



Rich History, Bright Future
Frederick County
Government
Frederick, Maryland

News Release

Winchester Hall/12 East Church Street
Frederick, Maryland 21701
CONTACT: Robin K. Santangelo
Public Information Officer
301-600-2590
rsantangelo@FrederickCountyMD.gov

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE JAN GARDNER DELIVERS THE “STATE OF THE COUNTY”

FREDERICK, MD – County Executive Jan Gardner today delivered the [State of the County](#), emphasizing that Frederick County is one of the best places to live, work and raise a family in America.

Executive Gardner commented, “After seven very busy and productive months of transitioning to our new Charter form of government, our citizens can see that I am focusing my initiatives on maintaining a vibrant and safe community, exceptional public schools and high quality services for our citizens. Key initiatives are job creation, economic development and making sure we have excellent schools, because I feel that education is the foundation of our economic prosperity.

“Overall, my message to our citizens is positive and that we are doing well. The county’s conservative budget that was approved recently put us in a position to maintain our excellent bond rating. However, there are many things we need to do to maintain our status, like investing in public education, working to provide affordable housing and planning for changing demographics, particularly in anticipation of the growth with the seniors’ population, as well as meeting the needs for the millennials, the workforce of the future.

“As the first county executive, I am trying to be a voice of moderation, listening to all views and balancing the competing needs in our community. I welcome and encourage citizen feedback.

“I would also like to express my appreciation to County Council President Bud Otis for the good working relationship we have forged. In addition, our county employees, especially our division and department directors, are doing an outstanding job and we will continue to value their work and the role they play in maintaining the quality of life we enjoy in Frederick County. Together, we will continue to work to secure a bright future for our citizens.”

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Highlights of the State of the County include:

- Information on demographics: Frederick County is the eighth largest county in Maryland by population with over 234,000 residents. The average home price in 2014 was \$294,000, up from \$265,000 five years ago, reflecting a recovering economy and an increase in housing demand.
- Unemployment rate: As of April 2015, the rates were: county, 4.3 percent; state, 5.3 percent, and national, 5.5 percent. Unemployment in Frederick County continues to trend lower than the state and national averages. Unemployment in Frederick County was as high as 7.3 percent in January 2010.
- Jobs: Frederick County boasts a wide diversity of employment from small mom-and-pop shops to major employers, and every industry sector is represented. The economy is relatively stable due to a diverse job base which provides a source of strength and resiliency. Job growth in the county has been higher than in the state overall and average weekly wages are up modestly by about 3.6 percent over the past four years. Fort Detrick is Frederick County's largest employer and is an economic engine both in terms of jobs and investment in science research and infrastructure.
- Diverse economy: Frederick is emerging as a leading national location for the bioscience industry and is located within the Maryland Biotech Cluster. Over 80 bioscience companies call Frederick County home -- the second largest number of biotech companies in the State of Maryland. The Frederick region is also home to a large number of technology companies because the majority of the fiber optic networks supplying Washington, D.C., are routed through Frederick County.
- Agriculture: Continuing in the county's tradition as an agricultural community, this industry remains a significant part of Frederick County's economy, with farmers producing almost \$150 million of agricultural products annually. Additionally, Frederick County is Maryland's largest dairy producer. In 2011 the county was in the top 10 counties in the U.S. for the most permanently preserved land, with over 51,000 acres.
- Live here, work here: A large percentage of Frederick County residents live and work in Frederick County -- 57.7 percent.
- Economic initiatives: Efforts will continue to brand Frederick County has a hub for bioscience, technology and knowledge-based industries. The Office of Economic Development was recently elevated to be under the direct supervision of the County Executive's Office. Efforts are underway to create a second incubator in a downtown Frederick location to encourage start ups and attract younger, skilled and well-educated employees. The county executive will reestablish a Small Business Revolving Loan Fund, expand tax credit opportunities for manufacturing, create a new Business and Industry Advisory Cabinet and actively support the Downtown Conference Center and Hotel project.

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- Public education: Frederick County has an outstanding public school system. The 2014 graduation rate was 92.6 percent. SAT scores surpass the state average by 87 points and also surpass the national average by 58 points. All Frederick County high schools rank in the nation’s top 11 percent for encouraging students to take Advance Placement or International Baccalaureate tests, according to the *Washington Post’s* 2015 “Challenge Index.”

Looking to the future: The county executive will continue to invest funding above the Maintenance of Effort for strategic objectives, work to reduce school overcrowding and develop a plan to address the needs of children living in poverty.

- Frederick Community College: With the enrollment of over 6,000 students, there are positive results from dual enrollment with Frederick County Public Schools, progress with workforce development and continuing efforts to keep the community college affordable.
- Law enforcement: A fundamental responsibility of local government is to ensure the safety of its citizens. Emergency call volume has increased 1.4 percent with total calls for service at 96,649. Last year, the county experienced a six percent overall decrease in serious crimes with significant decreases in other incidents. The county maintains an overall crime rate of less than one-half of the national average of crimes committed per 1,000 residents.
- Public works: The Office of Highway Operations, Division of Public Works, currently maintains 1,273 centerline miles of roads, including 218 bridges, with a full-time staff of 75 employees. Staff worked long and hard hours this past winter, responding to more than 30 separate winter weather events, some lasting multiple days. In addition to maintaining 151 buildings on 58 separate sites totaling more than 1.5 million square feet, the Office of Facility Maintenance with a staff of 31 employees has taken on numerous special projects.
- High quality services: County Executive Gardner expressed appreciation to all county divisions, but due to time constraints for the State of the County, she focused on libraries, parks and health services. Others will be addressed in the future, including TransIT, Animal Control, Housing, the Child Advocacy Center and many more.

Libraries: Almost 100,000 patrons visit a county library every month. The new Walkersville Branch is slated for FY2017.

Parks & recs: Over 17,700 people participated in recreational programs – a 31 percent increase from FY2014. County summer camps are very popular with over 3,700 children signed up this year. Fitness programs, sports leagues and aquatics programs are all very popular.

Health Department: Commended as one of the first in the country to receive accreditation for excellence in public health. Frederick County has one of the lowest healthcare uninsured rates in Maryland and the country.

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- Tackling heroin: With heroin overdoses and fatalities growing in recent years at an alarming rate, many county government agencies including the Sheriff’s Office, Division of Fire & Rescue Services, the Health Department, Frederick Police Department and others such as community non-profits are working together to address this problem.
- Talking trash: The Solid Waste Management Department has seen the transfer of over 140,000 tons of waste, 22,500 tons of recycled material and 10,000 tons of yard waste over the last year. The county executive recently launched a solid waste initiative called “What’s Next” that includes community meetings, a steering committee and facilitator to assist with the process.
- Housing trends: The trend in housing permits is up, reflecting a slowly recovering economy. It remains well below the average of 1,500 to 1,800 units per year that Frederick County experienced during the 1990’s and 2000’s. Likewise, commercial and industrial construction is trending up in terms of construction dollars expended and the number of permits.
- Population dynamics: The county’s population doubled over the past 40 years with most of the population growth driven from people in the family-formation years or workforce age population (mostly baby boomers). While the population of people over 65 is growing rapidly across the country, in Frederick County this 65-plus age group will grow twice as fast as the nation.

This growing aging population means fewer households will be in peak earning and peak spending years, which may translate into lower consumer spending. Since consumer spending plays a large role in driving the economy, there are challenging implications for Frederick County.

- Opportunities for the future: To ensure a prosperous future, the county will plan for the aging population and grow the next generation by keeping and attracting millennials to live here and work here. The county will look at the potential reduced demand for suburban and rural large lot housing. Efforts to update the Frederick County Comprehensive Plan will be announced in the near future.
- Creating a culture of good government: Making a smooth transition to Charter government has been one of Executive Gardner’s top priorities over the past seven months. An important part of this effort has been to create a culture of good government, including the appointment of an Ethics Task Force, which completed its work in June, and an update to the Ethics Ordinance. Public outreach has been emphasized through weekly press briefings, community proclamations and town meetings, as well as other public information vehicles such as the Frederick County Government website (www.FrederickCountyMD.gov), FCG-TV (cable channel 19) and social media outlets.

Watch the State of the County at www.tinyurl.com/FrederickStateofCounty and access just the presentation slides at www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/stateofcounty.

For further information on the State of the County, contact Special Projects Manager Margaret Nusbaum at 301-600-7700 or via e-mail at mnusbaum@FrederickCountyMD.gov.