MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

January 28, 2008

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Gwen Wright, Acting Planning Director

FROM: Melissa Cunha Banach, Chief, Strategic Planning Division

Matt Zisman, Planner Coordinator, Strategic Planning Division

SUBJECT: Planning Board Worksession on Master Plan Process Reassessment Report

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STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Review Executive Summary and Provide Direction on Development of Final Report

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Attached is the Executive Summary of the Master Plan Process Reassessment Report, along with the technical appendices critical to development of the draft recommendations presented here. These recommendations center on improvements to master plan process, to master plan content, and to master plan implementation.

We are bringing this report to the Board in a series of worksessions, beginning with the first informative worksession to discuss the basic concepts and recommendations derived from the collective information contributed by both consultants and Divisions. Subsequent to this discussion, at which we hope to obtain Planning Board feedback on the proposed recommendations and/or clarification on how to further develop concepts, we will schedule additional worksessions to present the full report. The final report must be completed prior to a scheduled presentation to the PHED Committee on this topic that is planned for March 17th.

We look forward to a productive series of worksessions with the Board as the Department develops a framework for future master plan efforts.

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Executive Summary

Project Scope

This Master Plan Process Reassessment Report takes a critical look at the master planning process in Montgomery County and offers recommendations to enhance the Planning Department's ability to meet the land use challenges posed by a maturing and urbanizing county.

The reassessment examines possible improvements to master plans in three broad categories:
1) process
2) content
3) implementation

During the past three decades, Montgomery County has developed a respected community master planning program that has successfully tackled issues such as rural preservation, transit-oriented development, and revitalization of urban centers. This reassessment seeks to refine our master planning activities in response to the changing nature of planning here in the county.

With many parts of the county built out, we will see significantly fewer "greenfields" plans. Instead, we will increase our emphasis on redevelopment of existing areas and infill projects. This more "urban" milieu requires a planning effort that can focus on smaller geographic areas that can more quickly respond to fast-changing trends.

At the same time, technological advances offer new opportunities to analyze land use, communicate with stakeholders, and visualize development concepts.

This exciting time of change offers an excellent opportunity to look at how the Planning Department can enhance its timeliness, nimbleness, analytical clarity, and accessibility. This Master Plan Process Reassessment Report should be viewed as a way to stimulate discussion and offer recommendations that will evolve over time as the department strives to efficiently and effectively respond to the county's anticipated – as well as unexpected – land use, economic, and demographic trends.

Project Methodology

In undertaking this project, the department used a multi-tiered methodology based on focus group interviews, research, and consultant expertise. We sought input from a wide spectrum of stakeholders including civic representatives, the development community, institutional/ religious/educational communities, planning staff, and county agencies.

The department also hired a consultant to undertake a nationwide comparative practice survey to identify potential improvements, and conducted its own research into how other large

jurisdictions throughout the country develop master plans, convey information, and implement concepts.

Attached appendices, which reflect much of the data gathered during this project, include:

- An existing conditions report developed by the Community-Based Planning Division;
- A report on current conditions in master plan process and outreach developed by the Community-Based Planning Division;
- A Report on the Stakeholder Focus Groups developed by Rhodeside and Harwell;
- A Nationwide Comparative Survey of Planning in other Jurisdictions developed by Rhodeside and Harwell;
- A Report on Master Plan Content and Form Based Codes developed by Ferrell Madden and Associates;
- A Report on Technology and Public Outreach developed by the Research and Technology Division; and
- A Report on Information Counter Public Outreach developed by the Community-Based Planning Division.

All of the information gathered has been critically analyzed and has been the genesis of the recommendations that make up the core of this report.

Major Recommendations

Process:

1. For the majority of master plans, plan area boundaries should be narrowed to focus on clearly-defined, smaller geographic areas where significant land use changes are anticipated or desired.

2. For master plans with clearly defined, smaller plan area boundaries, the timeframe for completion should be 18 months – from inception through Council approval and of Final Draft Plan (see attached chart.)

3. Limited master plan amendments, which focus on a very small area where there is an immediate planning concern, may be undertaken once or twice a year; however they should be infrequent so as to not disrupt the regular master plan work program.

4. Actions needed to accomplish this reduced timeframe include:

    a. better project scoping at the outset, including clear definition of manageable geographic boundaries for each plan, identification of tasks and needed resources, a project timetable, and a budget,

    b. early analysis of existing conditions (including demographics, employment, economic conditions, infrastructure, and environmental conditions, among other issues) to identify issues that plans should address, and more effectively identify constraints before engaging the public,

    c. systemization of communications strategies, with an emphasis on using new technologies,

    d. a more focused public outreach process centered on a community charrette or a series of charrettes for each plan,

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e. elimination of the current Staff Draft process, with the emphasis shifted to preparing a Preliminary Draft Plan,

f. periodic updates to the Planning Board during the development of the Preliminary Draft Plan to assure that major policy concerns are being addressed,

g. elimination of the 60-day County Executive fiscal review period,

h. standardization of plan formats and graphics to improve consistency and heighten efficiency.

5. Create larger planning teams within the Community Based Planning Division that are focused on fewer geographic areas.

6. Ensure that each plan has a clearly identified lead planner who will act as a project manager. The lead planner must have sufficient access to a wider range of resources within the rest of the department, including outreach support, graphics, administrative support, and legal advice.

7. Enhance senior staff skills on the principles of sound project management and encourage greater accountability among staff at all levels.

8. Enhance staff training to more effectively use emerging technologies.

9. Use the Program Elements in the Program Budget to manage individual master plan projects, including monitoring project schedules and labor distribution.

Content:

10. Develop a standard Master Plan template that includes not only the topics currently addressed by master plans, but also: a focus on design excellence; economic analyses; an examination of how plans stimulate healthier communities; and analyses of how plans impact energy consumption. This new Master Plan template will require plans to have an index to improve accessibility and a more succinct overview that offers supporting materials in technical appendices.

11. Ensure consistent review of master plan reports by the department's editor, and greater use of emerging technologies, including improved web tools and 3D visualization to make plans more understandable and accessible.

Implementation:

12. Carefully coordinate the use of new zoning tools – such as form-based codes – with master plan efforts to create a community vision.

13. Achieve greater and earlier communication/coordination with other county agencies throughout the plan making process.

14. Periodically review capital improvement priorities critical to achieving the visions that plans espouse.

Conclusion and Next Steps

To summarize, we reached out to a wide range of stakeholders both within and beyond the department, and those groups offered consistent feedback on areas to improve within the department's current master plan process. The conclusions presented here represent staff efforts to develop meaningful, practical solutions to better enable planners to efficiently perform their complicated work, and better enable the department to meet the demands of a changing and exciting future.
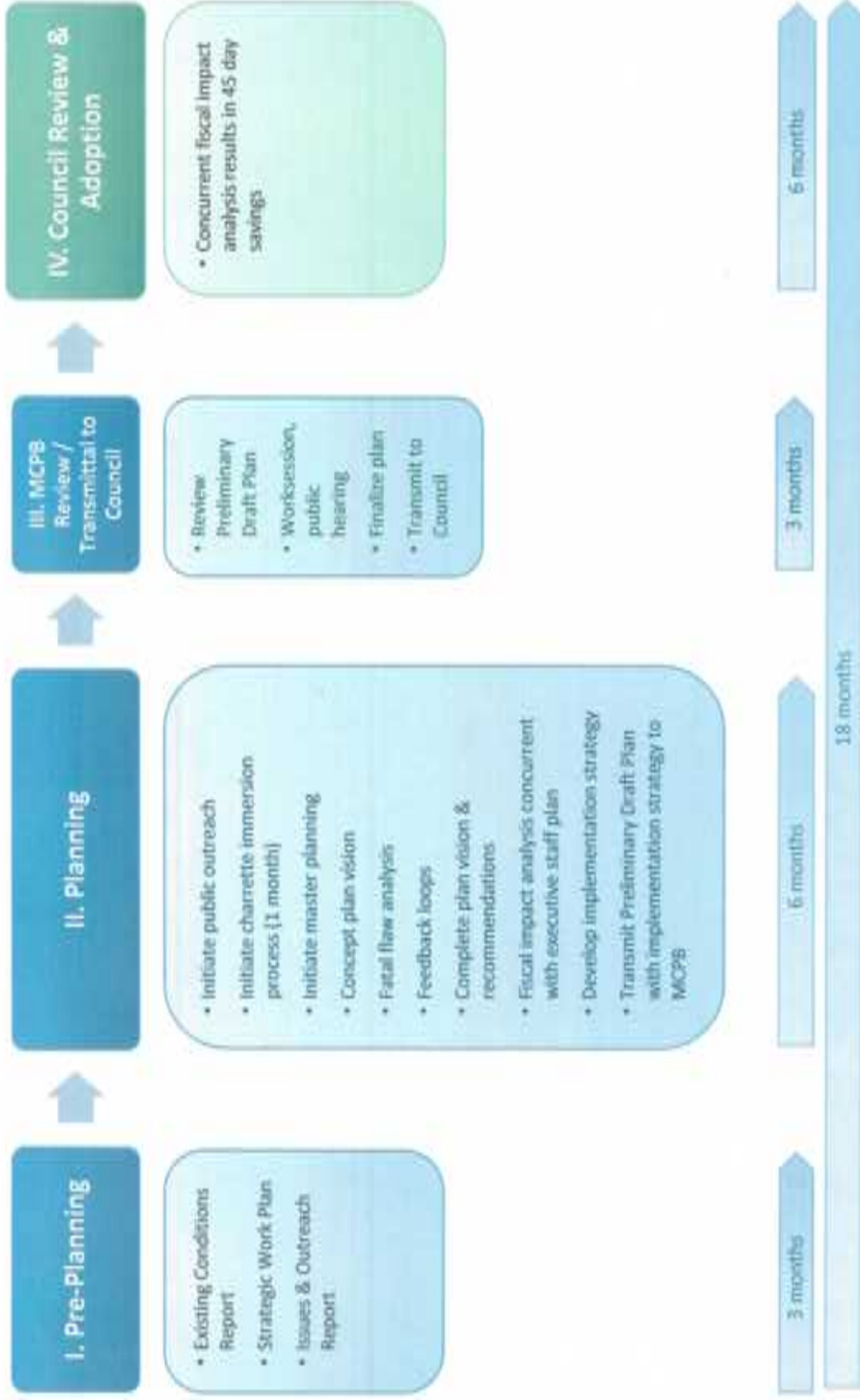
Our next steps will be to incorporate feedback from the Planning Board on our proposed recommendations, and refine the concepts in greater detail. This will include working closely with additional department staff to begin fleshing out the details of the concepts proposed here.

Examples include:
- Developing a standardized scoping process for master plans that includes key analytical steps and resource/ budget requirements for plan development;
- Developing a menu of outreach approaches, listing advantages and disadvantages, for planners to tailor to individual plans
- Creating menus of data available to planners from the Research and Technology Division; and
- Working with the editor to begin developing a standardized master plan template.

In conclusion, we recognize that the Planning Department has developed a respected, successful master planning program over several decades. Our goal now is to create a master plan process that builds upon our department's ground-breaking achievements and offers a similarly innovative vision into the future.

Proposed Planning Process

I. Pre-Planning

- Existing Conditions Report
- Strategic Work Plan
- Issues & Outreach Report

II. Planning

- Initiate public outreach
- Initiate charrette immersion process (1 month)
- Initiate master planning
- Concept plan vision
- Fatal flaw analysis
- Feedback loops
- Complete plan vision & recommendations
- Fiscal impact analysis concurrent with executive staff plan
- Develop implementation strategy
- Transmit Preliminary Draft Plan with implementation strategy to MCPB

III. MCPB Review / Transmittal to Council

- Review Preliminary Draft Plan
- Worksession, public hearing
- Finalize plan
- Transmit to Council

IV. Council Review & Adoption

- Concurrent fiscal impact analysis results in 45 day savings

3 months | 6 months | 3 months | 6 months

18 months

Assumptions: Standardization, Dedicated Staff, Adequate Resources

Appendix 1: Community-Based Planning Assessment of Existing Conditions for Master Plan Development

The attached documents complete the requested Existing Conditions Report to be used in the Master Plan Assessment project. As requested, the documents include the following:

Description of the Master Plan Process including the following:

- List of the Hierarchy and Description of Plan Types (Master Plans, Sector Plans, Plan Amendments, and Limited Plan Amendments)
- Master Plan Schedule and Length of Time to Complete Plans
- Description of Outreach Methods
- Description of the Charrette, Worksession, and Other Outreach Processes Currently in Use

ATTACHMENTS:

No. 1: What are the lessons learned in the 1997 Master Planning Process? What are the hurdles to implementing the Master Plan Recommendations listed in the 1997 report?

No. 2: How have land use, economic, and demographic trends impacted the preparation and implementation of master plans since 1997?

No. 3: What is the definition of a Functional Plan?

The remaining work products to be completed include the Information Counter Survey of Users, and a summary of the results of the focus group sessions with the staff of the Planning Department, community members and staff of the County Council. Our understanding is that after the summary of the results of the focus groups is completed by the consultant, representatives of the Community-Based Planning Division would participate in the preparation of the final recommendations to improve the Master Plan process. The entire staff of the Planning Department may not be aware of the improvements to the master planning process that have been suggested by the Planning Board during recent round table discussions. Given the approaching deadline, please let us know when the Community-Based Planning Division and the Countywide Division can participate in finalizing this important project.

ATTACHMENT NO. 1: WHAT ARE THE LESSONS LEARNED IN THE 1997 MASTER PLANNING PROCESS? WHAT ARE THE HURDLES TO IMPLEMENTING THE MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS LISTED IN THE 1997 REPORT?

INTRODUCTION

The Planning Department completed the Master Planning Process: A Guide for Citizens, Planners, and Government officials in September 1997. The current Master Plan Program is a direct result of this effort. More than fifteen focus groups consisting of planners, County staff, citizen activists, developers, and Council staff provided input. Over a three year period, planning staff researched other master planning processes and sought to balance the need for technical efficiency with the community's desire for ongoing discussion and participation. Finally, extensive dialogue with members of the Planning Board and the County Council helped shape many of the proposals contained in the September 1997 Guide.

SUMMARY OF THE MASTER PLAN PROCESS

The following list summarizes the phases and time frames of the plan development process recommended in the September 1997 Guide.

Phase and Description	Approximate Time
Phase 1: Detailed Data Collection	6 Months
Phase 2: Draft Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report	1-2 Months
Phase 3: Finalize Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report	2 Months
Phase 4: Identify Alternative Actions	6-10 Months
Phase 5: Finalize the Staff Draft Plan	3 Months
Phase 6: Planning Board Hearings and Worksessions	5 months
Phase 7: County Executive Review	2 Months
Phase 8: County Council Hearings, Worksessions and Approval	6 Months
Phase 9: Planning Commission Adopts the Plan*	1 Month
Phase 10: Sectional Map Amendment Preparation and Approval*	6 Months
	Total 38-43 Months

*Specific time frames not included in the 1997 Guide

The September 1997 guide was intended to produce master plans different from earlier plans. These plans were intended to cover the same issues and generally have the same boundaries as earlier plans. They were intended to be more focused than earlier plans, take less time to complete, and be shorter in length. The new plans were intended to achieve the following qualities:

- Build upon the foundations of earlier plans
- More focused
- More oriented toward quality-of-life issues

- Have shorter time frames
- More implementation oriented
- Greater emphasis on resources and strategies needed to make plan recommendations a reality
- Developed by seven multi-disciplinary planning teams assigned to geographic planning areas
- Developed with advisory input from a 8-10 members of a Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG)
- Recommendations monitored on a regular basis

FINDINGS

The September 1997 Guide served as a useful guide in the preparation of master plans during the last ten years. It provided some improvements to the plan process previously in use. Since the preparation of the September 1997 Guide, the following modifications have been made in the plan process.

Planning Board Involvement - The Planning Board is presently involved earlier in the plan preparation process. During the preparation of the Staff Draft a series of round table discussions with the Planning Board occur. The discussions include the following topics:

- Recommendations concerning Purpose, Outreach and Plan Boundaries
- Role of the Plan and Capacity Analysis
- Sketch Plan and Summary of recommendations

This revision to the process results in more definitive staff recommendations, Planning Board involvement earlier in the process, and a reduction in time for Planning Board worksessions.

2.   **Reduction of Time to Prepare the Purpose and Outreach Report** - Instead of a long, two-stage preparation of the Purpose and Outreach Report, this report is now discussed earlier in the Master Plan process during the first round table discussion with the Planning Board.

3.   **Reduction in Staff and Increase in the Number of Plans Prepared Each Year** - Instead of the 2-3 plans underway each year (page 13), the Planning Department has over ten plans underway each year. In addition, four planners have been eliminated from the Community-Based Planning Division.

4.   **Use of Master Plan Advisory Groups (MPAGs) as the Primary Outreach Method** - The MPAG, including 8-10 members, was a renaming of the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) system in use prior to the September 1997 report. The current process requires significantly more outreach. Hallmarks of the changes to the former process include:

Use of community worksessions and charrettes that involve significantly more community members

Preparation of a Community Outreach Tool Kit that provides the necessary resources to enhance community outreach

Use of a variety of outreach methods subject to approval by the Planning Board tailored to the needs of each individual community instead of one method

Time Saving Methods for Use After the Planning Board Draft - The September 1997 Guide did not provide recommendations for time saving measures after the preparation of the Planning Board Draft. The following time saving methods would reduce the reparation time without compromising the process:

Hold the County Council public hearing immediately after the completion of the review by the County Executive – time savings of 1 month minimum

Begin preparation of the Sectional Map Amendment immediately after approval by the PHED Committee – time savings of 2 months minimum

Fiscal Analysis - Instead of waiting for the County Executive to produce the required Fiscal analysis, the Planning Department could produce a Preliminary Fiscal Analysis with participation from the staff of the County Executive before each plan is transmitted to the County Executive.

Enhancing the Role of Technology - The September 1997 Guide did not discuss the role of technology in the preparation of plans. The use of technology is a major component in today's Master Plan process. Key components include the following:

- Use of three dimensional visualization to assist in the recommendation process
- Analysis of land use scenarios
- Capacity analysis of transportation, schools and the environment to produce a clear process

Publishing and Printing Process - The September 1997 Guide did not discuss the publishing and printing process, and assumed the continued use of printed reports as the primary method of publishing master plans. Today's Master Plans use a variety of publishing and printing process. Recent Master Plans include the following:

- Use of technology including publishing on the Web and use of compact disks (CDs) in addition to printed reports during all phases of the plan process
- Use of a recently hired editor to improve the organization and clarity of all documents
- Use of summary documents including posters and other documents
- Use of animation and three dimensional visualization to document recommendations

Grouping of Plans - The current Master Plan process will group plans with similar themes. The current plan process groups four plans in the I-270 Corridor, and three neighborhood plans. This grouping of plans is intended to reduce the time to prepare the plans in each group and improve the recommendations.

Increasing the Number of Plans Produced Each Year with a Reduction in Staff - The September 1997 Guide proposed that 2-3 plans would be underway each year (page 13). The current plan process has over 10 plans underway every year. In addition, the September 1997 Guide proposed the use of seven geographic teams to produce plans. The current plan process includes six teams and a reduction of four planners to produce an increased number of plans. The reduction in staff assigned to the master plan process and the substantial increase in the number of plans underway without compromising quality is an unprecedented demonstration of efficient production of master plans.

CONCLUSIONS

Primary Guide with Improvements - The September 1997 Guide continues to serve as a guide to the master plan process, but significant improvements to this process have occurred during the last ten years

as identified in the above paragraphs. In FY07, the preparation of master plans was stopped for approximately one year to allow additional staff to be assigned to the review of regulatory projects and to reduce the backlog of projects. If this stoppage is considered, the current plan process has been able to reduce the amount of time to produce the Staff Draft from the 18 -19 months recommended in the September 1997 guide. As an example, the Staff Draft of the Shady Grove Sector Plan was produced in approximately 12 months instead of the 19 months recommended in the September 1997 Guide. In addition, the staff was able to reduce the amount of time to produce the Sectional Map Amendment for the Damascus Master Plan by 2-3 months. If the staff is allowed the time to concentrate on the master plan process, the time to produce each master plan can be reduced by approximately 8 to 14 months from the 38 to 44 months recommended in the September 1997 guide.

Minor Master Plan Amendments - Further reduction in the time to prepare high quality plans may need the development of a new plan process with an emphasis on smaller area plans. The September 1997 Guide includes a brief description of a minor master plan amendment process. The suggested minor master plan amendment process would address a limited number of issues which serve to enhance the spirit and intent of the master plan process. The current planning process has already demonstrated the ability of the staff to efficiently produce minor master plan amendments. As an example, the Staff Draft of the Woodmont Triangle Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Bethesda CBD was produced in five months instead of the 19 months identified in the September 1997 guide. This plan received an Award of Distinction from the American Planning Association for in innovative community outreach. In addition, the proposed budget of FY09 includes the recommendation to establish a more formal minor master plan amendment process to address limited amendments and reduce the need for Zoning Text Amendments. The limited or minor master plan amendment process should be a significant focus of the master plan assessment project.

ATTACHMENT NO. 2: HOW HAVE LAND USE, ECONOMIC, AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IMPACTED THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF MASTER PLANS SINCE 1997?

INTRODUCTION

Master Plans are intended to provide along term vision for specific geographic areas. Short term land use, economic, and demographic trends have a more limited impact on the preparation of master plans. The current master plan process has identified a series of global and local forces and trends that impact the planning process.

SUMMARY OF TRENDS

The following land use, economic, and demographic trends including global and local forces have been established that impact the master plan process. The following trends are presently being incorporated into the on-going master plan program.

Global Forces

Climate Change - Global climate change has the potential to impact the health, the natural environment, and the economy. In the region and in Montgomery County, the main forces of pollution are electricity

generated by coal plants for heating and cooling, and vehicle emissions. The Metropolitan Council of Governments believes that by 2030 the region can expect a 48 percent increase in carbon dioxide. Montgomery County is contributing about 20 percent of the total increase. Ground level ozone can be mitigated by the use of more efficient vehicles, but an increase in drivers will keep ground level ozone at higher than desirable levels.

Global Competition - Globalization is challenging the dominance of the American economy by transferring technology abroad. Shifts in information technology that allow rapid transmission of information coupled with an increasingly educated work force have contributed to the increased competition for jobs and investment.

Technical Innovation - Scientific innovations in advanced technology, biotechnology and nanotechnology could have a profound influence on the U.S. economy in coming decades. The manipulation of matter at the atomic scale will revolutionize services, products, and manufacturing. For example, health care will likely integrate molecular-genetic advances to yield more personalized medicines. Businesses will likely be smaller with an increase in self-employed and e-workers.

Energy – The industrialization of China, India, and other third world nations is increasing the pressure on global energy resources, particularly oil, which is now perceived to have passed its peak as a source of energy. The cost and availability of energy will affect building construction and the cost of transportation.

Local Forces

Science, and Research and Development - Science and advanced technology are the County's most important economic industries. As one of the nation's top centers for research and development, the County's proximity to federal facilities makes it better positioned to remain competitive than other technology centers. But the County is not immune to global forces.

Population Changes - The County's increase in population is expected to be the highest in people aged 35 to 65. The younger cohort is drawn to the area's strong job market, and the older cohort will grow as the existing population of baby-boomers age. An increase is also expected in children aged 0-19. Housing and services will be needed to serve this population raising families, facing retirement, and facing advanced age. Providing affordable housing will continue to be a challenge.

Availability of Land - Montgomery County's historic development pattern focuses growth along the I-270 Corridor and reserves a significant portion of land for green space and agricultural uses. This pattern should continue with infill and redevelopment incorporated into existing street patterns coexisting with older buildings, and accessible transit. Communities should be created with a mix of housing types and neighborhood serving retail that is easily accessible from home and work. Open space that serves environmental and recreational functions should be incorporated into development.

Need for Clusters - The Brookings Institute has found that high technology industries clustered in a collaborative setting can foster scientific advancements. Clusters can also provide the mix of uses, living

environment, and attention to quality design necessary to attract the highly mobile employees of knowledge based industries.

Access - Ease of access in urban areas is a significant local problem that affects the quality of life, particularly time, money, and pollution. Roadway congestion has increased dramatically in the last 20 years with an increase in car ownership and total miles traveled.

Addressing the trends including global and local forces is a critical part of the on-going master plan program. The four plans in the I-270 Corridor (Twinbrook Sector Plan, White Flint Sector Plan, Germantown Employment Corridor, and the Gaithersburg West Master Plan) include methods to address the above trends and forces.

ATTACHMENT NO. 3: WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A FUNCTIONAL PLAN?

INTRODUCTION

Functional Plans cover overarching issues such as improving circulation systems (e.g. the Approved and Adopted Master Plan of Highways, and the Master Plan of Bikeways). Functional Plans are prepared in cooperation with the appropriate agencies, and in consultation with the County Executive and citizens. They follow the same process as master plans and sector plans except they do not include a Sectional Map Amendment. These plans are all incorporated as amendments to the General Plan ... on Wedges and Corridors, and they are designed to implement the spirit and intent of the general Plan.

SUMMARY OF FUTURE FUNCTIONAL PLANS

The proposed FY09 Budget includes a series of Functional Plans. These plans are focused around the issues concerning energy and the environment. These proposed Functional Plans include the following:

- Functional Plan for Energy and the Environment

- Functional Plan for Green Infrastructure

- Functional Plan for Water Resources

These plans are scheduled to take approximately, 42 to 48 months to complete. The Planning Department is presently examining methods to reduce the time to complete these plans without compromising the quality. The master plan assessment project could assist in addressing the time period needed to complete these functional plans.

Appendix 2: Community-Based Planning Description of Master Plan Process and Community Outreach

In response to the Planning Board's request at the last round table discussion of the Master Plan Assessment Project, the Community-Based Planning Division has completed a description of the existing Master Plan Program including community outreach currently being used.

SUMMARY

Plan Types and Timeframes – The time period for completing each Plan varies with the complexity and issues associated with each plan. Master Plans can be categorized into at least three different types with differing time frames:

- Master Plans for Large Areas (36 to 48 months)
- Sector Plans for Smaller Geographic Areas (24 to 36 months)
- Master Plan Amendments
- Comprehensive Master Plan Amendments (18 to 24 months)
- Limited Master Plan Amendments (6 to 12 months)

The Approved Master Plan Program: Making Our Communities Work – The approved Work Program groups the planning projects into five areas: Concepts, Functional Plans, Corridor City Plans, Metro Station Plans, and Plans for Neighborhoods and Centers.

Community Outreach – The outreach program for each type of Master Plan is designed to meet the needs of the specific community. This report identifies the range of community outreach methods currently being used.

Publications – Approved and Adopted Master Plans and Sector Plans include at least four methods of publication:

- Printed Documents
- Compact Discs
- Commission Web Site
- Poster Summaries (Optional)

MASTER PLAN TYPES

The Master Plans can be categorized into the following types or classifications:

Master Plans and Functional Plans for Large Areas – These plans provide recommendations for large geographic areas. They focus on broad concepts and planning issues. The recently completed Olney Master Plan is an example of a Master Plan for a large geographic area.

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Sector Plans for Smaller Geographic Areas – These plans include recommendations for smaller geographic areas such as central business districts. They include more detail than a Master Plan for a large geographic area. The recently completed Staff Draft of the Twinbrook Sector Plan is an example of a Sector Plan.

Master Plan Amendments - Master Plan Amendments that focus on a limited number of key issues have also been included in the program. The community outreach and public hearing process has been retained, but these amendments have been completed within a shorter time period because of the limited number of issues to be considered. Recently approved amendments include the following:

- Comprehensive Master Plan Amendments (e.g. Woodmont Triangle Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Bethesda CBD)
- Limited Master Plan Amendments (e.g. Montrose Parkway Amendment to the North Bethesda/Garrett Park Master Plan)

The approved Master Plan Schedule indicates that the time period from initiating a Master Plan to completing the Staff Draft varies depending on the County Council priorities, staff resources, complexity of the issues, and the method of community outreach. As examples, the approved schedule indicates that the Staff Draft of the White Flint Phase II Sector Plan is to be completed in six months, the Staff Draft of the Langley/Takoma Master Plan is to be completed in 18 months, and the Staff Draft of the Water Resources Functional Plan is to be completed in 28 months.

THE APPROVED MASTER PLAN PROGRAM: MAKING OUR COMMUNITIES WORK

The list of Program Elements identifies the Master Plans, Sector Plans, and Functional Plans that are presently included in the approved Master Plan Program. The Plans are grouped into the following thematic areas:

Concepts – This grouping includes Concept Studies for larger geographic areas such as the 355/270 Concept Study and the Georgia Avenue Concept Study. These studies provide a corridor-wide perspective before each Master Plan is completed.

Functional Plans – This grouping includes Functional Plans for countywide areas and issues. The Green Infrastructure Functional Plan, and the Countywide Water Resources Functional Plan are included in this category. The Countywide Planning Division is responsible for these efforts.

Corridor City Plans – Two Corridor City Master Plans are included in the approved program: the Master Plan for the Germantown Employment Corridor, and the Gaithersburg Vicinity West Master Plan.

Metro Station Plans – Three Metro station plans are included in this category: the Twinbrook Sector Plan, the White Flint Sector Plan, and the Sector Plan for the Wheaton CBD.

Plans for Neighborhoods and Centers – The Takoma/Langley Crossroads Master Plan, and the Kensington Sector Plan have been included in the approved Master Plan Program.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Summary of Outreach Methods

At least four general community outreach methods have been used. The outreach methods include the use of Citizens Advisory Committees (CAC), the Concordia Process, the Master Plan Advisory Groups (MPAG), and the inclusive Master Plan Advisory Process (MAP). The following paragraphs summarize each of these outreach methods.

1. Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)

The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) represents one method used to elicit public comment during the Master Plan process. The CAC was appointed by the Planning Board to represent a balanced spectrum of interests, with a geographic spread throughout the planning area, and with the ability to act as a conduit between the community and the staff. The CAC advised the staff and the Planning Board during the preparation of the Master Plan. Members of the committee were also responsible for briefing the community at large to facilitate public awareness. This process was used by Master Plans prior to 1997. It was used in the preparation of the following:

North Bethesda/Garrett Park (1994)   Four Corners (1996)   .
Aspen Hill (1994)   Glenmont (1997)
Bethesda CBD (1994)   Sandy Spring/Ashton (1996)
Forest Glen (1996)   Friendship Heights (1998)

2. Concordia Process

The Concordia Process was used for the plans in Eastern Montgomery County (Cloverly, Fairland, Four Corners and White Oak). The Concordia Process was intended to address community concerns of fairness, diversity, influence, and accountability. The plans used a Planning Board appointed Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) as the primary form of community involvement, but with changes in qualification and responsibility.

All CAC members had to be sponsored by a group, and individuals representing themselves were not appointed to the committees.

There were joint CAC meetings involving common issues and recommendations.

The chairpersons and vice-chairpersons, who were appointed by the CAC not the Planning Board, met informally with the planners every month to discuss the process and any problems.

- The chairperson was responsible for the management of the CAC. The CAC was asked to resolve its own disagreements.
- The Staff Draft and Public Hearing Draft indicated areas of concurrence and divergence between staff and CACs. "Box inserts," in the text of the plans, were used to reflect the consensus position of CACs.
- CAC members fully participated in Planning Board work sessions and CAC chairpersons participated in PHED Committee, and County Council work sessions.

3. Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG)

In 1994, a comprehensive evaluation of the Master Plan process was initiated to determine what revisions were appropriate to reduce the time needed to prepare Master Plans. In particular, the Department was interested in exploring issues related to enhancing and broadening citizen involvement. In September 1997, a new Master Plan process was identified that utilized a Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG) of 8 to 10 citizens, a separate Technical Work Group (TWG), and a community involvement program. The North and West Silver Spring Master Plan, the East Silver Spring Master Plan, and the City of Takoma Park Master Plan were the first to utilize the new master planning process. The Upper Rock Creek and the Potomac Subregion Master Plans also used this process. The Olney Master Plan modified this process by inviting all the applicants for the MPAG positions to participate in the process.

North and West Silver Spring Master Plan

Community Involvement and Outreach:
- A Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG) was utilized.
- Community workshops were held.
- Mailings were used.
- Translation assistance was provided.
- Telephone surveys were conducted.

East Silver Spring and the City of Takoma Park Master Plans

Community Involvement and Outreach:
- A Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG) was utilized.
- Community workshops were held.
- Mailings were used.
- Translation assistance was provided.
- Bilingual telephone survey was conducted.
- A design charrette process brought together businesses and residents from both Montgomery County and the District of Columbia to work with the College and the M-NCPPC to examine opportunities for expansion and relocation in the Silver Spring CBD.

Potomac Subregion Master Plan

Community Involvement and Outreach:
- A Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG) of sixteen citizens was utilized.
- Community workshops, van tours, and meetings with citizen associations were held.

- An issue-oriented telephone survey was conducted.
- A Technical Working Group with other agencies was established.

Upper Rock Creek Area Master Plan

Community Involvement and Outreach:
- A Master Plan Advisory Group was utilized.
- A Technical Working Group consisting of representatives of Executive Branch agencies with operating responsibilities in the area was established.
- Community workshops were held.

Olney Master Plan

Community Involvement and Outreach:
- A Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG) of forty people was utilized.
- Weekend charrettes were held for the entire area.
- Focus Group meetings were held that involved professionals with expertise in a specific topic or issue.
- A survey was used to identify issues of concern.
- The Commission web site was used to provide information relating to the update process including copies of reports and other pertinent documents.

4.   Master Plan Advisory Process (MAP)

The Planning Board has tried to address the issues of fairness, diversity, efficiency, accountability, historical community representation, and influence when developing a citizen participation process for Master Plans. Instead of a select group of individuals that serve as advisors during the preparation of Master Plans, a more inclusive approach to community outreach has been used. This process provides a more open participation process with the use of open meetings, focus groups and charrettes. The charrette process is often used to focus citizen involvement and planning expertise on a particular topic or area and to create a concept plan and vision for future development. The Master Plan Advisory Process (MAP) has been used in the preparation of the recent plans.

The Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan, the Damascus Master Plan, the Gaithersburg Vicinity Master Plan, the Shady Grove Sector Plan and the Twinbrook Sector Plan have utilized this format to allow everyone to speak. All participants were given the opportunity to state their opinions and vision for the areas. The open meetings, focus groups and charrettes were supplemented with open civic meetings. All material was documented and available on the web.

Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan

Community Involvement and Outreach:

- Community focus groups, open house meetings, issues-oriented community workshops with the existing Silver Spring Revitalization Steering Committee, and the existing Silver Spring Core Group as the technical working group were held.
- Informational mailing to citizens, places of worship, businesses, and civic associations were used.
- Information at public events was provided.
- Translation assistance was provided.
- Telephone surveys were conducted.
- Fenton Street Village Community Outreach - Staff worked directly with shopkeepers, translated materials to identify areas of concerns, and identified recommendations for further study or action to help revitalize Fenton Village.

Shady Grove and Twinbrook Sector Plans

Community Involvement and Outreach:

- Staff conducted community charrettes before the process began to understand the issues.
- Staff worked directly with community groups, rather than through a Master Plan Advisory Group.
- A series of charrettes, focus groups, and public meetings along with survey questions and electronic communication were used.
- Staff met with community, special interest groups, and property owners.
- All information gathered in the focus groups was shared in public forums, mailings, and the website.
- Meetings with the City of Rockville and the City of Gaithersburg were held.
- Electronic media was used as a participatory process to provide recommendations to the Planning Board and staff.

Damascus Master Plan

Community Involvement and Outreach:

- Two-tier participation system rather than a Master Plan Advisory Group was used.
  1. A Master Plan Review Committee was established. Meetings were open to all participants.
  2. Task Force meetings to discuss specific issues were held.
- Town Center meetings utilized the charrette process to elicit recommendations and comments from the community.
- E-mail and website postings of meeting packets were used.
- Notices were placed in a local newspaper.

Gaithersburg Vicinity Master Plan

Community Involvement and Outreach:
- A series of general public meetings were held.
- Civic association meetings were held.
- Community Issues Survey was completed.
- Informal meetings were held for members of the community who do not participate in general public meetings.
- Staff worked with the City of Gaithersburg.

"Listening to Learn" Outreach

In 2002, Community-Based Planning began working with Bowie State University in conjunction with a four-year tri-county diversity project called "Listening to Learn," which would be used as a mode of community participation to recommend improvements to University Boulevard. This approach has been incorporated into the Master Plan Advisory Process (MAP).

The major elements of this approach are:
- Identify target groups
- Initiate contact through a known person
- Meet with a variety of participants instead of expecting them to come to the planning offices.

At each session, the staff dressed casually, spent time in "ice-breaking" exercises, met during non-office hours, and met at a place already familiar to the group. If possible, staff arranged for someone known to the group to hold the meeting. Staff provided an interpreter. Staff also changed their role. Instead of giving a presentation-type lecture, staff established a setting where ideas and interaction with one another would be the focus, and staff would "listen" instead of talk. At the end of the meeting, staff would explain "next steps" that would help them participate formally in the University Boulevard improvement project.

The results were positive. Staff heard directly from people who would ordinarily never have access to the planning process.

PUBLICATION OF APPROVED AND ADOPTED MASTER PLANS

Presently, all Master Plans and Sector Plans completed by the Community-Based Planning Division include at least three types of products. The intent is to serve the diverse needs of the potential readers.

- **Printed Documents** - After a Master Plan or Sector Plan is approved and adopted, a printed document is produced. Outside printers are selected, and 250 to 500 copies are printed. This document is sent to government officials, local libraries, and adjacent jurisdictions in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding. These documents are available to the public at the Information Counter. The cost of printing is recovered though the sale of each document.
- **Compact Disks** - The recent Master Plans and Sector Plans are also available on Compact Discs (CDs). These CDs are available at the Information Counter. They are printed on-demand as needed. These CDs provide a document that is searchable by chapter. In the near future, the CDs will also provide an opportunity to include some of the analysis information including a variety of three-dimensional views and moving pictures.

- **Commission Web Site** - All Approved and Adopted Master Plans and Sector Plans are available on the Commission Web Site. These documents are available at no cost to the user.

- **Poster Summaries (Optional)** - The Master Plans with larger planning areas include a large poster with the Land Use Plan and Zoning Map. These posters are completed when additional detail is needed that cannot be displayed in the printed documents. These posters are also available at the Information Counter for the cost of printing.

FINAL REPORT:

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
BASED ON STAFF AND STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS AND
COMPARATIVE PRACTICES SURVEY

OPEN SPACE

NEW NEIGHBORHOOD

Montgomery County Master Plan Reassessment

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I. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

A. BACKGROUND

Across the nation, as suburban subdivisions have evolved into urban communities and as citizens have become increasingly involved in shaping the future of their areas, planning departments have been searching for effective strategies for creating, producing and implementing plans. At the end of 2007, Montgomery County began its own master plan reassessment process. This process, which focused on redefining, updating and improving the effectiveness of the County's master plans, sought input from a broad range of staff and outside participants regarding issues that need to be addressed in refining the planning process as well as recommendations for addressing these within a workable master planning framework.

Rhodeside & Harwell, a planning, urban design and landscape architecture firm with extensive master planning experience both within the Washington D.C. metropolitan region and on a national level, was asked to facilitate these discussions. At the same time, the firm was tasked with surveying other jurisdictions around the United States who had recently undertaken a similar process of reassessing their planning practices and retooling accordingly.

This report summarizes the key lessons learned from both the focus group sessions and the national planning survey. More detailed reports of the findings from these two tasks are provided in the Appendix and in the accompanying Comparative Practices Survey and Focus Group Discussions and Key Findings Summary Report.

B. METHODOLOGY

Focus group meetings were held with staff members of the Montgomery County Department of Planning and a variety of stakeholders from the region. The Planning Board and County Council staff were also interviewed. With the exception of County Council staff, all meetings were held at the department's Montgomery County offices in Silver Spring, with sessions taking place during both daytime and evening hours to accommodate attendees. The focus groups comprised representatives of the following:

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- County staff from:
  - Community-based Planning (2 sessions)
  - Strategic Planning, Research and Technology
  - Technology Media and Outreach
  - Information Counter
  - Parks and Recreation
  - Development Review
  - Transportation
  - Environmental Planning
  - Countywide Planning
- Institutions, including schools, healthcare, religious affiliations and housing
- Civic Groups (2 sessions)
- Businesses and development representatives (developers and attorneys) (2 sessions)
- Countywide and regional services
- Planning Board
- Council Staff

The focus group session "conversations" delved into those elements of the master plan process that are successful versus those not working as well as they should be; elements that make current master plans difficult to understand, use or produce; and factors that are facilitating or hindering effective master plan implementation. In addition to voicing concerns, participants offered a wide range of ideas for streamlining the planning process, and for making the multiple elements of the master plan process and product both more effective and more responsive. The information gleaned from the focus group sessions has been compiled and summarized in a separate report, and a matrix of key findings was widely distributed to all of those attending the sessions. In addition, focus group participants were invited back for a Summary Workshop. During this event, key findings were presented and, then, participants met in small discussion groups to recommend possible approaches to improve the County's planning process, products and implementation strategies. Finally, County planning staff was surveyed via e-mail regarding their key recommendations. Summaries of all of these recommendations are included in a separate Focus Group Summary Report.

In addition to the data generated by the focus groups, the consultant team also gathered information on the planning practices in eight cities and counties in the United States. This Comparative Practices Survey provides a snapshot of the range of approaches being utilized by local governments to conduct the planning process, produce planning documents and implement plan recommendations as well as major lessons learned by each planning agency. Communities surveyed

include: Austin, TX; Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, NC; Louisville-Jefferson County, KY; Miami-Dade County, FL; Minneapolis, MN; Nashville-Davidson County, TN; Prince George's County, MD and; Seattle, WA.

Many people have been willing to devote a considerable amount of time to thinking about ways to improve master planning in Montgomery County. Moreover, many innovative, creative and practical ideas have emerged as a result of these very fruitful conversations. We have tried to capture the best of these ideas in our Observations and Recommendations. As we learned from the Comparative Practices survey, a large number of jurisdictions across the country struggle constantly with the issue of creating a "better" planning process – one that can be completed and implemented more quickly while, at the same time, being responsive to a broad range of community needs. The planning process is complex and needs to change and evolve over time. Nevertheless, this is an appropriate time to move forward on improving the approach to master planning in Montgomery County given the change in scale of planning areas and issues, the willingness of the Council and Board to reassess current practices, and the technological innovations that have taken place in the last decade that can significantly improve the ways in which plans are developed.

II.   LESSONS LEARNED: A SUMMARY

A.   "LESSONS" FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

- *Lesson 1. Segments of the existing planning process are too time – consuming.*

Managing time is viewed as a major problem for the master planning process. On the one hand, planners felt that their time is constantly being demanded for other projects which removes their focus from the master planning effort. Other groups felt that many parts of the planning process could be completed more efficiently and effectively. These activities include: data gathering, public outreach, and preparation of the draft document. The primary reasons expressed for spending less time on the master plan process were twofold: to develop community visions and action strategies within a timeframe that can address current issues, and to allow plans to be updated more frequently.

- *Lesson 2. Outreach is difficult, time-consuming and needs improvement.*

The most frequently-stated reason to provide a sufficient amount of time for the development of master plans was the need for effective community involvement in the planning process. Nevertheless, there was no consensus regarding how to achieve an effective process or how long that process might take. Therefore, while some focus group participants felt that the process needed "time" in order to involve, educate and build trust and support within a community, others felt that a long, drawn-out planning process creates a disincentive for participation – that people simply get frustrated with a lack of progress and stop attending meetings. In general, many participants acknowledged the need for effective participation, but felt that it should be done within a more efficient timeframe.

- *Lesson 3. Master plans should be easier to understand, use and access.*

Focus group participants nearly unanimously expressed the view that the products of the master planning process – the plans themselves – should be improved. Many plans were felt to be poorly organized, confusing, and filled with planning jargon. A number of participants complained about the lack of effective graphics in master plans, and worried that those reading the plans could interpret them in a variety of unintended ways given the lack of realistic graphic illustrations and less than clear text accompanying the illustrations. Several participants noted that it is very difficult to quickly locate information in

a master plan since content, organization and structure vary from plan to plan. In addition, participants noted that the purpose of each plan is often unclear, as are answers to questions such as "how is this area going to change?" A number of participants also expressed the need for multi-lingual versions of each plan in order to accommodate the needs of those County residents for whom English is not the primary language.

Finally, many focus group participants discussed the inadequacy of the County's online master plans which are simply scanned versions of the hardcopy plans. Complaints included the fact that these online versions were difficult to browse and impossible to search. Moreover, several participants noted that current technology would allow for plans that can be linked to other documents and to more detailed information; current plans do not take advantage of any of these possibilities.

- **_Lesson 4._** There are a variety of opinions regarding streamlining the planning process.

While a number of planning staff, and a few civic leaders, expressed serious concerns about shortening the planning process, many of the other focus group participants wholly supported this effort. Streamlining concerns included the opinion that "thoughtful planning takes time" and that it is difficult to establish a process timeframe since every plan is different. Several of those opposed to shortening the timeframe felt that the process could, nevertheless, be made more effective. Many of those in favor of significantly shortening planning timeframe felt that the current multiple-year process discourages public involvement, delays plan updates, and often results in a plan that is outdated (i.e., does not address relevant current issues) by the time of its approval.

- **_Lesson 5._** Staff responsibilities and priorities are often unclear.

Significant frustrations were expressed by members of the planning staff who felt that their efforts were often countermanded and undermined by decision made at the County Council level, particularly at the end of a project. Many staff and non-staff focus group participants noted that the lack of planner/Planning Board/Council interaction throughout the planning process was a major problem both in terms of building trust with the community, efficient plan approvals, and effective plan implementation. In addition, participants also noted that current planning processes may require specific skill sets that are not available on existing planning teams, and that some re-

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evaluation of the team skills needed for effective master planning, should be carried out.

- **Lesson 6.** *Clarify the role of master plans and better define their relationship to other countywide plans and policies.*

One message of concern, repeated often during the focus group sessions, was that the public appears to be confused about the purpose and role of the County's master plans – are they laws or are they simply guidelines? While many members of the public treat a plan as if it were a legal contract between county government and the public, others believe that plans merely identify "suggested" ways to accommodate community needs but can allow for a range of other interpretations as well. In addition, participants felt that the relationship between area-wide plans and county policies is unclear. Issues of major countywide concern, such as affordable housing, job growth, and environmental sustainability, are addressed inconsistently in each master plan when, perhaps, they could be more effectively addressed at the countywide level. Moreover, the role of the master plan and its relationship to other County plans and policies needs to be more actively defined and discussed with the community throughout the planning process, and not just simply within the written planning document.

- **Lesson 7.** *Better tools and expanded communication and coordination are needed to help translate plans into reality.*

Many focus group participants noted significant disconnects between plan recommendations and plan implementation. Issues ranged from developer actions that do not respond to the vision expressed in the plan and approved by the community; lack of early and continuous coordination between operational entities within the planning phases with regard to project development and necessary infrastructure improvements; lack of effective guidance for developers concerning both the County's and the community's expectations; and the need for better impact analyses in order to understand both the potential short- and longer-term effects of a plan's proposed recommendations.

In addition, focus group participants across all categories expressed frustration with current zoning regulations. Comments included the opinion that zoning categories are too complex and unclear, that they do not ensure that the vision developed in a master plan will be implemented as planned, and that current mixed-use plans are often not covered under existing zoning regulations. The

general view expressed was that the current zoning regulations do not work and need to change. Participants familiar with the regulatory technique of form-based coding expressed positive opinions about its potential to simplify the regulatory process and to achieve the products supported through a careful and structured community involvement effort. It was clear, however, that many members of the County staff, as well as its civic leaders, developers and others need to be better informed about options such as form-based codes. A number of reservations expressed by staff may, in the end, simply be misconceptions about this process and how it can be used to achieve more effective planning.

B. COMPARATIVE PRACTICES SURVEY: SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

Process Findings

- ***Observation 1.*** Many jurisdictions are attempting to add greater structure and standardization to the planning process.

- ***Observation 2.*** Some planning agencies publish documents that describe in detail the agency's expectations and standard procedures for the planning process and product.

- ***Observation 3.*** Most planning efforts are initiated and directed by local government, but some jurisdictions allow neighborhoods to conduct their own planning.

- ***Observation 4.*** Planning departments use consultants to varying degrees.

- ***Observation 5.*** Jurisdictions are striving for better quality public outreach and are increasingly standardizing and strategizing their outreach approaches.

- ***Observation 6.*** Many communities attempt to complete plans in less than two years.

- ***Observation 7.*** Planning agencies are trying new approaches for managing staff resources.

- ***Observation 8.*** Some jurisdictions are trying to collect and interpret data more effectively and efficiently prior to the start of planning.

Through experience, some jurisdictions have found that a lack of structure can derail the planning process and cause delays. As a result, they have attempted to standardize certain planning practices—from public outreach mechanisms to document structure and content—to reduce delays and confusion caused by "reinventing the wheel" for each planning effort. Planning agencies are also becoming more specific about both the procedures to be followed during the planning process and, importantly, about what stakeholders should expect from the process. To do so, some jurisdictions have published detailed guidebooks that explain the planning department's expectations for every phase of the planning process and for the final product. While most plans are initiated and managed by the jurisdiction, some jurisdictions allow neighborhoods to conduct their own planning, often with the support of city staff and resources.

Many of the jurisdictions surveyed seek to complete the planning process in 1-2 years, with approximately one year devoted to planning and the remaining time to pre-planning and plan approval. To manage staff resources more effectively, some planning agencies are dividing staff responsibilities based on the type of task or phase of the planning process (such as pre-planning, public outreach, design and mapping work, implementation or work related to specific functional categories). In addition, some are placing more emphasis on collecting and interpreting data more effectively and efficiently prior to the start of the planning process.

In general, jurisdictions use consultants to varying degrees. A few complete the entire process and product in-house, while the majority rely on consultants for some or all of the work. Some planning agencies regard hiring consultants as a way to complete plans in less time than it would otherwise take if the plans were completed in-house. In some communities, consultants also may be able to provide higher-quality graphics and planning documents. At the same time, use of many different consultants may pose challenges for jurisdictions that hope to achieve processes and products that are consistent from plan to plan.

PRODUCT

- ***Observation 9.*** Some jurisdictions are moving toward greater standardization of the planning product.

- ***Observation 10.*** Planning agencies are working to expand their capabilities for producing better quality design.

- ***Observation 11.*** *Planning documents vary in terms of the length of the document.*

- ***Observation 12.*** *Some planning agencies are placing a greater emphasis on graphics while attempting to limit the amount of text in a plan.*

Planning agencies are striving for greater standardization of document format and structure, the topics addressed in each planning document, and certain graphics (such as maps) included in the document. Some jurisdictions have found that, in addition to making plans easier to use and understand, standardization also helps make plans easier to implement once they are adopted. Some planning departments are placing a greater emphasis on developing in-house urban design skills and graphics capabilities. Some agencies now have the ability to produce renderings and 3-D visualization, while many planners now have the ability to produce their own GIS maps. In some communities, plans average 50 pages or less. In other communities, plans tend to range from 60 to over 100 pages. Length depends on the type of plan and the size and characteristics of the geographic area. Overall, however, planning agencies appear to be striving for shorter, more concise documents with a greater emphasis on graphics.

IMPLEMENTATION

- ***Observation 13.*** *Jurisdictions are placing a greater emphasis on implementation activities to ensure effective delivery of plan recommendations.*

- ***Observation 14.*** *Some planning agencies have a more structured approach to implementation than others.*

- ***Observation 15.*** *Some jurisdictions are using form-based tools for implementing plan recommendations*

All of the jurisdictions surveyed include implementation strategies in their master plans. These approaches may include phasing strategies, implementation matrices in plans identifying roles and responsibilities for implementing key recommendations and, in some cases, form-based design specifications and other regulatory tools for achieving plan recommendations. In addition, some jurisdictions devote staff and resources specifically to implementation activities, including tracking the status of plan recommendations and ensuring that action items are included in budgeting and departmental

work plans. Some jurisdictions also noted the importance of identifying "quick wins" to show immediate results following plan adoption. Moreover, some planning agencies establish close coordination between planning staff and a "resource team" of representatives of other departments (such as transportation, public works, environment, parks and recreation, etc.) throughout the planning process; these interdepartmental partners can then serve as advocates for plan recommendations during the development of future budgets and work plans. Finally, some jurisdictions are developing new regulatory tools, such as form-based codes and urban design overlays, to achieve the type of design envisioned in a plan when traditional zoning falls short in this regard.

III. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK: BASIC POLICY DECISIONS

In addition to specific recommendations to improve the master plan process, products and implementation phases provided below, focus group interviews identified three larger policy decisions that will need to "frame" the County's future master plans. These more global policies need to be addressed up front in order to clearly define the County's planning context for master plan development. These three key issues are:

- **Are master plans legal or guidance documents?**

Different interpretations of the answer to this question are at the core of many current development disputes in the County. Providing greater clarity on this issue will require an understanding of relevant requirements at the state level, a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of giving plans legal status, and an exploration of regulatory tools that can more easily and effectively translate plan recommendations into actions. Examples of new regulatory tools include form-based codes, such as the code developed to implement the Downtown Kendall Plan in Miami-Dade County, FL or urban design overlays of the sort utilized in Nashville (see Recommendation #26 under "Implementation.").

- **What is the relationship between area plans and countywide policies?**

There is a need for further discussion of the ways in which countywide policy issues (such as affordable housing, green infrastructure, transportation, infrastructure, economic development) should be addressed in area plans. In particular, there is a need for clarification regarding whether area plans should address these issues independently or simply refer to a County-wide policy document that establishes quantifiable benchmarks for each of the County's planning areas. County-wide policies might be established through a process of updating existing functional plans as needed, or through an update to the County's General Plan. Establishment of this larger policy framework would then serve as the basis for area-specific plan recommendations pertaining to these policy issues.

- **What is the future of the County's zoning code?**

In focus group discussions, consensus emerged that the County's zoning code has become a complicated patchwork of zones that is neither easy to understand nor effective in translating plan visions into action. On-going dialogue within M-NCPPC appears to echo these concerns, and initial discussions regarding the need to substantially rewrite the zoning code are promising and should continue. A zoning overhaul is an essential component of the County's efforts to improve the master plan process given the fact that inadequate zoning appears to be at the root of widespread dissatisfaction with the County's ability to implement its plans.

B.   PROCESS

Both focus group sessions and the Comparative Practices survey provided numerous ideas for ways to make the planning process more efficient and effective. Based on the findings from these tasks, as well as our firm's own experience with the planning process, the recommendations below identify a number of actions the County could take to better manage planning timetables and staff resources and to improve public outreach to all segments of the County's diverse population.

1.   A different planning construct is needed for the preparation of small-area plans.

As the focus of planning efforts shifts to infill development and redevelopment rather than greenfield development, smaller target areas rather than larger regional areas, and more detailed planning studies that are responsive to development pressures, these changes will require an accompanying shift in the County's planning approach. An emphasis on planning for smaller areas will enable more focused outreach and a new set of effective outreach approaches, more efficient and targeted data gathering, and the ability to quickly hone in on a more focused and targeted set of planning issues. The shift to a greater emphasis on small-area planning should begin with the recognition that plans for smaller areas should not take as long to complete as plans for larger areas, and that the time horizons for these plans may need to be shorter as well.

2. There is a need for improved coordination between planners, the County Council and the Planning Board.

In focus group discussions, both stakeholders and staff alike expressed frustration with the extent to which plans are modified during the approval phase of the planning process. These concerns would be somewhat alleviated if members of the County Council were involved earlier and more frequently in the planning process. Creating opportunities for the Council to receive updates, and provide on-going feedback, on planning projects throughout all phases of their development could help minimize significant revisions at the end of the process during the Council approval phase. In many jurisdictions around the country, active Council involvement (either through the Council members themselves or their staff) has resulted in an enhanced Council understanding of the issues addressed in a given plan, the rationale behind each planning decision, and the complexities involved in the development of the plan. We have found that active Council participants become important advocates for a plan vision, and uphold the essence of a plan through its approval phases

Members of the Planning Board, during their focus group discussion, also noted that they could and should be involved more effectively throughout the master plan process. In particular, the Planning Board can play a greater role in helping to resolve any difficult issues that arise during planning and threaten to stall the process. Members have also suggested the need to be involved in the preparation of fiscal impact/cost benefit analyses that could help guide plan recommendations, as well as the need to be alerted to major planning issues before a plan is sent to Council. On the latter point, by involving both Council and Planning Board representatives throughout the planning process, the need for various levels of communication would be more transparent, and planners can build the advocacy structure they feel is needed for seamless plan approval.

3. Staff responsibilities should be further divided as part of an expanded team approach.

The planning process is complex and demanding, and staff resources should be managed in a way that minimizes the burden of responsibilities placed on a single individual. Instead, staff resources could be restructured in a way that enables staff to work as part of a larger planning team. This would maximize the use of those with multiple planning skills on each master planning process, and could allow planners to work on more than one planning project at a time. This approach recognizes that some planning projects need to time to "ripen" and therefore do not require 100 percent of each staff person's time during certain intervals in the

process. A planning team approach could include division of staff responsibilities among tasks such as pre-planning (including initial outreach and data collection), planning, meeting facilitation and implementation. As noted below under Recommendation #4, this team approach could also include the active participation of functional planning staff on issues related to their areas of specialization (i.e., public works and transportation, environmental planning, housing and economic development, etc.).

4. The planning process would benefit from more formal, structured and on-going collaboration with functional specialists as part of the planning team.

In some communities (for example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, NC and Prince George's County, MD), functional planning staff are assigned to work on a plan from start to finish in close collaboration with core planning staff. As members of the planning team, the resource staff would attend all team meetings, would be involved in community outreach sessions, and would play a key role in generating graphic and written materials (including recommendations) for the plan. The County should consider the formation of such a "technical team" or "resource team"; although specific team disciplines might vary for each planning area, team staff might include those focused on transportation/transit, environmental resources, public facilities and infrastructure, economic development, parks and recreation, housing, and historic resources. This approach has the benefit of ensuring a greater level of coordination and understanding across functional disciplines and avoiding unanticipated delays due to incompatibilities and lack of buy-in when the plan is finalized and implemented.

5. There should be a clear structure for the planning process and product, with procedures documented in writing.

In speaking with communities across the country, the most frequently cited cause of delays and frustration during the planning process was the lack of structure and consistency. These communities noted that running an efficient and effective planning effort requires a clear structure for the planning process that defines standard procedures, key milestones and deliverables during the process, the expected timetable for each phase, outreach approaches, staff responsibilities and expectations for the format and content of final products. Planning staff from numerous communities cited the preparation of a written manual describing standard planning tasks and procedures as a key to improving the planning process. For example, Louisville-Jefferson County, KY prepared two guidebooks (one geared toward community stakeholders and one for consultants and staff) that

describe procedures and expectations for each stage of the planning process, from plan initiation and outreach to preparation of the final product.

While each planning effort will need to address unique challenges related to community dynamics and planning area characteristics, many aspects of the planning process can be standardized. In doing so, time otherwise spent "reinventing the wheel" can be devoted to aspects of the planning process, such as outreach strategies, that require creativity and adaptability. For the above reasons, Community Planning should consider updating and expanding the 1997 document describing the planning process. The revised document should include more detail about some aspects of the planning process, such as timeframe and expectations for final products, not addressed in detail in the 1997 document. The revised document also should reflect actual practices, rather than approaches proposed but never implemented, as is the case in the 1997 document.

6. The County should establish a realistic yet aggressive timeframe for the planning process, based on the size, scope and complexities of a planning area.

One primary message expressed during focus group discussions was that the planning process currently takes too long. Too often, the process lasts so long that the issues, priorities and people have changed by the time a plan reaches completion. The appropriate timeframe for the planning process depends on multiple factors, such as the size and complexities of a planning area and the scope of the planning effort. Many jurisdictions around the nation are struggling with this challenge of effectively reducing the timeframe for master plans while maintaining a high quality, community responsive product. A survey of other jurisdictions suggests that a timeframe of 1 year to 18 months represents a reasonable period of time for completing a planning process for smaller areas, from pre-planning through preparation of the final document for Planning Board, and including Council approval. Larger planning areas will likely require additional months for plan completion.

To adhere to this more efficient schedule, the County should establish deadlines for each phase of the planning process and implement incentive-based mechanisms to hold staff to these deadlines. In addition, to keep the process moving forward, staff should maintain focus on the required final products from the start of the planning process. Clearly defining the required products at the start of the planning process can help staff keep an eye on the final product. By keeping the product in mind throughout the process, text and graphics can be prepared earlier in process and

refined during the various planning phases, as opposed to trying to complete everything during a limited window of time at the end of the process.

7. Data collection can and should be targeted to reflect the particular needs of a plan, rather than all of the information that is available.

During focus group sessions, both stakeholders and staff noted that data collection takes too long and lacks focus ("becomes an end in itself"). Staff should explore way to streamline and target data collection so that the information collected corresponds with key issues to be addressed during the planning process. One possible approach to help focus data needs is to identify issues and outreach needs *prior* to data collection and to let the "Issues and Outreach" document inform data collection. It is also important to ensure that that all data collection and synthesis occurs prior to the start of in order to minimize the staff time devoted to data collection during the planning phase.

8. The "Issues and Outreach" document should be prepared earlier in the planning process and should take less time to produce.

Documenting key issues and identifying/interviewing key stakeholders first, prior to data collection, could help to effectively focus both the data collection effort and the early phases of the planning process. Related to this, preparation of the "Issues and Outreach" document should not be considered a major process deliverable, but should be viewed as part of the initial planning effort. In this way, the Issues and Outreach product could be streamlined by consolidating draft and final document review into a single, shorter window of time.

9. To make the public outreach process more effective and efficient, staff resources and capabilities need to be expanded.

Focus groups discussions raised the question of whether M-NCPPC staff is sufficiently equipped, in terms of staff resources and training, to manage an effective public outreach process. Some participants noted that the small staff within Park & Planning's Outreach Department do not typically assist in planning and facilitating community sessions, but are focused primarily on achieving broad-based public notification of upcoming M-NCPPC meetings. As a result, the often complex and very important task of community involvement rests primarily on the Community Planning staff, who frequently have to balance this time-consuming task with other planning responsibilities. Yet, many of the staff interviewed during the

focus group sessions expressed uncertainty regarding their community outreach skills, and requested assistance in this area. Some suggested the need for additional staff training to build public outreach skills, and/or technical assistance from those who are skilled in community outreach processes. Furthermore, some of the stakeholders interviewed questioned the ability of the planners to remain objective and to effectively elicit and manage stakeholder expectations during the process. And, finally, as planners have noted, effective public participation does take time; but it does not need to take the amount of time suggested by planning staff.

For these reasons, M-NCPPC should consider hiring additional staff to work on public outreach. One possibility is to include an impartial facilitator as part of each planning team. Either an M-NCPPC staff position or an outside consultant, this person would assist in planning appropriate public sessions for each phase of the process, would advise on strategies for effective stakeholder identification and involvement, would lead public meetings in ways that would teach as well as solicit input, and would assist in translating planning concepts for public comprehension. At a minimum, M-NCPPC should consider expanding the existing Outreach staff, and having them focus more directly on working with the planning staff to implement effective public outreach strategies. In addition, providing training in public outreach—perhaps through organizations such as the National Charrette Institute—would help build staff facilitation skills. Training is especially important if Community Planning adopts new outreach approaches, such as the charrette process described below.

10. Planners need to explore a variety of outreach techniques to understand the applicability of each approach to each phase of the planning process.

Just as each community has its own character and a unique set of issues, an outreach approach that is successful in one area might not be appropriate in another community. Moreover, an outreach technique that is effective during the "issues defining" phase of the plan might not be relevant during the phase that explores alternative planning visions. In many locations across the country, planners define a strategic outreach plan for each community at the outset of the planning process. While this approach is often modified as the plan progresses, by defining the overall outreach strategy from the beginning, planners can establish a clear beginning, middle, and end to the outreach/involvement process and can employ appropriate outreach techniques accordingly.

The Comparative Practices survey indicated that the charrette process – in its various forms and interpretations – is being widely-used. Planners in these jurisdictions have found that, when used effectively, the charrette approach can help expedite public outreach and, by compressing public participation into a limited period of time, can also capture and hold stakeholders who might otherwise leave the process. Experience also suggests that the charrette approach is particularly useful when planning in detail for small areas by fostering collaboration among all stakeholders and by enabling compressed feedback loops. In light of this experience, the County should consider using the charrette process for a greater number of planning efforts, especially as the number of small area plans increases.

11. Master Plan Advisory Groups and Citizen Advisory Committees are not always the most representative public outreach mechanisms.

Community Planning should carefully assess its use of both Master Plan Advisory Groups (MPAGs) and Citizen Advisory Committees (CACs) as part of every planning process to determine whether this is indeed the best approach for each plan. These advisory groups can be especially useful in identifying community issues at the beginning of a planning process, for planning efforts in which many different interests need to interact with one another in order to share ideas, and as a "sounding board" for planning alternatives. However, such groups are often less useful at the end of a planning process, when they tend to prolong decisions, are incorrectly assumed to represent the views of the community at-large, and when they co-opt a more community-focused process. Therefore, regardless of the extent to which either MPAGs or CACs are utilized, these approaches should never replace effective outreach to, and feedback from, the entire community.

In several recent planning efforts in the County, staff has informed the advisory process through the use of community-wide charrettes. Community representatives have spoken positively of the effectiveness of these charrettes to quickly capture and focus public visions and concepts for a planning area. However, these same individuals have noted that the momentum gained during the charrette has often not been sustained through continued public outreach efforts. This underscores the fact that the charrette process is not the "final word" in community outreach – it is simply one, very effective, tool for quickly generating and focusing ideas from a broad range of participants. The charrette, however, should be followed up through other outreach strategies that can communicate and solicit input on the ideas developed following the charrette process.

12. The Planning Department's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) capabilities are not well integrated with the planning process and product.

During focus group discussions, staff suggested that a disconnect exists between M-NCPPC's GIS capabilities and the needs of Community Planning staff. One concern was that GIS staff are not trained as planners and, therefore, do not fully understand planners' needs when completing data and mapping requests. Another concern was that planning staff does not have an accurate understanding of the data layers available and that such an understanding could help expedite the data collection process. Further, whereas other communities rely heavily on GIS for producing a set of informative maps included in final planning documents, GIS maps are conspicuously absent from M-NCPPC plans. In addition to improving communication and exchange of knowledge between Community Planning and GIS staff, M-NCPPC should expand GIS skills among planners to enable these professionals to have a greater ability to work with maps according to their needs and specifications. In Austin, TX, for example, a majority of planners have GIS skills and, therefore, can prepare their own maps as needed. Likewise, it is important to ensure that GIS specialists working with Community Planning have a sufficient understanding of planning requirements so that GIS can be better utilized as both an analytical and illustrative tool.

13. There is a need to expand the pool of stakeholders involved in the planning process so that they reflect the County's diversity.

As the population diversity in Montgomery County increases, there is a growing need for plans to reflect new and diverse viewpoints and visions. Two approaches for increasing stakeholder diversity include (1) greater attention to educating residents about the planning process and planning concepts and (2) expanded efforts to reach out to non-English speaking and other typically under-represented populations. Educational efforts could include producing "Planning 101" materials that describe the planning process, the focus of the current planning effort and expectations regarding stakeholders' roles. Education could also focus on introducing the basic principles and terminology of planning and urban design so that newcomers to the planning process can become more familiar with these issues prior to participating in development of a plan. M-NCPPC might consider designating or hiring an outreach staff member with a background in planning, as well as a graphic designer, to help prepare clear and effective educational materials.

Given recent demographic changes in the county, M-NCPPC should also devote more resources to bilingual outreach through translation of documents and flyers into other languages, by ensuring adequate simultaneous translation capabilities at public meetings, and by identifying venues that would easily incorporate such groups in the planning process. Finally, outreach strategies should involve the inclusion of other segments of the population (e.g., youth and young adults) who do not typically participate in planning efforts. These groups are the future of the County; they are often more accepting of new ideas and approaches, and their views should be actively sought as part of the master planning process.

14. Graphics should be better utilized throughout the planning process and in the final product.

Graphics included in many of the County's planning materials appear to have been produced too often as an afterthought, once key planning decisions have been made. They fail to clearly express and communicate planning concepts, nor do they adequately explain how an area will change as a result of the plan. In many of the most effective planning processes, extensive use is made of graphic materials throughout all phases of plan development. In fact, graphics typically tend to be the most effective means of communicating planning ideas, issues and concepts, whether these involve an analysis of current conditions, strategies for change, and/or implementation guidelines. Use of effective graphic materials can ensure that all participants in the process can "see" the same interpretation of the vision for an area, can comment on that vision, and can understand the final vision arrived at for implementation purposes.

In many planning efforts, graphics are the first products generated in order to engage and involve the public. As such, many of the graphics prepared for use in public meetings can be incorporated into both the draft and final plans, thus eliminating the rush to produce graphics at the very end of the process. Final graphics could then be refined versions of graphics produced as part of a public visioning effort. In order to achieve graphic excellence in planning, jurisdictions sometimes hire a sizable urban design staff with strong graphic capabilities (e.g., the Miami-Dade County, FL) that can produce visuals for use throughout the planning process, and as part of the final product. More typically, jurisdictions seek the services of consultants who have both the staff capabilities and equipment to produce the high quality of graphics needed to communicate and build support for a plan.

15. The County should make more and better use of technology to enhance the public outreach process.

Technology can enhance the public outreach process in variety of way. Many jurisdictions are currently making use of excellent visualization techniques to clearly explain more abstract planning and design concepts, and to illustrate how these might be applied within an area. These tools include 2- and 3-dimensional visualizations of a concept, animations such as walk-throughs and fly-overs, and "before" and "after simulations, cross-sections and elevations. The County's current plans do not reflect the use of any of these now widely-applied graphic techniques.

In addition to improving community understanding of a plan's vision, technology can also help participants stay informed on, and engaged in, a planning process. M-NCPPC should explore ways to better utilize current technology to inform people about upcoming meetings, and to share materials from previous meetings. Documentation of meetings should include, at a minimum, materials presented during those sessions, but could be expanded to include on-demand podcasts or webcasts with audio and/or video capability, building on the existing model for Planning Board podcasts. Further, greater attempts should be made to solicit feedback online through interactive sites, blogs and other communication formats, given that some stakeholders may be interested in participating but may not be able to attend meetings. Other communities often create individual web pages for each planning effort, providing a central location where all information pertaining to a planning project can be stored for easy access. This is discussed in greater detail in the following "Products" section.

C.   PRODUCT

The visible result of the planning process – the plan itself – should *clearly* define and display the Plan's recommendations and how these will impact the current state of the planning area. As one focus group participant stated, the plan needs to immediately provide the reader with a clear and understandable answer to the question "How will this area change?" Comments from many of those interviewed indicated that current plans do not adequately accomplish this objective.

16. The County's planning products need to keep pace with the plan "state of the art" being produced by agencies across the country.

Reports obtained from multiple large and small jurisdictions around the United States demonstrate a trend toward creating plans that are easy to read, simple to understand, and are graphically well-organized and informative. These plans are designed to appeal to, and inform, a broad range of readers, from those who are unfamiliar with planning concepts and terminology to those who will play key roles in plan implementation.

The best of these plans are consciously *designed to communicate* through:
- Clear document structure
- Attractive and easy-to-read page layout
- Extensive use of color
- Ample use of graphics to explain and illustrate
- Concise and clearly written text

Plan design should be considered a critical part of the planning process. This task should not be relegated to the process's end stages, when time pressures for completion are greatest. Rather, tasks such as report layout, graphic design and document structure can and should be defined during the early phases. Plans should maximize use of the most current desktop publishing software (e.g., Adobe InDesign), utilize available graphics software (e.g., Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator and Google SketchUp) for the production of plan graphics, and incorporate color, text boxes, photographs and other graphic materials to the fullest extent possible. At least one member of a project's Planning Team should be skilled in the software necessary to produce visually appealing, readable and graphically outstanding products.

Finally, the agency's recent decision to hire an editor to review all plans is consistent with the need to ensure that plans communicate effectively. In addition to employing an editor, some jurisdictions also provide all planning staff and consultants with a short writing manual, covering elements of grammar, sentence structure, and other basic writing principles. In this way, the editor serves as the "final set of eyes' on each plan, but will not be expected to rewrite entire documents. The editor can, at a minimum, ensure that the planning concepts are expressed clearly, effectively and in sufficient detail; that use of planning jargon is minimized; and that language and concepts are consistent throughout.

17. Plans need to better incorporate effective graphics as an integral component of both the process and the final product.

Rather than simply serving as illustrations for written or verbally-expressed concepts, graphics need to be given equal weight with text in all planning

products. Effective graphics can meaningfully convey ideas and concepts, can generate excitement, and can build support for a plan. The graphic materials used in the plan should largely be those generated during the planning process, and might include photographic precedents that depict a planning or design concept used elsewhere but applicable to the planning area; 2- or 3-dimensional visualizations (including "before" and "after" images); cross-sections and elevations; and other rendering techniques as appropriate. In addition, on-line plans and web site postings (discussed in greater detail below) can make effective use of graphic animation techniques, including walk-throughs and fly-overs, that allow the viewer to better understand the "sense of place" to be created through plan implementation.

18. There should be a standard structure and content for all master plans in order to simplify one's ability to both quickly comprehend an overall plan and easily search for topics of specific interest.

While each planning area may face its own unique set of issues, the format for the plans themselves should be consistent. In this way, someone who is familiar with the County's planning documents can pick up a plan and quickly understand its concepts and recommendations, as well as where to look for more specific information. Moreover, overall plan layout (as discussed in Recommendation #16 above) can also be defined for all master plan documents. This may include number of text columns, space for graphics, type sizes and styles, color ranges, map and graphics formats and legends, table layouts, etc. Some jurisdictions also attempt to standardize the format and appearance of commonly-used maps, such as land use maps, to foster consistency with other plans.

The standard format should also include two additional features that can assist the general public in understanding the plan. The first – a feature that one participant in the focus groups called "Planning 101" – is an introductory section standard to all plans that explains why this plan is being done, the purpose of the planning process, the role of the plan (once again, is it law or guideline?), and expectations regarding the implementation process. The second is a glossary of terms used in the plan. While an effort needs to be made to minimize planning jargon, there are often terms that are basic to the planning process, and are difficult to avoid (e.g., terms such as charrette, density, façade, floodplain, infrastructure, zoning, and streetscape). These are often included at the back of the plan in a "Glossary of Terms". Several focus group participants underscored the need for this addition to the County's master plans.

Finally, plans should be concise and brief. In line with the County's intent to focus master planning efforts on smaller areas, the plans for these areas should also be focused and to the point. In our survey of comparative practices, we found that many of these jurisdictions have targeted plans of approximately 50 pages as the ideal size, although this can vary by plan and by locale. Several participants in the focus group sessions recommended that the County consider producing very short plans (e.g., 6 to 10 pages), and felt that a transition to form-based regulations could assist in achieving this goal. As a summary document, this "mini-plan" is an achievable goal and will be discussed in more detail below.

19. Each master plan should contain a brief and well designed summary that can provide a comprehensive overall description of the plan.

Master plans are typically read by a small percentage of people, particularly those who had a hand in its development or those who intend to take action within the area (e.g., purchase a house, develop in the area). The document is generally not read by the public at large, so that changes to an area often come as an unpleasant surprise for many residents. Multiple jurisdictions have overcome this problem by producing "public information" versions of their plans – summaries that quickly, clearly and attractively answer the questions: "What are the big issues that need to be addressed in this area?" and "How will my area change as a result of this plan?" These summary plans are often stand-alone documents that vary in length from one to 10 pages, can be produced in multiple languages, and are both attractively laid out and graphically intensive. In some cases, these summaries are produced as posters that can be displayed in public venues such as schools, community centers and libraries, and can be mailed to all residents and businesses in the planning area. The County might consider producing two "hard copy" versions of a plan – this brief "overview" version for general public use, and a more technical document containing detailed recommendations, regulatory requirements for implementation and other detailed information for use by the development-related sectors, regulatory entities, and other interested members of the public. In addition, an on-line version should also be made available (see below). The on-line version can contain details that are not available in the hardcopy versions, thus offering the user another way of accessing more detailed site information as needed.

20. On-line versions of master plans need to look and "work" differently than their hardcopy counterparts.

At present, some on-line master plans are simply scanned versions of hardcopy documents. Thus, the former are both difficult to read and scan and make it impossible to search for text electronically. Nevertheless, the state-of-the-art for on-line documents provides the County with an excellent opportunity to make its master plans available to a very broad segment of the public. These plans need to be *specifically designed for on-line access*, which means that they should be formatted for easy on-screen reading, should maximize the use of graphics (including the on-line capability for 3-dimensional animations), should be easy to scan and search through a plan index, and should be linked to other data sources. For example, a reader should be able to click on a particular site, and be linked to specific data about that site. Having this level of detail available on-line would support the possibility of producing only a brief plan summary document in hardcopy (as described above under Item 4).

21. Access to both plan documents and project websites needs to be better managed.

Several of the focus group participants complained about the unavailability of plans that have gone out of print. Given the length of time between plan completion and update, it is apparently not uncommon for copies of planning documents to become scarce. Nevertheless, these plans are often in high demand when changes to an area, such as development or redevelopment projects, are proposed. The County should continue efforts to maintain a library of on-line and CD versions of all of the County's master plans to help alleviate this problem.

In addition, both community planning staff and members of the public have commented about the inadequate design of planning project websites. These sites, which could be used to inform the public about the progress of a plan and about upcoming meetings, could also serve as opportunities for community input in the form of surveys, blogs, webcasts, and so on. Given the frequent difficultly of bringing people out to meetings, as reported by community planners, a well-designed web site could serve as an additional venue for meaningful public outreach and feedback. Moreover, the site could offer information in multiple languages in order to accommodate the County's diverse population. Given the sophistication of current web-site technology, a well-designed site for every master plan project should be viewed as an essential part of the planning process as well as a product in its own right.

22. Planning timeframes are too long. Given the pace of change, and assumptions made by developers for "short" and "long" term phasing of projects, plans need to be updated more frequently.

Frequent mention was made during the focus group sessions about outdated master plans and the need to update these more frequently. Remarks specifically centered on the speed with which many areas of the County are changing – particularly the areas that are becoming more urban – and the need to accommodate that change more effectively through the planning process. Both the general public and the development community appear to be skeptical about the County's minor amendment process, and would prefer to have up-to-date plans from which to make decisions.

The need to update plans more frequently is directly compatible with the need to produce plans more quickly. In many communities, plans are required to be updated every 5 to 6 years. This does not mean that the whole plan needs to be rewritten in that timeframe, but that key parts of the plan that are no longer relevant because of changes that had occurred during the previous 5 years, or are likely to occur over the next 5 years, should be revised within the 5-6 year timeframe.

23. The new generation of master plans needs to tackle issues that reflect the changing character of the County's physical and social realities.

The County's master plans need to better reflect those issues of growing critical concern both on Countywide and area-wide levels. These include issues such as:
- Redevelopment of areas to allow for, and encourage, transition from outdated and inefficient uses
- Defining "livable" densities within each area and planning for these
- Developing approaches that will respond to the need for environmentally sustainable communities
- Developing strategies for effective community building in areas which have become/are becoming demographically more diverse
- Producing plans that are socially and economically responsible and address issues such as affordability, job creation, community building, work force accommodations, and so on.

D. IMPLEMENTATION

Even the best plans are only words on paper unless they include effective and realistic strategies for implementation. Based on the lessons learned from the focus group sessions, and the experience of other planning agencies surveyed during the Comparative Practices task, there are a number of tools that the County should consider to strengthen the link between planning concepts and implementation actions.

24. The skills needed for plan implementation are often quite different from those needed to create the plan itself. Create an entity that is skilled at, and focused on, plan implementation.

A number of communities around the country have found that the planners who play a key role in creating the master plan are not necessarily the most effective people to carry out plan implementation. Effective implementation needs to go beyond a determination regarding whether a proposed action satisfies the requirements and recommendations of a given plan. Effective implementation typically involves skills in marketing the plan's recommendations to generate interest, putting together partnerships that will lead to implementation, and ensuring that the implementing entities, as well as the community, have the tools in hand that can guide them through the proposal review, approval and building processes.

For some communities, these tasks have been accomplished through the creation of either a separate in- house plan implementation group or a single staff position devoted to implementation, both consisting of individuals who have the tools in hand to initiate the actions proposed in a master plan and to shepherd the plan through to reality. In other communities, implementation has been turned over to an authority established for this purpose (e.g., a community development corporation, etc.). The implementation entity should work with the master planning team prior to plan finalization to ensure that the plan is sufficiently specific with regard to its implementation recommendations, that phasing is in place to identify early actions needed to "jump start" the plan, that the jurisdiction's various departments have coordinated actions as part of their work plans, and that incentives and other tools are defined to stimulate initiation of proposed implementation actions.

25. Better coordination is needed between departments in order to ensure that all of the elements needed for plan implementation have been accounted for in terms of budgeting, prioritization, and the establishment of work plans.

The team approach to master planning, as described in the Process section of these recommendations, should facilitate plan implementation by improving the communication and coordination of all departments needed for recommended changes to occur. So, for example, implementing a plan for a new mixed-use center that includes housing, office, retail and civic space will require close coordination between staff responsible for roadway and transit improvements, public facilities and open space, environmental regulations, housing, and economic development. Effective implementation can not be accomplished unless each of these entities has incorporated the actions it will need to take into its budget and work plan cycles.

In addition, the Planning Board and Council staff have asked that planners prioritize funding requests through the CIP for implementing master plans. These priorities can most effectively be established through careful interdepartmental coordination, in order to identify the implementation steps that will need to be taken and the role(s) that each department will need to play in the implementation process.

26. The County needs better regulating tools to ensure that there is a stronger connection between the vision defined in a master plan and the actions that occur as a result of the plan.

A frequent complaint voiced during the focus group sessions was that the community spends an enormous amount of time during the planning process to define the vision for change in an area, only to see a developer translate that vision in a totally different way, with completely unintended results. This "disconnect" between the plan and the reality has resulted in an increased distrust on the part of the public of both the planning process and the ability of master plans to establish visions and recommendations that can and will be implemented. Across the board, focus group participants have asked for better – that is, more reliable and trustworthy – tools for implementing master plans. Moreover, the development community has, as well, requested a much stronger, clearer, and more specific set of requirements as a result of the planning process. It is clear that current zoning does not fulfill the needs of either the community or the developers in this regard. In addition, some of the new, and more complex, uses

of land may require the creation of new zoning categories – a lengthy process at best. Better tools are, therefore, needed to implement master plans.

The approach that has received the greatest level of support to date is that of form-based coding. Using this technique, the master planners and the community can define a specific set of parameters that a developer must follow, and that will result in the product intended by the plan. A number of developers have also expressed their belief that form-based coding would facilitate the design and approval process by clearly identifying the "rules" that a development must follow. The specifics of form-based coding are being defined in a separate white paper that is being prepared concurrently with this document.

Some jurisdictions have created other mechanisms to implement plan recommendations by adding greater design specificity to plans and development regulations. Nashville, for example, plans can be developed in further detail, first as a Detailed Neighborhood Plan attachment to the plan and finally as an Urban Design Overlay, which is a regulatory document. If an Urban Design Overlay is developed, the design standards are attached to base zoning for the area.

27. Master plans should incorporate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the progress of plan implementation.

Implementation of a master plan typically occurs over many years. However, the progress toward implementation appears to be only loosely tracked at best. Master plans should, from the outset, establish goals for implementation that can be monitored on a regular (e.g., annual) basis. The plan can, for example, establish both quantitative and qualitative goals and implementation benchmarks such as the number of new jobs created in an area, the number of new/additional housing units in an area, the number of square feet of retail space created, the amount of new open space acreage, and so on. While the *1997 Master Planning Process in Montgomery County, Maryland* identified the need for Annual Master Plan Status Reports, it is unclear whether this recommendation was ever implemented. These reports would have provided yearly opportunities for planners to evaluate the progress being made toward implementing a master plan's recommendations. By establishing measurable benchmarks during the planning process, the annual reports would be relatively straight-forward to complete and could allow for the clear identification of areas in which progress has been made and those in which additional staff focus was needed.

Finally, when a project is finally implemented, the County should take every opportunity to "brag". This may be in the form of articles and photos on the

County's website, on the master plan's web page, and/or in the media. These signs of progress can be rewards for community participants who gave much of their time to envisioning change in their areas, for developers who should be publicly recognized for jobs well done, and for the planners, the Planning Board and the Council who had the foresight to support and approve the project from its inception in the master plan.

The County might consider an approach similar to the one established by Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods for reporting on the status of plan implementation. The Department web site includes a searchable database with an interactive map that enables residents to track the status of plan implementation by area of the city. A matrix of all major plan recommendations provides an explanation of the current status of implementation for each action item and provides contact information for the entity or individual responsible for implementing a particular project. The Department has also created a two-page fact sheets for adopted plans, summarizing key elements of the plan and activities relevant to the plan that occurred during a given calendar year.

COMPARATIVE PRACTICES SURVEY

SMALL AREA AND NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING

IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

JANUARY 2008

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A. Background and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to provide a snapshot of how other jurisdictions currently practice long-range planning and to identify successful and innovative planning practices that could inform improvements to planning in Montgomery County. This study seeks to capture a representative template of approaches to planning process, product and implementation from across the country. Rather than attempting to identify the select group of jurisdictions that are doing the "best" job of planning, this study emphasizes the comparative analysis of jurisdictions that approach planning in different ways. The resulting comparative analysis identifies both overall themes—practices, challenges and lessons learned—that are common to multiple jurisdictions as well as innovative approaches that are unique to a particular jurisdiction.

The following eight jurisdictions were surveyed:

> *Austin, TX*
> *Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, NC*
> *Louisville-Jefferson County, KY*
> *Miami-Dade County, FL*
> *Minneapolis, MN*
> *Nashville-Davidson County, TN*
> *Prince George's County, MD*
> *Seattle, WA*

These jurisdictions were selected based on a variety of criteria, including:

- Jurisdictions with an established focus on small-area or neighborhood planning that have produced enough plans to provide a meaningful sample.

- Jurisdictions that share characteristics with Montgomery County, including geographic size, population density, or a comparable range of land uses and development patterns.

- Jurisdictions that collectively represent the diversity of approaches to planning that are occurring nationwide, including both those that have developed particularly unique and innovative planning practices and those that appeared to be closer to the "norm."

Information on each jurisdiction was gathered through a combination of interviews with planning staff and other available written materials, including materials posted on agency web sites, published articles and other sources.

This report is divided into three sections. Section B summarizes the study's main findings, including overall observations and lessons learned. Section C summarizes planning practices in each jurisdiction that are particularly unique and/or innovative. Section D contains a more detailed profile of each jurisdiction surveyed.

B. Overall Observations

During the comparative practices survey, two general observations emerged. First, many planning agencies are grappling with same or similar issues. Common challenges include determining how to make planning processes both faster and more effective while ensuring the greatest possible public participation during the process; how to improve the quality and consistency of planning documents; and how to ensure that plans produce tangible, visible results that are consistent with plan recommendations. Second, no single "magic formula" for a successful planning process exists. Rather, jurisdictions have attempted to solve the common challenges in different ways and continue to assess and reform planning practices as additional lessons are learned.

While no single model exists for Montgomery County to emulate, each jurisdiction surveyed nevertheless offers innovations and overall lessons learned that may inform the County's own efforts to improve its planning practices. These findings are summarized below, while additional lessons learned by each community are noted in the profiles of each jurisdiction that follow.

PROCESS

- ***Observation 1.*** *Many jurisdictions are attempting to add greater structure and standardization to the planning process.*

  Through experience, some jurisdictions have found that a lack of structure can derail the planning process and cause delays. As a result, they have attempted to standardize certain planning practices to reduce delays and confusion caused by "reinventing the wheel" for each planning effort. Planning agencies are also becoming more specific about both the procedures to be followed during the planning process and, importantly, about what stakeholders should expect from the process.

- ***Observation 2.*** *Some planning agencies publish documents that describe in detail the agency's expectations and standard procedures for the planning process and product.*

  Some jurisdictions (i.e., Minneapolis, Louisville, and Austin) have published detailed guidebooks that explain the planning department's expectations for every phase of the planning process and for the final product. Some of these

documents are geared toward a general audience, while others are geared toward specific users such as neighborhoods, consultants and planning staff.

- **Observation 3.** *Most planning efforts are initiated and directed by local government, but some jurisdictions allow neighborhoods to conduct their own planning.*

Some jurisdictions, such as Seattle and Minneapolis, enable neighborhoods to initiate and conduct their own planning by providing local government funds and resources to the neighborhoods. While the Minneapolis experience with such an approach to planning is more limited in terms of the number of plans produced in this manner, the Seattle experience is widely cited as a model of neighborhood organizing and empowerment. From an implementation standpoint, Seattle's approach also proved successful, especially during the three years following plan adoption when funding and staff resources were at their peak. From a planning perspective, however, the experience may have been more mixed: while a large number of plans were completed during a short period of time using a "bottom-up" process, some believe that the sheer volume of plans undertaken simultaneously—as well as variations in plan format and the topics addressed—may have led to later difficulties in implementing and updating these plans.

- **Observation 4.** *Planning departments use consultants to varying degrees.*

Some jurisdictions (i.e., Miami-Dade, Nashville, Charlotte) conduct planning processes and produce planning documents entirely or mostly in-house; others rely on consultants for all aspects of a planning process or for specific tasks, such as analysis of transportation or economic issues. Some jurisdictions use consultants in order to compensate for the small number of planning staff or for a lack of appropriate skills in-house. In some cases, hiring consultants is seen as a way to complete plans in less time than it would otherwise take if the plans were completed in-house. In some jurisdictions, consultants also may be able to provide higher-quality graphics and planning documents. At the same time, use of many different consultants may pose challenges for jurisdictions that hope to achieve plans that are consistent in structure, content and appearance, especially in the absence of a clearly articulated structure that is expected for each plan. Moreover, the planning process and public outreach strategy may vary depending on the approach of a particular consultant, especially if a planning department's expectations are not clearly established upfront.

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- **Observation 5.** *Jurisdictions are striving for better quality public outreach and are increasingly standardizing and strategizing their outreach approaches.*

Some jurisdictions have standardized their outreach approaches and have particular methods (advisory groups, the charrette process) that they prefer; in other jurisdictions, the outreach process tends to vary depending on the planning area, planning issues and the consultant. The charrette process, with its compressed schedule and feedback loops, may enable a planning process to move more quickly; however, not every community finds that the charrette process alone is able to achieve all of the goals for a planning process.

- **Observation 6.** *Many planning agencies attempt to complete plans in less than two years.*

Many of the jurisdictions surveyed seek to complete the process in 1-2 years, with approximately one year devoted to planning and remaining time to pre-planning and plan approval. In practice, some plans substantially exceed these timeframe goals due to the geographic size and complexity of these areas as well as emerging issues that arise during the planning process. In general, jurisdictions are finding that participants in the planning process tend to burn out or lose interest if the planning phase prior to approval lasts for longer than one year. At the same time, however, there appear to be limits to how much the process can be hurried without compromising the meaningful public participation and comprehensive decision-making that all agree are necessary components of the planning process.

- **Observation 7.** *Planning agencies are trying new approaches for managing staff resources.*

Planning agencies have tried a variety of approaches to ensure that staff resources are managed efficiently. These approaches have ranged from assigning staff full-time to a single plan to assigning teams to work on plans and dividing responsibilities based on the type of task or phase of the planning process (such as pre-planning, public outreach, design and mapping work, implementation or work related to specific functional categories). Some planning agencies noted that they decided to move toward a team-based approach and a division of staff responsibilities after finding that other approaches did not work to their liking.

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- ***Observation 8.*** *Some jurisdictions are trying to collect and interpret data more effectively and efficiently prior to the start of planning.*

Some planning agencies are emphasizing the importance of completing data collection and other pre-planning activities prior to initiation of a plan to enable a more efficient planning process. Strategies include allowing more time or intensifying staff resources during the pre-planning phase as well as trying to do a better job of identifying the information that will be needed during the planning process.

PRODUCT

- ***Observation 9.*** *Some jurisdictions are moving toward greater standardization of the planning product.*

Planning agencies are striving for greater standardization of document format and structure, the topics addressed in each planning document, and certain graphics (such as maps) included in the document. Some jurisdictions have found that, in addition to making plans easier to use and understand, standardization also helps make plans easier to implement once they are adopted.

- ***Observation 10.*** *Planning agencies are working to expand their capabilities for producing better quality design..*

Some planning departments are placing a greater emphasis on in-house urban design capabilities. Miami-Dade and Nashville, for example, have numerous urban designers on staff and have the capability to produce graphic plans and drawings in-house. In addition, planners in some agencies have GIS mapping skills that enable them to produce their own maps.

- ***Observation 11.*** *Planning documents vary in terms of the length of the document.*

In some jurisdictions, plans average 50 pages or less. In others, plans tend to range from 60 to over 100 pages. Length depends on the type of plan and the size and characteristics of the geographic area.

- ***Observation 12.*** *Some planning agencies are placing a greater emphasis on graphics while attempting to limit the amount of text in a plan.*

Planning documents vary in terms of both the quantity and types of graphics used. Almost all of the jurisdictions surveyed use GIS mapping extensively in their plans. Many of these also use 3-D visualization and renderings in some or all plans. In-house capabilities for producing these graphics vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

IMPLEMENTATION

- ***Observation 13.*** *Jurisdictions are placing a greater emphasis on implementation activities to ensure effective delivery of plan recommendations.*

All of the jurisdictions surveyed include implementation strategies in their master plans. These approaches may include phasing strategies, implementation matrices in plans identifying roles and responsibilities for implementing key recommendations and, in some cases, form-based design specifications and other regulatory tools for achieving plan recommendations. In addition, some of the jurisdictions surveyed noted the importance of identifying action items that can serve as "quick wins" to show immediate results following plan adoption. Some are also placing greater emphasis on prioritization of plan recommendations in order to target implementation efforts.

- ***Observation 14.*** *Some planning agencies have a more structured approach to implementation than others.*

Approaches vary both in terms of the extent to which human and financial resources are designated specifically for implementation and in the extent to which the status of implementing plan recommendations is tracked following plan adoption. Some jurisdictions (i.e., Seattle and Miami-Dade) designate staff to work specifically on implementation and (in the case of Seattle) keep detailed, publicly-accessible records of the status of each plan recommendation. In Seattle, neighborhoods were provided with funds to implement high-priority recommendations during the first few years following plan adoption. In addition, some planning agencies are attempting to involve operating agencies throughout the planning process so that they can serve as more effective advocates for plan recommendations during implementation.

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- ***Observation 15.*** *Some jurisdictions are using form-based tools for implementing plan recommendations.*

Miami-Dade County, for example, adopted a separate form-based code to implement a plan for Downtown Kendall. Prince George's County has incorporated regulating plans and form-based design guidelines in some sector plans and is now exploring a form-based approach as part of its efforts to develop a new mixed-use zoning tool. Nashville-Davidson County established an Urban Design Overlay tool, which translates plan policies into "traditional neighborhood design" standards that are attached to, and go above and beyond, base zoning. Nashville also utilizes the Transect concept as an educational tool during the planning process. Finally, Louisville-Jefferson County established "Form Districts" to work alongside traditional, use-based zoning and establish greater design specificity for certain areas.

C. Innovative Approaches by Jurisdiction

AUSTIN	- Plans completed mostly in-house - Guidebook on neighborhood planning process - Grouping of neighborhoods into combined plans - Added staff to focus specifically on tasks such as pre-planning, facilitation and outreach, implementation and community education. - Standardized process and planning documents - Online stakeholder surveys - Final workshop to discuss implementation strategies - Staff from various departments review plan for feasibility and cost estimating
CHARLOTTE	- Plans completed mostly in-house - Interdepartmental staff team closely involved throughout the planning process - Online stakeholder surveys - Emphasis on preparing all background materials prior to start of planning - Implementation matrices included in plans
LOUISVILLE	- Regulatory approach includes Form Districts - Standardized process and planning documents - Two guidebooks produced to explain neighborhood planning process (for residents and consultants respectively). - Consultants used for most planning processes and products - Implementation matrices included in plans
MIAMI-DADE	- Charrette approach used exclusively for public outreach - Urban Design division with in-house design and graphics capabilities - Plans produced entirely in-house - Experience using form-based code to implement plan

MINNEAPOLIS	• Guidebook on neighborhood planning process • Consultants used for every planning process and product • Neighborhoods have the option of initiating and preparing their own plans, using City funds and resources
NASHVILLE	• Plans produced entirely in-house • Series of increasingly detailed planning documents, including Urban Design Overlays to translate plan recommendations and attach to base zoning • Use of Transect principle as an educational tool • Guidebook for communities on aspects of neighborhood form • Urban Design division with design and graphics capabilities • Plans produced in-house
PRINCE GEORGE'S	• Previous attempts to streamline planning process • Use of charrette approach for public outreach • Interdepartmental staff team closely involved throughout the planning process • County Council involved at all stages of the planning process • Joint hearings of Council/Planning Board during approval process • Experience with, and currently exploring, form-based approaches for mixed-use centers • Consultants used for every planning process and product.
SEATTLE	• Neighborhoods given autonomy to conduct their own planning process, using City funds and resources • Implementation process has included staffing and funds for implementing and tracking plan recommendations • Online implementation matrix detailing the status of implementation and responsible parties. • Fact sheets produced to update neighborhoods on plan recommendations, implementation status and noteworthy developments.

D.   Jurisdiction Profiles

AUSTIN, TX

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Other Sources: Notes from M-NCPPC interview with Paul Digiuseppi; City of Austin Neighborhood Planning and Zoning web site (www.ci.**austin**.tx.us/**planning**); *City of Austin Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department, Neighborhood Planning Handbook 2002 Edition II;* proceedings and materials from the April 15, 2006 workshop *The Future of Neighborhood Planning in Austin – Next Steps* (www.neighboraustin.com).

I.   PROCESS

Overview

Austin began doing neighborhood plans in 1997. While the original intention was for every neighborhood to have a plan, achieving this goal proved to be time-consuming. Nevertheless, within the past few years, the City Council requested that Neighborhood Planning complete all of its neighborhood plans for the city's core area. In order to meet this deadline, the City is now planning simultaneously for groups of neighborhoods. Plans for each of the City's 50 neighborhoods now comprise sections of the plans for larger groups of neighborhoods. In 2007, the Department began a process of reassessing its neighborhood planning process, with an emphasis on standardizing the process and plan document, being more specific about the procedures and expectations for the process.

FLOW CHART
Neighborhood Planning in Austin Today
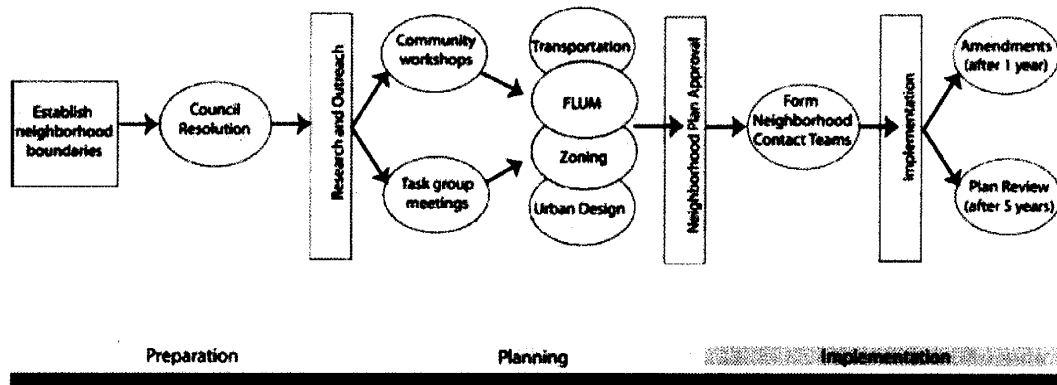
Relationship to Other Plans

The *Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan*, completed in 1979, mentions the need to "develop and implement specific, detailed plans tailored to the needs of each neighborhood." Neighborhood plans now serve as formal amendments to *Austin Tomorrow* and, since the late 1990s, have also served to complement the City's Smart Growth initiative. The city is included in a regional planning effort (Envision, TX). In Texas, cities have zoning authority, but counties cannot zone.

How Plans are Initiated

The City initiates neighborhood plans, following the direction of the Comprehensive Plan as well as the recent City Council mandate.

Public Outreach Mechanisms

The public outreach process includes at least two large public workshops. In addition, a series of smaller Task Group meetings address more focused topics such as Land Use and Transportation action items and Neighborhood Design Guidelines. Stakeholders on the City's "interest list" are invited to attend these meetings. The process also includes a separate meeting for affected property owners to address issues related to rezoning. Planners have flexibility to choose outreach methods from a larger set of commonly used outreach tools. For all planning efforts, the City mails information to all property owners and utility customers to announce the first public meeting and follows up mid-process with a

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second mailing. The City also circulates a web link to an online survey of stakeholders.

To increase participation, the City is in the process of exploring other outreach methods such as sending home notices with school children, increasing bilingual capabilities, involving churches and PTAs, and a range of approaches to involve youth and incorporate planning issues into school curriculum as extra credit.

For one recent planning process, the City employed a unique immersion approach: it hired a consultant and utilized a week-long charrette format that included an introductory public meeting, an all-day public design workshop, a week-long consultant design session, and a closing public meeting to present a preliminary concept plan.

Near the end of the process, prior to Planning Commission Review, stakeholders are asked to edit and prioritize goals, objectives and action items for the plan. Following adoption of the plan, a final workshop is held to discuss implementation strategies.

The City is now refining its approach for involving staff from other agencies. It previously organized a "services forum" at which stakeholders can communicate one-on-one with staff in other departments, who can provide information about service needs and infrastructure issues not addressed specifically in the neighborhood plans. In place of the services forum approach, the City is now trying to involve these staff in the process at the appropriate time, when relevant issues are addressed.

Timetable

Neighborhood plans generally take 1-2 years to complete and adopt. The hope is that a recently-hired impartial facilitator can help expedite the process by helping to frame community expectations and discussion.

Consultants

Most plans are produced entirely in-house. In one recent exception, the City hired a consultant to produce one of its plans, partly due to the small number of residents living in the planning focus area.

Approval Process

Before a plan is presented to the City Council, City staff from various departments first reviews a plan for feasibility and to develop cost estimates. The City's Law Department also reviews the plan for consistency with City laws and policies. Recommendations with which staff do not agree are included in an appendix to the plan, rather than in the main body. Moreover, plans for communities with large numbers of historic resources are reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission and plans that address business attraction issues are reviewed by the Real Estate Council of Austin. Neighborhood plans are then reviewed by the nine-member Planning Commissions. Once a plan is recommended for City Council adoption, a public hearing is held, after which the Council can vote to adopt the plan as a formal amendment to the Comprehensive Plan.

A current debate within the department is whether to address rezoning at the same time as plan adoption (as is currently the practice during the Council hearing) or to wait until after adoption to begin addressing rezoning.

Staff Resources

As of 2007, the Neighborhood Planning staff was expanded from 12 to 16 planners. The new staff include one staff member devoted to impartial facilitation, one "pre-planner" position to focus on outreach prior to the planning process, one implementation planner and an "educator." Three GIS staff and one demographer are available to assist with relevant tasks. In general, 2-4 planners work on a combined neighborhood plan. As a rule, one planner is assigned to each of the city's 50 neighborhood planning areas, of which 2-4 are combined as part of a single planning process.

II.   PRODUCT

Standardization

A standard format has been developed that includes plan elements such as Land Use, Transportation and Parks. Each plan also includes cost estimates and the identification of possible funding sources.

Text and Length of Document

Recent plans for combined groups of neighborhoods average over 100 pages in length, including appendices.

Graphics

Graphics consist primarily of GIS maps and photos. Most of the planning staff have GIS skills and are able to produce their own maps. Although the Department has an Urban Design division, these staff are not directly involved in the neighborhood planning process and tend to devote more time to transit/station area plans and corridor studies, as well as to the preparation of design guidelines. The Department is currently upgrading its capabilities for producing 3-D renderings by increasing SketchUp and modeling skills among Urban Design staff.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation consists of three parts. First, zoning is changed through the creation of a Neighborhood Plan Combining District to reflect the changes made to the Future Land Use Map. Second, staff works with neighborhoods to develop a plan to track and implement recommendations. At the end of the planning process, stakeholders are asked to prioritize action items from the plan to guide the implementation process. Third, neighborhood design guidelines are publicized, disseminated and put into use. These voluntary guidelines provide architectural direction to property owners and developers and suggest ways that buildings can "harmonize with and enhance their surroundings."

The City recently created a new staff position for an "implementation planner" to focus exclusively on implementation issues. Responsibilities of the new position include tracking all major action items from adopted plans and forming new relationships with other departments. This individual is also expected to work with staff on tasks such as wording action items appropriately so that they can get incorporated into work programs and prioritization of the top five issues to try to get incorporated into budget cycles.

IV. FORM-BASED CODES

Austin does not use form-based codes at this time, but it remains a possibility for the future. The City does use commercial design standards and Transit Oriented Development zones

V.   LESSONS LEARNED

- The Department has, and continues to, focus on standardizing its process and planning documents.
- The Department identified a need for additional staff to focus on specific aspects of the planning process, such as pre-planning outreach, implementation and facilitation during the planning process.
- The Department is trying to be more specific about its procedures during the planning process and putting the specifics in writing.
- In an effort to improve the public outreach process, the Department hired an impartial facilitator to lead outreach efforts. The hope is that improving the way the City establishes expectations with the community (i.e., "this is what you're getting into") will contribute to a smoother and faster planning process.
- "Deliver the goods" to neighborhoods. The Department has recognized a need to better link plans to budgeting and capital improvements and to deliver more visible improvements to neighborhoods. This recognition led to the creation of a new staff position to focus on implementation.

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I.   PROCESS

Relationship to Other Plans

In addition to the Comprehensive Plan for the City and County (known as *the 2015 Plan – Planning For Our Future*), plan types include broader General Development Policies, District Plans covering 6 large planning areas, and more-detailed Area Plans (including Neighborhood / Strategic Plans, Business Corridor Plans, Pedscape and Land Use Plans, and Station Area Plans. The small-area planning process was first established as part of the 1985 Comprehensive Plan; however, the majority of small-area planning occurred following the completion of District Plans during the 1990s. Area plans update District Plans and show up on District Plan maps

Evolution of the Planning Process

The planning process for Area Plans has changed and evolved over time and depends on the nature of the planning areas, in terms of size, socioeconomic characteristics and planning issues.

How Plans are Initiated

Plans are initiated at the City and County levels.

Use of Consultants

The Department produces most plans using in-house capabilities, with the exception of hiring market consultants. Consultants also have been retained for many of the station area plans because of staff resource issues and the fact that there is a particular consultant with whom the Department works well.

Public Outreach Mechanisms

The typical outreach process involves a large public kick-off meeting, a similar event upon completion of the plan, and sometimes a series of meetings in between. The Department sometimes works with smaller groups of citizen / stakeholder volunteers, an approach that is viewed as useful because it creates a group that can buy into a plan and advocate for it. The review and adoption process also includes public comment sessions.

For some plans, the Department has employed the charrette process, including a several-day charrette, and at least one large public meeting. While the charrette process has been successful in some ways, there is a feeling that this approach has been more of a "feel good" process and has not, in itself, produced the level of input and review needed for the plan.

The Department has also begun employing surveys, using a tool such as "Survey Monkey," in order to get more people involved.

Timetable

The timetable for plans depends on the type of plan as well as the size and characteristics of the planning area. On average, plans take between 1 and 2 years to prepare and adopt, with up to 3 months of pre-planning preparations, at least a year for the development of the plan, and 3-6 months for the review and adoption process. Timetables tend to vary widely, however, and can be influenced by politics and election cycles. Some plans have taken as long as 3-4 years; others have been completed in less than a year.

The Planning Department has been trying to make the planning process more efficient, and efforts to streamline the process have achieved mixed results. A number of the strategies employed to make the process more efficient have not made a significant impact on the amount of time the planning process takes. For example, the department tried assigning staff to work on only one plan at a time,

but found that this did not improve efficiency; rather, staff tended to get "too involved" and the Department found that the work could have been spread out more.

One approach that has helped improve the outreach portion of the process has been ensuring that all background materials needed for planning are prepared at the start of the planning process. While the work required to accomplish this goal has prolonged the process in terms of staff work, doing these preparations up front tends to speed up the process of working with the community.

At one point in the early- to mid-1990s, the Department prepared "action plans," which could be completed in 90 days. The problem with such a short process was that community participants did not fully understand why they were participating until just as the process was wrapping up.

Staff Resources

Staffing depends on the type of plan and the size of the planning area. Typically, staffing for a project will include at least two planners (including one project manager) and one urban designer. In addition, the team includes more limited involvement of one of the Planning Department's own transportation planners. Current planning staff are also involved to some extent to provide perspective on zoning and development review issues.

In addition, each plan involves a staff technical team that includes representatives of all of the functional planning areas, such as transportation, parks and engineering. This team is "joined at the hip" with planning staff and works closely with staff throughout the planning process.

II.   PRODUCT

Standardization

The Department tries to standardize plans to some extent, although standardization is not always evident by looking at the plans. Plan structure tends to be somewhat the same for each plan, but also tends to vary depending on the type of plans. Some graphics and charts are standard, but others are typically determined by the planning staff working on the plan. The Department is currently trying to limit the amount of text in each plans and increase the number of graphics.

Topics typically addressed in plans include:

- o Land use and zoning
- o Transportation
- o Environment
- o Infrastructure
- o Economic development / revitalization
- o Community appearance and urban deisgn
- o Community safety

Graphics

Graphics include primarily GIS maps, photographs, illustrative and concept plans (mostly hand-drawn, some digitally produced, pie charts/ bar graphs and some hand-drawn sections and urban design diagrams. The style and character of the graphics tends to vary, depending on the plan.

III.   IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation Process

The Department has been focusing more on implementation recently. Newer plans feature an implementation matrix that outlines implementation strategies, timeframes, costs and parties responsible for implementation. In addition, the Planning Department is now trying to prioritize recommendations for implementation.

Planning Department staff are responsible for any rezoning that needs to occur following completion of a plan. Plans are also used to guide development proposals.. A member of the Planning Department staff is responsible for following the implementation of recommendations on capital projects. The interdepartmental staff that participates on each planning project also works on plan implementation. Planning staff find that another important component in the implementation process is an involved neighborhood group to help push for implementation.

Form-Based Coding

The Planning Department has talked about using form-based codes, and there has been some interest in this approach expressed by planning staff and by the Mayor. However, form-based codes have not been developed to date.

IV.   LESSONS LEARNED

Observations Provided During Interview

- As much as one wants to push plans through, the process still takes a long time and can be hurried only so much. Planning is by nature a contemplative and involved process that is time-consuming but worthwhile.

- While the charrette process has been successful in some ways, there is a feeling that this approach has been more of a "feel good" process and has not, in itself, produced the level of input and review needed for the plan. While this outreach approach has been faster, the department has found that plan was not completed at the end of a charrette and required additional months of work.

- The Department tried assigning staff to work on only one plan at a time, but found that this did not improve efficiency; rather, staff tended to get "too involved" and the Department found that the work could have been spread out more.

- One approach that has helped improve the outreach portion of the process has been ensuring that all background materials needed for planning are prepared at the start of the planning process.

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I.   PROCESS

Overview

The current planning process stems from the 2004 merger of the City of Louisville and Jefferson County. The neighborhood planning process was built mostly from scratch at this time, following stated goals in the Mayor's Strategic Plan focused on creating strong neighborhoods and integrating strong planning and design to improve them. Although previous neighborhood plans had been completed in the City and County, the current neighborhood planning program represents the first unified program for neighborhood planning. Despite previous planning efforts, Louisville Metro did not have a model or guide to turn to when developing the neighborhood planning program.

Beginning with a basic template established for the first seven planning efforts, the Neighborhood Planning Program has since established specific procedures and guidelines for its planning process to add more structure to it. The planning process and timeline is now spelled out in detail in two published guides for citizens and consultants respectively.

Relationship to Other Plans

The executive summaries of neighborhood and small-area plans serve as amendments to the *Cornerstone 2020 Comprehensive Plan*, which states that these plans should take precedence over the more general recommendation in

Cornerstone 2020. The executive summaries that become amendments to *Cornerstone 2020* contain the plan vision statement and recommendations, but do not include recommendations regarding capital improvements.

Other than the elements of the Comprehensive Plan, the City and County do not have policy plans for functional elements. However, *Horizon 2030*, a regional transportation plan prepared by the Kentuckiana Regional Planning and Development Agency, also provides recommendations regarding transportation on a local as well as regional scale.

How Plans are Initiated

Louisville Metro government initiates all plans.

Staff Resources

The Neighborhood Planning Program staff consists of three full time planners—a Planning Supervisor, a Planning Coordinator and a Planner I—who work full time on all neighborhood plans. Additional staff members—a planning technician, a management assistant and sometimes an intern—assist the planning staff and provide data research and analysis, mapping and administrative assistance.

Other Metro staff participate in planning projects on an as-needed basis. A transportation resource person is generally involved throughout the plan. While transportation staff had been located within the department, recent restructuring moved transportation staff to the Public Works department. The Urban Design team within Planning and Design Services is involved in charrettes and works on the design elements of the plans. Moreover, historic preservation, parks and public works staff are involved at times during the planning process.

Use of Consultants

The Neighborhood Planning Program uses consultants for most planning projects, primarily due to internal staffing constraints. As of November 2007, however, the Neighborhood Planning Program reported that it intended to try doing one of its upcoming planning projects entirely in-house.

Staff generally begin the plan in-house and take the community's appointed advisory group through its first few meetings to establish goals, conduct initial visioning exercises and allow the advisory group to become familiar with both the Comprehensive Plan and Form Districts concept. Consultants are brought in at the

"component stage," when the focus turns to specific land use and transportation recommendations.

Public Outreach Mechanisms

Key elements of the public outreach approach include a Mayor-appointed advisory group, comprised of key citizen and business stakeholders, and a series of public meetings. Public meetings include an initial meeting to communicate the plan to the community and a day- or evening-long "charrette" workshop to brainstorm planning concepts. Prior to the public meetings, the process includes an initial meeting or series of meetings with the advisory group to form a community outreach subcommittee that can focus on communicating the plan to area neighborhoods. Specific early outreach steps include working with the Metro Council to get information in the community newsletter and disseminating information through Louisville Metro's neighborhood notification system, which is also used to communicate information on development cases.

Timetable

The Neighborhood Planning Program believes that the entire planning process should be completed in 10 to 18 months; however, the process may require more or less time depending on specific circumstances in each neighborhood. The initial group of plans initiated in the first year of neighborhood planning averaged 2 years to complete, which staff felt was too long. The delay was in large part due to the lack of a specific structure and process for all plans and the fact that consultants approached each plan differently. More recently, plans have adhered more closely to the 10-18 month process; however, in at least one case, the planning process has lasted up to 3.5 years. The approval process generally lasts up to 9 months.

Approval Process

The approval process involves Planning Commission review, followed by legislative body approval. Planning Commission review involves a public hearing and a recommendation to the legislative body. The legislative body approval follows review of the Planning Commission public hearing and relevant plan documents. The approval process generally takes up to 9 months.

II.   PRODUCT

Standardization

The Neighborhood Planning Program makes an effort to standardize planning documents by establishing a consistent structure and elements for inclusion in all plans. All plans now include a vision statement, a section on "neighborhood identity" (demographics, history, existing conditions), a section on implementation and an executive summary that eventually serves as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, all plans are required to address two planning components, Land Use/Community Form and Mobility. Plans may also include optional components, as needed, including: housing; economic development; community facilities and services; parks, open space and recreation; urban design; historic preservation and environmental resources. All of these common elements of plans are described in detail in both the *Neighborhood Planning Citizen Handbook* and *Neighborhood Planning Guidebook*.

Graphics

The Neighborhood Planning Program encourages all plans to be in full-color and contain a range of graphics and photographs. Specifications for the design and format of documents are included in the *Neighborhood Planning Guidebook*. Graphics typically included in planning documents include GIS maps and photographs, with a small number of plans containing sections and visualizations.

Text and Length of Document

The length of documents generally ranges from 30 – 50 pages.

III.   IMPLEMENTATION

Plans often include an implementation matrix that lists recommendations, responsible agencies and timeframe for implementation. The Department currently assigns certain implementation actions to other agencies. In practice, the implementation process often depends on the level of funding available, the degree to which a neighborhood pushes the plan recommendations and the amount of political will. As of November 2007, the Department is also in the midst of setting up a new, more orderly process for implementation that is connected with its new budget process.

- Establish "quick wins" early in the implementation process to show immediate results.

- Two years is too long for completion of a plan. When the planning portion of a neighborhood plan process lasts longer than a year, the process loses steam as people burn out and lose interest.

- There is no "magic formula" for a neighborhood planning process. Each jurisdiction must frequently evaluate and objectively analyze its current process in order to define ways in which it can be improved.

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I.   PROCESS

Overview

Florida state laws dictate the process and timeframe for master plans.

How Plans are Initiated

Both the County Comprehensive Development Master Plan and the County Code
call for the development of area planning reports. Charettes are prioritized and
authorized by the Board of County Commissioners, then by the Community
Council.

Relationship to Other Plans

The *County Comprehensive Development Master Plan* calls for the development of
area planning reports in order to assess planning-related issues and pursue the
implementation of County policies at a more localized level. The County also
conducts countywide studies and functional plans, such as the *South Miami-Dade
Watershed Planning Project Agriculture and Rural Area Study.*

Use of Consultants

Many of the more recent plans have been produced almost entirely in-house, with
the exception of hiring an outside transportation consultant. In some case, the
design team for a planning charrette has included a combination of County staff
and staff of an outside consulting firm. Earlier plans, such as the plan for

Downtown Kendall, utilized private planning and urban design consultants more extensively. In addition, staff of the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, which also has its own urban design studio, served as technical and design consultants for at least one charrette process in collaboration with an architectural firm and the County's Urban Design Center. Compared to other local planning departments, the County's staff includes a relatively large number of urban designers.

Public Outreach Mechanisms

The County has been using the charrette process as its preferred public outreach method since the late 1990s. Public outreach begins with the formation of a steering committee to establish issues. Sometime afterward, the charrette process takes place. The process is structured as a "design week," with the charrette conducted on a Saturday and a public event on the following Friday to present back to the community. For the Saturday event, tables are set up to accommodate groups of people to discuss neighborhood issues (usually about 10 to the table). Each table has a designer who assists with the discussion and records issues and visions. Each table presents its plan/vision in the afternoon. From that point, the designers assimilate and synthesize the plans developed at each table until each subject is considered feasible by a team of additional designers and department representatives that are present at the charrette.

Timetable

The County has conducted an average of three charrettes, and related charrette reports, per year since 1999.

Staff Resources

The Urban Design Center comprises a core group of urban designers responsible for working on Small Area Studies and developing the charrette reports, implementation and graphic zoning recommendations. The Community Planning Division staff consists of a Chief, an Urban Design Section Supervisor, 2-3 Principal Planners, 2 Senior Planners, a Graphic Designer, 2 Planning Technicians, a "Consultant" and administrative support. Numerous County departments provide liaisons to the charrette process.

II. PRODUCT

Standardization

The planning documents, called "charrette reports" address the following topics: demographics, land use, transportation, environmental issues, facilities and services, aesthetics, design, economic and social issues. Reports tend to follow a standard organizational structure consisting of sections entitled "Overview," "Vision," "Specific Recommendations," and "Implementation."

Graphics

Charrette reports are generally graphic-intensive, including maps, photos of the planning area and charrette process, an illustrative plan, sections and both hand-drawn and digital visualizations.

Text and Length of Document

Complete charrette reports range in length from 40 – 65 pages. For many of the plans completed, a 4-page executive summary for the charrette report with graphics, rather than the full-length document, is posted on the County's Community Planning web site.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

The Community Planning Division assigns planners to the Division's Area Planning Implementation Unit, which is responsible for developing strategies for implementing plan recommendations. If a new ordinance is necessary, the Division develops graphic regulating plans detailing land use density, building heights, street/block network, open space, minimum and maximum number of units per net acre, and mixed uses. Regulations develop also tend to include the illustrative plan that resulted from the planning process.

IV. FORM-BASED CODES

A form-based code was developed in conjunction with Downtown Kendall Master Plan in 1998. The code has served as a model for illustrating the successful use of form-based codes, in place of traditional zoning regulations, to guide the future development and urban design of an area

V.   LESSONS LEARNED

Consultant Observations

- The emphasis on in-house urban design capabilities gives County staff the ability to produce graphic-intensive plans with high-quality sketches and renderings of future development potential. In turn, these graphics can serve as marketing tools for the plan recommendations. The graphic-intensive executive summaries included on the County's web site serve as effective tool for such marketing efforts.

- The relatively small and well-defined scale of the projects being undertaken in the charrette report planning model seems appropriate to this process.

- Using the charrette as the "core" of the planning process, planners have been able to complete a large number of plans in remarkably short amounts of time.

- The charrette process requires a close collaboration between planners and urban designers, working together as a team. This collaboration, from project outset, allows the physical, social and economic issues to be addressed simultaneously and in conjunction with one another.

- The creation of an entity that can focus solely on plan implementation ensures that ideas expressed by citizens at the charrette are carried through.

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Contact:
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Other Sources: City of Minneapolis Planning Division web site
(www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/Planning); City of Minneapolis *Neighborhood Guide
for Developing Planning Documents*

I.   PROCESS

Overview

The existing small-area planning process has been in place since it was called for
in the 2000 Comprehensive Plan.

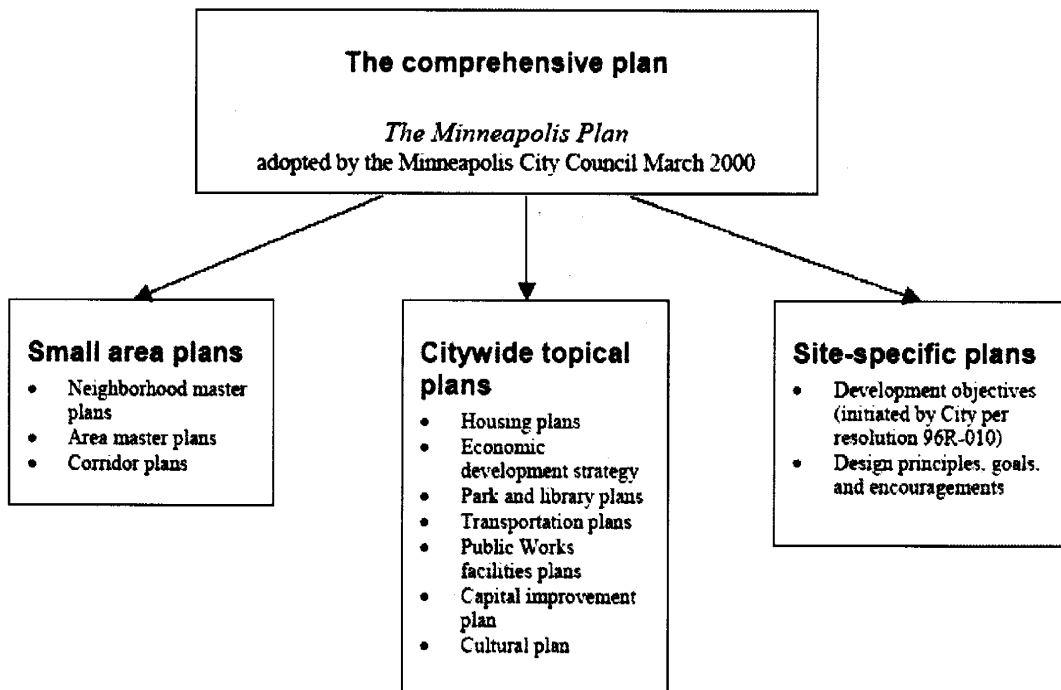### Relationship to Other Plans

In the City of Minneapolis, small-area plans include neighborhood master plans,
area master plans and corridor master plans. The City also does site-specific plans
for sites or relatively small areas with significant development issues or
opportunities as well as citywide topical plans (housing, economic development,
parks and libraries, transportation, public works facilities, capital improvement
plan and cultural plan).

How Plans are Initiated

Planning processes are not always initiated or coordinated by the city, but must be
approved by the City and Metropolitan Councils. The City's Neighborhood
Revitalization Program (NRP), a program that operates separately from the City's
Planning Division, provides grants to neighborhoods for a variety of neighborhood
improvements. In some cases, neighborhoods will choose to use their NRP money
for planning. The City must ultimately approve any plan produced by a
neighborhood group and expects the process and content of plans to conform with
general standards for all small-area plans. These processes and procedures are
outlined in the City's *Neighborhood Guide for Developing Planning Documents*.

Relationship to Comprehensive Plan

Small-area plans are meant to build upon, not replace or conflict with, the Comprehensive Plan in a finer level of detail and ultimately serve as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan. These plans typically outline a 15-25 year vision.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│            The comprehensive plan                │
│                                                  │
│              The Minneapolis Plan                │
│   adopted by the Minneapolis City Council March 2000 │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Small area plans
- Neighborhood master plans
- Area master plans
- Corridor plans

Citywide topical plans
- Housing plans
- Economic development strategy
- Park and library plans
- Transportation plans
- Public Works facilities plans
- Capital improvement plan
- Cultural plan

Site-specific plans
- Development objectives (initiated by City per resolution 96R-010)
- Design principles, goals, and encouragements

Use of Consultants

The City always uses consultants in some fashion, either to work on all aspects of a plan or on a specific topic.

Public Outreach Mechanisms

The standard outreach process includes at least three public meetings at the beginning, middle and end of the planning process. In addition, the City typically uses a steering committee in an advisory capacity to serve as a "sounding board" for planning issues. However, outreach approaches tend to vary somewhat, depending on the nature of the community. The City does not use the charrette process as a general practice, but some consultants have used a charrette-like approach for some plans.

Timetable

The planning process for small-area plans tends to last 18 months, on average. This timetable typically includes three months for initial preparations and hiring consultants, one year for planning, and an approval process that lasts up to 6 months and includes a 45-day review and comment period.

Approval Process

Entities that must approve a neighborhood plan include neighborhood the City Planning Commission, the Zoning and Planning Committee of the Council, the City Council and the Metropolitan Council.

Staff Resources

In general, planning processes are staffed by one project manager or, in some cases, two staff working together. Other staff are occasionally pulled in to participate in meetings.

II.   PRODUCT

Standardization

Some elements of plans are standardized; however, in general, the look, content and length of plans tend to vary depending on the consultant used and the available budget for the project. The City recently decided to standardize its future land use plans by requiring the use of a consistent legend for the maps in each plan. Each plan also includes development intensity maps that are intended to be consistent. Use of other graphics, such as sketches, tend to vary from plan to plan. The City has discussed standardizing more elements of plans, but to date has not taken steps in this direction.

In the *Neighborhood Guide for Developing Planning Documents,* the City lists the elements that every plan should include. These elements include:

Survey of existing conditions

- Purpose or reason for undertaking plan
- Definition of geographic area
- Vision statement
- History and background

- Past planning efforts in the study area
- Current comprehensive plan (The Minneapolis Plan) land use designations, policies, and implementation steps that apply to study area.
- Demographic survey of existing conditions including population, employment, and housing
- Current land uses and zoning in the study area

<u>Proposed changes</u>

- Technical analysis and proposed changes in the following categories:
- Future land use plan
- Urban character and design
- Economic development
- Housing
- Transportation
- Public realm
- Goals, objectives, and policies
- Implementation plan that includes proposed redevelopment sites, public improvements, timelines and costs

Graphics

Plans are generally graphic-intensive and full-color, including maps, photographs, assorted diagrams, renderings of future development potential, illustrative plans, sections, and 3D massing models. Plans vary in terms of the extent and character of the graphics, but all utilize a variety of graphics to some degree.

Text and Length of Document

A sampling of planning documents suggests that plans range from 60 pages to over 100 pages, depending on the nature of the project.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

The City is trying to make implementation a second step to every planning process. No formal structure exists for implementation; the process depends in part on the planning area being served. Typically the staff person who worked on the plan will take the lead on implementation, starting with the rezoning process (if needed) and also pushing for the inclusion of plan recommendations in Public Works funding and priorities.

FORM-BASED CODES

The City does not use form-based codes, although staff still talk about doing so from time to time. However, the City recently updated its zoning code, so there is not a lot of institutional will to make further changes. The City has encouraged the inclusion of additional design guidelines in plans that could help provide some of the design guidance that form-based codes would provide.

LESSONS LEARNED

Observations Provided During Interview

In general, staff seems content with the planning process as it is structured now. The current 18-month process is perceived as an appropriate amount of time for a small-area planning process. Small-area plans are viewed as important due to the need for detailed land use guidance in built-out communities with difficult transitions between commercial and residential uses.

NASHVILLE – DAVIDSON COUNTY, TN

Contact: N/A

Other Sources: Nashville Metro Planning Department web site (www.nashville.gov/mpc); *Community Planning in Nashville* fact sheet; Metro Planning Department *Neighborhood Guidebook: A Resource Guide for the Neighborhood District Overlay*; Metro Planning Department *Land Use Policy Application: Land Use Categories and How to Use Them*; Ruth Eckdish Knack, "One Step at a Time: UDOs in Nashville." *Planning Magazine* (January 2006)
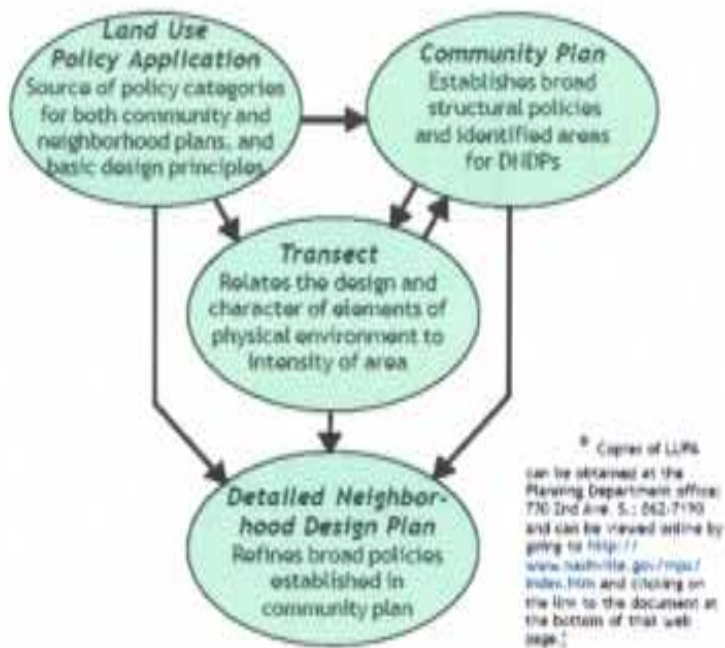

I.   PROCESS

Overview

The Nashville area is divided into 14 planning communities and develops Community Plans for each of the areas.

Community Plans include a Structure Plan, which consists of land use policies to be used as guidance. The land use policies are organized around the Community Transect, which consists of six Transect zones. Community Plans are updated approximately once every 5-7 years. Community Plans can lead to more detailed planning in Detailed Neighborhood Design Plans, which are supplements to and parts of, Community Plans that focus on smaller neighborhoods in a community requiring further study.

For neighborhoods that want their Detailed Neighborhood Design Plans to have stronger regulatory power, Urban Design Overlays serve to translate planning policy articulated in Detailed Neighborhood Design Plans into regulatory standards. Urban Design Overlays, which can be requested by a Council member, allow for "traditional neighborhood design" standards above and beyond base zoning. Developers can also apply for an Urban Design Overlay; in this case, the process follows the process for requesting a zoning change.

Land Use Policy Application
Source of policy categories for both community and neighborhood plans, and basic design principles

Community Plan
Establishes broad structural policies and identified areas for DHDPs

Transect
Relates the design and character of elements of physical environment to intensity of area

Detailed Neighborhood Design Plan
Refines broad policies established in community plan

* Copies of LUPA can be obtained at the Planning Department office: 730 2nd Ave. S.: 862-7190 and can be viewed online by going to http://www.nashville.gov/mpc/index.htm and clicking on the line to the document at the bottom of that web page.)

Relationship to Other Plans

The General Plan consists of multiple documents. *Concept 2010: A General Plan for Nashville and Davidson County* provides general goals and policies for a 20-YEAR planning horizon. Functional plans and community or subarea plans comprise the other documents. Functional plans address topics such as transportation, housing, economic development, historic preservation and land use policies.

How Plans are Initiated

The Metro Planning Department initiates plans, as required by the General Plan.

Use of Consultants

Plans are produced entirely in-house.

Public Outreach Mechanisms

Typical elements of the public outreach process include an open house kick-off meeting, one or more vision workshops, and workshops focused on specific areas as needed. The process culminates with one or more Structure Plan workshops that translate the community's vision into the into the official land use document that

guides future land use policy. Examples of planning processes for two communities are included below:
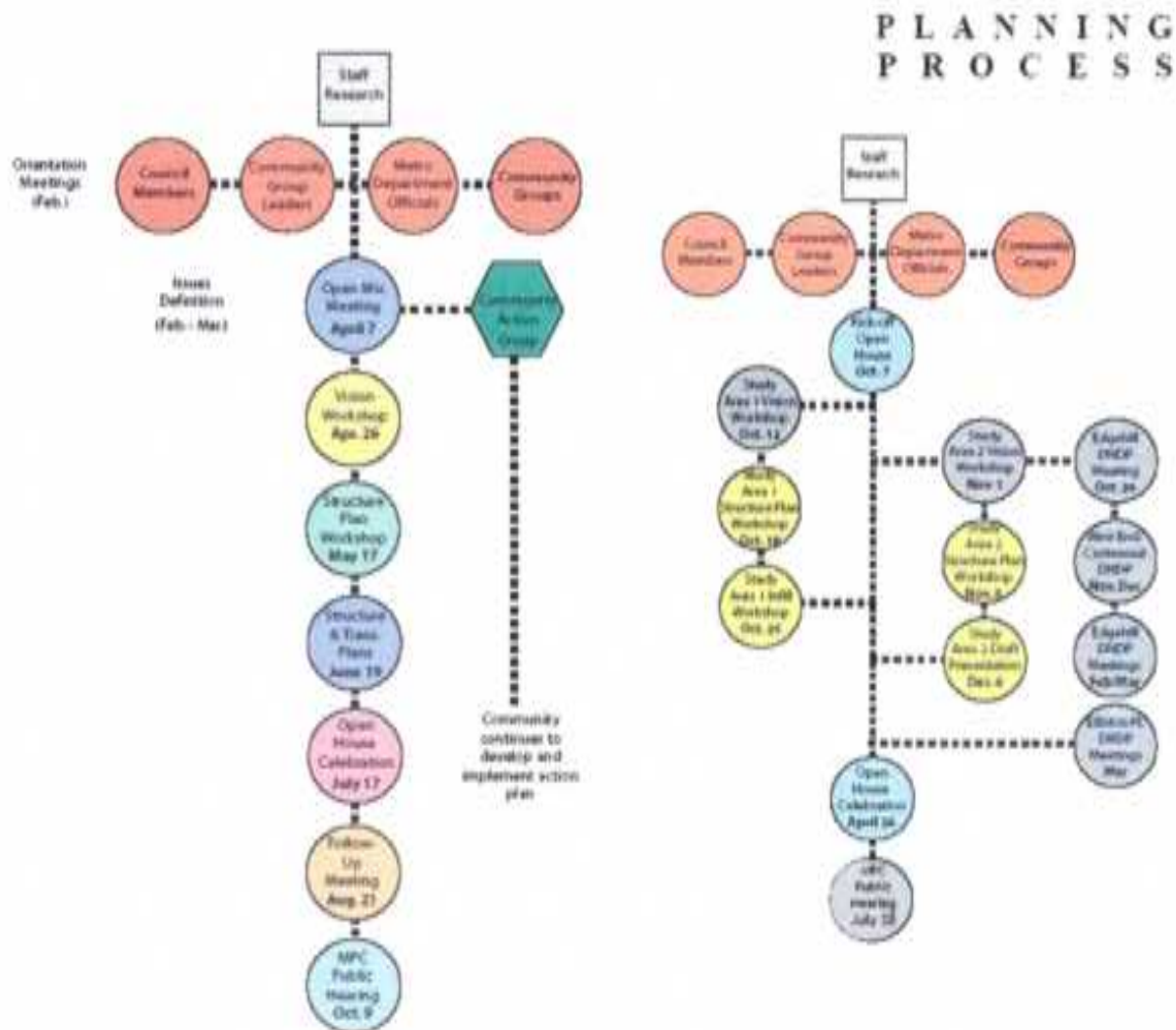
PLANNING PROCESS

PLANNING PROCESSES FROM TWO NASHVILLE COMMUNITIES

Approval Process

Community Plans and Detailed Neighborhood Design Plans are adopted by the Metropolitan Planning Commission after a public hearing.

Staff Resources

Design Studio includes four staff designers

II. PRODUCT

Standardization

Plans tend to follow a standard structure, with some variation between plans.

Graphics

Graphics consist primarily of maps, photographs and illustrative plans. Documents are published in full color.

Text and Length of Document

Documents range from 40-60 pages in length.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

Community Plans can be developed in further detail, first as a Detailed Neighborhood Plan and finally as an Urban Design Overlay, which is a regulatory document. If an Urban Design Overlay is developed, the design standards are attached to base zoning for the area.

IV. FORM-BASED CODES

As noted above, the Department has created a series of increasingly detailed plans that can culminate in an Urban Design Overlay. Urban Design Overlays can be requested by a Council member and allow for standards above and beyond base zoning. The overlays allow the Metro Planning Department to impose specific "traditional neighborhood design" standards at a level of detail and control beyond that of traditional base zoning. This approach gives the Department the ability to emphasize and dictate the form of future development without reforming the existing zoning code.

The Planning Department also uses the Transect in the planning process as a tool to explain conditions of the built environment. The Transect was adopted to help

communities identify the fundamental characteristics that they want in their communities. It categorizes the character of the City and County in seven zones:

- **T1 Natural**: Publicly or privately owned land intended to remain as open space for preservation and recreation needs.
- **T2 Rural**: Privately owned areas intended and designed to remain rural.
- **T3 Suburban**: Concentrations of low-intensity, single-use, isolated pods of development, characterized by residential use with limited small-scale commercial uses typically found at the edges of neighborhoods along major roads.
- **T4 Neighborhood**: A mixture of single-family, town houses, condominiums, apartments, and accessory units of medium density (three to 20 units per acre); civic and religious buildings; and small commercial uses.
- **T5 Center**: Areas with an urban intensity and mixture of uses, with commercial uses serving multiple neighborhoods
- **T6 Core**: The historic downtown and other intense mixed use areas. Nashville's core includes downtown and part of midtown.
- **District**: An area that does not lend itself to mixed use. Examples: industrial districts, airports, universities.
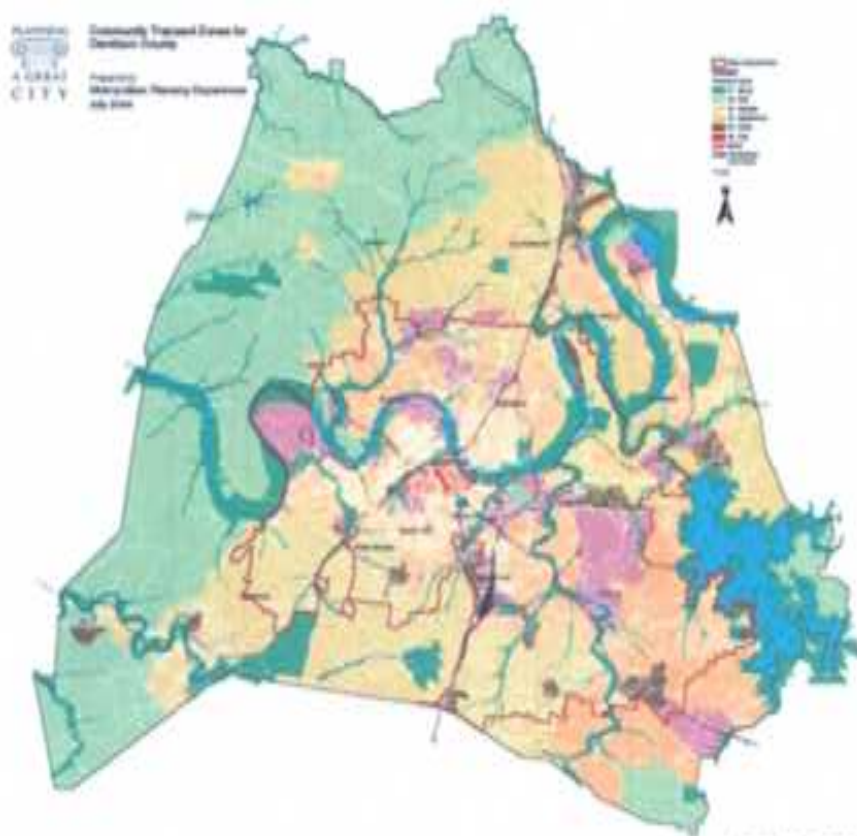
TRANSECT MAP

As an additional educational tool, The Department published a *Neighborhood Guidebook* that provides an overview of the basic design principles of neighborhoods and the Department's values related to responsible planning. Neighborhood components addressed include creating community, neighborhood structure, core, center, general, edge, civic and open spaces, streets and circulation, building types and the public realm.

V. LESSONS LEARNED

Consultant Observations

- Urban Design Overlays have the potential to give "teeth" to a plan by further developing plan recommendations in a format that provides a greater level of design detail and is backed by regulatory power. This approach provides a direct bridge between plans and zoning.

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MD

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Other Sources: Consultant experience with planning process in Prince George's County.

I. PROCESS

Overview

Plans used to take 3-5 years to complete. The process was first reduced to 2 years, primarily due to the use of consultants and the charrette process. The Council then asked for the process to be streamlined further to 18 months. In practice, the 18-month timetable has been difficult to achieve, and also does not take into account the pre-planning and post-planning phases of work. In reality, the process includes 3-6 months for pre-planning, depending on the size of the planning area, and up to 6 months of work related to plan approval. Only one plan has managed to achieve the 18-month timetable, and that was possible because the issues were pre-defined by a Council member.

The planning process begins with a team charter, which identifies the purpose of the plan, the human and financial resources that are needed, the timeframe, and the methodology. A project schedule (in Microsoft Project software) and draft table of contents for the plan report are also required prior to plan initiation. The schedule is then submitted once a month to the Division Chief.

Pre-planning activities, completed prior to formal initiation by the Council, include data gathering, documentation of existing conditions, a SWOT analysis of key issues, and a stakeholder analysis. Following initiation, the public outreach and plan preparation begin.

During the past seven years, the County has emphasized the completion of small-area / sector plans because plans for smaller areas are more development-oriented.. Attention is now being focused on the "subregion" plans for larger areas, which are now falling out-of-date.

Relationship to Other Plans

All plans build on and apply the principles and goals included in the 2002 Approved General Plan. Plans are also informed by Coutywide functional plans, such as the Countywide Green Infrastructure Plan and the forthcoming Transportation Master Plan. A bi-annual growth policy update assesses progress in meeting overall objectives.

How Plans are Initiated

Plans are initiated by the County Council.

Staff Resources

In general, one project manager and 1-2 additional planners are assigned to a project. In addition, a resource team of staff from the various functional areas is assembled at the outset of a project to provide feedback throughout the planning process and to participate in all public meetings. The staff resources are defined during the pre-planning phase; at this time, the team is formulated and a "team charter is written. The latter document identifies the team members and resources needed to complete the plan.

Use of Consultants

Consultants are used for all planning projects and are involved at all stages of the process, from pre-planning to completion of the planning document.

Public Outreach Mechanisms

The County generally uses the charrette process as its outreach method. Many planning processes include a "Pre-Charrette" meeting to introduce the project and solicit initial feedback on community issues. Based on the issues identified, preliminary concepts are refined to guide the brainstorming process during a 3-5 days Charrette event that includes at least one public event and meetings with key stakeholders. The results of the Charrette are further refined and presented back to

the community at a Post-Charrette event, approximately a month after the Charrette.

The County previously used a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) approach. This approach was dissolved because the general public tended to feel alienated by the product produced by these groups, which was perceived as not reflecting the public's vision and led to contentious public hearings. As a result, the County now seeks to engage the entire public without elevating some members of the community over others. Exceptions to this approach have included an area such as Takoma/Langley, in which many residents are transient and there is a need to focus on the people who live and work there. In such cases, the CAC (now called the "community team" is useful as a process for creating community leaders.

Timetable

Although the streamlined process is intended to take 18 months, in reality plans take closer to two years, depending on the size of the area. Small-area plans can take closer to 18 months, while plans for larger areas require a longer period of time to complete. It is estimated that these larger plans (i.e., Master Plans and Subregion Plans) can require a 24-month to 36-month timeframe.

Timetables that consider the plan completed at the time of approval do not take into account the post-planning work that is required to address Council comments and finalize the plan. The process truly ends when the plan is transmitted to the Clerk of the Court.

Approval Process

Unlike many other communities, the Council is involved throughout the planning process, rather than just at the end of the process, and planners are constantly interfacing with Council members. Another difference is that the Planning Board and Council hold a joint public hearing during the approval process.

II.   PRODUCT

Standardization

Plans are supposed to be standardized in a format that mimics the format and elements of the General Plan. Plans are divided into sections that address the vision, "development pattern element," community character and functional

elements such as environmental infrastructure, transportation, public facilities, and parks and recreation. For each section of the plan, text addresses the Vision, Goals, Policies and Strategies in succession as well as essential background information on the issue being addressed. In practice, there is a tension between the standardized format for plans and a perception that plan formats need to be unique and creative.

Graphics

A full range of color graphics are included, comprising maps, sections, illustrative plans, photographs and visualizations.

Text and Length of Document

Documents range from approximately 60 pages to over 100 pages, depending on the planning area.

III.　IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation is addressed in the final section of each planning document. Topics include phasing of recommendations, best practices for achieving recommendations, and potential funding sources. Most plans also include a matrix detailing agency responsibilities for implementing specific recommendations. The lead planners during the planning process also take on responsibility for guiding the implementation process. However, the level of involvement in implementation tends to depend on the interest and skills of the individual staff person.

IV.　FORM-BASED CODES

The County has incorporated a form-based approach in at least three of its sector plans, although the resulting design specifications served as guidelines rather than as a regulatory tool. The problem has been a lack of good zoning that is applicable to and can implement the recommendations. The jury is still out on form-based codes versus Euclidean zoning, but form-based codes can potentially streamline the planning process.

The County is currently exploring the use of form-based codes to regulate mixed-use areas, in place of existing zoning.

V.   LESSONS LEARNED

Observations Provided During Interview

- Streamlining:

    o   The biggest problem with streamlining is project management and "people issues," not the planning issues. Training is important for routine aspects of the planning process so that staff are free to be creative for other tasks. Staff currently spend too much time doing more bureaucratic work that can be standardized.

    o   A department needs strong leadership, needs to invest in staff training and needs to provide incentives for performance.

    o   It is not possible to streamline a community planning division without also looking at the entire department in which the division is housed.

    o   It is still possible to compromise the process by making it too fast and by cutting corners.

    o   The County could be more efficient in every facet of the planning process.

- Public Participation:

    o   The charrette process tends to work better for smaller areas than for larger areas. A workshop format makes more sense for larger areas. The charrette process is effective in that it captures people and holds them, rather than having people coming in and out of the process constantly.

    o   Public participation can protract the planning process unless one keeps the process moving forward; it's not appropriate to keep revisiting issues.

    o   Public participation is the creative aspect of each planning process and needs to be tailored to the community and the audience.

    o   Stakeholder analysis—determining whom to talk to and why, and then what to do with the information—is a critical part of the planning process.

    o   The challenge is figuring out how to get widespread community buy-in without going through an extended process.

- The phase during which the planning process gets bogged down in terms of time is during the writing of the plan, between the end of public participation and the start of the Planning Board phase.

50

- It is important to go into a project thinking about the product and tailoring work to fit the product. This type of thinking is not necessarily consistent with the mindset of planners, who are process-oriented. Should start writing the plan at the beginning of a project because everything that is done ultimately has a place in the plan.

- Data, such as demographic information, is often collected without a real understanding of how it will go into the plan.

- The County should not be relying on consultants to the extent it does currently. Staff should be better trained at this point. Consultants should be providing technical expertise that is not available, but should not be writing the plan. Consultants should, however, write smaller reports at intervals during the planning process; these products can be incorporated into the plans.

- The look of the plan is not as important as how it is written. Words are almost obsolete the moment you write them. There is a need to clearly articulate the recommendations in straightforward, readable language. Plans should be no more than 50 pages; substantial amounts of supporting material is not necessary.

- Small-area plans are more effective when "the world changes too quickly." There are many more issues in large area plans, and the planning work that has been done becomes obsolete more quickly.

- It should be possible to communicate the key aspects of plans in a single poster.

- A standardized approach is necessary to make the more routine and bureaucratic tasks and processes as efficient as possible, in order to allow time to be creative at other stages in the process.

- Preparing maps differently in each plan eats up lots of time and money. It is therefore important to standardize maps for all plans.

managers to serve as liaisons between the City and neigborhoods. Most of the staff hired were not traditional planners, but rather had a background in community organizing. While these staff provided some liaison to city technical staff, there were too many plans going on at once for technical staff (i.e., the planning department) to get actively involved in each plan.

Use of Consultants

Each of the 38 neighborhoods hired its own planning consultant to assist with plans. Consultants were used in different ways, depending on the resources available in the community (such as volunteer planners).

Public Outreach Mechanisms

Aside from the requirement that neighborhoods develop a detailed outreach strategy that reached all segments of the community, neighborhoods were free to develop their own outreach mechanisms. These mechanisms ranged from more traditional meetings to more creative strategies, such as giving kids cameras to photograph neighborhood issues, going door-to-door to businesses in order to reach those who would not show up for meetings, and holding Saturday "festivals" that focused on planning. Outreach mechanisms tended to embrace the philosphies of "going where people are" and making the process "fun rather than painful." At the end of the planning process, a community "validation" (up or down vote) was required before a plan could be approved during a Saturday open house event.

Timetable

All 38 plans were conducted simultaneously between 1995 and 1999. Plans were required to be completed within a 4-year period, and most took 2-4 years to complete.

Approval Process

A system was established for review of plans and approval by the City Council. City staff worked with each neighborhood to craft goals and policies to be adopted by and into the Comprehensive Plan. Upon approval, City Council issued two resolutions, one thanking those who participated in the plans and one establishing a work program item in a citywide matrix. The latter resolution served as the primary means of implementing plan recommendations.

II. PRODUCT

Standardization

Plans took on different formats and different structures, depending on the neighborhood's preferred approach. Topics addressed varied from plan to plan, depending on the issues important to each neighborhood. Issues considered in the plans extended beyond the traditional focus on land use and growth to address other issues deemed important by the neighborhood; such topics included: public safety, education, human services, transportation, open space, community building, jobs and economic development, and arts and culture.

The one element common to all plans was the inclusion of an implementation matrix that outlined recommendations in a consistent format.

Graphics

Graphics varied widely depending on the neighborhood and consultant that prepared the plan. Most plans include maps and photographs, while some plans included other graphics such as 3-D renderings.

Text and Length of Document

The length of neighborhood plans varied widely depending on the neighborhood and the consultant that prepared the plan. Some plans are as short as 25 pages, others as long as 104 pages.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

The Department of Neighborhoods keeps track of implementation items. For implementation purposes, the City was divided into six sectors. City departments were asked to decentralize their operations and formalize the sector boundaries. Since a new mayor took office during this time, there was an emphasis on "quick win" measures to show progress.

Neighborhood leaders were asked to prioritize their recommendations. Neighborhoods were then given "early implementation funds" (approximately $50,000) to use for implementing high-priority items. For three years following the adoption of the plans, City staff served as Neighborhood Sector Managers,"

whose job was to track projects and apply pressure on City departments to work on neighborhood plan recommendations. This approach helped to implement projects and raise the profile of the plan recommendations. The City also established Neighborhood Service Centers in each neighborhood to provide a range of city services and information to residents and businesses. In addition, the identification of three common themes in the neighborhood plans—new and improved library facilities, community centers and parks—led to a series of bond measures, approved by ballot measure, that focused on each of these needs that were implemented citywide.

The Department of Neighborhoods made use of two tools to keep residents informed of the status of implementation. First, the Department web site includes a searchable database with an interactive map that enables residents to track the status of plan implementation. A search for a specific neighborhood yields an online version of a neighborhood plan's implementation matrix. For each item in the matrix, the matrix provides an explanation of the current status of implementation and provides contact information for the entity or individual responsible for implementing a particular project. Second, the Department created a two-page fact sheet summarizes the key elements of the neighborhood plan and activities relevant to the plan that occurred during the past calendar year.

While most agree that the initial 3 years of implementation were generally successful, subsequent implementation appears to have been less structured and have achieved more mixed results. When the current Mayor, Greg Nickels, took office in 2002, the Director of the Department of Neighborhoods was replaced and some, but not all, of the institutions and resources established for implementation were scaled back, in part due to the economic downturn at the time and reductions in the budget for the Department of Neighborhoods. In September 2007, the City's Office of the Auditor published a report on neighborhood plan implementation that, while noting the successes of the program, identified a need to revisit the neighborhood plan implementation process. Specific issues included the loss and turnover of staff and resources, a shift to a more "top-down" City approach, the lack of a consistent template or framework for implementation given the diversity of the planning documents and inconsistent reporting and information, and increasing citizen "burnout" and cynicism. In addition, the report identified specific, tangible areas in which results were could be improved. For the full report, see the Office of the Auditor's web site at http://www.seattle.gov/audit/2007.htm.

IV.   FORM-BASED CODES

The City does not use form-based codes. The commercial code was recently revised, but zoning is still use-based.

V.   LESSONS LEARNED

These observations include those provided by both individuals interviewed, as well as some of the findings of the September 2007 City Auditor's report.

General:

- When dealing with large numbers of volunteers, technical assistance is needed at the front end of the planning process.
- It was important to have a Comprehensive Plan in place when using the matching fund model.

Positive:

- The neighborhood planning process was a successful organizing tool. A large number of people participated in the process. More people in the city are now savvy about planning and better appreciate the tradeoffs required as part of the decision-making process.
- The neighborhood planning approach was a successful community empowerment tool that made residents less suspicious of the City. The process benefits when the community itself has to make the case for plan recommendations and can address issues that are important to the community.
- The advantage of developing so many plans simultaneously was that neighborhoods could be in touch with one another, learn from each other and avoid overlaps (in the case of adjacent neighborhoods).
- The neighborhood-based process minimizes decisions that need to be made at a citywide level and instead leaves some decisions (i.e., whether or not to allow accessory apartments) up to individual neighborhoods.
- The process and structure resulted in substantial cross-department collaboration and coordination.

Negative:

- The planning process needs to be guided by more structure and managed expectations that include an understanding of how plans will be used and the tradeoffs that will be required.
- Undertake a more manageable number of plans
- Take less time per plan
- The planning content of the plans could have been better. Recommendations were sometimes of the "wish list" variety, rather than tied to specific problems, and City technical staff were not able to offer their expertise and institutional knowledge due to the number of plans undertaken simultaneously.
- The lack of a consistent framework and structure for plans makes implementation more difficult.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S MASTER PLAN
CONTENT, PROCESS AND OUTREACH:
RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO BEST INFORM
FORM-BASED DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

If Montgomery County is to pursue its stated goal of design excellence it must combine good urban design and planning with appropriate standards and regulations for implementation.

Like many affluent jurisdictions across the country in close proximity to major metropolitan areas, Montgomery County is experiencing growing pains with its planning and development process. The system was satisfactory when large scale green-field growth was the dominant form of development. The County has matured and its policies and processes must adapt to deal with now predominant urban infill redevelopment.

As the nation becomes more urban (with more mixed-use and infill redevelopment) citizens expect and demand greater community involvement. Yet, despite more intensive public involvement, community visioning, and review processes, planning efforts consistently result in buildings and places that fail to live up to the aspirations of citizens *or* planners.

The main cause is the set of implementing regulations and standards, developed with an inward-looking technician's perspective, tools that don't relate to a community's vision and too often contradict it. (This is true not only of narrow land use designations, but more significantly, of the categorization and standards for building "city streets" that are based on high-speed rural highways.) Less directly at fault is the planning process and paradigm, alternating between scales that are too large and vague or too specific to be relevant, which is not understandable to any but the most hardened specialists.

Form-based coding and *Public Participation Charrettes* are not panaceas. Talented planners are required to keep the big picture in mind - not examine projects in a vacuum - and administer regulations professionally and fairly.

This paper will spell out a series of steps and procedures for a planning process designed to complement a form-based approach to development regulation. These recommendations assume an adopted set of Form-Based Development Regulations that will be available for application and calibration to individual Master Plans. This paper will refer to that set of urban-appropriate tools as the *Urban Centers Zoning Toolkit.*

CURRENT SYSTEM AND PROCESS

An overview of the current Master Planning Process in Montgomery County reveals several problem characteristics. The intent is far reaching but does not address several fundamental planning issues that citizens may assume are included. The lengthy timeline, while allowing considerable input, has several (unintended) consequences. The transparency of the process also needs to be improved.

"Master Plans" in Montgomery County are defined as:
> ...comprehensive plans for the future development of generally one or more planning areas within the County...generally address such community concerns as housing, storm water management, historic preservation and pedestrian and trail systems, as well as such environmental factors as air, water and noise pollution, and preservation of agricultural lands. Plans also include maps outlining recommended land uses, zoning, transportation facilities (mass transit, roads, and other facilities), and recommended general locations for such public facilities as schools, parks, libraries, and fire and police stations.

(The Master Planning Process in Montgomery County, Maryland, MNCPPC, September 1997)

While this describes many of the factors that need to be addressed in thinking about future growth, there is no reference to the anticipated or desired community character—the preferred physical manifestation—of all the work mentioned.

The first difficulty with the current master plan process is the two and a half year time it takes from inception to any potential implementation. Although it is shorter than the previous version, in two and a half years market conditions can alter in a community or physical parameters can change and nullify some of the recommendations being proposed. The energy and enthusiasm of the community cannot be sustained without clear evidence of progress and there is frequently no excitement when the process is finally complete.

The six month timeline for Phase 1 is not unexpected given all the individual groups that are interviewed separately (many of them will have duplicate concerns or expectations) instead of inviting them all to participate in a hands-on open Charrette (as more fully described later in this paper).

An alternative timeline, based on a *Public-Participation Charrette* approach could be: two months spent on assembling base information and pre-charrette activities such as public and stakeholder outreach; a week-long Public-Participation Charrette with two months of follow-on work (writing the Draft Master Plan); and then presentation to the various political bodies with two months for comments. This can then be followed by four to six months of Final Master Plan and implementation drafting and documentation for a total of one year.

Secondly, the current planning process includes what could be described as a "public process" as far as meeting minimum legal requirements: there are provisions for "Community Information Gathering", multiple public hearings, and Citizen/Master Plan Advisory Committees/Groups involving and informing a diverse set of stakeholders. However, in terms of true public participation and involvement, there is much to be desired. The interested parties are segregated from one another, so there is no holistic discussion about

the future of the community. These 'stakeholders' do not actually participate in the real design, planning or growth decisions of their community.

Master Plan Advisory Groups can be extremely helpful if they are empowered to make choices for the larger community. However they are no substitute for direct community discourse. In many jurisdictions they are strictly political bodies with no real decision making capabilities. When the affected communities/sites are quite large, advisory groups may be the only practical approach to coordinate the larger overall vision. More focused community planning (definable areas or neighborhoods of a specific character), as is often done where place-making is the goal, is still better suited to direct citizen participation.

There is an obvious need for the legislative bodies to understand the Master Planning process and its results, but are the County Executive and City Council qualified (trained as planners or urban designers) to make modifications to the design features of the master plan?

In the formulation of a Community Vision, political representatives are best treated no differently than other stakeholders such as community residents, or business owners, or technical experts (like engineers). Presentations should be made to those Boards and Commissions but, to gain and maintain the public trust, any input or changes should be made in the same public arena (Charrette) rather than private workshop sessions. In the current process, any community/citizen input can be nullified behind closed doors without any explanation necessary as to why the change was made. This leads to disgruntled neighbors as there is no sense that they have any real participation in their own destiny.

A healthy public process should provide ample opportunity to discuss all potential issues, problems, and opportunities on how new development affects community values and the quality of life. Hands-on public workshops and interaction between citizens facilitates the identification and resolution of issues. Allowing the highest possible level of community involvement will help to achieve the consensus needed to implement the master plan.

This concept of openness—or the problems caused by a lack thereof—also applies to County departments and jurisdictions. It is important to foster good communication between all parties involved in the design and review process from the regional to the parcel scale. Currently, each issue or subject within a Master Plan is treated separately and does not involve all the County specialists. The MNCPPC planners are the leaders of the team, however all other planning departments should be fully included throughout the planning process:

- Planning Director,
- Community Based Planning,
- Community Outreach & Media Relations,
- Countywide Planning (Environmental Planning, Historic Preservation, Transportation),
- Development Review,
- Management Services,
- Legal,
- Research & Technology Center, and
- Strategic Planning.

Also, in a master planning process as comprehensive as the County's, there are very important issues under the jurisdiction of other agencies that need to be addressed from the beginning of the process:

- Environmental Protection Department (storm-water management);
- Watershed Management Division;
- Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation;
- Maryland State Highway Administration (traffic operations); and
- Montgomery County Public Schools.

Depending on the nature of the area being studied, it will likely be necessary to also involve representatives from additional County departments such as Public Libraries, Fire/Rescue Services, Recreation, Economic Development, Housing and Community Affairs, Housing Opportunities, Permitting Services, Regional Services Centers, and Zoning and Administrative Hearing. Quite simply, any group or agency that will be involved in the implementation of the final plan should be included in the process.

Similarly, since technical terminology can be confusing to lay people, there needs to be clarity in the different parts of the development and review process. The term "master plan" is often applied to large projects that are actually under Site Plan Review rather than being part of the County growth management process and the General Plan. The new manual of Development Review Procedures is extremely helpful in streamlining the application steps for individual parcels/projects and a similar document would be helpful for the Master Plan process.

As the County moves toward form-based regulations, it is important that the new standards relate directly to the community's vision for itself. The master planning process needs to move from a topical/issue oriented policy report to a physical, place-based plan. How do you get there?

Proposed System and Process

Each Master Plan should be treated as an educational process—both for the community and the planning team—as well as a roadmap for future development.

The core of Community Visioning is *place-making*. What citizens conceive of and focus on when they envision the future of their community is: *what it will look like* and *how they want it to work* (in other words, its form & function). The current planning and zoning approach (and its associated implementation tools) relate to form and function in only the most indirect manner. Thus the resulting built form is almost accidental—an unintended consequence—and uses are detailed to a degree that smothers vitality.

Community Planning sessions need to focus on the form and functions that will make up the public realm. Fortunately, citizens are ahead of the regulations and ordinances and the reality of our community planning process has already moved toward a *form* and *function* visioning focus. As the concept of form is easier (and more logical) to understand, citizen-based plans and aspirations are primarily about place-making – not the umpteen use categories or the statistically pleasant disposition of *Floor Area Ratios* across the county.

The charrette process is basically broken into three phases: the pre-charrette organization and administration; the intensive multi-day public participation charrette; and the follow-up. There is some overlap between each phase, such as project administration and management, and some tasks may be repeated later during the process, such as meetings with key stakeholders and technical specialists. (Depending on the specific local context, some tasks may carry greater or lesser importance, and others might be omitted altogether.)

Pre-Charrette Work

Kick-Off Meeting
At the start of the project, the planning team meets to review base information needs, strategize on the public participation process, identify stakeholders, and develop a detailed schedule for the charrette process and Master Plan production.

Create Public Awareness
Public outreach is fundamental to the entire master planning process. Flyers, posters, postcards, mailers, and press releases can be distributed to the media, neighborhood associations, merchant and business associations, and civic groups, among others, as a normal part of the process.

Each Master Plan should have its own website, accessed through the MNCPPC site, for maximum public exposure and comment, with regular updates, including: current schedule, event photographs, illustrations, maps, and answers to frequently asked questions.

In some circumstances, such as planning for a geographically large or heavily populated area, a Master Plan Advisory Committee should be considered, and should be formed as early as possible. Potential members are key individuals, local leaders, community associations, business organizations, and other stakeholders who will represent the various interests that will be essential in the charrette planning and execution process.

Review Relevant Information
Members of the planning team should review relevant information and background data at the beginning of the project in order to familiarize themselves with the specific characteristics of the plan area.

DOCUMENTS & DATA

In order for the charrette to produce a Master Plan appropriately detailed to be implemented via a form-based regulatory system, significant information is needed early in the process. This information should be (carefully) reviewed during the preparation phase and used as reference throughout the master planning process. Familiarity with opportunities and constraints—whether physical, economic, or political—is fundamental to leading a full public participation charrette. The following list is most efficiently and accurately compiled by Staff before the project kick-off.

Scale Base Maps
To be used in the public participation sessions as well as by the design/master planning team. Maps should be available in digital (AutoCAD or Arc Map GIS) and hard copy formats. Preferable scale of printed base maps is 1:100 or 1:200. At a minimum, the base maps should indicate the following existing conditions of the master plan area and surrounding context, including: any topography, hydrology, vegetation, property lines and easements, existing building footprints (and heights if available), roadways, sidewalks and any street trees, driveways and paved areas, curb cuts and alleys, street lighting and traffic control devices, utilities, street signage, and current parking—as well as archeological sites. Physical accuracy, not important in typical GIS documentation, is central to the physical Master Planning process. The design/planning process may involve site specific conflict resolutions and configurations especially relative to the street-space. This information, essentially a 'buildable-area' plan, is the foundation for that problem-solving ability.

GIS Data (or equivalent)
Tax lots with land use, zoning, lot size, building square footage and lot coverage.

Aerial Photographs
Preferably in color, in plan view and at the largest possible scale.

Relevant Existing Regulations and Plans
comprehensive plans, existing zoning and land use, Chesapeake Bay ordinances, etc. which may constrain (or influence) development or redevelopment in the area, and relevant published comments of local government officials and administrators regarding such constraints.

Historic Information
Historic documentation of the physical form of the community and site (such as original Sanborn maps, photographs, etc.) provide valuable 'lessons' from a past where common-sense solutions were the only viable choice for our development patterns.

Any Other Relevant Data
Including pertinent portions of previous local zoning approvals, covenants, and previous site studies, traffic studies, infrastructure studies, market feasibility studies, etc.

ANALYSIS

The charrette master planning effort includes significant analysis on a variety of topics/issues, some of which requires physically studying the plan area. These studies provide a "reality check" for the design and planning team. Some basic focus topics are described below. All are important for making the master plan as place-specific as possible.

Urban Framework and Open Space Analysis
The existing urban and surrounding site form—the network of streets, blocks and lots, and building forms—of the master plan area is examined, including a review of the existing land uses, density, open spaces, and urban design elements in the study area, with particular focus on the way people actually use the areas at different times and different days of the week. The analysis should be performed with the livability needs of the community and surrounding neighborhoods in mind.

Sustainability
Low-impact design should be understood as an integral part of this analysis (rather than a standalone issue.) The layout of streets, blocks, mix of uses, improved connections to transit, etc. can improve the overall sustainability—rather than solely building-specific—through the emphasis on compact urban design and connectivity. (The Environmental Building News released a report on this topic in Fall 2007, concluding that the location of a building saves considerably more energy than does just making the building "green.") A basic analysis of environmental conditions present throughout the study area should also be completed to explore opportunities to incorporate innovative urban storm-water management techniques on a Master Plan-area (rather than parcel) basis and lessen the overall impact of runoff on surrounding receiving waters.

Transportation Analysis
This analysis examines mobility from the perspective of all modes of travel: walking, biking, using transit, and driving. Speeds and volumes on thoroughfares in and around the plan area are studied to better understand the community character related to transportation. Pedestrian and vehicular connections, as well as parking availability and locations, are analyzed. Long-term transit plans will be reviewed and evaluated and solutions from comparable plan areas and peer communities are considered.

Economic and Market Analysis
It is important for the County to have an un-biased/balanced review of market conditions in a master plan area (rather than market studies produced at the behest of individual developers for their specific projects.) This comprehensive analysis should identify a range of redevelopment and infill development strategies and include local market research as well as an analysis of emerging national retail and redevelopment trends. In addition, analysis of this type explores where businesses and properties either thrive or decline, and the physical and economic factors which effect both. The research focuses on the present and future market as well as the identification of economic and market issues affecting the neighborhoods adjacent to the study area. Particularly for master plan areas where significant redevelopment is anticipated, the analysis should include regional and local demographics, housing markets, employment and consumer spending to produce a comprehensive assessment of conditions and trends.

This analysis typically serves to guide any economic and market incentives under consideration to encourage revitalization and mixed-use development and takes into account the existence of multiple landowners and/or leaseholders and the potential financial incentives for encouraging such stakeholders to participate in redevelopment.
In conjunction with the urban design and land use analysis, the economic analysis will identify parcels for redevelopment.

Stakeholder Interviews and Meetings
Meetings with additional staff, County officials, civic associations, chamber of commerce, property owners, community groups, and local stakeholders are important for gathering information for better understanding of the unique qualities, character, opportunities, and implementation strategies. The process will lead to specific discussions relating to future development such as: appropriate street types, road connections, public gathering spaces, building form controls, and other urban design strategies that create vital centers and livable neighborhoods.

Ultimately, stakeholder involvement and ownership will make the adoption and implementation of the master plan more feasible. As citizens see their ideas incorporated into the plan, they recognize their concerns are being addressed and take ownership in the design. Participants often see their desires for their community are remarkably similar to other local residents. The charrette will focus on gathering the community and engaging them to discuss overall master plan goals, objectives, and strategies.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION CHARRETTES

Public-Participation Charrettes have unequaled effectiveness in identifying and focusing the public will. A true *Public-Participation Charrette* is a multi-day event, not less than 5 to 7 days. Although the exact sequence of events, activities and work products may vary depending on the planning team and the characteristics of the specific Master Plan area, several aspects remain constant. Working on-site for a concentrated period of time improves public participation and involvement, providing multiple opportunities for public input, particularly compared to the more conventional "public meeting/hearing" process which puts citizens in a position of reacting to proposed plans. It also enables the planning team quick feedback from stakeholders and technical specialists as they draft the Master Plan.

The format is designed to encourage participants to identify their goals for the community in a meaningful and constructive manner. Active participation is critical to the project's success. In addition, the charrette format allows for maximum interaction between the team, residents, stakeholders, and other county agencies. The planning team will build on the resulting Community Vision as the foundation for the final Master Plan (and its related form-based development regulations.)

The following describes a generalized schedule for a Public-Participation planning and design charrette.

Kick-off Event
The charrette typically begins on a Friday evening with a public presentation that describes the elements of traditional town and city design—providing "food for thought"—as well as introduces the overall charrette process, followed by a general Q & A discussion with the audience.

Hands-on Design Session
The following morning, citizens gather around tables in small groups (guided by a facilitator) to identify important issues. Group issues are drawn or written onto large scale base maps of the area. At the conclusion of this session, a citizen-spokesperson from each table presents their table's findings before the larger group. These presentations identify common goals, as well as provide an opportunity for discussion of particular issues. To boost participation, this session should ideally be held at a location within, or very close to, the planning area. School facilities and hotel meeting rooms are common venues.

Open Design Studio
During the following week, the team sets up an on-site design studio in the study area, preferably in a space that is publicly accessible, such as a vacant local storefront. During the week, information gathered at the hands-on session is analyzed and the planning team begins to formulate initial concepts for the master plan. The team will digest what it has learned, reconciling it with the technical information, and preparing plans and renderings that illustrate the ideas articulated in the public workshop portion of the charrette, in order to make illustrative plans of development scenarios that will demonstrate the possibilities for future development. Community residents, elected officials, local stakeholders, and business people are encouraged to stop in throughout the week to discuss ideas and to check on the status of the project. The hands-on nature of the studio facilitates the identification and

resolution of issues. Because the open design studio allows the highest possible level of community involvement, it helps to achieve the consensus needed for implementation.

While working in the on-site design studio, issues/questions frequently arise that require additional information. A series of one-on-one or small group meetings can be scheduled with involved government agencies (Public Works Department, Police, Fire and Rescue, state highways, parks, etc.), local merchants, key property owners, real estate brokers, and representatives from neighborhood groups, and other key stakeholders. These meetings assist in the team's continued understanding of the physical, market, regulatory, and organizational forces that will shape the Master Plan. Equally important is the placement of the technicians in the role of a) entering into the plans at their outset and b) serving the citizens' vision with their expertise. No longer are is their perspective narrow and technical, rather it is the perspective of the overall vision and how the particular expertise can serve the community as a whole.

As the master plan begins to take shape, the economic members of the planning team can use economic and demographic trends to enumerate preliminary supportable goals for the integration of housing, retail and employment uses. This is an interactive process with the planning team and local stakeholders, who can provide sample program and development pro forma to determine project feasibility and requirements for success. The program/plan goals can be refined based on present and future development potential and community input, with an end result of feasible programs and achievable development strategies that are appropriate to the location, address neighborhood concerns, and support the community vision.

Work-in-Progress Presentation
At the end of the charrette week, the planning team makes a public presentation of the work to date, including initial sketches illustrating a refined conceptual vision for the area, "before" and "after" sketches and/or photo simulations showing possible development scenarios, as well as summaries of initial analysis. A summary of action strategies may also be presented, highlighting opportunities for redevelopment and detailing the roles and actions necessary for plan implementation.

For further information on charrettes in general and public participation planning, see The National Charrette Institute website: www.charretteinstitute.org.

CHARRETTE PRODUCTS

Change is difficult – the charrette process is intended to help citizens visualize change before it happens. Therefore, the products created during the charrette should target that goal. A variety of document and illustration techniques are important because the average citizen is not comfortable reading plans and (technical) code documents. Although the media may vary with different planning and design teams, at a minimum, the following basic items should be produced. The size and complexity of the master plan area should also be taken into consideration, particularly in determining the number of illustrations required to convey all of the major design/vision concepts.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrative Master Plans
The conceptual vision developed during the charrette will be refined to best illustrate the community's long-term vision for the study area. Illustrative plans of prototype scenarios will demonstrate the possibilities for future development. The final product will be an illustrative master plan that shows one way in which development could occur in the master plan area. A single illustrative master plan may be sufficient for a small planning area; however, for larger areas with diverse physical character, it may be appropriate to produce a detailed illustrative plan drawing for each focus area or designated redevelopment district. (For very large master plan areas, a selection of prototypical focus areas—such as a corridor, a dead-mall redevelopment, a TOD station area, etc—may be the most efficient.) These illustrative plans should be rendered in color and show blocks, streets, hypothetical buildings (roof plans), conceptual community buildings, community spaces (greens, squares, and parks) and other special features. (Typical scale: 1" = 200') These are integral to the master plan and key for communicating with the public and for making the connection between the vision and the new land development regulations.

Visualizations
These illustrations are created to provide "before and after" images for each focus area, to illustrate the vision and show how the new code would be reflected in future development. These images are typically very compelling, whether hand rendered or created via computer simulation, and assist the community in envisioning "change over time" in the plan area. The views for these images should be chosen for maximum effect. Street Views, Bird's Eye views, and even three dimensional computer models that can place the citizen in, and enable their understanding of, the scheme are very valuable.

REPORTS

Charrette Report
Immediately following the charrette, a document may be produced to provide a concise summary of the charrette work, including: a description of the public process, the illustrative plans, the computer images, a summary of the market analysis, and basic recommendations for implementation. This report is a standalone document, but may also be used as an executive summary or introduction for the full Master Plan Report. It must be written in plain English and readily accessible to the average citizen.

Master Plan Report
The Master Plan Report will fully summarize the planning analysis, community process, traditional urban design features of the plan, hypothetical build-out plan, and the phased physical implementation strategy. The transportation, economic, engineering, and environmental studies should also be included as conceptual chapters, with more detailed & technical information in an appendix. Typically, the plan will recommend mechanisms to enhance connectivity throughout the study area and will identify specific opportunities to enhance pedestrian circulation, transit, bike, and non-automobile accessibility. The economic development component of the report will feature the market analysis and strategies for implementation, including potential funding sources and relevant public-private partnership structures to achieve community goals. The appropriate roles for key participants will be identified. The Master Plan report should also include a section to explain how it relates (directly) to the County's new form-based development regulations.

The report will be created for the use of the public, developers, property owners, and County staff to ensure a coordinated effort in the continued redevelopment of the Master Plan area.

CODE DOCUMENTS

The Regulating Plan(s)
A Regulating Plan is the technical site-plan (most comparable to a zoning map) that relates the vision master plan to the land development regulations, setting site specific parameters for building form. These plans are place specific, providing information for both private development and public sector involvement and investment in the public realm. They are an integral part of form-based development regulations, with blocks, lots, building form designations, special build-to lines, streets (centerlines, curb faces, parking), streetlights, street tree alignments (and species recommendations), public spaces (greens, squares, and parks) and other special features. A detailed regulating plan should be produced for each master plan area or redevelopment district.

FORM-BASED CODE ELEMENTS
Montgomery County's *Urban Centers Zoning Toolkit*[1]

Urban Space Standards and *Street Specifications*
Standards for the placement of street trees and other amenities or appurtenances (e.g. street lights, benches, signs) on or near each property in order to ensure the coherence and beauty of the streetscape, along with general specifications for public spaces. These also provide *typical street details in section and plan view including pavement width, curb radii, parking, sidewalks, dooryards, tree planting areas, etc.* that balance pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile rights-of-way. This work does not deal with the three dimensional engineering of the street and utilities but provides for the necessary multi-modal configuration and sets the framework for further engineering (either by the County or State or a consultant urban transportation engineer with extensive experience in urban situations who verifies all specifications adhere to acceptable engineering standards).

Building Form Standards
The Planning team will designate and tailor a series of Building Form Standards appropriate to the specific Master Plan. These standards regulate buildings in three dimensions and establish use parameters. Their primary goal is to shape good street-space with the building frontages. The treatment at the rear of the lot and private open space is considered secondarily. They ensure that buildings behave constructively toward the Street and toward their neighboring properties. The standards aim for the minimum level of government regulation necessary to meet the goal of good street-space and a healthy urban environment. The Building Form Standards will be keyed to specific locations in the Regulating Plan. The final selection of standards will be determined during the Master Plan processes.).

Architectural Standards
The Planning team will designate and tailor a series of architectural standards appropriate to the specific Master Plan. (They will not replace design standards that may already exist for

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[1] These recommendations assume an adopted set of Form-Based Development Regulations that will be available for application and calibration to individual Master Plans. This paper will refer to that set of urban-appropriate tools as the *Urban Centers Zoning Toolkit*.

designated historic districts unless desired by the County.) Their goal is a coherent and quality building character that is complementary to local traditions. The Architectural Standards govern a building's exterior elements and set the parameters for allowable materials, configurations, and construction techniques.

CONCLUSION

Development regulations based first on *form* and secondarily on *function* relate directly to the task of fostering and protecting community vision and aspirations. Current best practice for form-based development regulation combines clear standards with a short approval process.

Focusing and recording the political will of the community is the foundation for any public policy and especially for development regulation. Citizens will support an abbreviated approval process only when they understand and support the Master Plan and can see that the regulations are in direct support of it. Form-Based development regulations not rooted in such community support will prove as problematic as the current conventional system.

The proposed approach represents an evolution and adaptation to the new circumstance facing Montgomery County in the Twenty First Century. It is a planning process that is heavily front-loaded, but clearly more efficient, and fair, in the long run. The resulting clarity will pay great dividends for the political and economic health of the community.

Appendix 6: Concepts for Enhancing Public Outreach through Technology

Evolving technologies can play a large role in improving outreach for and participation in master plans. The following are specific suggestions towards these ends.

DEVELOPING A WEB PAGE FOR EACH MASTER PLAN

The Department should develop a web page for each master plan. The web page should have two primary functions:

1) It should serve as a primary information dissemination and discussion tool. Each master plan has its own "blog" to which staff posts material no less than every couple of days. Posts can include draft staff reports (which readers can comment on) and other major deliverables, but should also include "small" pieces on information to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the people who are following the planning effort, such as:

   - an article in the newspaper about an issue that is relevant to the plan; or

   - a quick question, such as "what kind of store would you really like to see locate in the plan area?"

2) Repository of plan information: Even beyond the public hearing, the plan's web page can serve as the library and record of all materials that led up to the adoption of the plan. In this way, the web page can help when, years later, there are questions about the intent of the plan. The web page of an adopted plan should organize this material in a logical way, so people can follow the plan process from inception to adoption.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Technology will place an increasingly important role in the community outreach process. In order to conduct more effective and efficient outreach, technology can plan a role in several ways. Some possibilities are detailed below.

- *Scenario-building for residents:* The logical next step would be to give residents tools to build and test their own scenarios. This could be a GIS or 3-D tool, or something more complicated like a rudimentary SimCity model.

- *Information for the public to use to make recommendations*: The typical master plan process does not empower residents (and others) with the same tools as planners; as a result, residents can only react to planner proposals. Residents, especially in Montgomery County, as sophisticated in the use of data and technology. The planning process could include packaging all relevant data (perhaps in a web-based GIS tool) for resident use.

- *User-generated content:* Residents are experts about their communities; we now have tools to collect that knowledge in interesting ways.
   - For example, we could ask people what they think are the worst pedestrian problems in their neighborhood. With Google maps, for example, people can

individually attach digital photos and text to a location that is shown on a map that anyone can see. Someone might send in a photo of a gap in the sidewalk network; someone else might post a photo of a bus stop that is typically surrounded by muddy dirt.

- o Wikipedia is another model of user-generated content. Staff could develop several categories of content and let the public go on from there. For example, one category might be history, where people could post photos, videos, written memories, and other information about the history of the area that is being planned.
- o YouTube is a third model of user-generated content. People can communicate some planning issues via video more effectively than other methods.

- *Surveys and voting tools:* Technology is readily available to conduct surveys or "take the pulse" of a group of people. These tools can be used on the web, or as part of a public meeting. One benefit of using these tools in a public meeting is that people who may not be comfortable speaking in public have a means of communicating their ideas in a public worksession that can be dominated by more forceful personalities. Another benefit is that it allows planners to collect the thoughts of a large number of individuals quickly. A well-known process that uses this idea: visual preference surveys.

- *Transformed public hearings:* Technology allows continuous, rather than intermittent, participation in the planning process. People can post their comments about a plan remotely or in person at a Planning Board meeting. As a result, the role and character of the public hearing could and should change (the traditional public hearing is a very inefficient method of exposing the planning board to public opinions.) There is potential for radical transformation, but moderate steps might include:
  - o Videocasting oral testimony and posting all written testimony (creating an online public record of all testimony);
  - o Allowing, as part of the record, online public comments/responses to that testimony;
  - o Allowing people to submit video testimony; and
  - o Setting up remote locations, via videoconferencing, so that people can testify live in Rockville (for example) in front of a Planning Board sitting in Silver Spring.

Appendix 7: Information Counter Public Outreach

The Information Counter is the public face of the Montgomery County Planning Department. It provides access to written and graphic materials on the County's comprehensive and master plans as well as information of the development process that implements those plans. It is used by the knowledgeable — developers' representatives looking for detailed information on a preliminary plan of subdivision or site plan — and the neophyte — citizens seeking information on a vacant parcel at the end of their street. Like other elements of the planning process, the Counter's role in informing the public about master plans is evolving with the introduction of advanced technologies.

As more information becomes available online and as more residents use broadband connections to the Internet, it has become easier for local residents to research master plans and learn other relevant information without visiting or calling counter staff. Over the past several years, Counter staff report a decrease in walk-in traffic and a change in the profile of the typical visitor. Prospective home buyers fulfilling their responsibility to familiarize themselves with the relevant master plan are able to do so online. Some more detailed questions are answered over the phone by Counter staff; others are referred to the appropriate Community-Based Planner.

The most common visitor works for a local developer and is seeking specific information or graphics directly related to a pending or proposed development plan. The Counter keeps master copies of the County's large-scale zoning sheets, for example, which are necessary to complete the public record for various development review projects. Similarly, the Counter maintains a file of record plats, which provide an official depiction of a lot's size, shape and dimensions.

Local residents visiting the counter generally are doing so to undertake detailed research into development that has occurred or is proposed for their neighborhood. While basic information on development approvals is now available through the Department's web site, details such as the findings of transportation or environmental analysis can be seen only by reviewing the public file on a preliminary or site plan. These visits can be challenging; often, visitors have minimal information on the area or property they want to learn more about. In general, though, non-professional visitors are interested in the size of a property, the zone in which it's located and the uses allowable in it. In many cases, this basic information leads to other, more detailed questions and leads to discussions of master plans.

Sometimes, residents may not be able to get online to do initial research and visit the Counter instead. In these circumstances, information counter staff (and, when necessary, other professional staff) must help residents figure out what they're seeking and then provide the answers. In the case of master plan review, visitors may know no more than the fact that they have an obligation to review the plan prior to closing the transaction. These visits often become impromptu "primers" on the planning process, during which Counter and professional staff review the basic elements of master plans, then apply those elements to the particular property in which the visitor is interested.

It may be appropriate to consider revising the real estate contract's requirement for master plan review. The intent of the requirement appears to be that prospective buyers understand the broad outlines of comprehensive planning for the neighborhood in which they're interested. Buyers seem to interpret this as meaning that the plan will contain specific information about the property they're evaluating. It is more

likely that a buyer should know about roadway widening, commercial development, park acquisition and rezoning requests. A simplistic requirement to review the master plan may not get at those issues. Were buyers required to familiarize themselves with "development activity" in the immediate area of the property under evaluation, Counter and professional staff could more easily highlight specific projects or activities, then talk more generally about master plans and longer range activities.

Master plans, in sum, play an important, but not always direct role in the operation of the Information Counter; a plan isn't always the impetus for a resident's in person or online review of the Department's information resources, but in many cases, the plan becomes a way to illuminate the answers to basic questions about the use of land in the county. The availability of online resources may make basic planning research easier, but the Information Counter will continue to function as a liaison between individuals seeking planning and development information and the Department's resources.

Appendix 8: New Content in Master Plans – Economic Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Montgomery County's *Centers and Boulevards* provided a framework for the future of planning in the County. That framework recognized that the County's future growth would be increasingly infill in nature. The shift to more infill and redevelopment requires changes to the process and content of Montgomery County's master plans. One specific change recommended by the *Centers and Boulevards* report was that master plans should include economic assessment of redevelopment potential in plans to assure economic feasibility.

Montgomery County Planning is not a planning and redevelopment agency; however, the land use planning performed by the department must be grounded in the economic realities of redevelopment. The economic assessments performed by the County during the master plan process must clarify action plans and implementation strategies by providing "reality checks" on the land use planning process.

Through the master plan re-assessment, Montgomery County Planning Department is attempting to develop a nimble and predictable model for land use master plans.[1] The economic assessment should remain relevant throughout the period of the master plan's effectiveness. As such, it is incumbent that the Planning Department develops content that is grounded in economics, but which is not a "market analysis" or a "feasibility analysis."[2]

FRAMEWORK

The master plan process should include a multi-tiered economic assessment, the findings of which should be attached to the master plan staff report before transmittal to the Planning Board. In each master planning process, the economic assessment will consist of three "levels."

- Level One: Identification of Opportunities, Obstacles, Catalysts, and Risk Factors
- Level Two: Fatal Flaw Analysis
- Lev el Three: Financial Feasibility

The first two levels will be required in each economic assessment; the "level three" analysis will only be required under certain, defined circumstances. Additionally, the multi-tiered economic assessment should be revisited annually to identify new and obsolete opportunities and obstacles, as well as unidentified catalysts and risk factors.

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[1] It is expected that these land use master plans will remain in place for 10 to 15 years between periodic updates.

[2] A *market analysis* is a quantitative and qualitative analysis of whether (and at what price point) there is demand for a particular product in a particular location given existing supply. A *feasibility analysis* serves as a quantitative *pro forma* analysis of the economic feasibility of developing a particular use for which a prior determination of market demand has already occurred. A *feasibility analysis* is highly sensitive to current costs (land costs, construction costs) and to income assumptions that are specific to a particular product for which there is demand (e.g. a sports bar or a gas station).

<u>Level One: Identification of Opportunities, Obstacles, Catalysts, and Risk Factors</u>

The Level One analysis will serve to identify extant opportunities and obstacles affecting the master plan, as well as catalysts and risk factors that could affect the master plan area in the future. The Level One analysis will be included in the staff draft report for each master plan.

Opportunities

"Opportunities" are existing conditions that may positively impact future potential. It is important to identify opportunities in order to ensure that the master plan effectively leverages existing opportunities.

Examples of opportunities include: parcels that are the appropriate size and shape for future assemblage and redevelopment, the presence of aging commercial centers, or pending injections of federal or state dollars for new infrastructure projects.

Opportunities should be identified prior to planning work. These issues can be identified in an existing conditions report.

Obstacles

"Obstacles" are existing situations that may negatively impact the future potential of the master plan area. It is important to identify obstacles in order to make certain that the master plan vision is attainable and that, whenever possible, the potential impact of the obstacles is minimized.

Examples of obstacles include: recent development that is inconsistent with the master plan vision, existence of nearby alternatives that are less expensive, and parcels that are not the appropriate size and shape for redevelopment.

Catalysts

"Catalysts" are possible actions that can be taken to accelerate the realization of master plan objectives (actions that "prime the pump"). Catalysts often enhance the value or impact of identified opportunities or diminish the risk or negative impact of identified obstacles. Catalysts are particularly important to identify in areas with poor market fundamentals, where unique opportunities exist, or where significant countywide social or economic objectives militate for the acceleration of development/redevelopment. Catalysts can essentially single-handedly rejuvenate an areas; the Verizon Center in Washington, D.C. offers an example of such a project (or some better county example).

Examples of catalysts include: land parcel rationalization and assembly, public-private real estate development projects, and accelerated funding or creative financing for key infrastructure improvements/expansions.

Risk Factors

"Risk factors" are external negative forces that could prevent the realization of master plan objectives. It is important that master plans identify reasonably forseeable events that could significantly affect development/redevelopment in the area so that a master plan vision can be created which minimizes the potential risks posed.

Examples of risk factors include foreseeable actions by other Montgomery County agencies, the State of Maryland, or the federal government. For example, a master plan vision for a pedestrian friendly, mixed-use town center would be incompatible with certain other uses; a rumor that the Department of Defense

planned to relocate highly sensitive work to a secure campus adjacent to the town center location should be identified as a risk factor in the master plan.

Level Two: Fatal Flaw Analysis

A critical stage of the economic assessment is the fatal flaw analysis. The fatal flaw analysis ensures that the concept plan vision does not depict levels of density or patterns of development that are clearly unattainable in the master plan area. Examples of the issues to be addressed in the fatal flaw analysis are below.

Is the master plan consistent with other County plans, policies, and forecasts?

Before sending the preliminary draft plan of the master plan to the Planning Board, a determination should be made that the future development of the master plan area is consistent[3] with the Planning Department's vision for the County as a whole. This might involve checking the document against the General Plan, any countywide functional plans or policies, MWCOG forecasts, as well as ongoing or concurrent efforts of the Planning Department.[4]

Is the density envisioned within the zoning envelope when all relevant regulations (e.g. parking minimums, height restrictions, maximum FAR) have been considered?

A threshold inquiry must include an examination of whether it is possible under current zoning regulations to provide required parking for all uses depicted in the master plan at locations within the master plan area.

Does the master plan presuppose the redevelopment of any structures that are too new (or too old) to be redeveloped?

Where redevelopment is planned, a threshold determination must be made as to whether the properties to be redeveloped are still within their useful lives (e.g. not fully depreciated) or alternatively whether the historic nature of the structure renders redevelopment unlikely.

What is the ratio of assessed value of land to improvement value?

Redevelopment is likely to occur only when the properties in question are not achieving "highest and best use." Redevelopment is unlikely where improvements are more valuable than the underlying land.[5]

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[3] A determination of consistency must go beyond merely determining that the projected job or population growth for the master plan area is less than is projected for Montgomery County as a whole. Master plans must not depict a rate of capture that is unrealistic. For example, a master plan which includes sufficient office space to meet all of the County's projected growth in office employment over the next 20 years must address why this is reasonable or must alter the master plan to reflect a more realistic vision.

[4] One way of checking for consistency might involve establishing teams of "readers" to review the master plan against one document with which they have a particular knowledge.

[5] However, where multiple sites are to be assembled for a large development project, the "assemblage value" may tip the scales in favor of redevelopment. For example, redevelopment of a parcel might be deemed unlikely where that value of the improvements exceeds the value of the underlying land. However, the value of the land might be increased substantially when it is valued as a part of a larger development site. This consideration may become particularly salient where the master plan depicts uses that require large tracts of land (conversion of a mall to a town center, as proposed at White Flint).

What is the ratio of existing square feet to build-out square feet?

A modest increase in density may not be enough incentive for redevelopment.[6] Detailed analysis may be appropriate where the redevelopment is critical to the master plan vision, where timely action to take advantage of opportunities is necessary, or where the timeframe is accelerated for any other reason.

What is the ratio of land value to the cost of demolition/relocation?

Where the master plan vision involves substantial redevelopment, planners should seek to establish whether the cost associated with demolition or relocation of existing structures, households, and businesses is extraordinary when compared to the value of the land.

What is the ratio of land value to the cost of developing the structured parking depicted in the master plan?

Where the master plan vision depends heavily upon structured parking, it may be necessary to examine the cost of developing structured parking in relation to the value of the underlying land. Structured parking will not be developed without subsidy in locations where the value of land is not sufficient to support the cost of the parking.

Level Three: Financial Feasibility Analysis

Where catalyst real estate projects have been identified, or where the implementation timeline is otherwise accelerated, the financial feasibility of the project should be determined. The determination of financial feasibility may either stand alone or serve as a part of a larger redevelopment plan.[7] As a result of this re-assessment process the Planning Department should establish criteria and a process for determination that a level three analysis is required.

The most appropriate method for testing financial feasibility is a residual land value analysis.[8] Residual land value analysis seeks to determine if the value of the improvements is greater than the costs of construction. The difference between the value and the costs is called the "land residual." If the land residual is positive, then the project has passed the first threshold test for feasibility. The second test of feasibility is then whether the land residual is at least as great as the market value of the underlying land. A project that passes both of these tests may be considered feasible. A project that passes only the first test is feasible only if the feasibility gap can be closed (e.g. by public financing for the development of structured parking, long-term ground leases, or other creative financing strategies).

Financial feasibility is time dependent; it is tied to the current cost of developing products for which there is current market demand; consequently, it is not an analysis that will add value to a master plan in the absence of a need for short-term action to develop specific uses.

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[6] Similarly, a property that has remained vacant, blighted, or otherwise underutilized for some time may require greater increases density in order to spur redevelopment.

[7] A redevelopment plan would include identification of specific sites for acquisition, market feasibility analysis for potential uses, as well as a financial feasibility analysis.

[8] Other methods may also be appropriate (e.g. return-on-investment analysis).

Appendix 9: New Content in Master Plans – Planning for Healthy Communities

The topics listed below are prerequisites and credits taken from the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) for Neighborhood Development Rating System, a pilot document produced by the U.S. Green Building Council in partnership with the Congress for New Urbanism and the Natural Resources Defense Council. LEED for Neighborhood Development is part of the LEED Green Building Rating System framework. This particular rating system integrates principles of smart growth, urbanism, and green building to create standards for assessing and rewarding environmentally-superior development practices and neighborhood design.

LEED for Neighborhood Development is divided into three main subject categories: Smart Location & Linkage, Neighborhood Pattern & Design, and Green Construction & Technology. Each of these three categories includes prerequisites, which project teams must be able to achieve in order to be eligible for certification, and credits, which project teams attempt in order to accumulate points towards certification. For planning purposes, Montgomery County may want to focus more on the Smart Location & Linkage and Neighborhood Pattern & Design categories, and less on the Green Construction & Technology category. As such, the prerequisites and credits listed below are pulled from these first two subject categories.

The prerequisites and credits below may present opportunities for Montgomery County to incorporate walkability and accessibility into master plans, helping to create healthy, livable communities through quality design. Most of these items below relate directly or indirectly to walkability and accessibility, which staff views as proxies for public health. The topics below merely present examples and are not exhaustive; Montgomery County may wish to pick and choose from the list below when incorporating design elements into master plans. The LEED for Neighborhood Developing rating system provides just one starting point for a way to think about designing for healthy communities, and there may be other rating systems to consider in the future as well.

SMART LOCATION & LINKAGE

Smart Location: encourage development within and near existing communities or public transportation infrastructure. Reduce vehicle trips and miles traveled and support walking as a transportation choice.

Brownfields Redevelopment: encourage the reuse of land by developing sites where development is complicated by environmental contamination, reducing pressure on undeveloped land.

Reduced Automobile Dependence: encourage development in locations that exhibit superior performance in providing transportation choices or otherwise reducing motor vehicle use.

Bicycle Network: to promote bicycling and transportation efficiency.

School Proximity: promote public health through physical activity by facilitating walking to school. Promote community interaction and engagement.

NEIGHBORHOOD PATTERN & DESIGN

Open Community: promote communities that are physically connected to each other. Foster community and connectedness beyond the development.

Compact Development: conserve land. Promote livability, transportation efficiency, and walkability.

Diversity of Uses: promote community livability, transportation efficiency, and walkability.

Walkable Streets: provide appealing and comfortable pedestrian street environments in order to promote pedestrian activity. Promote public health though increased physical activity.

Street Network: encourage the design of projects that incorporate high levels of internal connectivity and the location of projects in existing communities in order to conserve land, promote multimodal transportation and promote public health through increased physical activity.

Transportation Demand Management: reduce energy consumption and pollution from motor vehicles by encouraging use of public transit.

Access to Surrounding Vicinity: provide direct and safe connections, for pedestrians and bicyclists as well as drivers, to local destinations and neighborhood centers. Promote public health by facilitating walking and bicycling.

Access to Public Spaces (also, Access to Active Spaces): to provide a variety of open spaces close to work and home to encourage walking, physical activity and time spent outdoors.

Local Food Production: promote community-based and local food production to minimize the environmental impacts from transporting food long distances and increase direct access to fresh foods.