

MINUTES
Town of Bel Air Focus Group for Comprehensive Strategic Plan
Meeting #1 Sensitive Area/Water Resources
Monday May 17, 2021

The Bel Air Department of Planning convened a focus group to gather input for the upcoming comprehensive plan. This took place at 5:30 p.m. at Bel Air's Town Hall.

PRESENT:

Brad Burdette, Free Masons
Patti Dresher, Dresher Foundation & Katherine's Keepers
Terry Hanley, Resident
Deanna Harkins, Harford County Climate Action
Jenny Jarkowski, Harford County Planning & Zoning
John Kane, Property Owner
Paul Magness, Harford County Parks & Recreation
Susan Niewenhous, Resident & Appearance & Beautification Committee member
Rachael Rice, Business & Property Owner
Sandy Schlehr, Resident

OTHERS PRESENT:

Kathi Santora, Recording Secretary
Rod Bourn, Owner of Down/Set/Lead

Mr. Bourn opened the meeting, introduced himself and described the focus group's purpose in the Town's strategic planning process. This is the first of four planned focus groups and this one will focus on Sensitive Areas/Water Resources. All attendees introduced themselves.

Mr. Bourn explained the SWOT analysis and its use to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as they relate to tonight's topic. He went on to use small and large group discussions to identify these.

He also later organized small groups to address the questions "What really needs to be addressed?" and "It would be really cool if . . ."

Strengths

- Native species with knowledgeable staff and local businesses that sell these **
- Rockfield Manor
- MA & PA Trail
- Nine community parks
- Recent Plumtree Park stream restoration
- Strong zoning code **

- Proactive commissioners and Town staff
- Tree Committee/ Tree City USA recognition
- Shamrock Park
- Positive working relationship with Harford County
- Flat terrain/moderate climate
- Interested community/hobby groups related to sustainability and nature
- Organic pesticide/herbicide options available **
- Potential resources for Federal and state funding
- Signage for bicyclists and pedestrians
- Dog parks

Weaknesses

- Limited geography/opportunities for further development and redevelopment
- Invasive species
- Need a variety of tree species in town to minimize insects and invasive species
- Surplus some government-owned properties

Threats

- Extreme weather events/climate change
- Development of certain areas, such as Liriodendron
- Lack of, or low, financial resources
- Invasive insects, such as Emerald Ash Borer
- Local stores that still sell invasive species
- Noise and light pollution
- Litter/plastics
- Overuse or degradation of certain areas
- Increase in vehicle traffic; decreased opportunities for biking and walking
- Apathy
- Old/Undeveloped property like the old High's location

Opportunities

- Potential Federal and state funding
- Strong community/volunteer base such as Tree Committee and Appearance & Beautification Committee
- Zoning code /redevelopment opportunities **
- More redevelopment like that of the old school building on Gordon Street
- Conserve current assets **

What really needs to be addressed

- Seeking funding sources **
- “Green” redevelopment
- Road salt run-off
- Invasive species
- Conservation of what we have
- Finding infrastructure dollars
- Preparation for extreme weather
- Reforestation
- Human and other resources
- Organic/pesticide/herbicide treatments

“It would be really cool if . . .”

. . . there was

- A balance of nature, landscape and modern conveniences on Main Street (Bozeman, Montana)
- No development in Abingdon Woods. Though it is not in town, no development will be a positive for Harford County
- A majority of residents who practice green initiatives
- No visible trash
- Resources to make a park for each neighborhood **
- Substantial funds for infrastructure improvement
- Rooftop gardens
- More alley gardens and walking paths
- A larger dog park with trees and a stream
- Solar power on municipal buildings
- More green space in front of the Court House
- More educational and wayfinding signage

General Discussion comments: The Town already has a strong base of committed residents, a strong tax base, attractive appearance, minimal vandalism, strong government staff;

**After compiling these lists, Mr. Bourn directed the group to each place a total of eight check marks next to the items in the SWOT analysis and “wish list” that are most important to him/her. These are the items that received three or more votes.

Mr. Bourn noted that these exercises have created the core of a strategic plan for the Bel Air Planning Department. Adding information about the group’s “Aspirations” and “Results” will help to narrow down these priorities.

Aspirations

- Green practices
- Zoning & Redevelopment
- Decrease impervious surfaces
- Education about native species
- Rewilding certain areas

Results

- Assessments/survey of green spaces
- Incorporation of practices by Town and subcontractors
- Increase permit issuances
- More green space at Town entrances/decrease percentage of hard surfaces/Aerial measurements
- Education campaigns
- Completion of rewilding projects

Mr. Bourn asked for final input. There was a question as to the outcomes of these discussions. Mr. Small stated the Town is still waiting on Census 2020 results. When available, that data will be compiled with tonight's discussions. He would like to reconvene this group in the fall or next year to report on the resulting draft plans and obtain additional feedback.

A participant praised the Town's responsiveness to inquiries from residents and businesses. There is a high quality of life here. Another participant stated that this group is an example of that responsiveness.

Mr. Small invited group members to contact him with any questions or concerns, including those not related to tonight's topic.

With the permission of the group, and as a result of a question, Mr. Small will send the group roster to all participants.

ADOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.