

# HAGERSTOWN SDAT

Southside Revival: Changing the Market Dynamics  
in an Early Mid-Atlantic Downtown

A Sustainable Design  
Assessment Team Report

**Hagerstown, Maryland**  
**November 6–8, 2006**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sustainable Design Assistance Team recommends a “Marsh Run development concept” as one of many sustainable ways to address issues within the Lee and Sycamore area identified in the Hagerstown application to the AIA Center for Communities by Design. The development concept and supporting recommendations featured in this report demonstrate a way to address site access, zoning conditions, parking requirements, and the Housing Authority’s development plans for “Hagerstown Southside Revival.” The recommendations illustrate development that would reinforce the downtown, connect the neighborhoods to the park and downtown life, ensure sustainable development, and build on the natural and cultural resources in and around the site area. These concepts are derived from consultation among the SDAT members, the Hagerstown SDAT Steering Committee, and community members who participated in the process; the concepts are designed to be responsive to current market forces in Hagerstown. The methods employed within these ideas involve best practices in sustainable urban design.

The Hagerstown Marsh Run project would employ sustainable design at the urban community scale. The approach includes

- Urban landscaping that will reduce flooding and restore water quality through the use of porous pavement, bioswales, water edge buffers, and reconstructed wetlands
- Green maintenance practices to reduce costs and improve public health through the use of alternatives to salt-based snow milting and low-maintenance native planting
- Resource conservation methods to reduce municipal costs and preserve natural resources, e.g., using water-saving fixtures, graywater alternatives, ecological waste water treatment systems, and regional/ municipal recycling
- Energy conservation to reduce costs and improve life quality and productivity, including such strategies as environmentally responsive urban lighting, solar envelope zoning, energy conservation in buildings, green (not-fossil fuel) power
- Green urban infrastructure, including a pedestrian friendly streetscape and treescape, pocket parks, children play lots, community gardens, and green networks for walks, trails, and habitat corridors, to improve community safety, pride, and beauty



The SDAT found the Marsh Run site to be a strategic, amenity-rich location that will support a quality catalyst project. Its current underdeveloped state actually makes the extraordinary possible. Local market factors suggest Hagerstown should consider some higher density urban housing in the mix downtown and especially in the Marsh Run development concept. The team suggests the city should strive for about 5 percent of the new home market downtown with as many as 500 units in the concept.



To accomplish a project like the Marsh Run, however, the city will need to address serious constraints to development. The suburbs have a competitive advantage through the current application of excise taxes and the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance. The area tends to be invisible and there will be a temptation to hide undesirable uses in lieu of the residential and cultural identity defined by the SDAT. Finally, the city will need to avoid the skepticism caused by false expectations created by unrealized projects in the past. The best way to do this is to take the incremental steps needed to gain confidence in the project and to reimagine the promise of the area.

### **Recommendations**

- Exempt the downtown area from the excise tax and Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance. Downtown will continue to more than pay its way as it has for decades. The exemption that applies to the C3 area should also include new development in adjacent neighborhoods.
- Relax zoning requirements for parking and setbacks.
- Continue to enforce building codes in the downtown area to maintain the marketability and reuse potential of properties.
- Enact an innovative zoning overlay zone that allows developers flexibility in design and land use in keeping with traditional urbanism and the demands of the 21st-century marketplace.
- Establish a business improvement district for downtown.

- Consider establishing a tax increment financing district for downtown.
- Develop a strategy to renovate and reuse upper stories of downtown buildings for residential or office use.
- Commission a thorough market study of the SDAT Marsh Run proposal to determine the economic feasibility of downtown residential development.

The success of the Marsh Run development concept will also depend on the project's ability to

- Recapture the southside area's identity by capitalizing on its most prominent, historic, and contemporary feature: Marsh Run
- Renew and develop the vitality of the Marsh Run district hand in hand with renewing and restoring the ecological vitality and identity of the Marsh Run's wetland landscape
- Celebrate the cultural and natural landscape interactions coalescing in the southwest quadrant and to programmatically as well as physically strengthen the identity of the entire area and reconnect it to its context
- Recognize how patterns of smaller block size and road divisions have characteristically defined neighborhoods, districts, urban scale, and fluid connectedness in Hagerstown's downtown area
- Strengthen north/south connectivity through the Marsh Run district with a bold landscape infrastructure move (boulevard, park, public space) and, in so doing, reconnect north and south areas of Hagerstown's city core

## Introduction

In January 2006 Hagerstown, Md., submitted a proposal to the American Institute of Architects (AIA) for a Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) to assist the town and its citizens in addressing key issues facing the community. The issues ranged from a declining downtown area to a potential redevelopment opportunity adjacent to the city core.



The AIA accepted the proposal and, after a preliminary visit by a small group in July, the SDAT members arrived in Hagerstown on November 6, 2006. For three days, the team members, working closely with local officials, community leaders, technical experts, and citizens, studied the community and its concerns. During those three days, the team came to understand the issues and used its expertise to frame a wide range of recommendations, which were presented to the community in a public meeting on November 8.

This report is a more detailed version of the findings and recommendations that were presented to the community on November 8. After a brief overview of the SDAT program and process and a short discussion of Hagerstown and the issues it is facing, the report covers

- Marsh Run development concept
- Market and policy framework
- Sustainable community design
- Landscape architecture

A closing section offers some thoughts on how the community can best move forward to address the range of issues and recommendations covered in the report.

## **What is the SDAT Program?**

The SDAT program is an interdisciplinary community assistance program that focuses on principles of sustainability. Launched in 2005, the program represents an exciting chapter in the AIA's history of supporting communities with volunteer design expertise.

The SDAT program is modeled on the AIA's R/UDAT (Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team) program. While the R/UDAT program provides communities with specific design solutions, the SDAT program provides broad assessments to help frame future policies or design solutions in the context of sustainability and helps communities plan the first steps of implementation. The SDAT program is based on an understanding of design as a process that

- Is integrative, holistic, and visual
- Is central to achieving a sustainable relationship among humans, the natural environment, and the place
- Gives three-dimensional form to a culture and a place
- Achieves balance among culture, environment, and economic systems

The SDAT program is grounded in the AIA design assistance team values, which call for a multidisciplinary approach, objectivity of the participating team members, and broad public participation.

## **Why is the SDAT Program Valuable?**

Many communities are immobilized by conflicting agendas, politics, personalities, or even the overabundance of opportunity. Many communities have not yet taken stock of their current practices and policies within a sustainability framework, while others have identified issues of concern but desire assistance in developing a plan of action to increase sustainability. The SDAT process ensures that alternative solutions are given a fair hearing and that options are weighed impartially. The SDAT process

- Informs the community of opportunities and encourages them to take action to protect local and regional resources
- Helps the community understand the structure of the place at various scales and contexts—from regional resources to the neighborhood scale
- Explores and articulates the larger contexts and interactions of ecological, sociological, economic, and physical systems



- Visualizes potential futures
- Recognizes and describes the qualities of a place by preserving the best elements of the past, addressing the needs of the present, and planning for the needs of future generations
- Identifies and describes choices and consequences
- Connects plans and actions
- Advances the principles of quality sustainable communities
- Helps the community define the roles of various stakeholders
- Develops a roadmap for the implementation of more sustainable policies and practices

The key to SDAT success is diversity and participation; the process involves multiple disciplines and multiple stakeholders. The SDAT process includes not only the expert team but also government agencies and officials, private businesses, schools and students, community members, and other parties as appropriate.

#### **Who are the Key Participants in the SDAT Process?**

SDATs bring a team of respected professionals, selected on the basis of their experience with the specific issues facing the community, to work with community decision makers to help them develop a vision and framework for a sustainable future. Team members volunteer their time to be a member of the SDAT. To ensure their objectivity, they agree to refrain from taking paid work for three years from the date of completion of the SDAT project. A distinct team is assembled for each project based on the project's unique features. The team consists of a leader, five to seven members, and a staff person from the AIA Center for Communities by Design.



The professional stature of the SDAT members, their independence, and the pro bono nature of their work generate community respect and enthusiasm for the SDAT process which, in turn, encourage the participation of community stakeholders. The passion and creativity that are unleashed by a top-notch multidisciplinary team of professionals working collaboratively can produce extraordinary results.



#### *Local Steering Committee*

The steering committee is the key organizing group for an SDAT project. It is responsible for assembling local and regional information, organizing the preliminary meeting and SDAT visit, and generating local media coverage during the entire project. After the SDAT visits, the steering committee typically evolves into a group that is dedicated to implementing the SDAT recommendations.

#### *Local Technical Committee*

The local technical committee is the technical support group for the SDAT project, including local design professionals, environmental professionals, economists, and others whose skills and experience parallel those of the SDAT members and who bring with them detailed knowledge of local conditions, issues, and information resources. Their presence magnifies the effectiveness of the team.

### *Citizens*

In the end, the citizens of the community are the critical players, both for their insights and observations during the team visit and for their support for the new directions that emerge from the SDAT process.

On behalf of the Hagerstown SDAT and the American Institute of Architects, it is hoped this report will be a useful guide to the Hagerstown community as it charts its future for the coming years and future generations.



## HAGERSTOWN TODAY

The city of Hagerstown in Washington County, Md., had a population of 36,260 according to the 2000 census, up 1 percent over 50 years. This static condition is contrasted with fringe area growth at 275 percent over the same time frame, 78 percent growth in the urban area, and 67 percent growth in the county. More recently the city has seen some increase in growth but still lags behind the overall growth of the county. Interest is picking up in urban living but the trends still point to fringe development and the accompanying dynamics of sprawl.

The city's application to the SDAT program declares that

As growth moved outside the city to suburban neighborhoods (from 1950 to 2000), Hagerstown's share of the Urban Growth Area population plunged from 71.7 percent in 1950 to 40 percent in 2000. In the 1990s, 82 percent of the building permits issued for new housing units in Washington County were for construction outside Hagerstown's boundaries.

The application and results of team interviews with the community and stakeholders during the SDAT team visit reveal that many believe Hagerstown may be at a tipping point in development interests in the downtown. With the right kinds of near-term investments, the city could attract some of the potential fringe developments to the downtown core.

The city was founded in 1762 by Johnathan Hager and can track its evolution to changes in transportation. In 1818 the National Road, which was the first federally funded road built to reach western settlements, opened eastern markets to the community by crossing the Appalachian Mountains; the C&O Canal opened in 1835; and, by the 1880s, there were several railroads in the city. The railroads spawned new growth between 1880 and 1920, providing much of the historical stock of buildings Hagerstown enjoys today. Later the construction of interstate highways 70 and 81 helped position Hagerstown as what some call the "Hub City."



Future growth in the city, especially in the core, is likely to be driven by market forces in the region. Baltimore and Washington, D.C., metropolitan area growth has expanded into Frederick and Montgomery counties. Issues of affordability, land scarcity, and regional economy add to the energy that could spawn new life downtown Hagerstown.

In addition SDAT members perceived the general community to be proud of their parks; the arts and culture in the community, including the historic theater; the community college; Hagerstown's role in the National Road Heritage Area; the annual Blues Fest; "Mummers"; and many other area assets and programs. To this they add other market forces supporting development downtown to include good highway access; the development of new markets for singles, the elderly, and young adults; and a variety of natural and cultural amenities.

Two blocks from Hagerstown's Public Square in the heart of downtown, an older industrial area offers a unique opportunity to "tip" the past trends in favor of redevelopment. To do this it must leverage the advantages of the site and address the constraints to



development that have plagued the area for decades. On the advantages ledger the application for the SDAT and the community representatives during the visit described the site as one of historic significance with available land for new construction. They cited the importance of its location close to downtown and related to City Park. On the challenges side of the ledger the informants identified some sewer service limitations to development and the need for public incentives given the limitations of the current market. Community participants noted constraints as well: community perceptions of the site are generally negative,

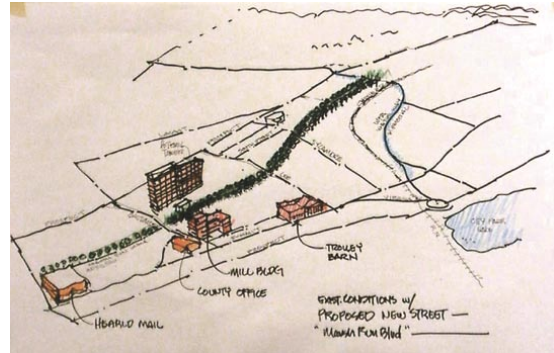
site access is problematic, the adequate public facilities ordinance constrains development, and the lowland condition requires special attention to drainage.

In addition to calls for real economic development in the downtown area, the SDAT reinforced the text of several citizens in their calls for the making of places that would reconstruct local pride in the city, improve the quality of life, improve the quality of environmental conditions, and reduce the costs of urban infrastructure maintenance. In short, the SDAT and community participants framed a call for sustainable design at the urban community scale. They clearly sought solutions that would work within the evolving market in Hagerstown and the region in order to take full advantage of the park, water, and historic conditions in and around the site.

# Marsh Run Development Concept

The concept plan illustrated throughout this report is one of numerous options that could be explored for the 25-acre site we came to call Marsh Run. The concept addresses some of the major planning issues constraining site development:

- Existing Sketch
- Access to site
- Existing zoning conditions
- Existing parking requirements
- Housing Authority development plans



## *Access to Site*

Access to the site is from Summit and Potomac along Lee, Baltimore, and Sycamore streets. The Marsh Run concept provides for a tree-lined parkway between Baltimore Street and Memorial Boulevard. The concept would allow for site access from the south, using Memorial Boulevard. The run or parkway would allow pedestrian and vehicular access from the main downtown area to the Marsh Parkway. It also would allow better overall site planning for an overlay district. The run would parallel the original railroad right of way where tracks are still visible above Baltimore Street.

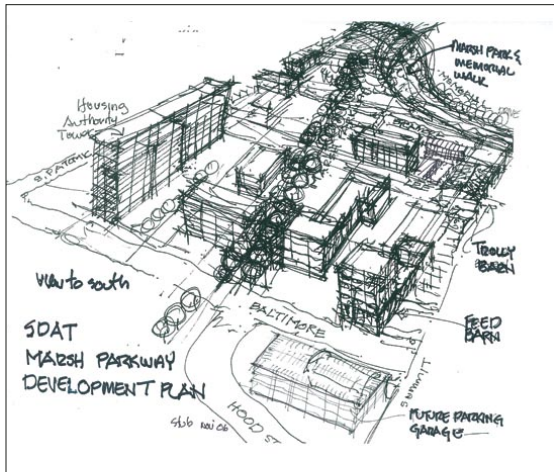


## *Existing Zoning Conditions*

The zoning conditions in the 25 acres vary between single-family residential and industrial/manufacturing to high-rise towers. We recommend all housing density and commercial/retail zones be allowed. All industrial/manufacturing and warehousing would be eliminated as properties are sold. The value of the property in its current condition is generally based on the land and not the buildings; that is, the market value for land for commercial and multifamily residences. As development occurs, the value will increase and be an incentive for private owners to sell.

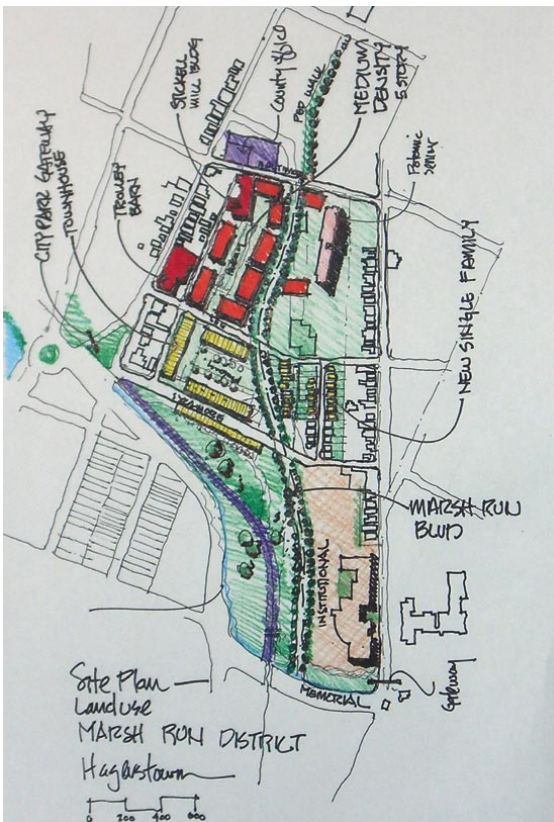
### Existing Parking Requirements

The issue of parking as required by the city needs to be addressed and requirements reduced to allow for development in the area. If the goal is economic development, it should not be controlled by current parking requirements. Cities make revenue on taxing building improvements, not on parking lots. As evidence, cities like Boston; San Francisco; and Washington, D.C., are successful in spite of limited parking.



### Housing Authority Development Plans

Coordination and cooperation with the Housing Authority in developing an overlay district plan is encouraged. The Housing Authority is currently the largest public user in the area and has a current proposal for additional housing on four acres adjacent to their existing property. In terms of right of way for the “Marsh Parkway” and density of site development, the Housing Authority is a key component.



### Preservation/Adaptive Use of Existing Buildings

The city of Hagerstown has recognized and maintained its historic fabric in the downtown district. The program of tax incentives provided by the county (10 percent), the state (20 percent), and the federal program (20 percent) allow for a tax credit of 50 percent for qualified structures. These credits can be sold to private investors as part of a financial package for a project.

For city-or county-owned historic structures, private investors can restore buildings under lease arrangements, which allow for recovery of development costs over 15 years by reduced lease rates. When the lease ends, the restored building is owned by the city or county to sell or continue to lease.

Two buildings in the development area are privately owned and would qualify for the available tax credits. The Feed Barn and Trolley Barn are large structures that could accommodate multiple-use tenants (commercial, retail, loft housing, condos). The county might also consider consolidating county facilities in the Feed Barn.

The current Design Review Commission and city ordinance allow for citizen input on design and preservation issues. Several historic buildings in the downtown area have been restored and renovated under the tax incentive provisions.

### **Density and Building Type of New Development**

One of the major questions raised in any development plan is the type and number of units that could be accommodated in the 25-acre site. The Marsh Run concept illustrated could accommodate 500 housing units of varying types. The South Street single-family residences would extend into available lots of similar-scale residential units. Town house units similar to the recently approved 47 units built by Hagerstown Neighborhood Development Corporation could be used in the site area. A project by DemCore is under construction on South Potomac Street and DemCore has acquired another five-story structure for adaptive use, also on Potomac Street. Both DemCore projects are using tax credits as part of their projects.

A new building type for the Marsh Run would be five-to six-story apartment or condo flats with the option of commercial property at the first level. This would provide a comfortable density for an urban area. This building type might be considered in working with the Housing Authority for its proposed addition of housing units. The buildings could be contemporary in design and provide a full range of rents and costs. Since parking would be a major question for this number of units, the city and county might consider a multilevel parking garage, perhaps at Hood and Baltimore streets. The former grocery store structure that is currently used as county offices could also be a possible site location for a parking garage.

The development of the area will be largely market driven but as projects are built the area will become an asset for the downtown fabric. The city/county's parking garage would generate a large tax contribution to both entities as development takes place. San Antonio built a parking facility to support a new Hyatt Hotel on the Riverwalk. Hagerstown would benefit in a similar way.



## SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AT THE URBAN COMMUNITY SCALE

The goal of sustainable design is to create conditions for a healthy environment for present and future generations, thereby fulfilling the needs and aspirations for economic vitality, social equity, public health, and well-being. Sustainable design at the urban community scale includes all feasible measures that support and improve those conditions.

### **The Hagerstown SDAT in Context**

A city with an established urban infrastructure and a community committed to it is, by definition, a sustainable model. It is possible to live and work in cities with less cost and greater public amenity, with far greater advantages when compared to suburban sprawl that is consuming precious resources, including our rural heritage and farmland. Cities have something to be proud of and something on which to build, something called “the urban advantage.”

Through the urban advantage, cities can save and sustain our nation. Through sustainable design, cities can become the most efficient, secure, supportive, and culturally rich way to live.

With the SDAT site, Hagerstown has an ideal opportunity to be a model of sustainable design. The site is relatively unencumbered. It offers potentials for community building, integration with the existing urban fabric, and restoration of its natural assets of waterways and parks. A variety of housing types can be considered: urban apartments for singles and seniors, town house clusters attractive to families with children, pedestrian friendly streets and walks, play lots, and gardens and open space.

A commitment to sustainable design begins with community discussion and participation. In our SDAT meetings, Hagerstown citizens told us of their proud connection to the city and the strength of local community involvement.

Sustainable design invites all parts of a community to work together. The volunteerism of a community is, in itself, a potent economic resource. The commitment to a sustainable future for Hagerstown can therefore begin here and now.

The notes below and accompanying illustrations highlight the foremost principles and practices of sustainable design at the urban community scale. Each principle and practice can improve some part of the urban infrastructure. Some can reduce the cost of municipal infrastructure support and maintenance. All make sense in the long run. When they are combined, new opportunities for a positive future are feasible, demonstrating the advantage of sustainable urban communities.

**Figure 1: Sustainable Urban Infrastructure**



**Urban Landscaping Reduces Flooding and Restores Water Quality**

- Porous paving in parking and low-traffic areas—Porous pavement increases groundwater recharge, reduces pollutants in stormwater runoff, and helps to alleviate flooding and contamination to streams. Porous pavement is a permeable pavement surface with a stone reservoir underneath. The reservoir temporarily stores surface runoff before infiltrating the subsoil. Porous pavement often appears the same as traditional asphalt or concrete but is manufactured without “fine” materials and, instead, incorporates void spaces that allow for infiltration, ideal for low traffic, parking areas,

and walkways. In extremely dense urban areas, porous pavement has been used successfully in redevelopment projects because it treats and stores stormwater without consuming extra land. Porous pavement can also be used on individual sites where a parking lot is being resurfaced (for additional information, see [epa.gov/OWM/mtb/porouspa.pdf](http://epa.gov/OWM/mtb/porouspa.pdf)).

- Bioswales—A bioswale is a landscape swale designed as a water filter to remove silt and pollution from surface runoff water. It consists of a swaled drainage course with gently sloped sides (less than 6 percent) and filled with vegetation, compost, and/or riprap. It is typically planted with hardy grasses and moisture-tolerant plants and wildflowers. The water's flow path, winding within the wide and shallow ditch, is designed to maximize the time water spends in the swale, which aids the trapping of pollutants and silt. Plants act as biofilters, removing phosphorous, soil sediments, and other pollutants. Several classes of water pollutants may be arrested with bioswales: silt, inorganic contaminants, organic chemicals, and pathogens. Water leaving a bioswale is cleaner than when it came in (see [www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/news/brochures/bioswale](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/news/brochures/bioswale)).



- Water edge buffers—A water edge (or riparian) buffer is a landscape area planted or left natural alongside streams, ponds, and wetlands. A buffer strip is typically at least 100 feet wide, wherever possible. The buffer preserves the stream's natural characteristics, protects water quality, and improves habitat for plants and animals on land and water. It filters sediments, nutrients, and chemicals from surface runoff and shallow groundwater. The buffer holds water, allowing percolation to deeper water aquifers, replenishing groundwater supplies. Water edge buffers and wetlands improve the biological diversity of surrounding areas. Birds and other animals find protective cover, water, food, and nesting sites as well as corridors and pathways for movement between areas. Native plants require continuous areas to extend their reseeding (see [www.nrcs.usda.gov/FEATURE/buffers](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/FEATURE/buffers)).

- Reconstructed wetland—The site has a unique potential, rarely so conveniently located, to restore and reconstruct a wetland at the bottom of the site. A wetland is an exquisitely complex biological system that cleans water and air, provides a natural sponge for varying water flows, and is an ideal habitat for wildlife which offers natural means of insect and pest control. An appropriate vegetation design is needed

to optimize hydraulic behavior, improve water quality, and increase biodiversity. Moderate vegetation density doesn't hinder the flow but rather increases dispersion number. A proper design has to avoid hydraulic short-circuiting and provide a good distribution of the flow especially in the vegetated zones. Due to its favorable location on the Hagerstown site, the proposed wetland can be part of a nature park, available to the school for science-based educational programs and available to the entire city for passive recreation. A portion of the wetland can be connected to innovative wastewater treatment (see [www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/wqual/bcproc.htm](http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/wqual/bcproc.htm)).

### **Green Maintenance Practices Reduce Costs and Improve Public Health**

- Limited use of salt for roadway and sidewalk de-icing—The common practice of salting roadways for snow/ice melting creates significant harmful pollution of surface and groundwater, with negative effects on the environment, human health, and groundwater systems. Absent readily available and proven alternatives to salting, a first step is to minimize its use. Various methods can be used to increase the effectiveness of salt, including pre-wetting with liquid ice solvers. The products with least impact to aquatic systems are calcium chloride (CaCl) or magnesium chloride (MgCl). The common choice, sodium chloride (NaCl), is most harmful to water, landscape, and natural environment and should be eliminated from use. Different salts also work best at different temperatures. CaCl residue is slippery on a well-sealed road. CaCl and MgCl are much more expensive than NaCl, which is why municipalities don't use them. Their use can be cut with a combination of Ca and Na to bring down cost and take advantage of a wider range of melting qualities. The abrasives—sand, gravel, pumice—are acceptable but messy and degrade to dust, which can create low visibility conditions and make dry roads slippery. Studies by Vladimir Novotny of Northwestern University address these alternatives.
- Low-maintenance native planting—A cost-effective measure by which to reduce municipal costs and improve environmental benefits is to replace traditional lawn planting and maintenance with native planting. Native planting conserves water and eliminates the need for pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Native plants grow well together—they evolved growing along side one another—and to predictable sizes. They do not need watering (except during initial planting), nor do they require chemical fertilizers or any of the commercial biocides—herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides. They are adapted to local conditions and resistant to local insects. In contrast, manicured lawns and bark-mulch beds (typical of commercial landscapes)

rely upon synthetic chemicals, pesticides, and fertilizers. Additional negative impacts of traditional landscape include noise and air pollution from lawn cutting, emitting exhaust fumes and air-borne chemicals. Mowers emit 10–12 times as much pollution as a typical automobile; string trimmers 21 times, and blowers 34 times (see [www.nps.gov/plants](http://www.nps.gov/plants)).

### **Resource Conservation Reduces Municipal Costs and Preserves Natural Resources**

- Water-saving fixtures—Water costs can be significantly reduced and freshwater can be saved by taking simple water-saving measures. About 70 percent of the total water used in the home and offices is for toilet flushing, laundry, and baths. Water-saving fixtures are standard options on such appliances, indicated by EPA Energy Star ratings. Water use can be cut as much as 90 percent in some cases (see [www.epa.gov/OW/you/chap3.html](http://www.epa.gov/OW/you/chap3.html)).
- Graywater alternatives—Freshwater is a precious resource. Its uses should be restricted to potable water. Any water that has been used once, except water from toilets, is called graywater. It can be reused for many other purposes, especially landscape irrigation. Plants thrive on used water containing small bits of compost. Dish, shower, sink, and laundry water comprise 50–80 percent of residential “waste” water. The Gray Water Policy Center provides guidelines for code compliance of various systems. The benefits of graywater recycling include lower freshwater use and related costs of supply, less strain on septic tank or treatment plant capacity, effective use of graywater treatment in topsoil, less energy and chemical use, and reclamation of otherwise wasted nutrients, helping to improve land fertility.
- Ecological wastewater treatment systems—Sewage treatment is a multiple-stage process to renovate wastewater before it reenters a body of water, is applied to the land, or is reused. The goal is to reduce or remove organic matter, solids, nutrients, disease-causing organisms, and other pollutants from wastewater. Some ecologically sound systems have provided means to recover nutrients and reduce the environmental impact of wastewater (often referred to as “black water”). Such systems are used for educational purposes, such as at Oberlin College, but are also finding markets in communities that use the recovered nutrients for agriculture and horticulture. Systems that can be used at smaller scale residential and community scale include dry composting, Living Machines, reed beds and constructed wetlands. System designs by Living Technologies Ltd. are representative of state-of-art applications.

- Regional/municipal recycling—Recycling reduces municipal waste management costs and creates new jobs. Collecting and processing secondary materials, manufacturing recycled-content products, and then purchasing recycled products creates a circle or loop that ensures the overall success and value of recycling. For recycling to work, everyone has to participate in each phase of the loop. Collecting recyclables varies from community to community, such as curbside, drop-off centers, buy-back centers, and deposit/refund programs. Recyclables are then sent to a materials recovery facility to be sorted and prepared into marketable commodities for manufacturing. Prices for the materials change and fluctuate with the market. More and more of today’s products are being manufactured with total or partial recycled content. Recycled materials also are used in innovative applications such as recovered glass in roadway asphalt or recovered plastic in carpeting, park benches, and pedestrian bridges. Purchasing recycled products completes the recycling loop. By “buying recycled,” governments, as well as businesses and individual consumers, help to complete the recycling process. Recycling, salvage, and restoration businesses can be encouraged by increasing municipal and regional waste “tipping fees,” to reflect true costs of waste transport and landfill/incineration and to provide an incentive to reduce waste. Recycling policies and practices are promoted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, [www.epa.gov/msw/recycle.htm](http://www.epa.gov/msw/recycle.htm).

### **Energy Conservation Reduces Costs and Improves Life Quality and Productivity**

- Environmentally responsible urban lighting—Environmentally responsible urban lighting can reduce cost and increase public safety and health by lighting surfaces and key areas for visibility with veiled lighting. The veiled lighting eliminates glare and night sky pollution. Reducing and veiling window lighting of office structures reduces energy costs and significantly reduces bird strikes. New lighting standards established by state officials in California encourage energy-efficient measures. The standards encourage building owners and users to pursue “ways to reduce wasted nighttime lighting, improve the quality of lighting and reduce light glare impacts.” The state’s highway lighting guidelines recommend to “only illuminate points of conflict [along roadways]...and to reduce that amount of light to its minimal levels.” The state removed more than 50 percent of existing roadway fixtures and provided 50 percent reduction of energy costs and improved lighting conditions through conversion of highway lighting systems to high-pressure sodium fixtures,

92 percent grid load reduction and sixfold life increase through the use of LED signals, and energy savings from implementing induction lighting upgrades on roadway sign lighting system (for urban street lighting standards, see [www.iowasudas.org/documents/Ch11Sect1-05.pdf](http://www.iowasudas.org/documents/Ch11Sect1-05.pdf)).

- Solar envelope zoning—Solar envelope zoning is a little used, but practical means to encourage developers and property owners to design and build structures for commercial offices and residences to take advantage of passive solar heating and sun-exposure on yards and gardens. Solar envelope zoning simply establishes lines of solar exposure to be preserved on specific sites so that one structure does not block useful south sun from adjacent properties. Studies by Ralph Knowles at the University of Southern California demonstrate that solar envelope zoning does not limit or inhibit high density and, in all cases, permits a wide variety of disposition of building types. In the case of the Hagerstown site, solar envelope zoning will enable the promotion of sunny homes with sunny gardens and play lots (see [www.rcf.usc.edu/~rknowles/sol\\_env/sol\\_env.html](http://www.rcf.usc.edu/~rknowles/sol_env/sol_env.html)).
- Energy conservation in buildings—Climate-responsive heating, cooling, daylighting, and other energy-conserving features in public and private buildings significantly reduce operational costs. Energy conservation increases public health and safety with improved environmental comfort as well as the amenity of outside views and sunlighting. These features reduce building ownership costs because they substantially reduce the size, capital cost, and operating cost of mechanical equipment. Replacement and use of state-of-art lighting fixtures and controls in buildings can reduce electric costs sufficiently to repay the investment cost in one to three years. Energy-efficient luminaries and low-temperature lamps last longer, reducing maintenance and replacement costs. In commercial interiors, energy-efficient lighting reduces air-conditioning costs (for one of innumerable citations, see [www.ecbcs.org/keywords.htm](http://www.ecbcs.org/keywords.htm)).
- Green Power (renewable electric energy generation)—Green power is a marketing term for electricity generated from environmentally responsible and renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, geothermal, biomass, biogas, and low-impact hydro. Green power is sold to support the development of new renewable energy sources. Products made with green power always contain a higher percentage of electricity from renewable energy sources than conventional electrical service. Conventional electricity generation causes air emissions. Fossil fuel-fired power plants are responsible for 67 percent of the nation’s sulfur dioxide emissions, 23 percent of nitrogen oxide emissions, and 40 percent of society’s carbon dioxide emissions.

Also power plants are the main source of mercury emissions in the United States. Electricity generation using renewable energy offers an alternative with zero or significantly lower emissions (see [www.epa.gov/greenpower](http://www.epa.gov/greenpower)).

### **Green Urban Infrastructure Improves Community Safety, Pride, and Beauty**

- Pedestrian friendly streetscape and treescape—Trees are indicators of a community’s ecological health. When trees are large and healthy, the ecological systems that support them (soil, air, and water) are also healthy. Healthy trees provide valuable environmental benefits. The greater the tree cover and the less the impervious surface, the more ecosystem services are produced, thereby reducing stormwater runoff, increasing air and water quality, storing and sequestering atmospheric carbon, and reducing energy consumption due to direct shading of residential buildings. An ideal design strategy is to combine urban parking with porous paving water storage, which allows trees to have sufficient water without a large soil bulb (for discussion of benefits of urban trees, see [www.walkable.org/download/22\\_benefits.pdf](http://www.walkable.org/download/22_benefits.pdf)).
- Pocket parks and children play lots—City living is normally thought of as providing limited areas for recreation, especially for children whose parents will properly place child supervision, safety, and welfare above all other considerations. The urban community infrastructure should provide safe tot lots, small areas for supervised play near residences. Such spaces are ideally placed where there are other community activities, such as small pocket parks that provide seating, alongside community gardening, recycling centers, and any other “focal points” that help make public areas visible and accessible. Pocket parks should be placed so that they can be safely accessed by pedestrian and bike traffic, free of conflicts with vehicular traffic. A range of play areas should be provided, sized, and equipped for different age groups (for design standards, see Time-Saver Standards for Urban Design, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/007068507X](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/007068507X)).
- Community gardens—The Hagerstown site has, in the past, been a location for commercial greenhouses. The site can be developed to include garden yards as well as space for community gardening. This is consistent with the composting, ecological land, and native plant management practices. Community gardens provide a public amenity as well, with land plots available to local residences, a place to meet, and an effective means to increase public activity, increasing safety and community volunteerism. They provide a source of local, fresh, and organic vegetables. Community gardens are also a natural adjunct to public parks. See, for example, [www.mrsc.org/subjects/parks/comgarden.aspx](http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/parks/comgarden.aspx).



- Green network for walks, trails, and habitat corridors—An urban matrix can be created by combining “greenscape” elements of natural landscape—trees, bioswales, buffer zones, and parks—with pedestrian-safe and bike and exercise trails. If, and as appropriate, such green and pedestrian linkages can at some points run parallel with “traffic calm” vehicular roadways (fewer than 20 miles per hour). At other points, it is properly separate from roadways, placed on right of ways that also provide service alleys where vehicular access is limited and/or cul-de-sac. To overcome a common objection to cul-de-sac streets, fire and emergency medical service and underground utilities services can be permitted to connect through contiguous cul-de-sac precincts and roads.

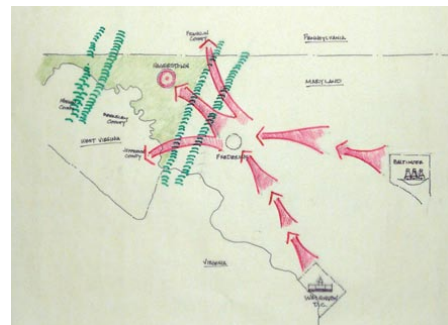
## MARKET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

A 25-acre parcel only two blocks from Hagerstown's central business district is a unique opportunity to strengthen the downtown, make a statement about Hagerstown's future, and send a positive signal to real estate investors and local businesses. Successful development of this or any site is defined by its location and the marketplace. Within its context, Marsh Run can be a signature project viable in the marketplace, and attractive enough to encourage new investment in the downtown, and increase visibility of the city as a whole. To understand constraints on, and potential for, site development, the SDAT worked with community representatives to identify external factors and site characteristics on which to base a vision for the future of the Marsh Run site.

### Regional Market Factors

Hagerstown lies in a well-established vector for wealth and economic activity moving from Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. As the economy of Washington grows and its real estate skyrockets in value, its economic region expands. This historical trend has already transformed the city of Frederick, Md., and the next area to receive new investment is Hagerstown. Jobs are growing throughout the region,<sup>1</sup> and Hagerstown is within an easy commute of an ever-increasing supply of good-paying jobs. Although some people will still wish to commute to and from D.C., a substantial market for residential development exists within the tristate area.

Nature and our forebears have favored Hagerstown with an abundance of recreational, natural, historical, and cultural attractions. Many people are demanding these assets in making a housing choice, and Hagerstown can respond with an array of lifestyle choices. Perhaps most important is that land is still relatively affordable in Hagerstown. The run-up in values in Frederick, taking most housing out of the reach of first-time homebuyers and middle-income families, and the scarcity of land available for development in Montgomery County, push the market toward the next available supply. Hagerstown will continue to see demand for the kind of housing it has been building on its periphery but the opportunity does not end there.



<sup>1</sup> For this paper, the region is defined roughly as the area surrounding Hagerstown, including the tristate area from Chambersburg to Martinsburg, east to Frederick and Montgomery County, to and including the Washington/Baltimore metropolitan area.

There are new market segments that will not locate in Hagerstown unless some new options are offered. Young professionals, singles, and empty-nesters are comprising a larger part of the new housing market and are interested in lifestyle as much as they are shelter. These buyers usually have no children at home and have been brought up at a time when urban culture is increasingly attractive to them. Older segments of the market are using their newly acquired time to take in cultural and recreational opportunities they had to defer while raising a family in a large, high-maintenance suburban home. Younger and older buyers represent the lower and higher segments of the market, respectively.

### Local Market Factors



Hagerstown is an attractive place to live. Its historic sites are of national significance and the arts community is comparable to that of much larger cities. Compared to communities to the east it is affordable, still offering housing that is within reach of first-time homebuyers and families. New housing that is coming on the market is of a typical suburban style with little or no real variation in the kind of living experience they provide. Missing from the mix is a higher-density urban-style product that is common in other growing centers. Those who want this kind of product are not considering suburban housing and will look elsewhere rather than settle for a house that is out of synch with their lifestyles. It is not necessary to attract a large proportion of new housing to the downtown to create a vibrant community. If even 5 percent of the area's housing is downtown, it will be transformative.



Most of the demand for urban residential will come from the immediate area around Hagerstown, but not from Hagerstown itself. It is axiomatic that locals do not appreciate the qualities of their own community. It is those from outside who approach a new place with fresh eyes and can see new possibilities where locals may see only the present.



Despite its powerful growth, the Washington/Baltimore area itself will be a secondary market for new housing in Hagerstown. Its energy is the reason the immediate region is growing and housing needs are proliferating. This train left the station years ago and its next stop is Hagerstown. The challenge now for the community is to use this force to make Hagerstown a more sustainable community than it otherwise might be.

## **Constraints on Development**

To realize the potential in this surge of demand, Hagerstown needs to address some constraints to development in the downtown.

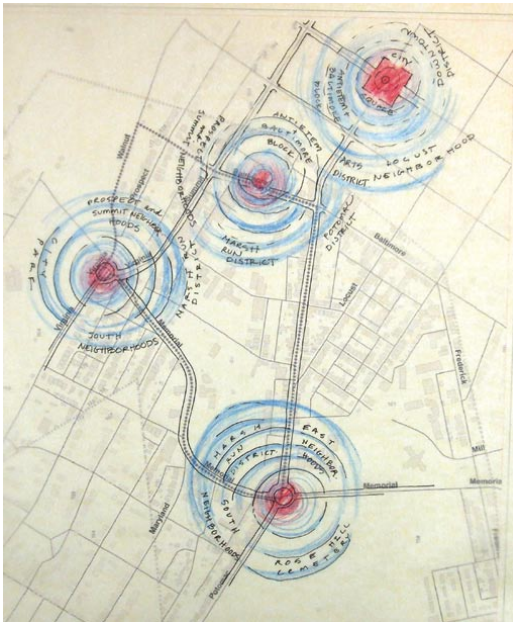
- If new housing outside the C3 exempt zoning district is subject to the excise tax and Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (AFPO), it will be at a potentially fatal disadvantage in the face of suburban development. Clearly increased services are necessitated by new households and these demands must be met. On the other hand, high-density commercial development contributes more to public coffers than it demands in services. Bear in mind that downtown properties have been paying their way for many years. Public infrastructure is in place and long since amortized. In addition it would be unfair, and bad urban policy, to ask downtown property owners to subsidize the developments that will continue to pull investment from downtown.
- There is a danger of complacency with regard to the Marsh Run site. It can easily become a place to hide less desirable, unsightly, and tax-exempt development. Historically the site played this role in the downtown area. With the passage of time, and downtown's continuing health, this 25-acre site is a different place than it was even 15 years ago.
- Location and access is typical of urban sites. Existing streets will not easily accommodate high peak-hour traffic or heavy truck traffic, nor should they. Adjacent neighborhoods would be severely affected by high-density uses or activities that generate excessive noise, light, or congestion.
- The community is concerned that there have been many proposals for development in Hagerstown that never came to fruition. Justifiable community skepticism about new ideas should be addressed head-on with more inclusive sharing of ideas and clarity about the commitment to follow-up.

## **Opportunities and Reasons to Develop the Marsh Run Site**

At this point in Hagerstown's development history, there probably could not be a better opportunity to accommodate the demands of a new market than this 25-acre Marsh Run site. The site's location is perfect for offering the kind of neighborhood environment and amenities that urban dwellers want. It is adjacent to an attractive downtown, sound neighborhoods, City Park, and a fine historic district and it can connect seamlessly with these surroundings. Historic buildings can be easily knit into a new

development and adjacency to Housing Authority property can be an advantage for financing mixed housing to meet their expansion needs, as well as providing leverage for private investment.

Downtown has great potential to be a regional center for unique goods, dining and dancing, and urban living. The building stock is attractive, there are unique local businesses, block faces are largely intact, and there is a strong cultural and arts community. A catalyst project would be a vote of confidence in downtown as a place to invest and would place Hagerstown in the regional spotlight. New residents would bring 24-hour activity, increase demand for new uses like art galleries and services, and strengthen locally owned businesses.



### Image Management

Currently the site labors under a very negative image—a place that, when noticed at all, is identified with low-value uses or uses that value parking more than a human-scale urban experience. It is easy to have low expectations; Marsh Run is a place that has been undesirable for so long that one might assume it will always be undesirable. On the contrary, a change to a high-value use will be all the more dramatic because of the contrast with current conditions. A project of the sort recommended by the SDAT would instantly change the image of the place by showing what is possible. This property is a sow's ear that is ready to become a silk purse. It is just a matter of seeing it differently:

The Marsh Run site is a strategic, amenity-rich location that will support a quality catalyst project. Its current underdeveloped state makes the extraordinary possible.

The image of this site will improve the image of downtown and the city of Hagerstown. It can be the kind of project that graces the cover of the Chamber of Commerce's annual report and be featured in the Washington Post Weekend section. It can also make a statement about sustainability through green design and infrastructure and be an embrace of innovation by the city. Proposing a project along the lines of the SDAT vision will set this in motion. Breaking ground on it will place it firmly in the consciousness of the region.

## Alternative Land-use Analysis

In evaluating possible uses for the site, the SDAT had as its first principle that development should not compete with downtown but instead provide new energy for the businesses already there. A second criterion was that development on the site would not adversely affect adjacent neighborhoods or require acquisition of existing homes. With these and other considerations in mind, the team assessed all urban land uses for their appropriateness.

- **Retail**—Any significant mass of retail on the site would compete with downtown by diverting pedestrian traffic. Since downtown has a good mix of retail and restaurants now, the only new retail concepts that could be offered are boutique retail and a strip mall. The former would be risky because of its isolation, the latter is a poor choice because it is not an urban form and would make poor use of the site. Limited retail that supports new housing is a viable and beneficial use.
- **Commercial Offices**—Commercial offices would have to achieve fairly high densities to be economically viable. Even then, with little demand for office space downtown, it is not likely to succeed. Furthermore, offices generate high traffic volumes at peak times which would cause congestion without benefiting local businesses. A commercial developer would likely want the city to subsidize a parking structure which would not be a good use of taxpayer funds compared with other infrastructure needs.
- **Hotel/Conference Center**—Every downtown wants a new hotel to bring business and convention visitors with their spending money. Unfortunately, because of inherently difficult financing issues, hotels, even in the most vibrant city centers, require considerable public subsidy. This site in particular does not have the access required by a meeting facility, and increasing street capacity would be very destructive to the neighborhood quality of downtown. If there is interest by the community in attracting a hotel to the city center, the Planning Department can identify more suitable sites.
- **Open Space**—City Park provides an exceptional resource for outdoor recreation. Little would be gained by expanding it to the entire site. However, the site itself should be designed with green, urban open space that brings nature back to the urban environment for enjoyment of residents and visitors. It can be both an amenity and a cost-efficient way to treat urban runoff, contribute to the progressive image of Hagerstown, and perhaps be an attraction in itself.

- Warehouse/Distribution—Current standards for warehouse and distribution require land-intensive, single-story buildings with expansive truck loading areas. This site cannot meet those requirements. Existing warehousing on the site would function better nearer the highway system.
- Manufacturing—Small-scale, high-value manufacturing might make use of some of the site but would employ few people and do little for downtown business. It could easily take years for the right user to come along and the opportunity costs of waiting could be substantial. There are better locations.
- Residential—This is a prime site for mixed-use, market-rate housing. Proximity to downtown, strong neighborhoods, City Park, and cultural facilities makes this site very attractive to potential downtown residents. Low parking requirement and smaller-scale building mass allow it to blend with the neighborhoods. The absence of peak-hour traffic would minimize neighborhood impacts and would not require much, if any, investment in new street capacity.
- Cultural Facilities—The site location suggests that a museum may be a viable use. It could be supportive of existing arts facilities and downtown businesses. However, such benefits would only accrue if the museum is of a scale and uniqueness that makes it a must-see destination. The cost of such a facility makes it a long-term proposition at best, and its parking requirement would be considerable. A typical museum structure may also create an impenetrable barrier between downtown and the neighborhoods.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Some hard decisions are needed to allow a project like Marsh Run to achieve the potential anticipated by the SDAT proposal. That said, work on this specific project should be done in conjunction with a strategy to make better use of downtown buildings for new compatible uses. All recommendations that follow are predicated on the assumption that there is a strong community and government commitment to supporting downtown.

- Exempt the downtown area from the excise tax and APFO. Downtown will continue to more than pay its way as it has for decades. The exemption that applies to the C3 zoning district should also include new development in adjacent neighborhoods.
- Relax zoning requirements for parking and setbacks. A true urban project cannot be designed with these restrictions and applying them will diminish the value of the property by limiting its productive use and design potential.

- Continue to enforce building codes in the downtown area to maintain the marketability and reuse potential of properties.
- Enact an innovative zoning overlay zone that allows developers flexibility in design and land use in keeping with traditional urbanism and the demands of the 21st-century marketplace. Many cities have had to modify or adopt new zoning to allow mixed-use housing where old zoning language did not anticipate a kind of housing product that is so common now.
- Establish a business improvement district (BID) for downtown. When designed well by the downtown business community and residents, a BID can be a powerful tool to improve the attractiveness and economic viability of downtown. Hundreds of BIDs across North America have met with success with a “Clean, Safe, and Fun” suite of programs. The vast majority of these BIDs are managed by independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations led by downtown businesses and property owners who make sure BID funds are spent consistent with their needs. The BID also strengthens downtown’s role in community discussions that affect downtown interests.
- Consider establishing a tax increment financing district for downtown. Since market trends indicate increasing land value in downtown, tax increment financing is an effective way to raise public funds for public improvements without raising taxes. A district should be drawn to include the entire downtown business district including the Marsh Run site.
- Develop a strategy to renovate and reuse upper stories of downtown buildings for residential or office use. Building codes may need to be revised to allow mixed uses. A BID can be an important partner in designing and implementing this program.
- Commission a thorough market study of the SDAT proposal to determine economic feasibility of downtown residential development. It will be necessary to identify viable ranges of units, unit mix and size, achievable rents, construction costs, phasing, and the potential market for residents. Designing, financing, and marketing of the proposed project are dependent on study findings. The study should also identify likely sources of financing and identify all available incentives that can be used to build or buy market-rate housing in Maryland.



### **Every Great Journey Begins with a Single Step**

The convergence of a strong market, the right site, an attractive setting, and an involved community suggests potential for a transformative project at Marsh Run. It is not without risk but the risk of doing nothing—or doing too little—carries its own dangers. If the site is left in its current state, it will continue to be a drag on downtown’s image and economy. If developed with an eye to the future, downtown and the city will be stronger. If all goes well, there will be demand for additional residential development in the downtown area and the neighborhoods. Downtown planning should be taking this into account now that the potential has been identified.

## LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

The future revitalization and development of the 25-acre southside site hinges on a site- or place-generated concept that renames it as the Marsh Run District and strives to “put the marsh back in Marsh Run.” Underlying this concept is an urban framework composed of several interrelated strategies that physically and programmatically order and activate the district, reconnect it to its context, and generate a compelling image and identity that blend the old and the new. The series of five interconnected urban strategies are described below.

### **Recommendations**

*Recapture the southside quadrant’s identity by capitalizing on its most prominent historic and contemporary feature, Marsh Run.*

Figuring prominently in the history and development of Hagerstown is Marsh Run and the marshlands that once surrounded it. From the beginning, the city’s unique geography propelled urbanization and spatial settlement along its many hilltops and ridges while the low-lying marsh valley, with its soggy, unstable soils, was reserved for water power and travel followed by draining, filling, and development into rail yards, industries, and warehouses.

Today, a channellized water system is all that remains of the once extensive marsh landscape. Stormwater from Hagerstown’s streets flows beneath pavement and makes its way to outlet pipes daylighting into the north and south walls of Marsh Run, a Works Progress Administration (WPA) era stone-edged channel with the ancient creek bed still visible at its base. Stormwaters reaching Marsh Run channel mix freely with upstream creek and spring waters and continue flowing eastward along Memorial Boulevard, through Hagerstown toward Antietam Creek. In spite of its ongoing role in sustaining the city, this historic piece of urban infrastructure, unique to historic Hagerstown, remains undercelebrated and, on the whole, isolated from its urban context.

Marsh Run figures prominently in renewing the identity and coherence of this southwest quadrant of the city. By adopting place names associated with the marsh, the district immediately gains an identity unique to its history and setting. This identity, dubbed the Marsh Run District, can move beyond mere reference and become the basis of a larger urban strategy recognizing and celebrating Hagerstown’s relationship to its creek and marsh valley setting. For example, reserving public space around Marsh Run, improving the ecological function of Marsh Run with the design of adjacent

development, and interweaving the connective open space and urban systems with Marsh Run are all ways to enhance and enrich the district/marsh interface and create the best of city and nature.

*Renew and develop the vitality of the Marsh Run District hand in hand with renewing and restoring the ecological vitality and identity of the Marsh Run's wetland landscape. In so doing create a vibrant urban watershed, landscape and park system attracting and sustaining a high quality of life for Hagerstown's urban dwellers.*

The reimagined Marsh Run District offers an opportunity to create an inviting, vital, and ecologically dynamic setting offering the best integration of city convenience and access to nature. By adopting sustainable ecological design approaches, the Marsh Run District can begin to take shape as an urban district set within a green marshy oasis linking and uniting diversified areas along its boundaries.

Putting the marsh back in Marsh Run quite literally means developing a landscape identity, in public places and open spaces, wedded to the function and identity of a living marsh/wetland. Such a landscape, between Summit and West Potomac streets, could continue to carry the railroad lines through it while providing recreational space for district residents and diverse wildlife and vegetation habitat. A network of pathways, park spaces, marsh walks, and elevated and subterranean crossings could provide users from the district and surrounding neighborhoods with an exceptional experience of nature in the midst of the city center. A reconstructed marsh and parkland along the southern boundary of the district would function to mitigate urban stormwater runoff and upgrade water quality in the urban watershed. It could be designed to accommodate and include the existing walled Marsh Run while also making it more accessible and valuable in its surrounding context. The integration of native plantings suitable to both the marsh's ecological function and urban needs offers a unique opportunity to create a highly imageable and attractive landscape that is also environmentally renewable, sustainable, and suitable to the Marsh Run area. New development along the edges of the marsh could be designed to take advantage of this unique setting and benefit from the views, overlapping activities and amenities that mutually designed public and private space can provide.

The Carroll Creek Park Project in Frederick, Md., is an excellent regional example of renewing a city center using a bold landscape infrastructure strategy blended with an aesthetic derived from its historic character. The Carroll Creek Park Project mitigates urban stormwater runoff while creating a publicly accessible "backbone" creekscape activating and engaging a diversity of surrounding urban contexts and land uses in historic Frederick. The creek park is over a mile in length and has been shaped into a positive

and attractive urban amenity offering opportunities for commercial, residential, cultural, and recreational development themed to adjacent uses and proposed activities. Its explicit approach is to “provide a high quality environment that enhances the downtown both aesthetically and economically and establishes a sense of public realm that integrates seamlessly with adjacent properties” (p. 1, Draft Park Plan, October 2003). It features creekside walks, public gathering places, pedestrian bridges, water features, a one-mile boating route, plantings, and venues for public art. Such features could easily be integrated into proposals for the Marsh Run District.

*In the Marsh Run District, celebrate the cultural and natural landscape interactions coalescing in the southwest quadrant to programmatically and physically strengthen the identity of the entire area and reconnect it to its context.*

The Marsh Run District is in a unique urban geographic context inter-linking Hagerstown’s natural setting and systems with the city’s evolution and development over time. Opportunities exist for physically and programmatically linking, connecting and interweaving a series of Hagerstown stories into the newly imagined Marsh Run District’s sense of place. Such stories can be reactivated in the area’s materials, spatial configuration, programs, interpretive features, and systems and help to activate and enliven the economic, social, recreational, and civic life of the district and the entire downtown area. The Marsh Run District’s advantageous location places it in the midst of a series of interrelated stories embedded in the city’s extant features, architecture, and geography. Public space linkages and connections between the places that are part of the Hagerstown story should be extended and strengthened to seamlessly reposition the Marsh Run District as the link, in all directions, between Public Square, South Potomac Street, Prospect Street, Rose Hill Cemetery, City Park, and the southside neighborhoods.

In the Marsh Run District are found the following aspects of the greater Hagerstown Story:

- Local Histories and Stories
- Native landscape story
- Settlement story
- Civil War story
- Trade and commerce story
- WPA story



Marsh Run plays a prominent role in Hagerstown's Native Landscape story. The native landscape's geography and ecology is what first invited human settlement in and around what would become Hagerstown. Natural springs provided freshwater while access to flowing water and vast marshlands provided travel routes and sources of abundant wildlife and foods. The natural lay of the land provided dry, breezy, wooded hilltops overlooking the marshy river plain into which natural runoff and, later, urban wastewater flowed. The same protruding bedrock seen along the foot of Prospect Street proved not only perfect for future urban development but also valuable as quarried building material for Hagerstown's facades, stonewalls, walkways, and monuments. This story of abundant ecological attributes and natural resources is one on which the revival of the Marsh Run District could be based.

Just beyond the western edge of the Marsh Run District, Hagerstown's Settlement story can be traced to the region of City Park and the historic Hager House. This area, fed by fresh springs and flowing creek waters proved advantageous for the water-powered mills and industries which quickly sprang up and spilled their waters downstream into Marsh Run and Antietum Creek. Over time, the creek valley welcomed change and progress as filling allowed rail lines, yards, and industries to grow up along its flat, low-lying terrain. Hagerstown's growth and commercial prosperity along the rail lines cutting through the valley floor fostered a Trade and Commerce story evident in the extant trolley car building, active rail lines, and abandoned railroad spurs that still striate the district. As an important gateway from the South, the district witnessed Civil War soldiers marching to and from the battlefield. Rose Hill Cemetery, the final resting place for both Union and Confederate soldiers; City Park (once known

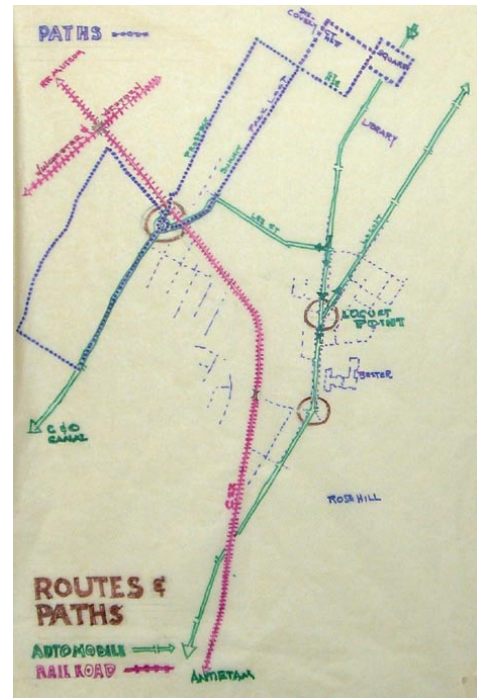
as Heyser's Woods), a staging area for troops; and Memorial Parkway, a living memorial to veterans, combine to tell fragments of Hagerstown's Civil War story. These same area landmarks, along with the Marsh Run channel, tell Hagerstown's WPA story through their elaborate stonework, public spaces, and monuments.



*Recognize how patterns of smaller block size and road divisions have characteristically defined neighborhoods, districts, urban scale, and fluid connectedness in Hagerstown's downtown area. To revitalize Marsh Run as an interconnected part of the downtown urban fabric, seek road, block, and public space networks that reweave the district into the surrounding context and overcome the sense of isolation and disconnection currently dominating there. To achieve such a reintegration requires activating important gateways, intersections, nodes, and transition points interconnecting Marsh Run and its neighboring districts.*

The Marsh Run District, with its historic pattern of industrial land uses and working landscape character, has been increasingly disconnected from the downtown commercial and residential districts and neighborhoods. This backyard space, just two blocks from Public Square, has become what many refer to as “a hole” in the urban fabric. Consequently decisions about land use, circulation, and development have, in large part, fostered the status quo, relegated less desirable uses to within its boundaries, and further isolated the area into a bounded mega block. The transitional character and, in some cases, marked erosion, of streetscapes, corners, and edges bordering the district (specifically West Baltimore, South Potomac, Memorial, and Potomac streets) provide evidence that the hole appears to be experiencing a widening, not a narrowing, trend. Therefore it is important to strengthen and develop the district's east/west and north/south routes for pedestrians and vehicles while activating urban gateways and transitions in all directions. Such a strategy will begin to diminish the hole and reweave the district back into the urban context on which it mutually relies for energy, vitality, and identity.

Hagerstown's smaller scale block structure, made up of a network of east/west and north/south roads and alleys, can easily be carried into the Marsh Run District in order to establish a network of streets and paths that are pedestrian friendly, linked, and energized. The uninterrupted pass-through nature of streets like Sycamore and Lee can be reconfigured into a network of intersecting streets and blocks more in scale with South, Lee and Potomac streets, for example. Important gateways from the north, southeast, and southwest can be affirmed as transition points between neighborhoods while providing welcoming nodes and identifiable landmarks between places. Such gateways provide legibil-



ity and identity to visitors and locals alike and need to be designed to seamlessly accommodate both pedestrians and vehicular traffic in order to maximize flows through and between them. Especially visible gateway areas on the south are located at the intersections of Memorial Boulevard with City Park and Rose Hill Cemetery. In recent years, the identities of these two intersections have suffered. Change has privileged fast moving vehicles while adjacent land uses have allowed such things as a gas station, Department of Public Works storage, and trailer park to denigrate and devalue their public and civic identity. Reversing this trend requires reclaiming the civic nature of these highly visible and important urban spaces and redesigning them so that they more clearly function as inviting arrival and transition points between downtown districts and destinations.

*Strengthen north/south connectivity through the Marsh Run District with a bold landscape infrastructure move (boulevard, park, public space) and, in so doing, reconnect north and south areas of Hagerstown's city core.*

Strengthening north/south connectivity in the Marsh Run District will help to overcome the divisive nature of industrial land uses currently separating residential areas south of Memorial Boulevard, from the mixed-use downtown core and its surrounding neighborhoods. Currently active railroad lines, Marsh Run channel, and Memorial Parkway act as major barriers to the flows between north and south. A strong north/south connection through the district could dramatically alter this sense of disconnect by creating a coherent and imageable urban landscape path heralding the renewed identity of the Marsh Run District. Imagined is a north/south landscaped boulevard/park system, entering at the southeast corner (near the intersection of Memorial Boulevard and South Potomac Street) and continuing through the district linking on its north end to the mid-block of West Baltimore Street (between South Potomac and Summit streets). The design of this street, as an inviting pedestrian park-like meander, can strongly help to build the identity of the entire Marsh Run District by celebrating its unique cultural and natural identity. As a magnet for movement and activity, the new spine could nearly follow the alignment of the old railway spur that previously ran north/south through the site.

## MOVING FORWARD

Hagerstown has a tremendous asset embodied in the Marsh Run District. Few cities have such extensive underdeveloped parcels of land adjacent to the downtown corridor; fewer still have the opportunity, foresight, and community support to steer the future growth of such an area in a sustainable fashion that will continue to benefit the community for many generations to come. In the original SDAT application as well as in the subsequent SDAT roundtable meetings, Hagerstown residents praised



Hagerstown as a great place to live, work, and play. The parks, festivals, and civic events such as the highly attended Blues Fest, and the myriad arts and cultural opportunities are clearly points of pride for the community. There are plenty of indications that the community is currently experiencing a broad revitalization. Our hope is that the successful and sustainable redevelopment of the Marsh Run District can expedite and enhance this renaissance.

We charge the SDAT Steering Committee and community at large with the following tasks as they begin to move toward the redevelopment of the Marsh Run District and the revitalization of downtown Hagerstown:

- Forge connections in order to create a pedestrian and bicyclist friendly place that connects various areas of the city rather than separate them. Visitors and residents alike should be able to clearly discern the connection of the park to downtown or of the neighborhoods to the park. The Marsh Run District needs to be recognized as something more than a cumbersome barrier between different sections of town; it needs to be the connection that bonds these areas together.
- Market and package Hagerstown as a desirable destination for visitors and residents. The existing museums, parks, festivals, and cultural opportunities should be a great draw to tourists; however, Hagerstown needs to promote these assets to prospective visitors and existing residents in order to truly take advantage of them. Embrace





the ecological and historical character of Marsh Run creek and create a thriving district with amenities such as distinctive greenways and natural features.

- Fashion a creative vision for the Marsh Run District. The redevelopment opportunity present within the district will not reach its full potential unless careful thought and consideration shape its future. The Marsh Run District needs to compliment and enhance the surrounding and adjacent areas, while at the same time creating an identity and appeal of its own. Careful consideration needs to be given to the type, scale, use, and design of new development. Hagerstown needs to address the needs and desires of the current residents while also creating a unique environment that will attract new residents and visitors.
- Increase the visibility of the Marsh Run District to the citizens of Hagerstown. The district has long been overlooked, underused, and dismissed by the community. The general perception of crime, disuse, and obsolete development has led to the gradual abandonment of the district. Community members need to be reminded of its presence and informed of its potential. Visionary leadership will allow the Marsh Run district to reaffirm its importance in downtown Hagerstown.

The members of the SDAT Steering Committee and other organizations have demonstrated capacity to get things done in the downtown. Reconvening such a group in the near future could lead to a review of actions that have occurred since the team visit and a review of each section of this report, listing proposed action steps. The group should consider and prioritize action according to such variables as



- Degree of difficulty (easy to hard)
- Cost (low to high)
- Importance to a sustainable Hagerstown (not very to very)
- Consistency with current capacity and interest (not interested to very interested)

The group may also wish to identify from the perspective of participants the actions they believe are essential that the site visit team did not uncover during the visit. Based on all of such work in the group, the SDAT recommends immediate work on easy and inexpensive actions to get some quick wins toward a sustainable Hagerstown even as they define more ambitious action steps.

In the process of continued collaboration, it is critical to openly and honestly discuss limitations in capacity or funds related to what remains and consider institutions and strategies that can advance the long-term, difficult, expensive projects that are seen as important to the success of the work ahead. It is also important to continue to celebrate accomplishments.

The recommendations presented by the SDAT within this report are intended to serve as a sustainability menu for the community. Hagerstown now must begin ordering off this menu, revising it as necessary, in order to assure a balanced meal of a more sustainable city. The people of Hagerstown are ultimately responsible for guiding the future of the community. The citizens and leaders of the town need to continue their efforts to work collaboratively to ensure this success. The SDAT process has begun the dialogue; the next step is for the community to continue the dialogue and stay true to the vision that was communicated by the community participants to the SDAT during the three days of the SDAT visit.

On behalf of the Hagerstown SDAT and the American Institute of Architects, we hope this report will be a useful guide to the Hagerstown community as it charts its course for the coming years and generations.



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