

# **TOWN MEETING : MID ATLANTIC**

## **TOWN MEETING: MARYLAND REPORT**

- History** In June, 1974, 39 communities in the United States participated in a Town Meeting pilot program under the logo "Local Community Convocation," offered by the Institute of Cultural Affairs. South Baltimore/Locust Point was one of those sites, as residents met to look at the past, present, and future of that community.
- 1975** In 1975, Town Meeting '76 was approved as a Bicentennial program  
**TM '76** under the Horizons portion of the ARBA program. In Maryland, approval and/or funding came from the Maryland State Bicentennial Commission and the Baltimore City Bicentennial Commission. In May, 1975, the Baltimore City-wide Town Meeting was held with over 15 community groups represented. Sponsors and supporters included Baltimore City Bicentennial Commission, Baltimore City Extension Homemakers, the Department of Education, the Baltimore City Council of PTA's, Gestetner, the Baltimore Jaycees, and many others.
- 1976** During the next 18 months other Maryland communities held 4 Town Meetings and a Community Issues Forum with a Special Emphasis on Law Enforcement. Local citizens in Baltimore City, Prince George's County and Montgomery County, as well as residents of Maryland Correctional Training Center in Washington County sponsored these programs, were trained by the ICA, led workshops, and committed themselves to follow-up.

1977

In the spring of 1977, many of those Town Meeting participants helped in a state-wide program in New Jersey (approximately 100 Town Meetings were held in 3 months, under a grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation). After the success of that campaign, local advocates formed the "Town Meeting: Mid Atlantic" program. From September through December, 1977, contacts were made in every county in Maryland and Delaware (as well as eastern West Virginia and northern Virginia) in which Town Meetings had not been held. In Maryland, 20 counties were visited, 15 Town Meetings or demonstrations (abbreviated workshops using the Town Meeting process with a small group of community leaders) were held, and dates were set for 4 more Town Meetings in early 1978. At the same time, Town Meetings were held in two counties in Delaware, 10 in the eastern counties of West Virginia, and approximately 20 in the northern half of Virginia. "Demonstration" or "full-fledged," these Town Meetings were participated in by citizens from age 12 to 80+ (the Town Meeting in Harford County focused on "senior citizens") and a mixture of established leaders and "just plain" citizens. Settings ranged from schools and fire halls to one woman's kitchen. With the spread across counties, a number of smaller communities were involved.

**Products** Each community had unique issues or situations, but a number of common themes showed up in the challenge statements. Five of the most common concerns were (1) lack of ways for local citizens to participate in government; (2) planning for growth held in tension with preservation of natural resources and local citizen desires; (3) unemployment and lack of industrial development; (4) public services: health care, sewage and water, transportation, recreation, etc., and (5) quality of education.

A number of proposals were built to meet these challenges. Citizen organization was proposed in some form by each of the Town Meetings; 7 of the 15 proposed formation or support of civic organizations, and citizen committees or action groups around specific issues were suggested by each of the others. Development of structures to promote interchange between officials and citizens: "open" commission meetings, extended media coverage of local issues, published reports from county and/or town officials

(distributed to citizens), broad-based Town Meetings, etc. was another arena of emphasis. Communication and information availability through local newsletters and information "clearing houses" were proposed in several communities. Attraction of industry and vocational education focused on economic concerns.

**Response** Initial responses within Town Meetings included comments like "these are proposals we can do," "I can't think of anywhere I'd rather live than here," and "we need more working meetings like this." In Princess Anne, the businessmen who attended the Town Meeting formed a Businessmen's Association before they left. The Washington County (Hagerstown) Town Meeting was videotaped and broadcast on the county's educational TV set-up as part of the fifth grade current events program. Response in one class was enthusiastic enough that their teacher (who appeared on the videotape) invited her husband into the class on another day to answer the class's questions and talk with them further about local citizen participation in decision-making.

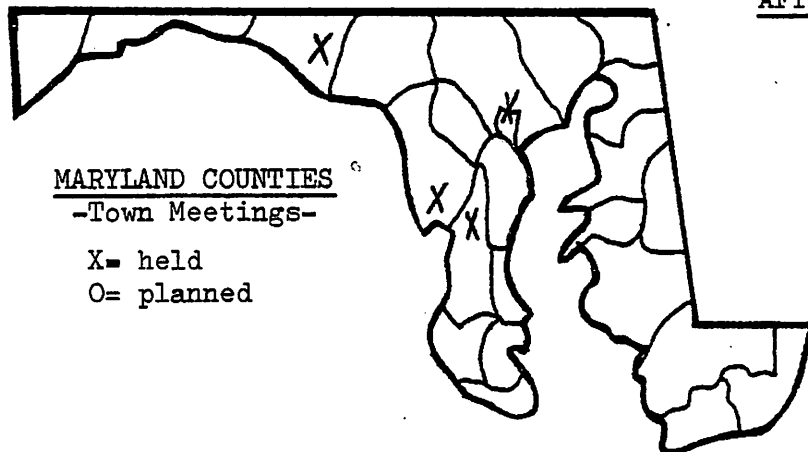
**1978** At this time, Town Meetings or "demonstrations" are planned in Ellicott City (February 22) and Salisbury (February 21). Citizen in Dorchester and Frederick Counties are also planning for Town Meetings, although no dates have been set. A number of other groups are looking to sponsor Town Meetings for their communities later in the year.

**Town Meeting Assembly** To provide an opportunity for citizens from Town Meeting communities to exchange ideas, a Town Meeting Assembly is being planned for Saturday, February 11, at Anne Arundel Community College. Two workshops will focus on types of events that catalyze further citizen participation and specific planning for such events in the local communities represented.

**ICA** The Institute of Cultural Affairs is an international voluntary group focused on local development through practical research, pilot demonstrations, and leadership training. Besides "Town Meetings," programs with special emphasis on women, youth and problem-solving in management are available for interested groups.

**January 1978**

BEFORE FALL '77



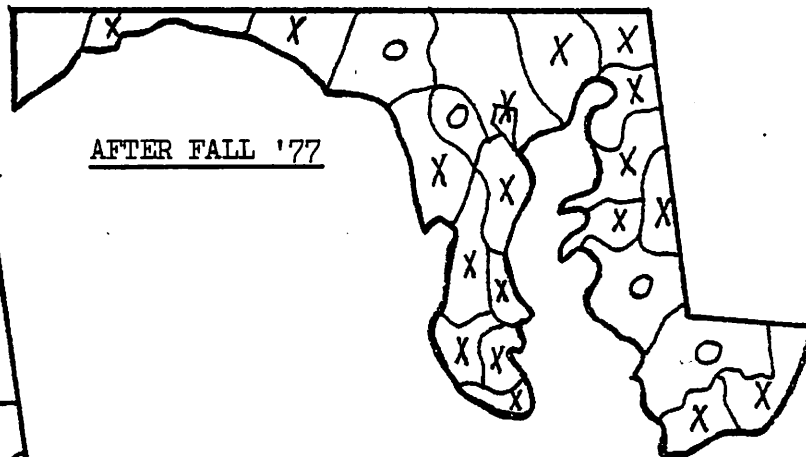
MARYLAND COUNTIES

-Town Meetings-

X= held

O= planned

AFTER FALL '77



TOWN MEETING: MARYLAND

The Institute of Cultural Affairs  
132 South Gilmore Street  
Baltimore, Maryland, 21223

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