

Note for Public Review Phase:

Since mid-summer of 2022, the Mayor & Council have been working on a three-year strategic agenda. Two primary questions have been addressed through this process: (1) what are the opportunities and issues before the Town and community at large? And (2) what focus do the Mayor & Council need to supply in assisting the Town staff, Town commissions and committees, and the community at large in advancing the Town's strategic interests? The process to date has included:

1. Collecting information from Town plans and other documents.
2. Creating a Framework, comprising a list of topics for the Town's continued attention, that was used to sort the collection of issues, opportunities, plans, and projects that should be considered by the Mayor & Council.
3. Visiting Town commissions and committees, as much as feasible, to discuss the process. This included the Environmental Committee and Recreation Committee, meeting jointly, the Historic District Commission, the ARPA Task Force, and the Tree Committee; also, during the time of this process, the Public Arts Committee, the Environmental Committee, and the Recreation Committee made substantial presentations to inform the Mayor & Council about their activities.
4. Issuing a survey (using the Survey Monkey platform) that asked participating organizations (Town commissions and committees, nonprofits, major businesses and institutions) to organize their insights and information by topic identified in the Framework, in August. More than 80 organizations received a link to fill out the questionnaire (not by individuals, but by the groups themselves). The response rate exceeded 50%. The raw, categorized data from that survey, list of responding organizations, and a copy of the questionnaire is available at www.chestertown.com/2023-Strategic-Plan
5. Holding a livestreamed retreat of the Mayor & Council on November 11-12, more than six hours total; the minutes (with images of the facilitator's wall sheets) are available at <https://townofchestertown.com/mayor-and-council-retreat-11-12-11-13-2022-from-130-p-m-to-500-p-m/>; and the archival record of the livestream is available at https://townhallstreams.com/stream.php?location_id=125&id=48564 and https://townhallstreams.com/stream.php?location_id=125&id=48565.
6. Issuing two drafts for Mayor & Council review and comment prior to release of this Public Draft.

Following is a draft for public review and comment prior to the Mayor & Council's meeting on March 20, 2023, to consider and issue a final document. Comments received from the public until 5 pm, Monday, March 13 will be compiled for the Mayor & Council's further consideration before issuing the final strategic agenda.

Elizabeth Watson, FAICP, a planner and principal of the consulting firm Heritage Strategies, LLC (and a resident of Chestertown), is the facilitator for this process.

Town of Chestertown, MD—PUBLIC DRAFT 2023-2026 Strategic Agenda

Chestertown’s DRAFT Vision Statement

NOTE: A vision statement is meant to describe the future – that is, please read the following statement as if it begins with the phrase, “In the year 2030, Chestertown will be...” We believe that Chestertown is already achieving the vision stated here, but that we must continually attend to the tasks of engaging residents, collaborating with Chestertown’s many civic groups, and taking positive steps to secure our prospects as a community with a longstanding, exceptional quality of life to share with all.

Chestertown is a vibrant, welcoming place for all, large enough to support a small college, yet of a manageable scale where residents freely engage in town matters and community activities and visitors enjoy friendly hospitality. We care about:

People: All neighborhoods are people-centered and physically united through outstanding parks and trails. Residents enjoy a sense of identity and shared community as they participate in Chestertown’s many activities and groups.

Place: Chestertown’s compelling sense of place, where historic streets meet the Chester River, evokes the legacies of a tidewater environment and the promise of the future. Parks and markets are designed to provide comfortable gathering places to enjoy old friends and meet new ones.

Opportunity Development: Growth provides opportunities for employment, economic stability, and a range of good housing, especially for families. It also enhances the long-term sustainability of the community and helps to improve its environmental footprint.

Leadership & Communication: Chestertown’s elected and other community leaders continually work to earn and sustain the trust of the community through transparency, effective involvement of volunteers, and the provision of excellent services; and they actively seek collaboration among all groups and all levels of government.

The four topics offered in this vision are used in the following pages to organize the Mayor & Council’s three-year strategic agenda. Each section begins with a brief goal statement based on the vision in question and then presents actions developed by the Mayor & Council, aided by answers to a questionnaire given to Town employees, Town committees and commissions, and other groups serving Chestertown (nonprofits, major employers). For this draft, ideas listed above the dark line in each section are noted as top priorities by at least one party (Mayor or Council member); **while all items chosen for this document are considered important enough to pursue over the next three years, those noted as “top priority” will receive more frequent attention at Mayor & Council meetings.** The vision and the accompanying goal statement can guide evaluation and execution of activities that arise which are not specifically mentioned in this agenda, but which require a timely response by the Mayor & Council. The righthand column (“Long-term Progress/Success Indicators”) can be read as providing specifics for what is meant by the more generally stated vision.

Vision for People: All neighborhoods are people-centered and physically united through outstanding parks and trails. Residents enjoy a sense of identity and shared community as they participate in Chestertown’s many activities and groups.

| Strategic Priorities – “PEOPLE” GOAL: Maintain a safe community with enriched physical connections, parks, and sense of community. | |
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| <i>Three Year Actions</i> <i>(Year 1: by June 2024; Year 2: by June 2025; Year 3: by June 2026)</i> | <i>Long-term Progress/Success Indicators</i> |
| <p>Top Priorities</p> <p>A. Public Safety: Substantial public-security camera system installed.</p> <p>B. Public Safety: Street lighting needs and efficiency upgrades fully addressed.</p> <p>C. Community: Equity Advisory Committee established to encourage considerations of community diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in communities policies, resources, and activities.</p> <p>D. Parks-Trails-Rec/Community: The River Heritage Trail along Chestertown’s waterfront is completely planned and if not completed by June of 2026, is well on its way to full funding and completion.</p> <p>E. Community: Needs assessment done for “third spaces.”¹</p> | <p>Top Priorities</p> <p>Public Safety:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fully operational, well-maintained camera security service in place 2. Well-lit streets everywhere (and lighting in parks where appropriate) <p>Community:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Community dialogue about opportunity, equity, access, diversity, and inclusion is robust, positive, and action-oriented. 4. Community surveys reveal widespread community satisfaction that all residents feel welcome, heard, and respected. 5. Chestertown’s new River Heritage Trail plays a dynamic role in community gatherings and events, especially during anniversary commemorations of America’s Revolutionary War. 6. Third spaces understood, recognized, celebrated. |
| <p>F. Public Safety: Chestertown Police Department maintains strong orientation to the need for good community relations in building a constituency for public safety.</p> | <p>Public Safety</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Community policing program is well-understood and supported by the entire community 8. All households can be reached to convey emergency information in the event of health or hazard events 9. Electronic fingerprinting is readily accessible to the CPD and residents |

¹ “In sociology, the **third place** refers to the social surroundings that are separate from the two usual social environments of home (“first place”) and the workplace (“second place”). Examples of third places include churches, cafes, clubs, public libraries, gyms, bookstores and parks.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_place

| <i>Strategic Priorities – “PEOPLE”</i> | |
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| GOAL: Maintain a safe community with enriched physical connections, parks, and sense of community. | |
| <i>Three Year Actions</i> <i>(Year 1: by June 2024; Year 2: by June 2025; Year 3: by June 2026)</i> | <i>Long-term Progress/Success Indicators</i> |
| <p>G. Public Safety/Parks-Trails-Rec: Bicycle-pedestrian safety plan and recreational trails plan both updated and coordinated.</p> | <p>Public Safety/Parks, Trails, and Recreation:</p> <p>10. Bicycle-pedestrian plan and recreational trails plan are complete and identified needs and projects addressed so that there is a full network/loop connecting all parks and all major trails are complete</p> <p>11. Accident-free Route 213 corridor with law-abiding vehicular travel, strictly enforced speed limits, and safe bicycle-pedestrian travel/crossings</p> <p>12. Flatland Road has a sidewalk or other pedestrian access/facilities</p> <p>13. Safe pedestrian crossing of Morgnec Road and well-executed pedestrian access to the YMCA</p> <p>14. Both bicycle-pedestrian facilities and recreational trails are updated and well-maintained throughout the community</p> |
| <p>H. Parks-Trails-Rec: Bailey Park Plan well underway to completion.</p> <p>I. Parks-Trails-Rec: General parks & recreational services plan completed (goals set for community-focused and youth-focused programming and facilities).</p> <p>J. Parks-Trails-Rec: Active provision of recreational programs for youth (in partnership with the county and nonprofits).</p> | <p>Parks, Trails, and Recreation</p> <p>15. Bailey Park completed</p> <p>16. Plans for other parks completed</p> <p>17. Youth recreation program fully operational</p> <p>At least one community-focused event or series occurs each year</p> |
| <p>K. Community: Priorities identified to address issues surrounding homelessness and those who are tenuously housed in the community.</p> | <p>Community:</p> <p>18. Shelter/services needs for homeless are meeting community goal(s)</p> |

Vision for Place: *Chestertown’s compelling sense of place, where historic streets meet the Chester River, evokes the legacies of a tidewater environment and the promise of the future. Parks and markets are designed to provide comfortable gathering places to enjoy old friends and meet new ones.*

| Strategic Priorities – “PLACE” | |
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| GOAL: Maintain Chestertown as a vibrant, attractive, and environmentally sound place. | |
| <u>Three Year Actions</u> (Year 1: by June 2024; Year 2: by June 2025; Year 3: by June 2026) | Long-term Progress/Success Indicators |
| <p>Priorities</p> <p>A. Parks-Trails-Rec/Community: The River Heritage Trail along Chestertown’s waterfront is completely planned and if not completed by June of 2026, is well on its way to full funding and completion. (Repeated from “People”)</p> <p>B. Community: Needs assessment done for “third spaces.” (Repeated from “People”)</p> | <p>Priorities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chestertown’s new River Heritage Trail plays a dynamic role in community gatherings and events, especially during anniversary commemorations of America’s Revolutionary War. 2. Third spaces understood, recognized, celebrated. |
| <p>C. Downtown: A downtown plan completed and under active implementation; early actions identified in this process under active implementation prior to completion of the plan as needed. This is expected to include a plan for public accommodations (public restroom).</p> <p>D. Downtown: Wi-Fi for everyone outdoors downtown.</p> <p>E. Downtown/Environment: A downtown beautification strategy.</p> | <p>Downtown:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. A downtown plan completed and under active implementation with a highly supportive downtown business community. 4. A well-maintained public restroom serving the primary commercial area. 5. Outdoor Wi-Fi for everyone downtown. |
| <p>F. Environment: A stormwater management plan completed and under active implementation.</p> <p>G. Environment: A “Trees+” Greenspace Plan completed and under active implementation.</p> <p>H. Environment: A healthy tree canopy town-wide with street tree planting plans for most streets without a full canopy.</p> <p>I. Environment: Maintenance of Chestertown’s “Tree City” designation.</p> <p>J. Environment: Community cleanup and bulk trash weekends held annually, with perhaps two per year beginning in 2026 [supports 250th]; ask Kent County for consideration on waste management fees associated with these events.</p> | <p>Environment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. A stormwater management plan completed and under active implementation. 7. A “Trees+” Greenspace Plan completed and under active implementation. 8. More trees throughout town: A healthy tree canopy town-wide with street tree planting plans for all streets without a full canopy. 9. Beautification. 10. Maintenance of Chestertown’s “Tree City” designation. 11. Entry of the Chestertown Bypass on SHA’s 12-year list. |

| <i>Strategic Priorities – “PLACE”</i> | |
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| <i>GOAL: Maintain Chestertown as a vibrant, attractive, and environmentally sound place.</i> | |
| <u>Three Year Actions</u> (Year 1: by June 2024; Year 2: by June 2025; Year 3: by June 2026) | <i>Long-term Progress/Success Indicators</i> |
| <p>K. Environment: Entry of the Chestertown Bypass on SHA’s 12-year list.</p> <p>L. Environment: Progress on creating a plan to address shoreline problems presented by both rising sea level and subsidence; early actions identified in this process under active implementation.</p> <p>M. Environment: Establish Town sustainability plan to include recommended efficiency investments, waste reduction, no mow areas, and other environmentally sound policies.</p> | <p>12. A plan to address shoreline problems presented by both rising sea level and subsidence, under active implementation.</p> <p>13. A Town sustainability plan under active implementation.</p> |

Vision for Opportunity Development: Growth provides opportunities for employment, economic stability, and a range of good housing, especially for families. It also enhances the long-term sustainability of the community and helps to improve its environmental footprint.

| <i>Strategic Priorities – “OPPORTUNITY”</i> | |
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| <i>GOAL: Encourage thriving economic growth, tourism, and housing that all support jobs, families, and community sustainability.</i> | |
| <u>Three Year Actions</u> (Year 1: by June 2024; Year 2: by June 2025; Year 3: by June 2026) | <i>Long-term Progress/Success Indicators</i> |
| <p>Priorities</p> <p>A. Economic Development: An economic development plan for Chestertown underway following completion of the Downtown plan, to include (at minimum):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Business community communications ○ Business diversity/community needs ○ College students (as customers & current residents, future residents) ○ Farmers’ Market support ○ Incubator (business/retail, culinary; County Co-op) ○ Marketing for Enterprise Zone, Opportunity Zone, other economic development programs (County Co-op) ○ Support for Washington College ○ Workforce initiative (County Co-op) | <p>Priorities</p> <p>1. An economic development plan, with measurable objectives, completed and under active implementation with a highly supportive business community.</p> <p>2. More (and more widely accessible) public transportation to support families, medical needs, education, and job access</p> <p>3. Shopping centers in Ward 4 that are fully occupied, support Chestertown’s sense of place, and provide a wide array of retail opportunities and services (and possibly housing).</p> |

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| <i>Three Year Actions (Year 1: by June 2024; Year 2: by June 2025; Year 3: by June 2026)</i> | <i>Long-term Progress/Success Indicators</i> |
| <p>B. Economic Development: Town support for County development of an improved public transportation system.</p> <p>C. Economic Development: Redevelopment of the two shopping centers in Ward 4.</p> | |
| <p>D. Housing: A housing plan underway or completed, with an increase in affordable housing that supports reaching a goal set by the community during creation of the housing plan and with more new employees choosing to live in Chestertown (or at least Kent County); early actions identified in this process under active implementation.</p> <p>E. Housing: Goal(s) set for lead remediation.</p> <p>F. Environment/Housing: Goal(s) set for upgrade of the Town’s drinking water system to address per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (known as PFAS).</p> | <p>Housing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. A full understanding of community housing conditions and needs, with fair rules and fees. 5. Zoning that allows flexibility and response to market forces while protecting (and improving) neighborhood character. 6. Maximized efficiency of the water and sewer system to support housing and population/business growth. This includes upgrades to address any PFAS contamination. 7. Maintenance of Chestertown’s participation in Maryland’s House Keys 4 Employees program. 8. At least one other large employer that has adopted the House Keys 4 Employees program. 9. Increasing availability of affordable housing on a percentage basis. 10. More new employees choosing to live in Chestertown (or at least Kent County). 11. Minimized possibility for lead poisoning from homes in Chestertown. |
| <p>G. Economic Development: Regional support secured for a thriving UMMS rural hospital facility and surrounding medical community.</p> <p>H. Economic Development: A new middle school under construction or completed on a site in Chestertown.</p> <p>I. Economic Development: Continued summer shuttle between Chestertown and Rock Hall.</p> | <p>Economic Development:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. A stable health facility providing vital community services, jobs, and other positive economic impacts. 13. A new middle school remaining within Chestertown’s boundaries providing vital community services, jobs, and other positive economic impacts. Retain the Middle School in Chestertown with a highly visible, once-in-a-generation community investment in a new school building. |

| <i>Strategic Priorities – “OPPORTUNITY”</i> | |
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| <i>GOAL: Encourage thriving economic growth, tourism, and housing that all support jobs, families, and community sustainability.</i> | |
| <i>Three Year Actions (Year 1: by June 2024; Year 2: by June 2025; Year 3: by June 2026)</i> | <i>Long-term Progress/Success Indicators</i> |
| | 14. Fairly and competitively priced taxes, water and sewer fees, building permit fees. 15. Excellent reputation for service to the business and development community. 16. A vibrant commercial sector and a high occupancy rate for all buildings and floors. 17. An excellent electronic communications system available to support a wide array of business and residential needs. |
| J. Tourism: Support familiarization (“fam”) tours for writers to experience Chestertown’s arts and publicize the town’s new outdoor public art installations. K. Tourism: A fully operational local committee supporting home-grown activities to celebrate the nation’s 250th birthday plus 250th anniversaries of individual events in Chestertown from 2025-2031. A Tea Party Festival and other major events planned for 2026. L. Tourism: historic self-guided tour, app based, providing town walking and home tours covering colonial, African-American, architecture, and other local history topics of interest. M. Tourism: Form plan in conjunction with others and County to enhance outdoor and rural tourism in and near Chestertown for hunters, birders, bicyclists, boaters, local food, day-trippers, theater and music audiences. | Tourism: 18. Programs taking full advantage of the presence of a world-class outdoor art collection; national media attention. 19. Ability to represent Chestertown’s history well in the national observation of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and to take full advantage of associated tourism opportunities. 20. More visitors walking around Chestertown using the app; more virtual visitors worldwide. 21. Full cooperation with the County and Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area in working to enhance the heritage area plan to enhance outdoor and rural tourism. |

Vision for Leadership & Communication: *Chestertown’s elected and other community leaders continually work to earn and sustain the trust of the community through transparency, effective involvement of volunteers, and the provision of excellent services; and they actively seek collaboration among all groups and all levels of government. Diverse constituencies and age groups have a voice in town decisions.*

| Strategic Priorities – “LEADERSHIP & COMMUNICATION” GOAL: A fiscally sustainable town government with robust community trust and involvement cultivated by innovative leaders and staff. | |
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| <u>Three Year Actions</u> (Year 1: by June 2024; Year 2: by June 2025; Year 3: by June 2026) | Long-term Progress/Success Indicators |
| <p>Highest Priorities:</p> <p>A. Town Collaboration (govt-to-govt): Work with Kent County to assure equitable division of local taxes (“tax differential”) and equitable collection of short-term rental taxes.</p> <p>B. Town Leadership: Update all town commission and committee rules ordinances to be up to date, with clear and consistent rules to follow</p> <p>C. Town Leadership: Mayor & Council have completed the core curriculum of the University of Maryland’s Academy for Excellence in Local Governance.</p> <p>D. Community: Equity Advisory Committee established to encourage considerations of community diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in communities policies, resources, and activities. (repeated from “People”)</p> <p>E. Town Services: In order to encourage efficient use of financial and human resources, one administrative efficiency review completed and cycle established for continuing the practice; implementation complete or underway from guidance for employment/HR upgrades, staff training & development, etc.</p> <p>F. Town Services: Create a plan, policies, and budget for staff training and growth.</p> <p>G. Town Budget/Environment: Establish Town sustainability plan to include recommended efficiency investments, waste reduction, no mow areas, and other environmentally sound policies. (repeated from “Place”)</p> | <p>Highest Priorities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mayor & Council have resolved points of contention with Kent County (especially tax differential, plus collection of short-term rental taxes), communicate routinely, and are collaborating on many projects and issues of mutual interest. 2. Have experienced and responsibly engaged Town volunteer commissions and committees that work with the Mayor & Council and administration toward implementation of Town goals. 3. At least three elected Town leaders (Mayor and/or Council) are fellows of the Academy for Excellence in Local Governance. 4. Community dialogue about opportunity, equity, access, diversity, and inclusion is robust, positive, and action-oriented. (repeated from “People”) 5. Community surveys reveal widespread community satisfaction that all residents feel welcome, heard, and respected. (repeated from “People”) 6. Up-to-date procedures, plans, and ordinances (as documented by annual audits and occasional independent administrative reviews; plus, reviews of permitting times). 7. Effective data collection to support services, planning, budgeting. 8. Number of staff that attend the Maryland Municipal League annual conference to take classes. |

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| <u>Three Year Actions</u> (Year 1: by June 2024; Year 2: by June 2025; Year 3: by June 2026) | Long-term Progress/Success Indicators |
| | 9. Employee satisfaction generally (as demonstrated through longevity, exit interviews, advancement, etc.). 10. Employee awards and other recognition (within and beyond the Town). 11. A Town sustainability plan under active implementation. |
| H. Town Services: A comprehensive capital improvement plan is complete and most if not all top priority projects are either underway or being covered by grant applications, local fundraising, and/or town budget plans. I. Town Services: Water/sewer efficiency reviews and energy audits complete and cycles established for continuing improvements; updates included in Town annual report. J. Town Services: Cycles for reporting/planning for roadway and sidewalk maintenance established; updates included in Town annual report. K. Town Services: Comp plan update completed. Mayor & Council check progress on the strategic agenda periodically and through an annual update. L. Town Services: Land use regulations and other ordinances are fully updated. An update to the historic district design guidelines is either complete or underway. | Town Services: 12. A culture of transparency for budgeting, maintenance of facilities and services, and communications with the public. 13. Energy costs stable or lowered. 14. Roadway maintenance and sidewalk maintenance are efficient and satisfactory for Town, contractors, and residents and stay ahead of schedule for repairs. More linear feet of brick sidewalks exist, and older sidewalks are repaired to ADA standards (in the historic district, as suited to a National Historic Landmark). 15. Trash collection is efficient and satisfactory for Town, contractor, and residents. 16. Population growth. |
| M. Town Budget: Budget protocols established and under annual review for effectiveness. N. Town Budget: Town administrative calendar under annual review for effectiveness and incorporated into Departmental Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). | Town Budget: 17. Increased town revenues and lowered costs without increases in taxes and fees beyond comparable municipalities in the region. 18. Grant revenue; grant applications increased in number, size, project ambition, and effectiveness. 19. Projects accomplished under multiple plans. |
| O. Town Leadership: Annual fiscal year report process well established. | Town Leadership & Communications: |

| <i>Strategic Priorities – “LEADERSHIP & COMMUNICATION”</i> | |
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| <i>GOAL: A fiscally sustainable town government with robust community trust and involvement cultivated by innovative leaders and staff.</i> | |
| <u>Three Year Actions</u> <i>(Year 1: by June 2024; Year 2: by June 2025; Year 3: by June 2026)</i> | <i>Long-term Progress/Success Indicators</i> |
| <p>P. Town Communications: Mayor & Council routinely conduct listening sessions, at least one in each ward each year, or have developed other means of community-driven communications.</p> <p>Q. Town Communications: Mayor & Council have investigated offering a pilot course for residents on local government (“Civics 101,” possibly through WC-ALL) and have completed it or it is well underway.²</p> | <p>20. Effective communications between/among elected leaders and staff.</p> <p>21. Bimonthly Mayor & Council meetings that routinely take only two hours or less.</p> <p>22. Compliance with open meetings requirements (both letter and spirit).</p> <p>23. Frequent reporting and listening to the public.</p> <p>24. Wide public participation in town budgeting and planning (supported by accessibility of Town Hall tech and Town website).</p> <p>25. Successful “ecosystem” of nonprofit community support (numbers of nonprofits and their members).</p> <p>26. Citizen participation in town training.</p> |
| <p>R. Town Collaboration (govt-to-govt): Mayor & Council have established protocol and goals for communications with other elected bodies on resolving issues of interest to Chestertown and meet routinely with other elected leaders, who understand Chestertown’s needs and goals.</p> | <p>Town Collaboration (govt-to-govt):</p> <p>27. Satisfaction of town and county elected leaders with processes of consultation and communication.</p> <p>28. Successfully executed joint projects.</p> |

² Example from the historic town of Davidson, NC: <https://townofdavidson.org/235/Civics-101>