Mayor Raymond M. Morriss
Councilman Richard J. "Rock" Cioni
Councilman Eugene T. Frazier
Councilman James L. Furstenberg
Councilman Brian R. Lepley

City Administrator Jeffrey F. Silka
City Solicitor Michael S. Cohen
City Clerk Allison K. Layton

Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

WORK SESSION

Rocky Gap's Executive Boardroom
16701 Lakeview Road, NE
Flintstone, MD 21530
Wednesday, September 24, 2025; 9:00 am

PRESENT: Mayor Raymond M. Morriss; Council Members: Richard J. "Rock" Cioni, Eugene Frazier, James Furstenberg, Brian Lepley.

ALSO PRESENT: Jeffrey F. Silka, City Administrator; Allison Layton, City Clerk; Shannon Berry, Assistant to the City Clerk; and Ashley James, Executive Administrative Assistant

Public: Kit Pepper Lescalette

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE GOAL SETTING PROCESS

Mr. Silka began the discussion and noted that today would be to revisit and review the session from October 2023, review the SWOT analysis and present updates and new goals for the next two years to be presented at a Work Session meeting.

Goals for 2023:

- Fiscal Well-Being
- General Communication

- Neighborhood Revitalization
- Staff Enhancements
- Governmental & Community Partner Relations

Mr. Silka reviewed the bullets under each category above and highlighted projects and changes that occurred throughout the year, as well as their impact on each category. (See attached) Council provided feedback on areas still needing improvements.

- Fiscal Well Being

  He provided an example with the project on Shades Lane, noting that with the dump having been shut down, resulting in the use of the landfill, the cost has now increased the already determined amount by $30 to $40K. These are just costs that cannot be foreseen. Our staff has done an exceptional job in sourcing and utilizing enhancements, as well as obtaining grants at the local level. Infrastructure needs will be ongoing and constantly changing due to wear and tear.

  With road paving, we aim to follow a 3-5-7-year cycle of sealing and protecting the pavement. Using CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funds for paving projects limits the amount of work that can be done due to the use of Davis-Bacon wages at 35% and additional requirements. Our target is coordinating with the water/sewer/gas work, so when we are not paving and tearing.

- The increase in real estate evaluations and property investments is growing each year. The hope is that, in the long run, more projects throughout the city will help lower property tax rates. Currently, the rising costs of goods and services make that difficult to predict. Mr. Silka shared an example: the last fire truck purchased was for $800K and is now valued at $1.2M in today's market. Our Fleet management departments do an excellent job with routine maintenance and proactively addressing service issues.

- One benefit of police taking home vehicles is that a car is not being used on three shifts a day; instead, it is assigned to one driver who takes it home at the end of the shift. Regarding the Fire Department, the current reserve engines are nearing the end of their lifespan, and a used replacement will need to be budgeted for next year. The newest engine from 1998 is leaking oil and may need to be taken off the road. It's also important to keep in mind that the new fleet may start to

experience wear and tear in a few years, which should be considered in the budget.

- To enhance communication, we are upgrading our website and boosting our ability to convey messages to citizens to help shape the narrative. Positive feedback has been received regarding our social media presence. A plan is also being developed for citizen messaging, along with providing a platform to share our messages and updates with the community.

- Blight removal efforts are continuous and will always be ongoing. Code enforcement continues, and a revised Ordinance is being drafted to address areas that need improvement. Efforts to remove blight are ongoing and will continue.

  To better control code violations, it was suggested increasing rental registration fees to $50 or approve licenses based on the tenant's history with the city. In addition, conducting yearly inspections as opposed to in between tenants could help identify properties that are deteriorating sooner, allowing for earlier intervention.

- When it comes to preserving our historic buildings, the City has taken a user-friendly approach to providing assistance to follow the state guidelines. As a certified municipality, we are eligible for tax credits and grant funding.

- Expanding on staff development involves assessing whether employees are ready to advance to the next level within their department or transfer to another department, and identifying the necessary steps to support that progression. Retirements over the next five years are expected to create numerous openings, so preparing staff now can help ensure a smooth transition.

- Focusing on how we can leverage technology is important. Many tasks that are currently supported can be done electronically. The current cost to generate and pay a water bill is $2.99. Providing a terminal for customers to use could save the city that expense.

- Cross-training is essential and continuous, particularly for departments that are seasonal, to ensure they have sufficient work.

- Our relationship with the County & State has improved over the past two years. We are currently working on building a relationship with the Strategic Housing Alliance and HRDC to establish an office for anyone interested in buying a home, where they can access all the necessary education and information to move forward with the process.

- For College and Career Center development, Mr. Silka suggested a town and gown committee that would focus on leveraging resources and forming internships.

II. REVIEW OF SWOT ANALYSIS

Mr. Silka reviewed the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) for 2023 to identify modifications to implement for the next two years and Council provided feedback on areas for improvement.

Strengths:

- Revitalization projects: Baltimore Street, Virginia Avenue, creating new residential and commercial opportunities and changing the perception.
- Quality of life amenities
- Relocation Program
- Citizen's Local Government Academy
- Private Investments/ Community Buy-In
- Bond Rating
- Committed Management Staff

Weaknesses:

- Absentee landlords
- Homeless population

- Blight within the City
- Higher-paying jobs
- Lack of housing options
- Low tax base / high tax rate – double taxation
- Recreational opportunities
- Negativity on Social Media

Opportunities:

- Finishing projects
- Mainstreet Project – Community Revitalization Bureau
- Attainable Housing Coalition
- Sports facility \ River Park \Dog Park\ Walking track at Mason Complex
- Multi-use development
- Enhance community policing
- Raise Code enforcement standards
- Communication engagement with residents
- South End improvements

Threats:

- Social Media
- Blight Properties
- State Fiscal / State Building Codes
- Population Decline
- Uncertainty of Federal Funds
- Absentee Landlords/enforcement of local management

III. STRATEGIC INITIATIVES FOR 2025:

- Levitt Amp possibly installing an amphitheater
- Sports facility
- UPMC being more involved with the community
- Engaging with colleges and universities

IV. REVIEW OF MISSION STATEMENT

Mr. Silka reviewed the previous mission statement and solicited feedback. The council agreed with the mission outlined in the statement.

V. DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC GOALS

Mr. Silka reviewed goals from 2023 and invited feedback or changes needed for the next two years:

- Public Safety (Fleet)
- Bring lighting back to South Cumberland
- Neighborhood groups – have tried in the past with low response and negativity. All agreed to consider encouraging the groups again.
- Citizen Engagement – Citizens' Local Government Academy would be a good platform to encourage the neighborhood groups.
- Parks and Recreation – multi-generational recreation. Currently, the focus is on youth. Providing programs for older residents is a worthwhile consideration.
- Community surveys

Continued work on staff enhancements is ongoing with administration providing cross-training to ensure adequate coverage during staff absences. With staff retirements approaching, a succession plan is crucial to have in place.
Fostering a positive culture is essential for employees to thrive and should be encouraged among directors. Creating an environment where they enjoy coming to work and collaborating with colleagues boosts morale and encourages them to give their best to the City.

The relationship with county and State Representatives has improved over the last 5-6 years. MML and MACO provide excellent education for our local representatives and the opportunity to observe developments in other municipalities.

Mr. Silka advised that the goals and ideas discussed would be drafted and presented at a Work Session meeting for review.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business at hand, the meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Allison K. Layton
City Clerk

Minutes approved on October 21, 2025