CHAPTER 2

Introduction to the Freedom Community

The content of Chapter 2 describes the location of the Freedom area in the region as well as its size and boundaries. This chapter also describes the history of the area we now call Freedom, from its infancy to modern times. The closing sections of this chapter introduce the reader to the local governmental structure, its finances, and the incorporated area of the Town of Sykesville.

A. Geographic Location of Freedom Community Planning Area

The Freedom Community Planning Area (CPA) is located in southeastern Carroll County and comprises approximately 27,932 acres or 44 square miles. Morgan Run, a branch of the Liberty Reservoir, forms the northern boundary of the CPA; the Liberty Reservoir and Baltimore County line the eastern boundary; the South Branch of the Patapsco River and Howard County line the southern boundary; and MD 97, the western boundary. Eldersburg, located at the crossroads of MD 32 and MD 26, is at the geographic center of the CPA. The Freedom CPA is comprised of a large portion of the Freedom Election District (#5) and a portion of the Berrett Election District (#14). The Regional Map at the end of this chapter shows the Freedom area location within the region and also within Carroll County.

B. History of the Freedom Area

Freedom was among the first areas of Carroll County to be settled. When colonial Annapolis was the hub of Maryland, the early explorers for land followed what is now known as Ridge Road to what is known today as the Freedom area. The first recorded settler to reach this location was Richard Owing, who acquired Owing Outland Plains in 1724, one hundred thirteen years before Carroll County was established (1837). During this colonial period, land grants included such colorfully named lands as Empty Bottle, Shadrach's Last Chance, Valley of Strife, Just in Sight, and Petticoat's Hope. The "Village of Eldersburg", as it was called in earlier years, began during the colonial era. Eldersburg was named for John Elders who was given a land grant from the King of England for as much land as Elder could stake out in twenty-four hours. Pursuant to that grant, Elder established around 1750 an eight hundred-acre farm named "Perseverance" on what is now known as Liberty Road. That road had been established ten years earlier as the stagecoach route between Baltimore and Frederick. Shortly after Elder staked out his land, the intersection which is known as MD 32 and MD 26 became a center of commerce containing two taverns, a blacksmith shop, and two general stores. Down the road at the intersection of MD 26 and Ridge Road were a trading post, a court house, and a turkey roost.

After the Revolutionary War, the town of Freedom was settled by a Mr. O'Donald. The town's name was derived from the manner in which lots were sold. For each lot purchased, the buyer was given an adjoining lot free.

In the early 1800's, the largest landholding in the county was the 2,000-acre Springfield, which was laid out for William Patterson, a prosperous Baltimore merchant. Patterson was one of the original directors of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. When the Railroad needed money, Patterson gave it with the insistence that the line go near his summer home in Springfield. It was from this home that his daughter Elizabeth, better known as Betsy, eloped to marry Jerome, prince brother of Napoleon Bonaparte. After first meeting Jerome, Betsy decided to elope. When her father learned of her plans, he locked her in her room. With the assistance of her mother and a family slave, she climbed down a ladder from the upper story, mounted her hidden horse, and galloped down the old Liberty Road to meet her intended. Although Betsy did marry Jerome, Napoleon had the marriage later annulled. Betsy returned to spend a long but embittered life in Maryland.

The early 1800's also contain the origins of Sykesville. James Sykes bought 1,000 acres of land, in different tracts, in 1825. Sykes rebuilt an existing saw and grist mill and later built a cotton factory. From this humble beginning, Sykesville was born.

The early years of the 1800's were ones of growth and development for Sykesville and the Freedom area. The area which would become Carroll County had advanced well beyond the primitive frontier. The landscape was dotted by barns, farm houses, mills, churches, and taverns. Seeing the growth in population as an opportunity, citizens in Westminster sought to carve out a new county from remnants of Baltimore and Frederick counties. Carroll County was created as a new county in 1837, much to the chagrin of the citizens of Freedom who generally opposed the change.

During this time period, the Freedom area continued to grow in population as is evidenced by the establishment of churches. Wesley Chapel was built in June 1822 and is the oldest Methodist church in Maryland still in its original form. St. Barnabus Episcopal Church was established in 1850. Oakland Methodist Church was built in 1859. St. Joseph=s Catholic Church in Sykesville was built in 1861.

During the Civil War, the Freedom area, which contained two-thirds of the county=s pre-war population of slaves, was generally pro-Southern. However, the war caused a split amongst a number of churches. The Freedom Methodist Church was the direct result of a split in the congregation of Wesley Chapel. South Carroll saw the presence of both Union and Confederate soldiers during the war with troops traveling on Liberty and Linton Roads.

After the Civil War, the area continued to change economically and in population. Perhaps the most notable change was that of the Springfield Estate. In 1894, John Hubner, State Senator from Baltimore County, led a committee which was concerned about the more than 1,000 mentally ill persons in the jails and almshouses throughout the state. The Senator introduced a bill to establish a "second hospital for the insane of Maryland," which was passed by the General Assembly. A sum of $100,000 was appropriated to acquire land for the project. Using this money, a total of 728 acres was purchased from the Patterson-Brown Estate, and in 1896 patients were first received at the new Springfield Hospital. Springfield had gone from housing the rich

and famous to housing the mentally ill. Over time, Springfield became one of the largest employers in the county.

In the early 1900's, growth continued in the Freedom area. Liberty Road was at this time paved ten-feet wide up to MD 32. In 1921, George Ruck bought all the materials from Western Electric Company to put electricity into parts of the Freedom area. Churches continued to be built. The area seemed prosperous until the depression hit, causing land prices to slide to $22 per acre in some parts of the district.

Some aspects of the past continue to the present. The intersection of MD 32 and MD 26 remains at the center of commerce, even as it did in colonial times. The Liberty Road corridor continues to be used as the major east-west route through the area, just like it was traveled by soldiers during the Civil War. The use of the Springfield property continues to be a topic of discussion just as it was during the late 1890's.

C. Governmental Structure and Finances

Government Structure

The CPA is governed by three County Commissioners elected at large to four-year terms. Deriving their power through state enabling legislation, the Board of Carroll County Commissioners serves as both an executive and legislative body. Several commissions and boards, appointed by the Commissioners, carry out a variety of governmental functions within the CPA. For example, the County Planning and Zoning Commission, the County Economic Development Commission, and the County Parks Board each have some influence over the growth and development of the Freedom area.

In terms of state and federal representation for the Freedom CPA, the planning area is located within the 4th Legislative District and is represented by one Senator and two Delegates in the State Legislature in Annapolis. Federal representation comes from within the 6th Congressional District which contains two Senators and one member of the House of Representatives.

Finances

The tax rate in the county in 2000 was set at $2.62 per $100 assessed value of land and improvements. In FY 98, the total amount of taxable assessment in the Freedom area was $511,528,060. Approximately 87 percent of this revenue was generated from residential buildings while 9 percent came from commercial establishments, 3 percent from industrial buildings, and less than 1 percent from agricultural land and improvements.

Different services provided in the Freedom CPA include roadway improvements, water and sewer services, schools, police and fire protection, snow removal, libraries, street lighting, park services, maintenance, and general government.

D. Town of Sykesville

Sykesville was incorporated in 1904, bringing street lights and other improvements. The town operates under a Mayor and Council form of government. A Mayor and Town Council are elected to four-year terms, and they hire a Town Manager to manage daily operations and carry out policies. Town staff overseen by the Town Manager include the Police and Public Works departments, Town Inspector, Clerk-Treasurer, Administrative Assistant, and Secretary/ Receptionist. Citizen volunteers make up the Planning and Zoning, Historic District, Ethics, Parks and Recreation Commissions, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Recycling Committees.

In the early 1970's, MD 32 was re-routed from an alignment that went through the town to its present location after Sykesville's iron bridge was washed away by Hurricane Agnes. Although through traffic was reduced by this re-routing, a variety of retail, office, restaurant, and service businesses are still vibrant today on Main Street and elsewhere in the town. Businesses are represented by the Sykesville Business Association.

Although Main Street looks much like it did 100 years ago, Sykesville continues to develop today, and its estimated 2000 population was 3,568 residents. Residential housing within the town offers a diversity of apartments, townhouses, and historic homes as well as single-family homes. Fairhaven Life Care Retirement Community, which had over 400 residents in 1998, opened in 1980, and Copper Ridge, a facility for persons with Alzheimer's disease, opened in 1994. Other town amenities include Millard Cooper Park, a linear park with a walk/bike trail, several open space areas, and tot lots with play equipment all in recently-developed neighborhoods.

While the Town of Sykesville does fall within the boundaries of the Freedom CPA, it is an autonomous jurisdiction. Therefore, this plan does not apply to the town; the town has its own adopted comprehensive plan for the area within the town limits.