

"Federation Corner" column
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A framework for planning in a mature county

The Park and Planning Commission submitted its Biannual Report to the County Council in April. The first attachment to that report presented a framework for planning in a maturing County. The paragraphs that follow copy some key sentences or paragraphs from this 17 page attachment to provide an overview of their thinking and planned activities. The full report can be found at: www.mc-mncppc.org (More Headlines on the right).

There are many signals that Montgomery County is maturing. The County is approaching build-out, its rate of growth is slowing, and its population is aging along with its infrastructure and buildings. A maturing County means that a greater proportion of future growth and change will occur as redevelopment, the reconstruction or replacement of buildings on developed parcels with new buildings; or infill, the construction of new buildings among existing buildings, either on vacant parcels or on the un-built portion of already-developed parcels.

In the past, the focus has been on managing the transition from rural to suburban. In the future the emphasis will be on making a careful transition from auto-oriented suburban to pedestrian-oriented, transit friendly urban. The Planning Department proposes to pursue a strategy that seeks to focus opportunities for continued economic growth within existing centers and along major transportation routes, while protecting and supporting the County's Agricultural Reserve by committing resources to meeting the needs of the rural areas of the county. These efforts will help to reduce pressure to expand the development envelope.

Goals - Capture projected growth within existing centers and along major transportation routes. Provide meaningful incentives to encourage reinvestment and redevelopment.

- = Development will be channeled, whenever possible, to existing, aging centers where infrastructure can support growth, public transportation can be provided efficiently, neighborhoods can be strengthened, and redevelopment can enhance economic vitality.
- = Planning will focus on enhancing the appropriate functions of some major transportation routes, by reshaping already developed areas into efficient and attractive multi-use places and by making road and transit improvements that will control roadway congestion and ease vehicular and pedestrian movement.
- = A range of housing types will be encouraged that are affordable to renters and homebuyers.
- = The use of parks will be further enhanced by improving public access and by taking into account the need for recreation close to population centers and the interests of the county's changing population.
- = Reinvestment will be nurtured with the use of County resources and public/private partnerships to improve infrastructure, housing, and other programs that attract and support business enterprise and neighborhood livability.
- = Renewed attention to site and project design will preserve and enhance the distinct character of centers and reinforce residents sense of place.
- = New urban environmental regulations and development standards will be created to encourage the redevelopment potential of these areas. Incentives for the construction of "green buildings" will be developed, as well.
- = ??New regulatory approaches will be designed to provide flexibility and incentives to achieve redevelopment goals.
- = Continue to protect the Agricultural Reserve.

Community Based Planning Program

The Master Plan Program is being reshaped to meet the needs of a mature County. A strong community outreach and participation process will continue to be a hallmark of this planning program. **Future planning efforts will focus on the following three areas:**

A. Planning the Major Travel Routes and Transportation Corridors - The character and functionality of many major travel routes should be improved. Aging residential and commercial frontage could be reshaped to capture new economic and community benefit. The transportation corridors also represent an opportunity to provide housing in areas accessible to transit where rail and bus service is frequent. The initial major travel routes to review could include MD 355, University Boulevard and Georgia Avenue. Planning should also focus on two important transportation corridors- the future Purple Line and the Corridor Cities Transitway.

B. Planning Individual Areas--

Phase One

1. Complete Inventory and Physical Assessment of all, 103, commercial centers.
2. Invite the Urban Land Institute to provide a national perspective. Identify national trends, economic feasibility, and unique conditions needed to reshape older commercial centers and aging frontage along major travel routes. Identify successful prototype projects and designs.
3. Assess the redevelopment potential of the County's aging centers and major travel routes.
4. Convene a Countywide Forum. Invite civic, business, educational, banking, and development leadership to participate.
5. Select specific areas for additional planning. Identify capacity issues to determine feasibility of successful completion.

Phase Two

1. Prepare a Concept Plan for each selected area with the community.
2. Select appropriate planning approach to deliver land-use and zoning recommendations - master plan amendment, special study area, special project area and/ or regulatory techniques.

Phase Three

1. Initiate detailed planning for selected areas. Heighten emphasis on presentation of visual characteristics to better determine compatibility and market feasibility
2. Convene a series of Community Forums and Workshops involving a broad spectrum of community and business interests.
3. Create a Development Program, for each area, that provides the necessary conditions and incentives to spur reinvestment and redevelopment. Identify a development focus for each area that can build on existing strength and competitive advantages of each unique area. Identify competitive advantage of living and/or locating in redeveloped areas.
4. Finalize recommendations at a Community Forum.
5. Develop an Implementation Strategy. Revise or amend, as needed the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Regulations, environmental and transportation regulations, standards, and guidelines. Initiate revision to 1992 Recreational and Open Space Guidelines.
6. Prepare an Infrastructure Implementation Study for each area.

C. Planning for the Agricultural Reserve -- Efforts to strengthen the agricultural and rural open space program will continue to be an important focus of the planning program.