

Resident Focus Group Results

Strategic Planning

February 4, 2026



Overview

On February 4, 2026, the Maple Bluff Village Planner, with support from the Deputy Administrator, facilitated a focus group to enhance community input related to the Village's pending strategic plan. The focus group was comprised of seven Maple Bluff homeowners who volunteered to participate via their responses to the Village's late-2025 community survey. Group members represented a range of neighborhoods, time living in Maple Bluff, ages, genders, and family status including three participants with children at home.

Focus group discussion centered on reviewing and adding insight to the community survey results. The survey was focused on respondents' future vision, service perceptions, and priorities for the Village over the next few years. The facilitator asked the group for further insight on each substantive survey question/responses, one or two survey questions at a time. The remainder of these meeting notes are organized around these survey questions.

Survey Question 1: What one, two, or three words would you use to describe the Village of Maple Bluff today?

- The facilitator noted that the words "community", "safe", "beautiful", and "friendly" were mentioned a remarkable number of times to this open-ended question.
- A participant was not surprised that the top response was "community" because he feels it all around him, with both informal and more formal ways to be part of the community.
- Another participant—a newer, older resident—generally agreed but felt that breaking into the community can take a little time.
- Another participant—a newer, younger resident—also agreed and indicated that informal opportunities such as a "mom's" text group has helped her feel welcomed quickly.

Survey Question 2: The Village's "vision" is the aspirational future state the Village is striving to create. In 2003, the Village Board approved the following vision statement: "The Village of Maple Bluff will continue to maintain its identity as a small, attractive, pedestrian-friendly lakeside residential community. Over the next 20 years, the Village will enhance its character and sense of place, which is defined by its unique neighborhoods, geography, extensive greenspace and recreational opportunities, corridors, Village edges, and proximity to Madison." To what extent do you think this vision still applies going forward?

Survey Question 3: What would you change in the 2003 vision statement to better reflect your future vision for Maple Bluff?

- The facilitator noted that that nearly three-quarters of survey respondents indicated that the Village vision statement "still fully applies", but summarized responses from those who advised changes.
- The focus group participants generally affirmed the survey results to this question.

- One participant emphasized the Village’s truly unique identity as key to his perception and vision of Maple Bluff; another added that this identity is marked by its lakeside location, close proximity to downtown Madison, and open space particularly that formed by the Country Club property.
- One participant noted that the community’s walkability one of its main features, to which a few others noted their concerns with the sometimes lack, narrowness, unevenness, and/or winter conditions of sidewalks, which prompts many to walk in the streets. Still, participants agreed that walking is very common, particularly with dogs.
- A participant understood why concerns over safety and security may have risen since 2003, recalling a period of break-ins roughly 15 years ago and reflecting on changes in the city and world around Maple Bluff.
- Two participants with preschool children at home agreed that having a safe community is part of their vision, and defined safety more in terms of traffic safety than safety from crime. They noted speeding traffic, failure to stop at stop signs, sidewalk concerns mentioned earlier, and problems with crossing North Sherman Avenue particularly near the Village Center. Still, one of these participants did not want to discount safety from crime as a component.
- One participant raised concern about potential changes to neighborhood character and housing diversity via homes being torn down for much bigger homes, while recognizing that there are some zoning controls on that. Another participant expressed more confidence that zoning controls would help preserve character, while yet another suggested that the age of the housing stock suggested that tear downs/rebuilds are inevitable.
- The group debated whether Maple Bluff should be considered or is well known as a group of three neighborhoods (Upper Bluff, Lower Bluff, Fuller’s Woods) or just one “neighborhood” of Maple Bluff. The feeling was generally the latter.

Survey Question 4: “Community Values” are core principles that guide the Village’s conduct, decisions, and expectations. Thinking about Maple Bluff’s future, please check up to THREE community values from among the choices below that are most important to you.

- The facilitator pointed out that the words “safe”, “well kept”, “welcoming community”, and “fiscally responsible” formed a clear top tier of responses to this survey question.
- The participants generally reaffirmed these results.
- One participant, also a volunteer with the Village’s Fire Rescue Department, noted that “health safety” is a key aspect of safety to him, and quick response to EMS calls and then to the hospital when necessary is a major component of Maple Bluff’s health safety. Another participant whose family had recent experience with ambulance service agreed that the ambulance was very quick to the scene.
- The conversation ended with a mention of a myriad of community involvement opportunities, including volunteering, recreational programs, and participation as a board or committee member.

Survey Question 5: Over the past five years (or since you began living in Maple Bluff), has your overall experience living in the Village improved, stayed about the same, or declined?

Survey Question 6: Briefly explain the reason for your answer to the last question please.

- The facilitator shared that most survey respondents suggested that their overall experience in the Village has “stayed about the same.” Other respondents were more than twice as likely to suggest that their experience has “improved” rather than “declined.” He asked the group whether there were things the Village might do to address concerns of those who felt their experience had declined.
- One focus group participant indicated that many of the reasons—such as rising housing costs, jet noise, or safety beyond the Village boundaries—are things the Village has little to no control over.
- Participants suggested that train whistles can be more disruptive than jets, and suggested that crossing improvements be made to decrease whistle frequency. The high cost was noted.
- A few participants disagreed with survey respondents’ “decline” reasons, with one noting that he felt that maintenance in and around public streets was actually strong.
- A participant noted that attendance at Village meetings can be disorienting—often unclear to her who the participants in the meeting were and with some overuse of jargon among them. She suggested nametags/nameplates and less use of jargon and acronyms at Village meetings.
- Another participant indicated an emerging concern with significant multiple-family development in Madison near Maple Bluff, without an apparent commitment to increasing protective and response services for that development.

Survey Question 7: Please complete the following statement: As I look ahead to the next few years, I wish Maple Bluff would...

Survey Question 8: If you could change anything about Maple Bluff, what would you change?

- The facilitator asked for reflections on the range of survey responses to these questions.
- One participant remarked on the tension between keeping taxes affordable and paying for services and other things to help maintain community character. Another noted that tax increases have been mostly attributed to school taxes.
- Another participant reflected on desired improvements to the sidewalk system mentioned earlier.
- One participant expressing a preference for long-term, high-quality solutions for upgrading roads over what he considered temporary fixes involving the laying of tarred gravel over road surfaces (i.e., chip sealing). He and others commented that the gravel gets tracked into garages, etc. for many months after the process is complete.
- One participants advocated speed humps on streets to slow traffic, which garnered some skepticism from two other participants.

Survey Question 9: Please indicate the IMPORTANCE TO YOU of each of the following Village services, by selecting one circle in each row [representing “not important”, “somewhat important”, or “very important”]?

Survey Question 10: Please indicate your LEVEL OF SATISFACTION with how the Village is delivering these same services today, by selecting one circle in each row [representing either “very dissatisfied”, “somewhat dissatisfied”, “neutral”, “somewhat satisfied”, or “very satisfied”.]

- The facilitator commented that satisfaction to most services appeared to be high, and asked the group to provide any further thoughts on what services should change.
- Participants generally felt that the Village was providing the right and a high level of public services.
- One participant appreciated improvements in Village notice via electronic communications, such as a that around a recent downed tree in a street.
- Participants discussed the ratings for “Marina services” and agreed that the large percentage of “neutral” responses were probably based on the fact that only a fraction of the population used the Marina. There was some lack of awareness among participants for how the Marina operates and how Village residents might use it. One participant suggested that there were some community concerns about the Marina’s current space availability, condition, accessibility, and shoreline vegetation.
- One participant asked why it was important for the Village to maintain its own fire protection services, as fires do not seem a major issue in the Village. Another participant (the Fire Rescue volunteer) acknowledged that the ambulance/EMS service component is typically the most utilized but described the sharing of staff and that major fire apparatus investments have recently been made.

Survey Question 11: To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding future municipal service delivery and expenses. Check the appropriate circle after each statement [representing “strongly disagree”, “somewhat disagree”, “neutral”, “somewhat agree”, or “strongly agree”].

- The facilitator ran through the statements, which focused particularly on respondents willingness to pay for government services, mainly through property taxes and user fees.
- One participant commented on what he felt was disinterest in contracting services to private entities or other local governments.
- Another participant suggested that more people might have expressed acceptance for higher taxes for new/expanded services if proposals for specific services were offered.

Survey Question 12: From the choices below, what do you feel are the UP TO THREE most important things for Maple Bluff to address in the future?

Survey Question 13: On which of the following issues do you think the Village should explore collaboration with the City of Madison or the Madison Metropolitan School District? Check any and all that apply.

- The facilitator noted the top tier of responses to question 12 included (in summary) managing property taxes, preserving character, maintaining roads, utilities, and stormwater systems, revitalizing North Sherman business district, and burying power lines, and there were several lower ranked things with the lowest being “improving fire and emergency medical services.”
- The facilitator also noted that most survey respondents favored collaborating with Madison to address the condition of North Sherman and Sherman Avenues, with less than half supporting collaboration on other listed matters with fire/EMS, bus service, and policing the three lowest.
- One participant hoped that improvements to North Sherman through the Village could include upgrades to aesthetics and pedestrian crossings; another agreed, and requested that all improvements along North Sherman reflect a welcoming character.
- One participant (the Fire Rescue volunteer) indicated that the results suggest resident satisfaction with the way that fire and emergency medical services are provided in the community today.
- While noting that environmental stewardship priorities generally ranked in the middle of responses, one participant urged the Village not to overlook these, especially efforts to improve lake/water quality (e.g., modest salt usage); another participant agreed.

Closing Remarks

The participants generally volunteered to reconvene if desired to help further with the strategic plan. The facilitator thanked them, and indicated that if desired by the Board this might best happen once a draft strategic plan was completed. He indicated that participants would be emailed the meeting notes and the how to access the plan once completed.