



March 13, 2008

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Glenn Kreger, Acting Chief *GK*  
Community-Based Planning Division

Khalid Afzal, Team Leader *KA*  
Georgia Avenue Planning Team

**FROM:** Frederick Vernon Boyd, Community Planner (301.495.4654) *FVB*  
Georgia Avenue Planning Team

**SUBJECT:** Limited Amendment to the 1990 Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity

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**RECOMMENDATION:** Approval of staff recommendations and set public hearing date.

The attached paper offers analysis, land use and zoning recommendations for a Limited Amendment to the 1990 Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity. It has been prepared in response to a concern by the County Council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee that the master plan process is more appropriate than the zoning text amendment process to achieve desired land use goals and objectives.

The study area for the amendment is located at the northern edge of the Wheaton CBD Sector Plan area. It consists of properties on the north side of Blueridge Avenue, between Georgia Avenue and Elkin Street, and a vacant parcel located immediately north of the Blueridge Avenue properties. Three properties, totaling approximately 7.6 acres, are addressed. The Blueridge Avenue properties are owned by Avalon Bay Communities and the Weinberg family. The vacant parcel is owned by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA).

The staff recommends mixed-use development for the Avalon Bay properties under the CBD-1 Zone; retention of the existing office uses in the C-O Zone for the Weinberg property; and future reevaluation of the WMATA property as part of the upcoming Sector Plan Amendment for the Wheaton Central Business District.

The table below shows recommendations for each of the properties in the study area:

| Property and Size       | Existing Zone | Proposed Zone |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Avalon Bay (3.65 acres) | C-O Zone      | CBD-1         |
| Weinberg (0.13 acres)   | C-O           | C-O           |
| WMATA (3.8 acres)       | R-90/TDR      | R-90/TDR      |

Planning Department staff has met with representatives of Avalon Bay and the Weinberg family and with the Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee, the Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee, and the Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board. Staff has also contacted representatives of community groups active in the neighborhoods nearest the Central Business District.

For this Limited Amendment, the Department is proposing to eliminate the preparation of a Staff Draft plan. If the Planning Board agrees with the staff recommendations proposed herein, the staff recommends approval to prepare and release a Public Hearing Draft of this Limited Amendment for a Planning Board Public Hearing on May 8. A worksession would follow the public hearing. The Department's objective is to transmit a Planning Board Draft of the Limited Amendment to the County Executive and County Council in the first half of June.

FVB:ha: g:/boyd/cbd amendment cover and  
g:/boyd/cbd amendment text

Attachment

# *Staff Recommendations*

*Limited Amendment to the  
1990 Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central  
Business District and Vicinity*



Montgomery County Planning Department  
March 2008

## Introduction

This Limited Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity evaluates and makes land use and zoning recommendations for a portion of the sector plan area. It also recommends adjustments to the boundaries for the Central Business District (CBD) to accommodate its zoning recommendations.

## The Study Area

The Study Area for this Amendment is located at the northern edge of the Wheaton Central Business District Sector Plan area. It consists of three sets of properties: Parcel C and Lots 5, 6, and 7 of the Villa Verde subdivision, all of which are owned by Avalon Bay Communities; Lot 8 of Villa Verde, owned by the Weinberg family; and Parcel 920, an unsubdivided and largely vacant property owned by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority that is immediately to the north of Parcel C. The three sets of properties total approximately 7.6 acres. Figures 1 and 2 show the Sector Plan area and the Study Area for this Limited Amendment.

The Avalon Bay and Weinberg properties comprise the entire frontage of Blueridge Avenue between Georgia Avenue on the west and Elkin Street on the east. The WMATA property fronts on Georgia Avenue. The Blueridge block currently includes four office buildings, from one to seven stories in height, and a single, unoccupied one-family house. The office buildings occupy Parcel C, and Lots 5, 6, and 8. The unoccupied house is on Lot 7. The WMATA parcel is vacant, with an access point for Metro operations in the southwest corner of the property.

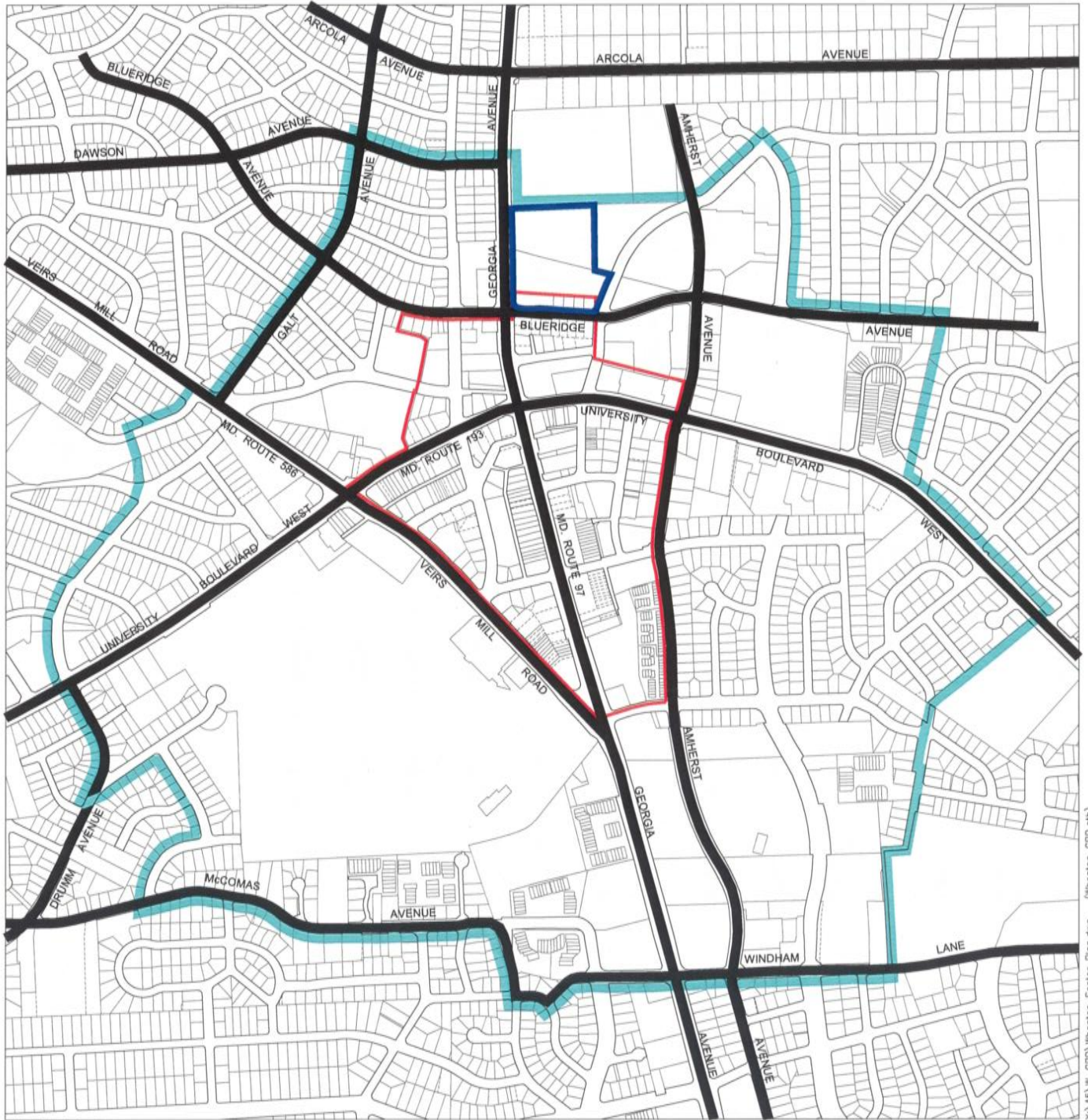
Lots 5, 6, 7 and 8, as well as a portion of Parcel C, are now classified in the Wheaton Retail Preservation Overlay Zone with an underlying C-O (Commercial Office) Zone. The remainder of Parcel C is only in the C-O Zone. The WMATA property is in the R-90/TDR Zone, with a Sector Plan recommendation of nine units to the acre. The Central Business District boundary divides Parcel C, with the buildings along Blueridge Avenue located inside the Central Business District, and the parking lot associated with the buildings outside the CBD. Lots 5, 6, 7 and 8 are inside the CBD.



The defining physical feature of the study area is the pronounced west to east slope along Blueridge Avenue. The intersection of Blueridge Avenue and Elkin Street is about 33 feet lower than the intersection of Georgia and Blueridge Avenues. The easternmost part of the study area, along the eastern property lines of Parcel 920 and Parcel C, is wooded. A stormwater management facility that serves Parcel C's parking lot is located in this area.

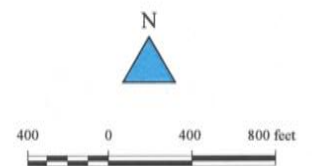
# VICINITY MAP

FIGURE 1



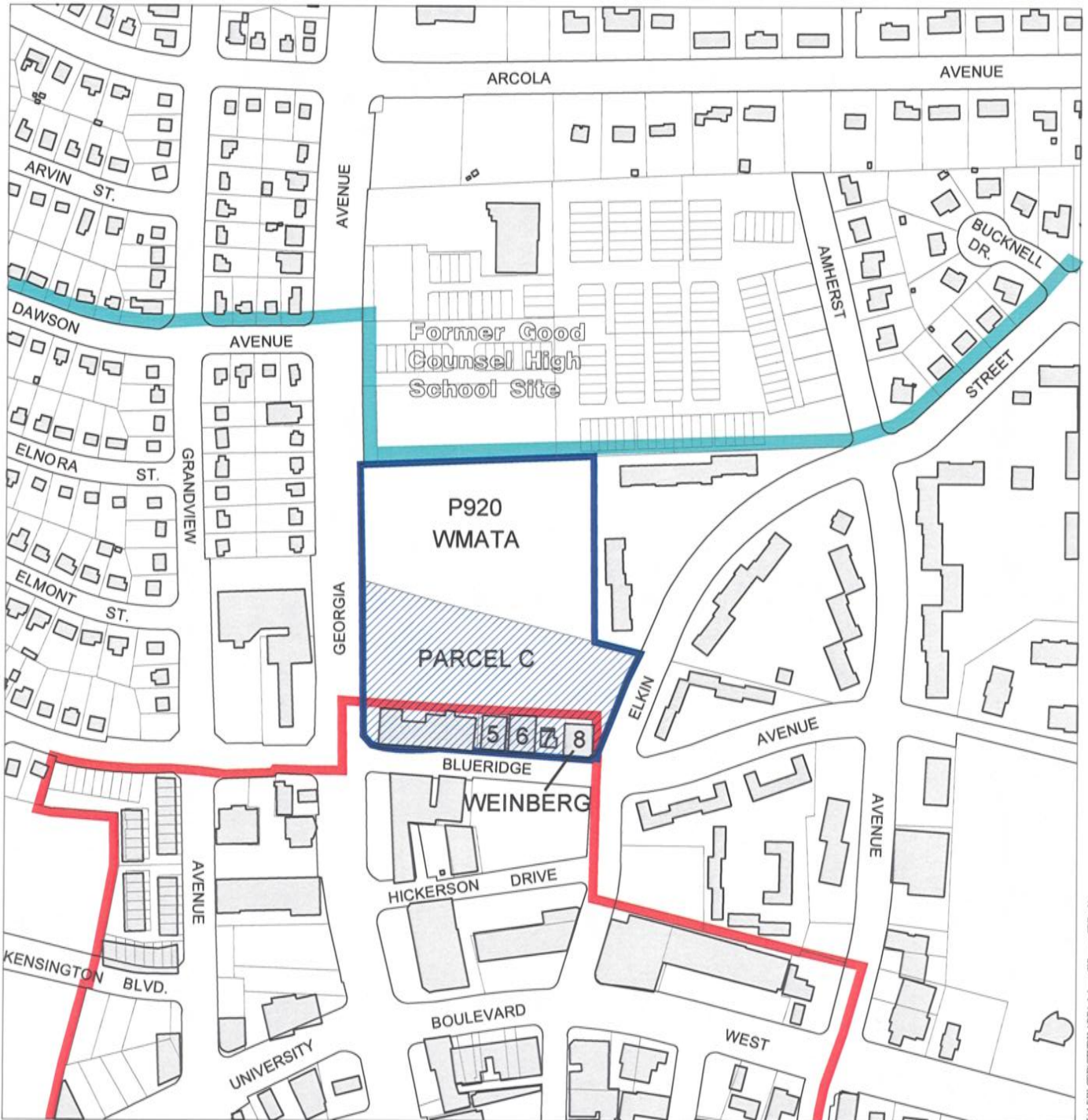
**LEGEND**

- STUDY AREA BOUNDARY
- SECTOR PLAN BOUNDARY
- CURRENT CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT BOUNDARY



# STUDY AREA

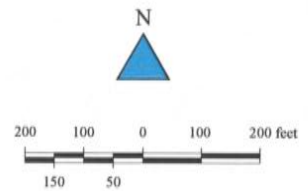
FIGURE 2



X:\AS\W-CBD\STUDY AREA 1.dwg (Wheaton CBD.ctb)

## LEGEND

- AVALON BAY
- SECTOR PLAN BOUNDARY
- CURRENT CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT BOUNDARY
- STUDY AREA BOUNDARY



## **Analysis**

The 1990 *Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity* recommends the Blueridge block for office use and also recommends that future office development in the area abutting residential neighborhoods should be limited to building heights of 30 feet to 40 feet. “These offices,” the Sector Plan states, “should serve as a transition between the residential areas to the north and the Central Business District south of Blueridge Avenue.” (p. 33)

In the years since the Sector Plan’s approval, mixed-use development has become an increasingly attractive and efficient way to redevelop relatively urban commercial areas. The CBD zones enable this mixing of uses. The C-O Zone, in contrast, does not generally allow commercial retail uses and the ability to include residential uses is limited.

Mixed-use development on the Blueridge block would accomplish the Sector Plan’s overriding objective of providing a transition between the more intense uses in the Central Business District and the lower density residential uses to the north. Building heights, for example, would “step down” from as much as 143 feet in the CBD-2 Zone south of Blueridge Avenue to 60 feet or 90 feet along Blueridge Avenue and to 35 feet in the proposed townhouse community on the former Good Counsel High School site south of Arcola Avenue.

Mixed-use development also would provide housing within a reasonable half-mile walk of the Wheaton Metro Station, and could increase the stock of housing in Wheaton that is attractive to residents of varying ages and incomes. The addition of residential and commercial retail uses would enliven Blueridge Avenue and provide neighborhood shopping destinations for residents of the multifamily communities along Elkin Street east of the study area.

## **Land Use and Zoning**

### **A. Blueridge Avenue Properties**

This Amendment recommends reclassifying the Avalon Bay properties to the CBD-1 Zone, and expanding the Central Business District boundary to include all of Parcel C. It also recommends adjusting the Urban District and Parking District boundaries to include all of Parcel C as well. With most of the Blueridge block in single ownership, and likely to be the subject of a single development proposal, the small business protection afforded by the Wheaton Retail Preservation Overlay Zone is less critical in this area. The Amendment therefore recommends that the Retail Preservation Overlay Zone be removed from the Blueridge block. The Amendment strongly encourages an Optional Method Development for the CBD-1 properties. An Optional Method Development would allow a denser development with more public use space and firmer regulatory controls through the site plan process than a Standard Method development.

This Amendment does not recommend mixed-use development for the Weinberg property on Lot 8. The current office use continues to meet the transition objectives of the Sector Plan. Although the building's floor area ratio exceeds the maximum FAR now allowed in the C-O Zone, it is conforming under the standards of the Zoning Ordinance and can be structurally altered, repaired, or reconstructed as long as the original dimensions are retained. This Amendment recommends guidelines aimed at minimizing the impact of any new development in the CBD-1 Zone on the Weinberg property.

## **B. WMATA Property**

The WMATA parcel is located between properties that appear poised for development. To the south is the Blueridge block, recommended for mixed-use development. To the north is the former Good Counsel High School site, which is now zoned for townhouse development at 15 dwelling units to the acre. Given the parcel's location, the Sector Plan's recommendation for the WMATA property should be reexamined. Recommended residential densities on all three properties immediately adjacent to the WMATA site are higher than the nine units to the acre recommended for the property by the 1990 Sector Plan. Densities could increase on the WMATA property without compromising the Sector Plan's objective of a smooth transition from the Central Business District to the one-family neighborhoods outside the Sector Plan area. This Amendment recommends that the upcoming comprehensive amendment to the Sector Plan reevaluate the recommendation for the WMATA property and determine a density appropriate to achieve the Sector Plan's transition objective.

In summary, staff makes the following recommendations for the study area:

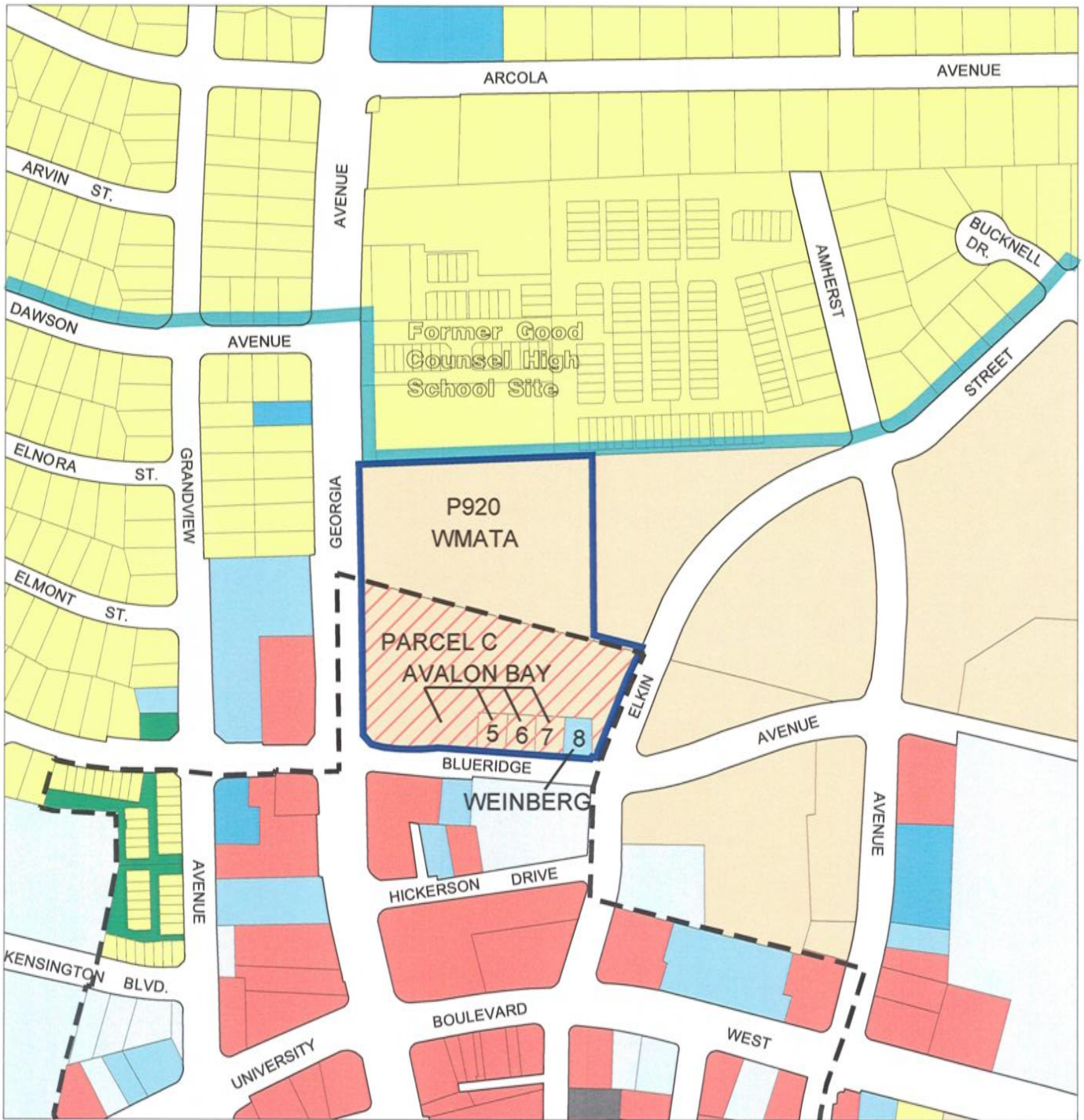
- Expand the boundary of the Wheaton Central Business District to include all of Parcel C, Villa Verde;
- Reclassify Parcel C, as well as Lots 5, 6 and 7 from the C-O Zone to the CBD-1 Zone;
- Remove the Wheaton Retail Preservation Overlay Zone from the north side of the block of Blueridge Avenue between Georgia Avenue and Elkin Street;
- Retain the C-O Zone on Lot 8;
- Allow a reduction of required public use space on site to 10 percent, should an Optional Method Development occur on CBD-1 properties, if the developer opts to adhere to standards in the Zoning Ordinance that allow off-site provision of some or all of the required 20 percent public use space;
- Reevaluate land use recommendations for the WMATA property as part of the comprehensive Amendment to the Sector Plan.

Figure 3 shows proposed land uses for the study area, Figure 4 shows existing zoning and Figure 5 depicts proposed zoning.



# PROPOSED LAND USES

FIGURE 3

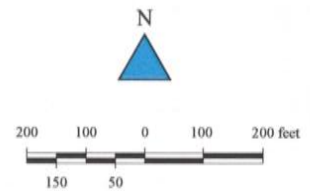


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## LEGEND

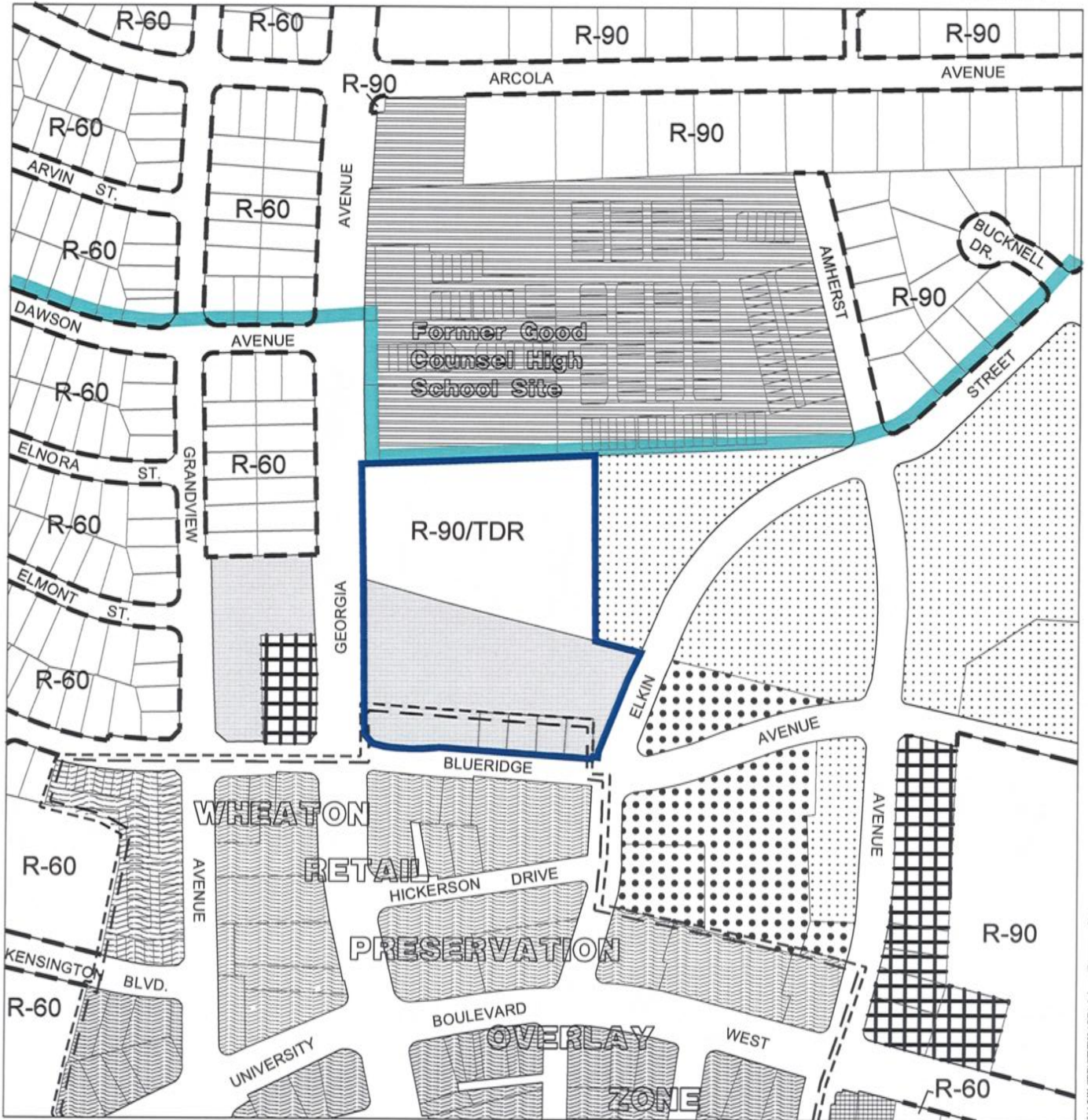
- STUDY AREA BOUNDARY
- SECTOR PLAN BOUNDARY
- PROPOSED CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT BOUNDARY
- SINGLE-FAMILY
- APARTMENTS, CONDOMINIUMS
- INDUSTRIAL AND WAREHOUSE

- TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATION, UTILITIES
- COMMERCIAL - RETAIL
- COMMERCIAL - OFFICE
- INSTITUTIONAL
- RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE
- MIXED USE



# EXISTING ZONING

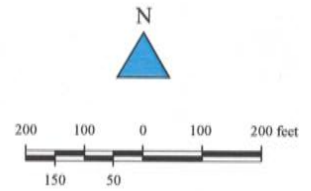
FIGURE 4



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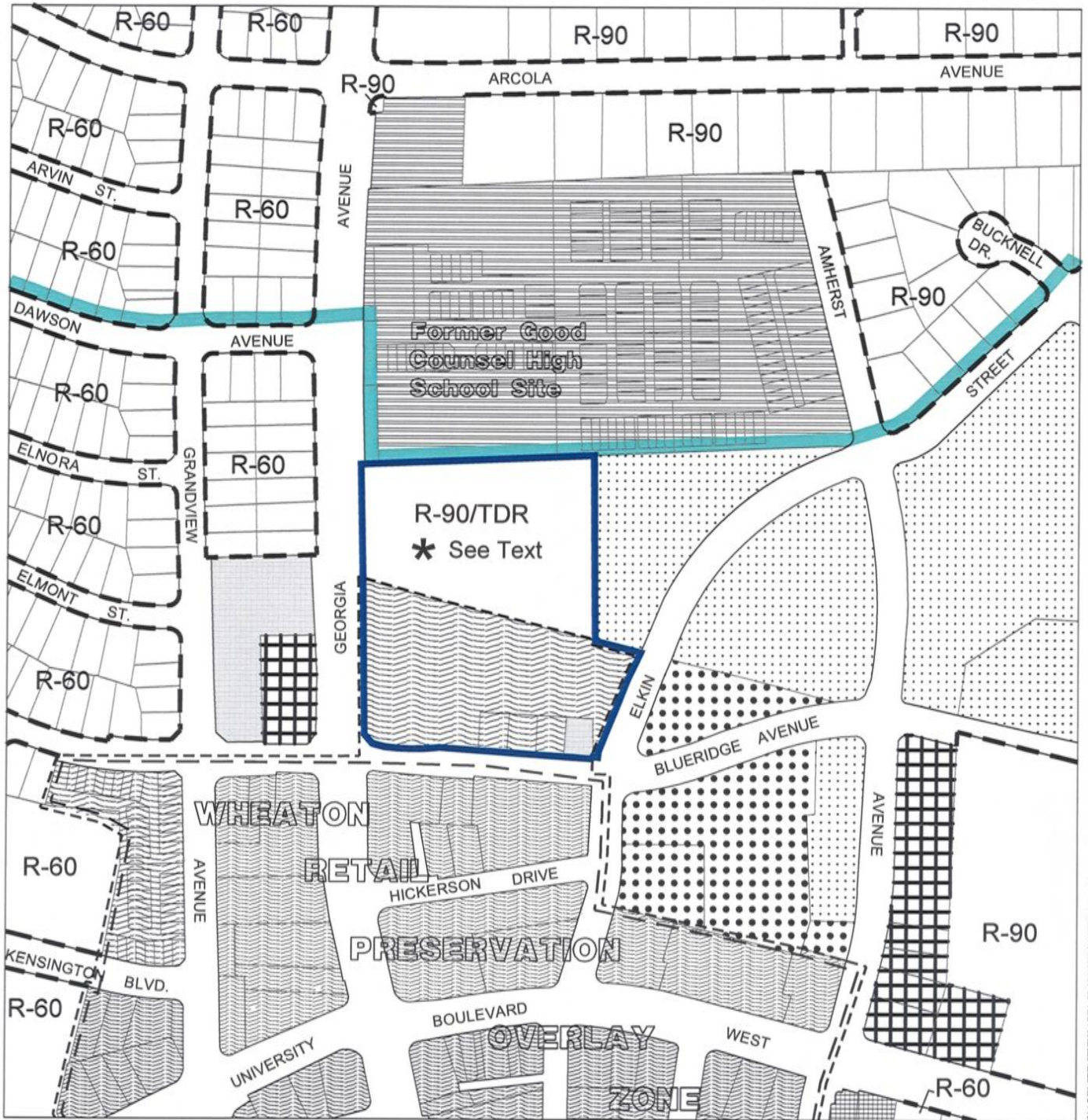
## LEGEND

- ZONE BOUNDARY
  - STUDY AREA BOUNDARY
  - SECTOR PLAN BOUNDARY
  - CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT BOUNDARY
  - WHEATON RETAIL PRESERVATION OVERLAY ZONE
- |       |       |     |
|-------|-------|-----|
| R-30  | RT-15 | C-O |
| R-20  | CBD-1 | C-1 |
| CBD-2 | C-2   |     |



# PROPOSED ZONING

FIGURE 5

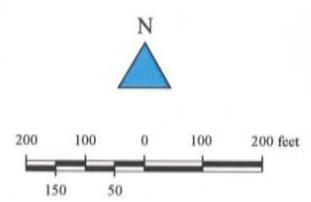


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## LEGEND

- ZONE BOUNDARY
- STUDY AREA BOUNDARY
- SECTOR PLAN BOUNDARY
- PROPOSED CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT BOUNDARY
- PROPOSED WHEATON RETAIL PRESERVATION OVERLAY ZONE

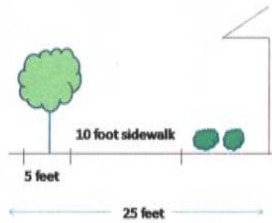
|  |       |  |       |  |     |
|--|-------|--|-------|--|-----|
|  | R-30  |  | RT-15 |  | C-O |
|  | R-20  |  | CBD-1 |  | C-1 |
|  | CBD-2 |  | C-2   |  |     |



## Urban Design

Successful urban streets provide an atmosphere that is attractive to and comfortable for pedestrians walking along them. These streets use elements of design—varied building massing, differing façades, landscaping and sidewalk treatments—to create a lively streetscape for workers and residents. This Amendment offers design guidelines whose aim is to insure that development along Blueridge and Georgia Avenues achieves design excellence and contributes to a smooth transition from more intensive CBD uses to less intensive residential uses. They also guide the location of public spaces and contribute to a gradual “stepping down” of potential building heights from the CBD core to the residential communities outside the CBD. The guidelines strongly encourage development projects in the CBD-1 Zone to:

- Orient all buildings to streets;
- Use building setbacks or façade articulations at appropriate heights to vary the building mass and enhance compatibility with existing buildings;
- Insure that building heights follow the sloping topography and “step down” from Georgia Avenue to Elkin Street;
- Locate and design vehicle and delivery entrances and other service elements so that they have minimal impact on pedestrian activities;
- Provide neighborhood retail and service activities in ground floor space along Blueridge Avenue to; use design features—varying façades, building setbacks, and landscaping, for example—in this area that encourage and enhance the walking experience;
- Use design techniques such as façade articulation, durable materials, building entrance and storefront design, awnings and other building features to create attractive building form;
- Provide a substantial mid-block public use space on Blueridge Avenue that is adjacent to building and store entrances;
- Provide building transparency along Blueridge Avenue for a minimum of 50 percent of the distance between Georgia Avenue and the mid-block public use space;
- Create open space at the eastern end of the site along Elkin Street, incorporate it into public use space for the benefit of neighborhood workers and residents, and design it so that new development does not “surround” the existing building on Lot 8;
- Provide a portion of the public use space in the form of significantly widened sidewalks located in part on private property along Georgia and Blueridge Avenues, and use materials that adhere to the county’s Wheaton Commercial Area Streetscape Standards;



- Provide a minimum building setback of 25 feet from Georgia Avenue, a planting strip along Georgia Avenue that is a minimum of five feet wide, and a sidewalk on Georgia Avenue that has a minimum clear width of 10 feet, all of which will help enliven the public pedestrian realm along this busy avenue;

- Provide building entrances, windows, stoops and landscaping on Georgia Avenue to create an active streetscape;
- Locate retail or other street activating non-residential uses at the corner of Georgia and Blueridge Avenues and provide a minimum of 25 feet from the curb at the corner of Georgia and Blueridge Avenues to the building by truncating the first floor corner or setting the entire building back.

## Transportation

This Amendment proposes no changes to existing street and highway classifications. The impact of possible land uses along Blueridge Avenue on the existing roadway network has been evaluated for this Amendment. The analysis considered mixed-use development at various proportions of office, retail and residential as well as the impact of development in the existing C-O Zone. The analysis concluded that mixed-use development with a significant residential component produces fewer peak hour vehicle trips—with a smaller resulting impact on the roadway network—than mixing non-residential uses such as office and retail or a development consisting solely of office uses.

## Environment

New sector plans in similarly urbanizing areas of the county, such as Twinbrook and White Flint, recognize the need for greater efforts in avoiding carbon emissions, increasing energy efficiency, and conserving water. There are a variety of techniques available to meet these goals. Because services needed for living and working are in close proximity, mixed-use developments enable residents to reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled, thus reducing the amount of carbon emitted. Carbon emissions can be reduced more if the development is built with energy systems that draw from renewable sources such as photovoltaic cells or geothermal heat pumps. Living

spaces should be outfitted with Energy Star appliances and lighting. Conserving water can be achieved through measures such as extensive green roofs, bioinfiltration cells or rain gardens, greywater reuse systems, and low flow water fixtures. An open space system with adequate pervious area provides ground area for trees to grow and areas for rain to infiltrate into the groundwater. Development proposed by this Amendment should provide required public use space within the Central Business District if it cannot be fully achieved on site. This Amendment recommends that new development:

- Provide high performance measures in new buildings that prioritize water conservation, energy efficiency, and reducing carbon emissions;
- Provide pervious open space except where necessary for walkways and bikeways;
- Incorporate ways to deconstruct existing buildings and make every reasonable effort to recycle or reuse materials in the existing building.