



CECIL COUNTY MARYLAND 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN





FROM THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

It is an exciting time for the citizens of Cecil County filled with promise for the future. The Cecil County 2020 Strategic Plan represents our Vision, Mission, Values, and Priorities for the upcoming years. Working together with our citizens and business partners, Cecil County Government will maintain focus on actions that result in economic vitality, quality education, and safe communities which will continue to move Cecil County forward.

Dr. Alan J. McCarthy, County Executive

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The Cecil County 2020 Strategic Plan was developed in accordance with Article 6, Section 601 (a) of the County Charter, which states, “Under the direction of the County Executive, the government shall establish a Strategic Plan for the County, which shall align the County with anticipated shifts in demographic, legal, political, social, or physical conditions.”

The Strategic Plan examines current and anticipated future conditions of Cecil County that must be addressed.

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FOREWORD

The Cecil County 2020 Strategic Plan was developed in accordance with Article 6, Section 601 (a) of the County Charter, which states, “Under the direction of the County Executive, the government shall establish a Strategic Plan for the County, which shall align the County with anticipated shifts in demographic, legal, political, social or physical conditions.”

The 2020 Cecil County Strategic Plan advances a vision and priorities for Cecil County for a ten-year period, 2020 - 2030. The plan was conceived for the entire County, not only County government. Priorities, goals and objectives that will guide the County in achieving their vision of “Cecil County is a place of opportunity for all, known for economic vitality, quality education, and safe communities” were established by the plan. It is intended that this plan will serve as a tool to establish priorities and drive decision making regarding resource allocation, programming needs, and future development of the County.

The Strategic Plan is the overarching framework to drive tactical planning that is advanced through departments, agencies, and organizations throughout the County. The goals and objectives consider the broad scope of public and private, local, state, and federal organizations. Inasmuch, the plan incorporates the municipalities, private sector organizations, and citizenry as a whole. Strong partnerships among these jurisdictions, agencies, organizations, and departments will be required for the goals and objectives to be advanced at an operational level. Forthcoming processes for each of these departments, agencies, and organizations will consider budgeting and resource allocation and the actions needed to implement the goals and objectives identified in the plan. It is these departments, agencies, and organizations that will achieve the goals and objectives identified in the plan.

Future efforts will be required to ensure that the Cecil County 2020 Strategic Plan serves as the seminal planning document and influences the priorities of all County agencies, departments, and partners. Through this approach, the County will effectively align community resources in a manner that strives for a future that instills economic vitality, quality education, and ensures safe and active communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cecil County 2020 Strategic Plan specifically responds to the regulations described in Article 6, Section 601 (a).

Through this plan, Cecil County is able to identify priorities that are responsive to the existing environment while, at the same time, position the County for the future. As the County considers the many challenges and opportunities that exist, it is critical to establish priorities that will provide the greatest benefit to citizens. This plan reflects priorities and performance measures that will verify the County is making progress to ensure economic vitality, quality education, and safe and healthy communities. The following priorities are integral to achieving the Vision of the County and are therefore of equal significance to advancing the Mission of Cecil County.

Economic Development Strategic Priority: Cecil County will create an environment that encourages economic growth through job creation, business development, and community revitalization.

Fiscal Stability Strategic Priority: Cecil County will provide fiscal stability that is predictable, sustainable, and supports the community to establish a secure financial foundation.

Education Strategic Priority: Cecil County will advance lifelong educational opportunities for citizens of all ages that serve as a foundation to enhance the quality of life.

Infrastructure Strategic Priority: Cecil County will implement improvements in infrastructure, consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan, that result in creating enhanced quality of life for citizens and opportunities for residential and economic development while preserving our natural environment.

Safe, Healthy, and Active Communities Strategic Priority: Cecil County will improve the quality of life for citizens by enhancing safe, healthy and active communities.

OVERVIEW OF CECIL COUNTY

Cecil County is distinguished by a rich history, natural beauty, and an enviable geographic location that provides economic development opportunity in a wide range of businesses and industries. The County is strategically located between Baltimore and Philadelphia with convenient access to a road, rail, air, and water transportation network. Cecil County has a population of 104,000 over a land area of 352 square miles. Cecil County Government provides a full complement of services including law enforcement, a correctional facility, emergency management services, construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, and other infrastructures. Volunteer fire companies provide fire protection with County-assisted funding. The County, in certain areas, provides wastewater services and a central landfill is maintained. Cecil County Government also provides significant financial support to the Board of Education, Cecil College, and the Cecil County Public Library.

The County offers resources that enrich the quality of life for all citizens, including 1,500 acres of public parks, recreation, and open space and an additional 13,576 acres in natural resource lands, including the Fair Hill Natural Resources Management Area and the Elk Neck State Park and State Forest. Additionally, the County has more than 70 square miles of water that offer recreational and residential advantages. The preservation of these natural resources, in part, reflects the County's strong commitment to its rural heritage.

Cecil County's strategic location, quality of life, and engaged citizenry all combine to offer Cecil County residents the opportunity for a bright future. Like other Maryland counties, in recent years Cecil County has faced economic challenges. While the local unemployment rate has dropped from a high in February 2010 of 11.8% to 3.8% in December 2018.

Opportunities for growth can be found in building upon the County's thriving agricultural and strong manufacturing sectors. Cecil County's manufacturing base is nearly three times that of the State average and provides jobs for 15% of the County's workforce. At the same time, the County should continue to diversify its economic base.

The single most significant resource in our County is the citizenry. Currently, there is demand to enhance Cecil County workforce preparation by aligning career and degree credentials with the changing demands of the workplace. Further, the County must ensure safe and healthy communities. There are 13 measures related to public health on which the County is tracking below state averages. Most alarming among these are issues concerning substance abuse. Substance abuse usage rates not only contribute to challenges in the realm of public health, but also public safety.

Collectively, the County is strongly committed to setting priorities that enhance its resources and improve the health and prosperity of all citizens.

VISION

Cecil County is a place of opportunity for all, known for economic vitality, quality education, and safe communities.

MISSION

Cecil County Government enhances the health, education, safety, economic well-being, and quality of life for all citizens by providing public services in a fiscally responsible and efficient manner. The County will operate in a manner that is worthy of public trust and respectful of our rural heritage. The County embraces innovation, diversity, and collaboration in meeting citizen and community needs. The county government recognizes its stewardship role and strives to:

*Do What's Right!
Work as a Team!
Get Results!*

VALUES

Collaboration

We commit to advancing work through productive and supportive teams. We will strive to create collaborative partnerships with citizens, stakeholders, and staff.

Excellence

We will ensure quality standards in all we do. The County commits to innovative approaches. Standards of excellence will be employed that represent best practices.

Citizen Involvement

We strive to actively engage citizens in advancing the priorities of the County. Public participation will be sought through volunteerism, committee representation, and citizen feedback.

Integrity

We will sustain sound and ethical governing practices worthy of public trust. Professional conduct and work processes will positively represent and be accountable to those we serve.

Leadership

We commit to strong leadership that embraces the need to provide stewardship for the County's fiscal, physical, and natural resources. Furthermore, County leaders will be responsible to advance the attainment of our strategic priorities.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Cecil County is strongly positioned for growth on the economic development front. A strategic location on the I-95 corridor between Philadelphia and Baltimore provides the County with geographic advantages that few communities possess. Strong geographic positioning is supported by a transportation network of roads, water, rail, and air. These factors are complemented by County resources that offer a highly desirable quality of life.

In recent years, new businesses have moved to this area; however, other indicators show that more activity is needed to bolster the standard of living for County residents. The workforce needs to be equipped with a higher level skill set to be more competitive for higher skilled and higher waged jobs. This, in part, will abate the unemployment rate that exceeds the State average.

The County must also address the need for mixed-use communities to attract new residents to the area who are seeking neighborhood-based amenities that enhance quality of life standards. This is consistent with efforts to continually revitalize our communities where more recreational, cultural, and retail options are more conveniently located.

Strategic Priority: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Cecil County will create an environment that encourages **economic growth** through job creation, business development, and community revitalization.*

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: Accelerate efforts to **create jobs** and prepare the workforce for the demands of emerging employment opportunities with a technology focus.

- 1.1 Increase the number of new jobs in the County among existing businesses and new businesses.
- 1.2 Upgrade workforce skills to take advantage of new jobs in this region, especially those that offer higher wages.
- 1.3 Reduce unemployment rates in the County.

GOAL 2: Increase County efforts to create a flexible and streamlined environment for **business development** that eliminates barriers to business recruitment and retention.

- 2.1 Increase the number of new businesses in the County (for-profit and non-profit).
- 2.2 Strengthen the Business Assistance Program for new and existing businesses.
- 2.3 Seek State and Federal support for infrastructure enhancements to create a more business-friendly community (broadband, roads, water, sewer, etc.).

GOAL 3: Promote a positive **County image** which serves to attract new residents and businesses.

- 3.1 Promote improvements to the County's infrastructure that enhance quality of life standards and a more business friendly community.
- 3.2 Market economic advantages related to cost-of-living savings the County offers.
- 3.3 Market initiatives that create and advance sports tourism, promote the recreation and leisure industry, and preserve the County's cultural and historic significance.

GOAL 4: Support **community revitalization** and the development of mixed-use communities.

- 4.1 Encourage the expansion and development of mixed-use communities.
- 4.2 Continue support for community revitalization.

GOAL 5: Protect and leverage the **unique natural, agricultural, and historic aspects** of Cecil County to promote economic development while preserving natural resources.

- 5.1 Support efforts to expand the agriculture business sector.
- 5.2 Collaborate with towns and municipalities to advance initiatives related to development and historic preservation.
- 5.3 Grow tourism, including event-related tourism, as a key component of economic development.

Strategic Priority: FISCAL STABILITY

*Cecil County will provide **fiscal stability** that is predictable, sustainable, and supports the community to establish a secure financial foundation.*

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: The County will exercise **responsible stewardship** in the allocation, maintenance, and use of public resources.

- 1.1 Allocate reasonable levels of the fund balance to support local priorities while seeking the maximum level of state and federal funding.
- 1.2 Support efforts through County departments to ensure funding is provided for the infrastructure needed for ongoing work within the growth corridor.

GOAL 2: Demonstrate **fiscal sustainability** to address current needs and anticipate the emerging financial demands of a growing population.

- 2.1 Employ financial modeling methods that anticipate funding needs related to changes in the size and demography of the Cecil County population.
- 2.2 Advance budget strategies that consider the needed support to advance priorities in the County's Strategic Plan.
- 2.3 Explore opportunities for public/private partnerships.

GOAL 3: Advance strategies to increase **State and Federal funding** for projects within the County that fall within regulatory guidelines for financial eligibility.

- 3.1 Elevate the importance of County government and affiliates to increase the level of State and Federal support for programs and projects for departments/agencies.
- 3.2 Provide advocacy, at the State level, through the Cecil County legislative delegation to advance projects and regulations that advantage Cecil County.

GOAL 4: Forecast and align projected revenues and **capital expenditure** needs over a five-year period to strengthen the linkages between community infrastructure and the financial capacity of the County.

- 4.1 Adhere to statutory and self-imposed debt affordability criteria.
- 4.2 Provide priority consideration to the funding needs associated with the County's Strategic Plan.
- 4.3 Fund the backlog of deferred maintenance projects within acceptable limits.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

The County has traditionally been fiscally conservative, which has allowed the County to weather the recent economic downturn and retain a healthy fund balance. The assets of the County exceeded its liabilities at the close of the fiscal year 2018 by \$121,399,980.

This pattern of fiscal responsibility has positioned the County to fund future priorities at a reasonable level. Through collaborative and transparent processes, County Government is able to advance strategies that will lead to the enhancement of economic vitality, quality education, and safe and healthy communities.

This effort will be amplified by active advocacy to seek State and Federal support for projects that will improve conditions in Cecil County, and explore more opportunities for private/public partnerships.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

The State of Maryland lauds a four-year degree completion rate of 38%, while the four-year degree completion rate for Cecil County is approximately 22%. At the same time, it is estimated that approximately 60% of the jobs in the workforce require some level of college coursework. This is particularly true in the northeastern region of Maryland, given the degree requirements for research, development, test and evaluation jobs that have expanded at Aberdeen Proving Ground based on growth in the Department of Defense.

This trend persists, in part, since the connection between educational attainment and the impact on community economic vitality and safety is not strongly associated by many citizens. Greater recognition is needed that learning, beginning at birth and throughout life, is essential to maximize the potential of our community and workforce.

Education is a driving force in producing strong and active citizens. It creates a pathway to instilling character and the highest standards of citizenship. Therefore, education funding as an investment to yield economic benefits and engaged citizens, is a priority for the County. Aligning education and skill development with the needs of county, regional, and state employers is a critical goal that must be addressed to better position Cecil County citizens for the current and emerging workforce.

Strategic Priority: EDUCATION

*Cecil County will advance lifelong **educational opportunities** for citizens of all ages that serve as a foundation to enhance the quality of life.*

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: Provide **advocacy** to enhance the public perception of the value of education.

- 1.1 Community leaders and officials will promote the value of education related to return on investment in employment viability and income.
- 1.2 Create awareness regarding the positive impact of education on creating safe and healthy communities.

GOAL 2: Support community efforts to increase **degree attainment** at the secondary and college levels.

- 2.1 Improve the high school graduation rate while lowering the dropout rate.
- 2.2 Expand the number of career and technology opportunities as a mechanism to increase pathways to degree completion.
- 2.3 Increase the availability of workforce training and industry certification programs for citizens.
- 2.4 Increase the rate of college and/or career readiness among high school graduates.
- 2.5 Exceed the national average for college degree attainment rates of Cecil County citizens.
- 2.6 Support regional efforts to bring four-year universities to northeastern Maryland.

GOAL 3: Champion initiatives that encourage **family engagement** in educational activities within and beyond the classroom.

- 3.1 Support parent/caregiver engagement with free/low-cost programs and outreach initiatives coordinated by community partners addressing early childhood educational challenges and success.
- 3.2 Support creation of systematized outreach led by county leaders in early childhood education and aimed at lower income children and families, facilitating their ability and enthusiasm to pursue educational and career development opportunities.

GOAL 4: Foster opportunity for all citizens to learn throughout life by **leveraging community education resources**.

- 4.1 Encourage partnership between the public schools and public library to increase enthusiasm for educational attainment and enhance educational performance.
- 4.2 Support increasing the number of children and teens engaged in free or low-cost educational classes and activities during the summer and out-of-school.
- 4.3 Encourage strong partnerships among education institutions and with community partners addressing needs such as workforce development, recreation services, and challenges facing county youth.
- 4.4 Promote and support free and low-cost self-directed lifelong learning opportunities for citizens of all ages, creating a community culture that embraces learning and education throughout life as the foundation for mental and physical health and economic vitality.

Strategic Priority: INFRASTRUCTURE

*Cecil County will implement improvements in **infrastructure**, consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan, that result in creating enhanced quality of life for citizens and opportunities for residential and economic development while preserving our natural environment.*

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: Provide support to advance recommendations outlined in the **Comprehensive Plan**.

- 1.1 Partner with the State Highway Administration to ensure the maintenance and upgrade of state roads.
- 1.2 Support the Department of Public Works to ensure that County roads and bridges are safe and support the demands of traffic flow.
- 1.3 Continue to support initiatives to ensure adequate supply (quantity and quality) and distribution of water.
- 1.4 Continue to support initiatives to ensure adequate capacity, collection, and management of wastewater.
- 1.5 Encourage enhancement of energy distribution systems to support residential and business needs of the County.

GOAL 2: Expand access to **technology and communications** throughout the County.

- 2.1 Support efforts to expand residential internet access.
- 2.2 Advance initiatives to support the continued expansion of broadband access throughout the County.

GOAL 3: Improve **public transit** options for residents.

- 3.1 Expand the frequency of existing bus routes and increase the volume and expanse of bus routes.
- 3.2 Support the regional rail effort to expand MARC service to Philadelphia, Wilmington, Newark, and Elkton.
- 3.3 Expand MARC service out of Perryville to include Saturday and Sunday.

GOAL 4: Advance conservation and preservation efforts in rural and sensitive lands to protect the County's **natural environment**.

- 4.1 Promote and use the local, state, federal, and private agricultural land preservation programs to keep farming viable in the County.
- 4.2 Support protection of clean water in our streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay.
- 4.3 Support programs to assure the protection of forested and other sensitive areas.
- 4.4 Cecil County will implement improvements in infrastructure, consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan, that result in creating an enhanced quality of life for citizens and opportunities for residential and economic development while protecting rural character and the environment.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Adequate, well-maintained infrastructure is critical to the prosperity of Cecil County. It is a driving force to ensure that clean water, safe roads, adequate transit, energy, and connectivity is available to residents and businesses throughout the County. The County's Comprehensive Plan provides an expansive review of the projects that must be undertaken to keep pace with the County's growing population and changes needed to support economic development as well as preserve the rural character.

Substantial progress has been made in the past four years to advance these projects. However, priority must be given to accelerate progress in several areas. The need to enhance public transportation (bus and rail) is dire. Progress is needed in the expansion of broadband access. Sustained efforts are also needed to ensure that water and wastewater services can meet the County's needs.

The County has made significant progress related to the maintenance and repair of County bridges and roads, but must continue to collaborate with the State to address critical issues related to state roads within the County, intersection capacity, and others.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Cecil County is committed to providing safe and healthy communities. The Law Enforcement Division of the Cecil County Sheriff's Office and the Department of Emergency Services (DES) are critical components in making certain that this commitment is fulfilled. Cecil County saw decreases in all reported crimes of 13% and property crime by 11% in 2018 (as compared to 2017 data). There was an increase in violent Part 1 Crimes by 18%.

For 2018, DES operated four advanced life support response units, in addition to the nine volunteer fire departments and responded to approximately 14,757 calls. The 911 Call Center handled 57,771 emergency calls and 70,428 non-emergency calls.

The Cecil County Health Department tracks the health of citizens across 39 measures that are compared to state averages. There are 24 measures on which Cecil County is tracking below the state average. Mental health and substance abuse issues have been persistent among these. Illicit drug use ranks among the highest in the State of Maryland. Also notable are the high rates of heart disease, cancer, and obesity in the County. Each of these indicators exceed state rates and, in some cases, national trends.

Arguably, high poverty rates, which exceed state levels, contribute to many of the County's health and safety challenges.

Strategic Priority: SAFE, HEALTHY, AND ACTIVE COMMUNITIES

Cecil County will improve the quality of life for citizens by enhancing **safe, healthy, and active** communities.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: Provide **public safety** resources appropriate to meet the complement of needs of citizens.

- 1.1 Continue to reduce the crime rate in the County.
- 1.2 Provide law enforcement support to address the criminal factors related to escalating criminal activity and substance abuse rates.
- 1.3 Support the volunteer fire departments to provide service in their local communities.

GOAL 2: Improve the **health status** of Cecil County citizens.

- 2.1 Through a community based collaborative, bolster prevention and intervention efforts, expand treatment and recovery support initiatives and strengthen enforcement resources to reduce substance abuse and drug addiction in the community.
- 2.2 Increase the volume of behavioral and mental health treatment resources and programs available through a collaborative network of community providers.
- 2.3 Support the Health Department in addressing health indicators that exceed State averages (i.e. heart disease, cancer, obesity).
- 2.4 Actively seek a restoration of State funding to support the County's public health programs, particularly resources that deal with the abatement of substance abuse.
- 2.5 Address environmental issues that have an adverse effect on citizens' quality of life.

GOAL 3: Promote **healthy lifestyles** by engaging citizens in health and wellness activities.

- 3.1 Provide opportunities to engage youth and young adults in recreational programs to create active and productive citizens.
- 3.2 Support the departments of Parks and Recreation, Health, and Community Services to expand programming for children and adults of all ages.
- 3.3 Collaborate with local municipalities and local/regional trail organizations to support the development of safe pedestrian, bicycle, and recreational pathways.

GOAL 4: Collaborate with **social service** agencies to support citizens with the greatest need.

- 4.1 Pursue strategies to address those in economic need while promoting independence and self-sufficiency.
- 4.2 Support programs to protect vulnerable children and adults and augment prevention efforts related to family violence and homelessness

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The Cecil County 2020 Strategic Plan outlines the priorities that will be addressed in the upcoming years. Specific measures will be reviewed annually to determine the status of progress-to-goal across the five strategic priorities. These measures will be tracked to verify the County is deploying public resources in an efficient and effective manner that produces results.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Cecil County will create an environment that encourages economic growth through job creation, business development, and community revitalization.

Job Creation

- Net number of new jobs
- Increase in weekly wages
- Employment placement by skills level report

Business Development

- Net number of new businesses report
- Report of existing businesses status and size
- Participation rate in Business Assistance Program
- Agricultural business dollar-volume; Acres in agricultural use as percent of county acres

County Image

- Increase in press releases with information about County programs
- Volume of positive news stories

Community Revitalization

- Number of projects completed
- Report of mixed-use community development plans

Natural, Agricultural, Historic Aspects

- Status report of the state of agriculture business sector
- Status report of the historic preservation projects

FISCAL STABILITY

Cecil County will provide fiscal stability that is predictable, sustainable, and supports the community to establish a secure financial foundation.

Stewardship

- State and Federal support dollars
- Infrastructure improvement report
- Status of fund balance
- Balanced budget report

Sustainability

- Financial models that support debt affordability policies and prudent fiscal management

Capital Expenditures

- Status report on Capital Improvement Projects
- Report of road upgrades
- Report of bridge upgrades
- Number of structurally deficient/obsolete bridges
- Report of wastewater collection & treatment system improvement

EDUCATION

Cecil County will advance lifelong educational opportunities for citizens of all ages that serve as a foundation to enhance the quality of life.

Advocacy

- Number of advocacy outreach programs
- Number of press releases
- Number of news stories

Degree Attainment

- High school dropout rates
- High school graduation rates
- Growth in science, tech., engineering, and math students
- College/Career readiness rates
- College degree rates
- GED attainment rates
- Industry certification rates

Family Engagement

- Number of free/low-cost programs for families
- Number of family programs
- Family participation rate

Educational Resources

- Number of educational alliance initiatives
- Youth participation rates in free/low-cost and summer programs
- Number of educational, community, workforce partnerships

INFRASTRUCTURE

Cecil County will implement improvements in infrastructure that result in creating enhanced quality of life for citizens and opportunities for residential and economic development while preserving our natural environment.

Comprehensive Plan

- Report of energy distribution system improvements
- Building permits by zoning category
- Agricultural preservation acres

Technology & Communications

- Expanded broadband access

Public Transit

- Number of bus routes
- Expanded bus service area report
- Expanded MARC service through Elkton
- Expanded SEPTA service through Perryville

Natural Environment

- Planning Commission Annual Report with summary of land preservation and development activity

SAFE, HEALTHY, and ACTIVE COMMUNITIES

Cecil County will improve the quality of life for citizens by enhancing safe, healthy, and active communities.

Public Safety

- Maryland crime rates report

Health Status

- Substance abuse rates
- Report on Local Health Improvement Plan rates
- Status report on State funding for public health
- Report on new program for behavioral/mental health services

Healthy Lifestyles

- Report on recreation/wellness programs for youth and adults

Social Services

- Report on child abuse rates
- Report on homeless assistance rates