

# STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES ADVISORY TEAM EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES WORKGROUP

Exploring how the City of Frederick can support greater opportunity for all residents through the Arts, Education, Health and other aspects that contribute to the overall “Livability” within the City of Frederick.

Final Report – June  
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## Introduction

As part of the Mayor’s Strategic Opportunities Advisory Team, the EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY WORKGROUP explored how the City can support greater opportunity for all residents through the Arts, Education, Health and other aspects that contribute to the overall “Livability” within the City of Frederick.

## Executive Summary

The Expanding Opportunities workgroup was charged with exploring “strategic opportunities” for improving and preserving factors that contribute to the overall “livability” of the City of Frederick; specifically, with an emphasis on The Arts, Education, Public Health. The workgroup also included an examination of Historic Preservation and Parks and Recreation activities.

While feedback gathered suggests that City Government is generally viewed as competent and committed, quantitatively evaluating “livability” proved difficult within the scope and schedule of the overall effort.

- “Livability” is inherently personal and qualitative and means different things to different residents.
- Gathering broad, representative feedback directly from the diversity of stakeholder groups that comprise City residents proved unfeasible.
- The most pressing and impactful livability issues are intractable and complex: access to health care, poverty, affordable housing, educational achievement, work readiness.

That is not to imply that the workgroup did not identify opportunities for the Mayor to consider; however, the workgroup is cautious not to suggest that it’s recommendations represent an exhaustive enumeration from all City stakeholders.

## Workgroup Members

- Jim Racheff
- Kris Fair
- Martha Gurzick
- Rich Haney
- Jay Mason
- Tamar Osterman
- Andy Stout

## Terminology and Format

This report uses the phrase “City Government” to refer to the entirety of the City of Frederick Governmental officials, staff, and assets. The report is organized into subsections that address each element within the workgroup’s mission scope, with observations concerning said element followed by recommendations to consider. The report begins with general themes that the workgroup discovered between two or more elements.

## Observations and Recommendations

### General Livability Themes

#### Observations

- City Government is operationally sound (with respect to the Weinberg Center, Historic Preservation, and Parks and Recreation).
- City Government responds to other Government entities, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and non-profits.
- City Government staffing and other resources are viewed as scarce; priorities are often unclear to residents and external stakeholders.
- City Government is reactive rather than proactive; the City is not viewed as a full “partner” or “collaborator” but rather as isolated, standoffish or overly risk adverse.
- City Government is too focused on operational activities and tasks and not enough on the “bigger picture”.
- While some residents are faring well economically, a significant portion struggle with the affordability of residing in Frederick City.
- Frederick County has one of the fastest growing populations in the State, increasing 5.1% between 2010 and 2015, with senior citizens and Latinos leading the way. This will have an impact in both the health care and educational sectors.
- Knowledge of and connection with various populations and stakeholder groups is uneven and inconsistent. The subcommittee regularly struggled with needing to collate disparate lists and experiential knowledge; even then, the subcommittee routinely felt that “we don’t know who we don’t know”.

#### Recommendations

Recommendation: Use Data and Relationships to Identify and Better Connect with Underserved and Vulnerable Populations.

- Formally adopt and utilize “gold standard” data sets that are specific to Frederick to identify underserved populations and measure City Government progress and set City Government priorities. Examples include the United Way ALICE Report and Community Health Survey.
- Develop and institutionalize methods to connect with residents; specifically, underserved and vulnerable populations (addressed in depth by the Community Engagement subcommittee).
- Regularly engage at both leadership and staff levels with other entities that support underserved and vulnerable populations; improve coordination and effective use of limited resources.

Challenges:

- Given the size of the City, it may be challenging to develop granular data sets that are City specific.
- Data used must be statistically sound and significant.
- Coordinating across organizations and entities can be challenging and time consuming; staff has a full-plate with current operational responsibilities.

Recommendation: Develop a “Livability Index” and/or “Livability Report”

- Work with Board of Alderman and public to better define the elements that contribute to a positivity environment of “Livability”.
- Develop or obtain more sophisticated data analytics capabilities within City Government.
- Develop metrics and measures that can be used in on-going monitoring of Livability factors; such measures should coincide with strategic planning efforts and tactical goal setting across City Government.
- Report on City “livability” on a regular to ensure transparency and engage stakeholder feedback.
- Report should include opportunities for economic growth and assess the City’s ability to effectively respond to these opportunities by grading the key factors required to attract and retain firms in these areas of opportunity.

Challenges:

- Developing broad, generally applicable livability “elements” requires significant, genuine engagement across stakeholder groups.

Recommendation: Develop a Strategic Plan with Measurable Objectives

- City Government should establish a formal Strategic Plan.
- Plan should include measurable objectives that can be used to gauge progress and provide transparency to City residents.

Challenges:

- A comprehensive strategic planning process is involved.
- The City and City Government comprise a complex environment with many stakeholders.
- Leading such an effort requires substantial experience and expertise.

Recommendation: Apply for CityStart Grant (<http://cfefund.org/project/citystart/>)

- This two-phase action engagement connects critical insights about the impact of financial instability on municipal governments with tangible, sustainable strategies to improve families’ financial lives.
- Should be dovetailed with efforts like the United Way ALICE report.

Recommendation: Ensure that City Government leadership and staff visit leading communities of similar size and suburban/urban location to Frederick to look at best practices in addressing community needs across a broad spectrum of education, healthcare, etc. not just economic development.

- The Chamber of Commerce has a similar program; City Government should look to adopt best practices and/or partner with the Chamber in this effort.

Recommendation: Consider Community Impact Model or Approaches

- City Government has limited resources and capabilities – formally adopting partnerships based on the Stanford Community Impact model.
- The Community Impact model has been widely adopted by City and County non-profits.
- City Government can play several roles in such relationships, depending on an issue. The City can act as a convener of stakeholders, a supporting partner, or play a lead role. Two areas within the subcommittees scope are essential to City residents but are led by other entities in our community (Education and Public Health) but City Government’s partnership and support can contribute greatly to overall impact on these issues.
- Many organizations expressed a desire for increased and regular interactions with City Government, both at the Leadership and Staff levels.

Challenges:

- The Community Impact model requires leadership and collaboration among diverse stakeholders.
- Institutionally it can be challenging to cede organizational authority in return for collaboration.

Recommendation: Review the City’s website to determine its effectiveness in providing all citizens with information regarding services in the community and how one can access them.

- Link to the websites of key community agencies providing these services and address the communication needs of non-native English speakers in website enhancements (e.g., translation software technology).
- There has also been a noticeable increase in demand for mental health services in languages other than English.

Recommendation: Increase Opportunities for Volunteerism and Internships to Augment City Government Resources and Capabilities as well as provide Work Experience for City Job Seekers

- The City should develop or support a “Volunteer Clearing House” for City initiatives. City Government could partner with other entities or NGOs (such as Volunteer Frederick) in this effort.

- The City should seek ways to better engage our Senior population. Seniors represent a wealth of experiential knowledge and skills, are a growing population in Frederick, and are often interested in contributing to the community via volunteerism.
- Internships can represent a “win-win” for job seekers needing work experience and organizations that are under-resourced. Frederick County Workforce Development, Frederick Community College, Hood, FCPS are frequently looking to place interns. Priority should be given to underserved populations and City residents.
- City Government Human Resources should include consideration of Volunteerism and/or Interns when reviewing requests for staff augmentation.

Challenges:

- Coordinating volunteers can be time consuming; volunteers are not City Government staff and are not subject to the same management controls as paid staff; risk should be considered on a project-by-project basis.
- Interns require training, supervision and mentoring that is a use of limited staff time.

Recommendation: Fund top-notch grant writer who will proactively seek grants for City Government as well as respond to grant opportunities for City Government; consider expanding grant capacity to support all City non-profits.

- City resources are limited, and grant funding represents an opportunity to augment City Government revenues.
- City Government should consider external companies that provide grant seeking and grant writing services.
- Non-profits are essential partners in City Government meeting the essential needs of City residents; supporting non-profits can help reduce direct demand on City Government staff and other resources.

## Health and Wellness

### Observations

- Public Health and Wellness are critical factors in the quality of life of residents.
- Public Health and Wellness efforts are typically led by other organizations within the City community; specifically, the Frederick County Health Department, Frederick Memorial Hospital (FMH) and the Mental Health Association (MHA).
- Public Health and Wellness stakeholders already collaborate in an on-going and in-depth way.
- Frederick has proximity to highly regarded health care and educational institutions in the metro DC/Baltimore region.
- Mental health and substance abuse services at the State level have been merged under the heading of behavioral health services. This presents a challenge to some community not-for-profit organizations that have focused more on one of these areas than the other.
- Opioid/other drugs and alcohol addiction is an increasing community issue; individuals with treatment and recovery needs often must seek services outside the immediate region so the lack of local access to treatment services is a major concern.
- Smoking is a known health issue leading to the development of many health problems like heart disease, stroke, emphysema, and various types of cancer.
- There is also a greater focus in the community on the impact of trauma and ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) throughout a person's lifetime. Although efforts have been made to raise awareness, no one entity has stepped in to coordinate or fund additional services.
- National and regional awareness of the marginalization of populations – African Americans, Hispanics and Immigrants, the LGBTQ community – has been increasing. For example, transgender citizens' access to informed healthcare services and employment opportunities is limited by the lack of training and/or experience working with this population.

### Recommendations

Recommendation: City Government should continue with and expand relationships with Health Organizations.

- Because of its relative affluence (compared to other parts of the country) and a high earning/spending population, Frederick has significant opportunities to better address the service needs of our community.

Recommendation: City Government should partner with community behavioral health to review and update City Government policies; City staff should receive training to increase awareness and ensure good practices are integrated across the organization.



Recommendation: City Government should pursue becoming a “Trauma Informed City” in partnership with MHA or other organizations.

- Work with partners to establish and integrate a trauma-informed approach to help address mental health and substance use disorders
- Important not only for individual residents, but for communities as well.
- MHA has substantial information in this area.

Recommendation: City Government should update ordinances regarding smoking to reflect current best practices; City Government should consider banning smoking in public places.

- Studies have shown that smoke-free laws that prohibit smoking in public places help improve the health of workers and the general population.  
[https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/secondhand\\_smoke/protecti on/improve\\_health/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/secondhand_smoke/protecti on/improve_health/index.htm)

Challenges:

- Such policy can be difficult to garner broad public support.

Recommendation: Continue and expand participation and partnership with “LiveWell Frederick”

- City Government – Parks and Recreation – is a current partner.

Recommendation: Support for Detox Center

- Partner with Frederick County Government and Non-Profits to support a local Detox Center.
- Frederick County Government has already taken some steps toward addressing this pressing need.

Challenges:

- Lack of adequate funding resources.
- Planning and permitting of facilities.
- Neighborhood concerns and questions.
- Stigmatization of those suffering from substance addiction.

Recommendation: Facilitate the establishment of a Year-Round Family Shelter

- Availability of year-round shelter space exceeds need.

Challenges:

- Lack of resources: financial, personnel and facilities.

- Challenge of self-advocacy: vulnerable populations are sometimes least able to advocate for themselves.
- Coordination among independent agencies and organizations.
- Addressing neighborhood concerns and questions.
- Stigmatization and misunderstanding of homelessness.

Recommendation: Engage in a wider community effort to reduce Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events, including abuse and neglect. They may also include household dysfunction such as witnessing domestic violence or growing up with family members who have substance use disorders.
- ACEs are strongly related to the development and prevalence of a wide range of health problems throughout a person's lifespan, including those associated with substance misuse.
- City Government should strongly partner with other Health and Community agencies and organizations to reduce ACEs in Frederick City.

## Employment and Housing

### Observations

- Employment, affordability, housing and poverty are complex and intractable challenges.
- There are many overlapping Government and Non-Profits that work on issues directly or indirectly to lessen the root causes or alleviate the symptoms of these challenges. Frederick County Government is the lead agency with regards to Workforce Development. Several City Government, County and Non-Profits work to address poverty and affordable housing.
- The recent United Way Alice Report gives some insight into the scale of the lack of affordability in the City and the populations disproportionately affected.
- Education (academic and training), employment opportunity, and the ability to be able to afford City residency are inter-connected.
- Transportation and/or access to retail can be barriers to housing occupation.
- It can be challenging for individuals seeking housing and shelter to connect with available resources. Discovering, connecting to and applying across dispersed properties can be a barrier for those employed but income constrained.
- Diversity of the City is a strength. Companies want to hire a diverse workforce and diverse employee candidates want to live in a place in which they would feel comfortable.
- The vibrant downtown and proposed Downtown Hotel and Conference Center were mentioned as strengths that would be attractive to employers.
- The changing dynamic of jobs is a key issue as the number of jobs being replaced by technological automation is increasing. This creates economic insecurity for those employed and results in an increased demand for mid-career training and education.
- Economic development and transformation in the nature of work is both an opportunity and a challenge for City residents and businesses.

### Recommendations

Recommendation: City Government needs to establish strategic priorities and a strategic plan to increase impact on these issues.

#### Challenges:

- Establishing shared visions and goals, and continuing long-term collaborations to work on complex, long-term problems is difficult and requires continuous focus and leadership across multiple City Government administrations.
- Scope and scale of issues can motivate leaders to address symptoms rather than long-term redress of root causes.

Recommendation: Work collaboratively to increase housing for permanent and temporarily homeless residents.

- City Government can act as a “forcing function” and/or convener of agencies and non-profits.
- City Government must advocate for and facilitate the establishment of these resources while considering existing neighborhood questions and concerns.
- City Government should help navigate and streamline permitting processes.

Challenges:

- Lack of resources: financial, personnel and facilities.
- Challenge of self-advocacy: vulnerable populations are sometimes least able to advocate for themselves.
- Coordination among independent agencies and organizations.
- Addressing neighborhood concerns and questions.
- Stigmatization and misunderstanding of homelessness.

Recommendation: establish an “affordable housing” navigator capability.

- Internally establish or partner with agencies or non-profit to establish a “one stop” resource for individuals that are employed but income constrained.
- Capability needs to be more than “a list of numbers to call”. Income constrained individuals may not have access to transportation, internet or other abilities to connect with housing providers.
- Navigator should also be able to assist with information of existing resources and services that support access to housing.

Challenges:

- Coordination among various housing providers and availability.
- Funding to support navigator staffing.

Recommendation: Partner with Frederick County Government to expand public transportation routes, availability and access.

- Frederick City’s lack of density and mixed-use, and pattern outlying suburban development creates employment, food and services deserts.

Challenges:

- Lack of funding and resources; transportation vehicles must not only be purchased but maintained and operated.
- Uneven demand for or adoption of public transportation by residents.

## Arts & Historic Preservation

### Observations

- Frederick has a Nationally recognized, vibrant Arts Community. This is an asset to the quality of life and economic well-being of the City.
- There are many existing non-profit organizations and for-profit enterprises engaged in the Arts Community, the Preservation Community and Creative Economy.
- Frederick's Historic assets contribute to the Quality of Life, Economic Prosperity and the Knowledge of Future Generations.
- Frederick City lacks a large performance venue (for example, capable of supporting a Symphony Performance or larger staged play).
- Zoning and permitting is incongruent with the nature of Creative Class businesses and jobs.

### Recommendations

Recommendation: continue and expand support and partnership with Arts organizations.

Recommendation: continue and expand support and partnership with the Preservation Community.

- Much like Public Health and Wellness, a vibrant mix of agency and non-profit preservation organizations exist in Frederick County.
- City should strive to be a national leader in preservation efforts.

### Challenges:

- Achieving balance between preservation goals, property owners desires, and available funds.

Recommendation: continue to recognize importance of Arts and Preservation in Strategic and Comprehensive planning efforts.

Recommendation: recognize and consider the lack of a large performance venue and other venues.

- Lack of a larger performance venue limits resident opportunities to access Arts but also leads to the loss of Creative Class businesses that must re-locate to other geographies.
- Zoning and permitting not structured in a way that recognizes the differences in Creative Class occupations and businesses and more traditional space uses.

Recommendation: improve outreach to creative class entrepreneurs.

- Consider modeling after Tech Frederick, which was established between the City's Technology firms and City Government Department of Economic Development.

Recommendation: involve City Government staff preservationists as early as feasible and throughout the planning process.

- Ensure adequate and requisite staffing to support participation by City Government preservationist staff.

Recommendation: continue with current HPC process and guideline improvement process.

## Parks and Recreation

### Observations

- Frederick has some wonderful parks and recreational assets.
- Parks and recreational opportunities are not universally accessible across all City neighborhoods.
- Athletic fields and facilities are lacking relative to demand.
- Loss of Frederick High School pool is a detriment to the City.
- Pedestrian and bike access is improving but is not universally consistent.

### Recommendations

Recommendation: Continue to increase connectivity of parks and trails.

- Connectivity of parks also increases pedestrian and bike access and travel across the City.

Recommendation: Continue efforts to make greenspace and parks accessible in all neighborhoods.

- Public transportation can also help residents access centralized parks and recreational assets.

Challenges: funding and land, especially within established neighborhoods.

Recommendation: Address Hargett Park

- Hargett Park represents a large, underutilized resource.
- Represents some possible relief for lack of athletic fields and aquatic facilities.
- Exploration of different models, including public-private partnership and special taxing fund, should be considered.

Challenges:

- Funding to improve park and construct, operate and maintain facilities.

Recommendation: Continue to seek opportunities to partner with FCPS on co-location of recreational spaces (such as Lincoln Elementary).

Recommendation: consider partnership opportunities with Ft. Detrick.

Recommendation: continue stewardship and maintenance of existing facilities and assets.

Recommendation: increased event and on-going recycling, removal and policing of trash and cigarette butts.

Recommendation: continued improvement of bike and pedestrian access and routes.

- City Government has a current standing committee in this area.

## Education

### Observations

- Public Education is primarily lead by Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS), Frederick County Government, and Frederick Community College (FCC).
- A large percentage of school age children reside within Frederick City.
- Multiple Frederick City schools are overcrowded; residential housing changes directly impact school capacity.
- Educational attainment (academic and/or skills) is linked to employment and affordability.
- In addition to FCC, Frederick City is also home to Hood College.

### Recommendations

Recommendation: establish a formal City Government liaison to FCPS; mayor should meet regularly with Superintendent.

- Given the percentage of FCPS students and resources (facilities, staff) that are City residents, City Government should establish a formal liaison with FCPS.

Recommendation: ensure strong communications and coordination between City Government Planning Department Staff and FCPS.

- Changes in approved and planned residential growth directly impacts FCPS school capacity planning.
- City Government should strive to be as predictable in planning estimates as possible and notify FCPS promptly after any significant change to residential housing projections or approvals.

Recommendation: Explore possibility of strengthening relationships between FCPS, Frederick Community College and City of Frederick Police Department.

- FCC and FPD have already been meeting around campus safety issues.
- Public School Safety issues continue to be a concern nationally and among City residents.
- FCPS would welcome greater engagement with City Government with regards to this issue.

Recommendation: Consider review and revisit of current City Government Mitigation Fee structure.

- Mitigation fees provide a mechanism for residential housing developers to pay a “mitigation fee” to move forward with residential housing construction that is predicted to create or add to public school overcrowding.
- City Government’s policy to allow development to proceed without mitigation after only a three year wait period is a concern for parents and FCPS.



Challenges:

- Do not want to encourage suburban sprawl at City borders.
- Revisiting policy requires collaboration between City Government, County Government, FCPS, School Advocates and Building Industry.

## Summary and Conclusions

The City of Frederick is a diverse, growing municipality with many strengths, challenges and opportunities. Chief among those strengths are the people that comprise our residents, community organizations, businesses and City Government. In all our work across the stakeholders involved in our mission scope, the workgroup universally experienced a genuine commitment to build on the City's successes and progress towards a community that is truly "livable" for all.

Throughout our efforts the workgroup recognized that while we have an engaged community, there are many stakeholder groups that City Government and community leaders are not connect to. A common refrain was "It's not that we only don't know what we don't know, we also don't know who we don't know." We feel this supports and reinforces the work done in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Communications and Community Engagement workgroups.

We also recognize that City Government has limited resources and authorities; as such, it is critical that City Government develop, set and employ strategic priorities and look to partner and collaborate with other entities and organizations. Many of the challenges observed by our workgroup have complex, underlying causes that are not quickly or easily ameliorated. Rather than be deterred, we believe that City Government should lead on tackling these issues.