



CHAPTER 12: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

GOALS

As previously detailed in Chapter 2, Union Bridge has set forth the following goals:

- To improve resident awareness of the comprehensive plans, community decisions, and the impacts of each
- To continue to provide, and increase where possible, public participation in community issues and decisions

CURRENT CONDITIONS

The citizens of the Union Bridge community are provided with many opportunities to participate in and have influence over both the Town's and the County's decision-making processes concerning their area. Along with conventional activities, such as voting and attending council meetings, committees, and workshops, other types of opportunities are also available as means for citizen involvement and participation.

1 Government Structure

A MAYOR

Both the Mayor and the five Town Council positions are voted on at-large by the citizens of the Town of Union Bridge. The Mayor is elected to serve a four-year term as the primary executive officer of the Town. Those seeking the office must be a qualified registered voter of the Town and have resided within the town limits for a least one year.

B TOWN COUNCIL

Members of the Town Council, with whom all legislative powers of the Town are vested, also serve four-year terms. These terms are staggered so that elections for town officials in Union Bridge are actually held every other year. Two Town Council positions coincide with the election of the Mayor, with the remaining three positions being elected in between. Those seeking election to the Town Council must also meet the same demographic qualifications as the Mayor. Vacancies in either the Mayor's office or on the Town Council are filled by a qualified person selected and approved by a majority of the remaining Town Council members.



C BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

The unincorporated areas with Carroll County, including the Union Bridge environs, are governed by the three-member Board of County Commissioners. The Board has both executive and legislative authority for the jurisdiction and holds many final-decision making powers to address issues with the community. Currently, the Commissioners are elected at large and serve for a four-year term. The Board is required by law to hold public hearings on changes to a diversity of regulations and plans such as zoning maps, the zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations and the Water and Sewer Master Plan, prior to any final action. These hearing are required to be publicly advertised and are open to all citizens for their input and comments.

D LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

The Mayor retains passage and/or veto power of any ordinance approved by the Town Council. The Mayor has six days (excluding Sunday) from the time of Council approval to either sign or veto an ordinance. If no action is taken within that time period, the ordinance automatically becomes law. In the case of a veto, members of the Town Council have thirty-five calendar days to override a veto with a four-fifths majority.

With the successful passage of an ordinance, citizens of the town may call for a referendum by filing a petition containing the signatures of no less than twenty percent of the town's qualified voters. These petitions must arrive at the Town Hall no later than twenty calendar days after the passage of an ordinance. This referendum can occur at either the next general election or, at the Council's discretion, during a special election. No ordinance, upon receipt of such a petition, shall take effect until such matters are resolved through either the general or special election. A simple majority of voters may carry a referendum.

The three-member Board of Carroll County Commissioners serves as both the executive and legislative body for the jurisdiction. Their powers are derived from the state's governing body through enabling legislation. Because Carroll County is neither a code nor a charter governed-county, the Maryland Legislature must adopt many of the laws that govern the County.

E TOWN PLANNING COMMISSION

The Town Planning Commission is a five-member commission created with powers and duties as set out in Article 66B, Land Use, of the Annotated Code of Maryland. Four commission members are appointed by the Mayor and Council for staggered terms of five years each and one alternate may be appointed also for a five year term. The fifth voting member is a council member who serves in an ex officio capacity during their four year elected term. The Commission meets on the third Thursday of every month in the Town Hall.

F CARROLL COUNTY PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

The seven-member (plus alternate) Planning and Zoning Commission is an appointed body responsible for such planning-related activities as developing and approving comprehensive plans, approving subdivision and site development plans, and recommending a Capital Improvement Program to the County Commissioners. The Planning Commission also recommends to the County Commissioners amendments to planning-related regulations and ordinances such as the subdivision regulations and zoning ordinance



(ordinance text and zoning map). The Planning Commission holds public meetings twice monthly to consider planning-related projects and issues. Citizens are welcome to attend; meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month and in the evening on the fourth Monday of each month. The Planning Commission is required to hold public hearings to receive input on comprehensive plan elements, updates, or amendments. The Planning Commission considers the comments received before approving the plan and submitting it to the County Commissioners for adoption.

G THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Land Use authorizations found in Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland mandates that the Planning Commission develop and approve a comprehensive plan and recommend it to the local legislative body for adoption. Community meetings and workshops are held to encourage citizen input to help ensure that the vision and goals of the plan reflect the desires of the community.

H TOWN BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

The Board of Zoning Appeals consists of three members appointed by the mayor for terms of three years each. In general the Board hears and decides on issues pertaining to special exceptions, and variances. The powers of the Board are defined in the Code of the Town of Union Bridge.

I CARROLL COUNTY BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

The Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) is a quasi-judicial body comprised of three members. The Board is empowered to hear and decide on requests for conditional uses and authorize appeals for variances to the zoning ordinance. The BZA may also hear and rule on appeals to orders, requirements, decisions, or determinations that are made by an administrative officer in the enforcement of powers granted under the Land use statutes (Article 66B) or any ordinance adopted under the article. These cases may involve, for example, appeals to actions of the planning commission. The BZA conducts public hearings to address all cases that are filed for its review and action. Public hearing notices are published in local newspapers, signs are posted on properties under review, and notices of the public hearings are mailed to adjoining property owners. The public hearings and notification of them provide an important opportunity for citizen input to these cases.

J CARROLL COUNTY TECHNICAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

Citizens have an opportunity for input in the early stages of the review and approval process involved with the development of property. The Technical Review Committee (TRC) is comprised of County and State agencies that review and comment on subdivision and site development plans. TRC meets monthly to publicly review all development plans submitted to the County and to present its recommendations and requirements to the owner/developer of the property and the developer's engineer. When a property owner is contemplating the improvement or subdivision of his or her property, notices of the TRC meeting are mailed to adjoining property owners and signs are posted on the property informing the public of the scheduled TRC meeting. Citizens are invited to attend the TRC meeting to voice their concerns on the proposed development at this early design stage.



K TOWN STAFF

Town office personnel currently consists of a Clerk-Treasurer. The Mayor appoints and Town Council approves a Zoning Administrator to process all zoning applications in accordance with town zoning codes. Other specialized and professional services, including legal, engineering , planning and the like, are provided to the Town on a contractual basis.

2 Current Citizen Participation Opportunities

The most obvious and common way for citizens to participate in the workings of their local government is by voting and attending public meetings. Eligible citizens may also run for public office, be appointed and/or volunteer to serve on committees and commissions. Meetings of the Town Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, among others, are open for general public attendance and participation.

A COMMITTEES

The Main Street Revitalization Committee completed its sanctioned duties in May 2007. Its volunteer members have been called upon by the Mayor and Council for input and special assignments. Likewise, the Union Bridge Area Heritage Committee has also been a resource for the Town. A group of interested citizens continues this 501(c)(3) non-profit organization to preserve and promote the unique history of the Town of Union Bridge. Membership is open to all interested residents of the Town and the larger community.

B PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public community meeting opportunities are present and ongoing within the town as well. The Town Council holds open meetings on the fourth Monday of every month and work sessions on the second Monday of each month. Likewise, the Town Planning and Zoning Commission also meets on a monthly basis, holding their meetings on the third Thursday of each month. The Town's Board of Zoning Appeals convenes on an as-needed basis.

C SURVEYS AND WORKSHOPS

Occasional opportunities for participation also develop as both the Town and County prepare various plans and projects for the Union Bridge area. The County conducted a series of citizen workshops in order to create a vision statement and goals for this Union Bridge Community Comprehensive Plan. For those not able to attend the workshops, detailed surveys were sent to each and every household in the 12th Election District. Community workshops, surveys, and informational newsletters are a standard part of the comprehensive plan process.

D PRIVATE ASSOCIATIONS & COMMUNITY GROUPS

Outside of the governmental realm, other associations and groups existing in the community include the Union Bridge Fire Company, with both a Ladies Auxiliary and Junior Fire Company, a Lions Club, West



Carroll Recreation Council, and the Masonic Lodge, Union Bridge Business Association, a Cub Scout troop, a 4-H club and the newly formed Bridges, a local organization that supports youth in the community. These groups, while pursuing their individual missions, may work cooperatively with each other as well as the Town to meet community goals.

3 *Citizen Information Sources*

A MEDIA

Residents in the Union Bridge area have a variety of sources of information to keep informed of local events and activities. The Town publishes a bi-monthly newsletter that contains a variety of local meeting notices, community events and articles relevant to area citizens. The Carroll County Times, the Carroll County edition of the Baltimore Examiner, and the Carroll County edition of The Baltimore Sun are general-circulation daily for-purchase newspapers that focus on news in Carroll County, in addition to providing regional, state, national, and world news. Landmark Community Newspapers of Maryland, Inc., publisher of the Carroll County Times, also circulates two free monthly publications, Carroll Families and Carroll Seniors. These periodicals contain feature stories and County activities aimed at families and senior citizens, respectively.

Numerous television and radio stations broadcast regional news and information that may include Carroll County. WTTR (1470 AM), located in Westminster, focuses on Carroll County news and events. In addition to its standard offering of network and cable stations, the county's cable television service provider, Comcast, operates Cablevision Channel 3, a commercial local origination channel that covers local news and events, and Channel 24 (CCG24), a channel devoted to Carroll County Government that broadcasts public meetings, events, and other programs related to local government. Additionally, Comcast broadcasts Carroll Community Television Channel 19, Carroll Community College Television Channel 18, and Carroll Educational Television Channel 21 (sponsored by Carroll County Public Schools), noncommercial local access channels that include information on local news and events as part of their scheduled programming.

Carroll County Government posts its legal ads in the Carroll County Times and provides press releases to the media regarding current events and issues. Additionally, notices of upcoming meetings are provided for inclusion in the community news and events sections of local papers. The County also uses WTTR, Cablevision Channel 3 and Channel 24, and Carroll Community Television Channel 19 to convey public information.

B INTERNET

The Internet is a growing resource of information for citizens. One website that contains information oriented to Carroll County is located at <http://ccgov.carr.org>. This site contains extensive information on the County, County government, information about and links to the municipalities located in the County, the public library system, schools, services and organizations, and businesses. Also available from this web site are either live web-streaming broadcasts of County meetings or archived video of County meetings or hearings for many boards and commissions. This resource is available for meetings dating back to July 2006.



On-line information related to updates of the community comprehensive plans can be found on the county website's page for the Department of Planning within the Bureau of Comprehensive Planning section.

The Town of Union Bridge maintains a website with a variety of useful facts including meeting schedules, contact information, rosters of various committees and boards, and certain needed public information. This website is linked to the Carroll County website or may be reached directly via <http://www.carr.org/~unionbr/>.

C TOWN NEWSLETTER

The citizens of Union Bridge are also kept informed of the happenings of their local government through a bi-monthly newsletter. The newsletter is mailed to each household within the town limits. For members of the community residing outside of the corporate limits, the newsletter is available at the Town Hall and on the internet at the Town's website <http://www.carr.org/~unionbr/>. The publication has articles from the Mayor, Council and Committee updates, special project reports, and important information relevant to the Town's functions

ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY NEEDS

Multiple opportunities already exist for the community to be involved in government-related issues. Opportunities for improvement, however, do exist. Many of the residents indicated in the community surveys that they receive information regarding public decisions, meetings and community participation opportunities from newspapers and mailed flyers. However, few people indicated they actually attended any public meetings held by County or Town officials. Public meeting agendas are posted and often printed in local newspapers, but these meetings are not broadcast on cable television for public viewing on a regular basis.

Although these conditions may lead to a lack of citizen involvement, the reality is that most people will not participate in meetings or other public participation opportunities unless they feel directly and significantly impacted. This apathy often leaves the community unaware of the plans for the community or the issues within the community which need to be addressed. The effect is that a very small number of people often influence decisions meant to address the good of a much larger community.

Although a need always exists for local governments to find additional ways to solicit input from a greater number of citizens, there also is an element of social and political apathy that must be addressed as well. One major impediment to overcoming the relative public apathy associated with the planning process is the length of time taken to produce the plans. Momentum built up in the initial phase of the public participation quickly is lost when the plans go into the "drafting" stage, where shifting priorities for staff and lengthy writing requirements can create a lag time of at least six months, sometimes much more.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- 1 *Survey the community periodically to measure and understand the needs and desires of the residents*

The success of a comprehensive planning effort is not just measured when the plan is adopted. It is an ongoing challenge to ensure that the plan continues to embody the desires of the community and is being implemented as recommended. Because residents and businesses are continually leaving and new ones taking their place, the population served by the plan is always changing. Periodic surveys of the population about their goals and concerns for the environs will inform planners and others who are implementing the plan as to how well the plan is upholding or changing to meet the needs of the community.

- 2 *Continue to provide updates on projects, events, and the implementation of specific plan recommendations through a community newsletter or website*

Part of making a comprehensive plan a “blue print for guidance and action” is to keep the plan’s relevance in the forefront of people’s minds in both the private and public sectors, since both have a part in actually implementing the plan. Providing the general citizenry with periodic and annually updated information and reports on the progress of implementation will help to foster relevance and understanding of the Plan and the process.

In addition to updates on the comprehensive plan process, it is important that all web-based data is maintained so to be current and effective. Once community members become familiar that current data is easily available, they may also become confident to relying on the data provided. Ultimately, the users of this resource may become more informed and more active citizens thanks to the schedule flexibility afforded by electronic participation.

- 3 *Form citizen committees to implement appropriate strategies from the comprehensive plan as well as other community projects*

Citizens interested and involved in planning and accomplishing key elements of the official plan are assets to the community- Creating citizen committees charged with helping with specific tasks detailed in the plan can be a wise use of human resources, provided both the appointing authorities and those willing to serve clearly understand the time commitment involved, scope of the charge and duration of time to accomplish the mission.

- 4 *Find ways in which the plan update process can be shortened to maintain interest and momentum*

One of the greatest challenges posed by the planning process is finding ways to keep people’s interest and momentum throughout an effort that, by its very nature, is methodical and time-consuming. Great lengths are taken to reach out to as many people as possible and much time is spent gathering the information that will validate the plan’s recommendations. More frequent plan updates could reduce the amount of time



needed to do this work, and concentrated points of public input could be programmed into the process so that momentum is not lost. Other creative ways to achieve these objectives should be sought as well.

A well thought out comprehensive plan will have a much longer life than 6 years. Nothing prohibits it from being amended at any time to keep it current with changes in circumstances, or by reason of actions of the State Legislature, or by the publishing of the latest Census. The required 6 year review may only need to be a fine tuning. A concise plan that stays focused on key and coordinated elements and essential matters of significance will more likely have more meaning and relevance in serving the citizens and community well.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS & ANTICIPATED CIP PROJECTS

The recommendations contained in this plan may be policy-oriented or action-oriented, and their implementation may be the responsibility of the Town, the County, other public agencies, private landowners and developers, or a combination of these. This section is designed to identify the potential fiscal impacts to the Town and/or County of each of the recommendations. There could be “No Fiscal Impact,” meaning the Town or County would not incur direct or predictable expenses as a result of implementing the recommendation, an “Undetermined Impact,” meaning there likely would be a cost associated with implementing the recommendation but that cost can not be determined at this time for various reasons, or a “Fiscal Impact,” which likely would be incurred by the Town or County if the recommendation were implemented. For recommendations that have an identified fiscal impact, the cost of implementing that recommendation is estimated to the best degree possible.

- 1 Survey the community periodically to measure and understand the needs and desires of the residents*

Undetermined Impact: While there likely would be a cost associated with the implementation of this recommendation, the project would need to be further developed before a reasonable cost estimate could be determined. Fiscal impacts would vary depending on the method used to survey community residents and could be minimized, if not eliminated, if integrated into existing forms of communication such as the Town’s newsletter or website.

- 2 Continue to provide updates on projects, events, and the implementation of specific plan recommendations through a community newsletter or website*

Undetermined Impact: While there likely would be a cost associated with the implementation of this recommendation, the project would need to be further developed before a reasonable cost estimate could be determined. Fiscal impacts would vary depending on the method used to communicate with community residents and could be minimized, if not eliminated, if integrated into expanding the existing forms of communication such as the Town’s newsletter or website.

- 3 Form citizen committees to implement appropriate strategies from the comprehensive plan as well as other community projects*

No Fiscal Impact



- 4 *Find ways in which the plan update process can be shortened to maintain interest and momentum*

No Fiscal Impact