

ACTION PLAN

Introduction

An economic development program for Williamsport should have the following primary goals:

- To increase the income of Williamsport's residents and
- To increase the Town's tax base
- To improve the quality of life for Williamsport residents
- To maintain the town and town services for future residents
- To preserve and maintain the Town Center as a viable

Commercial Center

- To encourage economic development in that area as commercial and not residential.
- Discourage residential improvement on street level.
- Upgrade facades if possible endeavor to utilize an architecturally similar uniform design of an attractive nature.
- Encourage property owners to maintain and repair their properties in accordance with State, County and municipal building livability codes, fire codes, etc.

- Encourage Allegheny Power to endeavor to landscape in order to more compatibly fit with the C & O Canal Parka and the River Bottom Park.

Most employment for Williamsport residents is located outside the Town limits, largely in Washington County. Therefore, it is in the Town's interest to work with County economic development authorities to enhance the County's economy as much as possible and, in particular, to encourage the establishment of new economic activities within easy reach of Williamsport - in such areas as the Interstate Industrial Park and the Interstate 70/81 Industrial Park, revival or least economic revival of the vacant Garden State Tannery Complex.

The residents of Williamsport will benefit both from the location of new and expanded economic activities within the Town that will enhance the property-tax base without overburdening Town services and improved employment activities for the residents themselves. Thus, the potential for economic growth in Williamsport lies in three general categories: (1) location of those activities that are compatible with its historic and residential character in Williamsport, (2) continuing development of business and industry in the "EC" area at the south end of Town, and (3)

location of other economic activities within easy commuting distance of Williamsport.

Historic Attractions

The particular assets of the Town are its historic buildings and residential character, the presence of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and related sites, the scenic areas along the Potomac River and Conococheague Creek, Williamsport's proximity to major regional freeways, and its good accessibility to the Civil War and other historic sites, and the state parks in the nearby mountains. If the Town wishes growth in history-related employment within its borders the most desirable activities would be additional antique shops, restaurants serving travelers, Canal visitors, and the antique shoppers; additional bed-and-breakfast accommodations and inns; stores selling merchandise related to River activities and other outdoor pursuits; and gift shops featuring regional specialties.

Williamsport's historic resources are one of its primary assets in improving its citizens' economic situation. The Town realizes that historic preservation can be a major factor in continuing economic growth. Town leadership will work with the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal staff of the National Park service to achieve the best balance of preservation and enhancement of historic resources.

Williamsport is unique in its historic location at the confluence of highway, water, and rail transportation routes, its original town plan, and its well-preserved historic buildings.

The focus of economic development activities should be the area related to the Cushwa Basin and other Canal attractions and the central commercial area: Conococheague, Potomac and Salisbury Streets. These areas should be tied together visually and functionally, to build a "critical mass" of tourist and commercial attractions. Tourists should be able to move easily back and forth between these areas, by foot if possible. The distance from the Basin to Town Hall is about a half-mile, which is walking distance for most people, although at the longer end of the acceptable range. However, if there are attractions along the way the distance should not be a problem.

Park Service Program

The National Park Service views Williamsport as one of the prime attractions along the upper reaches of the Canal. The park Service has developed a program for the area around the Cushwa Basin which is intended to enhance the historic resources in that area. Actions listed in a 1980 plan report include those listed below. A new interpretive plan for the area is underway, and an interim visitor center has been established. More

than three million people visit the C & O annually, and the many points of interest in Williamsport could bring visitors who would patronize the Town's businesses. The 1980 Plan proposed the following:

- Stabilize the Conococheague Aqueduct, possibly to the point of rewatering the Aqueduct.

- Restore the trolley power station as a combination visitor center and management facility. This work is underway, with an interim visitor center in the Cushwa Warehouse.

- Restore the Cushwa Warehouse and find an appropriate use for it.

- Landscape the area around the basin.

- Outline the Basin in stone for interpretive purposes.

- Restore the Canal prism and towpath westward to Mile 100.9.

- Restore lock 44 and Lockhouse

- Develop a self-guiding interpretive walk with wayside exhibits at the Aqueduct, the Basin, the trolley power station, Cushwa Warehouse, the railroad lift bridge, the Bollman Truss Bridge, and Lock 44 and Lockhouse.

- Rewater the canal from Lock 44 to Conococheague Aqueduct.

- If possible, rewater from level 43 through lock 44 to permit its operation.
- Encourage Allegheny Power to endeavor to landscape and/or to beautify in some manner the power plant complex so that it blends in with the existing River Park and the C & O Canal on a more aesthetic basis.

To support and enhance the National Park Service attractions, the Town should make compatible improvements in the adjoining Riverbottom Park. These would not have to be expensive, in fact, substantial investment is not appropriate because of periodic flooding. Landscaping could make this park more attractive, and a developed recreation field here could add to Williamsport's recreational services. Another town project, that would support both the C & O Canal attractions and the Downtown area, would be to develop additional parking between Downtown and the Basin, within walking distance of both. This would encourage "one-stop" visits to the Canal and to Downtown merchants.

In addition, in order to improve the scenic beauty of the Basin, the Town should look into an investment in the small Town garage and fenced yard that is adjacent to the Basin. The current condition detracts from the visual beauty of the area. A solution could be to give the garage and yard a historic "face lift" to better blend with the historic atmosphere of the site.

Williamsport could also establish Town facilities or encourage private facilities in the Basin area that would promote canal and river activities. For the Canal, this could be activities and amenities for bicyclists; and for the river, this could be canoe or other boating activities and amenities.

It will be important to separate traffic to and from the power plant from the related to Downtown and the Canal, and it insure easy travel along the C & O Canal towpath from the north and south.

Improvements at Williamsport should be combined in an advertising and interpretive program with others along the Canal and River from Harper's Ferry to Cumberland, including the aqueducts at Antietam, Conococheague, Great Tonoloway, Fifteen Mile, Town, and Evitts Creeks, facilities at Four Locks (Locks 47 to 50), Fort Frederick, Hancock, the Paw Paw Tunnel, and others. They should also be combined in these programs with other historic attractions in Frederick, Washington, and Allegany Counties, such a Antietam Battlefield, downtown Hagerstown, and the historic towns of Sharpsburg, Boonsboro, Keedysville, Funkstown, Clear Spring and Hancock. These attractions, taken together, should support accessible restaurants and overnight accommodations for visitors from the large metropolitan areas from Philadelphia to Richmond.

Downtown

The preservation element of the Williamsport Comprehensive Plan has two focuses: the old "Town Square: at the Cushwa Basin and the commercial core, centering on Conococheague between Potomac and Salisbury Streets. A study has indentified the structures within an area bounded by the frontages of Potomac Street from the Canal to Artizan Street and Conococheague Street from the north frontage of Potomac Street to Church Street. This would be coterminous with the current "TC" zoning, plus Potomac Street to the Canal. The most valuable historic buildings should be identified and their preservation assured. A new overlay zoning district should be established on Potomac Street from Conococheague Street to the National Park Service property, as suggested above. Uses compatible with downtown functions, tourism, and visitor services should be encouraged in this area through these zoning regulations and available public programs providing grants and technical assistance for preservation and business development.

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development is currently organizing a new Neighborhood Business Development Program, providing grant and loan assistance for the improvement of business areas. This program's focus will be on smaller towns. Designated

areas may be urban, suburban, or rural, and areas may vary from a few blocks to a whole town. Both direct funding and other program resources will be offered by DHCD. Activities eligible for funding will include planning, studies, and surveys; land acquisition and improvements; and start-up operation costs.

The Main Street Maryland Program, also under the direction of DHCD, works in conjunction with the National Main Street Center of the National Trust of Historic Preservation and may be able to assist Williamsport in reaching its goal of revitalizing the downtown area.

Williamsport should continue to apply for a planning and design grant for its downtown core, and if possible, initial development funds. Some of this could be used for streetscape improvements, parking improvements, landscaping, as well as design work on new facilities in the area.

The Williamsport Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on October 26, 2001. While the Town has rejected a historic district in the past because of its regulatory effect, a National Register listing does not impose regulations on private property owners. However, it can promote revitalization through the availability of a 20 percent investment tax credit for rehabilitation of historic buildings. This district would be approximately the same as the TC district outlined above.

Williamsport should also investigate the Main Street program, sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and should join the Maryland Downtown Development Association.

The Town has investigated, applied for and prepared a proposal through the Market Investment Zone Program of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area. Some of the recommendations, etc. contained therein should be continuing and implemented.

Quality of Life for Residents

Williamsport is seen as a residential community and so the quality of life of its residents of all ages should be preserved. Some of the areas in which this can be done are:

- Work on street and park lighting to maintain beauty and to improve safety.
- Build an amphitheater to stage outdoor concerts and other entertainment.
- Make improvements to the Town swimming pool and bath house.

- Replace/upgrade playground equipment in Byron Memorial Park to make it more modern, safer, and accessible to children with handicaps.
- Improve/enlarge the gazebo to allow for a variety of uses by the public.
- Move electric lines in all park and historic area underground to keep with the scenic nature of the areas.
- Build a fourth pavilion to increase service to residents.
- Purchase land to expand park and recreation services.
- Establish/build other youth recreation facilities to encourage a more creative use of free time.
- Encourage and promote cultural activities, functions, concerts, plays, recitals and art shows, etc. at the Town Museum and Barn.

Maintain Town Services

Williamsport is an older town in need of many improvements, now and in the future, that will allow it to keep pace with changing times in its service to its residents. Some areas that should be addressed are:

- Build an electric substation to enhance our electric service to residents.

- Upgrade/modernize our sewer pumping and ejector stations to prevent future problems.
- Upgrade/replace old water and sewer lines.
- Relocate main Town garage to allow for growth, modernization and vehicle storage.
- Install an elevator in Town Hall to allow the upper floors to be handicapped accessible.
- Improve streets, alleys, and sidewalks to keep them at a continuously high level of quality.

Note: Sewer lines are presently being replaced/pump stations are being Upgraded at this time also.

Other Economic Development

Other economic development should include both employment opportunities for Williamsport residents and tax-paying establishments in Town. Economic activity outside of Williamsport will be the responsibility of County economic development officials, but Town official should support and cooperate with this effort.

A major effect for the County must be to retain and continue to attract manufacturing, transport-related, and other traditional industries. A shift-share analysis has been carried out for Washington County to identify industries that are growing faster here than in the nation as a whole. These

are presumed to be industries for which conditions in Washington County are relatively good. The industries identified in this analysis are general contracting; wholesale trade, particularly in lumber and other construction materials, metals and minerals, and groceries; manufacturing, particularly rubber products, stone, glass, and clay; retail trade, particularly food stores and eating and drinking places; finance, insurance, and real estate; and repair services.

These are all in addition to tourist services. Location quotients and growth rates are low for this industry, but it represents an untapped source of employment and income. Washington County is close to major metropolitan areas and low in cost of living. If the national economy continues to grow slowly, as seems likely at this time, people will be seeking low-cost vacations and away-from-home recreations. Western Washington County is prime territory for these visitors, with its low costs and recreational amenities.

Summary of the Action Program

To achieve the goals of economic development and community improvement, Williamsport should focus on a number of opportunities and actions. The Town should:

- Provide streetscape improvements in the central area, starting with Conococheague Street from Salisbury Street to Potomac Street, then Potomac Street from Artizan Street to the C & O Canal property, then extending north along Conococheague Street to Conococheague Creek and south to Church Street

- Encourage compatible commercial activities such as antique shops, gift shops, small restaurants, and bed-and-breakfast inns along Potomac Street between the central business area and the C & O Canal while preserving the historic structures and character of this area.

- Continue to promote employment activities in the area next to the Route 68/Interstate 81 interchange.

- Work with Washington County to bring housing programs to Williamsport, primarily to help residents to improve their homes.

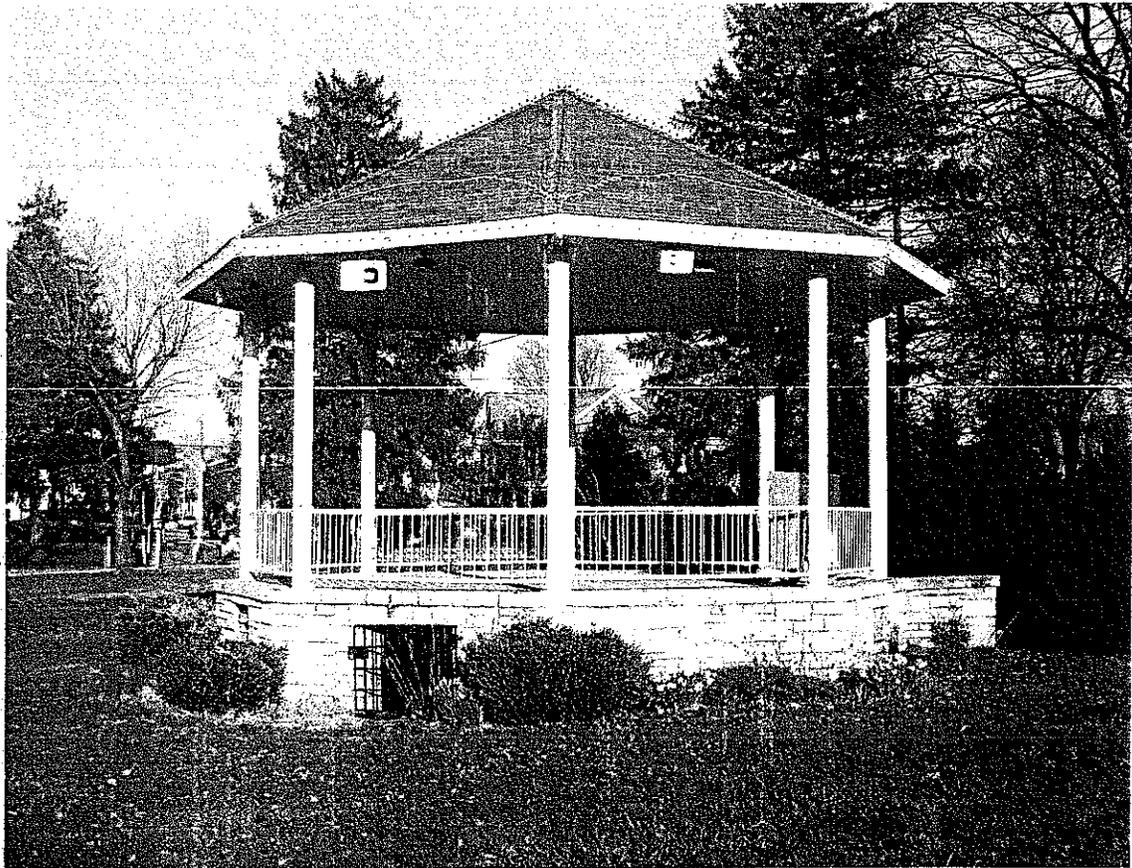
- Work with Washington County, the State, and the National Park Service to promote Williamsport and other historic town, the C & O Canal, Antietam Battlefield, Fort Frederick, and other attractions as a network of historic attractions.

- Preserve land along Conococheague Creek and the railroad right of way as open space and a trail.

- Continue improvements to the Town Museum, and the potential Civil War Museum.

CONCLUSION

Williamsport is a friendly town and an old one, with very few serious problems. However, population and economic trends and the Town's advancing age indicate that Williamsport cannot "rest on its laurels" and must continue its efforts to improve its economic and physical assets. This plan suggests a number of actions that can contribute to these improvements.



Band Shell - Byron Memorial Park