

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

of the

BALTIMORE TREE TRUST, INC.

SUMMARY of the BOARD and STAFF
STRATEGIC VISIONING SESSION
Held November 7, 2020

Submitted by:

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BTT Mission Statement

*Baltimore Tree Trust's mission
is to restore Baltimore's urban forest
through increased tree planting, community
engagement and advocacy.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Context and Impetus for the Retreat.....	3
II. Retreat Goals and Agenda.....	4
III. Outcomes of the Retreat.....	5
A. Vision Statements Generated by the Board	5
B. State of the Organization Reports	5
C. Board & Staff Strategic Analysis with SWOT Items.....	6
D. SWOT Synthesis	7
E. Committee Reports from Small Group Work	8
IV. Emerging Themes from Zoom Chat for Future Board Consideration....	9
V. Suggested Next Steps for Retreat Follow Up.....	10
VI. Strategic Direction Management Chart.....	12
VII. ATTACHMENTS.....	14
A. Retreat Participant List.....	15
B. Baltimore Tree Trust Board of Directors and Staff List as of November, 2020.....	16
C. Vision Statements for Future Use by the BTT.....	17
D. Compilation of All SWOT Responses by Retreat Participants.....	19
E. Evaluation Synthesis of the 11-7-20 Planning Retreat.....	23

I. Context and History for the Baltimore Tree Trust Visioning Process

With its mission, its co-directors and several other key board members as strong constants, the Baltimore Tree Trust has undergone several significant changes in its board and staff, its role city-wide and its activities within the period of 2019-2020. Most notably, with the exception of its tree crew Foreman Kwamel Couther, the organization has seen 100% staff turnover in 2020, and has subsequently welcomed a new Executive Director, Bryant Spoon Smith, and two additional new staff members: Associate Director, Justin Bowers, and Operations Coordinator, Amy Burke.

Four new Board members have joined the BTT leadership team: Doug Holthaus, Mark Smolarz, Joan Plisko and Michael Woollen. With the addition of these individuals, the Board is now near its designated number. BTT has also been designated as an essential organization during the Covid-19 pandemic due to its workforce development program; as such, it has been able to keep its tree planting crew and urban forestry component active throughout the spring, summer and fall of 2020. Bryant Smith also secured an agreement with Baltimore City Forestry Department for the planting of its street trees moving forward. Taken together, these developments have created a new landscape for the organization — one which has opened a vista onto new possibilities and an ambitious new goal of planting 10,000 trees over a five year period.

This new landscape also requires significant organizational development in order to move toward the new goal from a stable position, with the requisite organizational systems in place to support both Board and Staff in their work. It also begs the need for a commensurate development of its financial resources and thus, fundraising capacity. To this end, the Strategic Visioning Retreat was scheduled in order to educate and unite the Board around the 10,000 tree goal, and to begin this two-pronged effort of developing the organization and deepening its capacity.

BTT contracted with Cinder Hypki of Hypki Consulting to help prepare for and to facilitate the retreat; in preparation for developing the retreat agenda, Cinder:

- Led a Zoom meeting with a small group of BTT Board members on October 7 to discuss their perspectives on the desired content of the retreat, specific needs and agenda items.
- Held several meetings with Bryant Smith to gain familiarity with the organization and specific retreat needs.
- Met with Bryant Smith and the Board co-chairs to discuss their goals and the final retreat agenda
- Developed a participant and a detailed facilitators agenda to guide the work of the day
- Conducted a run-through of the virtual platform for the retreat itself with BTT staff.

Organizational changes in the related work of the City, other partners, and the communities BTT serves factored into the group's work together as did consideration of the impact on BTT's work of the significant and shifting challenges posed by Covid-19, including remote work and facilities issues. These issues informed retreat discussions in terms of operationalizing the mission.

In preparing this report for the Board, I have erred on the side of including information, with the goal of providing a record both broad and deep of this first meeting of both Board and Staff for those present and those who could not attend.

II. RETREAT GOALS & AGENDA

GOALS

1. Enable board members and staff to get to know each other via collaborative work around shared vision, mission, and priorities.
2. Update and inform participants about the current financial and fundraising status of the organization.
3. Update and inform participants about the state of BTT operations and programs using a framework that will be helpful for future goal setting.
4. Provide the board with an opportunity to understand the work of the staff and their contributions to BTT's mission in a comprehensive way.
5. Conduct an organizational analysis/environmental scan (internal / external) using a SWOT analysis of BTT.
6. Consider organizational development needs in order to undertake operational planning; solidify Board Committees, strategic tasks, structure and membership.
7. Set the stage for the board to set short and medium term (1-3 years) organizational goals, and to identify the board and staff support needed to accomplish them. (Note that the goal setting work will be undertaken by board and staff after the retreat.)
8. Identify next steps in fleshing out a completed operational plan.

AGENDA

10:00 - 10:10	Welcome (Thomasina Poirot / Chris Feiss) & Zoom Etiquette (Justin Bowers)
10:10 - 10:20	Recap of impetus for retreat (Thomasina Poirot / Chris Feiss)
10:20 - 10:30	Day's Overview to Accomplish Retreat Goals (Bryant Spoon Smith & Cinder Hypki)
10:30 - 11:00	A Vision for BTT: Our Stake in What We Are Striving For (Cinder)
11:00 - 11:30	State of the Organization: Financial Trends / Q & A (Chris Mfume + Bryant Spoon Smith)
11:30 - 11:40	Break
11:45 - 12:15	State of the Organization: Operational Analysis (Bryant Spoon Smith) Urban Forestry - Bryant Spoon Smith / Kwamel Couther. Workforce Development - Justin Bowers Public Health Program and Education (Justin Bowers / Bryant Spoon Smith)
12:15 - 1:15	Environmental Scan & Organizational Analysis: SWOT chart analysis & matrix map for setting priorities (Cinder Hypki)
1:15 - 1:45	LUNCH BREAK
1:45 - 2:05	Development Session (Ashley Principe)
2:05 - 2:10	Operations Committee (Chris Mfume)
2:10 - 2:15	Recruitment for Fundraising and Operations Committees (Chris Feiss / Thomasina)
2:15 - 2:35	Leveraging up to 10,000 trees in Committee Breakouts (Ashley Principe, Chris Mfume)
2:35 - 2:45	Report back - 2 committees (5 mins each)
2:45 - 2:55	Next Steps (Bryant Spoon Smith / Thomasina Poirot / Chris Feiss)
2:55 - 3:00	Closing (Thomasina Poirot / Chris Feiss)
3:00 - 3:05	Retreat Evaluation (Cinder)

III. Outcomes of the Retreat

A. Vision Statements generated by the Board

As a warm up and introductory exercise, retreat participants were asked to consider and briefly jot down the key elements or points of a Vision Statement for the Baltimore Tree Trust. Currently, the organization has only a Mission statement (see cover of this report). The generation of a Vision Statement is considered vital to the strategic planning process for any nonprofit, as it both defines the end-goal of the organization's work and importantly communicates to constituencies and supporters what the organization is attempting to achieve.

The individual vision statements generated by participants can be found in Attachment C. p. 17. These should be further synthesized by an individual or committee of the board and presented to the full board for consideration, discussion and feedback. Ultimately, a final Vision Statement should be generated and voted upon by the full board prior to its use in advocacy, fundraising and media.

B. State of the Organization Reports

Executive Director Bryant Spoon Smith and staff presented two snapshots of the organization. The first was an operational overview and the second, a five year projection of the resources needed for BTT to achieve its goal of planting 10,000 trees. These sessions were followed by time for questions and a deeper look at both the current state of affairs and future needs.

The operational overview was grounded in a description by Kwamel Couther, Tree Care Foreman, of his day-to-day work with the crew actually planting trees in city neighborhoods. He and Bryant provided insights into the challenges and rewards involved, as well as the requirements for scaling up that work in terms of human resources, equipment, facilities and financial resources. Justin Bowers, Associate Director, detailed the work on the community side — from educational efforts in the neighborhoods to providing volunteer opportunities for planting— which are temporarily halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It all pointed to a tremendous potential for BTT's advocacy role in the green/environmental landscape of Baltimore and beyond, and in its efforts to more deeply impact public health.

The shortage of time did not permit an in-depth discussion of the workforce development side of BTT's work, or of the community organizing efforts needed to support the education, advocacy and public health promotion.

Bryant presented the five year projection for reaching the 10,000 tree goal and fielded questions that signaled a need for greater in-depth understanding of the relationships between and among the city agencies and organizations involved in the tree planting and maintenance processes from beginning to several years afterwards. Carving out a

unique niche within Baltimore City’s urban forestry “ecosystem” will factor in to this ambitious goal, as will developing the ability to respond to the challenges of concurrently running a workforce development program. Other issues mentioned that will be important for the Board to consider in the near future are those of the intersection of the operations scale-up with BTT’s social justice goals for its work. In the shorter term, a more in-depth look at the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on all aspects of the organization will be needed.

C. Board & Staff Strategic Analysis with SWOT Items

The SWOT activity is helpful to strategic thinking in that it prompts the generation and analysis of an organization’s (Internal) Strengths and Weaknesses, as well as the (External) Environmental Opportunities and Threats. BTT participants engaged in small group discussions of the SWOT synthesis pre-prepared by Hypki Consulting from the individual SWOT exercises that were completed prior to the retreat.

Below is a one-page **synthesis** of all responses to the SWOT completed by those Board members and staff who chose to share one. Note that responses have been loosely grouped around key areas of the organization and its purview. A **compilation of all responses** to the SWOT, completed by those Board members and staff who chose to share one, including the initials of each respondent, can be found in Attachment D, p. 19 at the conclusion of this report.

Use the following chart to identify, consider and analyze the intersection of the **internal** Strengths and Weaknesses with the Opportunities and Threats that are **external** to the organization.

OPPORTUNITIES +	THREATS +
<p>STRENGTHS = INVEST</p> <p>Competitive advantage</p>	<p>STRENGTHS = DEFEND</p> <p>Need to mobilize resources alone or with others</p>
<p>WEAKNESSES = DECIDE</p> <p>Invest or divest; collaborate</p>	<p>WEAKNESSES = DAMAGE CONTROL / DIVEST</p>