

Emmitsburg Ensures Quality of Life for Future Generations

By Donald N. Briggs, Mayor, Emmitsburg

Sustainability of a town is about future value - what you want to sustain and how to go about sustaining it. It includes ratcheting “sustainability” into a verb, because sustainability consists of actions to make a town an organic extension of its natural setting and arrest the conflict. Sustaining comes with some pruning as accepted practices have to be modified. There are things and actions you want to sustain and others you do not. A change from prescriptive compliance to a blend with performance ratings and baseline comparisons can give a more accurate and predictable valuation of its progression or regression.

What we want to sustain in Emmitsburg is a time tested quality of life in a rural hamlet with a rich history. With a strong sense of self-sufficiency, Emmitsburg is set amid rolling contour farmed fields at the northern reach of the Catoctin Mountains where Tom’s Creek and Flat Run flow through and along part of the town boundary. A setting reinforced by a 1,300 acre greenbelt of preserved land and 2,000 acres of university or town owned mountain land. Emmitsburg’s historic pallet includes settlement in the pre-revolutionary 1700s, a more formal establishment in 1785, founding of Mount Mary’s University in 1808, and America’s first Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton moving here in 1809. Civil War events include serving as an encampment site for thousands of troops, Union one day and shortly thereafter Confederate, as they moved on to the battle of Gettysburg. In 1973 the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) - FEMA/Fire Academy was established. The quaint town of 2,900 residents serves sizable daytime employment at NETC - 750 civilian and contractors, Mount Saint Mary’s University - 500 employed (and 2,900 students), and the Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton - 300 employed. These numbers are bolstered by the steady stream of visitors to the Fallen Firefighters Memorial and the National Shrine Grotto of Lourdes.

For years the town perspective with regard to its place in history and setting became muddled at best and challenging to what was

best for the town. In the federally recognized historic district, pedestrian accommodations more and more gave way to vehicular concerns of expediting traffic through town as quickly as possible. The town was in regressive spin and changes were needed. But how? As a springboard to reverse the trend, we integrated US Green Building Council neighborhood development guidelines into our planning. Our main project was to “Take back the Square”. While most towns have a main intersection, Emmitsburg has a square. Revitalization of the town square and sidewalks along its main arteries was set as a priority. In partnership with State Highway Administration (SHA), after four years of planning that included public charrettes, work is scheduled to commence in Spring 2017. Other priorities included:

- Becoming a State of Maryland Sustainable Community (SC) and with that came entitlements that included Community Legacy grants. We have since been awarded four 50-50 façade grants for property owners. The total of \$200,000 in grants has led to \$400,000 of improvements to properties in the SC - Historic District.

- Connecting the town from a concentric perspective around the square to make the town more walkable with eight sidewalk connections and one street connection.
- Replacing expensive town street lighting with low emitting diode (LED) lights that reduced the energy expense of lighting by 40%. Project costs were almost 100% covered by a grant and a utility company rebate.
- Becoming a solar renewable energy provider to offset town electricity demands. Our solar array was built in two phases, each with over a million kilowatt capacities. The total project cost of over \$4.4 million was financed through 20 year power purchase agreements (PPAs) with investors. Emmitsburg had surplus land at its wastewater treatment plant so there was no impact on conservation or agricultural land. By virtual aggregation of town accounts the town compensated for electricity grid reliance with creation of renewable energy. Environmentally, the equivalent of over 1,200 cars a day have been taken off the road. What we could not do because of location and being a car dependent community, we compensated for by being a renewable energy provider. Our new \$19.4 million wastewater treatment plant electricity needs are offset by renewable solar energy.
- Continuing our momentum, we applied to become a Sustainable Maryland (SM) certified community, formed a Green Team, and took action to qualify. In the fall of 2015 we earned the certification. This was a critical step in continuing our efforts. SM certification brings guidance, new ideas, education opportunities and most of all staff support.

Mark Twain once quipped, “Common sense ain’t so common.” We took up that challenge! If your municipality hasn’t, it should. Sustainability is about every day common sense decisions like being less wasteful, and enhanced actions that respect our natural environment and resources. It’s a responsibility of our generation to protect and ensure a quality of life that will endure both now and for those who come after us. ■



The Town’s new wastewater treatment plant electricity needs are offset by renewable energy from the solar array built on surplus land at the wastewater plant site.

