

Bowie Area: Regional Community Forum Summary

The *Bowie Area* Community Forum, sponsored by the *Greater Prince George's Business Roundtable* and hosted by the City of Bowie was held on Tuesday, October 26, 2004, from 7-9:30 P.M. Representatives from the following communities were invited to participate: *Lanham, Mitchellville, Seabrook, Woodmore* and surrounding areas.

The fourth in a continuing series of “*Zone*” community focus groups to be scheduled by the Roundtable, the Bowie event was convened in the City Hall Conference Room.

Introduced by GPGBR President and CEO Jim Estep, Bowie Mayor Fred Robinson welcomed the attendees and offered a brief but extensive update on the current status of the City of Bowie. According to the last Census, Bowie is considered the 4th largest city in the State of Maryland and the largest community in Prince George's County with an average household income of \$85,000.00. In comparison to the average income for Prince George's County of \$49,164.00, \$57,218 for the State of Maryland, and \$43,564.00 for the United States, the City of Bowie is thriving. The average home sells for \$324,606.00 and boasts a \$3.6 billion tax base with a \$14 per capita debt rate.

John King, Director of Economic Development gave an historical overview and strategic perspective of the city's future growth and development. With a 33% population growth since 1990, Bowie has experienced an increase in small businesses (over 1500) comprised of Professionals, Retail, and Service Industries. They are looking to increase growth in the Technology & Hospitality fields, and continue to provide better retail destinations modeled after the success of the *Bowie Town Center*.

Jim Estepp introduced *Roundtable* Members, **Timothy Adams, President & CEO of Systems Application Technology, Inc. and Jason L. Groves, Vice President External Affairs - South, Verizon.** Each shared his ideas as to the overall mission of the Roundtable and his own organization. Also introduced to the forum participants was the staff of The Roundtable, Liz Casto, Director of Research and Carla A. Nelson, interim Director of Communications. Each participant introduced themselves giving the name of their company or organization and the name of their community.

Mr. Estepp briefly reviewed the purpose and vision of the Roundtable as published in the handouts. He explained both the concept and goals of *VisionFramework®*. Addressing the major categories that will serve as guideposts in the actual creation of the *Roundtable's* Vision document, he encouraged the participants to consider what they would like for the future of Prince George's County. If they were to draft a Vision for the County, what would be the signatures or measures for success in the next 5, 10, 20 years?

***Signature topics* that are critical in the creation of a *VISION* for Prince George's County, Maryland were stated as:**

Education

Economic Development

Schools (buildings, staffing, resources)

Infrastructure – Resources to manage population growth, government, transportation....

Public Safety

Clean Air, environmental standards

Overall Quality of Life

It did not take long for the participants to engage in a lively yet friendly discussion on the importance of placing a high priority on Education and Economic Development. After some intense discussion, they agreed that the strategy and success of these two *signatures* go hand in hand.

EDUCATION /SCHOOLS (Summary of Comments)

“The economic growth of our County will hinge largely on the educational system and values we set in place”....*bowie forum participants*

- We need to take a deeper look at how our children are prepared when they come to school. If the teachers are responsible for what *comes out* of the students, then the parents must be held responsible for what *goes into* them before they go to school. This relates especially to pre-school (identifying colors and shapes, and being potty trained) and as they come to school on a daily basis (discipline, manners, respect for the teacher, and getting enough rest.)
- Proper education of our youth would lower our juvenile crimes rates. If children are being positively challenged in school, the less likely they will commit crimes outside of school.
- Parental accountability for properly preparing their children for school is paramount
- Parental involvement in their child’s learning process, school PTSA and activities should be a requirement
- Students (teenagers) must be accountable for their own actions

Education/Schools: Con'td.

- Children should receive discipline at home. It is not the responsibility of the school to *raise* children; it is their responsibility to *teach them*.
- Schools administrations don't seem to care enough about truancy.
- With all the advances in technology, we should have a better communications network between our Schools and Police. Everyone should be wired.
- Solicit large companies to adopt a school the same way *Fannie Mae* adopts schools in the *District*. This may be an issue since we have a limited number of large companies that reside in the County.
- Teachers say it is better to be committed to the system instead of being committed to the *politics* of the system.
- Our issue is not a racial issue in teaching children, it is an economic issue. Prince George's County ranks second to Baltimore City in the subsidized school lunch program (a prime indicator of poverty).
- We need to groom our future leaders while in school regardless of the areas they want to go into for a career (education, politics, or public safety). This could help to decrease the number of juvenile crimes that occur during the daytime/school hours especially.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Many of the Economic Development issues were tied to *Schools* and *Public Safety*. Various of the responses for this section can be found in either of the two headings

- Transit Oriented Development – there needs to be more commercial properties around our Metro Stations. We have more metro stops in this County than in any other jurisdiction other than Washington, DC; however, with the exception of the new Largo Station, there is nowhere to shop, work, and eat near our Metro stations.
- We would still like to see more upscale retail in our County.
- Businesses need to be more community friendly. Be involved.
- *Jason Groves of Verizon* stated that he would love to bring his operations in Silver Spring to Prince George's but he cannot due to the high percentage of car thefts and vandalism. This is an issue being felt at hotels, shopping centers and in both wealthy and poorer neighborhoods.
- Education and Public Safety are the two factors employers look at before considering moving their company to any area. Our County has to do a better job of improving both.
- *Tim Adams of SA-Tech* stated that you can judge where a community is going based on its public safety and the quality of those who manage it!

PUBLIC SAFETY

- Public Safety/Crime: the perception appears to be that this is *out of control* in our County. Rogue police is not so much the issue anymore because most of the force was born in the 1970's, and it has become much more diverse in both its leadership and among the rank and file.
- Police cannot be pro-active due to the lack of manpower and resources. In Bowie, one of the biggest problems is children accidentally setting off burglar alarms when they come home from school. They need training and accountability.
- Police don't even have adequate manpower to answer the telephones. We are all accountable to the system – we make the system.
- The issues with Public Safety are not one of governance but one of money and resources. Bowie has looked into creating its own police department and the resources necessary to maintain it. In the past they decided it was better to work more closely with the County's department to improve response times and communications issues than to create a new one. That may change in the future.
- County Council Member Doug Peters spoke briefly on a bill he has introduced: CB89-04; it modifies the current requirements of the "Police Test" and "Fire Test" for new residential development projects in the County. It includes requirements for staffing and response times, not just facilities for public safety:
 - a) Inadequate response times for Ambulance (from time of call to arrival) Will result in denial of preliminary plans.
 - b) Inadequate response times for Police; the same as above.
 - c) Staffing of police to increase to 1450 sworn officers, currently authorized strength is 1280 with 7 officers retiring each month

- d) Staffing of firefighters to increase to 692; currently there are more volunteers than career firefighters countywide.

PUBLIC SAFETY: Con'td.

- Council Member Peters says the county is looking into building Ambulance houses which are less expensive and smaller than a full service fire station near residential developments. Most of the department's calls are for rescue/ambulance/paramedic services. **Note: CB-89-04, passed the Council, on a 7-0 vote on 11/16/04.**

INFRASTRUCTURE/QUALITY OF LIFE

- We have not allowed the proper infrastructure to grow along with the growth and demands of our population. For example: The Police & Fire Departments have remained the same size they were in the 1990's. They are understaffed and resources are inadequate to handle the increased service demands of our residents
- The County is still very rural in a large portion of its geography. There needs to be a re-thinking or re-planning of what we want our County to look like in the near and distant future in order to keep up with the demands of our residents and not allow growth to out pace services.
- The people of Prince George's County do not engage or interact with their political officials enough. Most residents do not know their Local, County, or State representatives. There also seems to be a lack of continuity and disconnect among elected officials because of term-limits and other constraints.
- More bike paths, recreational facilities are needed.
- Clean air, great schools, and time to enjoy life--what is missing is **TIME**. Children are left home alone because parents often have to work outside of the County, traveling for long periods of time--not enough time to spend with their children.

- There is too much time commuting on clogged roads to and from work. We need a plan to bring businesses to the County and allow our residents to work closer to home.

BOWIE AREA ATTENDEES PRIORITY LIST

This listing was an actual polling of the participants in respect to the most serious challenges we face in the county:

#1 Education – Producing “Responsible Citizens”

#1 Public Safety/Crime

#2 Smart Growth & Quality Economic Development

The discussion was cut short due to the lateness of the hour and the fact that a World Series Baseball game was televised during this prime TV viewing period. Nevertheless, the participation and results were excellent and all agreed that this process should continue and be available across the entire county.

Ron Skotz asked how many of the attendees lived in Prince George’s County 35 years ago (about 5 people raised their hands). He stated that “we are often fighting the perceptions of the past. TRIM caused many of the infrastructure problems we have today, and it is difficult to ask the state government for more and more money while we are continuing to restrict our own revenue growth by having tax caps like TRIM.” The message: *we want to buy things, but we want someone else to pay for it.*

And with that, the session adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

***GREATER PRINCE GEORGE'S BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE
BOWIE AREA REGIONAL FORUM***

Attendees

1. **Honorable G. Fred Robinson, *Mayor City of Bowie***
2. **David Deutsch, *City Manager of Bowie***
3. **John King, *Director of Economic Development, City of Bowie***
4. **Honorable Douglas J. J. Peters, *Councilman, District 4, Prince George's County Council***
5. **Timothy Adams, *GPGBR Board Member and President SA-Tech, Inc., Landover***
6. **Jason L. Groves, *GPGBR Board Member and Asst. Vice Pres. External Affairs - South, Verizon***
7. ***External Affairs - South, Verizon***
8. **M.H. Jim Estepp, *President & CEO, GPGBR***
9. **Michael L. Fowler, *Sr. Gov't. Relations Rep., Constellation Energy***
10. **Ron Peake, *President, Bowie Responsible Growth HOA***
11. **Lisa R. Ramson, *President, The Ramson Group***
12. **Charles B. Thompson, *Board of Directors, Woodmore Home Owner's Association***
13. **Alan Coppola, *KLNB***
14. **Charlene Gatewood, *Board of Directors, Woodmore Home Owner's Association***
15. **Sherman Ragland, *Chairman – City of Bowie EDC***
16. **Joe Bracone, *Senior VP – Citizen's National Bank***
17. **Marcus Crosby – *Porter Education & Comm., Inc.***
18. **Bill Britton – *community citizen participant***
19. **Alphonso Porter, *President – Porter Education & Communications, Inc.***
20. **Albert Baumann, *Vice President – BB& T Bank***
21. **Percy Austin – *President, Fraternal Order of Police; Lodge #89***
22. **Dean Jones, *Treasurer, FOP Lodge #89***
23. **Howard Simons, *President – BTCA***
24. **Mr. Bryan Wimpy – *community citizen participant***
25. **Mrs. Bryan Wimpy – *community citizen participant***
26. **Liz Casto – *GPGBR***
27. **Carla A. Nelson – *GPGBR***