

## Executive Summary

### What is a Vision?

A vision is a process and a product that provides the town residents and overall community the ability to tell their leaders what they value about their community and to come together to develop a consensus on what they would like to preserve and where they would like to see improvement. It is often the first step a community takes when developing a Comprehensive Plan for the town. A vision is developed at the beginning of the Comprehensive Planning process because it offers a useful tool for developing big picture community consensus, setting the stage for effective planning, and providing key focus areas to build future plans on. And while citizens are asked to think “big” during the process, the end result is often a realistic credible attractive future for the community, one that establishes guiding principals towards which the Town should strive to adhere to in every decision that is made.

### Harpers Ferry Vision

**Harpers Ferry Vision Statement: Celebrate the Past, Savor the Present, Steward the Future** was the result of a consensus building exercise conducted by the Harper’s Ferry Vision Steering Committee and Town Planning Consultant David M. Beniamino, AICP. It was the result of a year long effort undertaken to build consensus on community values and vision as the first step in the town’s next Comprehensive Plan update. Beginning in early 2011, a Steering Committee was formed by the Harpers Ferry Town Council to help guide the vision process. Made up by individuals with varying backgrounds and interests, the Steering Committee worked with Planning Consultant David M. Beniamino to hold public input sessions and engage the community to begin to start thing about the future.

On Thursday, November 17, 2011 and again on Wednesday, December 7, 2011 two community visioning sessions were held in Harpers Ferry to begin the process of gaining public input on the vision process. During the two meetings a total of sixty (60) meeting participants along with 24 citizens who were not able to attend the meeting but instead submitted written comments, answered two sets of questions regarding their vision for the Town of Harpers Ferry. The first question was ***“What is it about Harpers Ferry that you like today? What made you move here? What makes you stay”*** followed by the second question ***“Looking forward twenty (20) years, what is your vision for the town’s future? Should Harpers Ferry of the future be different from or similar to the Harpers Ferry of today? If you want it to be different, tell us what should change or what types of infrastructure or amenities you would like the town to focus on or invest in.”***

During both public input sessions, Mr. Beniamino broke the participants up into smaller teams to discuss and record responses to the two aforementioned questions. This format allowed for greater participation amongst the attendees and let everyone’s voice be heard.

## **Participant Demographic Breakdown**

Participants who attended the public input sessions as well as those who completed the written questions were also asked to complete and submit a demographic information sheet to give the Steering Committee an idea of who participated in this process. Of the 84 people who participated in this process, 67 of them completed this demographic information sheet. The following tables show a breakdown of the information compiled from the demographic survey:

Table #1

<b>Respondent Description</b>	
Residential Property Owner	55
Residential Renter	2
Non-Resident Property Owner	5
Non-Resident Business Owner/Operator	3
Other	2

Table #2

<b>Respondent Location</b>	
Contiguous to Swan Property	6
Camp Hill (inc Henry clay)	44
Lower Town	11
Union Square (Town Hall Area)	1
West Ridge	11
Pine Grove (Old Furnace Rd, etc)	0
Other	1

Table #3

<b>Are you a business owner?</b>	
Yes	20
No	47

Table #4

<b>Where is your business located?</b>	
Contiguous to Swan Property	1
Camp Hill (Inc Henry Clay)	12
Lower Town	6
Union Square (Town Hall Area)	0
West Ridge	2
Pine Grove (Old Furbace Rd, etc)	0
Other	1

Table #5

<b>How long have you been a:</b>	<b>Resident</b>	<b>Business Owner</b>	<b>Non-Resident Property Owner</b>
Less than 2 years	7	4	1
3 – 5 years	9	5	0
6-10 years	15	1	1
11-20 years	15	3	1

21-30 years	10	2	0
31-40 years	2	1	1
Over 40 years	0	5	0

Table #6

Respondent Age	
18-25	1
26-35	0
36-45	12
46-55	11
56-65	25
66-75	15
Over 75	6

### **Participant Response Information**

The following information was compiled from both the individual questionnaires submitted in advance and the vision input meetings held on November 17 and December 7, 2011. In processing the information, best efforts were made by Mr. Beniamino to group similar responses together to show where the community is in agreement. Not every response fit exactly into the categories listed below, but best efforts were made to ensure the spirit of each response were noted. In Table # 7 & # 8 below, the number in the "Response from Meetings" column indicates approximately how many of the 60 participants identified the item as part of their vision for Harpers Ferry, and the number in the "Response from Written Questionnaire" column indicates how many of the 24 survey participants identified the item as part of their vision for Harpers Ferry.

### **Question #1: “What is it about Harpers Ferry that you like today? What made you move here? What makes you stay?”**

Table #7

Question #1	Responses from Meetings	Responses from written questionnaire	Total Responses
History (Including historic architecture, culture & sense of place)	24	11	35
Scenic Beauty & Natural Environment	21	11	32
Sense of Community (“Small town feel”)	19	10	29
Community Interaction & Engagement (Friendliness, knowing your neighbors, feel opinion matters)	15	9	24
Quiet (Peaceful,	11	11	22

sanctuary)			
Unique Character (No other place like it & Destination Location)	11	4	15
Outdoor & Water Recreational Activities (Trails, Canals, Rivers)	12	2	14
Good Place to Raise a family (Includes family in area)	9	5	14
Access to MARC Train	12	2	14
Harpers Ferry National Park (includes resources & tourism benefits)	9	4	13
Preservation & Restoration of Historic Structures	8	5	13
Easy access to Metro Areas (Includes DC & Baltimore)	9	3	12
Safety (Includes police presence and sense)	7	3	10
Appalachian Trail	8	1	9
Walkability & Pedestrian Mobility	7	1	8
Viewsheds & Vistas	6	2	8
Tolerance & Diversity	8	0	8
Community Vibe (Sense that community is special)	6	1	7
Tourism (Influx of interesting people)	6	0	6
Protection from encroaching development (No room for sprawl)	6	0	6
Live, work, play	3	2	5
Good commercial & residential mix	4	0	4
Dog Friendly	4	0	4
Good place to retire	4	0	4
Police & Park Ranger presence	3	0	3
Access to all 4 Seasons	2	0	2
Good home based occupation location	2	0	2
Low taxes	1	1	2

Absence of cars	1	1	2
Comments with only 1 respondent	6	2	8

**Question #2: “Looking forward twenty (20) years, what is your vision for the town’s future? Should Harpers Ferry of the future be different from or similar to the Harpers Ferry of today? If you want it to be different, tell us what should change or what types of infrastructure or amenities you would like the town to focus on or invest in.”**

Table #8

Question #2	Responses from Meetings	Responses from written questionnaire	Total Responses
Improved Public Infrastructure (Includes water, wastewater, sidewalks, roads)	18	5	23
Preservation of historic structures & sites	9	9	18
Change by staying the same (keep the things we like today)	8	8	16
More commercial opportunities for businesses catering to local economy	13	3	16
Focus on public spaces, arts & cultural resources	8	5	13
Increased focus on outdoor recreation to promote tourism	8	4	12
New Hilltop Hotel that is profitable, but to scale	6	6	12
Improved town codes that are enforceable (Include property maintenance & demolition by neglect ordinances)	9	2	11
Better parking plan (Includes planning for hotel & idea of buses)	9	2	11
Town manager and/or increased staff	5	2	7
Underground power lines	7	0	7
Fewer empty & vacant	7	0	7

houses			
Integration of new hotel into the town	6	0	6
Deer population control	6	0	6
Sustainable revenue stream that does not depend on liquor or gambling	4	2	6
Improved Streetscape (trees, visuals, signage)	5	0	5
Tree Preservation	4	0	4
Consolidation of services w/ Bolivar	4	0	4
Increased cottage industry	4	0	4
Green technology investment	4	0	4
Preservation of environmental qualities (air, water, dark sky)	2	2	4
Feel the town is too small for a large hotel project	0	3	3
Make the town a hub for Appalachian Trail hikers	3	0	3
Dog Park	2	0	2
Elimination of fire siren	2	0	2
Comments with on 1 respondent	8	4	12

### **Public Meeting Results Tabulated**

The responses gathered from the two public input sessions on the vision were compiled alongside responses gathered from the written comments provided by those who could not attend either of the sessions. Participants were asked to write down all responses that were made during the public sessions, even if the ideas were duplicates, in order to accurately tabulate information from everyone who took part in the exercise.

While the Steering Committee and Mr. Beniamino took great care to ensure all of those who participated would be heard, the categories that received the highest level of community consensus were chosen to form the basis of the Vision Statement.

### **The Vision Statement**

Entitled **“Harpers Ferry Vision Statement: Celebrate the Past, Savor the Present, Steward the Future”**, this document is focused on setting the direction for decision

making processes by the Town Council and other appointed boards and committees over the next 20 years. The Town Vision Statement is intended to set a direction for the future instead of being a mere statement of what will be. Instead of describing the Harpers Ferry we think is likely, it expresses what the community strives to become and believes it can achieve. The Vision Statement should be read in an optimistic future tense, affirming the focus areas achievements and attributes as they exist in the Harpers Ferry of tomorrow.

### **What is next after the Vision Statement and how it plays into the next Comprehensive Plan**

As you will see, the Vision Statement covers ten “focus” specific areas in a relatively broad context, using strong and bold language to emphasize points regarding community values and vision for the future. These ten areas could form the basis for the next Comprehensive Plan update. As it stands now, many of the existing chapters in the Town’s current comprehensive plan have close similarities with the corresponding focus areas laid out in the Vision Statement. By giving each of the focus areas a separate section of the new Comprehensive Plan update, you can allow the Planning Commission to work with members of the community to develop new and innovative strategies on how the town can best implement the Vision Statement while adhering to its core community values. Each focus area could not only follow the existing comprehensive plan format by stating goals and objectives for each area but add in additional action items to keep projects on track from year to year.

In addition to using the vision as a roadmap for the Comprehensive Plan update, elected and appointed Town leaders can use this document as a basis in which to make day to day decisions that affect the town and to inform people who do not live in Harpers Ferry but are interested in Harpers Ferry (such as potential residents, business owners, and developers) about the future of the Town. Decisions in a small town environment are often made by regular people trying to make the best choices for their communities, but with a formulated vision at your disposal, each choice the town makes can be weighed against the hopes, desires and dreams of the community as a whole.