



## CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY INPUT

In order that the greatest amount and diversity of input into the comprehensive planning process might be achieved, a variety of avenues for feedback were built into the process that spanned several months during the first half of 2002. Interviews with community leaders and elected officials were conducted, a survey was mailed to all of the households in the study area, and two community workshops were conducted. Additionally, three newsletters were produced throughout the process and public information meetings were held on the draft plan. The results of these efforts are summarized below, and more complete responses can be found in the appendix.

### INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS AND OFFICIALS

Throughout the month of February 2002, the Carroll County Planning Department conducted interviews with various community officials and leaders in the Union Bridge area concerning the development of the Union Bridge Community Comprehensive Plan. The same set of questions, dealing with topics ranging from community assets to growth management, was presented to the 12 participants who took part in the interview process. The most common responses to each question are summarized here.

In discussing the Union Bridge community with those who know it best, it becomes apparent that there are many common aspects of the community that are considered to be strong assets. The greatest assets that many talked about were a strong sense of community in a small-town atmosphere, good schools, and many natural resources. There is no question that Main Street is a valuable feature of the town, and continued improvements and revitalization are important to maintain that inherent value.

The Union Bridge community also has its share of obstacles and challenges to face in the future. It was acknowledged that dealing with the look and feel of new planned development and providing adequate public services and facilities will be the most difficult issues that the community will face. The need to provide a stock of moderately priced housing within the community is vital to accommodate many of the local working families. Another priority that became clear during the interviews was the need to increase and expand recreational opportunities and community services in the area. Finally, striking an appropriate balance between residential and commercial growth through strong economic development efforts and coordination will continue to be an important consideration for the community in the near future.

### COMMUNITY SURVEY

In order to reach as many people as possible for their input, a survey of public opinion on planning-related issues was mailed to all households in Election District 12 in March of 2002. An excellent response rate of approximately 24% meant that the surveys returned represent a good cross-section of area residents.

The survey was divided into two sections, one that asked multiple choice and open-answer questions about quality of life issues, and one that asked respondents to express their opinion by indicating whether they strongly agreed, agreed, were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed on specific issues.



Most of the survey respondents felt their quality of life was adequate or higher. The qualities most cited as reasons why people chose to live in the Union Bridge community and what they liked most about it were the rural and small town atmosphere, the closeness of family, the affordability of homes, and the proximity to work. Conversely, they least liked the lack of shopping opportunities, the amount of crime, the lack of park facilities, and development issues. Issues related to development, the loss of farmland, and crime were viewed as the most challenging that the community would face in the future.

The greatest need identified for recreational facilities was bicycle and pedestrian trails. Other popular responses were playgrounds, public pools, and picnic areas.

Respondents generally felt that they were somewhat informed about the amount and location of future development, planned public facilities, and transportation improvements. It was generally felt that new development should respect the architectural character of the community and design/maintenance standards should be considered. Respondents were conservatively positive in their opinion about opportunities for public input on Town and County issues.

There was strong support for continued efforts in land preservation, the protection of open space, and also in the enforcement of environmental regulations. At the same time, those who completed the survey favored programs to help revitalize the Main Street area as well as preserving the small town feel to Union Bridge. Responses to increase the amount of downtown parking and improve on its current safety and aesthetics further demonstrate support for the viability of Main Street. Improvements to sidewalks within the developed areas received a lot of support, as did creating better pedestrian links to different destinations in the Town.

## COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Several components were built into the community participation process. The use of these various components was provided to ensure that citizens had the opportunity not only to participate and give input and feedback throughout the process, but to do so in different forms as well. In addition to 600 surveys that were sent to households in the study area, a series of community workshops were held. The purpose of the workshops was to provide another avenue for community input that also helped to focus on the community's desires for its future.

Two community workshops were held in the late spring of 2002 that focused on the community's desires for its future. The first workshop focused on what participants envisioned as the preferred future of the community, as well as participants' perception of the obstacles that presently exist that may prevent the community from reaching its preferred future. A vision statement presented during the second workshop focused on getting some more direction on specific issues that surfaced.

The vision statement contained in this plan, as well as the goals and actions recommended, reflects the input received during the various community input phases. More complete responses can be found in the appendix.