

**MINUTES**  
**Town of Bel Air Focus Group for Comprehensive Strategic Plan**  
**Meeting #2 Community Facilities/Historic Preservation**  
Tuesday May 18, 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:**

Hank Allen, American Legion  
Graham Becker, Tree Committee  
Jeff Campbell, Historic Preservation Committee  
Phil Crocker, Upper Chesapeake Health  
Kristien Foss, Cultural Arts Commission  
Richard Hicks, Bel Air Recreation Council  
Frank Kellner, Harford Mutual  
Beth McFadden, St. Margaret School  
Laura Musser, Resident  
Charles Robbins, Civilian Advisory Board  
Blaise Sedney, St. Matthews Church/Resident  
Diane Sengstacke, A & E District/Business Owner

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Rowan Glidden, Planner  
Patti Parker, Community & Public Relations Manager  
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 second of four planned focus groups and this one will focus on Community Facilities/Historic Preservation. 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**

- The Town has significance in the community as a county seat

- Accessible location
- Town takes the opportunity to honor businesses and homeowners, e.g. Archer Bull Award and Bel Air Business of the Year
- There are many places that deserve recognition and promotion
- Continuity of community over the years
- Unique character/sense of place
- There are opportunities for redevelopment/repurposing
- History shows the town's evolution
- There are a variety of building types for visual interest and use

### **Weaknesses**

- Lack of recognition of the history and significance of certain buildings
- Lack of land to expand property
- Need more promotion of historical facilities
- Lack of functionality within the property
- Lack of coordination of events/buildings/places; need leadership to plan this out

### **Threats**

- Lack of funding revenue
- Local competition for public meeting spaces
- Apathy
- People who are afraid of coming to public spaces (health)
- Vandalism/weather damage/aging facilities

### **Opportunities**

- To elevate stories of under-represented and minority groups who have contributed to the Town. This would be through preservation activities, focused events and celebrations
- Solicit local businesses for pro bono services
- Organize a historical walking tour through town
- Modernize local government facilities
- Use the arts as a core community unifier

### **What really needs to be addressed**

- If two-way traffic on Main Street is viable
- Assemble a community charrette to address Main Street future
- Enterprise Zone to encourage business on Main Street
- Cloud IT services rather than maintaining a data center
- Water costs and vulnerability, especially as it impacts restaurants

- Multiple business vacancies on Main Street/incentivize owners to sell or lease
- Limited bicycling areas
- Modernize county buildings
- Develop mixed use areas

**“It would be really cool if . . .”**

- In-person guided historic walks
- Guided historic walks app
- Sponsored use of facilities for nonprofit groups
- If all historically preserved sites were identified with signage
- There were interpretations inside historically significant buildings that reflect its history
- Regular events that celebrate the Town of Bel Air overall
- Public transportation such as a trolley that would ease traffic congestion during events
- Funds directed to promote and preserve
- Splash park for families
- Art gallery pop-up shops
- Interesting gathering areas for teens

**Things not included in Historic Preservation that concern me:**

- Ensuring the economic vitality of downtown
- Availability of hotels/B & Bs for visitors
- Cost of water
- Too much regulation/takes too much time to get things done
- Empty commercial property
- The future of the Harford Mall
- Lack of traffic flow
- Traffic and easy parking availability
- Overdevelopment
- Ability for businesses to thrive
- Overcrowding
- Too many unneeded regulations

Mr. Bourn noted that these exercises have created the core of a strategic plan for the Bel Air Planning Department.

Mr. Bourn asked for final input. He expects that the group will reconvene in the fall or next year to report on the resulting draft plans and obtain additional feedback.

**ADOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.