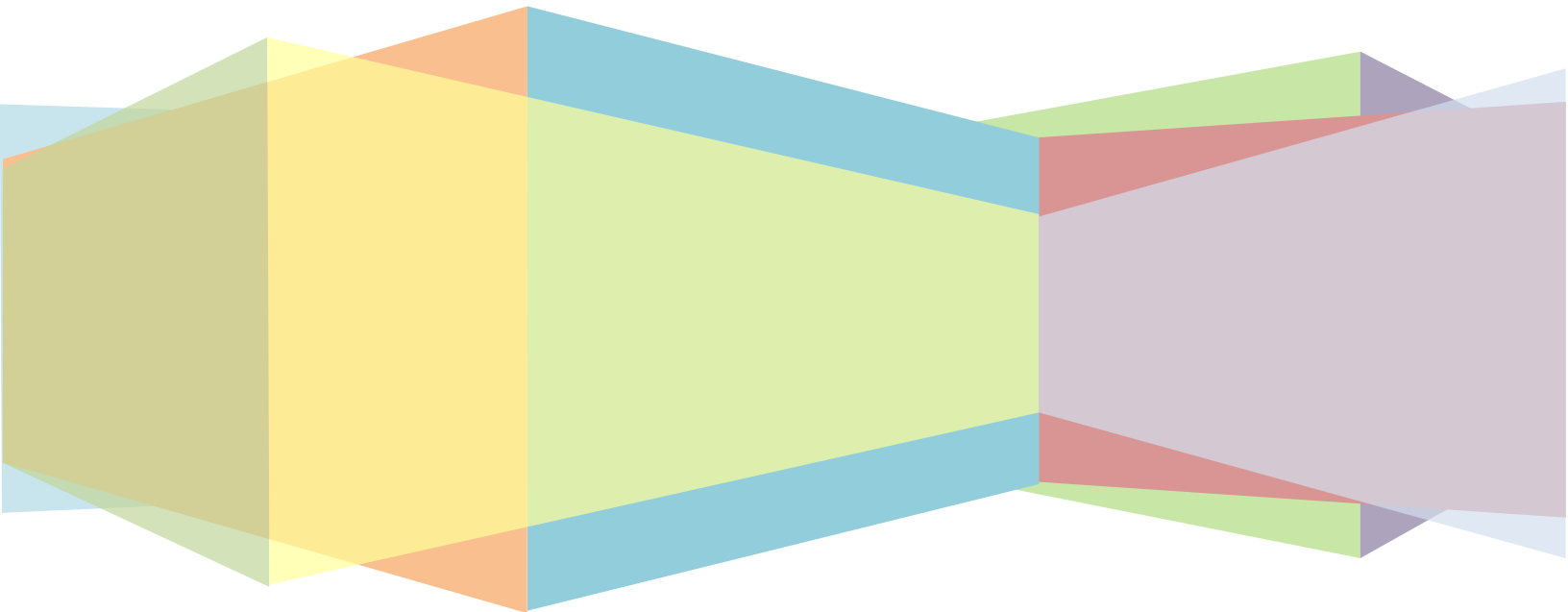


Obesity Task Force

Interim Report to County Council

May 1, 2012



**Harford County Obesity Task Force
Interim Report to County Council
May 1, 2012**

Introduction

The following is an interim report as required by Resolution No. 28-11 introduced by Council Member Lisanti on October 18, 2011 establishing a Harford County Obesity Task Force. The Task Force has been created to review and make recommendations on programs and policies that support a healthier Harford County. The resolution states that “individual effort alone is not sufficient to combat obesity and that changes in public policy and the built environment need to occur.” The following provides an overview of the progress of the Obesity Task Force to date. A final report with findings and recommendations will be shared with the Council October 2, 2012.

Obesity Task Force Charge

Study and make recommendations concerning programs and policies for the following:

- 1) Educating citizens of all ages regarding healthier living, including food choices and exercise;
- 2) Accessibility to healthy and affordable foods;
- 3) Encouraging food providers to provide healthier food choices and menu options; and
- 4) Identify ways to develop and implement more opportunities for walkable communities and recreational activities for all citizens throughout the County.

Members

The Obesity Task Force was to consist of 15 members representing the following areas: restaurants, grocery stores, nutritionists, physicians, farmers, fitness specialists, County Council, Board of Education, Parks and Recreation, the Harford County Health Department, Community Services, Harford County Sheriff’s Office, Planning and Zoning, and the Economic Development Advisory Board. The Task Force shall be chaired by the County Health Officer.

- Susan Kelly (Chair) - Harford County Health Department
- Mary Ann Lisanti (Vice-Chair) - Harford County Council
- Jesse Bane - Harford County Sheriff’s Office
- Bruce Clarke (Laurrapin Grille) - Restaurant
- Michael Elder - Fitness Specialist
- Janet Gleisner - Harford County Department of Planning and Zoning
- Rebecca Hartwig (Pediatric Partners) - Physician
- Elizabeth Hendrix (Harford County Government) - Community Services
- Jayne Klein (Klein’s ShopRite) - Nutritionist & Grocery Store
- Kathy Kraft (Upper Chesapeake Health) - Community Services
- Kelly Lepley (Y of Central Maryland) - Fitness Specialist
- Arden McClune - Harford County Department of Parks and Recreation
- Vanessa Milio (Harford County Chamber of Commerce) - Economic Development Advisory Board
- Brad Milton (Brad’s Produce) - Farmer
- Robert Tomback - Board of Education

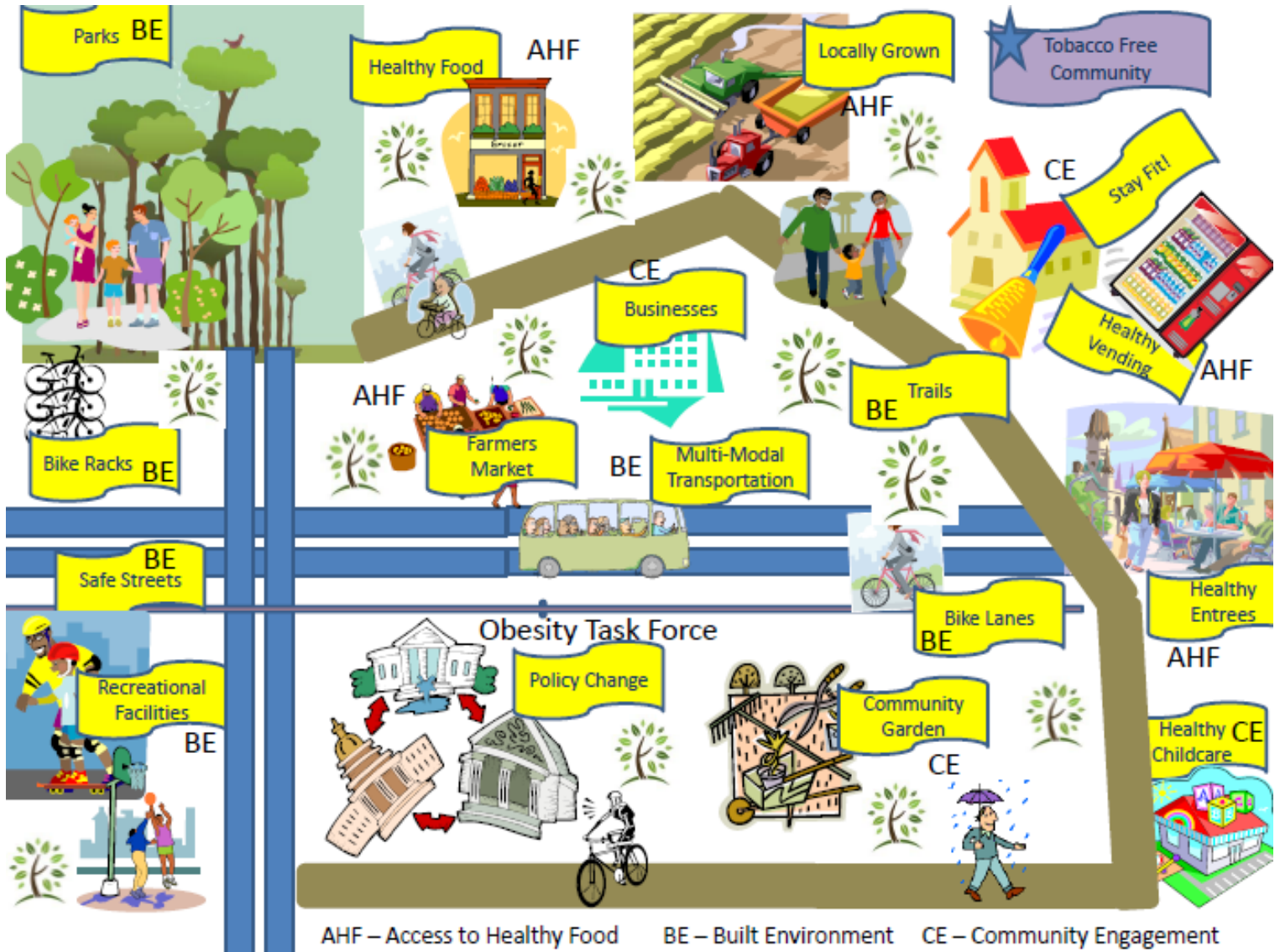
Project Progress

The following three committees were established to carry out the charge of the Obesity Task Force: **Access to Healthy Foods, Community Engagement** and **Built Environment**. To date, these groups have engaged in the following process: data review, idea generation and idea prioritization.

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All Obesity Task Force members were asked to participate in one of the three subcommittees, with the exception of the chair. Subcommittees were also populated with local experts and interested community members. These groups meet on a monthly basis to discuss their specific piece of the health and wellness puzzle. The following chart, created by Kathy Kraft of Upper Chesapeake Health and chair of the Community Engagement subcommittee, is a visual representation of how all three groups have an important role to play in building a healthier Harford County.

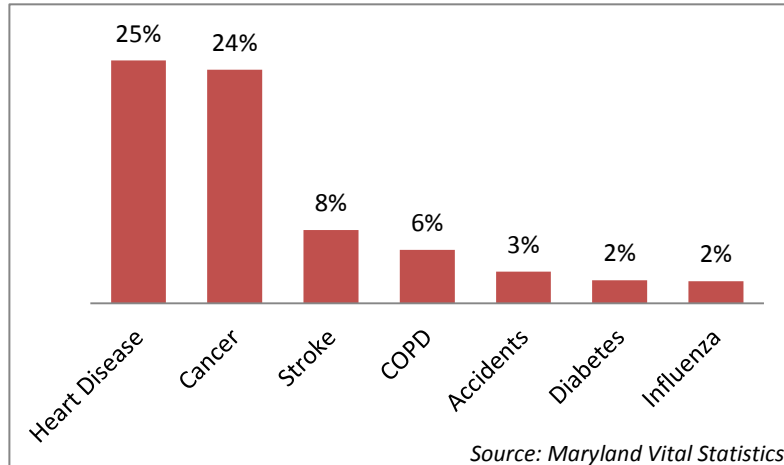
Vision of a Healthy Community



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DATA REVIEW - Members of the task force and its subcommittees reviewed local data on current health trends, such as the number of individuals suffering from a chronic disease and those that are overweight or obese. In Harford County, similar to the state and nation, there has been an overall decline in the health of the local community in recent years. Two ways to work towards a reversal of these trends are to encourage physical activity and healthy eating.

**Top 7 Causes of Death
Harford County, 2009**



**For chronic disease outcomes,
Harford County ranks worse than the State**

Indicator	Harford	Maryland
Heart Disease Mortality	210	197.8
Cancer Mortality	185.8	177.7
Stroke Mortality	57.3	55.7
COPD Mortality	45.7	35.6

*Mortality rates per 100,000 population, 2007-2009
Source: Maryland Vital Statistics*

**For lifestyle choices,
Harford County has room for improvement**

Indicator	Harford	Maryland
Obesity/Overweight	63.5%	64.1%
Physical Activity	37.1%	33.9%
Fruits/Vegetables	25.2%	27.3%

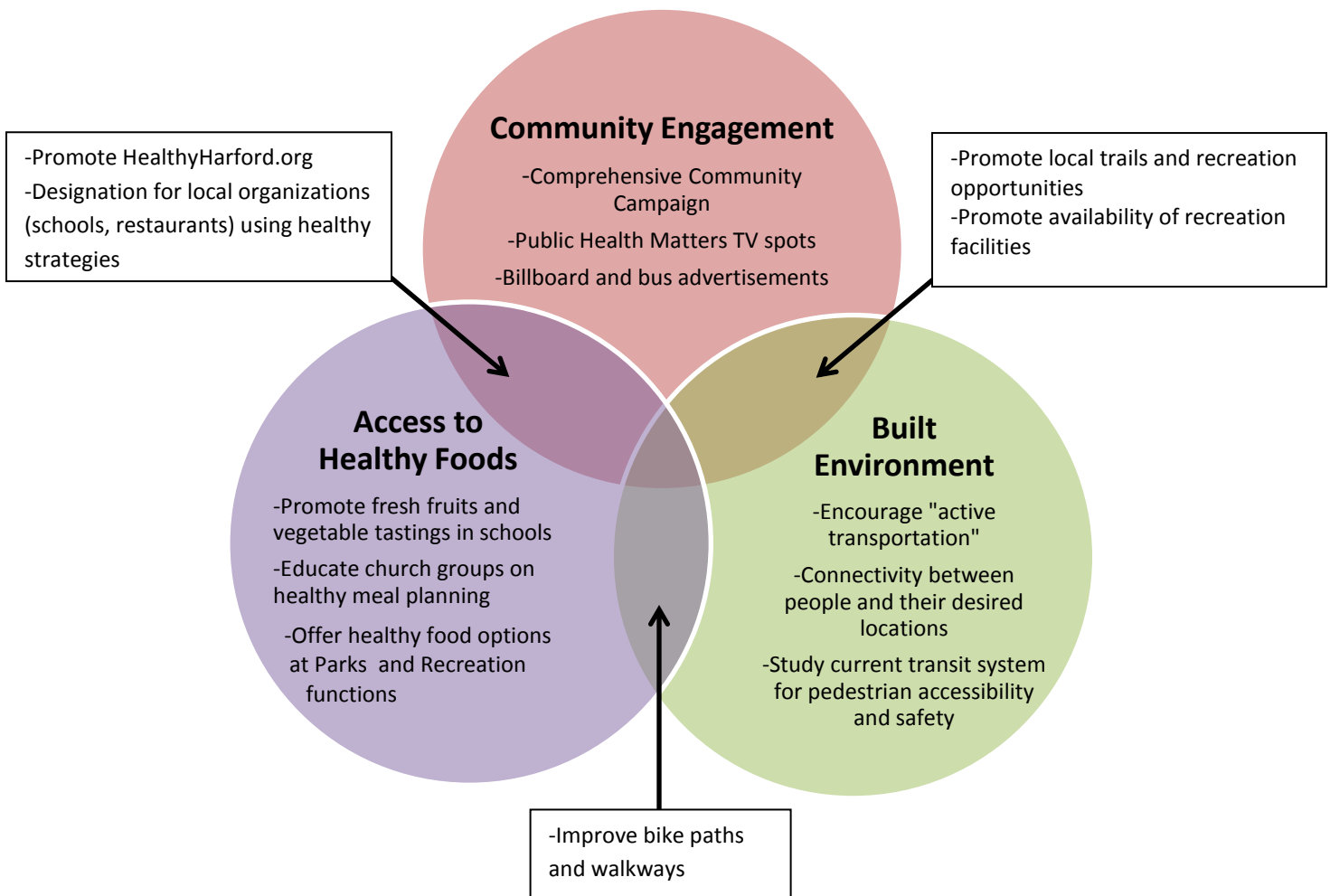
Source: CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2008-2010

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IDEA GENERATION - Subcommittee members then engaged in brainstorming exercises in order to identify projects which would have an impact on the health of Harford County citizens. Group members drew from their respective expertise as well as examples from similar communities throughout the nation. While brainstorming, groups were encouraged to think about whether the idea would have far reaching impact, address a significant health issue, have measurable results, be fundable and sustainable.

IDEA PRIORITIZATION - Brainstormed ideas were then ranked based on level of priority, ease of implementation and cost to implement. Based on this review and ranking process, each subcommittee has made preliminary recommendations. It is important to note that there can be overlap between the subcommittees' work as some priorities fall within the purview of more than one group.

Examples of potential overlap:



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Access to Healthy Foods Subcommittee

Members:

- Elizabeth Hendrix, Harford County Department of Community Services (Chair)
- Linda Sue Ames, Registered Nurse
- Marcy Austin, Harford County Health Department
- Dee Athey, United Way of Central Maryland, Inc.
- Heidi Brady, Registered Dietician
- Gary Childress, Harford County Public Schools Food and Nutrition Department
- Bruce Clark, Laurrapin Grille Restaurant
- Meg Deem, Office of the County Executive
- Erin Ferriter, PhD, Harford County Sustainability Office
- Jayne Klein, RD, Shop Rite Grocery Store
- Judy Mason, Harford County Community Action Agency, Inc.
- Brad Milton, Brad's Produce
- Andrea Pomilla, Harford County Department of Community Services - Office on Aging
- Ginny Popiolek, Harford County Public Schools
- Barbara Richardson, Mason Dixon Community Services, Inc.
- Rob Reier, DC, Town of Bel Air
- John Sullivan, Deputy Chief of Staff for Agricultural Affairs
- Terry Troy, Community Member
- Andrew Walsh, SAIC
- Cindy Weyant, Consultant

The following is an excerpt of the Department of Community Service's report to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on its assessment of the availability of food to low and moderate income households in Harford County. This assessment was conducted in collaboration with the work of the Access to Healthy Foods Subcommittee.

Purpose:

Access to healthy food can be a challenge for many residents of Harford County. In some areas, healthy food is not as readily available as in other parts of the county. In many communities unhealthy alternatives may be more convenient or more appealing than healthy choices.

Healthy food refers to foods that can provide an individual with a balanced diet that meets their personal dietary needs, comprised mostly of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy products, lean meats and legumes, and healthy unsaturated fats such as olive or canola oil (United States Department of Agriculture, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, 2010).

The variety of retail food outlets in Harford County including supermarkets, farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farm stands, food pantries, and soup kitchens increases opportunities for accessing healthy food. Local food production and direct sales increase options to purchase and consume more fruits and vegetables. The majority of food resources are located in the southern half of the county (See Attachment A).

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Many studies on the availability of healthy food review the amount and types of restaurants in a particular geographic area. The subcommittee discussed the abundance of chain restaurants, fast food, and premade food in Harford County, but did not want to label a certain type of establishment as healthy vs. unhealthy. The group felt that fast food is accessible and cost friendly and believes there is a need for more locally based establishments serving healthy food.

The Access to Healthy Food Subcommittee defined a food desert as an area that is lacking:

- Access to fresh fruits, vegetables, and healthy options, preferably local products
- Consistent physical access (transportation/walking)
- Consistent access 7 days per week

By reviewing the data, it was found that the assistance programs, such as soup kitchens, food pantries, and congregant meals are primarily found in the Route 40 corridor. Based on the definition and standards that the subcommittee developed to define a food desert, the identified gaps are prevalent in the northern area of the county. However, since the northwestern zip codes are more affluent, have a higher educational level, and transportation is not typically an issue, that area does not meet the criteria for a food desert. The only true food desert, as defined by the subcommittee, is the northeastern area, primarily 21154 (Street), 21160 (Whiteford), and 21034 (Darlington). The committee agreed that there is work to be done to fill those gaps for our economically disadvantaged residents.

Status Report of Recommendations to Date:

Highest priority

- Utilize schools (and PTA's as a central way to reach families) to teach meal planning and ways to exercise outside of the school day.
- Promote farmers market at senior centers. Continue use of farmer's market coupons.
- Advocate for additional fresh fruit & vegetable tastings at more elementary schools in Harford County.

Easiest to implement

- Promote the Healthy Harford website: www.healthyharford.org.
- Advocate for additional fresh fruit & vegetable tastings at more elementary schools in Harford County.
- Promote farmers market at senior centers. Continue use of farmer's market coupons.

Lowest cost

- Promote the Healthy Harford website: www.healthyharford.org.
- Provide recipe cards with fruits and vegetables at food pantries.
- Utilize schools (and PTA's as a central way to reach families) to teach meal planning and ways to exercise outside of the school day.
- Do educational outreach on calories consumed versus calories burned through exercise.
- Educate church groups on healthy meal planning for potluck events, community events and serving the homeless.

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The group agreed about the importance of utilizing schools, in particular PTAs, to teach healthier habits and feels that the good things happening in schools related to healthy eating and exercise should be highlighted. This is an easy way to reach both parents and children. Another idea is to offer healthy food options at Parks and Recreation functions.

As faith and community groups organize food drives, the focus should be on donating healthy foods. This will assist our local food banks with having nutritious options for their clients. Another idea is to capitalize on existing campaigns such as National Hunger Awareness month.

Educational outreach continues to remain a high priority. The group agreed that it is important to get the word out about healthy eating through organizations like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Centers for Disease Control, and locally through the Healthy Harford website and other means. Outreach is essential to educate all of our residents to make better and healthier food choices.

Some concerns were noted that funding for programs can be inconsistent and at times unavailable. Policy changes may be needed at local and school system levels. Also, there is a perception in the public that healthy food may be more costly, but the long term health benefits must be factored in. In the long run, the most important cost benefits to healthy living are health costs.

The subcommittee is interested if the amount and type of restaurants impact food deserts. There was considerable discussion regarding the health effects of foods at fast food and chain restaurants. A popular idea that came out of the discussion is to champion restaurants that use healthy ingredients and foods, and highlight their “best practices”. Another idea is to incentivize restaurants to provide healthy alternatives. These restaurants could be publicized on the Healthy Harford website. The group felt there should be more “mom and pop” and organic establishments. It is important to get evidence and outcomes as to what can be done to assist, encourage, and nurture these types of start-ups.

Equitable access to healthy food is a cornerstone for healthy communities in which all residents have the opportunity to participate, work, prosper, and enjoy healthy, productive lives. As the Harford County Obesity Task Force continues to champion this effort, it must help residents choose health – strengthen their ability to make healthy decisions, remove obstacles to healthy choices, and create more opportunities to be healthy.

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Built Environment

Members:

- Arden McClune, Harford County Department of Parks and Recreation (Chair)
- Kathy Baker-Brosh, PhD, Anita Estuary Center
- Jesse Bane, Harford County Sheriff
- Ann Bizzano, PhD, Physical Therapist
- Michael Elder, Citizen
- Erin Ferriter, PhD, Harford County Sustainability Office
- Janet Gleisner, Harford County Department of Planning and Zoning
- Dale Gomez, Community College of Baltimore County – Essex
- David Hagen, Harford County Public Schools, Physical Education
- Gil Jones, City of Aberdeen
- Mary Ann Lisanti, Harford County Council
- Julie Mackert, Harford County Health Department
- Hudson Myers, Harford County Department of Public Works
- Keith Rawlings, The Arena Club
- Kevin Small, Town of Bel Air
- Jeff Springer, Booz Allen Hamilton
- Barbara Wagner, Havre de Grace City Council
- Keith Warner, Harford County Sheriff's Office

Purpose:

The impact of the Built Environment on efforts to reduce obesity fall into two basic categories – elements which encourage more activity as part of conducting one's tasks of daily living and those that promote more activity in leisure pursuits.

Many people, when asked about becoming more active in order to lose weight or prevent weight gain, will quickly focus on their lack of time to add an exercise program to their schedule. One of the most important ways to fight obesity is for people to be more active throughout their day. For adults, activities such as walking or bicycling to stores, banks and other services and taking the stairs instead of the elevator can burn calories and contribute to the fight against obesity. For children, walking or biking to school and to visit friends, together with active play opportunities can be more important than participation in organized sports.

In many situations, the evolution of the suburban environment has encouraged dependence on the automobile and discouraged walking and biking. To make active transportation a reality, the built environment must make the use of transit such as buses an attractive and convenient option.

These concepts have already been incorporated in the County policy in the 2012 Harford County Master Plan and Land Use Element Plan. The plan sets forth:

“A healthy community offers a built environment that encourages and supports behaviors focused on physical activity. Trails, sidewalks, and bikeways create linkages between residential

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and business areas, and they encourage walking or bicycling instead of automotive travel. Creating a safe structural environment for children to walk to school is also a way to promote physical activity. Harford County recognizes the importance of providing recreational facilities including bicycle and pedestrian linkages. The Department of Parks and Recreation oversees the development and management of the County's sports fields, and they work with non-profit groups, the recreation councils and the Board of Education to provide playgrounds, activity centers, and assorted recreational programs. Additional walking and bicycling opportunities are provided along the Ma and Pa Heritage Trail and the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway. The County Development Regulations also require the provision of pedestrian and bicycling facilities, and the 2010 Transportation Element Plan emphasizes the need for the continued development of these facilities as part of a functional multimodal transportation network."

Status Report of Recommendations to Date:

- **Connectivity:** The term "connectivity" focuses on the linkages between people and their desired destinations. In order to encourage the walking and bicycling as forms of active transportation, the road, sidewalk and/or trail connections must be in place. The current built environment often does not meet the needs of the public to use these modes of transportation.
 - The County Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan should identify the existing gaps in connectivity and prioritize the county projects needed.
 - Public awareness should be raised regarding current and future plans for community connections and the use of alternate means of transportation.
 - Safe Routes to School programs should be developed to encourage children to walk or bicycle to school. This program would include Harford County Government, Harford County Public School, the Town of Bel Air and the Cities of Aberdeen and Havre de Grace in the establishment and implementation of uniform standards, consistent with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, for traffic control signs and pavement markings near Harford County schools
 - Harford County Public Schools should establish a pilot Walking School Bus program at one (or several) school
 - The County should review the Subdivision Regulations to ensure that adequate regulations requiring that new development and redevelopment support accessibility by walking biking or transit.
- **Commuting Alternatives:** To encourage "Active Transportation", the use of bicycles and public transportation such as transit buses must be a safe and attractive option. There are numerous problems with the current transit stops in the Harford and Maryland transit systems that discourage pedestrians and cyclists from utilizing this option.
 - A study should be done of the current transit system stops to determine the pedestrian accessibility, safety and comfort of the stops. A priority list of improvements should be developed and funding sought.
 - The availability of bike racks on the current transit buses should be publicized.

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- **Walking Paths:** Walking is a key component to both incorporating activity in the work/school day and in promoting activity recreation pursuits. While gaps in connectivity are an issue, many paths and trails exist but the public lacks information about these facilities.
 - Existing walking paths should be clearly labeled where available for public use. Plaques or signage can encourage their use when going from neighborhoods to a community amenity such as a school or library.
 - A website should be developed to provide information about available walking paths, including both trails such as the Ma and Pa Trail which connect parks and facilities, trails within existing parks and smaller community connections.
 - Programs which encourage families to utilize local trails through activities such as a “passport” program (record participation at various walking/biking sites) should be promoted in conjunction with walking/running groups or other groups.
- **Recreation:** Harford County has numerous indoor and outdoor recreation facilities at its State and County Parks (See Attachment B).
 - The 2012 Land Preservation Parks and Recreation Plan should incorporate goals regarding community health and the provision of facilities that promote healthy activity by all residents. Facilities for individual and independent use should be incorporated into future parks in addition to the team sports fields.
 - Public information efforts to promote the availability of recreation facilities at County parks and public schools should be improved. Many citizens are unaware of the fact that outdoor school facilities such as tracks and playgrounds can be used by the public when not needed for school activities.
 - Public outreach should advertise family activity programs at schools and recreation through a variety of outlets, including social media, websites, grocery stores and libraries.
- **Community Support:** Public education and engagement is essential to change public perceptions regarding an active lifestyle and its importance to health.
 - An alliance should be developed to draw support from a broad range of stakeholders (i.e. walking groups, running stores, senior centers) to gain support for the Built Environment Subcommittee’s recommendations.
 - Community buy-in can be achieved through public outreach at existing meetings such as community councils or PTAs, as well as with the use of social media.

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Community Engagement

Members:

- Kathy Kraft, Upper Chesapeake Health (Chair)
- Rob Bailey, Harford County Parks and Recreation
- Gregory Beatty, Vetcentric, Inc.
- Carole Boniface, Harford County Government
- Kathy Burley, Harford Community College
- Rebecca Hartwig, MD, Pediatrician
- Mary Hastler, Harford County Public Libraries
- Bari Klein, Upper Chesapeake Health/Harford County Health Department
- Jayne Klein, RD, Klein's ShopRite
- Whitney Lang, Y of Central Maryland
- Kelly Lepley, Y of Central Maryland
- Vanessa Milio, Harford County Chamber of Commerce
- Donarae Moulodale, Harford County Chamber of Commerce
- Mary Nasuta, Harford County Public Schools
- Katy Richardson, MD, Physician
- Gale Sauer, Aberdeen Proving Ground
- Robin Stokes-Smith, Upper Chesapeake Health
- Robert Tomback, PhD, Superintendent, Harford County Public Schools
- Martha Valentine, Business Wellness Consultant

Purpose:

The purpose of the Community Engagement Subcommittee is twofold: (1) to broadly educate the community with respect to healthy lifestyle choices related to good nutrition and physical activity; and (2) to engage influencers in the community to support, enable, and empower adults, youth, and children to make healthier and better choices with respect to nutritional habits and physical activity levels.

The work of this subcommittee supports the work of the Built Environment and Access to Healthy Foods Subcommittees through the following:

- educating Harford County citizens with respect to the positive health outcomes associated with good nutritional choices and increased physical activity levels;
- enhancing awareness about the opportunities available in Harford County to support those healthy lifestyle choices; and
- partnering with key influencers (Businesses, Child Care Centers, Schools, Health Providers) to increase the sphere of influence and potential impact in Harford County with respect to healthy lifestyle choices associated with good nutrition and increased physical activity levels (See Attachment C).

At the present time, the Community Engagement Subcommittee is focusing their efforts around four key recommendations that support their stated purpose. While these recommendations are considered to be in their initial developmental phase, the following is a summary of the recommendations to date for purposes of this interim report.

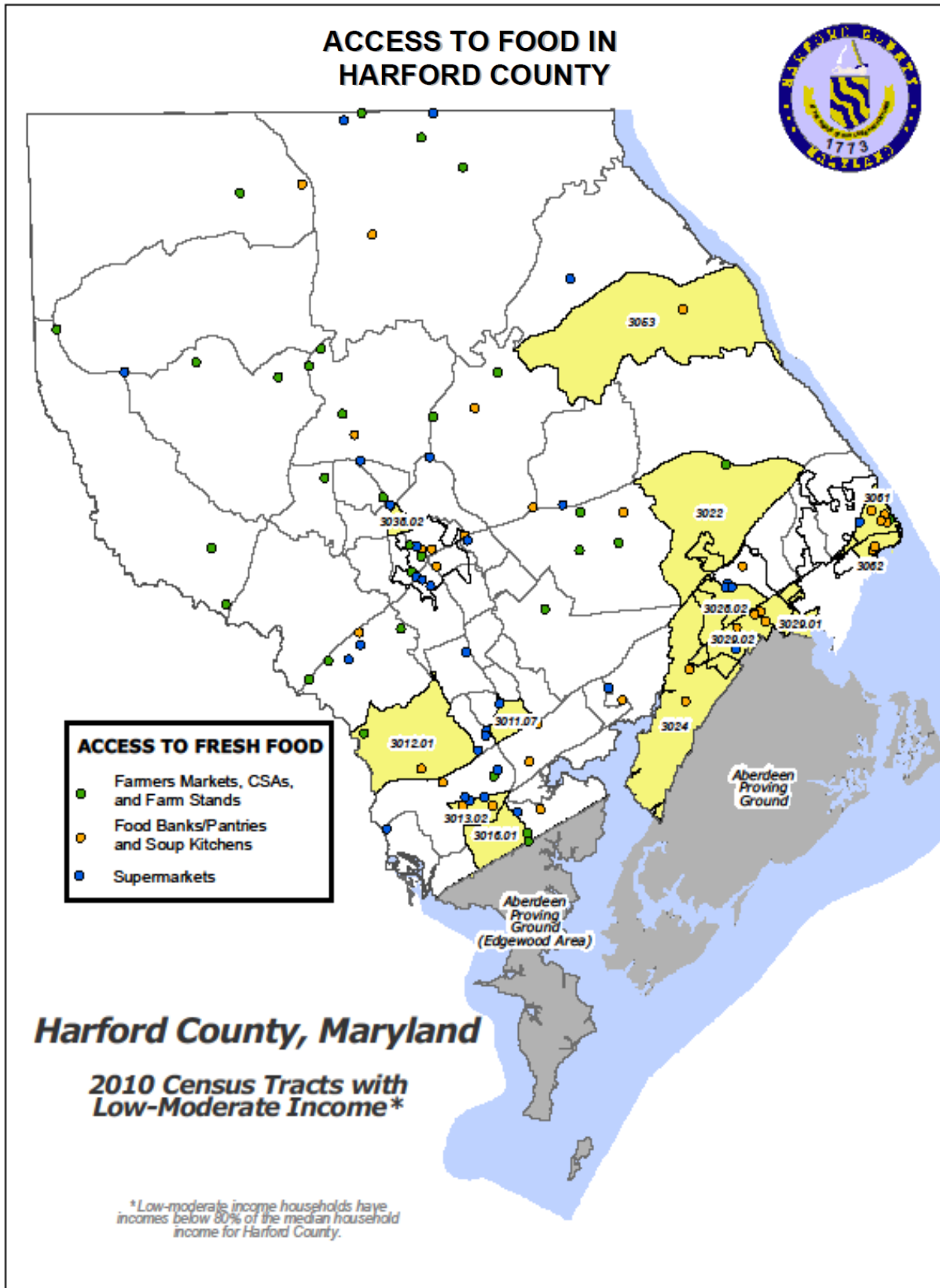
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Status Report of Recommendations to Date:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive Community Campaign promoting awareness and education about the importance of Harford County “getting healthy.”
 - A positive, active, easy to recognize message/symbol (i.e. “Get Healthy Harford”)
 - Branding for work of the 3 subcommittees associated with the Obesity Task Force
 - A key target is parents
 - Emphasize the long-term benefits (health) associated with a healthier lifestyle
 - Keep it positive
 - Use existing in addition to new venues for promotion and education such as:
 - Public Health Matters on Harford Cable Network
 - Existing public and private newsletters/ publications
 - Billboards
 - Local Buses
- Partner with major “influencers” that have the potential to impact large segments of the population in all areas of Harford County: Schools, Businesses, Child Care Centers, Health Providers.
 - Provide information related to strategies based on evidence based best practices
 - Identify strategic partnerships that link influencers with nutrition/physical activity opportunities. Examples include:
 - Joint Use Agreements with schools to enable public access to recreational facilities
 - CSA partnerships with businesses to enable enhanced access to healthy foods
 - Provide avenues to share information and strategies
 - Provide a support mechanism to insure long-term follow through
 - Ensure all areas of Harford County are included
 - Provide guidelines while ensuring opportunities for flexibility and creativity
- Provide opportunities for major “influencers” to receive formal recognition and a healthy designation (“Get Healthy Harford” symbol) that can be displayed for achieving nutrition and physical activity defined criteria.
 - Provide a gold, silver, and bronze level
 - Formal recognition by key county officials at an annual ceremony
 - Formal recognition in local publications
 - Formal recognition through Department of Economic Development and Tourism
 - Ensure all areas of Harford County are included
 - Provide guidelines while ensuring opportunities for flexibility and creativity
- Implement a structure for long-term sustainability of the Obesity Task Force initiative.
 - Get Healthy Harford Board comprised of key Harford County leaders that will serve as the governing Board for the initiative
 - Get Healthy Harford Coalition comprised of representatives from key agencies and organizations that will oversee the implementation of the Obesity Task Force recommendations and report their activities directly to the Board
 - Hire an Executive Director for the Get Healthy Harford initiative that will lead the Coalition and report directly to the Board

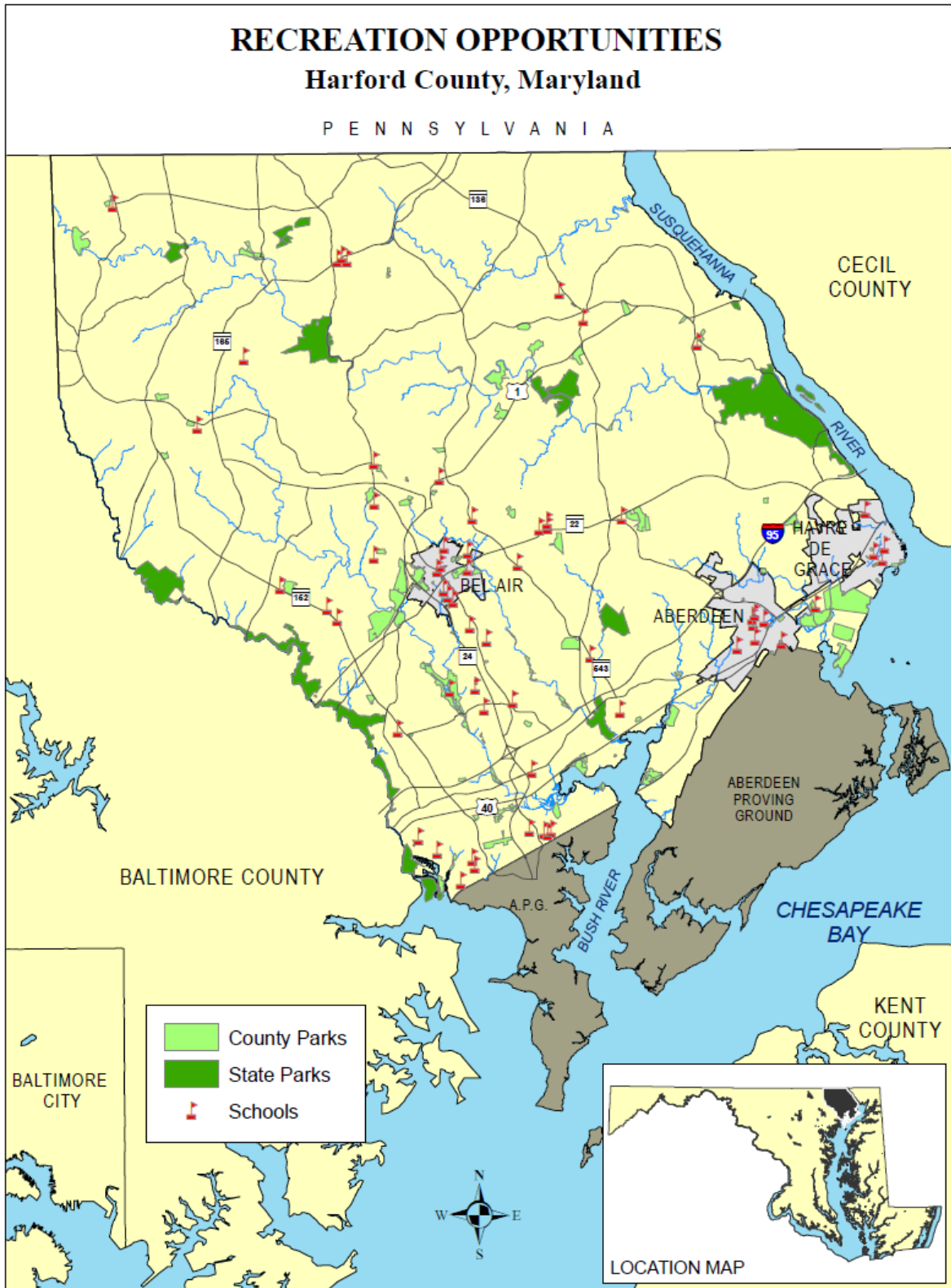
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Attachment A
Access to Healthy Foods Subcommittee



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Attachment B
Built Environment Subcommittee



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Attachment C
Community Engagement Subcommittee

DRAFT
3/23/12

