



**BETHESDA URBAN PARTNERSHIP  
STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2019**

**REPORT TO  
OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE  
OVERSIGHT**

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**BETHESDA URBAN PARTNERSHIP  
STRATEGIC PLAN  
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## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In 2008, the County Council Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) issued a performance evaluation of the Bethesda Urban Partnership, Inc. (BUP) that recommended reauthorization of BUP for an additional five years. The report also recommended that prior to the next reauthorization in 2013, BUP should complete a new five-year Strategic Plan as well as provide updates from the 2008 Strategic Plan. (*See Attachment 1 for the Status Report on the strategic initiatives from the 2008 Strategic Plan.*)

**A Strategic Planning Committee of the BUP Board of Directors led the year-long Strategic Plan Project.** Beginning in summer 2012, the committee conducted a search for a consultant that would facilitate the focus groups, write the online survey and summarize all data and strategic recommendations. Association Laboratory, Inc. was selected as the consultant for this process.

Between November 2012 and February 2013, Association Laboratory, Inc. led group meetings with the Bethesda Urban Partnership Board of Directors, the Transportation Management District Advisory Committee, the Bethesda Arts & Entertainment District Board and BUP staff. Association Laboratory also led focus groups with the following constituent groups: County partners, downtown Bethesda retail business owners, downtown Bethesda residents, customers, developers and downtown Bethesda employers. In total, 75 people provided feedback during the focus group meetings. The information gathered from these sessions comprised the qualitative data that was used to create the questions for the online survey to collect the quantitative data.

Additionally, the Bethesda Urban Partnership has met with the Montgomery County Council District representative for the Bethesda area, Roger Berliner, since our last Strategic Plan to discuss the Bethesda Urban Partnership priorities. We have also facilitated a County focus group to receive feedback and kept this year's goals and strategies more limited than in 2008 to items that do not require legislation or are fully dependent on other County agency actions.

In March 2013, the online survey was sent to 5,300 contacts of the Bethesda Urban Partnership and the Bethesda Chevy Chase Regional Services Center. The survey received a total of 562 responses, or a 10.6% response rate.

Overall, the focus groups shared a highly positive regard for downtown Bethesda which include: central location with access to transportation options (e.g., Metro), the nation's capital, convenience, quality of life ("livability" factor is high due to easy access to services, shops, and restaurants on foot or via the Bethesda Circulator), potential for strong business and business growth.

According to Association Laboratory's final report (*See Attachment 7*), there is a consistently high opinion of BUP, its staff, and their role as a resource and advocate. County partners had the highest awareness of BUP and feel they have a strong working relationship with the staff. Overall, the Bethesda Urban Partnership received accolades and positive feedback for its work in maintaining and marketing downtown Bethesda. Constituent groups were very familiar with the work of BUP and gave BUP high marks for its positive work in downtown Bethesda.

Association Laboratory facilitated a Board retreat that reviewed the feedback from the focus groups and helped set the priorities for the Bethesda Urban Partnership five-year Strategic Plan. The five-year plan consists of Strategic Goals in all five areas of BUP's legislation: Maintenance, Marketing, Transportation, Arts & Entertainment and Internal Operations. *(Please see sections II and IV for the Strategic Plan Goals.)*

Bethesda is projected to grow from 101,982 total households in 2010 to 110,885 in 2015, according to the Montgomery County Planning Department Center for Research and Information Systems. In the Bethesda Central Business District alone, the total number of households is expected to grow from 13,837 in 2010 to 18,127 in 2015. This is a household population increase of 31% in downtown Bethesda. While the Bethesda Urban Partnership is poised and tactically prepared for the additional population increase and potentially changing demographics of our downtown, we are aware that an increase in the residential population may pose a strain on our current staff and services provided to the downtown. *(See Attachment 2 for Bethesda's Future Developments.)*

As this presentation highlights, the Bethesda Urban Partnership has researched local and national consumer trends, reviewed constituent feedback, and successfully worked together to complete a Strategic Plan that takes into consideration the growth of downtown Bethesda and the surrounding community. We feel strongly that we have created a Plan that will continue to keep downtown Bethesda and the Bethesda Urban Partnership at the forefront of nationally recognized downtowns. BUP has proven its sense of fiscal responsibility and team management over the last 20 year and is confident we can continue our success.

The BUP Board strongly believes that the recommendations in this report, derived in great part from Bethesda's constituents, will greatly enhance downtown Bethesda and that BUP will continue to play a significant role in the economic viability of downtown Bethesda. We respectfully request that you reauthorize the Bethesda Urban Partnership for another five years to continue our work in downtown Bethesda.

## **II. SUMMARY OF BUP FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **Strategic Goal and Vision**

#### **National Recognition of Downtown Bethesda as a Model Urban Community**

### **Maintenance Goal**

#### **Create a State of the Art Appearance and Easier Customer Navigability for Downtown Bethesda.**

##### **Strategies**

- Create a Unified and Attractive Downtown Bethesda Streetscape
- Improve Wayfinding in Downtown Bethesda
- Use Technology to Manage Downtown Bethesda's Infrastructure
- Improve Appearance of Bethesda Metro Station and Bus Bay

### **Marketing and Communications Goal**

#### **Create and Implement a Successful Marketing Plan to Ensure that Bethesda is at the Regional Forefront of Attracting Customers and Businesses.**

##### **Strategies**

- Enhance and Build Downtown Bethesda's Brand
- Promote the Economic Viability of Downtown Bethesda
- Improve Communication to Constituents
- Develop Relationships with Nearby Constituents

### **Transportation Goal**

#### **A Transportation System that has Complementary Vehicular and Non-Vehicular Options.**

##### **Strategies**

- Improve Non-Single Occupancy Vehicular Options
- Ease Traffic Congestion
- Monitor Development and Traffic Plans that Impact Downtown Bethesda

### **Arts & Entertainment Goal**

#### **Ensure that Bethesda is a vibrant Arts & Entertainment District that attracts artists, arts patrons and arts organizations.**

##### **Strategies**

- Support Individual Arts & Entertainment Organizations
- Facilitate Events to Appeal to Bethesda's Many Audiences
- Add More Art Elements to Downtown Bethesda

### **III. BETHESDA URBAN PARTNERSHIP SUMMARY OF SERVICES**

The Bethesda Urban Partnership, Inc., (BUP) is the organization responsible for the management and marketing of downtown Bethesda which is home to numerous retailers, arts organizations, a thriving restaurant community and an expansive downtown workforce. Established by Montgomery County in 1994, BUP fulfills the landscaping and maintenance needs and creates cultural events and exciting festivals for the community. In our 19-year operation, BUP created Bethesda Transportation Solutions in 2000, established the Bethesda Arts & Entertainment District in 2002, took over management of the Bethesda Circulator in 2006 and has grown from two full-time staff members to more than 35 employees working in maintenance, marketing, transportation and administration.

BUP is operated by an 11-member Board of Directors comprised of residents, businesses and developers appointed by the County Executive. BUP is funded primarily by revenue generated from the Bethesda Parking Lot District fees, in addition to the commercial Urban District property tax, revenue from outside maintenance contracts and sponsorship dollars. BUP *does not* receive any general tax dollars. *(See Attachment 3 for a breakdown of PLD revenues, BUP's revenue sources and BUP's budget.)*

Downtown Bethesda is a thriving urban community consisting of the following features within the 300 acres of the downtown:

- 25 arts and entertainment organizations
- 200 restaurants
- 500 retail shops and services
- 1,500 hotel rooms
- 45,000 employees who commute daily into downtown Bethesda

Four program directors (Marketing and Communications, Deputy Director/Operations and Maintenance, Finance/Administration and Bethesda Transportation Solutions) report to the Executive Director.

With the exception of the addition of the Bethesda Circulator to BUP's management entities, the Bethesda Urban Partnership has expanded its services and staff with minimal increase in budget over the last 10 years. The costs of additional programs and services have been offset by bringing more contracts and staff in-house and by reaching out to corporate partners to serve as sponsors.

#### **A. MAINTENANCE SERVICES**

Clean and safe streets, tree-lined streetscapes and beautiful flowers are a signature of Bethesda's vibrant community. Bethesda's walkable downtown is managed by a dedicated maintenance team who works seven days a week keeping Bethesda a vibrant and attractive place to live, work and visit. There are 20 employees in this department.

Monday through Saturday, BUP's landscaping and urban beautification squads handle the following maintenance tasks:

- Street sweeping
- Removing litter three times daily
- Sidewalk repairs and maintenance
- Planting 32,000 flowers in two annual rotations
- Trimming 1,200 trees
- Maintaining 188,000 square feet of turf and Bethesda's sidewalks.

BUP's maintenance team has also been designated by the state of Maryland and Montgomery County to take on special projects within and outside of downtown Bethesda. In addition to daily duties, BUP's maintenance team is charged with maintaining the median strip along Wisconsin Avenue, removing trash and street sweeping in downtown Silver Spring and Wheaton and repairing potholes on Urban District's county roads. Additionally, in 2012, BUP entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to maintain NIH's green space located at the corner of Woodmont and Wisconsin Avenues thereby enhancing another gateway into downtown Bethesda.

BUP's maintenance team is certified in First Aid, CPR and AED use. Employees are also provided English as a Second Language classes at no cost to them.

The Bethesda Urban Partnership's "Ask Me" Team assists residents and visitors, fields questions about the community, provides motorist assistance and offers first aid and quick response in emergency situations during afternoons and weekends, Wednesday through Sunday. BUP is particularly proud of these employees who have received numerous thank you letters from individual community members for their assistance.

The red-shirted "Ask Me" Team can be found roving the streets of downtown Bethesda or stationed at Bethesda's three Ask Me information kiosks. Kiosks are located in Veterans Park, at the corner of Woodmont and Norfolk Avenues; at the Bethesda Metro Center, at the corner of Wisconsin Avenue and Old Georgetown Road and at the corner of Woodmont and Bethesda Avenues.

## **B. MARKETING SERVICES**

BUP's marketing plan targets downtown Bethesda's residents, visitors and employees. BUP's marketing and communications team creates cultural, artistic and entertaining events that attract patrons into downtown Bethesda throughout the year. BUP's annual event series highlights Bethesda's diverse restaurants and retailers, as well as entertains attendees with music, theatre, dance, film, literature and children's activities. There are four employees in this department.

BUP events annually attract over 100,000 attendees into downtown Bethesda with the following special events:

- Taste of Bethesda
- Bethesda Fine Arts Festival
- Imagination Bethesda
- Bethesda Literary Festival
- Winter Wonderland
- Summer Concert Series

- Bethesda Outdoor Movies: Stars on the Avenue

The marketing department also operates BUP's online presence, including downtown Bethesda's website, [www.bethesda.org](http://www.bethesda.org), which receives over 25,000 visits per month, as well as active Facebook (more than 2,500 likes) and Twitter (nearly 1,500 followers) accounts. Additionally, BUP produces and distributes free brochures that detail Bethesda's restaurant, retail and arts organizations. Brochures are distributed at Bethesda hotels, large-scale festivals, Bethesda Urban Partnership's three information kiosks, via BUP's mailing list and BUP's website.

### **C. TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT SERVICES**

Bethesda Transportation Solutions (BTS) was established in 2000 to help reduce single occupancy vehicle trips in downtown Bethesda by marketing local, state and federal commuter benefits programs and tax incentives to employers. BTS has marketing campaigns, a website and several brochures to promote alternative transportation options such as rail, bus, carpools and biking with the goal of reducing the number of Bethesda employees who drive alone to work. BTS has five employees.

BTS handles the following transportation management initiatives:

- Participation in the annual Walk & Ride Challenge to encourage downtown Bethesda employees to walk or ride a bike to work. In 2012, 226 Bethesda employees participated.
- Administration of the annual Commuter Survey to determine commute patterns in Bethesda. The most recent survey numbers show that more than 36 percent of Bethesda employees are not drivers of a single-occupancy vehicle and are using other transportation options.
- Management of Bethesda employers that are required to file Traffic Mitigation Plans and assisting them in filing Annual Reports of their activities.
- Promotion of numerous transportation alternatives through its website and weekly Commuter Information Days held in Bethesda's commercial buildings.
- Matching of ride share participants
- Management of Bethesda's Bike to Work Day pit stop which, was the region's third largest in 2013 and had more than 709 participants.
- Distribution of more than 2,500 monthly electronic newsletters.
- Social marketing campaigns directed to commuters on Facebook and Twitter.
- Participation in networking events produced by The Greater Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce to reach more downtown Bethesda employees.

### **D. BETHESDA ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT**

The state of Maryland designated downtown Bethesda as an Arts & Entertainment (A&E) District effective July 1, 2002.

Special tax incentives are in place that benefit artists, arts enterprises and developers located within the Bethesda Arts & Entertainment District. Bethesda Urban Partnership is the manager of Bethesda's Arts & Entertainment District, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. BUP's marketing team works with A&E's 13-member Board of Directors, as well as a creative committee consisting of local artists and arts business representatives, to produce arts and cultural programming that

benefits residents, businesses and tourists, and supports the community's growth and vitality. Events produced by the Arts & Entertainment District highlight local artists, writers and performers, and provide them a venue to show their work in the community. These programs also promote the variety of artistic and cultural resources in the community and attract nearly 1,000 artists and more than 30,000 attendees each year.

In 2012, Bethesda was re-designated as an Arts & Entertainment District. Also that year, the Maryland Department of Economic Development awarded the Bethesda Arts & Entertainment District the Arts & Entertainment District Outstanding Achievement Award.

Over the past 10 years, the A&E District has expanded arts initiatives in the community, with several new programs including *Gallery B*, a nonprofit art gallery managed by the A&E District; *Tunnel Vision: Arts Under the Avenue*, which installed new lighting and artwork by 12 local artists in the Bethesda Metro pedestrian tunnel; and *Bethesda Film Fest*, a short documentary film festival highlighting the work of regional filmmakers. Initiatives of the Bethesda Arts & Entertainment District that have reached over 10,000 participating artists since 2002 include:

- The Trawick Prize: Bethesda Contemporary Art Awards
- Bethesda Art Walk
- Bethesda Fine Arts Festival
- Bethesda Artist Market
- Dance Bethesda
- Bethesda Painting Awards
- Play in a Day
- Gallery B
- Tunnel Vision
- Bethesda Film Fest

#### **E. BETHESDA CIRCULATOR**

In 2006, the Bethesda Urban Partnership took over the management of the Bethesda Circulator, formerly the Bethesda 8 Trolley, which had been managed by Montgomery County since 1999. The Bethesda Circulator is a free bus service that provides transportation to Metro, public parking garages, restaurants and shopping in downtown Bethesda. In 2008, new signs were designed and are now located at each of the 20 Bethesda Circulator stops. These visual aids provide a detailed map showing the route of the free transportation service along with the hours of operation.

In July 2011, the Bethesda Urban Partnership introduced a new Bethesda Circulator fleet, replacing older trolley-style vehicles with new buses. The new vehicles offer more reliable service, consistent branding and a more comfortable ride. Additionally, the Circulator's hours were expanded in 2012 to 7 a.m. to midnight, Monday-Thursday; 7 a.m. to 2 a.m., Friday and 10 a.m. to 2 a.m. Saturday. The new schedule was created to better accommodate riders, with particular attention to those parking in less-used garages after the closing of Lot 31.

With ridership strong at an average of 27,000 - 29,000 riders per month, the Bethesda Circulator remains one of the best ways to get around downtown Bethesda.

#### **IV. BETHESDA URBAN PARTENRSHIP FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN, 2014-2019**

##### **A. SUMMARY OF PROCESS EMPLOYED TO DEVELOP STRATEGIC PLAN**

The five-year plan of the Bethesda Urban Partnership was created in several steps.

1. The BUP Board created a Strategic Planning Committee.
2. The committee reviewed proposals from four outside consultants to facilitate internal and external focus groups that would assist BUP in creating its Strategic Plan. Association Laboratory, Inc. was hired to manage these meetings.
3. Association Laboratory served as a facilitator in meetings that included the Bethesda Urban Partnership board and staff; Bethesda A&E District Board and the Transportation Management District Advisory Committee.
4. Association Laboratory facilitated focus groups with six constituent groups: County partners, downtown Bethesda retail business owners, downtown Bethesda residents, customers, developers and downtown Bethesda employers.
5. The Strategic Planning Committee met regularly to evaluate the findings of Association Laboratory.
6. The full BUP Board of Directors held a strategic planning retreat, facilitated by Association Laboratory, in January 2013 to discuss the strategic plan and determine priorities for the five-year plan.
7. The Strategic Planning Committee worked with Association Laboratory on determining the questions for the survey that was distributed to 5,300 individuals. (*See Attachment 8 for the Survey and Responses Spreadsheet.*)
8. Association Laboratory wrote a final report including the significant findings from the focus groups and online survey as well as their recommendations for the Strategic Plan. (*See Attachment 7 for Association Laboratory's Final Report.*)
9. The BUP Board of Directors drafted the final Five-Year Goals, Strategies and Action Items that are the basis of the Five-Year Strategic Plan.

There six focus areas in the BUP Strategic Plan are 1) Maintenance 2) Marketing and Communications 3) Arts & Entertainment 4) Transportation 5) Update on 2008 Plan and 6) Future of the BUP Organization.

**BETHESDA URBAN PARTNERSHIP**  
**STRATEGIC GOAL AND VISION**  
**National Recognition of Downtown Bethesda**  
**as a Model Urban Community**

**B. Maintenance**

**Goal: Create a State of the Art Appearance and Easier Customer Navigability for Downtown Bethesda**

The maintenance strategies and action items reflect the Bethesda Urban Partnership's goal to create a state of the art appearance in downtown Bethesda as well as a downtown that is easy for residents, visitors and employees to navigate. The strategies include a unified and attractive downtown Bethesda streetscape; improved wayfinding signage; use of technology to manage downtown Bethesda's infrastructure and the improved appearance of the Metro station and bus bay area.

**Strategy: Create a Unified and Attractive Downtown Bethesda Streetscape**

**Action Items:**

- Improve street lighting.
  - Work with state and county on upgrades.
- Improve streetscape for downtown Bethesda.
  - Complete streetscape on Wisconsin and Norfolk Avenues.
- Improve downtown Bethesda gateways.
- Coordinate and enhance existing public spaces as places for gathering; identify new spaces, as appropriate.
- Improve walkability and connectivity between corridors.
- Unify bike racks, newspaper boxes, etc.

**Strategy: Improve Wayfinding in Downtown Bethesda**

**Action Items:**

- Create a task force to review and improve Wayfinding Signage, street blades and mast arm signs; ensure uniform branding.
- Improve signs indicating parking and Metro.
- Add street banners promoting downtown Bethesda and BUP to identify and brand downtown Bethesda.

### **Strategy: Use Technology to Manage Downtown Bethesda's Infrastructure**

#### **Action Items:**

- Use GIS technology and mapping to manage street lights, interface with BUP website, etc.

### **Strategy: Improve Appearance of Bethesda Metro Station and Bus Bay**

#### **Action Items:**

- Work with WMATA Task Force on completion of proposed improvements to Bethesda Metro station.
- Improve signage and directional information for Metro riders
- Add artwork to the Metro station.

## **C. Marketing and Communications**

### **Goal: Create and Implement a Successful Marketing Plan to Ensure that Bethesda is at the Regional Forefront of Attracting Customers and Businesses.**

The following marketing strategies and action items are necessary to maintain and grow downtown Bethesda's customer base, attract new businesses to the community, communicate effectively with constituents and ensure that downtown Bethesda offers the best restaurants, shops, arts organizations and special events in the region.

### **Strategy: Enhance and Build Downtown Bethesda's Brand**

#### **Action Items:**

- Create a marketing campaign featuring downtown Bethesda as the best regional downtown and destination for dining, shopping and the arts.
- Implement more signage/branding within downtown Bethesda promoting Bethesda and the Bethesda Urban Partnership.
- Promote 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bethesda Urban Partnership in 2014.

### **Strategy: Promote the Economic Viability of Downtown Bethesda**

#### **Action Items:**

- Market downtown Bethesda to potential new retail and commercial businesses.
- Add more statistical data about downtown Bethesda to website and marketing materials.

### **Strategy: Improve Communication to Constituents**

#### **Action Items:**

- More outreach to local businesses, retailers, property managers and arts and entertainment organizations.
- Increase use of technology and social media.
- Update BUP website; create mobile application for smartphones.
- Increase promotion of parking options, rates and payment options.
- Use interactive maps on BUP's website showing parking, restaurants, shops and more.

### **Strategy: Develop Relationships with Nearby Constituents**

#### **Action Item:**

- More outreach to nearby "Bethesda customers" at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, National Institutes of Health, Suburban Hospital, etc.

## **D. Transportation**

### **Goal: A Transportation System that has Complementary Vehicular and Non-Vehicular Options.**

The following transportation strategies and action items were put forth in order to ensure that traffic is mitigated, pedestrians are safe and Bethesda continues to be at the regional forefront of providing non-single occupancy vehicular options. Additionally, BUP will monitor traffic and development plans that will impact downtown Bethesda.

### **Strategy: Improve Pedestrian Safety**

#### **Action Items:**

- Improve condition of current crosswalks with more frequent re-striping.
- Work with Montgomery County to ensure enforcement of traffic laws.

### **Strategy: Improve Non-Single Occupancy Vehicular Options**

#### **Action Items:**

- Research/Consider expansion of Circulator route; Addition of new vehicles.
- Improve Bicycle Access into downtown Bethesda.
- Market Capital Bikeshare program.
- Encourage car sharing and Flexcar.

### **Strategy: Ease Traffic Congestion**

#### **Action Items:**

- Educate public on non-vehicular options.
- Increase marketing efforts of Bethesda Transportation Solutions.
- Increase “connectivity” between all parts of downtown Bethesda.
- Encourage county to do a traffic light study.

### **Strategy: Monitor Development and Traffic Plans that Impact Downtown Bethesda**

#### **Action Item:**

- Continue to attend The Greater Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber, Montgomery County Park and Planning and community meetings.
- Monitor and provide feedback on the proposed Bus Rapid Transit plans.

## **E. Arts & Entertainment**

### **Goal: Ensure that Bethesda is a vibrant Arts & Entertainment District that attracts artists, arts patrons and arts organizations.**

The following arts and entertainment strategies and action items are slated to ensure that the Bethesda Arts & Entertainment District continues to attract artists, arts patrons and arts organizations as well as sustains the success of our current arts organizations and initiatives. The strategies include supporting individual arts and entertainment organizations; creating diverse events that appeal to Bethesda’s many audiences and adding more arts elements to downtown Bethesda.

### **Strategy: Support Individual Arts & Entertainment Organizations**

#### **Action Items:**

- Promote events held at individual art venues.
- Host networking events for arts venues in the Bethesda A&E District which will connect them to collaborate on shared ideas and marketing efforts.
- Reach out to new, potential arts organizations to open in downtown Bethesda.

### **Strategy: Facilitate Events to Appeal to Bethesda’s Many Audiences**

#### **Action Items:**

- Host events that appeal to different age groups and diverse audiences.
- Market events to specific age groups and audiences.

## **Strategy: Add More Art Elements to Downtown Bethesda**

### **Action Items:**

- Add more public art in public spaces and on private commercial buildings.
- Open artist studio spaces in downtown Bethesda
- Open a community theatre where local dance and theatre companies can rent the space to host events.
- Support other arts groups in producing and hosting arts and entertainment events.
- Continue to host monthly visual art exhibitions.

## **F. Update from 2008 Strategic Plan, Initiatives to Discuss with Montgomery County**

In 2008, the Bethesda Urban Partnership put forth the following strategic items for follow up with Montgomery County: 1) Obtain a longer term authorization by Montgomery County, from a five-year authorization to a ten-year authorization; 2) Administration of all County contracts for BUP, BTS and the Bethesda Circulator should be organized and processed via the Bethesda Chevy Chase Regional Services Center; 3) Implementation of a bi-annual budget review cycle, with a change from a fiscal year to a calendar year that still allows for an annual review of funds; 4) Expansion of route and increased hours for the Bethesda Circulator; and 5) Expansion of BUP's responsibility in the implementation of lighting and crosswalk repair.

The Bethesda Urban Partnership Staff and Board representatives met with the Montgomery County Council District representative for the Bethesda area, Roger Berliner, as well as continually sought feedback from our B-CC Regional Services Center partner and contract manager, Ken Hartman, to discuss the steps necessary to implement these strategic items from 2008 and to review current Bethesda Urban Partnership priorities. While still worthy initiatives, the BUP Board decided to not pursue items 1, 2 and 3 as strategic plan goals or current priorities since they are dependent on other agency action or legislation and not as pertinent to the primary mission of the Bethesda Urban Partnership to maintain and promote downtown Bethesda. These are more administrative and/or efficiency items for future Boards and County agencies to consider and pursue when appropriate.

## **G. Future of the Bethesda Urban Partnership Organization**

In addition to the external strategies and action items, the Bethesda Urban Partnership Strategic Plan includes several internal items for consideration as we plan for the next five years. These include:

- 1) Maintain current operations and manage growth
- 2) Maintain financial stability
- 3) Optimize staff
- 4) Plan for succession
- 5) Optimize technology
- 6) Participate in Bethesda's new Master Plan

The Bethesda Urban Partnership was established in 1994. The organization began with only two full-time staff. Today, there are 35 employees working in maintenance, marketing, transportation management and administration. We have been able to effectively grow our team and budget with the support of Montgomery County, and through effective budget, time and staff management have taken on more responsibilities within downtown Bethesda since our creation. We are poised to take on additional duties within the downtown with the continued support of the county and our community partners. We also need the sustained support of the Bethesda Parking Lot District (PLD) funds so that we can continue to provide the highest level of service to downtown Bethesda which attracts the many patrons and residents who park in our garages to keep the PLD healthy.

In order to achieve our goals, BUP needs to optimize our current staff workload as well as plan for succession. We have many things that we want to accomplish in the next five years and need to be able to maintain a top quality team as well as effectively bring in new talented staff members as necessary. We have found that our valued team leaders and staff are our most significant resource and our goal is to maintain a strong and motivated team. While Association Laboratory, Inc. specifically recommended the addition of an executive staff member for strategic initiatives, the BUP Board did not conclude that such position was necessary for the successful pursuit of the Strategic Plan goals or the most efficient use of staff resources, but agreed that reviewing staffing needs and optimizing current staff talents is an integral part of monitoring the Strategic Plan implementation.

Another one of our goals is to optimize technology in order to keep our downtown on the cutting edge of maintenance, marketing and transportation management. For example, we are currently using GIS mapping technology to map streetlights, trash cans, trees, etc. in downtown Bethesda which enables us to more effectively manage outages, repairs and more. Additionally, our social media numbers have climbed considerably as we have Facebook and Twitter followers and will soon launch a new website with more interactive mapping to help Bethesda visitors more easily find parking, restaurants, shops and more.

Bethesda will soon have a new Master Plan. Montgomery County's Park and Planning Division will begin work on the new Plan in early 2014. The Bethesda Urban Partnership intends to review and comment on the plan as appropriate as well as closely examine the plan to ensure that our strategic goals and action items are in line with the County's plan for downtown Bethesda.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Since 1994, the Bethesda Urban Partnership, with the support of Montgomery County, has successfully maintained and marketed downtown Bethesda. We have taken on significant new initiatives such as the Transportation Management District, Bethesda Arts & Entertainment District and the Bethesda Circulator because of our management expertise and experience in downtown Bethesda.

We are eager to continue our work in the downtown and provide valuable services to our many constituents. We greatly value the County, focus group and survey feedback we have received over the last several months that was used to create this Strategic Plan.

We believe our Strategic Plan, which covers the next five years, will not only maintain our current level of service and success in downtown Bethesda but also raise the bar and increase our regional and national reputation as a model urban community. We respectfully ask that you reauthorize the Bethesda Urban Partnership to continue our mission of maintaining and marketing downtown Bethesda.

