Airy  
PO Box 50  
Mount Airy, MD 21771

**Re: Mount Airy Draft 2013 Comprehensive Master Plan**

Dear Ms. Weierbach:

Thank you for submitting the draft Mount Airy 2013 Comprehensive Master Plan update to the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) for our review.

The town does a commendable job identifying a vision of incorporating preservation of the community's character, providing for quality infill and maintaining the downtown historic district. The town also recognizes the benefits of maintaining agricultural uses as a greenbelt and a clear defined town boundary. We encourage you to consider our comments as supportive of this vision. Additional comments were received from the Maryland Department of the Environment and are attached. As other state agency comments are received we will forward them to you.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or Melissa Appler at 410.767.4500 should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Peter G. Conrad'.

Peter G. Conrad, AICP  
Director of Local Planning Assistance

Enclosures: MDP Comments on Draft 2013 Mount Airy Comprehensive Master Plan

cc: Phillip Hager, Director, Carroll County Planning & Zoning  
Gary Hessong, Acting Director, Frederick County Planning  
Rich Josephson, Director, Planning Services  
Melissa Appler, Regional Planner  
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Martin O'Malley, Governor  
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**Maryland Department of Planning  
Comment on Town of Mount Airy's 2013 Comprehensive Master Plan  
November 26, 2013**

**General Comments:**

- The organization and format of the plan elements is sometimes hard to follow. For example:
  - Chapter 1 provides the Town's history, some demographic information and acknowledges some planning legislation and initiatives. In Chapter 2, a more in-depth discussion of State Planning legislation and initiatives is provided and then Planning history in the Town. It may be helpful to the reader to provide the Planning Process and State Planning context; legislation and initiatives in the first chapter. Then provide the Town History, Regional Context/Demographics and Objectives in Chapter 2.
  - The content of the Municipal Growth Element (MGE) appears to be duplicated. A significant portion of the information provided in Chapter 4, "Land Use and Zoning," is duplicated in the MGE section of the document. Additionally, it appears that the MGE is not a formal Chapter in the document, it is placed between Chapters 4 and 5 with no reference to its inclusion in the document's Table of Contents and includes page numbering that is also not consistent with the document.
  - The text of the MGE at times references that the Town's Comprehensive Plan is currently in the process of being updated. Since the MGE is included as part of this update these references should be corrected.
- The Town recognizes that PlanMaryland provides the opportunity for local jurisdictions to adopt local PlanMaryland planning areas. MDP encourages local jurisdictions to participate in this process and offers assistance in the application process.
- The Sustainable Growth & Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012 (SB236), directs every local jurisdiction with planning and zoning authority to submit a map showing the implementation of their adopted growth tiers. The Town is encouraged to review the materials and guidance associated with SB236; MDP is available to assist the Town with the process.
- In 2012, the Maryland General Assembly repealed Article 66B and Article 28 and replaced it

with the Land Use Article. This should be correctly referenced in the plan as needed.

### **Chapter 3 – Natural Resources**

- Steep Slopes- The Town states that many regulations referenced define steep slopes as being between 15% and 25%; however Mounty Airy allows development on lands up to 30%. This section may benefit from a discussion of why Mount Airy permits development on slopes greater than many of the referenced regulations (page 38).
- Goal 5 provided at the end of Chapter 3 states that the Town intends to update the current wellhead protection ordinance to increase the buffer zone directly around the Town wellheads. It may be beneficial to mention this goal in the discussion of wellhead protection on page 41.

### **Chapter 4 – Land Use and Zoning and Municipal Growth Element (MGE)**

- As mentioned above, Chapter 4 and the MGE seem to duplicate a significant amount of information. It would be beneficial to readers to reduce redundancy of this information.
- The MGE section following Chapter 4 makes statements referencing that the update of the 2003 Comprehensive Plan is currently underway. Since the MGE is now being reviewed as part of the update it would be beneficial to remove these references that may create confusion.
- The statements in the document related to growth and development seem to be inconsistent. The draft plan states that there is currently adequate vacant land in the municipal boundary for both residential and industrial expansion (pg58). The plan further notes that there is still over 200 acres of residentially zoned land in Town with development potential; enough capacity for 40 years of growth. On page 2 of the MGE the Town states that the “next decade will focus on infill and redevelopment.” However, the Town then identifies 968 acres of land for potential annexation. While it is the Town’s vision that several of these areas will be used to create a “Greenbelt” around the Town, the total residential capacity of these areas appear to be over 1,000 units according to the chart on page 62 of chapter 4 and same chart on page 7 of the MGE. Using the 3.0 persons per household this would be 3,000 additional people. Based on the Low Growth Scenario the Town has currently endorsed this would be enough capacity for 66 years of growth.
- Please keep in mind that if Mount Airy provides too much land for development, it will tend to be used inefficiently. In addition, plans and growth controls will be marginalized because there are an abundance of locational options for each new development.
- The Town mentions that due to water and sewer shortages, future annexation areas could be designated as groundwater recharge sites. Is it appropriate to be re-zoning

land as Employment (i.e.-Harrison Farm) and including land as Commercial (i.e.-84 Lumber Property) in such areas?

- It is difficult to determine the total residential capacity in the current municipal boundary. Page 13 of the plan states there is capacity for 607 units, the discussion on pages 58-59 reports a total capacity of 694 units and the chart on page 60 has a states that the vacant land available for residential units equals 287 units. While the difference may be attributed to some areas being adjusted based on the proposed rezonings this is not clear. It would be helpful to provide one capacity number for the Town in a chart form by zoning or property.
- The charts, map and corresponding text of the future annexation areas are identified using a letter system. These “letters” should be consistent between the Future Annexation map, charts and text. For example, the 84 lumber property is M on the map and chart and K in the MGE text. Additionally, the chart on MGE page 7 does not include G. Dorseytown.
- A number of rezonings are presented in the draft plan; a future land use map that corresponds to these rezonings may be helpful to included.
- The draft plan states that a number of the potential annexation areas will be used to create a “green” buffer around the Town. A more detailed discussion on this “Greenbelt” concept should be provided that identifies how the Town will ensure that these properties are preserved for this purpose upon annexation.
- On page 26 of the MGE it states that the current update of the Master Plan will have a future municipal growth boundary that is a significant reduction of the 2003 plan. This statement should be removed as the update of the plan actually includes a larger municipal growth area than the 2003 plan.
- The draft plan states that water availability and sewer capacity will be the single-most limiting factor for any new growth. Additionally the Town states that the total future water demand assumes that everything within the growth boundary will build out according to the adopted land use plan. The current limits are unclear, it would be helpful if this information were provided in a chart that states the current available capacity, future demand based on current zoning and future demand based on rezonings.
- Given the large annexation area identified, the Town should discuss it’s long-term prospects for providing water and sewer to these properties.

## **Chapter 5 - Transportation**

- The Town’s vision to provide improved mobility for bicycle and pedestrian travel is commended by MDP. The Town may consider adding information such as funding sources and a timeframe for implementation.

- MDP appreciates the plan's desire to study improvements to MD-27 in a corridor analysis. The Town's traffic congestion on MD-27 and MD-808 during the morning and evening peak hour commute should be examined from a transportation planning and land use perspective. Two of the worst performing intersections mentioned in the Master Plan are MD-808 at Ridgeville Road and MD-27 at Twin Arch Road; both locations are surrounded by commercial land uses. It is imperative that land use and transportation planning be integrated to direct future commercial and residential development in strategically targeted growth areas or infill areas and provide alternative and connected local roadways to avoid further congestion along MD-27 and MD 808.
- Road widening may not be a viable, long-term solution to the Town's traffic congestion issues if it is not addressed through integrated transportation and land use strategies. Building new roads is expensive and even more costly to maintain long term. It is recommended the Town work with SHA to examine access management strategies along MD-27 and MD-808 to improve safety and capacity along the corridor.
- As mentioned on page 1 of the plan, "...the Town will maintain its buffer of agricultural land uses directly surrounding its boundaries on all sides." If this goal is to be obtained in the future, the Town may want to consider scaling back some of the proposed road additions illustrated on the Mount Airy Future Annexation Areas Map and the Mount Airy Proposed Street System map. New roads such as a western bypass may provide a missing connection(s), but it may lead to significant development and more traffic outside of the municipal boundary.

## **Chapter 6 – Community Facilities & Public Services**

- Water Resource Element (WRE):
  - Section 3-106 of the Land Use Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland mandates that all Maryland counties and municipalities that exercise planning and zoning authority prepare and adopt a water resources element to their comprehensive plans. Mount Airy passed Resolution No. 2010-4 for the purpose of adoption of the Town WRE Comprehensive Plan Element on 10/4/10.

While the WRE is referenced in the Comprehensive plan, the draft plan should indicate if the WRE's analyses of water and sewer demand, constraints, and proposed solutions are still adequate in the context of changes in the land use plan. The draft plan should also include updates on issues discussed and questions that are found in the WRE. For example, have the pending appropriation request with MDE for Wells #1, #3, #12, and #18 been allocated? Have any of the System-Specific Action Items Already in Place been completed?

Has the Town determined whether the WRE's proposed water solutions for Mt. Airy are reasonable?

- The WRE also requires each jurisdiction to “identify suitable receiving waters and land areas to meet the stormwater management and wastewater treatment and disposal needs of existing and future development proposed in the land use element of the plan, considering available data provided by MDE. The WRE should discuss the suitability of receiving waters.