

PATH Winter Newsletter

A Message from PATH's Lead Organizer – Hector Rodriguez

House Meeting Campaign

House meetings held in the months before the formation of PATH gave rise to the issue areas which we committed to work on at our two public assemblies last year. House meeting campaigns are once again needed in each of our PATH institutions in order to fine tune PATH's positions on affordable housing and transportation. In the area of youth, we already have youth from various churches and schools committed to holding house meetings among their peers. Adults need to do the same with regard to the other issue areas. In the area of housing, we should ask what the folks at our house meetings think are priorities in the development of downtown Columbia. In the area of transportation, we should ask people to name their next highest priority, now that we have won on our issue of reducing by half the wait time for a bus.

If you agree to hold a house meeting, contact me at hector@comcast.net and I will send you a format for the meeting and a report form to be used so we can collect all the data coming from all the house meetings. These sessions are democracy in action. We value them because they provide everyone an opportunity to be heard on the issues most important to them. PATH's power comes from the broad range of Howard Countians bringing their voices and reasoned arguments to bear on the vital issues of the day. Get yourself to a house meeting or set one up yourself.

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A Message from PATH Leadership Team

PATH went public last June in an historic gathering at St. Augustine Church in Elkridge. Four months later, just before the election in November, we reconvened, as promised, at Oakland Mills High School where the political candidates were given an opportunity to publicly respond to the PATH agenda of advocacy for affordable housing, improved public transportation, and youth services and activities.

Once again PATH was enthusiastically recognized by our aspiring political leadership who publicly expressed general agreement in principal with our proposals, even if each candidate didn't feel able to support all the specifics of our agenda.

With the election behind us PATH lost no time in scheduling relational meetings with our newly elected leadership in Howard County. We had productive and encouraging meetings with County Executive Ken Ullman, County Council Chairman Calvin Ball, Vice Chair Courtney Watson, Greg Fox, Mary Kay Sigaty, and Jen Teresa. All expressed strong support for PATH and its objectives, and an enthusiastic desire to work with us.

PATH is making significant progress in identifying and meeting with high school youth leaders in Howard County. In January we convened a youth meeting at Hebron House attended by about

50 people, evenly divided between adults and youth, representing several Howard County high schools. A second meeting was scheduled in February and a third meeting will occur in March. The purpose of these meetings is to encourage our youth to hold house meetings and develop their own agenda of issues expressing their needs and desires. Judging by the level of honesty and trust expressed by the youth at our first meeting, PATH has demonstrated its ability to create a safe environment where the young people can feel free to speak honestly from the heart.

PATH has certainly made a strong impression on community life in Howard County and is experiencing significant progress in furthering its agenda. This success can not realistically be expected to move forward smoothly, however, without each of us doing our best to continue to spread the news about PATH in our daily contacts with other residents of Howard County. Our bread and butter is having one-on-ones and house meetings. Building relationships has formed the backbone of PATH and our fellow IAF organizations. Our successful reaching out to form relationships with our neighbors brought PATH into being and will continue to nurture and strengthen it as we move forward.

John Farrell, Friends jbfarrell@comcast.net

Housing Action

Capitol Mobile Park Outreach

Thirty folks gathered at St. Augustine Church February 26 to take the next steps in developing their sense of community. Ten were PATH leaders who were not residents of the park, but who are offering their support. Capitol Mobile Park, where 119 mobile homes are located on 23 acres, does not have a neighborhood association; there is a feeling of victim hood as tenants of a place where their rent goes up each year but the maintenance of their park goes down. The beginnings of increased feeling of community is being felt by these folks who began meeting in January and are now talking about a cleanup day in the spring to take into their own hands the maintenance of the park.

The main focus of the meeting was how to get more tenant's rights for these residents. We heard reports on laws providing such rights in Florida and Delaware. In Florida, residents who meet together are protected from retaliation by the park owner; in Delaware, residents receive payments from a state fund when their park closes and they are forced to relocate. Several attendees agreed to meet with state delegates to press their case for the need for similar laws in Maryland. Several also agreed to visit residents in the four other mobile home parks in Howard County to expand the number of persons interested in greater rights for tenant's of mobile home parks.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 24 with reports to be heard on meetings with State delegates and members of Governor's O'Malley's administration, and with attendees from other mobile home parks in Howard County with an eye to sensing whether there is support for building an organization that can pursue the goal of tenant rights.

Submitted by Wendel Thompson, Bethany UMC wendelth@yahoo.com

PROPOSED MARYLAND STATE HOUSING TRUST FUND

The Maryland Legislature is now considering a law to establish a Maryland State Housing Trust Fund

Housing Trust Fund (SB 644 and HB 486)

These bills proposed to create a dedicated revenue source for affordable housing in Maryland by preserving the current level of funds appropriated for housing and adding an estimated \$100 million. Funding will come by adding to the State property taxes \$.02 for each \$100 of assessed value (typically about \$34 for an average home annually). Counties, Baltimore City and larger municipalities would be entitled to receive funding from this trust fund, but only as they demonstrate that they are taking real action to promote affordable housing. Hearing dates are: Feb 27 at 1pm in the House, and March 6 in the Senate.

There is a companion bill that would allow counties and municipalities to undertake affordable housing initiatives in the Maryland State Housing Trust Fund, without the delays in current law requiring State approval first.

A patchwork of legislation affecting some few localities means that they must first get State approval, and this law would grant blanket approval. HR 784.

Submitted by Ruth Alice White, CUCC nspmaryland@gmail.com

Transportation Action

At our February 11th meeting, each member of the Glen Mar PATH Steering Committee agreed to hold three one-on-one interviews with other Glen Mar members and to invite them to a house meeting on Saturday afternoon March 10th. In the meantime, PATH Coordinator, Ron Stevens will write an article about PATH activities for the March issue of our monthly newsletter, "The Messenger."

Our Transportation Action Team met on February 11, 2007. Discussions covered a report on PATH's meetings with the newly elected County Executive and County Council members. We also talked about the importance of building strong active teams within the institutions we represent, and we discussed plans for PATH's victory celebration over the 30 minute headway on major HT busses. This celebration will take place when the County introduces the new bus schedules reflecting this change in April or May. More about our plans later.

Gini Edwards, Glen Mar UMC 410 884-9240.

The Transportation Action Group meets the first Sunday of each month at Glen Mar United Methodist Church from 7 PM - 8:30 PM..

Youth Action

PATH's Youth Focus comes out of house meetings that have been held around Howard County over the last year plus. Along with concern for affordable housing and reliable/affordable transportation has come a concern for youth and the quality of life for them in our area.

While the first two concerns revolve around issues/problems, "youth" is a dynamic, vital group of individuals whose needs span a wide spectrum and change regularly with each new class/generation. The young people in Howard County come from wealthy, middle class and low income homes. Some are able to afford many of the opportunities available through public and private institutions while others have difficulty being able to access anything. What do they have in common? As churches and other small groups of young people have gathered in house meetings several themes were repeated - a lack of reliable transportation after events and regular opportunities to share information/concern with other youth and adult community leaders.

Many young people have said that they have trouble getting transportation home when after-school events conclude. For those who are bussed, the only options are to wait for a parent who will pick them up after work (many can't get to school until long after most folks have left the building), go home with a friend (who may or may not be a good driver, and sometimes parents are unwilling to have their child share rides) or wait for a Green Bus from the County (the kids say that these are often not convenient because of their location far from school or their schedule.) All of these options leave them in potentially unsafe situations.

In our first large group meeting, held at Mt. Hebron House on Sunday January 28th, young people from several churches, schools and a mosque reiterated the concern about transportation and also made the suggestion that a non-voting Youth position be added to the County Parks and Recreation Board to keep that body and the community aware of current issues related to young people. Congregations and schools were invited to hold their own house meetings and meet back to share their insights on the afternoon of Sunday March 25th.

Rev. Beth O'Malley, CUCC rev.bethomalley@verizon.net

www.path-iaf.org – Building the PATH Web-based Resources Page

PATH Member Congregations are invited to share their contact information on PATH's website. Send your congregation's web site, and other contact information to Jo McLaughlin at jmclaugh2000@aol.com
Or call 410-465-9119.