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Middletown going greener to be certified 'sustainable'

By Sylvia Carignan scarignan@newspost.com Feb 18, 2016



Staff photo by Graham Cullen

The dog park at Wiles Branch Park in Middletown.

With a new solar array powering its wastewater plant, efficient LED lighting in town hall and a farmers market, Middletown is close to becoming a state-certified “sustainable” community.

Like several other municipalities in Frederick County, Middletown is pursuing “Sustainable Maryland” program certification from the state.

“We feel that Middletown has done a lot in the past already in terms of sustainability, and so we’re thinking it’s not going to be a long process,” said Cindy Unangst, Middletown’s staff planner and a member of the town’s Green Team.

Under the Sustainable Maryland program, municipalities organize environmentally conscious

events, plan green improvements and create “green teams” to earn points toward certification, all with the goal of reducing expenditures and ensuring better quality of life over the long term.

Middletown’s Green Team is currently working on Earth Day events, a workplace wellness program and a compost bin program.

The workplace wellness program encourages flu shots and runs a contest for town employees who take the most steps in a certain amount of time. It has started offering prizes for employees who take the most steps in a week, measured via a fitness tracker or a step-tracking smartphone app.

For the town’s Earth Day events, the Green Team hopes to offer document shredding services and hold a recreational bike ride and a tree planting to increase awareness about the environment.

The Middletown Green Team is building on several sustainable improvements that were put into motion last year. A new dog park, which opened about a month ago, is part of their sustainability program, Unangst said.

The Green Team is promoting Middletown’s farmers market and food bank. In April, they will hold a ribbon-cutting ceremony for their new 6.4-acre **solar array**, which powers their wastewater and water treatment facilities.

At town hall, they’ve converted some interior lighting to energy-efficient LEDs and will add an unused prescription drug drop-off location.

A once-popular rain barrel program may also be converted into a compost bin program. The town sold out of rain barrels season after season.

“Last year is the first year that we didn’t have as much interest in it, or participation,” Unangst said. “We’re thinking we hit the saturation point with that.”

Instead, the Green Team is considering selling compost bins at town hall.

In the future, Unangst said, they hope to turn their focus to trees by completing a tree canopy assessment and earning “Tree City USA” standing from the Arbor Day Foundation.

Emmitsburg, Frederick and Brunswick have already earned Sustainable Maryland certification. Thurmont, Walkersville, New Market, Burkittsville and Middletown are still pursuing it.

The certification is a collaborative effort between the Environmental Finance Center at the University of Maryland and the Maryland Municipal League — an organization of cities in the state

— to replicate the success of a similar program in New Jersey.

Municipalities must pass a resolution to state their intent to pursue Sustainable Maryland certification. Certain actions, such as creating a “green team,” are required, though most others are at the discretion of the municipality.

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