
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE TOWN OF POOLESVILLE

PREPARED FOR:
THE TOWN OF POOLESVILLE

PREPARED BY:
ORION VENTURES, LLC

September 2012

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ABOUT ORION VENTURES

Orion Ventures, LLC (Orion) is a consulting firm that provides economic development, business development, public policy and communications solutions to public and private sector organizations. Orion brings a unique perspective of government, business and non-profit experience to provide a customer-focused and comprehensive array of services to its clients.

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Orion Ventures (Orion) was commissioned by the Town of Poolesville (the “town”) to conduct a review of options and alternatives for increasing economic activity, tourism and quality of life for Poolesville residents. In developing this report, Orion Ventures met with various community stakeholders to solicit an array of perspectives and opinions. These meetings were not meant to be a statistically significant sample of opinions, but instead were designed to solicit knowledge of activities, experiences, needs and goals from groups throughout Poolesville in order to present the best array of options for the town going forward.

This report approaches the project with two main objectives: 1) Propose strategies to increase Poolesville’s visibility and image; and 2) Outline alternatives to make Poolesville a more attractive place for residents to live and work via organic growth of the community. The first objective will have the result of driving economic activity within Poolesville through increasing trips to town by non-residents for shopping, dining and outdoor activities. The second objective explores opportunities to capitalize on the town’s unique competitive advantages in agriculture, outdoor activities and quality of life to create new opportunities for business expansion and growth.

This report will provide Orion’s findings regarding possible options the town may choose to pursue. Options are not meant to be exclusive, and in fact, would benefit greatly from being implemented in conjunction with other alternatives. It is important to note that effects of economic development programs cannot be seen overnight, and it will take a concerted effort and leadership by the town to foster the long-term efforts necessary to achieve the town’s objectives.

The Poolesville Story

The Town of Poolesville sits in the northwest part of Montgomery County (the county), in an area between Rockville (15 miles to the south) Gaithersburg (9 miles to the east) and Frederick (17 miles to the north). The center of town is approximately 6 miles east of the Potomac River at White’s Ferry, the last ferry crossing of the Potomac and less than 25 miles from Washington, DC. The town encompasses 2,374 acres, with a population of

4,833 according to the 2010 census. As of April 1, 2010, the town contained 1,663 housing units, a growth of 33 units from the decade previous.¹

Poolesville is the largest municipality within Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve, a 100,000-acre area of land in northern region of the county established in 1981. The Agricultural Reserve encompasses approximately 30 percent of the county's land area and contains over 550 farms and 350 horticulture enterprises. These businesses employ approximately 10,000 people and contribute approximately \$250 million to the county's economy.²

In 2007, the Town of Poolesville commissioned a market study from Thomas Point Associates to assess the town's economic climate and commercial opportunities. The study is being updated in conjunction with this report, but data from the updated report is not yet available to Orion. According to data provided by the 2007 study, the population within the Poolesville 'market area,' a 15-minute drive from center of town – Fisher Avenue and Elgin Road – was 9,815. While projections at the time forecast a growth to 10,608 residents by 2012, this has not, in fact, occurred. The town does anticipate this level of growth in the future, but it is proceeding at a substantially slower pace than was expected.³

The 2007 median household income for the market area was \$87,500 as compared to \$72,138 for the rest of Montgomery County. Median home value in the area was \$239,600, 13 percent greater than the median value for the county of \$212,000 in 2007. Nearly 75 percent of workers that live in the Poolesville market area hold white-collar occupations.⁴

Poolesville is within a 90-minute drive of a metropolitan population of approximately 5 million. Data from the 2007 market report indicated that the average commute to work for town residents was approximately 40 minutes, a statistic that is supported by census data from the 2010 American Community Survey, which found that the mean travel time to work was 32.3 minutes, with over 50 percent of workers having a commute between 30 minutes and one hour. Demonstrating the town's relative distance from other employment centers, 17 percent of workers in 2010 had a commute of less than 10 minutes (essentially employed within the town) while only 24 percent of workers had a commute of between 10 and 30 minutes.⁵ Consistent with this data, the 2007 market survey found that approximately 85 percent of employed Poolesville residents commute to work outside of the town (regardless of distance), an indication of the opportunity to improve opportunities to both live and work in Poolesville.

Unlike many municipalities throughout the country, Poolesville is not responsible for funding much of its public services and infrastructure such as schools, library and police. In fact, one of the town's greatest assets is the local public

school system, which is funded and administered by Montgomery County. Poolesville High School, home of the Whole School Magnet Program and Global Ecology Studies Program, was recently ranked as the top high school in Maryland and the Washington, DC area, and placed 64th on Newsweek's top 100 public high schools in America in 2011.⁶ During Orion's interviews with local stakeholders, the topic of the high quality of local schools was raised frequently, with many individuals citing this as a primary reason for living in the town.

According to the town's 2011 Master Plan, there are 98 acres of parkland and stream valleys within town limits. Planned subdivision growth will include an additional 83 acres of parkland and conservation land, bringing the total to 181 acres within Poolesville, or roughly eight percent of total town acreage.⁷ In these parks one can find open space and athletic fields as well as venues such as a skate park, basketball courts, fishing ponds, a public pool facility (maintained by the county) and a band shell to name a few.⁸

As part of the 2011 Master Plan review and update process, the town conducted a citizen survey to solicit feedback from residents as to their opinions regarding Poolesville's future. The survey revealed several key points that have been used to help lay out economic development objectives in this report. For example, the survey found that the most common reason residents enjoy living in Poolesville is its small town feeling. This choice garnered 41 percent of responses, over double the next most popular answer. In addition, 65 percent of respondents rated 'small town atmosphere' as a 'very strong' influence in their decision to live in Poolesville.⁹ Town leaders should be mindful of residents' desire to maintain Poolesville's small town atmosphere when implementing economic development alternatives.

Poolesville has four main commercial areas, which are not all contiguous to the center of the town. In addition, there are other commercial enterprises spread throughout town, mainly on Fisher Avenue. Total commercial space in the town is approximately 140,000 square feet, significantly more than would generally be found in a town of this size. The central business district (CBD), which is centered on the intersection of Elgin Road (Route 109) and Fisher Avenue (Route 107), contains businesses such as a gas station, bicycle shop, and Basset's, a well-known restaurant in town. Shopping centers spaced around the town contain business services firms, a CVS, the town library, a liquor store, a Subway as well as the former location of Selby's Market. It is the closing of Selby's Market in 2012 that was the bellwether for many residents, indicating that action needed to be taken to ensure the town's economic future.

The Poolesville Master Plan Land Use section outlines the goal of uniting various strip shopping centers into a core downtown area in order to reduce the

disjointed layout of Poolesville's town core. This would help greatly in creating a sense of place as well as fostering economic vitality. As the Master Plan states, "The absence of a definable, more compressed town center suppresses a more robust and sustainable marketplace."¹⁰ Zoning and incentives will be examined later in this report as tools for encouraging the types of infill development town residents desire.

Unlike many other incorporated municipalities in Montgomery County, Poolesville is not connected to the county water and sewer services, and thus must obtain its water via a series of wells and operate its own wastewater treatment plant. The town has taken steps to ensure adequate and reliable capacity for both water and sewer, but as the 2011 Master Plan states, it should remain mindful of these issues when new development occurs. The town must consider water and sewer issues when looking to attract new businesses, residential development and visitors, as none of these will be possible without correct and adequate allotments. In addition, there will be alternatives presented later that would allow for additional green recharge space for the town's water supply. This issue was echoed in the 2011 town survey as almost 80% of respondents cited that ensuring adequate water and sewer should be among the greatest priorities for the town going forward.¹¹

It will be important for the town to ensure water and sewer allocations are consistent with town goals to encourage growth in the CBD and Target Investment Zone (TIZ) for the types of buildings and businesses that residents desire. For example, a restaurant will place significantly more demand on the water and sewer system than a business services firm of a similar size. At the time of Master Plan approval, the town's well capacity was estimated at 1.21 million gallons per day (gpd) while current daily use was estimated at 450,000 to 500,000 gpd. The town expects no issues in capacity to arise within the planned growth limits of up to 6,500 residents however, issues will very likely arise should the town desire commercial and residential growth beyond that point.

As noted in the town Master Plan as well as the town's list of commercial real estate for lease, there are significant vacancies in the commercial retail space in Poolesville. This list is attached as Appendix I. Data from the 2007 market report indicate that the top uses for open commercial space in Poolesville are restaurants, specialty retail and business services. However, it is important to recognize that these entities will not automatically appear. The town must be proactive in increasing economic activity, tourism and community engagement, which will in turn allow those businesses to be viable.

The 2007 study recommended the town improve its marketing efforts to attract more visitors and create a central place that facilitates residential and visitor foot traffic. While this can and should be improved, the town has a

solid foundation to build upon. Current efforts at community engagement and stimulating both visitor and residential foot traffic can be seen in town-sponsored events such as the summer concert series, Poolesville Heritage Days, Poolesville Day, public movie screenings, the town website with brochures and announcements, as well as non-profit organizations such as the Historic Medley.

The 2007 study also highlighted the unique and attractive features in the greater Poolesville area such as the historic John Poole House, the C&O Canal National Historical Park, the Potomac River and Sugarloaf Mountain. These features and many others make Poolesville attractive to hikers, bicyclists (road and mountain), equestrians, and day trips for families and seniors. In addition, there is the Poolesville Public Golf Course, which is operated by the county, as well as recreation-focused venues such as Woodstock Equestrian Park just north of town and Muldoon's Farm, which hosts soccer tournaments.

Poolesville's proximity to major population centers such as Germantown, Rockville, Gaithersburg and Frederick are both one of its greatest assets as well as one of its greatest challenges. The town's rural character offers the opportunity to be a close-in getaway with a rural town atmosphere that is convenient for day trips from the greater DC metro area. At the same time, many of the challenges the town faces in attracting the amenities residents desire can be attributed to this same proximity. With 85 percent of workers commuting outside of town, residents do not need to rely on having all services and amenities within the town proper. In addition, being only a handful of miles from larger markets has prevented the location of some key businesses, most notably a grocery store, which would be in competition with the Harris Teeter market, only a twelve-minute drive away.

The remainder of this report will address the alternatives Orion has deemed to be best suited to the specific attributes laid out above as well as the competitive advantages of the town. These alternatives fall under three main areas: Agriculture, Recreation and Business Growth and Retention. It is important to note that many of these alternatives will focus on assets that are outside of the town limits of Poolesville. While that limits the extent to which the town can act (unless the town chooses to annex the properties), it does not mean that the town cannot benefit from them. For example, if the number of yearly visitors to Sugarloaf Mountain were to double, the town should see a significant increase in visitors stopping for lunch, shopping, etc. as while the mountain is not within town limits, Poolesville is the largest nearby municipality.

Economic Development Options

Poolesville, like many small towns in America, is confronting the situation of its economic reality, which is exacerbated because of its location near larger communities. It is experiencing flat to declining population growth, home values have declined impacting local revenue, and businesses are closing because of the reduction in economic activity. While this paints a somewhat pessimistic picture, the town has many unique assets and strengths that provide it much greater opportunity than many other small communities. In particular, the town has nationally recognized schools, a high median income and a tremendous location. This provides the community a number of options, with perhaps the biggest challenge being to coalesce support and to take action.

Orion believes the key to Poolesville's success is to identify activities that leverage its unique characteristics and are sustainable (i.e. that can be maintained through continued organic growth within the community). While Poolesville is a high quality community, its geographic location makes it a challenge to attract companies to relocate within the town when competing with surrounding jurisdictions because of the relative "distance" one has to travel to the next community – a concern that was echoed in several of Orion's interviews with local business owners. However, there are a number of opportunities that can build upon the town's assets and grow over time. A theme that will be found throughout this report is that the town needs to be proactive and 'own the process' of economic development in order to obtain maximum benefit from its existing assets as well as additional economic development efforts made going forward. This can be seen clearly when working to leverage assets such as Poolesville's parks and nearby outdoor activities. For example, it is not sufficient to only list weekly activities and events on the town website; instead, the town must own the process of outreach and informing people in the wider area (Frederick, Germantown, Montgomery County, DC) that there are events worth attending in Poolesville.

The following recommendations focus on the specific areas of competitive advantage within the town and lay out alternatives to leverage each for increasing economic activity within Poolesville.

AGRICULTURE

As outlined in the overview, Poolesville is the largest municipality in Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve, the largest tract of land set aside for agricultural cultivation in a metropolitan area in the United States. By virtue of its location and culture as a traditional farming community, Poolesville is uniquely situated to leverage this resource.

There is interest throughout the National Capital Region in providing access to locally sourced agriculture products for restaurants, schools, hospitals and under-served communities. There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of farm markets throughout the region. Refer to Appendix 2 for a list of farmers markets in Montgomery County. The challenge in meeting this increased demand lies in the aggregation of crops and other products for distribution to the areas of interest. If each farmer or producer is required to identify each of their market opportunities and deliver products themselves, the process becomes very time consuming and inefficient. However, if an aggregator, or 'food hub' could be established to develop relationships for producer-to-business and producer-to-consumer interactions, local farmers and producers could expand their market opportunities while streamlining their distribution and selling operations. In addition, this would create a central point for Montgomery County's agriculture community to engage with consumers in the broader region, for both the benefit of local farms and the town.

Food Hub

Orion has examined communities that have undertaken the development of a food hub and found that Poolesville is ideally located for this type of operation. With proximity to one of the nation's most populous regions while being located in the midst of a thriving agricultural community, Poolesville has an opportunity to link these two elements together to benefit the town, the farmers and the community at large seeking broader access to locally sourced food products.

A regional food hub is a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail and institutional demand year round.

There are a number of food hubs located throughout the nation, and the closest to this region is located in the Charlottesville, Virginia community, called Local Food Hub.¹² Local Food Hub is set up as a non-profit organization and operates a local food warehouse and purchases and aggregates locally grown produce from more than 70 small family farms within 100 miles of Charlottesville. The produce is distributed to more than 150 locations in the region including public schools, hospitals, institutions, restaurants and markets.

Another good example of a regional food hub is Eastern Carolina Organics (ECO), a privately held limited liability company (LLC) based in Pittsboro, North Carolina. ECO was started by a group of farmers in 2004 through a local nonprofit called the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA).¹³ ECO markets and distributes local organic produce from 40 farmers to more than 150 customers including grocery stores, food cooperatives, buying clubs, restaurants, school foodservice providers and colleges and universities. By pooling diverse harvests from farmers in several regions of North Carolina, ECO is able to meet the demand for a steady stream of high-quality local, organic, seasonal food choices throughout the year.

In addition to these models, there are several wholesale and hybrid wholesale farmers markets that function as food hubs because the markets' management has taken an active role in engaging in a number of food-hub-related activities. A good example of this is the Central New York Regional Market in Syracuse, New York, which operates both a wholesale market and a farmers market. Along with the market's participation in electronic benefits transfer (EBT), SNAP (USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, once called food stamps) and other supplemental nutrition programs, the market operates the "Farm Fresh" Mobile Market, which acts as an effective delivery mechanism to increase access of healthy foods in under-served communities.

There is also a movement to leverage online technologies to establish food hub activities. According to the Huffington Post, California-based Ag Link allows school districts to communicate with nearby farmers and buy their produce with the click of a mouse. Ag Link is helping the Turlock, California district and others meet new federal rules requiring more fruits and vegetables in school cafeterias to help prevent childhood obesity. In addition, the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, a non-profit cooperative that trains new organic farmers in Salinas, California, is working with the Santa Cruz City Schools to coordinate orders and deliver produce. The district, with 13,000 students, purchases more than half of its produce from local farms.¹⁴

Poolesville is in close proximity to both the large population centers and numerous institutional clients that are necessary to support a food hub. In

Montgomery and Frederick Counties there are more than 200,000 school children consuming nearly 20 million school lunches each year. In addition, there is the University System of Maryland as well as numerous local hospitals and other institutional clients with year-round demand for produce. Annually, \$16.8 billion is currently spent on fruits and vegetables in the tri-state area plus DC (MD, VA, DE and DC) – but less than 7 percent of that goes towards produce from the region.¹⁵

Definition

According to the United States Department of Agriculture Regional Food Hub Resource Guide published in April 2012, (Attached as Appendix 3) regional food hubs are defined less by a particular business or legal structure than by how their functions and outcomes affect producers and the wider communities they serve.

Defining characteristics of a regional food hub include:

- Carries out or coordinates the aggregation, distribution and marketing of primarily locally and regionally produced foods from multiple producers to multiple markets.
- Considers producers as valued business partners instead of interchangeable suppliers and is committed to buying from small to mid-sized local producers whenever possible.
- Works closely with producers, particularly small-scale operations, to ensure they can meet buyer requirements by either providing technical assistance or finding partners that can provide this technical assistance.
- Uses product differentiation strategies to ensure that producers get a good price for their products. Examples of product differentiation strategies include: identity preservation (knowing who produced it and where it comes from), group branding, specialty product attributes (such as heirloom or unusual varieties), and sustainable production practices (such as certified organic, minimum pesticides, or “naturally” grown or raised).
- Aims to be financially viable while also having positive economic, social, and environmental impacts within their communities, as demonstrated by carrying out certain production, community, or environmental services and activities.

Food hubs have a significant economic impact in the communities in which they operate. According to the National Food Hub Collaboration’s 2011 study, regional food hubs “gross nearly \$1 million in annual sales on average, with many showing double- and even triple-digit annual sales growth.”¹⁶ Food hubs can also play a significant role in job creation. For example, Farm to Family Naturally, a social enterprise focused on increasing access to fresh and nu-

tritious foods, will be expanding its operation and opening the St. Louis Farm Fresh Food Hub. “The expansion will increase its reach into school systems, corner stores, human service networks and institutional foodservice operations, all in areas with low access to fruits and vegetables. With this expansion, Farm to Family Naturally will increase its number of employees from 50 to 100 – 125 full-time employees.”¹⁷

As shown above, an interesting aspect of food hubs is that they can be shaped to meet the individual needs and opportunities of the community. Each model is different, and tailored to the specific situation, giving Poolesville the opportunity to shape the institution to the community’s needs.

Producers

By offering producers larger sales volumes, more stable sources of income and higher returns, food hubs provide opportunities for producers to expand and diversify production, which can translate into increased profitability.

One notable aspect of food hubs is that many of them work with producers and buyers in advance of the planting season to coordinate production planning and pricing with anticipated demand. This helps farmers plan what they should grow for the coming season with greater confidence that their product will find a ready market outlet at an acceptable price point, which ultimately provides them with more economic security.

In addition, institutional clients have the scale to provide the demand for locally-sourced food 12 months of the year that makes year-round farming and value added product operations profitable. For example, with established and consistent demand, a farmer can have the capital and demand for greenhouses to provide warm-weather vegetables in the winter months, hothouses for early spring and processing and storage facilities for value-added products.

Local Food Hub, Tuscarora Organic Growers Cooperative,¹⁸ and Intervale Food Hub¹⁹ are just a few examples of food hubs that have adopted this model of collaborative planning. By working with buyers to make projections on product demand and target pricing ranges, Local Food Hub is able to pre-order specific crops from producers in November and December for the following growing season, giving producers an opportunity to make bulk seed purchases, schedule planting and estimate their projected sales for the season. Weekly volume demand figures and pricing data help producers develop a strong business plan and maximize revenue from their operations.

Funding Opportunities

Many Federal grant and loan programs could potentially finance various aspects of food hub operations. As referenced below, the National Food Hub Collaboration has identified more than 30 of these Federal programs (20 pro-

grams from USDA alone) that either have a proven track record or have the greatest potential to fund food hub work. In addition, many philanthropic foundations have a growing interest in local and regional food systems and their relationship to health, economic development, the environment and a number of other underlying aspects. However, food hubs have only just begun to receive the attention of many philanthropic organizations, so not many—with some notable exceptions discussed below—explicitly support food hub projects in their program descriptions.

- National Food Hub Collaboration Resources: <http://ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-cluster-calls/financing-food-hubs>
- USDA Regional Food Hub Guide: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/FoodHubs>
- National Good Food Network: <http://www.ngfn.org/resources/food-hubs>
- FDA Value-Added Producer Grant: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_VAPG.html

Agricultural Services

Poolesville is one of the few municipalities within Montgomery County that retains its local zoning authority. This is a tremendous asset that allows the town to better respond to community interests and to capitalize on unique land use opportunities that may present themselves. Agricultural services could provide just such an opportunity.

In Montgomery County there are number of agriculture related activities that are allowed in the agricultural and rural zones as “by right” activities which means they do not require any special approval to be conducted. Oftentimes these related activities provide the ability to make farming economically viable for farmers. However, there are some activities that are not allowed except by the special exception process, which can hinder farm production.

Two specific activities provide potential opportunities for the town as a central location within the Agricultural Reserve. The first, agricultural processing, is only allowed as an accessory use in the county for farmers and requires a special exception. This exclusion goes further in that it is only allowed for agriculture that has been harvested on property that is adjacent to the farm. Many farmers cultivate crops on leased land that is not adjacent to their property. The zoning requirement effectively prohibits their processing of any harvest from those other properties on their farm.

The second activity, Farm Machinery, Sales, Storage, Services and Supply, is explicitly prohibited from being undertaken in the Agricultural Reserve. Farming requires extensive machinery to be successful and the closer the resources supporting that machinery are to the actually farming activities, the more efficient the farmers are in managing their operations.

Agricultural processing provides an opportunity for Poolesville to interact directly with the Agricultural community to survey its specific needs. This could be providing space for grain processing, or could connect well with the concept of a food hub and provide packaging and distribution services for various produce. Another example is that of an abattoir for processing of meat. There is no resource within Montgomery County because it is not allowed within the Agricultural Reserve, therefore all processing of meat occurs outside of the county limits. As a result of surveying the Agricultural community, Poolesville could then provide adequate zoning and incentives to encourage a provider or providers of needed services for the community. This would have two benefits for the community: First, it would directly provide increased business in town. Second, it would provide increased activity that brings more people into town in the form of farmers bringing produce for processing which could translate into more economic activity as they took advantage of other services in town.

With regard to farm machinery, this also provides an opportunity, but one over which the town has somewhat less control. There is and will continue to be a need for equipment to support the activities of farming. There are some providers of these services within the county, but they are limited in their ability to expand because of zoning and other regulations. If any of the current providers are looking to expand, then Poolesville can provide the zoning that can allow for an expansion of these services within the town limits. This opportunity has the same benefits of providing access to agricultural processing.

The benefit to each of these opportunities is that it provides Poolesville with a mechanism to further establish itself as the central agricultural community within Montgomery County as well as the region and provides increased economic activity for the community.

Farm/Agricultural Incubator

The Agricultural Reserve is a tremendous asset for the county and town, but one of the most significant challenges for the viability of the Agricultural Reserve going forward is to make sure that there continues to be enough farmers to produce crops on this county asset. The county has taken steps to make farming more affordable by making certain changes in zoning, but there have also been a number of discussions about establishing a program to increase the number of farmers by bringing new people into the industry. The former chairman of Montgomery County Park and Planning, Royce Hanson, proposed using county parkland to develop a “farm incubator” program.²⁰ The effects of the recession made it difficult for this proposal to move forward and the project is just now beginning to gain momentum. There has also been the recent announcement by Montgomery County of a New Farmer Pilot Project that commits some land by two property owners to assist new farmers, which provides a small amount of resources to begin a pilot program on how to address this issue.²¹

There are a number of incubator programs throughout the nation and with 100,000 acres of land in the agricultural reserve, it will be important to develop a deep pipeline of future farmers and land opportunities to develop future farms. Following are three different examples of incubators under development in different parts of the country. There is the opportunity for Pool-essville to develop a farm incubator as part of a standalone program, done in conjunction with the creation of a food hub, or also in partnership with the county.

Viva Farms

Viva Farms is a 33-acre incubator farm and farming program that helps beginning farmers get established, with the goal of eventually moving them onto their own farmland. The program is a joint venture of Washington State University (WSU) Extension and GrowFood.org, an international nonprofit dedicated to recruiting and training the next generation of sustainable farmers. Viva Farms is located in the Skagit Valley in Washington, and provides training in farming and business practices, marketing and technical assistance to aspiring farmers.

Nationwide, the number of farmers aged 65 and over increased by 22 percent between 2002 and 2007, according to the most recent agricultural census, while those younger than 45 fell by 14 percent and those younger than 25 dropped by 30 percent. In Montgomery County, the average age of farmers is 60. The trouble isn't lack of interest; it is that the infrastructure, money and skills – even the necessary government aid – are too often just out of reach for new (younger) farmers. In theory, places like Viva Farms can help would-be farmers bridge the gap.²²

The Seed Farm

The Seed Farm is a new farmer training and agricultural business incubator program that helps start and maintain new sustainable farms in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley. Facilitating the development of a vibrant, local food system, the Seed Farm links new farmers with training, equipment and land through its apprenticeship and stewardship programs, eliminating the top three barriers to farm entry, and opening doors for a new generation of farmers.²³

The Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming

The Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming is an agriculture education nonprofit based in Ithaca, New York, operating under the Center for Transformative Action and EcoVillage at Ithaca and serving the broader Finger Lakes area. Groundswell's core work is nurturing the next generation of farmers and cultivating knowledgeable "food citizens" through experience-based educational programs. The program hopes to inspire people and promote positive change in collaboration with, and with support from diverse donors, experienced area farmers, local educational institutions, granting

agencies, a broad range of non-profit and for-profit organizations, and the efforts of dedicated volunteers.²⁴

Education Activities

Montgomery County, for all of its agricultural heritage and resources, has a dearth of agricultural educational programs for its younger generations. The 4-H program is robust, as is witnessed each year at the Montgomery County Agricultural Fair, but there is only one FFA chapter and one high school with informal agriculture programming in the entire county. These facts represent another opportunity for Poolesville to brand itself as the locus of the county's agricultural community by developing strong educational programming.

The strength of Poolesville High School was discussed in the introduction, and it provides a tremendous quality of life asset for the community. Poolesville High School's greatest advantage is that it is a Whole School Magnet Program and draws students from around the county in addition to students from the surrounding community. There has long been discussion about developing an agriculture track or magnet program for students in the county and Poolesville would be a logical choice given the way the school's programming is currently structured. Through Orion's interviews, it is clear that there is interest in pursuing an agricultural track for the school.

Interestingly, the Byrd Endowment for Agricultural Education at the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation was initially established by two local farmers who set aside resources to be used to expand agriculture education programs in Poolesville. By the time the endowment could be used, there were no longer any agriculture programs in the school. As a result a portion of these funds are now used to support agriculture programs in Damascus High School and Brunswick High School, although it is Orion's understanding that this is still a financial resource that could be used to support agriculture education in Poolesville.²⁵

As more focus is given to career pathways for students it is important to note that agriculture is the nation's largest employer, with more than 23 million jobs (17 percent of the civilian workforce) involved in some facet of the industry. Poolesville is well situated to provide access to a strong educational program especially when the elements of successful agricultural education programs are identified. Agricultural education instruction is delivered through three major components:

- Classroom/laboratory instruction (contextual learning).
- Supervised agricultural experience programs (work-based learning).
- Student leadership organizations: National FFA Organization, National Young Farmer Educational Association, and National Postsecondary Agricultural Student Organization.

Again, Poolesville's proximity to Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve provides ready accessibility for these components and also aids in building the foundation for future economic growth. As an indication of the opportunity in this approach, the National FFA Organization has 540,379 FFA members aged 12–21 in 7,489 chapters throughout all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands – among its highest membership totals in its history.²⁶

Montgomery College also provides an interesting opportunity for expanding agricultural education partnerships through an array of programs like horticulture, plant science and food nutrition. Building on the career pathway concept, there is a growing interest locally and regionally in sustainable agricultural practices – whether that is in more effective turf management or looking at improving food nutrition by providing access to more locally grown produce.

Montgomery College is continually looking at expanding its programs and partnerships to provide students with the greatest opportunity for career success. By partnering with a local high school to provide access to an array of courses and programming, this provides a unique source of training and opportunity for local residents who can then expand into new business opportunities. One of the unique aspects of Montgomery College is its ability to provide access to curriculum in both agricultural pursuits and business, thereby providing entrepreneurs with the tools necessary for success.

The University System of Maryland also provides interesting opportunities for partnership, whether through the Institute of Applied Agriculture or the School of Agriculture. This relationship again builds upon the concept of career pathways and because of Poolesville's proximity to agricultural and recreational assets, provides an opportunity to combine academic theory with real world practice – positioning the town for higher visibility and increased economic opportunities. Additionally, the Universities at Shady Grove continues to expand its programming from throughout the University System and is looking for public/private partnerships to justify bringing additional academic programming into the county and agriculture is an area in which there is significant interest.

Food Innovation Center

The concepts that have been laid out thus far are opportunities to increase economic activity in Poolesville with a focus on agriculture primarily in Montgomery County. The State of Maryland has a strong interest in the future success of agriculture as well, and there may be a model that could allow Poolesville's efforts to extend beyond its local borders.

Rutgers University, working with the State of New Jersey, the local community and the private sector established the Rutgers Food Innovation Center (FIC) as a business incubation and economic development accelerator pro-

gram. The FIC is the result of a 1998 Rutgers study of the status and condition of New Jersey's food and agriculture industry, which quantified the significant decline in New Jersey's food industry, recognized the need for value added enterprises that were necessary to create viability in the agricultural and food industry sectors, and identified Southern New Jersey as the hub of the state's food processing industry. It also recognized the need for economic development assistance in southern New Jersey and for the food industry in the region as a whole. The result was an incubator that leased 23,000 square feet of commercial space and raised more than \$8 million in grants to build a client base and is now a successful and vital part of the agriculture and food services sector in New Jersey and parts of the Mid-Atlantic region.

The FIC is a unique business incubation and economic development accelerator program which provides business and technology expertise to small and mid-sized food and agribusiness companies in New Jersey and the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions, and utilizes its outreach capacity to reach food and agribusinesses throughout the world. Over 1,200 companies and entrepreneurs have been assisted since the center began operations in 2000 including:

- **Farmers and Agricultural Cooperatives** desiring to create new businesses based on value-added agricultural products and/or developing new markets for their existing commodities.
- **Startup Food Companies** coping with challenges such as financing, technology, regulations, market development and infrastructure requirements.
- **Existing small and mid-size Food Companies** seeking to access new technologies, upgrade quality assurance capabilities, enter new markets, train their workforce and expand and improve their operations.
- **Retail and Foodservice Establishments** seeking to improve their operations and purchase locally grown New Jersey products.

Agriculture in the State of Maryland currently contributes approximately \$2.5 billion per year to the state's economy, employs 350,000 individuals and covers approximately one third of the state's land area. As the National Capital Region and State of Maryland seek opportunities to expand and solidify the strength of the agriculture and food production industry and provide employment opportunities to residents, the FIC provides an interesting model for Poolesville to explore as Maryland has many of the same agricultural assets that have made the Rutgers center successful. Such a venture could bring together the University System of Maryland, Montgomery College and Frederick Community College, the hospitality and food services sectors, the Federal

government and the State of Maryland to develop an agriculture and food innovation center that is designed to meet the unique needs of the area.

Philanthropic Support

There is increasing philanthropic interest in local agriculture and sustainable food initiatives throughout the National Capital Region. Orion has had discussions with local philanthropic organizations pursuing efforts in these areas and has included a list of potential partners for the town. These organizations and others are assessing their interest in supporting certain agriculture and sustainable food programs to achieve various social and economic goals that meet the objectives of their funders. With the appropriate program(s) linking to other communities and/or organizations within the region, Poolesville could be well positioned to receive funding to support such programs.

- The Community Foundation of Montgomery County
- Kaiser Community Health Initiatives²⁷
- Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers
- Evergreen Initiative – University of Maryland

Restaurants/Brewery/Winery

There has been a recent rise in the popularity of wineries, microbreweries and restaurants featuring locally sourced ingredients. An excellent example of each exists near Poolesville in the Sugarloaf Winery in Dickerson and the Flying Dog Brewery in Frederick. Sugarloaf Winery is a great example of building a strong product through its vineyard in the wines that it produces, but also by creating a sense of place that attracts people to visit and purchase additional merchandise. As a side benefit, wineries have recently been granted a specific exception to regulations regarding the number of yearly public events that can be held without county permission.²⁸ There are examples throughout the nation of microbreweries using locally sourced wheat, barley and hops in their production of certain beers. Just recently it was reported that the Flying Dog Brewery began using locally grown hops in some of its upcoming microbrews (refer to Appendix 4).

This approach represents another opportunity for the Poolesville community to leverage its local resources. The Town could provide incentives in the form of space or financial resources to attract an interested local brewer to establish a microbrewery in the community using locally sourced products. This could also evolve into a restaurant opportunity, thereby encouraging consumers to come into the community to take advantage of this unique asset as well as providing current residents new employment opportunities and an attractive amenity.

Host/Sponsor Agricultural Summit

If Poolesville is interested in becoming synonymous with agriculture in Montgomery County, it must begin to position itself in the minds of stakeholders and decision-makers. The county has recently implemented a Food Council (refer to Appendix 5) in which there is an attempt to develop a strategy for using local produce and products to create a more sustainable food environment in the community. The town should explore reaching out to this organization and playing a role and offering to host regular meetings of this organization.

As previously discussed, there is a lot of movement among philanthropic and other regional organizations to focus on sustainable sources of food for local communities. Poolesville has the opportunity to proactively reach out to these organizations to invite them to the community, introduce them to the Agricultural Reserve and host them as they explore various opportunities.

There also is interest in holding an agriculture summit in late 2012 or early 2013 to discuss the challenges of sustaining agriculture in a growing urban/suburban community. Poolesville has the opportunity to reach out to the organizers of this and other agriculture related meetings to either host or support these efforts.

Regardless of the agricultural strategies selected, the town should invite the Maryland Secretary of Agriculture, the Maryland Secretary of Economic Development, the Montgomery County Director of Economic Development (under which the local Agricultural programs are administered), Dean of the University of Maryland-College of Agriculture, appropriate representatives from Montgomery College, Maryland National Capital Park and Planning (MNCPPC), the University of Maryland Agricultural Extension Services and the Farm Bureau to provide them an overview of the community's interest in and plans for increasing activity in agriculture and seeking partnerships with each of these organizations to generate additional programming. As the town has recently discovered with planned visits by members of the Montgomery County Council, there is a renewed interest in fostering local agricultural development, and Poolesville is in a prime position to leverage the efforts and resources of these organizations.

OUTDOOR AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Poolesville's location places it right in the middle of a vast array of natural and historical resources. As stated earlier, these resources do not necessarily fall within town boundaries, but can still be leveraged by the town to meet its economic development goals. Resources such as town parks and historical sites, outdoor activities, athletic fields and equine facilities and events each present unique opportunities for the town to leverage. For each of these alternatives, it will be important for the town to identify which organization(s) in the broader DC metro area would make the best partners for Poolesville and do the most to further the town's goals.

Historic and Natural Resources

Currently, the town contains seven miles of a multi-purpose trail system, which has been required as part of new development as first proposed in the 1990 Master Plan. This trail allows residents access to community schools, recreation facilities, and shopping areas via walking or cycling.²⁹ In addition, town assets such as the skate park are a step in the right direction – they provide a high quality of life to residents with some potential to draw people in from outside the community, as facilities like a skate park are not readily available in nearby areas.³⁰

Beyond the parks contained within town limits, there are numerous state and local parks in close proximity to Poolesville: Seneca Creek State Park to the south, C&O Canal National Historical Park to the west, and Sugarloaf Mountain Park only a short drive away. Sites such as Sugarloaf Mountain Park and the C&O Canal already have their own visitor and marketing materials, and these could be utilized by the town in a comprehensive marketing and outreach plan to inform the public of the array of activities located in and around Poolesville. For example, a history and collection of trail maps for Sugarloaf Mountain Park and the C&O canal can be found in the links footnoted below.³¹

The Potomac River and White's Ferry are very close to the center of town and offer boating and fishing opportunities as well as a waypoint for people traveling to sites in northern Virginia. With Poolesville's proximity to the ferry, there could be an opportunity for better outreach to present the town as a waypoint or getaway from northern Virginia.

Poolesville is well placed to be a location for day trips for families and seniors and the nearby parks and historical sites can play a key role in this. The Washington Post recently published an article about day trips in the Washington metro region highlighting historical sites such as Antietam battlefield or Manassas battlefield and scenery like Cunningham Falls state park (refer to Appendix 6). While the article did not mention Poolesville, the town has many of the same amenities to offer as the sites featured, and could use this as a model of attracting visitors to the area.

The town's history, dating back to the settlement of John Poole in 1760, already provides a significant draw to visitors. The Historic Medley, which owns and curates a number of historic properties in and around Poolesville such as the John Poole House and the former town hall, provides a good jumping off point for marketing Poolesville's history for visitors and educational opportunities.³²

Poolesville also contains a Civil War memorial cemetery, along with other sites related to the Civil War. While the town was not a major site in the war, soldiers often passed through on their way to Sugarloaf Mountain, which was used as a lookout, as well as battles such as Gettysburg.³³ In order to attract more visitors and get the most out of these assets, the town should explore ways to coordinate open houses and events at historic sites with other events in town such as farmers' markets and festivals as well as by coordinating with other civil war sites and events.

There may be an opportunity for the town to receive and utilize a federal grant related to historical sites in Poolesville. With the new 6th congressional district, the town may have a special opportunity to work with the new representative to maximize the town's utilization of its natural, agricultural and historical resources. Poolesville's increased importance in the new district will help with outreach efforts to the new representative, providing the town another opportunity to raise its visibility in the region.

Woodstock Equestrian Park is another asset adjacent to Poolesville that can be used to draw in visitors. The park covers 825 acres, with fields, forests and 16 miles of trails. The park is owned and run by MNCPPC. There are plans to add temporary use stalls, a cross-country course and outdoor riding arenas.³⁴ The Park is greatly under-utilized when compared to other equestrian facilities in the region. For example, the Morven Park Equestrian Center in Leesburg hosts a variety of events throughout the year and attracts over 100,000 participants annually.³⁵ In addition, hosting an event like the Maryland Steeplechase could bring large numbers of visitors to Woodstock Park or a farm near town.³⁶

Similarly, the Capital Polo Club is another asset near the town that is not very well known and could be leveraged. The club is located at 14460 Hughes Road, just a few minutes drive from the center of town. The facility contains three full-sized polo fields, a grandstand, a clubhouse, and an indoor arena as part of a 600-acre facility. The club plays indoors for spring and fall, with matches held outdoors during the summer and draws participants from throughout Maryland and northern Virginia. Events are held almost every weekend during the three seasons and are open and free to the public.³⁷

Sports and Recreational Resources

In Montgomery County soccer is a significant recreation activity for youth and adults that continues to grow. The impact of this sport has begun to be felt in Poolesville at Muldoon's Farm and the Polo Club. Located just outside of town limits, Muldoon's Farm hosts numerous soccer games and tournaments on its 11 grass fields. However, there are certain restrictions in the county regarding the number and size of events that can be hosted each year on the property.

Muldoon's farm is a prime example of how the town can leverage its existing assets to make Poolesville an attractive place to visit. The soccer tournaments draw visitors from other parts of the county, who may not be aware of the assets Poolesville has to offer. There is a direct spin-off from each event when parents and children go out to eat after the games or stop to look around the town. There also is a potential downside under the current arrangement because often the local businesses and eateries do not know when events are scheduled to occur and are not adequately prepared for a large influx of people resulting in subpar service or insufficient food supplies.

A similar opportunity can be seen in the Olney Boys and Girls Club (OBGC) fields located off of Route 108 in Olney, Maryland. The fields cover 180 acres (much of it green space) and were developed in 1998 with a grant from the Carl M. Freeman Foundation. The facility, which includes two lacrosse fields, one football field, four soccer fields and five baseball fields, hosts games nearly every weekend from spring through fall for the nearly 7,000 annual participants. (Refer to Appendix 7 for a map and overview of the facility.)

The OBGC model provides an interesting case study for Poolesville to explore. There are parcels of green space for sale within the community that could be purchased for the development of athletic fields. For instance, there are a number of soccer and baseball organizations seeking to increase the supply of fields they can use. Currently, any fields that are owned by the county are scheduled through the Montgomery County Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF) program. As such, each organization effectively bids on the fields it would like to use and use of fields can vary from year to year. However, Poolesville can work directly with specific organizations to meet their needs and to increase activity in the community. MSI is an excellent example of an organization that might be interested in partnering with Poolesville. As the largest soccer organization in the county, MSI is looking for dedi-

cated locations for its teams to play and Poolesville could reach out to the organization to gauge its interest.³⁸ Beyond attracting visitors from outside the town and providing more recreation space, the town would reap a side benefit in the soccer fields providing green recharge space for the town's aquifer.

Competitive Racing

Finally, the town has the opportunity to market itself as a hub for outdoor activities such as hiking, bicycling (road and mountain) and running, which all benefit from the rural character of the town and surrounding area. The town could build off of the parks and recreational opportunities located nearby by creating a trail map for road and mountain cyclists that highlights the numerous sites available to visit while using the town as starting location or way-point.³⁹

Further, the town and surrounding area have the infrastructure necessary to be home to a number of different types of races. For example, an off-road triathlon could be held with the swim in the Potomac River at White's Ferry and the bicycle and run portions done on the C & O Canal Trail. Similarly, an on-road triathlon could be held with the swim portion at the local public pool, bicycle through nearby countryside and run on the paths and trails in the town. Or, there could be a trail running or mountain bike race at the Woodstock Equestrian Park. Finally, the town might consider hosting a mud-run type event that is currently very popular. These races feature an off-road course that incorporates various obstacles for participants to navigate. Such an event could be held at a location such as the Woodstock Equestrian Park, or a privately owned farm. For reference, there is a similar event being held on a farm north of Frederick that is expected to draw well over 20,000 participants.⁴⁰ Drawing that number of participants, the overwhelming majority of which would be from outside the Poolesville area, would be a great jumping off point for raising the visibility of Poolesville as a hub for outdoor activities.

Races and events are not necessarily activities the town needs to organize itself, but by either encouraging private groups to explore these options or pursuing them in conjunction with other organizations, the town can further increase its visibility within the region while simultaneously offering residents numerous healthy and enjoyable activities.

Marketing and Outreach

Poolesville has an array of assets that would be the envy of most towns of similar size. However, as part of a broader region that offers an array of activities and options to residents, the town must be proactive in its approach if it wants to maximize return on these assets. Few people outside of the town (and undoubtedly some within it) are aware of the full range of amenities and activities Poolesville offers. The numerous assets such as town parks, nearby

outdoors destinations and activities such as the Capitol Polo Club as well as local town-sponsored events provide ample opportunity to raise the visibility of Poolesville within the broader region and thus enhance economic activity within the town.

Tying all of these recreational assets together will be critical in order for the town to make the most of its efforts. Numerous individuals in the community expressed the difficulty with knowing what events were happening on which days, and as a result, were often unprepared for the influx of visitors and customers on certain weekends. For the town to increase its visibility and provide an enjoyable and engaging experience to visitors, it is essential that the community and businesses know when to expect large crowds and thus prepare to put the best face on the community.

Muldoon's farm provides a prime example of this situation. By working with the property owners and developing a coordinated relationship – whether by annexing the properties into the town or working more closely on event scheduling – the town and Muldoon's would be able to coordinate the timing and marketing of these and other activities in Poolesville. Coordination will minimize the overlap of large events while ensuring that there is something going on in the town nearly every weekend in the spring, summer and fall with the end result of making visitors trips to Poolesville more satisfying.

The Poolesville Golf Course, run by Montgomery County, is immediately adjacent to the town. Offering an 18-hole course on 380 acres, the Poolesville Golf Course is open to the public year round. This is just another asset in the Poolesville community that those outside the town likely are not aware of and should be highlighted in a comprehensive plan to demonstrate the variety amenities Poolesville has to offer.⁴¹

The desired result of increased visitors and events in Poolesville will take not only coordination among the various entities, but also proactive town involvement and ownership of the outreach process. By taking charge of the solution and 'owning the process,' the town has the opportunity to be its own best advocate and capitalize on the numerous resources it already has. This requires relatively little resources as the expensive assets area already in place – all the town needs to do is take charge of leveraging these to its own best benefit.

For outdoors and equestrian activities, this may just involve reaching out to local organizations such as the Montgomery County Road Runners, DC Triathlon Club⁴² or Maryland Hunt Races to gauge interest in holding events in Poolesville and demonstrate the high-quality facilities the town has to offer. For soccer events, this could involve working with the Maryland Soccerplex in Germantown to host matches that cannot be held at the facility on busy

weekends due to space constraints or working with MSI to host some of their matches and tournaments.

If Poolesville decides to focus on leveraging its outdoors resources for economic development, the town should hire an individual who has sole responsibility for coordinating this outreach process. By creating a single point of contact, the town can best provide a central point by which existing events can be orchestrated for maximum impact while also providing a consistent and easily accessible point of contact for outreach to outside organizations.

BUSINESS GROWTH AND RETENTION

Many of the activities discussed in this report seek to leverage assets that are somewhat underutilized, but there is a small and vibrant business community in Poolesville that can also be built upon. When speaking with business owners and residents, one theme about the community that is always raised is quality of life. Poolesville is a small, well-connected community where people can remember (and often lead the lifestyle of) a simpler time. This provides tremendous value for the businesses already in the community and represents a potential marketing opportunity for businesses seeking a place to start and grow.

The 2000 Census reported that 450 individuals in Poolesville worked out of their home – either in a home-based business or telecommuting. There is a growing trend in the region and nation of people seeking opportunities to live near where they work. In addition, as the nation emerges from the recession, there is an interest in more people undertaking entrepreneurial activities so they can have more control over their livelihood. Poolesville is well-situated to act upon these trends.

Small Business Incubator

Montgomery County was one of the first communities in the nation to seize upon the concept of establishing incubators for small companies, which provide flexible lease terms, business support and the synergy of working near other small businesses. The county's program began in the late 1990's and now has five incubators. The county's focus was primarily on growing technology companies and this has worked well as a concept. Interestingly, there has been very little focus on the growth of service sector businesses within the County – either in business services or those focused on consumers.

There is an opportunity for Poolesville to work with local property owners to identify and market a location within the community as the Poolesville Small Business Incubator. There are a number of models and activities that could be explored that range from partnering with a private firm to provide real estate space or the town subsidizing space with a local property owner. For example, the City of Gaithersburg worked with Scheer Partners with Scheer owning the commercial space and the city providing incentives and

funding to assist companies in outfitting the space for their requirements.⁴³ Conversely, there is a much more hands on model where the town would work with a property owner to either subsidize space for new businesses or provide an actual operating grant for new companies that are selected/recruited to be located in the incubator.

This concept was also referenced in the Agriculture section of this report, and the town could seek to develop an incubator with an agricultural focus that could also work in conjunction with a farm incubator. The town could support an incubator for either agricultural services or agricultural products that could leverage products being produced in the field.

Finally, the incubator concept could also be undertaken in conjunction with Montgomery County to provide a focus for new business creation that is not in the area the county is currently working, but could leverage county and town resources to create a partnership that would be very synergistic.

Local Zoning and Business Growth

One of the greatest assets for Poolesville as a municipality is authority over local land use. This creates a competitive advantage as compared to other communities in the county because there is a single point of contact for the community and a single organization that can make decisions to allow projects to move forward if they are in the best interest of the community. In much of the rest of the county any projects must go through the Montgomery County Planning Department and if there are significant changes required, potentially the County Council. This process can be long, drawn-out and expensive.

There is currently a trend in the nation to try and simplify zoning ordinances, especially in communities seeking increased economic activity. In conversations with local business owners, local zoning is an issue that was raised regarding the commercial sector of the community. Currently there are two zones governing any development within the commercial core of the community – the General Commercial (GC) zone and Central Business District (CBD). The goal of each is to provide for commercial development, but the CBD is also focused on stimulating the development and maintenance of the unique small town character of the original Town Center.

The commercial core of Poolesville is not very large, and to subdivide it into two separate zones with two sets of requirements appears to be creating barriers to future development of existing successful businesses or new commercial opportunities both of which the community would like to see occur. Since each zone requires site plan approval, it would seem that the goals of the CBD zone could be accomplished under the GC zone process thereby simplifying the efforts for anyone interested in developing while still allowing the town to retain its approval of the specific projects.

Another opportunity that builds upon the success of another local community is implementing an “economic development toolbox.” The City of Gaithersburg developed this concept to help businesses expand into existing space within the community by providing financial resources to help with retrofitting the space and building it out. This helps existing business expand and provides a mechanism that can be attractive to businesses that may be interested in locating in Poolesville. (See Appendix 8 for an overview of Gaithersburg’s program.)

Senior Housing

One of the key objectives of this report is to identify opportunities that can bring more people into Poolesville in an effort to spur economic activity. There are already single-family residential projects underway that will bring additional families into the community, but there is another significant residential opportunity that Orion believes the town should explore – senior housing.

As the population in the nation, region, county and community age with the first stage of the baby boom generation beginning to retire, there continues to be increased demand for affordable and accessible senior housing. As more and more families are becoming caregivers to older family members or grandparents want to be near their families and grandchildren, there is an opportunity to provide housing in the community that will allow this to occur. There are already successful examples of this in the county in Olney and Germantown.

These developments provide access to moderately sized, multi-family units of affordable senior housing within local communities and neighborhoods, which provide access to already existing amenities, local infrastructure, and community. Poolesville is again well situated to explore this concept with local property owners and residential developers. While this type of opportunity is itself a potential economic benefit, it also aids in the community marketing its quality of life more broadly as it increases inter-generational activities.

Associations

While it is likely to be challenging to focus on business relocation because of the continuing competition to attract or retain business throughout the region, there may be a niche that Poolesville may want to consider. The National Capital Region is home to a great percentage of the nation’s membership associations and non-profit organizations because it is a central location, provides access to national policy-makers, and is a place that members will generally be willing to travel to for events. Often it is important for organizations to have access to many things in Washington, D.C, and it is often not particularly relevant or important except when there are membership meetings or annual legislative activities that usually occur once or twice in a calendar year. Oftentimes the organization’s location in the region is one of convenience rather than necessity (i.e. that’s where other organizations like them are located).

Many of the smaller organizations with 20 – 50 employees often can't provide particularly high-paying jobs, but they can provide a more set schedule, more flexibility and a higher quality of life. One or two of these organizations would be an ideal fit for Poolesville. Again, building on the agricultural or outdoor themes, reaching out to organizations with a mission in these areas and working with local property owners to implement an incentive package for relocating organizations could be very attractive. In particular if the organization has a mission associated with agriculture, historic preservation, outdoor sporting and recreational activities, or national parks. An example of where something like this occurs is Santa Fe, New Mexico where *Outdoor Magazine* is headquartered because the location provides access to outdoor activities for its employees. The type of organization that could be worth exploring is the American Farm Bureau Federation – an organization that is grounded in agriculture, needs to be in proximity of Washington, DC and builds on a strong local Farm Bureau.

While Orion thinks there is potential in exploring this type of opportunity, we think it could also be very time consuming with a low payoff – a bit like finding a needle in a haystack. Nevertheless, this is the type of concept that can be discussed with local community members who may work for such organizations, or discussed at broader region-wide meetings like the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments, Maryland Municipal League and others.

MISCELLANEOUS OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUNDING

One of the most exciting elements associated with many of the projects outlined in this report is the opportunity for partnerships and funding assistance. As has been highlighted in previous portions of the report, a number of different funding opportunities are available depending on which alternatives the town decides to pursue. When pursuing outside funding, the town is in a very advantageous position as unlike a start-up organization or more traditional non-profit, the Town of Poolesville enjoys a long history, municipal infrastructure and access to financial resources. This provides an opportunity to approach potential funders as partners because of all that the town brings to the table. Possible avenues for funding are outlined below:

Federal Resources

In the most recent Congressional redistricting of 2012, the Town of Poolesville has been moved into a new Congressional district. Regardless of who wins the race, Poolesville will have new representation in Congress. This provides the community with the opportunity to reach out to its new representative and show them the unique assets that exist, and particularly the federal assets like the C&O Canal and NIH. It is important for the representative to understand that these vital national assets exist in such a small community and additional support may be required. Additionally, there may also be an opportunity for Poolesville to work with other small communities facing similar economic situations to develop proposals for economic assistance that could benefit the region.⁴⁴

State Resources

Many of the programs that have been suggested in this report could be of interest to various departments within State government. The local state delegation has been helpful to the community in the past, and specific proposals can be developed around any one of these opportunities and presented to the Maryland Department of Agriculture and Maryland Department of Economic Development for funding assistance. Again, one of the competitive advantages that can be brought to bear is that the town has some resources it could leverage to assist any proposal or partnership and this is viewed favorably as the state continues to face economic challenges.

County Resources

Montgomery County has already shown a great deal of interest in agriculture, economic development and education. It is likely that a clear proposal outlining a specific role for county government will achieve some degree of success. The county recently announced funding for efforts in the area of a farm incubator, as well as the recent creation of a Food Council to look at sustainable food production and distribution. There is a great deal of opportunity for partnership at the county level which will in turn strengthen any proposals at the state and federal levels.

Local Foundations

As has been referenced previously in this report, there are a number of specific activities that may be of interest to local foundations and a number of them are identified earlier.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

While the recent nationwide recession has affected the Poolesville community, there are many options available to cultivate sustainable long-term economic growth. The most significant issue facing the town is determining which option (s), if any, it would choose for future development. This is not a simple issue. In fact, there are those in the community who look at the community's assets and may question the need for change and for the town to do anything. However, the approach taken in this report builds upon characteristics that are already ingrained in the community, but need to be taken to a higher level to see greater economic opportunity – thereby taking what is already good in the community and making it stronger.

One of the precipitating events leading to the request for this report was the closing of Selby's Market. This was a significant blow to many long-time residents as it signaled change within the community and was the loss of a local landmark. There are many factors that go into deciding when and where to open a grocery store, and the right person or organization may look at Poolesville in the future as an enticing opportunity. This report may or may not influence that decision. The goal of this report is to identify a series of viable economic development options that the town could seek to implement. If successful, there will likely be many positive benefits for the community and among them could be a new local food market.

Poolesville is rich in assets, heritage and community character. A number of these assets can be leveraged to develop a sustainable plan for local growth that does not compete directly with any other community. A key theme among these assets is agriculture. While it is clearly a part of the community's past and present, the town has yet to integrate it into the fabric of the local economy. This report outlines a number of exciting ways that this can occur that will be of benefit to the town and the region as a whole.

There are also activities that the community can undertake in the areas of outdoor and recreational activities that build upon some smaller activities that are already underway. There are already soccer games, bike races, polo matches and other activities that take place, but they are often "one off" activities and not a part of a more coordinated set of activities that make Poolesville a destination. With a clear plan and marketing activities, Poolesville could be an outdoor activities hub that will attract people from throughout the region to come and spend their weekends engaging in all that the community has to offer.

Sometimes there are basic things that a community can reexamine too. For example, minor tweaks to the zoning code, residential development with a focus on seniors or even small incentives to assist new business growth can provide the catalyst for economic development the community is seeking.

Perhaps the most two most important elements that the town should take away from this report are: 1) there is an array of viable sustainable options that can be chosen to help increase economic growth and 2) there needs to be a clear course of direction selected with someone/something in place to own the process with resources committed to move the process forward. Put simply, there is a lot that can be done, but someone has to be in place with the tools to do it.

The timing for the community to move forward is positive. The economy appears to be making incremental improvement, which means that people are looking for good opportunities, but are not moving too quickly because identifying capital for projects is still challenging. In the area of agriculture, there are many conversations underway throughout the region in which the town could begin to engage that would help bring more focus for the interested organizations and position the community in a leadership role.

The next steps for the town need to be ones of decision and action. First, Orion would recommend a series of work group sessions to determine which, if any, of the options presented are of interest to the town. Second, a person/small group should be identified to implement the community's economic development activities. Third, the economic development entity should develop a strategy and work plan laying out short, mid and long term objectives and corresponding resources required to undertake and pursue those tasks. Finally, the town, through its leadership, should dedicate itself to the pursuit of its strategy.

It is important to recognize that sustainable economic development programs focus on long-term growth. There may be short-term wins, but those are the outliers, not the norm. Poolesville's economic development effort will require ongoing commitment and oversight if it is to succeed. Some chosen alternatives may not work. Therefore, one of the key activities in an economic development program needs to be oversight by the town on a regular (probably quarterly) basis to assess how activities are proceeding and work with the economic development leadership to make candid assessments of where things stand. In the words of the entrepreneurial world, it is important to "kill things early" so the town can focus on the projects with the highest likelihood for success.

This can be an exciting time for Poolesville if it decides to pursue actions to seek additional economic growth. The town has many enviable assets and tremendous potential; all that is required is committing to a defined course of action.

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APPENDICES

The following is a list of the appendices contained in this report. Due to the extensive nature of the attached reports and documents, appendices have been provided to the Town of Poolesville in PDF Files.

Appendix 1: Commercial Space Available in Poolesville

Appendix 2: Montgomery County Farmers Markets

Appendix 3: USDA Regional Food Hub Resource Guide

Appendix 4: Frederick Breweries get into 'Locavore' Movement

Appendix 5: Montgomery County Food Council

Appendix 6: Can't Get Away from DC? Here are Some Good Day Trips

Appendix 7: OBGC Olney, Maryland

Appendix 8: City of Gaithersburg Economic Development Toolbox