



## **CHAPTER 10**

### *Goal 6: To Encourage Community Involvement in the Development, Implementation, and Monitoring of the Freedom Community Comprehensive Plan*

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The development of the 2001 Freedom Community Comprehensive Plan, as well as the implementation and monitoring of the plan, is a public responsibility. Therefore, the plan must contain opportunities for public involvement in the planning process to ensure that citizens are aware of the daily decisions being made regarding the successful realization of the overall vision of the Freedom Community Comprehensive Plan. Following is a summary of the existing opportunities for citizen participation in the decision-making process, ways and means to influence final decisions of importance to the community, and recommendations for the creation of new public participation avenues.

#### **A. Existing Public Participation Opportunities**

Several formal opportunities are available to citizens of the Freedom community to voice public concerns and comments on a variety of issues of importance to local citizens. In addition to the following public participation avenues, information on the activities of these groups is also available over the internet and through the local newspapers (The Carroll County Times and the Carroll section of The Baltimore Sun). The internet web address for the Carroll County Department of Planning is [www.ccgov.carr.org/planning](http://www.ccgov.carr.org/planning).

##### **Carroll County Planning and Zoning Commission**

The Planning Commission holds its regular meeting on the third Tuesday of each month. They meet in the hearing room (Room 003/004) at the County Office Building, with meetings usually beginning at 9:00 AM. A tentative schedule is made available ahead of time at the Planning Department office. The meetings are open to the public, and opportunity is provided for citizen input.

##### **Carroll County Board of Commissioners**

The Board is required by law to duly advertise any and all public hearings on such diverse issues as zoning changes and zoning ordinance amendments prior to issuing final decisions. All public meetings and hearings conducted by the Board are open to citizens for their input.

##### **Carroll County Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA)**

The BZA schedules public hearings to ensure and/or provide equal opportunity for public participation and debate on specific property development requests. The BZA meets at the County Office Building in Westminster to discuss property owner appeals for variances, conditional uses, and other interpretations of the locally-adopted Zoning Ordinance. They post





signs on properties under review and mail adjacent property owners notices of public hearings to be conducted.

### **Carroll County Subdivision Advisory Committee**

Another opportunity for citizen involvement in the development process is available through the Carroll County Subdivision Advisory Committee (SAC). When a local property owner submits a plan for subdivision of a parcel, adjoining property owners are notified through the mail and by signage on the subject parcel of an opportunity to voice their concerns at a meeting of the SAC. The SAC meets on the fourth Thursday of every month to publicly review all development plans submitted to county government prior to their approval to proceed.

### **Comprehensive and Functional Plans**

Citizen participation is built into the process of the development and/or update of the comprehensive and functional plans that are developed in the county. Citizen participation can involve any or all of a number of activities. These activities often include citizen workshops, community surveys, community newsletters, a 60-day review period prior to the public hearing, and the public hearing itself.

## **B. Recommendations to Encourage Community Involvement in the Development, Implementation, and Monitoring of the Freedom Community Comprehensive Plan**

Numerous formal opportunities are already available for public participation in the planning and decision-making process. That is not to say, however, that improvements in citizen participation options are not needed. Following are several recommendations to help keep local citizens better informed about local matters and new opportunities to influence final decisions.

### ***Locate a county government branch office in the CPA***

- Construct a county government branch office in the Freedom area in an effort to improve citizen input opportunities. The elimination of the physical separation of the local government offices from the citizens would go a long way toward a meaningful facilitation of community awareness on issues of local importance.

### ***Provide updates on projects and events in the Freedom community through a local newsletter***

- Prepare and distribute a local newsletter on a regular basis for the citizens of the Freedom community. The newsletter can be used to present residents with valuable background information and current events on important issues affecting the Freedom community. The newsletter can provide information on recent or upcoming decisions, dates of interest, educational information on government proceedings, and reminders to register to vote.





***Encourage citizens to vote***

- Encourage active citizen participation through voter registration and the voting process. Reminders to individual citizens to register and vote can be included in a regularly-published and distributed community newsletter.

***Conduct periodic surveys of citizens in the Freedom community to measure attitudes and perceptions regarding the public input process***

- Conduct periodic surveys of residents satisfaction/dissatisfaction with a variety of issues affecting everyday life in the community. The survey would give Carroll County the opportunity to keep track of certain changes and trends over time while increasing public participation on any number of issues having some bearing on life in the Freedom community. A survey of this type also provides additional current information for future updating of the Freedom Community Comprehensive Plan.

***Encourage community volunteerism***

- Encouraging participation on and support for local groups and committees involved in the direction of the Freedom community is a positive response. Administrative support to local committees and groups also provides for continuity between meetings and a greater level of public participation in local debate. A high level of community interaction with and support for local planning and civic groups lends credibility to public debate due to the involvement of a wide range of people who bring varying skills and professions to the discussion.

***Provide continuous opportunity for citizen participation with the County Planning Commission***

- A fundamental element of a successful public participation effort is the continued opportunity for Freedom area citizens to publicly address their concerns to and receive feedback from the County Planning Commission. While the County Planning Commission addresses growth, development, and community planning issues for the entire county, the Freedom community is one of two growth areas that is predominantly unincorporated, thereby making the Planning Commission the principal body available for public interaction on local planning and development issues. This avenue is particularly important for citizens desiring to monitor and influence the implementation of the Freedom Community Comprehensive Plan. The Commission should hold regular meetings, possibly twice a year, in the Freedom area.

***Promote coordinated review and public interaction with adjacent jurisdictions***

- Within the boundaries of the Freedom Community Planning Area is the incorporated Town of Sykesville. The eastern boundary of the Freedom community is formed by the Baltimore County line. The southern boundary of the Freedom community is formed by the Howard County line. It is apparent that the activities contemplated by these jurisdictions will have an impact on the citizens of the Freedom community. Conversely, projects and policies at work in the Freedom community affect citizens in adjacent





jurisdictions as well. Therefore, the county should make every effort to keep local citizens abreast of planned or proposed activities in the general vicinity of the Freedom community which may impact on citizen-s lives, property values, etc. The community newsletter would be an ideal forum for such information and updates.

***Promote internet access to planning and development information in the Freedom area***

- The availability and popularity of computer technology and internet access creates a new opportunity for local government and private citizens to become better informed on issues of importance in the community. While Carroll County is already online, it is recommended that newsletters continue to be available on the internet to ensure that a higher percentage of local residents receive available information on community projects, meetings, events, etc. Additional information, such as the Freedom Community Comprehensive Plan, complete with information on public facilities, land use, and zoning, could be made available to citizens via the internet.

## **C. Fiscal Impacts**

Aside from the location and construction costs of a branch office of county government in Freedom, most of the recommendations contained in this chapter present limited budgeting impacts on the county. The preparation and mailing of newsletters and attending public meetings are duties already performed by county staff.

Regarding the construction of a branch office in Freedom, new office construction may cost the county roughly \$750,000 for a 10,000 square-foot building. Should an existing building be utilized as an adaptive reuse opportunity, these costs could be decreased considerably. No additional staff costs are anticipated. It is also important to note that the creation of a special taxing district in Freedom could assist in the cost of new office construction.

