

*We Come for the Architecture and Stay for the People*

# BOLTON HILL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION STRATEGIC PLAN (2021)



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Bolton Hill offers the best of two worlds. It is arguably the best historic neighborhood in Baltimore and one of the greatest urban neighborhoods in the United States. It is also a community diverse in age, racial and ethnic groups, sexual orientations, and household types. A common saying for why Bolton Hill residents are so committed to the neighborhood is that “we come for the architecture and stay for the people.” Few neighborhoods anywhere generate as much loyalty or inspire as much creative collaboration.

Periodically since 1983, Bolton Hill’s community association has undertaken a strategic planning process. The emphasis in 1983 was on the importance of homeownership. Over the years, emphasis grew to include the importance of neighborhood institutions, economic development and Bolton Hill’s relationships with other neighborhoods. The last effort was in 2005 and included a continued focus not only on these issues but also educational opportunities for neighborhood children and the need to actively foster community engagement. In view of the decade and a half that has passed and new issues that have come to the fore, the Bolton Hill Community Association (BHCA), the successor to the Mount Royal Improvement Association (MRIA), undertook another Strategic Planning process starting in 2019.

BHCA appointed a Strategic Planning Committee to shepherd the process through to completion. The Committee distributed an electronic community survey and obtained demographic information from a variety of sources. Based on the survey responses and the demographic information, the Committee developed a number of Key Topics. Those Key Topics were distributed to the neighborhood for comment. With this information, the Strategic Planning Committee wrote the Strategic Plan to guide Bolton Hill for at least the next decade.

Key recommendations of the Strategic Plan are as follows:

1. Maintain Bolton Hill’s distinguished streetscapes, buildings, trees and gardens. Provide more information and support for property owners about historic preservation and renovating properties responsibly. The extensive greening efforts in the neighborhood’s parks, public tree wells, and public gardens should continue.
2. Continue BHCA’s policy of opposing increases in density in row homes while recognizing the importance of having an array of housing stock in the neighborhood.
3. Support and broaden community engagement, the pillar of the Bolton Hill community. Strive to live up to the diversity BHCA aims for in its membership, its leadership, and in its wider community engagement.
4. Expand BHCA support of educational and youth development activities in the neighborhood to attract and retain families with children.
5. Acknowledge Bolton Hill’s past involvement in systemic racism and make sure that racial and social justice are embedded in all of our community’s efforts.
6. Strengthen Bolton Hill’s relationships with adjacent neighborhoods, which must include not only Mt. Vernon-Belvedere and Reservoir Hill but also Madison Park, Historic Marble Hill, Druid Heights and Upton.

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7. Strengthen BHCA's relationships with neighborhood institutions, including schools, houses of worship, and businesses
8. Bolton Hill alone has too few people to support as much retail as residents want, including a much-desired healthy food grocery store within walking distance. However, BHCA should be proactive in supporting existing Bolton Hill businesses and encouraging new ones. In addition, Bolton Hill should be proactive in supporting existing retail in adjacent neighborhoods and encouraging more retail opportunities in those neighborhoods.
9. Make the BHCA website the central repository for neighborhood information and use it for both existing residents and to attract new ones. If necessary, employ an individual to keep the website up-to-date.
10. Continue our present safety and security efforts and develop a Bolton Hill camera network among private cameras facing public spaces being mindful of protecting civil rights and respecting civil liberties.
11. Continue to work on a number of traffic calming initiatives throughout the neighborhood.
12. Develop a central repository of environmental sustainability options.
13. Advocate for improvements in Baltimore's public transportation system and examine the role of the automobile in our community in the coming decades.

This Strategic Plan is designed to offer a wide range of opportunities for both owners and renters to become involved in the Bolton Hill community, offering manageable amounts of commitment. Through these opportunities, different people can get to know each other in a much more meaningful way. The rewards are clear. Not only will we continue to live in the most beautiful and interesting neighborhood in Baltimore, but the richness of our relationships with our neighbors will be that much more enjoyable.

Following this Executive Summary is the full Strategic Plan. It lays out in greater detail the demographics and survey results on which the Plan was based and the full set of recommendations.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Beginning in 1983, the Mount Royal Improvement Association (MRIA), predecessor to the Bolton Hill Community Association (BHCA), has periodically undertaken a strategic planning process. The first plan focused on the importance of homeownership and expressed skepticism toward economic and institutional uses of residential properties. Over time attitudes and priorities changed. In 1993-1994, the importance of institutions to the continued viability of Bolton Hill was recognized, as was the importance of fostering relationships with other neighborhoods.

The 2005 Strategic Plan continued the focus on economic development, with a more intense approach to relationships with other neighborhoods, education opportunities for neighborhood children, and an acceptance of the need to actively foster community engagement. The vision statement from that plan was as follows: “Bolton Hill is the premier diverse urban community committed to historic preservation and maintaining its attractive residential character with lively streetscapes, green parks and pathways, safe and child friendly streets, supportive institutional neighbors, local shops which meet our needs and dedicated to helping the City to grow into a vibrant and healthy metropolis.”

That vision statement was echoed in the 2018 BHCA bylaws, which state that “The object of this Association shall be to preserve and enhance the quality of life in the Bolton Hill community and to continue to make it a safe, green and socially conscious community which enhances and promotes diversity in all of its activities and membership.”

This strategic planning effort addresses a number of persistent issues in addition to a plethora of newer ones that have gained more attention over the past 15 years: transportation and environmental sustainability; the role of parks and gardens; communications; our place in the neighborhoods of Central West Baltimore; our community’s role in addressing the issue of systemic racism that continues to haunt America; and the balance between renters, non-resident landlords, and homeowners in the neighborhood.

Finally, we need to consider these issues in the context of a growing number of other neighborhoods offering attractive city living for those individuals and families considering residing in Baltimore.

## **THE PROCESS**

The process for the development of this new plan has been more expansive and disciplined than previous strategic plans for Bolton Hill. A Strategic Planning Committee was appointed by the BHCA president. After a number of committee meetings, a survey was developed and sent to the Bolton Hill community. There were 470 responses, of which two-thirds came from homeowners and one-third from renters. From these results and other demographic information, Key Topics were identified. These topics, accompanied by the Survey Results, were sent again to the entire community. Members of the Committee then wrote particular sections of the Strategic Plan, which in turn were compiled into this document. During the drafting process, there were additional discussions with individuals in the neighborhood about aspects of the plan.

## A. DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic characteristics for Bolton Hill are based on a number of sources: Baltimore City Planning Department Neighborhood Statistical Areas (NSA), one of which is Bolton Hill; Baltimore Police Department crime statistics; supplemental socioeconomic and vital signs data from the Baltimore Neighborhoods Indicators Alliance; the Baltimore City Health Department; two recent reports (April, 2020 and July, 2020) prepared for the Abell Foundation, which addressed Baltimore neighborhood changes in racial and ethnic composition, income, and home ownership; the 2010 Census and the 2017, 2018, and 2019 American Community Surveys (ACSs) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. The adjacent NSAs to which we compared ourselves were Midtown, Mt. Vernon, Madison Park and Reservoir Hill. Selected competitive and comparable NSAs also were evaluated including: Federal Hill, Locust Point, Riverside, Guilford, Roland Park, and Homeland.

Takeaways include the following:

- Based on the 2019 ACS, Bolton Hill has 4,452 residents.
- Bolton Hill has proportionately fewer young people than the City as a whole and the comparable areas. Conversely, Bolton Hill has more than twice the proportion of people over 65 than the City as a whole (25% versus 12%) and this “mature” population is growing in Bolton Hill as a percentage of the total population.
- Using Baltimore City Planning data of 2018, approximately 60% of Bolton Hill households consist of one person. The remaining 40% of households in Bolton Hill are distributed among family households of less than three people (approximately 25%), non-family households of two or more people (approximately 10%), and family households of 3 or more people (approximately 5%).
- Bolton Hill’s racial characteristics are as follows: 52% White, 37% Black, and 11% Other.
- Housing Unit Occupation is an important category for which exact data is difficult to find. Based on the most up-to-date data source, the 2019 ACS, 733 (33%) of the occupied housing units were owner occupied and 1,516 (67%) of them were occupied by renters. These figures include the large apartment buildings in the neighborhood. If large apartment buildings are excluded, the number of owner-occupied units is in the 40-50% range.
- The 2018 ACS median household income for Bolton Hill (\$54,402) is higher than the City (\$50,051) but only by 7.7%. This is probably because many Bolton Hill residents are students and many live-in government-subsidized affordable apartments. The neighborhoods to Bolton Hill’s West and North have lower median household incomes, with Madison Park at \$32,041, Upton at \$27,904 and Reservoir Hill (\$49,031). Bolton Hill’s median household income is substantially below other neighborhoods to whom we often compare ourselves: Guilford (\$156,268), Roland Park (\$107,449), Federal Hill (\$112,971), Locust Point (\$125,360), and Riverside (\$120,171).
- Bolton Hill residents have a high level of educational attainment: 38% of the population has graduate education; 20% college; and 27% high school with some college. In the City as a whole, 18% have graduate education; 17% are college graduates; and 47% are high school graduates with some college.
- The crime rate in Bolton Hill is significantly lower than Baltimore as whole and the other neighborhoods in the Midtown area. The crime rate per 1,000 population in Bolton Hill is 36.1

for property crimes and 17.7 for violent crimes compared to the City as a whole with a rate of 46.4 for property crimes and 28.3 for violent crimes

## **B. SURVEY**

The Survey added more dimensions to the Bolton Hill portrait. There were 470 responses. The characteristics of the survey respondents varied from the demographics of the Census. Survey respondents represented more owner households (68% vs. 33%), an older population (51% vs. 25% over 65) and more white respondents (80% vs. 52%). Selected cross tabs highlighted key demographic characteristics:

- Nearly 53% of respondents were 45 or older and 17% were currently retired. Nevertheless, supporting the needs of our senior community was viewed as a low priority.
- Nearly 70% of respondents feel “usually safe” or “almost always safe”. However, crime prevention was by far the top priority for improvement.
- There was a high desire (80%) for more retail options in Bolton Hill, specifically a long sought-after healthy grocery store within walking distance.
- There was high interest from all key segments in advancing educational opportunities for children. Forty-two per cent of children attend school outside the neighborhood. While families raising children in Bolton Hill made up a small percentage of the respondents, they were some of the most engaged community members and almost all are homeowners.
- Community engagement is seen as a pillar of the Bolton Hill community.
- Approximately 50% of respondents (whether renter or homeowner) favored more involvement with neighboring communities, while 30% weren’t sure and 15% were opposed.
- There was nearly universal support for making our neighborhood more environmentally sustainable for both homeowners and renters, and there was very low use of public transportation and continued reliance on cars. 47% of renters and 49% of homeowners used off-street parking while 53% of renters and 51% of homeowners used on-street parking.
- Adults under the age of 35 are not very involved in the community and only 24% planned to stay.
- All key segments wanted more information about Bolton Hill activities.

From the demographic characteristics and survey results, the following observations are relevant to Bolton Hill’s strengths and challenges as they relate to the 2021 Strategic Plan.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

Bolton Hill is a neighborhood of choice for homeowners and renters, arguably the most beautiful neighborhood in Baltimore. Residents like living here and many remain for a long time. Bolton Hill has approximately 5,000 residents and is a diverse community. We are one of the most family friendly urban neighborhoods in the City with safe play spaces, good schools and family-size houses. We aspire to be a socially conscious community embracing and promoting diversity. Our community is in a

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convenient location with close proximity to major job bases, including downtown, universities/medical facilities and the Washington Metro job market. Bolton Hill is the most convenient neighborhood in Baltimore to all means of public transportation, along with access to the Jones Falls Expressway and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. Unfortunately, residents don't take full advantage of public transportation, in part, because Baltimore has an inadequate public transportation system.

From 2000 to 2017, Baltimore lost 15,000 homeowners, and the City's homeownership rate has dropped below 50%, the lowest since 1930. Yet in recent decades Baltimore has developed a number of communities that appeal to people who desire city living. Accordingly, there are a number of options for the number of people who want to live in these communities and, in some cases, own homes in Baltimore. Bolton Hill no longer has a monopoly on attracting these people, if it ever did. Even our large row homes are not universally regarded as an asset as compact residences are seen as more desirable. Finally, as we are an aging neighborhood, it is to be expected that Bolton Hill will see more than the usual rate of turnover of owner occupants in the next decade.

Still, our neighborhood is unique. Why have so many residents for so long a period of time been willing to give so much of themselves to support our community and help move it forward? The answer is simply that we "come for the architecture and stay for the people."

What acts as an initial attraction for so many people who become neighbors is Bolton Hill's commitment to historic preservation. There is a coherence to the architecture that has been faithfully maintained together with the parks and green spaces which make it an incredibly beautiful neighborhood. But the more important attribute compelling so many of us to stay are the diverse and interesting people who are willing to contribute their time and skills to make the neighborhood a vibrant and engaging place to live.

Our assets are clear: a beautiful neighborhood, a relatively large amount of green space, a commitment to historic preservation, a wonderful location, a diverse population, a family friendly environment, and a strong history of community and civic engagement. The challenge is to strengthen our existing assets and develop new ones while actively increasing awareness of why Bolton Hill is a great place to live to potential buyers and renters outside of our community.

Maintaining the quality of life in Bolton Hill will take work, whether it is ongoing and never-ending architectural stewardship to sustain the neighborhood's beauty, or enhancing community engagement, or working to improve public safety, or focusing on the constant vigilance necessary to protect our limited stock of family or owner-occupied houses against those non-resident landlords who are not committed to the neighborhood. Despite our low crime rates, the issue of safety, security, and crime prevention in the Survey results remains a chief concern for Bolton Hill residents. Our community needs to find ways to support retail establishments in our own and nearby neighborhoods; to strengthen our institutional relationships; to address systemic racism; and to discern how we fit into the larger context of neighborhoods not just to the south but also to the north and west.

This Strategic Plan is designed to provide the framework to address these issues over the next decade. It is also designed to offer members of our community ways to become more engaged with the neighborhood and with each other. It will indeed take work, but it is good work and is necessary if we want Bolton Hill to continue to thrive as a neighborhood. The following areas of focus and their accompanying recommendations and indicators of progress will help Bolton Hill stay on track with implementing the Strategic Plan.

## AREAS OF FOCUS

There were a number of different ways to order the Areas of Focus. This approach lists those areas which seem to most directly involve the neighborhood and then those issues which could be viewed in a larger perspective. All are important.

### A. HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Bolton Hill is a beautiful neighborhood. The reasons for the attractiveness of our neighborhood are many. They include the care that residents give their properties, sidewalks and alleys; the community's parks and green spaces; and finally, Bolton Hill's commitment to historic preservation.

In 1967, Bolton Hill was placed on the City of Baltimore's Historic Landmark List and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1971, resulting in the requirement that all changes to the visible exterior of properties in the neighborhood be approved by the Baltimore Commission of Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP). BHCA's Architectural Review Committee (ARC) is the neighborhood's representative to CHAP and works in concert with CHAP to review and approve requests.

As new people become homeowners or property owners in the neighborhood, it will be important that they be informed that Bolton Hill is a historic district and provided resources to support them in maintaining their historic homes.

#### **Historic Preservation Recommendations:**

1. ARC should review and share links to CHAP materials that provide information about maintaining an historic property in Bolton Hill as well as historic preservation requirements.
2. ARC should consider developing ancillary materials, if appropriate, specific to Bolton Hill.
3. ARC's role as a group of neighbors with their own experience and expertise to assist property owners with historic preservation should be publicized more, via the BHCA Website, BHEN, and the BHCA Bulletin.
4. There should be a link to CHAP requirements on the BHCA website.
5. ARC contact information and ARC and/or CHAP materials should be included in BHCA's Welcome Packet which is recommended in the Strategic Plan.

Indicators will be reviewing and sharing the CHAP links, developing, as appropriate, additional information and ensuring that new neighbors receive them.

### B. HOUSING

It is also important to have an array of housing stock in the neighborhood. Many of Bolton Hill's row houses were divided into apartments in the 1940s to 1960s in response to a growing city population, which then began to decline. Now we have far more dwelling units for renters than homeowners. We want to ensure that people at all levels of means and all ages-- from twenty somethings to families to seniors-- have an opportunity to live in Bolton Hill.

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To ensure that Bolton Hill maintains a mix of apartments and single-family row homes, Bolton Hill has opposed increases in density where single-family row homes are to be converted into apartments or the number of units is to be increased in an already existing multi-unit building. Too many multi-unit properties are often owned by non-resident landlords, who do not maintain their properties or manage the trash and recycling of their renters as well as the residents of owner-occupied row homes. There is an additional concern that until there are changes in Baltimore's public transportation system that make Bolton Hill residents use it more than automobiles, increasing density will add to parking congestion on our streets.

The damage that non-resident landlords have done and continue to do to communities across the City cannot be ignored. The value of having residents as homeowners can also not be overestimated as it is those individuals or families with a long-term commitment to a neighborhood who perform the "work" necessary to have a community thrive. That understanding is reflected both in the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicator Alliance which urges neighborhoods where home ownership is below 50% or is rapidly declining to consider a Special Benefits tax to support the community and also in the recent studies by the Abell Foundation and by Live Baltimore supporting the critical importance of home ownership.

The only present mechanism our neighborhood's toolbox (and possibly the only tool in the City's toolbox) to prevent absentee landlords from out-bidding potential homeowners and creating multi-unit dwellings has been the requirement of adding an off-street parking space for each new unit added to the property. The off-street parking requirement also prevents an owner of a multi-unit building from attempting to add more units to the property unless the requirement is met.

There is a concern that the Zoning Board has not been as rigorous in enforcing the off-street parking requirement recently as it has been in the past. There is also an argument that off-street parking requirements should not be tied to a housing policy. Yet this argument does not address the present reality of an inadequate public transportation system that makes cars necessary for many activities of daily living and related concerns about personal security if a person cannot park relatively close to where they live because of parking congestion. The issue of the extent of parking congestion in Bolton Hill has been challenged and a survey conducted post Pandemic and with MICA in session could help clarify this point.

This past summer a group of neighborhoods banded together to develop the concept of a Home Ownership Overlay District to be added to those Baltimore City Zoning Codes which include Bolton Hill homes. Except in extenuating circumstances, this approach would not allow existing single-family homes to be converted to a multi-unit building unless an owner in a home that otherwise satisfied the zoning requirements wanted to create a second unit. The Home Ownership Overlay District is a partial alternative to the off-street parking requirement. At this time, it is only a concept.

**Housing Recommendations:**

1. BHCA's Zoning Committee should continue its support of zoning policies that prevent dwelling units from being added to Bolton Hill's row houses.
2. BHCA should advocate for a more vigorous and timely code enforcement process affecting all property owners in Bolton Hill, particularly non-resident landlords.

## C. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is viewed as one of Bolton Hill's greatest assets. Attendance at BHCA monthly meetings of at least 50 people and the willingness of three dozen volunteers to be on the Board at a given time and assume leadership positions is noteworthy compared to many other communities in the City. This Strategic Plan is proposing that the Bolton Hill community take a much broader view of community engagement, namely that a strength of the neighborhood is its opportunity for interpersonal relationships, which in turn make living in Bolton Hill that much more enjoyable and rewarding. Consider how at any neighborhood restaurant, it's common to observe that everyone seems to know each other.

BHCA acknowledges that to date it has not had the participation from Black residents and other racial minorities that it needs and wants. BHCA must be deliberate and persistent in its efforts to engage as many residents with a diversity of backgrounds as it can in its work.

### **Recommendations:**

1. A Membership Committee (MC) should be a permanent committee of the Board. Its responsibilities should include not only conducting the annual membership drive, but also welcoming new neighbors, including renters, sponsoring the New Neighbor Party and developing an online "Welcome Packet."
2. MC should enlist Board volunteers to personally contact new neighbors and offer assistance with becoming acquainted and engaged with life in Bolton Hill.
3. MC should contact large apartment buildings in the neighborhood and ask management to send their renters information about BHCA and the Board's desire to encourage renters to become association members, and/or volunteers or participants in community activities.
4. MC should report annually on its progress in engaging new neighbors.

Indicators should focus on the amount of outreach performed to new neighbors and the number of new members, particularly renter residents, who have joined BHCA. MC should report these indicators at each annual BHCA meeting.

## D. COMMUNICATING WITH NEIGHBORS

Communication is an essential element of community engagement. Despite the many ways in which neighbors communicate from social media to word-of-mouth, the Survey indicated that everyone wanted more information about Bolton Hill living and events. The Bolton Hill website ([boltonhillmd.org](http://boltonhillmd.org)) hosts the monthly Bolton Hill Bulletin. Neighborhood information and announcements are circulated through the Bolton Hill Email Network (BHEN). In addition to information for existing residents, it is important to increase awareness of why Bolton Hill is a great place to live to potential homeowners and renters outside of our community.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The central repository for neighborhood information, including a calendar of events, should be the BHCA Web Site. The Website should include links to essential City services. BHCA should, if

necessary, employ an individual to keep the web site current, maintain the BHCA membership data base, maintain the BHEN roster and send out BHEN notices.

2. BHCA should consider establishing an official Bolton Hill Instagram account and hashtag to share photos and stories from our neighborhood. Fifty-five percent of Instagram users are between the ages of 18-34 years old and the majority of users live in urban areas, making it a prime channel to drive awareness of Bolton Hill. The individual keeping the web site current could also be charged with maintaining the Instagram account.

The indicators should be the progress in making the BJCA Web Site the central repository of neighborhood information and the establishment of the Instagram Account.

## **E. EDUCATION/YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES**

A critical concern for families living in or considering living in Bolton Hill is the availability of convenient, high quality childcare from birth through kindergarten, and high-quality primary and secondary public education, ideally within walking distance or a short commute. The neighborhood does have the non-profit Bolton Hill Nursery (BHN) serving 80 children ages 2-5. It also has two public elementary/middle schools: Mt. Royal Elementary/Middle School with the Ingenuity Project and advanced academic magnet programs and the Midtown Academy, a public charter school serving mainly Bolton Hill and Reservoir Hill students. A third public school, Eutaw Marshburn Elementary, is located on Eutaw Place, but Bolton Hill residents are not zoned here. The neighborhood also has the Bolton Swim & Tennis Club (BS&T), a membership club with an active youth swim team and youth programming. Both the BHN and the BS&T have multi-year waiting lists and both have a high percentage of out-of-neighborhood members.

The Mt. Royal Recreation Center and the Druid Hill YMCA are underutilized by Bolton Hill families. MICA may have resources for youth education which need to be explored. There are some annual neighborhood events for families such as the Easter Egg Hunt in Rutter's Mill Park and a Halloween celebration in Sumpter Park for the first time in 2020. Finally, there is a Parent on the Hill Facebook page for Bolton Hill and Reservoir Hill but little else in the way of formal and accessible resources for families and those considering families in the neighborhood.

In summary Bolton Hill has a number of attractive attributes for families, but they are not organized in a comprehensive, holistic way. Moreover, not everyone is a member of BS&T or has a child in BHN, so there are different sets of families with different needs who at present are not fully engaged or served.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Establish an Education/Youth Development Committee (EYC), which should conduct an initial focus group to establish the needs of the families in the neighborhood and the possibilities of partnerships and expanded community programming/education with the Bolton Hill Nursery, Mt. Royal Elementary/Middle School, Midtown Academy, Mt. Royal Recreation Center, Druid Hill YMCA and MICA.

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2. Initiate or build upon the efforts of the Parents on the Hill Facebook group, consider establishing a Family Support Group, and develop a Resource Guide for Education, Youth and Family services that can be placed on the BHCA website.
3. Explore joint programming with youth/families from other neighborhoods and if there is shared interest, develop and create those programs.
4. Focus on expanding neighborhood representation on individual school parent committees, the Mt. Royal Recreation Center Advisory Committee and the Druid Hill YMCA Advisory Committee.
5. Increase voluntarism among Bolton Hill residents in local school and youth organizations.

The indicators for this work are the success in instituting these recommendations as well as seeing an increase in the number of families with children residing and remaining in Bolton Hill.

## F. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The desire for retail establishments in the community is a dramatic change from the 1980s. At the same time, our neighborhood's insufficient market share means that Bolton Hill has to look for partners to accomplish its goals. For example, the developer of State Center was unable to find a high-quality grocery chain to become part of its Fifth Regiment Armory retail proposal in part because of the grocery store chains belief that the greater community lacked sufficient market share, particularly when State government refused to sign leases for a new office building on the site. The Madison Park North redevelopment is expected to encounter similar challenges when it attempts to recruit a high-quality grocery store to its site. BHCA already has an Economic Development Committee (EDC) and it should be asked to undertake the following.

Recommendations:

1. EDC should work with existing Bolton Hill and nearby businesses to assist them in enhancing their businesses and meeting the needs of Bolton Hill residents.
2. EDC should proactively reach out to potential partners where redevelopment is underway to varying degrees. Examples include but are not limited to University of Baltimore (Post Office Yard), Penn Station Redevelopment, Madison Park North and other West Baltimore organizations offering development opportunities. It should also become involved if there are new development opportunities at the Sav-A-Lot/Walgreen Shopping Center
3. Although the State Center project is presently in limbo, the EDC and BHCA must monitor any developments and if the project is revived, BHCA should ask the former neighborhood coalition to again be actively involved. Despite its market share and other redevelopment challenges, it remains the one parcel that can bring Bolton Hill's interests together with Mt. Vernon-Belvedere, Seton Hill and Upton neighborhoods.
4. EDC must work to ensure that social, racial and environmental justice are practiced in its efforts.
5. EDC should update the BHJCA on at least a semi-annual basis.

Indicators include the number of businesses and redevelopment partners with which BHCA engages.

## G. GREEN SPACE

Bolton Hill has 28 areas that could be considered parks, 8 public gardens, and more than 1,300 public tree wells. This abundance of outdoor public green space contributes to the quality of life in the neighborhood and to environmental sustainability. There is some support from Baltimore City which is responsible for mowing grass and removing large fallen limbs and dead trees. The Midtown Community Benefits District (Midtown), which covers four distinct neighborhoods, contributes substantially to the maintenance effort by organizing tree plantings and pruning and generally keeping Bolton Hill's green spaces in good order. Still, it is noteworthy how much of the work is performed by volunteers who care about Bolton Hill's green spaces, including the efforts to care for street trees.

BHCA's Greening Committee (GC) was recently re-established with reinvigorated energy to revive maintenance of parks such as Congressional Medal of Honor Park and to coordinate greening efforts around Bolton Hill and surrounding neighborhoods.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Memorialize Recreation and Parks Department's commitment to greening in Bolton Hill in a 5-year MOU for the purpose of grant applications.
2. Memorialize Midtown's commitment to greening in Bolton Hill in a 5-year MOU for the purpose of grant applications.
3. Develop a plan with Madison Park and Historic Marble Hill to create a unified plan for the Eutaw Place and McMechen Street median strips and nearby parks and apply for grants to implement that plan.
4. Participate in joint clean-ups and other greening activities with neighbors in Historic Marble Hill, Madison Park, and Reservoir Hill.
5. Survey trees in Bolton Hill to determine replacement needs and identify locations for tree well expansion around the neighborhood. Develop plans to accomplish those goals.
6. Identify locations and make operational public water supply for parks and gardens.
7. Institute an Arts in the Parks program, which would be planned in conjunction with Madison Park and Historic Marble Hill.

The indicators for this will be how many of the recommendations are achieved.

## H. SAFETY AND SECURITY

As a community, we should address the issues of safety and security by also realizing that our sense of well-being depends on our relationships with our neighbors. Crime and crime prevention are important, but do we know each other and are we reaching out to each other?

As previously noted, Bolton Hill's crime statistics are very favorable when compared to adjacent neighborhoods. Nonetheless when a crime occurs, particularly to the victim, any incident is one too many and the subject remains the chief concern listed in the Survey. The Strategic Plan recommends that the Safety and Security Committee (SSC) be charged with the following:

**Recommendations:**

1. The SSC and the BHCA president should continue working to recruit Block Captains to address immediate safety and security issues and coordinate with the Baltimore Police Department, sharing vital safety information with the community through the BHEN listserv. These Block Captains could also be charged with maintaining email addresses for the residents on their block and encouraging block involvement in improvement efforts and promoting community events.
2. The SSC should continue its work on developing a Bolton Hill Camera Network, including the establishment of policies and procedures that will help the community work with the Baltimore Police Department to enhance safety and security. Such policies and procedures should reflect best practices as to civil rights and civil liberties
3. The SSC should regularly monitor lighting within the neighborhood and coordinate with BG&E, and MICA, where applicable, to address inadequate street lighting. It must also work with the private sector to help provide appropriate lighting in their domains.
4. The SSC should explore placing any safety and security tips on the Bolton Hill Website along with potential problem crime types and data on where crime occurs in Bolton Hill obtained from the Baltimore Police Department.
5. The SSC should carry out and/or monitor court watch activities, including where in the judicial process are those who have been charged with crimes in the neighborhood.
6. The SEC should provide support for victims of crime and potential witnesses.
7. The SEC should educate the community, monitor and provide input into the Baltimore Police Department Consent Decree process.
8. The SEC should educate the community about alternative conflict resolution and restorative justice programs such as the Community Conferencing Process, which allows victims and perpetrators to resolve disputes outside of the traditional judicial process.
9. The SEC should work to ensure that social, racial and economic equity is practiced within the judicial system.

The metric Indicators for the Safety and Security Committee will be how many of the above-described initiatives are accomplished during the year. There must be a semi-annual report to the Board.

## **I. TRANSPORTATION**

Bolton Hill is superbly located for transportation, whether by car, transit, or nonmotorized vehicle. Located just 2 miles uphill from the harbor, it is within walking or short transit distance to downtown destinations. According to the survey, about 1/3 of Bolton Hill residents use their cars only once a week, if at all.

- Drivers can access the Jones Falls Expressway and Martin Luther King Blvd. at the edges of our neighborhood, for quick travel to points north and south.
- Stations for Amtrak, MARC, light rail, subway, and various bus routes are within a few blocks, providing non-driving access from Hunt Valley to downtown, as well as to BMI-Thurgood Marshall Airport, Washington, D.C., and the entire Northeast train corridor.
- Dedicated bike lanes connect us to the Inner Harbor and Johns Hopkins, and the State Center and UM Medical Center are within walking distance.
- Few shopping destinations are within walking distance

Bolton Hill also has several transportation challenges:

- Few or no transportation modes provide rapid access to many parts of the city.
- Some Bolton Hill residents are concerned about their personal safety on mass transit or in walking from a transit stop to their home.
- Bolton Hill does not have high-quality grocery store within walking distance desired by many residents, although there are other neighborhood retail establishments and restaurants.
- Speeding is increasingly common on our small local streets, which separate the Jones Falls Expressway from several major employment destinations, notably State Center.

The lack of rapid transit to employment or shopping destinations leads to heavy reliance on personal cars. Additionally, bus service in Baltimore is reportedly unreliable and inconvenient in a number of respects, again leading to reliance on personal cars. The impact of private cars on CO2 emissions is addressed in the Sustainability section. The issue of local shopping choices is addressed in the Economic Development section.

Speeding traffic is an important safety issue, and BHCA is working with City DOT to manage high speed cut-through traffic while preserving local access to and from the neighborhood. Because traffic calming on one street tends to move speeders to another street, it is important for traffic calming efforts to remain coordinated. BHCA has established a Traffic Coordinator position to manage this. The recommendations apply primarily to this person.

**Recommendations:**

1. Continue to request traffic calming infrastructure from City DOT, providing information and guidance to residents.
2. Recruit interested individuals to collect data on neighborhood-wide traffic patterns and identify hot spots.
3. Connect with traffic committees in adjacent neighborhoods, to consider more regional solutions to speeding.
4. Conduct an inventory of streets and alleyways in Bolton Hill and establish a priority repair list to be submitted to the Department of Transportation understanding that it may be 4-5 years before the most important priorities are addressed

Indicators will be semi-annual reports to BHCA and installation of traffic calming devices.

## **J. SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE CHANGE**

Bolton Hill is a tiny part of the whole planet, which needs to reduce CO2 emissions and change to a more sustainable use of resources—from petroleum products to paper to food. It is likely that public policy will soon be impacting our decisions about how we power our travel and our homes and about how we “consume” and what we throw away. This is bigger than Bolton Hill, but we can help ourselves and each other learn more sustainable practices.

## *We Come for the Architecture and Stay for the People*

Bolton Hill's rowhouses and apartments already use less energy than free-standing homes in the suburbs. Some Bolton Hill residents have already installed solar heating panels or converted to electric cars. Some have participated in urging the City to improve recycling and cease sending trash to an incinerator. Just about everyone recycles, and the neighborhood has access to two food composting services.

We are well located to increasingly use bicycles and transit rather than private cars, reducing vehicle emissions—the largest source of emissions in the United States and the pandemic has taught many of us to shop remotely—which can reduce vehicle trips or not, depending on how it is used.

BHCA can help its residents manage coming changes by supporting neighbors in sharing ideas for reducing energy use, emissions, and trash. Because many residents do not have dedicated parking, on street charging stations would be needed to support electric cars. And better information might encourage more residents to try transit in lieu of individual car trips.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Create a Sustainability Committee to identify specific areas and activities by which to encourage change to the way we live our lives in Bolton Hill and change our travel habits in the face of climate change. Topic would include home energy options, curbside car charging stations, rainwater capture, waste reduction, environmental tax credits, and promoting current transit options and advocating for those which Bolton Hill could more easily adopt.
2. Create a communication mechanism limited to residents and businesses located in Bolton Hill to discuss sustainability improvements.
3. Investigate and begin a discussion of creative transportation options to help make transit a more viable choice, including a Bolton Hill mini-bus or golf carts, an online ride sharing app, or more neighborhood Zip cars.

Indicators would be a semi-annual report to BHCA and a communications mechanism to discuss these issues.

## **K. INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Bolton Hill has a large number of institutions for a small neighborhood. They include: Memorial Episcopal, Brown Memorial, Corpus Christi, School for the Bible, City Temple Church, Mount Calvary Pentecostal Church, Maryland Prince Hall Masons, Lillie May Carroll Jackson Museum, Kappa Alpha Psi, Midtown Academy, Mt. Royal Elementary/Middle School (School 66), Bolton Hill Nursery School, Bolton Swim & Tennis Club, Maryland Institute, College of Art (MICA), and Unity Hall under development on Eutaw Place.

Neighbors who live in the community are most active in Memorial Episcopal, Brown Memorial, Corpus Christi, Midtown, School 66, Bolton Hill Nursery and Bolton Swim & Tennis Club. Of course, MICA remains the institution that has the most effect on the community. How BHCA should communicate and interact with these institutions needs to be part of our Strategic Plan.

One recurrent issue voiced in the Survey was the long wait lists some residents encountered with sending their children to Bolton Hill Nursery or joining Bolton Swim & Tennis. If Bolton Hill wants to

attract younger families and other types of residents to live in the neighborhood, this issue needs to be addressed.

**Recommendations:**

1. The Executive Committee of BHCA should contact these institutions to ascertain their interest in being more involved with Bolton Hill and whether Bolton Hill can assist them in any way.
2. Understanding that Bolton Hill Nursery and Bolton Swim & Tennis are private institutions, the Board should request that each institution, which are so much a part of the fabric of the neighborhood, examine its admission policies so that applicants from Bolton Hill have at least an equal priority for admission with applicants living outside the neighborhood.
3. The Executive Committee should contact the leadership of MICA requesting that its relationship with the neighborhood be re-examined. The last time such an examination occurred was in the 1980s. Issues to be addressed include but are not limited to MICA's ownership of properties in the 1500 block of Mt. Royal Avenue, maintenance of the Mt. Royal Median Strip and Mt. Royal Terrace, and MICA's interest in joining with the neighborhood on environmental sustainability projects.

Indicators will include the number of outreach efforts, the progress of the discussions of the waiting list issue with Bolton Swim & Tennis and Bolton Hill Nursery and the status of the discussions with MICA.

## L. SYSTEMIC RACISM

Bolton Hill's involvement in systemic racism in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century has been well documented. Many, if not most, of Baltimore neighborhoods as well as the City, State and Federal governments of that era contributed to systemic racism toward Black residents and other racial minorities.

Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, Bolton Hill residents were part of the greater Baltimore community's leadership that began the long and still very incomplete battle for civil rights and the destruction of systemic racism. Now with more national attention given to dismantling systemic racism, it is hoped that our country is finally prepared to confront this issue and begin the struggle to eliminate it from our society.

Although we are a small neighborhood in the context of our city, state and nation, the Bolton Hill community can do our part by committing to ensuring that racial and social justice are embedded in all our efforts. As an example, BHCA recently commissioned a historic public marker review committee to review public monuments, plaques, and park names and their association with racist elements of Bolton Hill's past. Similarly, it will undertake a similar review of its Blue Plaques nominations.

**Recommendations:**

1. BHCA should support the Social Action Task Force (SATF) in continuing to broaden Bolton Hill residents' awareness and support of local non-profits working in a variety of ways to advance social justice.
2. BHCA should urge our Bolton Hill residents to become involved as volunteers or donors with the list of non-profits developed by SATF and listed on the BHCA website.

3. BHCA should proactively seek out opportunities to work with other neighborhoods to further the revitalization of Central West Baltimore. For example, a new effort to re-establish the Friends of Druid Hill Park by neighborhoods to our North and West is now underway and needs support.

Indicators would be the number of activities sponsored by the SATF and joint efforts with our neighborhoods to the north and west. Indicators would also include recommendations being made by the markers committee and the Blue Plaque committee once the latter is established

## **M.ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS**

Bolton Hill has traditionally oriented itself south toward Mt. Vernon-Belvedere. That community's focus on historic preservation, cultural institutions and the downtown business and medical community complemented Bolton Hill's residential character. With the establishment of the Midtown Community Benefits District in the 1990s, Bolton Hill now views Madison Park and Charles North as neighborhoods with which it is affiliated. The Strategic Plan recommends that Bolton Hill take a broader view of the neighborhoods with which it is affiliated and partner with those neighborhoods on issues of mutual interest.

Our near neighborhoods to the west and north (Madison Park, Historic Marble Hill, Druid Heights, Upton, and Reservoir Hill) have a great deal in common with Bolton Hill including that we are all residential enclaves with distinguished homes with small groups of homeowners and a large body of renters. We all share concerns about trying to promote homeownership, managing the effects of non-resident landlords, increased density, trash, traffic management and parking. With regular attendance at multi-neighborhood meetings over the last 18 months, there has been a strengthening of relationships and revealed areas of mutual interest. They include the redevelopment of Pedestal Gardens, the proposed redevelopment of 1700 Eutaw Place, and the possibility of a joint effort on parks and green spaces in Bolton Hill, Madison Park and Historic Marble Hill. The new Madison Park North project offers opportunities to align our interests with Reservoir Hill.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Members of the BHCA Board, and particularly the Executive Committee, should continue to attend monthly community meetings in Reservoir Hill, Historic Marble Hill, Madison Park, Druid Heights, Upton, and the No Boundaries Coalition.
2. The Executive Committee should report to the Board concerning issues on which cooperation with Bolton Hill is desired.
3. Invitations to attend BHCA meetings should be extended to representatives of neighboring communities.
4. Continue active involvement with the Midtown Community Benefits District.

Indicators for this work will be attendance at community meetings and the number of joint cooperation efforts.

## CONCLUSION

Frequently, community leaders from other neighborhoods point to the success of Bolton Hill over many decades of sustaining and enhancing the character and quality of life of the neighborhood. MRIA and its successor BHCA are admired for their apparent effectiveness. Often the reason offered by these community leaders is that Bolton Hill gets preferential treatment from the City of Baltimore. This is not the case. Bolton Hill is no different from any other community in the difficulty of getting a response from City agencies.

The real reason Bolton Hill has been able to be stable and solve problems over several decades is the people who have lived and continue to live in Bolton Hill. Compared to other neighborhoods, there has always been a seemingly inexhaustible number of neighbors who are willing to do the work to make this neighborhood better. The expertise in Bolton Hill and the willingness to step up and get things done is remarkable.

So, will this Strategic Plan be successful? It depends on you and your neighbors. This Strategic Plan is designed to offer manageable commitments. It is designed to offer individuals the opportunity to work together on projects or areas of interest and to allow different people to get to know each other in a meaningful way.

Our neighborhood is diverse and expected to become more so, and a great challenge we face is to how to utilize that diversity and its expertise and skills for our own greater good. We cannot look to city government. We have to look to ourselves.

The New York Times columnist David Brooks referred in a column at the end of 2020 to Gordon Allport's "contact hypothesis." This hypothesis proposes that "doing life together with people of other groups can reduce prejudice and change minds. It's how new emotional bonds are formed, how new conceptions of who is 'us' and who is 'them' come into being." Brooks went on to elaborate that "real change seems to involve putting bodies from different groups in the same room, on the same team and in the same neighborhood."

This Strategic Plan is designed to do just that. So, "Bolton Hillers" it is up to us. The rewards are clear and immense. Not only can we continue to live in the most beautiful and interesting neighborhood in Baltimore, but also the richness of our relationships with our neighbors can be that much more meaningful.

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*We Come for the Architecture and Stay for the People*

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