

Executive Summary

America in Bloom 2026 Evaluation Report

Community: Cottage City, Maryland

Cottage City, Maryland earned a total of 279 of 774 possible points (36.04%), corresponding to a 4-star rating in its 2026 America in Bloom evaluation. This executive summary consolidates the advisors' suggestions and identifies every metric that scored below the "In Place" threshold (i.e., rated Not Started or In Progress), organized together by impact area for quick reference.

Overall Scoring Summary

Impact Area	Possible Pts	Actual Pts	Percent	Below "In Place" Metrics
Community Vitality	104	50	48.07%	2
Floral Impact	80	6	7.50%	10
Landscaped Areas	80	9	11.25%	9
Urban Forestry	96	64	66.66%	2
Environmental Initiatives	104	48	46.15%	3
Celebrating Heritage	96	24	25.00%	6
Overall Impression	96	49	51.04%	2
Community Involvement	104	18	17.30%	10
Evaluation Tour Preparation and Actions	14	11	78.57%	—
TOTAL	774	279	36.04%	4 Star Rating

Community Vitality

Score: 50 of 104 possible points (48.07%)

Advisors' Suggestions

- Have an engineer determine the safety and liability of the existing parking structure to assess its current condition and future value.
- Refer to the section Celebrating your Heritage for possible short-term and long-term suggestions for the Bladensburg Road.
- The proposed visitor center at the corner of Bladensburg Road and 38th Ave might also house an Open Tool Library.
- Attracting artists to a blighted neighborhood is a common strategy.
- Learn about land management practices of CSX.

Metrics Scored Below "In Place"

- ▶ 3. Master plan exists for current and/or future community growth and public green space. Growth, enhancements, and/or protection of undeveloped areas are included. It is reviewed and routinely updated. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 13. Safety policies, programs, and/or services are in place. Examples include, but are not limited to, police, fire, emergency medical services, community health, crime prevention, homeland security, gang prevention, traffic, homelessness, and civil and human rights. Information is easily accessible and communicated. — Scored: In Progress (1)

Floral Impact

Score: 6 of 80 possible points (7.50%)

Advisors' Suggestions

- Consider working with an area nursery to pre-order plants for installation in early spring so that they can mature throughout the growing season. Another plant source could be Home Depot, Lowe's, or a similar business. Approach them nicely, and they may even donate them to your community. Tell them that you will advertise where the plants were obtained, and they may give you a price break or a donation. Consider involving your community garden people to act as coordinators for ordering floral plants. Go beyond in-ground plantings and try to expand the palette into hanging baskets and shrubbery that flower throughout the summer, such as roses.
- Another suggestion is to designate a person to water the plants. This individual's responsibilities would be to water the plants, groom them, and fertilize as needed. Some sort of water wagon will be needed.
- Another way to get more floral impact is to have a plant exchange with your community members. Advertise this in your community newsletter.

Metrics Scored Below "In Place"

- ▶ 1. Floral combinations are carefully selected for location and environmental conditions. The combinations create visual interest, provide dramatic effects, and appear coordinated. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 2. Floral displays are located throughout the community. Displays are well maintained and attractive. Examples include, but are not limited to, flowerbeds, raised beds, planters, hanging baskets, window boxes, carpet bedding, topiaries, and/or mosaics. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 3. In-ground flower displays are designed with mature plant heights, color, and texture in mind. Plants are healthy, robust, and floriferous. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 4. Containers and/or hanging baskets are part of a floral plan, in use, scaled to their surroundings, and have suitable plants. Flowers are robust, floriferous, and provide a dramatic effect. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 5. Regular maintenance, watering, fertilizing, pruning, deadheading, weeding, removal, and/or replacement of dead flowers is conducted on public properties. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 6. Demonstration/display gardens are available. Flowers are labeled. The garden is promoted to the public. Garden is available to residents and businesses for events. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 7. Appropriate floral maintenance procedures, including fertilization (chemical and/or non-chemical) for municipal, parks, and/or school properties are implemented. The procedures produce effective results. Educational information about fertilization is communicated. Examples of communication avenues include, but are not limited to, lectures, print, city website, city hall postings, libraries, and social media. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 8. Training programs for proper floral displays care and maintenance are offered to seasonal staff and/or volunteers. Training is conducted by Master Gardeners, County Extension, local garden centers, state agencies, and/or contractors. — Scored: Not Started (0)

- ▶ 9. Efforts are in place to educate and raise public awareness of the importance of floral displays in the landscape. Educational information about the selection and care of flowers for beautification is available and communicated to the public. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 10. Recognition programs are in place monthly, quarterly, and/or annually for attractive displays created by businesses and/or residents. — Scored: Not Started (0)

Landscaped Areas

Score: 9 of 80 possible points (11.25%)

Advisors' Suggestions

- Consider updating your tree selections so “weedy” taxa are not planted. Contact your local County Extension Agents for suggestions. Create a picture book illustrating viable tree options and their growth habits so homeowners can better choose species to plant on their land.
- Consider adding large, frost-free, plant containers, which would add another element to the landscape at Town Hall. These could be changed out depending upon the season and also serve as entrance markers for the facility. This could be done in-house or contracted out.
- You might add evergreens for winter interest. The new area to be planted as a native plant garden should have some hardscaping so it does not look weedy. Also consider adding interpretation so visitors learn what is being grown and why.
- Your newsletter could feature articles on why to plant native trees, how to build a rain garden, incorporate rain barrels into the landscape, how to plant a tree, and how to avoid contracting poison ivy.

Metrics Scored Below "In Place"

- ▶ 2. Plan developed each season for procurement, scheduling, planting, and/or maintenance of landscapes. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 3. Landscape ordinances and/or policies are in place. City landscape ordinance requires specifications for landscaping and maintenance for new and improved residential, commercial, and public development. Ordinances and/or policies are easily accessible. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 4. Landscaping is found throughout the community including public areas, parks, gateways, and/or key buildings. Landscape displays are selected for location, environmental conditions, and/or impact. Attractive designs are utilized and well maintained. Landscapes serve as focal areas in the community. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 5. Landscape displays enhance community entryways. The use of trees, shrubs, signage, hardscapes, and/or lighting creates a welcome display. The displays are attractive, well maintained, and create visual impact. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 6. Procedures in place to monitor and/or manage diseases and/or pests in the landscape. Pertinent information is available and/or communicated to the public. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 7. Lawn and turf areas display health and vigor. Procedures and practices, such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM) are used to manage lawn and turf areas, including fertilizing, mowing, edging, proper watering, and/or weeding. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 8. Qualified landscape personnel and/or experienced contractors are available to design, install, source, and/or maintain public landscape sites. Additional support can be provided by growers, garden centers, County Extension Agents, and/or city departments. These resources are utilized to create and implement attractive municipal landscape displays. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 9. Training programs for proper landscape display care and maintenance are available for volunteers, full-time, and/or seasonal staff. Examples of trainers include, but are not limited to, Master Gardeners, County Extension, local garden centers, state agencies, and contractors. — Scored: In Progress (1)

- ▶ 10. Recognition programs are in place monthly, quarterly, and/or annually for attractive displays created by businesses and/or residents. — Scored: Not Started (0)

Urban Forestry

Score: 64 of 96 possible points (66.66%)

Advisors' Suggestions

- Newly planted trees need to be regularly watered to help establish them. A water truck needs to be made or purchased to help take care of all city plantings. Homeowners should be able to assume the responsibility of watering their own trees, given careful instructions depending on the planting site and size of the saplings. Your consultant, who is a certified arborist and the American Landscaping company, should give instructions.
- Keeping a tree inventory up to date takes a commitment and should be budgeted annually so you do not get behind, especially if there have been any destructive storms or insect infestations. If you have an up-to-date inventory and great losses, you can apply for FEMA funds if available.
- Consider planting more native oaks as they are a keystone species that supports a surprising number and variety of fauna. See "The Nature of Oaks" by Douglas W. Tallamy.
- Provide ongoing education about how to mulch trees, especially the harm caused when mulch is too deep, e.g., volcano mulching, basic pruning techniques, etc.

Metrics Scored Below "In Place"

- ▶ 9. Trees are identified in public sites such as arboretums, parks, and/or cemeteries. Examples include, but are not limited to, identification labels, descriptive signage, QR codes, kiosks, maps, apps, and brochures. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 11. Effective communication of recommended trees is available to the public. Topics include "Right Tree in the Right Place," mulching, placement, spacing, and/or maintenance. Examples of communication include, but are not limited to, lectures, print, city website, library, City Hall, and social media. — Scored: In Progress (2)

Environmental Initiatives

Score: 48 of 104 possible points (46.15%)

Advisors' Suggestions

- If Cottage City wants to distinguish itself nationally, we recommend creating a Living Laboratory for Climate Resilience. The town or port towns could partner with nearby schools, universities, and nonprofits to pilot innovative approaches to stormwater management, urban forestry, biodiversity, community engagement, and environmental education. Cottage City's compact size makes it an ideal place to test ideas that could later be replicated across other municipalities. Given its existing Green Team, tree canopy work, community garden, and Sustainable Maryland certification, it already has the foundation for such a role.
- Create an Adopt-a-Rain-Garden Program Rather than relying only on town maintenance, residents, civic groups, scouts, or businesses could "adopt" rain gardens and bioswales. Each garden would have a small sign recognizing its caretakers and explaining how it reduces pollution entering the Anacostia River.
- Consider having a Community BioBlitz Weekend Residents use apps like iNaturalist to identify every bird, butterfly, insect, tree, and flower found in Cottage City over one weekend. This creates a biodiversity inventory that can be repeated every year. Keep track of it on your city's website.
- Consider putting solar panels over the Town Hall parking lots, which will also protect vehicles from sun and snow while generating electricity. Use the funds you get from the panels you have on the Town Hall to help pay for the project.

- Station recycling and trash cans together. If one or the other is the only can available, recycling and trash will be thrown in the same container.
- A sign to promote the efforts of the Green Team and how to become a member should be posted at each Green Team worksite to recruit new members.

Metrics Scored Below "In Place"

- ▶ 7. Water conservation and water quality measures are widely promoted throughout the community and accessible. Residential and business practices include, but are not limited to, using rain barrels, rain gardens, and permeable surfaces; addressing water leaks in homes, businesses, and community spaces; choosing efficient appliances; and irrigating responsibly. Efforts also emphasize protecting water quality through stormwater management, reducing chemical runoff, proper disposal of household and yard waste, and maintaining healthy waterways. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 8. Management strategies are implemented for the effective reuse/repurpose of buildings, structures, and/or land. The municipality has a reuse plan in place. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 10. Reuse opportunities are offered and include clothing, books, household goods, resale shops, tool lending, durable medical equipment, and/or equipment repair initiatives available for donations and/or purchase. — Scored: In Progress (1)

Celebrating Heritage

Score: 24 of 96 possible points (25.00%)

Advisors' Suggestions

- On the future site of a community outreach center, the former Cottage City & Colmar Manor firehouse, consider featuring its history with silhouettes of early fire trucks on the front and side of the building.
- The following are some actionable ways to brand Cottage City using the streetcar suburb concept.

Metrics Scored Below "In Place"

- ▶ 3. Historic districts, neighborhoods, structures, landmarks, and/or objects are identified and/or labeled. Designations by such organizations as the Department of Archives and History and/or National Register are in place and/or in progress. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 7. Staff and/or volunteers are trained to maintain historical sites, archives, records, collections, artifacts, structures, and/or landscapes. Historic educators are trained to effectively communicate a community's history. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 8. Historic preservation incentives are available and promoted. Incentives may include, but are not limited to, tax credits, waived permit fees, eased setbacks, and/or rebates. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 9. Programs are in place for the purchase, installation, and/or long-term maintenance of memorial features. Examples include, but are not limited to, memorial benches, trees, brick pathways, and lamp posts. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 11. Programs and/or events are available to bring history to life. Examples include, but are not limited to, theater dramas, reenactments, and historic characters at public events. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 13. Youth of all ages and abilities participate in historical programs. Examples include, but are not limited to, lectures, tours, events, reenactments, research, and reader's theater. Participants are recognized for their efforts and/or achievements. — Scored: Not Started (0)

Overall Impression

Score: 49 of 96 possible points (51.04%)

Advisors' Suggestions

- Add more creative crosswalk art. They enhance streetscapes, boost community pride, and improve safety by encouraging both pedestrians and motorists to be more aware of their surroundings. Young people can be involved in crosswalk art projects.
- Establish and/or review your design guidelines, branding, historic preservation code and downtown ordinances, etc. to confirm they are current and represent the look you want to present and preserve.
- Above all, review the proposed zoning changes and long-term plans for Bladensburg Road by The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.
- Straighten street signs periodically. It creates a sense of care.
- Consider short-term and long-term goals and projects.

Metrics Scored Below "In Place"

- ▶ 8. Wayfinding signage is visible, attractive, and in appropriate locations throughout the community. Signage adequately lists directional information and/or areas of interest. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 10. Year-round seasonal decorations are used in key areas. The decorations are well maintained and attractive. Examples include, but are not limited to, lighting, ornamental displays, wreaths, planters, luminaries, and displays in government buildings, residential homes, and storefronts. — Scored: In Progress (1)

Community Involvement

Score: 18 of 104 possible points (17.30%)

Advisors' Suggestions

- Strategies to support the participation of Hispanics include addressing heightened concerns for personal safety plus responsive strategies that emphasize family, shared trust, and relationship-building. Flexible scheduling, bilingual resources, and communal, welcoming environments, rather than relying on traditional, individualistic volunteer models, have helped other organizations to overcome lower participation rates.
- Include in the Community Profile information about boards, committees, programs, events, and actions related to the items listed above. Include how the local police and fire departments interact with the community.
- Review the above items and identify how Cottage City encourages residents to volunteer, as well as work and play together.

Metrics Scored Below "In Place"

- ▶ 1. Programs are in place to encourage, recruit, engage and/or recognize a diverse base of volunteers of all ages, abilities, cultures, and/or segments of the community in each of the America in Bloom criteria. Volunteers from businesses, residents, schools, and/or organizations participate, and opportunities present themselves to residents and/or businesses to get involved. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 3. Annual recognition of a community champion. This may be from the schools, social organizations, Chamber of Commerce, businesses, to include issues that are important to the community, including, but not limited to, housing, health, and environmental initiatives. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 6. Youth of all ages and abilities participate in community events. Examples include, but are not limited to, lectures, tours, events, reenactments, research, and reader's theater. Participants are recognized for their efforts and/or achievements. — Scored: Not Started (0)

- ▶ 7. Youth organizations such as Scouts, Green Teams, schools, and 4H encourage community involvement. Participants are recognized for their efforts and/or achievements. Efforts are communicated to the public through social media, newsletters, city website, and other methods. Youth-focused programs are in place for multiple ages and/or abilities. Examples include, but are not limited to, sports, gardening, clubs, and lectures. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 8. Volunteer engagement in parades, festivals, and community events as measured by but not limited to event volunteers, the frequency and variety of events, a dedicated volunteer coordinator, and number of volunteer hours. — Scored: In Progress (2)
- ▶ 9. Volunteers participate in community improvement initiatives. Examples include, but are not limited to, Habitat for Humanity, home repair programs, disaster relief, and clean-up days. — Scored: In Progress (2)
- ▶ 10. Residential best practices regarding water conservation measures are used throughout the community. Examples include, but are not limited to, water-saving shower heads, full loads for dishwashers and washing machines, sink and toilet leaks fixed, lawn irrigation, drought-resistant plants, and use of gray water. — Scored: Not Started (0)
- ▶ 11. Compassionate Community Response: The community demonstrates organized efforts to provide compassionate care during crises such as floods or hurricanes, wildfires, homelessness, and tragic deaths of community members. Support may include short- and long-term assistance (e.g., meals, housing, support groups, vigils, warming centers, garden therapy), volunteer service, fundraising, and coordinated relief efforts. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 12. Training programs for volunteer excellence are in place to teach best practices assuring every volunteer is equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed for all volunteer positions. Training should include standardized best practices, role-specific instruction, hands-on learning, mentorship, safety, communication, and teamwork. — Scored: In Progress (1)
- ▶ 13. The community has a disaster preparedness plan in place and routinely reviews and updates it to ensure effectiveness, incorporates lessons learned from past events, and conducts regular training exercises to maintain readiness among residents and emergency personnel. — Scored: Not Started (0)

Evaluation Tour Preparation and Actions

Score: 11 of 14 possible points (78.57%)

This area is scored on a Met/Unmet (rather than an In Place) scale. 3 item(s) were scored Unmet.

Advisors' Suggestions

- Involve more government employees, business leaders, and residents in addressing aspects of the community tour. Bring together people with common interests, e.g., history buffs, historians, and people restoring antiques, living in an old house, etc. or environmentalists, birders, and gardeners. Consider different aspects of the tour (e.g., meeting places or meals) as opportunities to bring people together, provide opportunities to talk about what they contribute to the town, and to learn what others with a similar passion are doing. People are usually flattered to be invited and enjoy an opportunity to talk about their personal interests as related to the town. It builds pride, generates new ideas, and helps move projects forward.
- Provide the community profile to the advisors two weeks in advance of their visit.

Metrics Scored Below "In Place"

No metrics in this impact area scored below "In Place."