

# Town of Colmar Manor

Governance Retreat Report

April 2023

## Introductions

The Town of Colmar Manor (Town), Maryland engaged Raftelis to facilitate a governance retreat on April 15, 2023. The purpose of this retreat was to establish a strong foundation for effective governance, and develop a common vision and shared priorities for the Town. This retreat was facilitated by Jennifer Teal and attended by the following individuals:

- Mayor Monica Casañas
- Maliek Harding, Member of Council
- Irina Hobbs, Member of Council
- Keith Brooks, Member of Council
- Melinda Mendoza, Member of Council
- Greg Holcomb, Town Administrator

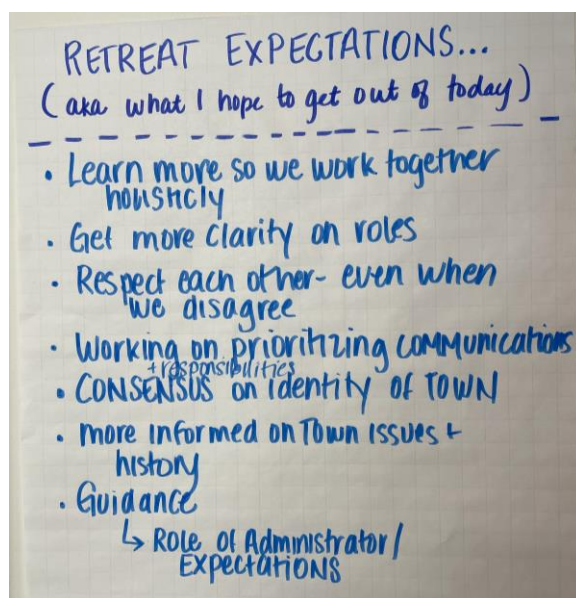
## Norms

- Listen with respect
  - Let others finish before you start talking
  - Be attentive to the speaker
  - Disagree agreeably
- Be:
  - **BOLD**
  - Positive and realistic
  - Candid and honest
  - Patient and self-aware
  - Engaged and fully present
- Strive for consensus
- Look for opportunities to agree
- Remember the power of “if” and “and”
- Have fun!

## Retreat Expectations

To set the tone for the day, retreat participants were asked to share their expectations for the retreat. Responses included:

- Learn more so we can work together holistically
- Get more clarity on roles
- Respect each other even when we disagree
- Working on prioritizing communications and responsibilities
- Consensus on identity of Town
- More information on Town issues and history
- Guidance on the role of Administrator and expectations





What expectations do I have of my colleagues on Council?	What expectations do I have of the Mayor?	What expectations do I have of Town staff?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do best to represent the residents of the Town and leave it better than they found it</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Respect for one another</li> <li>• Working relationship</li> <li>• Willingness to make mistakes and learn from them</li> <li>• <i>Deliberation of ideas policy ordinances etc.</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide big picture vision and strategy</i></li> <li>• <i>Be a resource for information connections relationships etc.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ensure there are opportunities to track and address key priorities of the Town, informative reporting</i></li> <li>• <i>Build community connection to “Town Hall”</i></li> <li>• <i>Work on big picture items</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide vision</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ownership of job description and aspire to see Town and residents grow</li> <li>• A desire to want to <u>work</u> in our Town</li> <li>• Know that there is power in their voice to make effective change</li> <li>• Hospitality, kindness, and respect</li> <li>• Make the Mayor's life easier</li> <li>• <i>Complete tasks (job duties)</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide guidance of policy</i></li> <li>• <i>Carry out Council's decisions</i></li> </ul>

## Governing Together

The facilitator discussed the concept a governing body, and how it is different than from the way individuals may currently perceive their role on Council. The skills and mindset that are valuable for campaigning for office, for example, are very individualistic, while governing together effectively requires the governing body to think differently about how they operate. The facilitator shared ten attributes of an ideal governing body, which include:

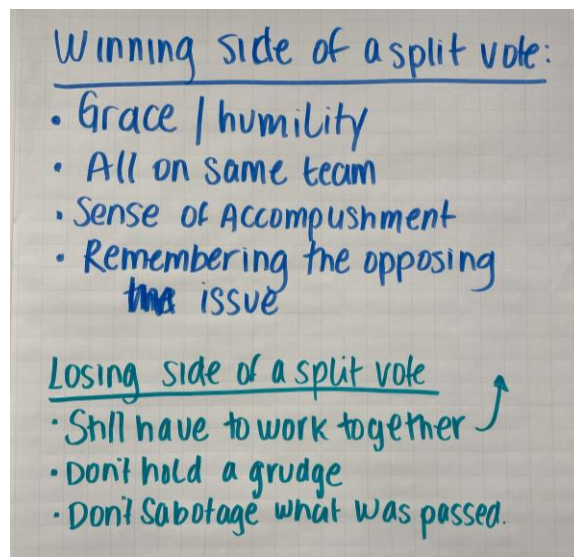
1. **Community:** Uses their office to convene conversations that matter and recognizes that a primary role is to build, maintain, and preserve community.
2. **Brand:** Protects and enhances the value of the brand of their community at all times.
3. **Majority:** Understands that their most important constituents are other members of the governing body – nothing gets done without a majority.
  - Focuses their energy on doing things as a governing body.
  - Recognizes that compromise and negotiation are the tools of the political craft.
  - Seeks to bring their colleagues into the majority, even when another vote is not needed.
4. **Unique Power:** Understands that they (the governing body) have the power to do things that no one else in the community can do.
5. **No Right Answers:** Understand the inherent values conflict at play when making decisions AND respect that there are no absolutes—no “right” answers (even theirs).
6. **Dual Roles:** Is aware and respectful of the different roles they play and understand they serve as both a representative of constituencies and a trustee of the public good.
7. **Respect:** Understands that respect can be earned by:
  - a. Speaking on issues only when they have new insights that further debate and understanding.
  - b. Asking genuine questions of others.
  - c. Exercising their strengths in a way that other others value.

8. **Partnership:** Respects and values the partnership between the governing body and their appointed staff.
9. **Acceptable and Sustainable:** Understands that what can be done must be both politically acceptable AND administratively sustainable.
10. **Outcome-focused:** Is adept at creating useful policy goals and boundaries that allow staff flexibility in achieving outcomes.

One attribute that garnered more lengthy discussion was the concept of **Majority**.

Participants were led through a discussion about split votes – those in which some members of Council are on the “losing” side of a 3-2 or 4-1 vote. The group discussed the importance of maintaining positive long-term working relationships as a governing body, and responded to two specific prompts provided by the facilitator:

What is important to remember when your position is in the prevailing decision (i.e. you are on the winning side of a split vote)?	What is important to remember when your position is not in the prevailing decision?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grace and humility</li> <li>• We're all on the same team</li> <li>• Sense of accomplishment</li> <li>• Remembering the opposing issue</li> <li>• We still have to work together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We still have to work together</li> <li>• Don't hold a grudge</li> <li>• Don't sabotage what was passed</li> </ul>



## True Today – True in Ten Years

Each participant was asked to share their response to the following questions. Responses are transcribed in the tables that follow.

What are three things that are TRUE TODAY about Colmar Manor that you hope will still be TRUE in ten years?	What are three things about Colmar Manor that are NOT TRUE TODAY, but you HOPE will be TRUE in ten years?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preservation of natural resources</li> <li>• Green spaces preserved</li> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Diverse community with shared values</li> <li>• Engaged and passionate Council and Mayor</li> <li>• Small town feel</li> <li>• Friendly community</li> <li>• Loving and welcoming</li> <li>• We have a Town Administrator</li> <li>• Having and keeping a Town Administrator</li> <li>• Town Administrator (Greg)</li> <li>• Fully staffed Police Department</li> <li>• Doing better to generate and maintain funds</li> <li>• Thriving <u>Town</u> Hall and community center</li> <li>• Active older population and preservation of history</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generational wealth and housing affordability</li> <li>• Lower property taxes</li> <li>• Culture driven</li> <li>• Neighbors who know each other</li> <li>• Considerate of boundaries</li> <li>• Open door policy with neighbors</li> <li>• Other revenue generating avenues outside of Town Hall rentals</li> <li>• Quality business district</li> <li>• Having a Town swimming pool</li> <li>• Having a dog park</li> <li>• More parking for Town Hall</li> <li>• Swimmable Anacostia riverbank</li> <li>• Term limits for elected officials</li> <li>• Full transparency of official Town documents</li> </ul>

## Our Shared Vision

The group then identified common themes for a shared vision for Colmar Manor. These include:

- Thriving and Active Community
- Accountable Governance
- Effective and Efficient Operations
- Sustainable Community
- Inclusive and Caring Neighbors
- Full-Service Community
- Aging-in-Place

## Focus Areas

From this list, the group distilled their shared vision for the future of Colmar Manor into three distinct Focus Areas. These Focus Areas capture the essence of Council’s shared vision for the future of Colmar Manor and will create a framework within which the Mayor and Town Administrator can develop future work plans and budgets.

Each Focus Area is accompanied by a success statement developed by the group that captures the essence of the Council’s intent and further describes the future envisioned for the Town.

## Inclusive Neighbors

Colmar Manor is a diverse community where neighbors know and support each other, and work to create shared values.



## Sustainable Community

Colmar Manor's ongoing sustainability is supported by a holistic focus on the environmental, social, and economic factors:

- Colmar Manor supports the preservation and enhancement of its natural and historic resources.
- Residents participate in a thriving and active community where they can age in place.
- The Town fosters economic stewardship through initiatives that support economic mobility.

## Effective Governance and Administration

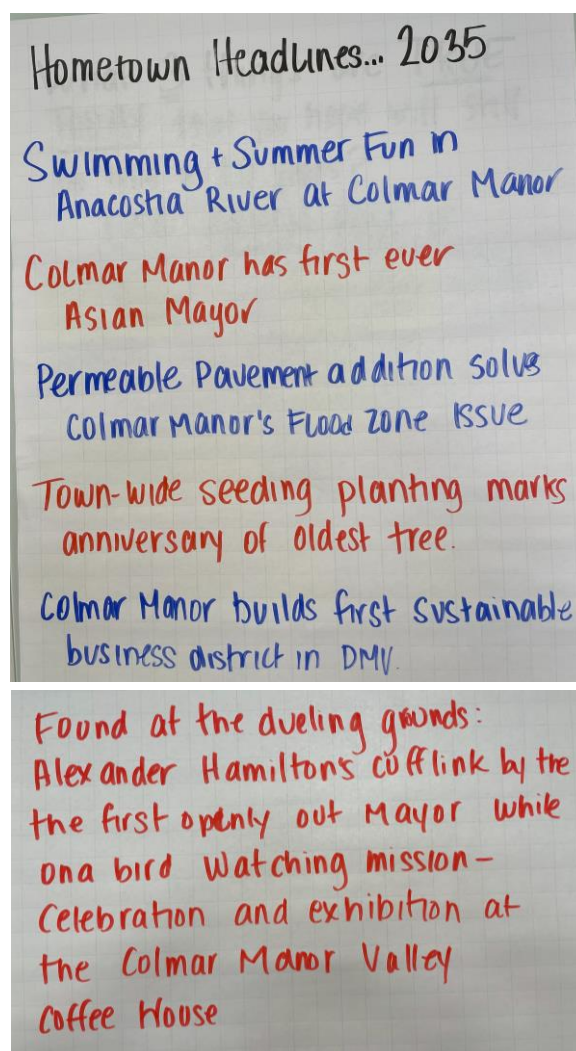
Colmar Manor's governing body is engaged and committed to the community by actively pursuing solutions to promote efficiency and transparency; Town staff develop and deliver services that support the community and systems that ensure continuity and accountability.

## Hometown Headlines

As a closing exercise, participants were each asked to craft a fictional newspaper headline from the year 2035 – a year in which their shared vision for the future of Colmar Manor had been achieved.

These headlines include:

- Swimming And Summer Fun In Anacostia River At Colmar Manor
- Colmar Manor Has First Ever Asian Mayor
- Permeable Pavement Addition Solves Colmar Manor's Flood Zone Issue
- Town-wide Seeding Planting Marks Anniversary of Oldest Tree
- Colmar Manor Builds First Sustainable Business District in DMV
- Found at the Dueling Ground: Alexander Hamilton's Cufflink by the First Openly Out Mayor While on a Bird Watching Mission – Celebration and Exhibition at the Colmar Manor Valley Coffee House



## Parting Thoughts

To end the retreat, participants were each asked to share one word that expressed their reflections on the retreat.

These included:

- Cohesion
- Motivated
- Reflecting
- On-the-same-page
- Effectiveness
- Clarity

