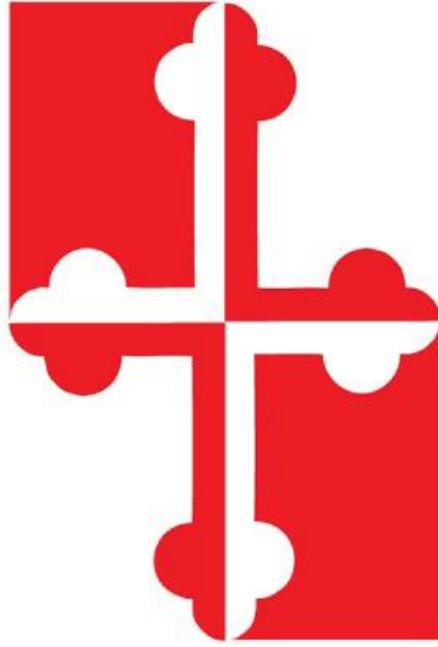


MPCA



Maryland Planning
Commissioners Association

MPCA Master Plan

A ROADMAP FOR THE ORGANIZATION, ITS LEADERSHIP & MEMBERS

OCTOBER, 2018

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- MPCA Outreach Project Results & Feedback
- Results for MDP’s “A Better Maryland” Listening Sessions – Phase I

MPCA - Background

Founded in 1983 and headquartered in Baltimore, the Maryland Planning Commissioners Association (MPCA) is a statewide, nonprofit organization of the volunteer members of municipal, county and regional Planning Commissions (PC's) and Boards of Zoning Appeals (BZA's).

Purpose and Mission

MPCA is dedicated to:

- Guiding the association's development over time through appropriate policy, strategy and supportive initiatives
- The continuing education and professionalism of its members
- Supporting improved efficiency and effectiveness of local PC's and BZA's
- Improving the quality of life for all Marylanders through comprehensive planning, environmental protection, historic preservation and growth management.

Long-Term Goals

In support of its Purpose and Mission, MPCA will:

- Foster a sense of pride and satisfaction in benefitting local communities by utilizing best planning practices and processes
- Strive to increase planning coordination and cooperation at all levels within the state
- Provide communication and information sharing via multiple channels and mechanisms
- Promote the public interest in municipal, county, regional and state planning issues
- Establish the means to achieve the above stated goals

Background on the MPCA Master Plan

The 2016 Annual MPCA Conference, held in Frederick, included the announcement that MDP would be conducting an Outreach Project in 2017 with all local planning commissions and members across the state. The purpose of the project included:

- Providing members with the opportunity to be heard
- Enabling networking with other stakeholders
- Determining what is important to local jurisdictions and what will meet their needs
- Identifying topics for timely and targeted training and other technical assistance

The results of Project Outreach were presented at the 2017 Annual MPCA Conference held in Easton and indicated a priority for more knowledge and training in best PC practices, processes and fundamental planning issues (*see attached Outreach Project Results*). In response, the agenda and breakout sessions for the 2017 conference reflected several of the expressed priorities. The agenda and offerings at the 2018 Annual MPCA Conference in Gaithersburg will continue that response with expanded training sessions and panel discussions.

Concurrent with the Outreach Project, MDP also launched and has just completed, county-by-county listening sessions in all Maryland counties as a means of capturing feedback and recommendations from county planning staff, elected officials and county residents to assist the development of MDP's Master Plan, "A Better Maryland" (*see attached Listening Session Results for A Better Maryland*).

The concurrence of both assessments couldn't be better timing, as their combined data and insights provide fundamental guidance in support of MPCA leadership's desire to create and implement a Strategic Plan that guides our organization's continued development and success at the local, county and regional levels.

A Master Plan is Meant to be A Roadmap

Master Plans are comprehensive, visioning, goal-setting documents that require focus, lots of consideration, discipline and accountability to accomplish. Plus significant additional effort and follow-through to implement the stated key initiatives and gain the full benefit of the Plan.

A “Roadmap” is an appropriate metaphor. It’s what we already accomplish when we create or update a local Master Plan. We utilize an established template and set of processes to capture the existing reality of our local jurisdictions and create a forward-thinking roadmap that guides our planning response to local needs through a connected set of goals, strategies and initiatives.

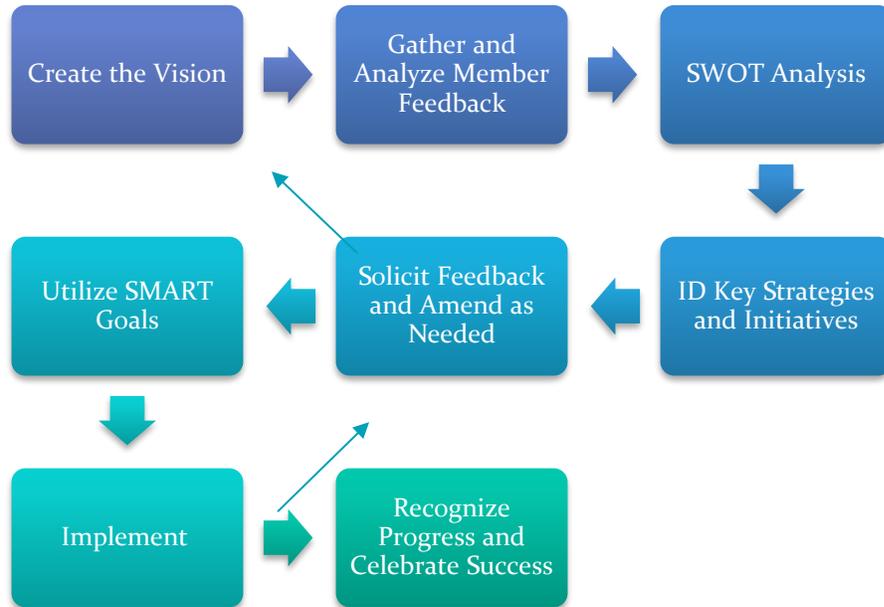
Building upon the importance of supporting and enabling our membership to better fulfill their local planning roles and responsibilities, MPCA leadership believes it’s timely to create a MPCA Master Plan that increases the likelihood of those outcomes.

The 2018-2023 MPCA Master Plan outline represents our initial attempt to build on member feedback and expressed needs and provide additional training, resources and operational support to sustain our members (individuals and local teams) development and success.

Lastly, let’s admit the obvious: Planning Commission and BZA members are local volunteers. Likewise, the members of the MPCA Board of Directors. We all share a belief in the value of good planning and the difference it can make in our communities, and collectively, in our state. We are all members of the same team, and our shared values and partnered investment of time and effort, commitment and accountability make all the difference.

➤ **STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS**

To draft this Master Plan, the MPCA Strategic Planning Committee utilized an 8-step basic Strategic Planning Process:



➤ **STEP #1: CREATE THE VISION.....**

A fully engaged, committed and growing membership across Maryland that efficiently and effectively utilize best practices and processes as appropriate to the planning, environmental protection, historic preservation and growth management needs of all local jurisdictions.

➤ **STEP #2: NEEDS ASCERTAINMENT: GATHER AND ANALYZE MEMBER FEEDBACK**

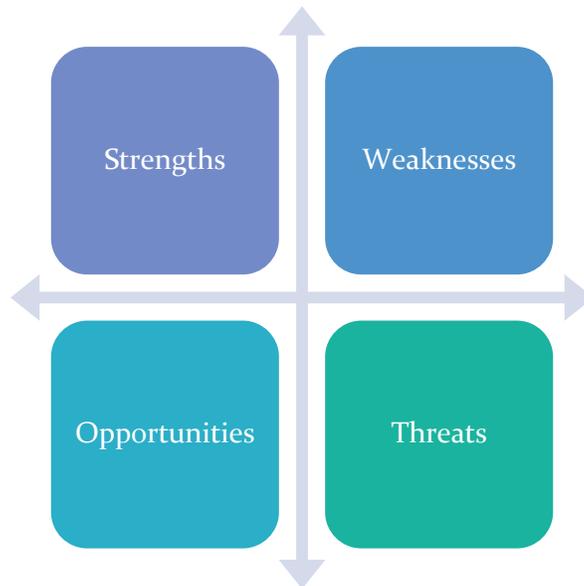
- Outreach Project Survey Results & Feedback. *(see attachment)*
- Results for “A Better Maryland” Listening Sessions *(see attachment)*.

➤ **STEP #3: APPLY A SWOT ANALYSIS TO THE COLLECTED DATA**

Often used in the world of business, a **SWOT Analysis** (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, **T**hreats) is an exercise through which an organization identifies issues and factors that are currently impacting its operation or condition, as well as those that will present themselves in the future. It is also commonly used early in a community planning process.

- **Strengths** are those factors that your organization does well and that bolster it.
- **Weaknesses** are those factors that is struggles with or that limit it.
- **Opportunities** are those factors that your organization could capitalize on the increase its effectiveness.
- **Threats** are those looming factors that may harm your organization.

The MPCA Strategic Planning Committee conducted an initial SWOT analysis for the organization. Preliminary observations are shown below:



■ **Strengths** (*Factors that MPCA does well or that bolster the organization*)

- Largely volunteer organization, ostensibly objective and non-biased
- The Master Plan process requires our members to focus on the full planning context of their jurisdiction, and therefore become aware of

and address the comprehensive mix of factors and issues that comprise the particular Master Plan, its development and implementation

- Local PC's and BZA's utilize an open operating format fully accessible to the residents of the jurisdiction
- The opportunity to objectively consider and recommend best strategies to accomplish Master Plan goals and provide the benefit of that due diligence to local government leaders

■ **Weaknesses** (*Factors that MPCA struggles with or that limit it*)

- Because our members are volunteers, there are practical limits to their available time
- Absent a documented set of candidacy requirements, new members may come aboard with a particular bias/agenda and/or not be properly vetted and mentored
- Renewal of PC appointment may not be based on critical criteria, e.g. attendance, performance, etc.
- Frequently, a PC may not have followed through on the requirement to create a set of local PC Policies and Procedures and operate accordingly

■ **Opportunities** (*Factors that MPCA could capitalize on to increase its effectiveness*)

- To be part of creating and implementing the jurisdiction's Master Plan and its potential to enhance the community, and overall, to be part of utilizing best planning practices and processes and the benefits they provide
- To ensure elected officials are provided with the benefit of their PC's due diligence on particular topics/issues as well as a baseline of best planning practices and processes
- To develop leadership and strategic thinking re: local planning topics & issues

■ **Threats** (*Looming factors that have the potential to harm the organization*)

- Lapsing into complacency or worse yet, obstructing progress on key local planning issues & challenges

- Not following-through on responsibility to lead, coordinate and facilitate the implementation of the Master Plan
- Failure to think and act strategically and as a result, critical issues are not addressed and corrective initiatives undertaken
- Not reaching out and partnering with the other jurisdictions within their county to share planning experience and insights and advocate for regional planning and coordination
- Local PC members allow themselves to be swayed by self-serving petitioner interests

➤ **STEP#4: IDENTIFY KEY STRATEGIES & INITIATIVES**

The following are an initial attempt by the MPCA Strategic Planning Committee and Board to propose five (5) Key Strategies with supporting Initiatives that have the potential to deliver on the stated goals and objectives of this Master Plan.

- **Strengthen Member Engagement & Development**
 - Make effective use of the Annual MPCA Conference
 - Offer additional training and workshop opportunities
 - Continue to solicit & utilize member input
 - Create and utilize recognition programs
 - Recruit more BOD members from counties/regions not currently represented on the Board

- **Enable Access to Best Planning Practices & Processes**
 - Create a Master MPCA Resource site to include a dynamic/expanding array of these topics
 - Identify and utilize best national, regional and state knowledge resources and experience, e.g., PlannersWeb, Planning Commissioners Journal
 - Expand and organize communication vehicles to deliver the material

- Develop Local Planning Leadership (Knowledge, Skills, Practices & Processes)
 - Follow-through on requirement for each local PC & BZA to create and fully utilize a local Planning Commission Rules & Procedures document
 - Encourage facilitation & coordination by the local PC with other local Town commissions
 - Build a section of material and guidance within the MPCA Master Resource Site expressly for commission/board chairs and vice chairs
 - Encourage working peer group committees to better support local planning needs based on size/complexity of the local planning function.... and planning topic/need-driven

- Pursue Productive Partnerships
 - Pursue a mutually productive partnership with APA-Maryland
 - Advocate for increased coordination between each county and their municipal planning teams, and MDP with both
 - Add MML to the dialogue to connect with a broader set of elected local officials and encourage adjacent county and regional cooperation
 - Reach out to other state planning associations to gain their insight and experience
 - Continue to explore opportunity with Morgan State

- Ensure Adequate Operating & Financial Capacity
 - Advocate for adequate local staff and department budget
 - Pursue underwriting and sponsorship opportunities for the annual conference and other applications
 - Encourage more jurisdictions to submit annual MPCA dues
 - Pursue opportunity for a part time, paid MPCA administrative position to support the organization

➤ **STEP#5: SOLICIT FEEDBACK & AMEND THE PLAN AS NEEDED**

- First with the MPCA Board and then at the 2018 Annual Conference in Gaithersburg

- The Primary Goals for 2018 Annual Conference include an expanded set of presentations, breakout sessions and training on Best Practices & Processes, including
 - Open Meetings Act
 - A Primer on Developing & Implementing Local Master Plans
 - How to Recruit and Cultivate New Planning Commissioners
 - Best Practices for PC/Staff Communications and Training
 - Best Practices for PC/Staff Collaboration
 - Best Practices in Developing Local Planning Rules & Regs

- Also present an overview of the MPCA Master Plan at the 2018 Conference to include goals, strategic initiatives and next steps with a forecast of what we plan to accomplish by the 2019 Conference.

➤ **STEP#6: Utilize SMART GOALS for the Strategic Initiatives**

- In follow-up to the 2018 Conference, assign who will be responsible for each Strategic Initiative
- Utilize a **SMART** Goals Structure (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ctionable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-bound) to specify the operational steps planned to accomplish each strategy....
 - What specifically will the committee do?
 - How progress be measured?
 - By what date?
 - Who will be responsible?

➤ **STEP#7: IMPLEMENT THE MASTER PLAN**

- Focus the de-briefing session immediately following the 2018 Conference and the First Qtr 2019 BOD meeting to kick off Plan implementation

➤ **STEP#8: RECOGNIZE PROGRESS & CELEBRATE SUCCESS!**

- Timeline and projected Milestones (TBD)
- Recognition Opportunities, e.g.:
 - At the 2018 Annual Conference appropriately recognize the contributions of specific MPCA members
 - Create a new program: a periodic or annual “Planning Team Spotlight” modeled after the Maryland Sustainable Communities Program tonominate and recognize local planning team progress & success

MPCA Roadmap & Focus for 2019

Key Strategy

Put in place *a resourced infrastructure of training & development knowledge, insights, recommendations, best practices & processes* that will enable our members to better accomplish their role and responsibilities as local PC/BZA members and to function more effectively in partnership with their local planning staff.

Delivery Mechanisms

- MPCA website supplemented with contribution from APA, other state & regional planning sources, PlannersWeb.com and Planners Commissioners Journal
- Implemented takeaway from Annual MPCA Conferences
- Eventually, webinars, podcasts, regional workshops, case studies & noteworthy local examples of effective planning practices & processes
- A growing peer network of local and county planning teams sharing information, experience and insights

A Compact of Shared Responsibility

The above is what your MPCA Board, MDP and our resources partners are committing to. *What's your PC Team's responsibility and accountability in this Plan, you ask?*

1. Proactive participation
2. Commitment to Planning Literacy, i.e., fully understand and commit to your role and responsibilities as local PC/BZA members
3. Develop & follow a local PC Rules & Procedures document (a State of Maryland requirement)
4. Attend the annual MPCA Conference and encourage your fellow PC members to do likewise, or take back and fully share the insights you gain from attending
5. Make full use of the expanded Planning Resources Section on the MPCA website, especially the PlannersWeb.com materials

6. Help build our levels of MPCA membership and bottom-up engagement
7. Utilize your local PC Team to be a leader, coordinator and facilitator in working with your fellow local commissions/boards, involving them in the development & implementation of your local Master Plan
8. Request any other planning topics or issues you'd like to see general information on or best practices & processes added to the MPCA Resource Database.
9. Lastly, what are planning challenges or topics you'd like to discuss with other jurisdictions who possess experience and insight in those areas?

SWOT Analysis

We have utilized a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) in the MPCA Master Plan to assess our current situation and identify factors that may need to be addressed locally or statewide to reach our stated MPCA destination.

Ideally, *each local jurisdiction should do their own local SWOT analysis* to gain better awareness and understanding, as well as build better focus and team cohesion. In that regard, a SWOT analysis is a practical and useful tool. It can help you and your local planning team better achieve your destination: achieving the stated goals and vision of your local Master Plan as well as other applications of your commission role and responsibilities.

2019 Quarterly Goals & Milestones, Assessment & Reporting (TBD)

- March 2019
- June 2019
- September 2019
- December 2019

Comments/Suggestions/Contacts

The MPCA Board welcomes continued dialogue about the strategic plan and the organization's offerings. If you would like to make a suggestion or get more involved in the organization, please contact:

Bill Butts (MPCA Board Member): retirement@solutions-md.com or;

Joe Griffiths (Maryland Department of Planning): joseph.griffiths@maryland.gov