



**ELICOTT CITY
PARTNERSHIP**

Ellicott City Partnership: Strategic Plan FY2018-20

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The Ellicott City Partnership is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that seeks to preserve the heritage and vitality of Old Ellicott City while enhancing and creating economic growth.

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Contents

Introduction	3
Background	3
Context: Strategic Environment.....	4
ECP FY2018-20: Goals, Objectives, Actions.....	7
The Path Forward	14
Conclusion.....	14

Introduction

This document presents a strategic plan that guides the FY2018-20 work of the Ellicott City Partnership (ECP), a not-for-profit organization that seeks to preserve the heritage and vitality of Old Ellicott City (OEC) while enhancing and creating economic growth. The document is structured as follows: after this brief introduction is a brief background; the strategic environment is discussed for context; and FY2018-20 goals, objectives, and actions are set forth.

Background

The ECP serves Ellicott City, Maryland, specifically its historic district, OEC. OEC was founded in 1772 by the Ellicott brothers. Ellicott's Mills—later renamed Ellicott City—grew to become one of the largest milling and manufacturing towns on the East Coast. Over the years, OEC has served as the first terminus of commercial railroad in the United States (its B&O train station, built in 1830, is the oldest surviving railroad station in America), a hospital for Union soldiers in the Civil War, and site of the first wedding of Babe Ruth, among other things. At present, OEC—a historic gem of the mid-Atlantic with its celebrated Main Street—offers a unique mix of restaurants, shops, services, historical sites, and green spaces. OEC contains more than 119 historic properties built prior to 1900 (including three built prior to 1800).¹

OEC and greater Ellicott City sit within Howard County, Maryland—home to some of the nation's very best schools, most educated populace, and highest median income—and within easy commuting distance to both Baltimore and Washington, DC. For example, in 2013, Howard County ranked second among the nation's counties for median income.² In 2014, the Howard County Public School System was deemed to be the top school district in Maryland.³

The ECP itself is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2013 with the merger of the Ellicott City Business Association and the Ellicott City Restoration Foundation. The organization balances the functions of a chamber of commerce and a historic preservation organization, working to preserve the heritage and vitality of OEC while enhancing and creating economic growth (its mission). The ECP seeks a vibrant, economically sustainable, historic community (its vision). Through the work of the ECP, OEC was officially designated a “Maryland Main Street Community” in 2014.⁴ The ECP utilizes Main Street

¹ For more on the history of OEC, see, for example (accessed on February 7, 2017):

<http://ellicottcity.net/tourism/history/>; <http://www.borail.org/Ellicott-City-Station.aspx>; <http://www.davidbstinsonauthor.com/2013/04/19/ellicott-citys-st-pauls-catholic-church-where-babe-ruth-got-married/>; and also <http://hchsm.org>.

² See (accessed on February 7, 2017): <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/howard/ellicott-city/ph-ho-cf-howard-income-1003-20130930-story.html>.

³ See (accessed on February 7, 2017): <http://www.hcpss.org/news-posts/2014/11/2014-15-92/>.

⁴ For more on the Maryland Main Street Program, which “strives to strengthen the economic potential of Maryland’s traditional main streets and neighborhoods,” see here (accessed on February 7, 2017): <http://dhcd.maryland.gov/Communities/Pages/programs/MainStreet.aspx>.

Maryland parameters and has five standing committees: 1) Economic Vitality; 2) Promotions; 3) Design; 4) Clean, Safe, and Green; and 5) Organization.⁵

The ECP works closely with partners in county, state, and federal levels of government.⁶ These partners include: Howard County Executive Branch, Howard County Council, Howard County Economic Development Authority, Howard County Tourism, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, and the office of U.S. Congressman Elijah Cummings. In addition, the ECP works with area non-profits including the Patapsco Heritage Greenway, Howard County Historical Society, Blossoms of Hope, and the Community Foundation of Howard County.

Context: Strategic Environment

In essence, the ECP's mission is to support and enable the success of OEC. The ECP cannot and would not exist without OEC; any review of the strategic environment for the organization necessitates reviewing that of the town. Both the ECP and OEC exist within an interesting and dynamic milieu, influenced by various trends discussed in greater detail below.

Flooding and Climate Change:

First and foremost, OEC sustained considerable damage in a devastating flood on July 30, 2016. Assessed to be a “thousand-year event,” nearly six inches of rain fell in under two hours, resulting in flash-flood waters more than six feet deep in parts of the historic district. Two people were killed, and the town was declared a federal disaster area in the aftermath. Shut down for more than a month after the flood, OEC is still recovering, with many property owners and businesses rebuilding—and others choosing to call it a day. Research suggests that the flood may cause a reduction in economic activity of more than \$42 million.⁷ OEC has seen multiple floods in its 200+ years, though none seemingly as destructive as the 2016 event. Climate research suggests that extreme weather events may be becoming more frequent and severe, however, and OEC must remain cognizant of risks from its unique watershed (while balancing an important link to the beautiful Patapsco Valley, an area popular with hikers and mountain bikers, among others).⁸

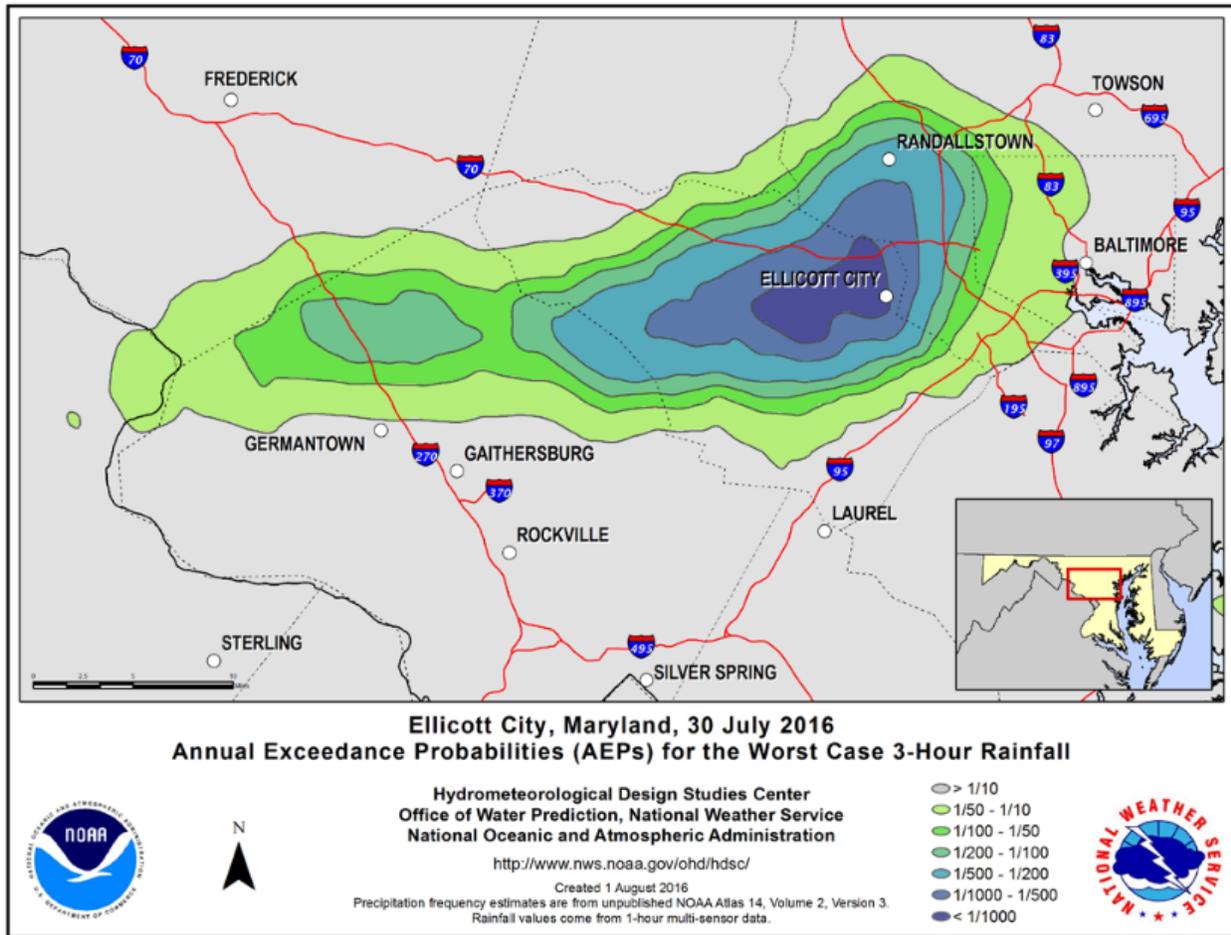
⁵ For more information about the committees, see here (accessed on February 7, 2017):

<http://www.mainstreet.org/main-street/main-street-news/story-of-the-week/2014-/main-street-publications-are.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/>.

⁶ OEC is not an incorporated municipality; neither OEC nor greater Ellicott City has a mayor or other local form of government other than representation on the Howard County Council. OEC is part of a County District 1, which includes the areas of Ellicott City, Elkridge, and Hanover.

⁷ The July 30, 2016 flood received national media attention; for more, see, for example (all accessed on February 7, 2017): <http://www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2016/08/01/ellicott-city-maryland-flood/87914944/>; <http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/31/us/maryland-flooding/>; <http://www.baltimoresun.com/entertainment/dining/baltimore-diner-blog/bal-rumor-mill-will-not-reopen-in-ellicott-city-space-destroyed-by-flood-20161006-story.html>. For information on economic impact, see here (accessed on February 7, 2107): <http://www.jacob-france-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/Economic-Impact-Ellicott-City-Flood-2016.pdf>.

Figure 1. NOAA/NWS Information on the July 30, 2016 Flood⁹



Economy:

The United States is experiencing one of the longest economic recoveries in its history—though it is also one of the slowest periods of growth since WWII.¹⁰ Anecdotal information suggests that OEC, like much of America, has been on a path to growth, though one tempered by persistent (albeit weakening) economic headwinds following the financial crisis of 2007/08. Of course, any recent economic growth was disrupted by the flood on July 30, 2016.

⁸ See, for example (accessed on February 7, 2017): <https://www.epa.gov/climate-change-science/understanding-link-between-climate-change-and-extreme-weather>. A Flood Advisory Workgroup was established in 2015 to “focus on long-term flood preparation and prevention”; see (accessed on February 7, 2017): <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/howard/ellcott-city/ph-ho-cf-flood-workgroup-feedback-0324-20160321-story.html>.

⁹ See (accessed on February 7, 2017): <http://www.weather.gov/lwx/EllicottCityFlood2016>

¹⁰ See (accessed on February 7, 2017): <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/current-us-economic-recovery-may-end-up-as-longest-ever-2016-07-18>.

OEC sits at the crossroads of affluence and education, within one of the richest and most educated counties in the United States. A recent study conducted by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) suggests that an estimated 5 million people live within a one-hour drive of a OEC.¹¹ OEC thus resides in what should be an optimal environment to support high and sustained rates of affluent visitation with accompanying economic growth.

Main streets have traditionally viewed suburban development and the attendant malls that arose with it as the “competition” of main street shopping. Consumers are currently rejecting traditional suburban modes of shopping, however, and their habits are drifting towards two modes: e-commerce and shopping local. On the former, the retail shopping environment is to some extent shifting to an online economy, and “big-box” retail brick-and-mortar stores are closing down in record numbers.¹² At the same time, there is a growing movement that supports small, independent, unique, best-of-breed businesses, locavores, and the like.¹³ Both trends support historic main streets like that of OEC, in that OEC businesses can capitalize on “shop local/shop small” demand while also supplementing physical customers with virtual ones wherever possible.

Politics:

Following the July 30th flood, OEC received very strong support from county, state, and federal officials. Close working relationships to drive post-flood recovery between ECP and officials have sustained goodwill from elected leaders—as well as with the broader community. Indeed, government leaders—particularly at the local level—have long supported OEC. The initiative to form the ECP began under former County Executive Ken Ulman, but support for the organization remained strong following the change of power (and parties) with the current County Executive, Allan Kittleman, voicing strong backing for OEC and the ECP.¹⁴ County Councilman Jon Weinstein was an early supporter of the ECP, serving on a committee as well as leading a Leadership Howard County team that helped guide the ECP through its initial strategic planning process.

Additionally, though anecdotally, volatility at the federal level following the contentious election of 2016 appears to be pushing citizens to focus on their local communities (perhaps in the spirit of “this is something I can affect”). OEC can benefit from current goodwill of its local government and the citizenry. Continuing its non-partisan stance of advocating for OEC will allow the ECP to withstand any further political changes both in the short term and long term.

¹¹ See (accessed June 11, 2017): <http://baltimore.uli.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2011/05/2017-03-06-Ellicott-City-TAP-Report-rev-1.pdf>.

¹² See (accessed February 7, 2017): <http://www.businessinsider.com/stores-closing-macys-kohls-walmart-sears-2016-12>.

¹³ See (accessed on February 7, 2017): <https://www.americanexpress.com/us/small-business/shop-small/>; <https://radius.com/2014/02/04/goinglocal/>; <http://fortune.com/2015/08/21/local-food-movement-business/>.

¹⁴ As noted above, ECP itself was formed with Howard County actively encouraging the merging of ECP’s two precursor organizations. ECP has played an active, nonpartisan role, representing its constituency at hearings and working closely with government officials and agencies and other organizations to the benefit of OEC.

Technological Innovation:

OEC, and the country as a whole, are witnessing and benefitting from various technology trends. Aside from the aforementioned increase in e-commerce, technology is facilitating different approaches to both work and leisure. For example, technology innovations support a broad work-at-home/work-where-you-live movement, one that allows employees to often work in shared environments (e.g., We Work offices; “maker” spaces). Driving services like Uber and Lyft, and intense research on self-driving cars, may also provide greater accessibility for visitors to OEC. And innovations such as augmented reality have proven popular (and occasionally “faddish”), with applications such as Pokémon Go, which was popular in OEC prior to the July 30, 2016 flood, leading to nearly unprecedented levels of foot traffic in the area. These innovations offer OEC the ability to adapt its approach to these trends and provide an opportunity for further economic growth (e.g., encouraging the use of driving services as a partial solution to potential parking issues). The ECP can utilize changing technology to increase its communications with constituents and assist OEC in adapting to technological innovation as it happens.

ECP FY2018-20: Goals, Objectives, Actions

Facing this strategic environment, the ECP will work in FY2018-20 (and beyond) to achieve its vision of a vibrant, economically sustainable, historic community. This implies the following strategic goals:

- visitors—whether residents, employees, business owners, property owners, or out-of-town tourists—play an active role in a vibrant community;
- business and property owners are economically successful in a sustainable sense, over the long term; and
- heritage and history are leveraged to maintain a unique, independent OEC.

More specifically, such a vision implies the following accompanying objectives:

For a vibrant community:

1. Events, attractions, and a beautiful and safe historic town drawing visitors to OEC
2. A smart commercial mix that serves a community and that meets community demand
3. Strong reputation and pride of place

For sustainable business owner success:

4. Sufficient potential customer throughput (whether physical or virtual)
5. Strong rates of conversions of potential customers to sales
6. Businesses that offer a smart mix of complementary goods and services for sustained economic growth of OEC as a community

For sustainable property owner success:

7. Low vacancy rates for both commercial and residential properties
8. A smart mix of complementary commercial tenants for sustained economic growth of OEC as a community

For heritage/history:

9. Maintenance of OEC's historic look and feel (e.g., through zoning, beautification, etc.)
10. Unique, independent (i.e., not national chains) commercial tenants
11. Increased awareness of and community connections to OEC history (e.g., of PFI, B&O, commerce, etc.)

To achieve this vision and its goals and objectives, OEC needs intentional, smart economic growth. Accordingly, in FY2018-20, the ECP will place itself in an active role to, among other things:

- attract (e.g., visitors via events and a beautiful town; potential commercial tenants for property owners);
- facilitate (e.g., training for businesses; discussions about community demand); and
- advocate (e.g., for favorable public policies).¹⁵

The work of the ECP is directed by its committees. Specifically, in FY2018-20—in its role to attract, facilitate, and advocate—the ECP, via its committees, will take the following actions (aligning with the numbered objectives above):

¹⁵ The ECP will also measure its progress in achieving goals and objectives.

Economic Vitality Committee:

<i>Action</i>	<i>Timing</i>	<i>Objective(s) supported</i>
Perform a market analysis to establish current baseline data on OEC trade area, demographic profile, and lifestyle trends to determine needed appropriate businesses categories and fill gaps in demand	FY18	2, 6, 7, 8, 10
Establish and maintain data collection systems to determine commercial property inventory, business inventory, state of infrastructure, community assets, and financial incentive availability for investment	FY18	2, 6, 7, 8
Establish and maintain list of appropriate desired businesses in order to assist property owners fill gaps in business demand as vacancies become available and as identified in the market analysis	FY18	2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10
Continue to provide business consulting services for established business retention and new business attraction for businesses to take advantage of best practices in a rapidly changing consumer environment	FY18/19/20	2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10
Form a business improvement district to fill gaps in cleanliness and safety services provided by county government (services could include for example, supplemental garbage/recycling pick up, streetscape cleaning/maintenance, and a safety patrol officer from 12-4am)	FY20	1, 3, 7
Drive forward the work of the ULI and other outside groups as appropriate	FY18/19/20	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10

Promotions Committee:

<i>Action</i>	<i>Timing</i>	<i>Objective(s) supported</i>
Revitalize promotion committee (i.e., define mission of committee, membership requirements, and strategic plan)	FY18	Internal
Conduct a survey of constituents (i.e., property owners, business owners, and residents/tourists) to establish the demand for events (e.g., type, frequency, etc.)	FY18	1, 3, 4
Plan, promote, and run festivals, Midnight Madness, and innovative events suggested by the constituent survey	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 4
Create partnerships with surrounding communities and organizations (e.g., HC Historical Society) to enhance quality and quantity of events	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 4
Seek to bring patrons to a variety of spaces in OEC that have not been historically used for events	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 4
Create public awareness of amenities in OEC, including shopping, dining, outdoor recreation, and professional services through advertising and events to an appropriate and varied demographic	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 11
Conduct post-event analysis to determine if ECP events are meeting goals including financial impact, fundraising, and public opinion; apply this analysis to improve future events	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 4, 5, 11

Design Committee:

Action	Timing	Objective(s) supported
Monitor and comment on recovery projects, EC Master Plan	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 9, 11
Tour courthouse building and site; monitor and comment on courthouse proposals	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 9, 11
Monitor streetscape refurbishment	FY18	1, 3, 9, 11
Explore additional seasonal building lighting and power sources	FY18	1, 3, 9, 11
Explore B&O clock repair or replacement (NB: completed in July 2017)	FY18	1, 3, 9, 11
Explore outdoor stages at parking lots D and F	FY18	1, 3, 9, 11
Refurbish flood level signage; repaint B&O railroad bridge (NB: completed in July 2017)	FY18	1, 3, 9, 11
Encourage the creation of two pocket parks along Main Street	FY18	1, 3, 9, 11
Employ an intern grant writer to pursue funding for projects	FY18	1, 3, 9, 11

Clean, Safe, and Green Committee:

<i>Action</i>	<i>Timing</i>	<i>Objective(s) supported</i>
Coordinate cleanup, invasive removal, and beautification project schedule with Patapsco Heritage Greenway and Roger Carter Center to maximize volunteer participation	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 9, 11
Coordinate above with Promotions Committee and DPW to be sure ECP is ready for events and not duplicating efforts	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 9, 11
Attract grants and/or sponsor grantees in support of "Soak it Up"	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 9, 11
Place additional trash/cigarette receptacles	FY18	1, 3, 9, 11
Participate in creation of storm water management best management practices	FY18	1, 3, 9, 11
Work with county on reviving the "Adopt a Piece of History" program (similar to adopt a highway)	FY18	1, 3, 9, 11
Strengthen the ECP brand for and continue to grow the Milltown 5K run	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 9, 11
Coordinate annual holiday décor with Tourism	FY18/19/20	1, 3, 9, 11

Organization Committee:

<i>Action</i>	<i>Timing</i>	<i>Objective(s) supported</i>
Develop and oversee execution of ECP's annual planning and budgeting processes	FY18/19/20	Internal
Refine and properly memorialize organizational processes (procurement, financial management, human resources, budget, etc.)	FY18/19/20	Internal
Increase communications efforts with ECP's various constituencies (business owners, property owners, residents, area nonprofits, governmental agencies, visitors, and potential visitors)	FY18/19/20	Internal
Create and manage successful membership and fundraising programs	FY18/19/20	Internal
Plan and host successful board retreats and annual meetings, including the creation of each year's snapshot annual report	FY18/19/20	Internal
Drive the quarterly check-ins that measure ECP progress in achieving goals and objectives	FY18/19/20	Internal

The Path Forward

Implementation of the *ECP Strategic Plan FY2018-20* will require cooperation and buy-in from internal and external stakeholders. After adoption of the strategic plan, the ECP will:

- connect with stakeholders;
- solicit feedback and constructive changes to the strategic plan, as necessary; and
- review with ECP constituencies at community meetings.

The ECP board committees will develop quantifiable metrics to gauge progress in achieving strategic goals and objectives (and progress in implementing COAs). Under the auspices of the Organization Committee, these metrics will be presented on a quarterly basis to the board and annually to the ECP membership as follows:

- October 2017: quarterly check-in;
- January 2018: quarterly check-in and board review of the strategic plan; and
- March 2018: annual review with ECP membership.

During the quarterly board review, metrics will be reevaluated for fitness for purpose and adjusted as necessary. These quarterly and annual check-ins will continue through 2020, when either a new strategic plan is adopted or the *ECP Strategic Plan FY2018-20* is extended.

Conclusion

The ECP is dedicated to the success and vitality of OEC. The ECP has shown itself to be adept at problem solving in times of crisis; this strategic plan sets out a much more challenging path of problem solving in times of calm, when the “next most important thing” is not as apparent. It should be used as a reference and as a tool to ground the organization.