

GREATER PRINCE GEORGE'S BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE

BLADENSBURG: PORT TOWNS COMMUNITY FORUM

September 28, 2004

Remnants of hurricane *Jeanne* swept through our region as the forum began at the Bladensburg town hall. Some thirty local leaders of business, clergy, youth, politics, and government participated in discussions intended to promote and shape the future of Prince George's County.

This forum was the 3rd hosted by the *Greater Prince George's Business Roundtable* in an effort to provide participants an open discussion of issues and "possibility thinking".

Jim Estep, GPGBR President and CEO served as facilitator and posed key questions to the audience who voiced opinions and concerns with openness and honesty throughout the evening. Jim introduced Mayor Bob McGrory of Bladensburg, our host, and the Mayor welcomed us, especially on such a terrible night (weather-wise). He also indicated how excited he and the Town are to host this unusual gathering. He praised the GPGBR for undertaking this grass roots effort and for caring about the communities that enrich our lives and our livelihoods.

The Mayor indicated that he and the Council will be watching with great anticipation, our future efforts to feel the pulse of county residents and to shape a vision for the future. **Both Jim Estep and the Mayor recognized the contributions of Council Member Charlina Watson in conceiving of the Forum in Bladensburg/Port Towns and making the logistical arrangements. We deeply appreciate her efforts.**

The historic area known as "Port Towns" embodies Bladensburg, Colmar Manor, and Cottage City. This area was settled in the 1700's near or on the eastern branch of the Potomac River. Bladensburg Councilwoman Marion Hoffman provided a historic overview of the area and a current update of recent activities afforded to residents. These included a ribbon cutting scheduled in October 2004 at the Waterfront Park, a long anticipated recreational area for youth and families. A poignant Remembrance Day of 9-11-01 sponsored by Colmar Manor American Legion Post 131, was held in the park on that day which all Americans will remember. Numerous projects including the

restoration of Market Master's House built in the mid sixteenth century is only one of many historic sights wanting attention.

Jim Estepp, GPGBR President and CEO presented information about the overall mission of the *Roundtable* and recent community events they have sponsored, including a forum for re-entry of non violent offenders to the work force. The Community Advisory Council of the *Roundtable* was represented by Sadara Barrow, who also serves on the Colmar Manor Town Council.

Mayor Bob McGrory, Town of Bladensburg warmly welcomed guests and expressed the importance of community leaders working together, sharing ideas, and planning for the future. He also praised the leadership of the *Roundtable* for its insightful involvement bringing people and communities together to obtain grassroots input from citizens.

Percy Alston, President of Prince George's County Fraternal Order of Police, spoke from the heart when he said that the concerns of the men and women in uniform are the same as the communities. "People want to know that when they walk out of their house they are safe, and if help is needed it would be only minutes away." The greatest concern he expressed was under staffing and not being proactive.

He discussed county-wide response times and emphasized how dangerously lengthy these are, due primarily to staffing shortages. He indicated that the county needs to put a greater priority on hiring and beefing up the ranks as quickly as possible. Otherwise, in his opinion, things will only get worse.

Chief Proctor talked about the excellent response times to emergency incidents in the Town of Bladensburg. She said that usually it takes two-three minutes for her own department to respond to calls in the town. An excellent record of service compared to many other jurisdictions. Certainly one that should be emulated by county officials.

Lauren Good, President of the Bladensburg Local Development Corporation and Joe Rodriquez, Americana Grocery, wanted the Port Towns to be a model for all communities with multicultural citizens and backgrounds to emulate. In order for a community to prosper Mr. Rodriquez said it needed to take a "progressive strategic approach to economic development" It was expressed that we must look at how the Port Towns are similar to Prince George's County but also to the demographics of the Washington Metropolitan Region. We live in a world with a global economy and it affects us all. The prosperity of Prince George's County and the entire region impact on the Port Towns.

There were many participants who expressed the need for continued community beautification. It was felt that a clean beautiful town promotes health and happiness, as well as prosperity. Mr. Robert Boone stated the relationship of clean streets, free of

trash... to the promotion of clean water. He also said business plays a significant role in keeping our water clean and safe.

It is important to note and recognize some participants brought their children to the forum, in spite of the terrible storm that remained persistent. The youth were encouraged to participate and in deed helped verify education needs and those of recreational areas and facilities. It was refreshing to for all of the participants to hear their perspective on values and see their willingness and desire to be included.

As the evening progressed, participants were asked to identify “markers” which, in their own estimations would define a prosperous community. Their vision included an aesthetically pleasing to the eye environment, with clean streets and green spaces of flowers and trees. They wanted to be able to walk and shop and have more sidewalks and bike paths. The participants also want an environment that promotes family stability, with churches and recreational facilities easily accessible. In order to “make this community successful”, the group was prompted to prioritize their needs.

The responses were as follows:

- 1. Improve school programs and provide well rounded quality education system**
- 2. Create Total Quality in the services provided**
- 3. Institute Crime Prevention Programs**
- 4. Need more safety and security, animal control**
- 5. Municipalities and County should work together; create good relationships**
- 6. Need more family oriented recreational areas and facilities**
- 7. Be a model in the County and State for Police, Fire and EMS Services**

Participant Poll: Top Priorities for County

When further asked to identify the top 3 priorities the group provided the following insight and concluded that the *first priority* would be **Education**, which begins in the home and evolves to the school system.

Participants concluded that a:

1. Holistic Education System-- and new approach to solving problems in the home was necessary to positively impact social issues. They concluded that a strong family, who educates their children beginning in the home with values, will ultimately lead to benefiting an entire community.

The *second top priority* the group concluded is:

2. Public Safety-- Community Oriented Policing, where officers were available to talk with youth and be present in the neighborhoods to prevent crime before it happened would be of top priority. Businesses, in order to prosper, need crime and drug free environments. People need to feel safe in their homes, places of business as well as schools. It was concluded that more officers were needed who could directly touch lives. This led the group to tackling social issues that had previously been identified as starting in the home. Thus their *third priority* was identified as

3. Community Development-- which includes good hospitals and healthcare to meet both physical and mental health needs. Community development means obtaining resources, both monetary and physical, to promote the social well being of their environment. And as the evening grew to a close the **Mayor of Bladensburg** said that after choosing these priorities *a community must market their success to continue the cycle of life.*

In Conclusion: Participants included youth and seniors, as well as politicians, clergy, teachers, environmentalists, businessmen, and public safety employees. Everyone seemed to reach the same conclusion; we must work together to make a bright future by embracing new ideas and being positive about our challenges. All we need is a vision,

the framework and leadership. We can reach any goal when we work together and are committed.

The participants again commended parents and community leaders for bringing the youth participants to the forum. They added greatly to the dialogue and the exposure was great for everyone. After all, these young people represent our future and the best of our communities.

Adjourning the Forum, Mr. Estopp encouraged the participants to continue the process that was so successfully begun during the evening for their own community. He also assured the participants that their opinions were sincerely appreciated and would contribute to the *VisionFramework*. **(Note: Bladensburg has subsequently scheduled a visioning session of its own. They are enthusiastically following up on the outcomes recommended during this forum).**

#####

BLADENSBURG/PORT TOWNS COMMUNITY

FORUM

PARTICIPANTS:

- 1. Hon. Robert McGrory, Mayor of Bladensburg**
- 2. Hon. Charlina Watson, Bladensburg Town Council**
- 3. Reverend Gail A. Addison, President, End Time Harvest, Port Towns**
- 4. Hon. Sadara Barrow, Colmar Manor Town Council, P.T.O.C.**

5. Dean Jones, *Prince George's County Police Officer*, FOP Lodge #89
6. Percy Alston, *Prince Georges County Police Officer and President FOP Lodge #89*
7. Sheila D. Wade, *citizen participant*, Port Towns
8. Jerry Thomas, *Real Estate Consultant*
9. Vanessa Robinson, *concerned parent*, Port Towns
10. Curtis Robinson, *concerned parent*, Port Towns
11. Hon. Marion Hoffman, *Council Member*, Town of Bladensburg
12. Robert Boone, *President*, Anacostia Watershed Society
13. Patricia Gladding, *Anacostia Watershed Society*
14. Walter Lee James, Jr., *Council Member*, Town of Bladensburg
15. Daithi Htun, *Executive Director*, Port Towns C.D.C.
16. Mack Adedekuc, *Manager African Boutique*, business representative
17. Alma H. Holloway, *Senior Citizen*, Parkview at Bladensburg
18. Joe Rodriquez, *President*, American Grocer, business representative
19. Curtis Gill, *citizen participant*, Bladensburg
20. Reverend Charles Dockett, *Pastor*
21. John Moss, *Assistant Chief of Police*, Bladensburg
22. Dick Charlton, *Trustee/Treasurer*, *Amman Memorial Trust*, Bladensburg
23. Robert Jimenez, *Latino Market Manager*, Port Towns
24. Lauren Good, *President*, *Expression*
25. Sonja Proctor, *Bladensburg Chief of Police (Former Deputy Police Chief, District of Columbia and just named: Chief of Amtrak Rail System's Nationwide law enforcement)*.
26. André Gore, *Executive Director*, N-Put, Inc.

27. Cornell Wing, *Senior Mentor*, Hyattsville

28. Nancy Estepp, *volunteer*, GPGBR

29. Liz Casto, *Director of Research*, GPGBR

30. Len Casto, *volunteer*, GPGBR

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM