

Sustainable Community Action Plan

The Town of Church Hill

Submitted by the Town of Church Hill Sustainable Communities Workgroup and Approved by the Board of Town Commissioners

6/19/2017

Environment

(Environmental strengths and weaknesses can include but are not limited to quality of land, water, air, watersheds, tree canopy, risk of sea level rise, carbon footprint, energy conservation, access to local foods, green infrastructure, stormwater infrastructure/management, parks, trails and recreation, recycling, water and sewer capacity, etc.)

Strengths

- The Southeast Creek is a rated Tier II Waterway through the Town. The Creek drains the southern part of the Town and its associated woodlands form a corridor of nature defining the southern limit of the planned growth area. Much of the woodlands and shoreline of the Creek (33 acres) are owned by the Town of Church Hill providing a unique opportunity to make recreational improvements.
- Church Hill Park. A County park located within Town limits is a destination for walking for seniors in the community and attracts residents throughout the region to Church Hill for league sports. It is also an important green space in the Town's overall plan.

Weaknesses

- Outdated stormwater management systems. The stormwater management systems includes direct discharge to Southeast Creek at two locations. This unnecessarily contributes nutrient and sediment pollution to Southeast Creek.
- Lack of Engagement with the Southeast Creek and nature generally. Little direct or meaningful connection to the Creek exists any longer. Even though it runs along the southern edge of Town, the Creek it is almost hidden and residents and visitors alike have little opportunity to engage with this resource area either recreationally or educationally. The Town's origin is tied to this waterway and the old mill at Southeast Creek but with the passage of time, this connection has gradually been lost. A renewed connection to the Creek is an essential part of the rejuvenation of Church Hill.
- Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP). Upon the planned build-out of ongoing development projects, the Town's WWTP will approach its design capacity of 80,000 gallons per day and its discharge permit limits to Southeast Creek. The Town commissioned a water and sewer feasibility study in 2010 and anticipates upgrading the plant to Enhanced Nutrient Removal status and expanding the capacity of the plant to serve its municipal growth area.

| <p align="center"><u>Desired Outcomes and Progress Measures</u></p> <p>Based on the strengths and weaknesses identify the strengths on which you would like to build and the challenges you would like to address. What outcomes are you trying to achieve? Where/ in what area do you want those changes to happen? Progress Measure: Identify how you will know that you have achieved your outcome.</p> | <p align="center"><u>Strategies and Action Items</u></p> <p>Identify strategies that will help your community to achieve each identified outcome to the left. If applicable, break down each strategy into specific action items that outline different steps of the strategy. Specify how you are planning to achieve the desired outcomes.</p> | <p align="center"><u>Implementation Partners</u></p> <p>Which community stakeholders need to be involved to realize each action step and strategy? Name specific public and/or private sector partners.</p> |
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| <p>Outcome 1: Make Southeast Creek a prominent part of the Town experience.</p> <p>Progress Measures:</p> <p>Increased visitation to the Town measured by attendance at (proposed) events, visits at the Town Hall/visitor center, and web site traffic. Number of visits to Southeast Creek once improvements are made.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Develop a town-wide hiking/biking trail as called for in the Comprehensive Plan, connecting points north of Town through the County Park and Church Hill Hunt subdivision to New Street and onto and along Southeast Creek.</p> <p>The first phases of this work are completed (through the park). Next steps: Begin by conducting a preliminary alignment study including the estimate of costs especially associated with the trail through the Southeast Creek natural area. Develop of funding strategy. Contract with an engineering or landscape architecture firm to develop a plan aligned with available and programmed resources.</p> | <p>Chester River Association</p> <p>MD Dept. of the Environment</p> <p>MD Dept. of Natural Resources including the Critical Area Commission</p> <p>Queen Anne’s County Tourism</p> |
| <p>Outcome 2: Bring about a greening of the Town that is aligned with its land use program, recognizing Church Hill’s unique potential to bring about lasting water quality improvements.</p> <p>Progress Measures:</p> <p>The Maryland nutrient reduction calculator will be used to estimate pollutant reductions associated with each BMP. Over the next decade, the Progress Measure will be the number of trees planted with the target being 700 net new trees by 2025, which is approximately one for every existing</p> | <p>Strategy A: An overall landscape design plan (1) addressing the coordination of tree planting (along the planned trail) to connect the County Park, Church Hill Hunt subdivision, New Street to the Southeast Creek nature area (2) the planned use and improvement of open spaces in Town.</p> <p>Strategy B: A town wide strategy to bring about stormwater management Best Management Practices. This will include a tree-planting program to establish tree canopy where it is missing. The program will include free trees for existing residents and for new residents as part of a welcome package. The strategy also includes street tree planting, rain barrels, and the planting of rain gardens where feasible. It includes shoreline restoration improvements on land the Town has acquired along Route 19 at the Southeast Creek Bridge and the acquisition and restoration of the parcel that adjoins this land.</p> | <p>Program Open Space</p> <p>Chester River Association</p> <p>MD Dept. of Natural Resources</p> |

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| <p>resident. Beginning in 2027, we will measure canopy coverage.</p> | <p>Strategy C. Retrofit stormwater outfalls at South East Creek using modern techniques to clean the water prior to discharge. An engineering review has already been conducted and feasibility has been determined. A cost estimate has been prepared. Also, repair and modernize storm drain inlets in the neighborhood between Walnut Street and New Street (formally Buzzards Lane).</p> <p>Strategy D: Enforce existing developer commitments in Church Hill Hunt to install street trees, trees and other plantings in the village greens, and the trail easements platted in those greens.</p> | |
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Economy

(Economic strengths and weaknesses can include but are not limited to regional accessibility, business attraction/retention, health of the business district and commercial vacancies, workforce/employment and economic drivers, local policies/regulations, marketing, tourism, cultural and historic assets)

| <u>Strengths</u> | <u>Weaknesses</u> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Church Hill Theatre.</u> The theater has a tradition that dates to the 1920’s. It serves audiences from throughout the upper Eastern Shore Region and attracts theatre goers to the Town throughout the year. • <u>Municipal Land Holdings.</u> Town of Church Hill owns three corners of the Main / Walnut intersection including the historic bank building at 404 Main Street, the existing Town Hall and parking lot, and a vacant lot opposite the Town Hall. It is in a unique position to leverage these land resources as part of strategy to promote revitalization of the old town. • <u>Pedestrian Amenities.</u> The old town of Church Hill has attractive pedestrian amenities with wide brick sidewalks and paver crosswalks that add to the historic charm of the place. • <u>34-Acre Tract of Land.</u> There is a 34-acre tract of land in Town with commercial zoning, highway visibility, and ready access to MD Route 213. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Historic Business District.</u> The Main Street / Church Street business district looks tired and has not been an active center since the later 1960’s or early 1970’s. Little investment has been made by the private sector in the modernization of building façades, signage, lighting, or landscaping. The Queenstown Bank closed its branch office in the historic bank building on Main Street, the hardware store on Walnut is inactive, and the street level retail space at 502 Main has been largely vacant for years. There is little space for parking either off-street in lots or on-street. SHA’s crosswalks markings have largely worn off and need maintenance. • <u>The Town’s store-front business</u> consists of two automotive businesses, a local bank branch, a convenience store with gas pumps, and a hardware store that is not in active use. Except for the Rhodes Store (convenience store), there is no active retailing in the Town. There are several home-based businesses including a salon and child day care. • <u>Highway accessibility and visibility is limited</u> only to properties on Rt. 300 near MD Rt. 213 and further north. • <u>Infrastructure.</u> The Town does not have a municipal water system. The sewer system is approaching its design-capacity of 80,000 gallons per day, when the build-out of approved subdivisions and infill lots are provided for. • <u>The Town has nothing in place to support visitation</u> or regional tourism, meaning visitor’s center, signage, marketing, a useful website or adequate parking in its old town. |

| Desired Outcomes and Progress Measures | Strategies and Action Items | Implementation Partners |
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| <p>Outcome 1: A vibrant cultural district on Main and Walnut Streets.</p> <p>Progress Measures:</p> <p>Increased visitation to Church Hill.</p> <p>Increased ticket sales at Church Hill Theater.</p> <p>Occupancy of existing building space and building permit issuance for improvements to existing buildings.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Promote modernization improvements to the look and vitality of Main and Walnut Streets. Develop a façade rehabilitation assistance program whereby improvements to the building facades in downtown are incentivized through cost sharing.</p> <p>Strategy B: Enhance the ambiance and function of the cultural district at Main and Walnut Streets, provide coordinated container and window box plantings and provide coordinated commercial signage and street lighting.</p> <p>Strategy C: Parking: Improve the Town’s vacant lot at 319 Main Street and coordinate with St. Luke’s Episcopal Church and Church Hill United Methodist Church to improve and expand parking in support of the Theatre, businesses and institutions in the old town and special events.</p> <p>Strategy D: Coordinate with the Art and Art History Department at Washington College to develop a plan for the installation of public art in the cultural district.</p> <p>Strategy E: Develop an events program, coordinated with the Theatre’s schedule for openings, that brings people to the district for community wide events.</p> <p>Strategy F: Promote the use of the theatre in Church Hill for more types of performances than just Church Hill Theatre performances; bringing back to some degree the “community theatre” use of the venue and revenue producing special events such as live music.</p> <p>Strategy G: Seek public and private investment to develop a café in the district.</p> | <p>Church Hill Theatre</p> <p>Washington College</p> <p>Church Hill Garden and Landscape Committee</p> <p>Queen Anne’s County Department of Economic Development</p> <p>Queen Anne’s County Tourism</p> <p>Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development</p> <p>Church Hill Economic and Community Development Committee</p> <p>Maryland Department of Commerce</p> |
| <p>Outcome 2: A marketing program aligned with County tourism to highlight Church Hill.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Coordinate with the County and other area towns to promote tourism and visitation to Church Hill and the northern part of the County.</p> <p>Strategy B: Fund and update the Town’s website.</p> | <p>Queen Anne’s County Tourism Office</p> <p>Queen Anne’s County Economic Development Commission</p> <p>Church Hill Economic and Community Development Committee</p> |

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| <p>Outcome 3: A regionally significant recreational / tourist draw – a water trail connecting Chestertown to Church Hill along the Chester River</p> | <p>Strategy A. Convene a group of stakeholders to study the proposal.</p> | <p>Town of Chestertown</p> <p>Queen Anne’s County Departments of Planning and Parks and Recreation</p> <p>Kent County Department of Planning</p> <p>Maryland Department of Natural Resources</p> <p>Chester River Association</p> |
| <p>Outcome 4: The development of employment supporting commercial businesses on the 34-acre tract and other commercially zoned property in Town.</p> <p>Progress Measures: Square footage of new commercial space and number of jobs associated with new uses.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Develop a municipal water system. The Town has already completed a Water and Sewer study which evaluated the feasibility and costs of developing a municipal water system.</p> <p>Strategy B: Expand the capacity of the wastewater treatment plant as guided by the Town of Church Hill Water and Sewer Study. Preliminary engineering and coordination with MDE, indicates that with current ENR capabilities and modern technologies, the plant could be expanded and upgraded to meet flows associated with build-out of the Town’s ultimate growth boundary or up to 480,000 gpd.</p> <p>Strategy C: Obtain an Enterprise Zone designation for the Town which will provide property tax incentives for the development and improvement of commercial property and the creation of local jobs. The Town has confirmed it is eligible for the designation and has begun deliberations with the MD Department of Commerce.</p> | <p>Maryland Department of the Environment</p> <p>Maryland Department of Commerce</p> |

Transportation

(Transportation strengths and weaknesses can include access to transit corridors, pedestrian safety and accessibility/sidewalks, alternative modes of transportation, such as bikeways and trails, public transit, such as bus and rail, carpooling, proximity to transportation centers, parking, road conditions)

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sidewalk Network. The Town has a good sidewalk network to build on thanks in large part to the State Highway Administration’s community enhancement project dating back 10 years ago. The old town and most neighborhoods are connected to the Elementary School and the sidewalks on Walnut Street extend east to Oakmont Avenue at Church Hill Hunt. Highway Accessibility. The Town is highly accessible by highways providing regional access to employment opportunities on the Eastern Shore and Delaware. The mean commute time for the Town’s labor force is 34.5 minutes (Source: 2015 US Census, ACS). Walking in Town. Because the Town is relatively compact and the County Park is accessible, there is an emerging pattern of town residents (especially senior citizens) walking for recreation and exercise. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sidewalk Weakness. While in general the sidewalk network is good, there are weaknesses including: the lack of sidewalk along Rt. 19 from Rhodes Store north. This means that the Elementary School is not accessible by walking from points north. Also, there are no crosswalks at the 4-way stop at Routes 300 and 19. Lack of parking in old town Church Hill. The revitalization of Church Hill is hindered by the lack of parking in the old section of the community along Main and Walnut Streets. On-street parking is limited in some places and prohibited in others due to the narrow width of the streets. |

| Desired Outcomes and Progress Measures | Strategies and Action Items | Implementation Partners |
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| <p>Outcome 1: Greater pedestrian connectivity and shoring up of gaps in the sidewalk network to bring about a culture of walking and wellness in the Town.</p> <p>Progress Measures:</p> <p>Length of sidewalks completed and, more importantly, an increase in pedestrian activity as measured by planned sensors at key locations to count pedestrian pass by trips.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Target the remaining areas which lack adequate and safe sidewalks and crosswalks and related improvements needed for safe and direct pedestrian circulation through the whole town (especially the Route 300 / 19 intersection and along the west side of Route 19).</p> <p>Strategy B: Celebrate walking. Church Hill can become a very pedestrian friendly town and we want to celebrate progress. Pedestrian sensors will be added to key locations to record the number of pass-by trips. The count will be visible and Town residents can see how walking is taking off. The Town will encourage the development of an app that will allow residents to connect to the pedestrian counters on their mobile devices.</p> | <p>State Highway Administration</p> |

Housing

(Housing strengths and weaknesses can include affordability, homeownership vs rental, housing stock diversity, housing condition and value, housing programs, foreclosures, residential vacancies, property values, home sale values)

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>A distribution of existing housing choices among the spectrum of home values.</u> The value of housing in Church Hill is recognized as very good due especially to the presence of Church Hill Elementary School. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Housing vacancy:</u> At the time of the 2010 Census 12 percent of the housing units in Church Hill were vacant. Tracking of vacancies indicates that housing vacancies have persisted in highly visible properties in the Town. • <u>Outdated Housing Stock:</u> According to the Census roughly 1/3 of the housing units in Church Hill were constructed in 1939 or before. Because of the historic development of the Town, most of these older houses are located prominently on Main Street and Walnut Avenue. The operating costs (heating and cooling) of the homes are high while the incomes of an aging homeowner population have not kept up. Some of these and the older houses throughout Town have begun to show signs of exterior deterioration. • <u>The housing market demand for the larger houses-in Church Hill Subdivision</u> – has not returned a decade after the financial crisis. • <u>Lack of available zoned land and infrastructure to support multiple family and townhouse development</u> which can be priced for single people or young families. |

| Desired Outcomes and Progress Measures | Strategies and Action Items | Implementation Partners |
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| <p>Outcome 1: We would like to grow the residential base in ways to reduce the number of vacant housing units, which approximate 95 units or 12% of the housing stock and promote greater home ownership.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Progress Measures: Reduced vacancy rates and increased homeownership as revealed by the U.S. Census.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Consider using a facade rehabilitation grant program to address housing rehabilitation within certain parts of the community to contribute to the overall appearance and wellbeing of neighborhoods.</p> <p>Strategy B: Promote the MD HCD <i>WholeHome</i> program that may be of great assistance to seniors or lower income homeowners to repair or modernizes their homes.</p> <p>Strategy C: Repair or replace old street signs, broken curbs and sidewalks, plant street trees, install street lights, and otherwise re-invest in neighborhood infrastructure, to shore up the real estate market in older neighborhoods.</p> | <p>MD Department of Housing and Community Development</p> |

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| | Strategy D: Consider zoning map and/or text amendments to remove restrictions on townhouse development on land otherwise suitable for housing. | |
| <p>Outcome 2: Preserve historic buildings and the history quality of the built environment especially along Main Street and Walnut Street.</p> <p>Progress Measures: No loss of historic buildings. Participation in preservation programs.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Consider creating Historic District provisions in the Zoning Ordinance and a Church Hill program for historic preservation that incentivizes owners to maintain and improve properties in historically significant and compatible ways.</p> <p>Strategy B: Celebrate the historic qualities of the town and the historic buildings that create the unique and special sense of place in Church Hill.</p> | <p>Queen Anne’s County Historical Society</p> <p>MD Department of Planning, Planning Services</p> <p>Maryland Historical Trust</p> |
| <p>Outcome 3: Development of starter housing for young families.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Consider zoning amendments that would allow townhouse development on lots smaller than 5 acres in size and at densities that would make it more economical to develop on infill lots.</p> | <p>Church Hill Economic and Community Development Committee</p> |

Quality of Life

(Strengths and weaknesses can include crime, socio-economic demographics, educational opportunities, museums, libraries, historic and cultural assets, civic amenities, faith-based organizations, economic health of households, sense of place, etc)

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Elementary School</u>. The Town is home to the Church Hill Elementary School. • <u>Active Religious Life</u>. The community is home to churches that are active in service to the community. • <u>The Volunteer Fire Company</u>. The fire company is in Town and has been active in community life. • <u>St. Luke’s Church</u>. The historic St. Luke’s Church with its historic landscape and red brick wall along Main Street occupies a prominent place in the landscape and historic context of the Town. • <u>Town Facilities</u>. The Town Hall is conveniently located in old town. • <u>Sense of Place on Main and Walnut Street</u>. The old town contains a mix of historic buildings and the Church Hill Theatre. • <u>Church Hill Park</u>. The County Park is a regional / county-wide destination. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>No Gateways</u>. The Town lacks designated gateways that announce arrival into Church Hill, missing an opportunity to beautify the Town and provide a welcome to visitors. • <u>Connecting the School into the Life of Town</u>. The Town has the enviable good fortune to be home to the public elementary school, which is a great strength, but it has not yet realized the full potential benefits of this. The Town can be a “laboratory” for students and teachers because of its integral connections to Southeast Creek. In the future, students on class trips may have the opportunity to study the natural ecology and history of the Town. • <u>The Town does not hold any community wide events</u> such as parades or street festivals. • <u>The Town does not have the most vibrant civic life</u>. The committee recognizes that a key to future growth and vitality will be fostering a more involved civil society in town; promoting associations; and engaging newer residents in the work of building community. • <u>No community center</u> of other large meeting space in Town. |

| Desired Outcomes and Progress Measures → | Strategies and Action Items → | Implementation Partners |
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| <p>Outcome 1: Town Beautification</p> <p>Progress Measures:</p> | <p>Strategy A: Add gateways at three prominent locations: on Walnut Street, roughly 850 feet east of Oakmont Drive; at the intersection of MD Routes 213 and 300; and along MD Route 300 between Hall Road and the County Park entrance. As part of the strategy, re-imagine the MD Route 300 entry into Town from MD Route 213 as a commercial / institutional gateway to the Town.</p> <p>Strategy B: Plant flowers and trees along the school frontage opposite the site of Queenstown Bank to beautify this main entrance into Town.</p> <p>Strategy C: In addition to installing crosswalks and curbs and sidewalks at the intersection of MD Routes 300 and 19, landscape around the intersection to create a beautiful welcoming point.</p> <p>Strategy D: The Town will add wayfaring signage to direct visitors to new and existing points to engage with Southeast Creek.</p> | <p>Church Hill Garden and Landscaping Committee</p> <p>MD State Highway Administration</p> <p>Chester River Association</p> |
| <p>Outcome 2: Enhance the County Park for year-round activities such as ice skating.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Work with the County Department of Parks and Recreation to fund enhancements of the County Park. Survey town residents to understand what they would like to do at the Park.</p> | <p>Queen Anne’s County</p> |
| <p>Outcome 3: Reconnect with the History of Church Hill</p> | <p>Strategy A: Do a cultural landscape survey / plan including designating locations for interpretative signage at key locations. Plan a walking tour and other similar events that showcase the Town’s history and cultural setting.</p> | <p>Maryland Historical Trust</p> <p>Queen Anne’s County Historical Society</p> <p>Washington College</p> |
| <p>Outcome 4: An active and engage citizenry.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Develop a community based email system to invite residents to Town meetings and otherwise keep interested citizens informed of Town business.</p> <p>Strategy B: Update the Town’s website to make it functionally modern and user-friendly.</p> <p>Strategy C: Survey town residents every two years through digital and in person surveys to record and track community wellbeing and satisfaction with the Town.</p> | |

Local Planning and Land Use

(Strengths and weaknesses in the local planning and land use subject area include but are not limited to zoning, land use, policies, taxes and fees, historical patterns of development, lot sizes and shapes, etc.)

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The Town’s Comprehensive Plan</u> which provide a unifying framework for town development, growth, and investments in infrastructure. • <u>Accessibility by Walking</u>. Because of its compact nature and its good mix of land use activities, Church Hill is highly accessible by walking. With exception of several areas, the Town is inherently walkable. Main Street and the County Park are highly accessible to most residents. • <u>Desirable Growth Prospects</u>. The Town faces no substantive limitation on its growth; if market conditions provide, the Town has space to grow and amenities including the Elementary School and the County Park. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Lack of public water</u>. The Town does not have a municipal water system which makes development more expensive and land consumptive and is a disincentive to commercial development. • <u>Sewer system capacity is limited and will be need to be expanded upon the build-out of infill lots</u>. • <u>The Church Hill Hunt Subdivision is only partially completed</u> leaving many vacant lots and uncompleted infrastructure and landscape improvements. |

| Desired Outcomes and Progress Measures → | Strategies and Action Items → | Implementation Partners |
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| <p>Outcome 1: Investments in streetscape, trails, access to Southeast Creek, parking, and landscaping are aligned with the Town’s overall program for revitalization and Comprehensive Plan.</p> <p>Progress Measures: Implementation progress on the Town’s new capital improvements program.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Prepare and annually adopt a five-year capital improvements program with a long-range planning component.</p> <p>Strategy B: Re-imagine the MD Route 300 entry way from MD Route 213 as a commercial / institutional gateway to the Town. The Town will revisit its landscape standards in the zoning ordinance.</p> | <p>MD Department of Planning</p> |
| <p>Outcome 2: The steady completion and build-out of Church Hill Hunt subdivision as provided under the subdivision’s approved Improvements Plan.</p> <p>Progress Measures: Completion of improvements as measured against the approved Improvement Plan.</p> <p>Build out of the remaining lots in the subdivision.</p> | <p>Strategy A: Enforce all remaining improvement guarantees to secure street lights, landscaping enhancements, trails, and street tree plantings that are part of the project’s required improvements.</p> | |

