



Report of Feasible Alternatives to
Maryland Avenue/Rolling Mill Demolition Project
Spring 2016

I. Vision Statement

The citizens of Cumberland deserve a just, sustainable and healthy community. Towards that end, Preservation Maryland has prepared a report on potential alternatives to the existing total demolition option planned for Maryland Avenue/Rolling Mill. Any of the proposed options would avoid costly delays, controversy and turmoil created by the existing demolition proposal. The proposed options also respect Cumberland taxpayers who deserve cost effective approaches to economic development in their city.

The options herein presented were designed to:

- A. **Protect taxpayers from unreasonable risk and exposure** to financing private sector profits.
- B. **Create equitable impacts for all citizens.**
- C. **Maximize the Return-On-Investment for the City of Cumberland taxpayers** and increase the municipal tax base wherever possible.
- D. **Retain** as much of Cumberland's unique and irreplaceable **character and built heritage** wherever possible.

II. Concerns with Existing Proposal

The existing plan has generated serious opposition for a variety of concerns, including:

- 1. Unnecessary loss of historic fabric and unique neighborhoods,
- 2. Exceptionally high cost to Cumberland taxpayers,
- 3. Role of government in subsidizing private businesses,
- 4. Potential for illegal use of eminent domain to remove current owners,
- 5. New development out of character with existing neighborhood,
- 6. Lack of community engagement and involvement,
- 7. Opaque planning principles resulting in confusion about goals, impacts of project,
- 8. Inconsistency of project with stated goals/ambitions for community development per previously prepared plan (RKG Study).

III. A Positive Path Forward

Fortunately, the City of Cumberland, its citizens, advocacy organizations and preservationists need not be at odds. Their goals, though seemingly dissimilar actually share much in common.

Universal Points of Agreement

According to a review of existing documents, statements, etc., all groups appear to agree:

- ✓ The City of Cumberland must increase its municipal tax base.
- ✓ The City of Cumberland must embrace sustainable and equitable economic growth opportunities.
- ✓ The City of Cumberland must find ways to increase affordable homeownership and reinvestment in existing housing stock.
- ✓ The City of Cumberland must find ways of embracing its heritage and culture as a means of attracting a 21st century workforce and lucrative heritage tourists.

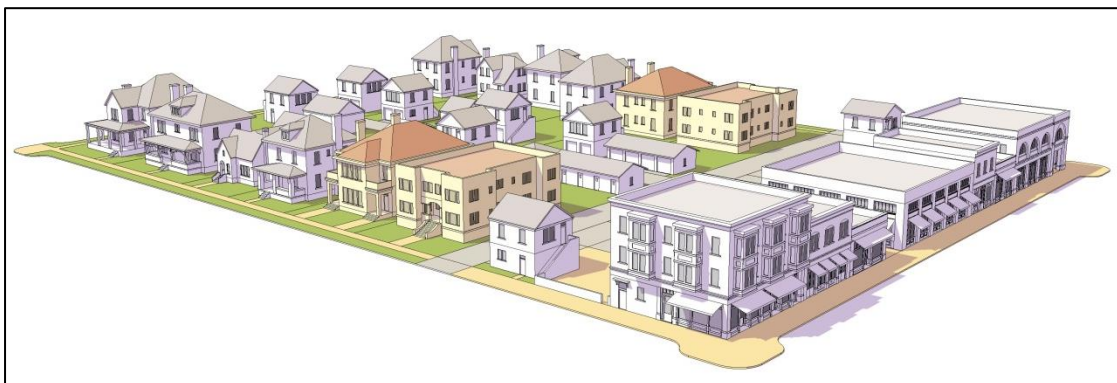
With these universal agreements in mind, the following alternative options for Maryland Avenue/Rolling Mill are presented as realistic, feasible and prudent options:

Option 1: Robust Infill Development Approach

The *Municipal Research and Services Center* defines Infill Development as,

The process of developing vacant or under-used parcels within existing urban areas that are already largely developed. Most communities have significant vacant land within city limits, which, for various reasons, has been passed over in the normal course of urbanization.

Under this option, vacant and under-used parcels would be broadly defined as parcels within the project area that are entirely vacant (i.e. large parcel beside *Martin's Grocery*), or parcels retaining structures that are unquestionably beyond feasible rehabilitation as defined by a qualified preservation architect (i.e. certain Cumberland Economic Development Corporation owned structures).



Example of infill development (shown in yellow) within an existing mixed-use residential & commercial neighborhood. (missingmiddlehousing.com)

Why Infill Development?

According to a recent 2015 publication, “Attracting Infill Development in Distressed Communities: 30 Strategies,” quality infill is beneficial to communities and municipalities for a variety of reasons, including:

- **Compact infill development** with a mix of uses **yields more property tax** revenue per acre than spread-out, single-use greenfield development.¹
- Infill development can help **stabilize impoverished or abandoned areas** by introducing a more diverse mix of households at different income levels.
- Infill development provides **more choices** to meet changing consumer preferences driven by demographic shifts.²

Although infill development may not provide ideal large, level spaces for “small or big-box development,” this kind of community-sensitive development does match the



character, rhythm and feel of communities – and maintains the livable, walkable scale of neighborhoods that is the hallmark of good planning and design.

This example [left] of modern infill development in the historic town of Sykesville, Maryland is a classic example of how infill can add to an existing streetscape and provide new and expanded commercial space without sacrificing the character of the community.³

What Type of Infill?

Considering the scale and diversity of the Maryland Avenue/Rolling Mill neighborhood, a wide variety of infill development could be considered – and should be discussed with the community prior to embarking on the process. Community driven and centered planning must be the priority. High-density residential, workforce single-family residential, small business incubator space, retail chain space and restaurants could all play a distinct role in a revitalized community.

How to Attract Infill Investment?

¹ Langdon, Philip. “Best Bet for Tax Revenue: Mixed-use Downtown Development.” *New Urban News*. Sep. 13, 2010. <http://bettercities.net/article/best-bet-tax-revenue-mixed-use-downtown-development-13144>.

² Warrick, Brooke. “Builder Home Buyer Study 2011.” *Builder Magazine*. 2011.

³ <http://www.destinationmainstreets.com/maryland/sykesville.php>

Fortunately, a new government report⁴ has recently addressed the challenges and opportunities for distressed communities looking to encourage infill development. Although it may require more innovation than greenfield box development, the economic and social pay-off is worth the effort.

The [full report is available online](#), and has been summarized below concerning the specific strategies that are often required to attract quality infill development and private sector investment. Many of the recommended strategies (which have been successfully implemented across the United States) could provide for the equitable redevelopment and reinvestment in the entire project area – and throughout the city.

FOUNDATION	PRIORITIES
	Strategy 1: Identify Priority Infill Development Areas
	POLICIES
	Strategy 2: Expedite Development Review
	Strategy 3: Set Tiered Impact Fees
	Strategy 4: Ease Parking Requirements in Infill Locations
	Strategy 5: Adopt Flexible Codes
	Strategy 6: Provide Clear Rules for Renovating Historic Buildings
	Strategy 7: Adopt an Adaptive Reuse Ordinance
	Strategy 8: Offer Density Bonuses in Infill Locations
	Strategy 9: Put Public Offices in Infill Locations
	PARTNERSHIPS
	Strategy 10: Seek State and Regional Partners
	Strategy 11: Identify Key Anchor Institutions
	Strategy 12: Explore Employer-Assisted Housing
	Strategy 13: Engage Philanthropic Organizations
Strategy 14: Create a Public Sector-Developer Liaison	
Strategy 15: Create a Local Developer Capacity-Building Program	
PERCEPTION	
Strategy 16: Strengthen Code Enforcement	
Strategy 17: Build Complete Streets	
Strategy 18: Create a Business Improvement District	
Strategy 19: Hold Public Events and Festivals in Infill Locations	
Strategy 20: Initiate a Neighborhood Identity Campaign	

FUNDING	FUNDING FOR INFILL
	Strategy 21: Enact a Property Tax Abatement Program for Infill Locations
	Strategy 22: Implement a Land Banking Program
	Strategy 23: Implement a Land Value Tax
	Strategy 24: Attract Private Equity
	Strategy 25: Encourage Community Development Corporations
	Strategy 26: Encourage Crowdfunding for Projects and Businesses in Priority Infill Development Areas
	FUNDING FOR INFRASTRUCTURE
	Strategy 27: Create a Tax Increment Financing District
	Strategy 28: Establish a Capital Reserve Fund
Strategy 29: Create Special Assessment Districts	
Strategy 30: Generate Revenue through Naming Rights and Advertising	

⁴ [Attracting Infill Development in Distressed Communities: 30 Strategies](#), Environmental Protection Agency, 2015.

Option 2: “Vacants-to-Value” Partnership Approach

As **legacy cities** across the nation wrestle with the challenges of post-industrial population decline, a number of municipalities have entered into innovative, responsible and results-driven partnerships to deal with large volumes of vacant housing stock. This approach answers the question: What does the City of Cumberland do with the homes it has already acquired for demolition?

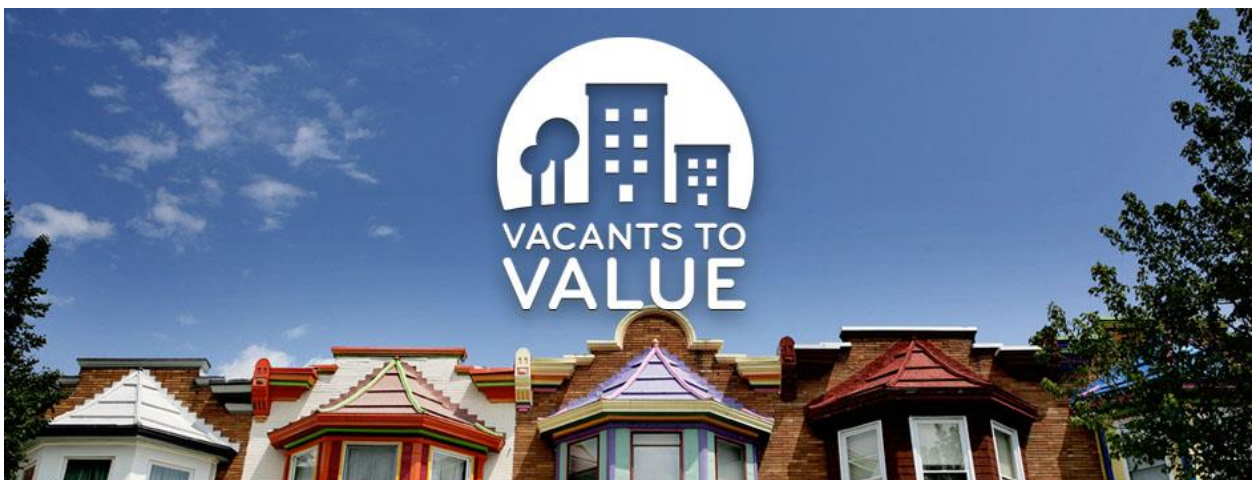
These programs and initiatives can take many forms – but the scale of the challenge in Cumberland is compact enough to allow for the creation of a program that could have powerful, lasting and quick results.

In Baltimore, the [Vacants-to-Values](#) program has developed a series of common sense approaches to dealing with the challenges associated with transitioning vacant residential structures to sustainable private ownership.

According to a recent report prepared by the [Urban Land Institute](#), the key tools in the program include:

- **Receivership auctions** that transfer underutilized vacant properties into the hands of **capitalized developers**;
- **Streamlined processes** and rationalized pricing that get city-owned vacant properties to developers **quickly and affordably**;
- **Interagency partnerships** that target **public safety** and infrastructure issues in transitioning neighborhoods; and
- **Strategic homeownership incentives** in the form of down payment and closing cost assistance **targeted to buyers** of vacant workforce housing.

The Maryland Avenue/Rolling Mill neighborhood could act as an ideal pilot effort to establish a similar program that is custom tailored for the Cumberland housing market. Once successful, the program could be broadened to the entire City of Cumberland as a way of dealing with vacant, underutilized and aging housing.



Option 3: Community Land Trust Approach

From the [Democracy Collaborative](#):

Community land trusts are nonprofit, community-based organizations designed to ensure community stewardship of land. Community land trusts can be used for many types of development (including commercial and retail), but are primarily used to ensure long-term housing affordability.

To do so, the trust acquires land and maintains ownership of it permanently. With prospective homeowners, it enters into a long-term, renewable lease instead of a traditional sale. When the homeowner sells, the family earns only a portion of the increased property value. The remainder is kept by the trust, preserving the affordability for future low- to moderate-income families.

Key Facts & Figures	
(based on the latest industry survey)	
Estimated number of community land trusts, 2011	242
Housing units, 1991	<2000
Housing units, 2010	9,543
Percent of residents who are first-time homebuyers	79%
Percentage of residents with income less than 50% of area median	82%
Percentage of residents who are non-white	31%

For Cumberland, a Community Land Trust could assist where the market, city and other organizations are unable to meet the current need – and address the question of what the city is to do with homes already acquired as a part of the current plan.

Fortunately, significant resources already exist to assist in the process of creating, funding and implementing a trust, which is nearly always community governed. The *Democracy Collaborative* maintains a [comprehensive online toolbox of resources](#). Thanks to the passage of the [Maryland Affordable Housing Land Trust Act](#) in 2010,

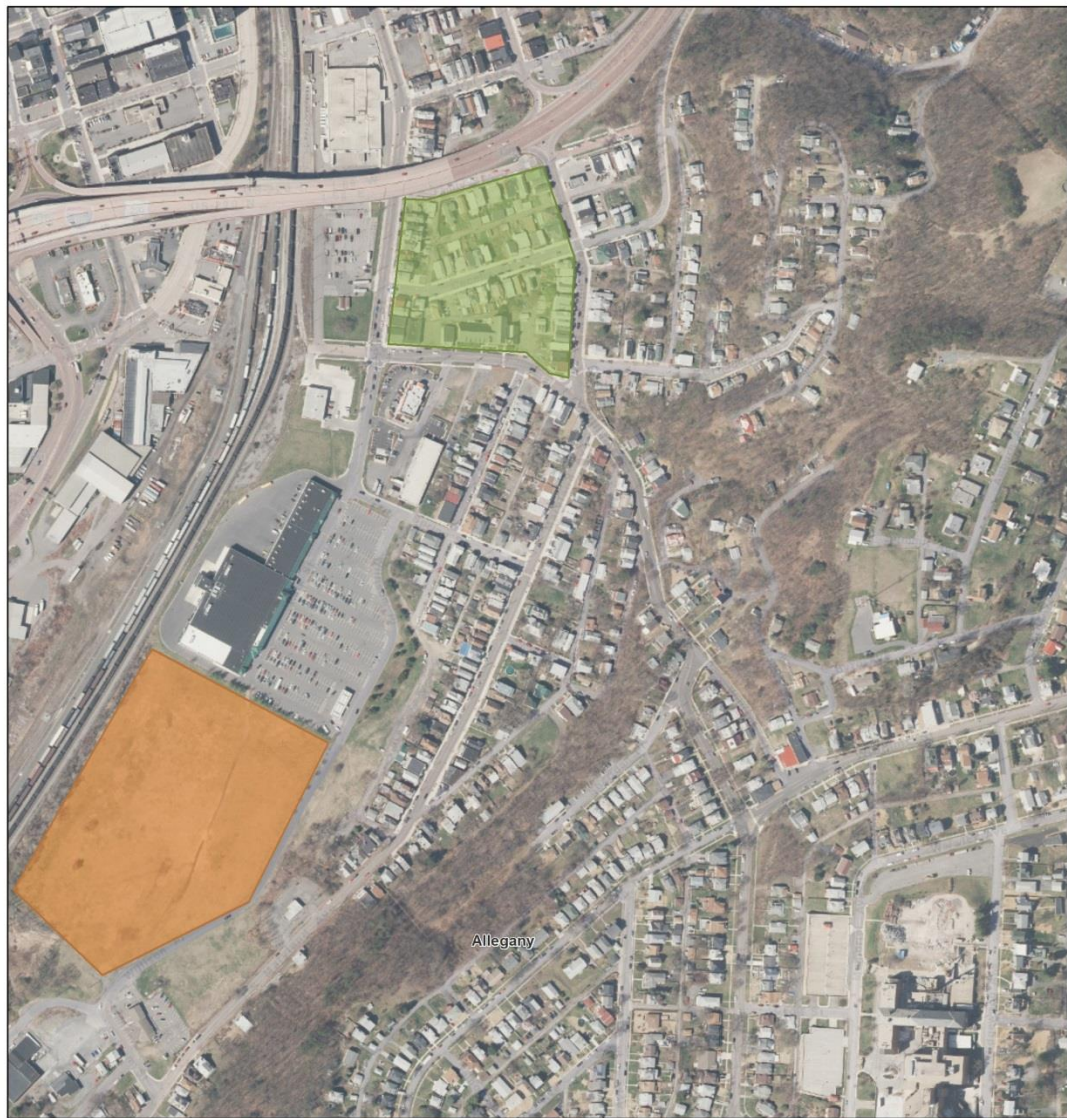
the legal framework now exists in Maryland to implement and establish this proven tool for community redevelopment and reinvestment.



Option 4: Commercial Growth on Vacant Land

Under the previous proposed alternatives, big or small box development (fast-food restaurants, etc.) has not been identified as a preferred development model for the neighborhood project area. Fortunately, there is **abundant** nearby land able to accept this type of development without the disruption of an existing neighborhood and at a reduced cost to the local taxpayer. The vacant brownfield show below could be easily remediated like the parcel to the north and experience the same level of commercial success at a reduced cost to city taxpayers.

Rolling Mill Redevelopment Opportunities



May 2, 2016
County

1:4,514
0 0.05 0.1 0.2 mi
0 0.075 0.15 0.3 km

Current project area (highlighted in green) in comparison to large, undeveloped level tract of land adjacent to existing commercial development (highlighted in orange)



Commercial growth once slated for a demolished neighborhood could be readily and easily accepted by the flat, open terrain adjacent (shown above) to existing commercial growth. This alternative would provide space for commercial growth and expansion and legitimate community revitalization without the controversy or expense.

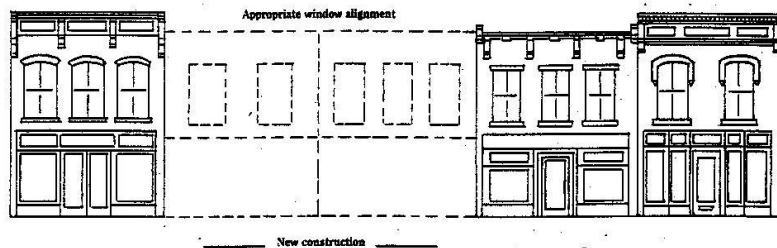
Option 5: Combination of Feasible Alternatives.

Creative, sustainable and equitable development does not have to be all or nothing.

Instead, the City of Cumberland could work *with* local citizens and organizations to draft a new approach to redevelopment of this portion of the city – and beyond – that would embrace certain aspects of each alternative.

The Maryland Avenue/Rolling Mill community could become a **targeted infill zone** – with reduced barriers to investment established through a thorough and comprehensive review of existing local policy. Certain types of acceptable infill would be driven by community input and involvement and could include space for workforce housing, market rate and affordable apartment units, small business incubator spaces, retail and food-service operations. In addition, houses originally acquired by the City and CEDC for demolition, would be mothballed and transitioned to a newly established

**Rolling Mill
Community Land
Trust and Cumberland
Vacants-to-Value**
auctions for
rehabilitation and resale
at affordable levels.



Example guidelines that match new construction with existing rhythm, feel and scale of historic community.

Large scale commercial growth, previously envisioned and planned for construction where this community now stands would instead be relocated to existing, cost-effective space adjacent to current commercial center. With the additional hurdle of acquisition

and demolition of an entire neighborhood, private investment could proceed with *limited* public subsidy.

New development, infill development, rehabilitations and redevelopment would be driven by a shared set of agreed upon goals. Information would be shared in a transparent, open and honest manner via a new Rolling Mill Redevelopment website. Design guidelines would provide opportunities for growth without sacrificing the heritage or character of the community.

IV. Next Steps

Refocusing and refining economic redevelopment efforts as new information and opportunities arise is not only common, but is good policy. No plan, however well-conceived can provide for the innumerable variables that will arise once preparation turns to execution. **With this in mind, Preservation Maryland proposes the following next steps to jumpstart a process to think anew about redevelopment of this community and surrounding area:**

Short Term (6-12 months)

1. Announce a “pause” on the current project and withdraw the commitment to demolish or utilize eminent domain as a part of this project.
2. Meet with affected local citizens in the community at a location within the neighborhood to discuss concerns and potential alternatives.
3. Mothball and stabilize CEDC and City owned properties within the project area until further decisions and evaluations can be made concerning their future.
4. Meet with leaders at the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) and Housing of Urban Development (HUD) to review potential state and federal assistance programs for infill development planning efforts.
5. Meet with CSX Corporation to discuss availability of vacant property adjacent to existing commercial corridor. Discuss brownfield remediation with EPA, HUD & MDP. Review cost-benefits analysis of acquisition of parcel for future growth.

Mid-Range (12-24 months)

1. Invite Maryland-based Community Land Trusts to public forum on Land Trusts to discuss concept and viability for Cumberland.
2. Confer with *Vacants-to-Value* program to draft pilot Cumberland version.
3. Prepare applications for state and federal planning assistance to guide infill and redevelopment efforts. Review opportunities for TIF financing of future projects.
4. Host a series of community-needs assessment charrettes with information gathered published to project focused website.

Long-Range (24-36 months)

1. Publish RFP to solicit bids for commercial development on vacant land adjoining commercial corridor.
2. Establish Rolling Mill Community Land Trust and transfer ownership of viable residential structures already acquired to Trust.
3. Engage in selective demolition of non-viable structures and publish RFP for targeted infill development opportunities within project area.

V. Conclusion

Preservation Maryland believes that if the City of Cumberland's goal is truly **economic redevelopment** and **increasing the local tax base**, simply demolishing the existing Maryland Avenue/Rolling Mill neighborhood is not the prudent, reasonable or most cost-effective option.

Rather, by working *with* established organizations, agencies and citizens, the City of Cumberland has an opportunity to avoid costly mistakes and to invest in the sustainable future of the community. **The result would be a bolder, stronger and more equitable Cumberland.**

In addition, by taking a more innovative and dynamic approach, the City could diversify its housing stock, commercial businesses and tax base. Focusing entirely on small box commercial growth at the expense of other sectors of the real estate spectrum is a recipe for economic peaks and valleys – and the difficult budgeting that inevitably follows.

No consultant or expert can predict the future – so by investing in a **broad spectrum of opportunities** from high density residential to small business incubators to traditional 'box' retailers the city can avoid the crippling return to dependency on one sector.

In review, the proposed alternatives:

- ✓ Avoid the costly and highly contentious use of eminent domain.
- ✓ Provide for a diversified and growing tax base.
- ✓ Demonstrate opportunities for the establishment and expansion of workforce housing at a reduced cost to taxpayers.
- ✓ Could be offset utilizing existing state and federal support programs focused on infill development and smart growth.
- ✓ Maintain the character and heritage of the community while providing a space for the 'new Cumberland' to grow and prosper.
- ✓ Provide equitable outcomes for all citizens of Cumberland.