

**MINUTES**  
**Town of Bel Air Focus Group for Comprehensive Strategic Planning**  
**Meeting #4 Housing/Land Use**  
Monday May 24, 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:**

Kenneth Avery, NAACP  
Mary Chance, Greater Bel Air Community Foundation  
Linda Cole/HOA  
David Guzewich, Lions Club  
Ed Hopkins, Harford County Emergency Services  
Charles Johnson, Assisted Living  
Fran Johnson, Elderly & Needy Committee  
Rob Reier, Wellness Committee  
Amber Schrodos, Harford County Community Services  
Bill Snyder, Bel Air Volunteer Fire Department

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Patti Parker, Community & Public Relations Manager  
Laura Bianca-Pruett, Planner  
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 last of four planned focus groups. This one will focus on **Housing/Land Use**. 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.

**Strengths**

- Walkable\*\*
- Variety of housing
- Close to resources
- Strong schools
- Strong facilities

- Low Crime\*\*

### **Weaknesses**

- Housing affordability, especially for seniors and young families\*\*
- Senior independent living
- Transportation
- Parking
- Bike paths
- Overnight accommodations

### **Opportunities**

- Redevelop/infill; remix/reuse\*\*
- Pedestrian friendly\*\*
- Make Bel Air a destination
- Increase Town's viability
- Redefine town identity
- Hotels/B & B

### **Threats**

- "Megatropolis"/loss of historic identity
- Traffic exceeding infrastructure\*\*
- Increased crime/gang activity
- Increased taxes/demand exceeding services
- Group homes
- Homelessness
- Overdevelopment/residential vs. commercial
- Mall vacancies

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

### **Key concerns not under the Housing/Land Use topic**

- Traffic safety/pedestrian awareness\*\*
- Acquisition of Rt. 24 (Main Street) from SHA to allow Town greater control over use for community events, etc.\*\* (discussion about other towns who have experimented with this, e.g. Cumberland, Williamsburg)
- Increased government demand for services will require Bel Air to expand government structure
- Communication via other means than social media

- Flight path to UCMC ER causes noise issues
- Need diversity
- Web access

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

- Rt. 24 traffic could be diverted off Main Street\*\*
- Bel Air was a destination; known for something unique
- HCC annex in Town
- Walking bridge over Rt. 22/Entrance to Town
- Monorail
- Wi-Fi
- Accessory use/cottage housing/ Airbnb
- Acquire Liriodendron as a meeting/retreat/event facility
- Walking bridge Rt. 24 to Harford Mall

**General Discussion comments:** Mr. Bourn confirmed that the participants felt that the lists reflected their viewpoints.

\*\*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.

**Top Concerns**

- Ped friendly/walkable – 9 votes
- Redevelopment/remix/reuse (eyesores) – 7 votes
- Traffic exceeding infrastructure – 6 votes
- Housing affordability – 6 votes
- Low crime – 5 votes
- Traffic diverted off Main Street – 4 votes

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. There was none. He expects that the group will reconvene in the fall or next year to report on resulting draft plans and to obtain additional feedback.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.