



August 27, 2009

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Glenn Kreger, Acting Chief *GKC*  
Vision Division

Khalid Afzal, Team Leader, East Transit Corridor Team *KA*  
Vision Division

**FROM:** Frederick Vernon Boyd, Planner Coordinator (301.495.4654)  
East Transit Corridor Team  
Vision Division

**SUBJECT:** Worksession 2—Kensington and Vicinity Sector Plan: Land Use, Community  
Facilities, and Historic Preservation

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Review and approve densities and building heights for the Town Center and Crafts/Services districts.
2. Review schools forecasts; determine impact of added development on schools; review Plan recommendation for recreation facilities.
3. Discuss timing for historic resource evaluation and review Plan language of historic resource strategies.

**PROCESS AND SCHEDULE**

The July 30 worksession reviewed transportation issues and began an evaluation of land uses, densities and zoning recommendations. This second worksession will complete the land use and zoning evaluation, review and amplify the Sector Plan sections on schools and other community facilities. Finally, it will review Sector Plan recommendations on historic preservation and provide a recommendation for subsequent evaluation of proposed resources.

The work program calls for approval of the Planning Board Draft on October 1.

## INTRODUCTION

This staff report is organized to highlight the issues the Planning Board should address, which are posed as questions. A staff recommendation for Board action concludes each issue section.

### Diversity/Land Uses

The overall rationale for proposed mixed-use development in the Town Center, which includes Kensington's commercial areas, is the desirability of lively and active streets as a means of revitalizing the area. Introducing housing into the Town Center creates a critical mass of people to live on well-designed streets and make use of the shops, public spaces, and other neighborhood services that will be located there. It also adheres to clearly articulated County policies to increase housing choices for the broadest possible range of ages and incomes.

*What are the appropriate densities and building heights for the Town Center and the Crafts/Services District?*

The Sector Plan generally recommends densities consistent with those available in the existing, exclusively non-residential office and commercial zones now in the Town Center. For three areas in the Town Center, it recommends modestly higher densities to create a clearly defined and distinctive central core. For these same areas, the Plan recommends maximum building height greater than the rest of the Town Center area, which will, combined with attentive regulatory controls, allow relatively small, but centrally located properties in Kensington to redevelop in the proposed CR Zone while providing significant public benefits in the areas of design, connectivity, diversity and sustainability. Where commercial areas directly abut residential communities, the Plan adjusts residential densities and reduces building heights to create smooth transitions.

The Sector Plan makes recommendations for the Town Center, and for the Crafts/Services Districts, the mixed retail and industrial services areas on West Howard and Metropolitan Avenues. The proposed CR Zone requires four specific elements to be prescribed for each property/area to be zoned CR. They are: 1) overall floor area ratio; 2) commercial FAR; 3) residential FAR; and 4) building height. In the following section, the first three properties/areas—1. Town Center Core; 2. Town Center 3700 Plyers Mill Road; and 5. Town Center Howard—were reviewed and decided by the Board in the first worksession on July 30. The remaining properties/areas are to be reviewed by the Board on September 10. The attached map (analysis areas) shows the location and the corresponding number of the properties/areas.

#### **1. Town Center Core**

*Improved square footage:* 390,147

*Current zones:* C-2, C-O, C-T, R-60

*Proposed zone:* CR 2.0, C 1.5, R 1.5, H 75

*Staff recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; include area in Urban Design Guidelines

***Planning Board recommendation:* CR 2.5, C 2.0, R 2.0, H 75; language in design guidelines emphasizing need to mix retail, residential and office to achieve full density**

**2. Town Center 3700 Plyers Mill Road**

*Improved square footage:* 244,934

*Current zone:* C-2

*Proposed zone:* CR 2.0, C 1.0, R 1.5, H 60

*Staff recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; include area in Urban Design Guidelines; consider recommending restrictions on Lexington Avenue to prevent cut-through traffic

***Planning Board recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; set desire line for extension of Lexington Avenue**

**5. Town Center Howard**

*Improved square footage:* 78,049

*Current zones:* O-M, C-2, R-20

*Proposed zone:* CR 1.5, C 1.0, R 1.0, H 45

*Staff recommendation:* CR 2.0, C 2.0, R 0.5, H 45; exclude R-20 properties shown in Public Hearing Draft; include property in Urban Design Guidelines

***Planning Board recommendation:* CR 2.0, H 45**

**3. Town Center Concord**

*Improved square footage:* 65,220

*Allowable FAR:* CT—0.5; C-O—1.5

*Mean FAR:* 0.32

*Current zones:* CT, C-O, C-2, R-60

*Proposed zone:* CR 1.5, C 1.5, R 1.0, H 60

*Rationale:* Non-residential focus reflects location and existing uses; maximum heights should be located away from adjacent residential neighborhood

*Issues raised by testimony:* Some residents consider recommended building heights too high

*Staff recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; include area in Urban Design Guidelines

**4. Town Center East**

*Improved square footage:* 63,873

*Allowable FAR:* CT—0.5; C-1—none specified; C-O—1.5

*Mean FAR:* 0.25

*Current zones:* CT, C-1, C-O, R-60

*Proposed zone:* CR 1.5, C 1.0, R 1.0, H 45

*Rationale:* Does not favor single use; proximity to neighborhoods constrains height

*Issues raised by testimony:* None

*Staff recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; include property in Urban Design Guidelines

## **6. Town Center Howard East**

*Improved square footage:* 50,008

*Allowable FAR:* C-1—none specified; C-2—1.5; I-1—none specified

*Mean FAR:* 0.33

*Current zones:* C-1, C-2, I-1

*Proposed zone:* CR 1.5, C 1.0, R 1.0, H 45

*Rationale:* Confronting historic properties should constrain height along Howard Avenue

*Issues raised by testimony:* None

*Staff recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; include property in Urban Design Guidelines

## **7. Town Center Near West**

*Improved square footage:* 220,399

*Allowable FAR:* O-M—1.5; C-1—none specified; C-2—1.5

*Mean FAR:* 0.42

*Current zones:* O-M, C-1, C-2, R-60

*Proposed zone:* CR 1.5, C 1.0, R 0.5, H 60

*Rationale:* Non-residential focus reflects location away from Core

*Issues raised by testimony:* Some residents consider recommended building heights too high; landowner in analysis area desires consistent building heights

*Staff recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; include property in Urban Design Guidelines

## **8. Town Center West**

*Improved square footage:* 96,244

*Allowable FAR:* C-T—0.5; C-2—1.5; I-1—none specified

*Mean FAR:* 0.22

*Current zones:* C-T, C-2, I-1, R-60

*Proposed zone:* CR 1.5, C 1.0, R 0.5, H 45

*Rationale:* Does not favor single use; location adjacent to existing neighborhood suggests lower density

*Issues raised by testimony:* None

*Other issues:* Density adjacent to existing Ken-Gar community; inclusion of Mitchell/Dedrick properties in this area, instead of Town Center Near West

*Staff recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; include property in Urban Design Guidelines

## **9. Crafts/Services Metropolitan**

*Improved square footage:* 163,008

*Allowable FAR:* C-T—0.5; C-2—1.5; I-1—none specified

*Mean FAR:* 0.51

*Current zones:* CT, C-2, I-1, R-60

*Proposed zone:* CR 1.5, C 1.5, R 1.0, H 60

*Rationale:* Non-residential focus reflects desirability of preserving existing uses

*Issues raised by testimony:* Some residents consider recommended building heights too high

*Other issues:* Lower heights appropriate adjacent to residential and recreational uses; Konterra property in this area

*Staff recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; include property in Urban Design Guidelines

## **10. Crafts/Services West Howard**

*Improved square footage:* 328,920

*Allowable FAR:* C-T—0.5; O-M—1.5; I-1—none specified

*Mean FAR:* 0.58

*Current zones:* O-M, C-T, I-1, R-60

*Proposed zone:* I-1

*Rationale:* Non-residential focus reflects desirability of preserving existing uses

*Issues raised by testimony:* None

*Other issues:* Appropriateness of CR district; SHA property status; desirability of correcting zoning anomalies

*Staff recommendation:* Retain I-1 Zone; reducing residential densities under CR district may be necessary if CR district is applied to this area

## **11. Connecticut/University South**

*Improved square footage:* 50,475

*Allowable FAR:* O-M—1.5; C-1—none specified

*Mean FAR:* 0.29

*Current zones:* O-M, C-1, R-60

*Proposed zone:* CR 2.0, C 1.5, R 1.5, H 75

*Rationale:* Maximum density at major intersection

*Issues raised by testimony:* Some residents consider recommended building heights too high

*Other issues:* Stubbs property in this area

*Staff recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; include property in Urban Design Guidelines

## **12. Connecticut/University Northwest**

*Improved square footage:* 13,594

*Allowable FAR:* C-T—0.5

*Mean FAR:* 0.10

*Current zones:* C-T, R-60

*Proposed zone:* CR 1.0, C 0.5, R 1.0, H 45

*Rationale:* Location adjacent to existing neighborhood suggests lower density and residential focus

*Issues raised by testimony:* None

*Other issues:* R-60 special exception for parking associated with commercial development across street

*Staff recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; include property in Urban Design Guidelines

## **13. Connecticut/University Northeast**

*Improved square footage:* 17,292

*Allowable FAR:* C-1—none specified

*Mean FAR:* 0.16

*Current zones:* C-1, R-60

*Proposed zone:* CR 1.5, C 1.0, R 0.5, H 60

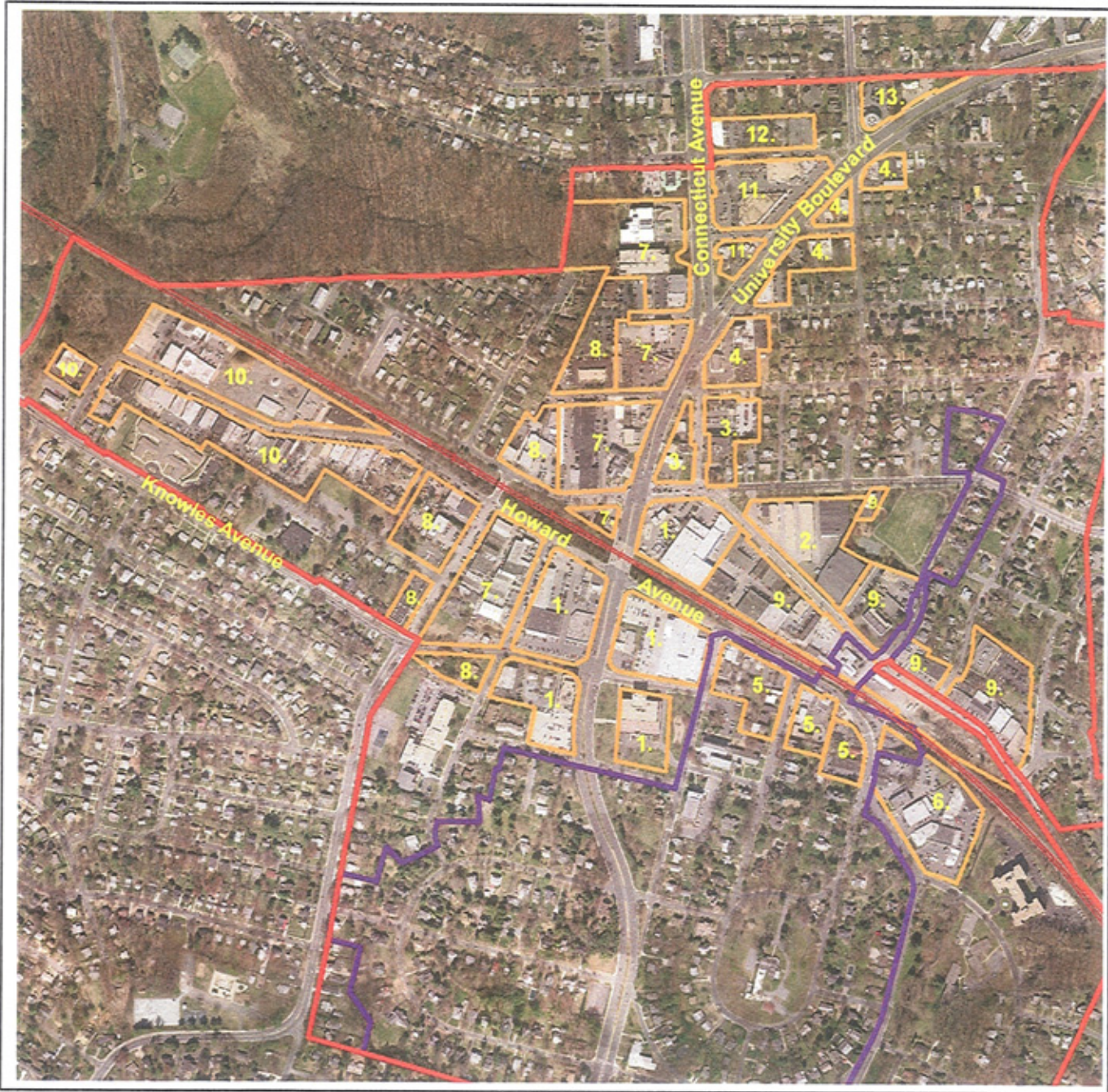
*Rationale:* Non-residential focus reflects location in self-contained area at edge of Plan area

*Issues raised by testimony:* Some residents consider recommended building heights too high

*Other issues:* Building height compatibility; desirability of correcting zoning anomaly

*Staff recommendation:* Retain Public Hearing Draft recommendation; include property in Urban Design Guidelines

Analysis Areas Map



- Kensington Sector Plan Boundary
- Historic District Boundary
- Property/Area

## Historic Preservation

The Sector Plan section on Historic Preservation identifies three neighborhoods (North Kensington, Kensington Estates and Ken-Gar), and three individual sites (Kensington Cabin, Kensington Fire Station, and the Ken-Gar Rosenwald School) that should be evaluated for inclusion on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation. The Plan also recommends re-evaluating the boundaries of the existing Kensington Historic District, in part to reconcile discrepancies between the County and National Register districts. Testimony at the Public Hearing endorsed the proposed resource and district evaluations; others urged concurrent review of historic resources and the Sector Plan.

*Should the Sector Plan be delayed to allow concurrent review of historic resources?*

The County Council has clearly indicated that it wants to approve the Kensington Sector Plan and SMA before the November 2010 election. Worksessions for the Sector Plan have been scheduled to allow an early October transmittal to the Executive and Council, which would allow the Council to begin its work in December. Approval of the Sector Plan in the spring will allow the SMA to be approved before the election cut-off.

At the same time, the Council has directed Historic Preservation staff to concentrate staff resources on evaluation of resources on the County's *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites*. The Historic Preservation staff is devoting most of its resources to this directive. Historic Preservation staff estimates that it would take more than six months to evaluate the resources and sites proposed for inclusion in the Historic District and would take staff away from the Locational Atlas review.

The Town of Kensington has created a task force comprised of local historic preservation activists, town officials, historic district residents, and Historic Preservation staff to undertake cooperatively the background research and other tasks associated with resource evaluation. Its first meeting was July 22, 2009.

### *Staff Recommendation*

Review and approval of the Sector Plan should continue on the schedule approved at the April 2009 Semi-Annual Report and reaffirmed in the FY10 budget. Evaluation of proposed historic resources should be completed on a timely, but separate schedule.

*Should specific recommendations of the 1992 consultant's report, Vision of Kensington, be added to the Sector Plan?*

Testimony from the Kensington Historical Society urged the inclusion of several strategies from the report that would strengthen the review of areas adjacent to the historic district "which are part of the viewshed and physical environment affecting the appearance of the district." The proposed strategies would expand the district to allow review by the Historic Preservation Commission of construction activity in these adjacent areas; create a revitalization plan for incompatible or deteriorated properties in adjacent areas; and extend historic area pedestrian street improvements into adjacent areas.



As noted above, the proposed Sector Plan specifically recommends design guidelines for crosswalks, medians, and streetscape on Connecticut Avenue that will build on Kensington's historic scale and character, in addition to guidelines for development in areas adjacent to the district. The first strategy proposed by the Kensington Historical Society represents a significant expansion of the HPC's purview, and, as such, is outside the scope of this Sector Plan (Note: the HPC has recently affirmed, pursuant to Council Resolution 16-875, that its regulatory jurisdiction does not extend beyond the designated boundary of a historic district). Mixed-use revitalization in adjacent areas will be subject to detailed regulatory review in the CR Zone; infill residential projects can be evaluated under the proposed Sector Plan's design recommendations.

*Staff Recommendation*

Existing language in the Historic Preservation section remain as written. The proposed Sector Plan guidelines can accomplish those recommendations from the *Vision* that are within the purview of the Plan.

*Should the list of resources identified for further historic preservation evaluation in the Sector Plan be expanded to include additional resources identified by the community?*

Public testimony confirmed interest in re-evaluating the boundaries of the existing historic district for potential expansion, and in evaluating additional resources. In addition, testimony supports evaluation of 10115 Connecticut Avenue and a potential historic district on Frederick Avenue. Testimony also requested that more detailed information be provided on the historic district map to accurately depict categories of resources in the district.

*Staff Recommendation*

Amend the draft Sector Plan to identify these potential resources and include a more detailed historic district map.

## **Schools**

The Sector Plan notes that Kensington and the surrounding neighborhoods are located in the Walter Johnson Cluster. Kensington-Parkwood Elementary School and North Bethesda Middle School serve area residents. Several residents expressed concern at the Public Hearing about the impacts of development on existing capacities at schools in the Walter Johnson Cluster. The cluster is currently burdened with overcrowding at the elementary level; at Kensington-Parkwood, moderately crowded conditions are expected for the life of the current Capital Improvements Program. (Note: Residential development in White Flint will generate sufficient students to warrant construction of a new school, and the proposed White Flint Sector Plan identifies a site for a new school outside the White Flint Sector Plan area.)

*Is school capacity sufficient to support proposed development in Kensington?*

Sector plans determine whether proposed development is likely to create the need for additional schools and, if it does, plans recommend locations for them. To project student enrollment, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) demographers use a series of factors that are based on types of development. In Kensington, the forecast assumes the highest permitted density in the form of multifamily development with structured parking.

The following table summarizes the forecast of elementary, middle, and high school student yields from potential redevelopment in Kensington. The forecast is based on a highly optimistic assumption that the five properties highlighted in the Sector Plan, as well as other relatively large properties in the Town Center, will develop as mixed-use projects to the maximum overall densities recommended in the Plan.

Property/Area	Size	Residential FAR	Units	Students Grades K-5	Students Grades 6-8	Students Grades 9-12
Burka/Core	138000	2	251	11	10	8
Huggins/Core	46100	2	84	4	3	3
3700 Plyers Mill Road	156500	1.5	213	9	8	7
Konterra/Metropolitan	84070	1	76	3	3	3
Stubbs/Conn-Univ S	52800	1.5	72	3	3	2
Calomiris/Near West	76600	0.5	35	1	1	1
West Farragut Office Condos/West	72600	0.5	33	1	1	1
Curtis/Conn-Univ S	73300	1.5	100	4	4	3
Parkway/Metropolitan	68400	1	62	3	2	2
Johnson/Howard East	70000	0.5	32	1	1	1
Mizell/Metropolitan	56500	1	51	2	2	2
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>1009</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>33</b>

Yield rates: K-5—0.042 students per unit; 6-8—0.039 students per unit; 9-12—0.033 students per unit

The table shows that, over the life of the Sector Plan, even a complete mixed-use redevelopment of major properties in Kensington's commercial areas at the recommended residential densities will not yield enough students to warrant an additional school. In reality, not all properties would be able to develop to the maximum permitted densities, and they would develop over a long period of time further reducing the impact of recommended additional development on local schools. In the near term, redevelopment is likely to have minimal if any impact on existing conditions in the Walter Johnson Cluster, because it is unlikely that redevelopment projects will be completed and occupied during the life of the current MCPS Capital Improvements Program (CIP). As MCPS moves through its CIP cycles and as redevelopment occurs in Kensington, the County's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance would be able to evaluate the adequacy of school capacity to support new development. The Growth Policy can require schools facility payments or impose moratoria if warranted.

*Staff Recommendation*

Confirm that school capacity is adequate to support the densities recommended in the Sector Plan; no additional schools are needed in the cluster due to development in Kensington.

## **Recreation**

In response to concerns raised by local residents during the Plan's development, the Sector Plan includes language indicating that the closed Kensington Elementary School, currently HOC's administrative offices, is suitable for other public uses, including recreation. Testimony from the Coalition of Kensington Communities and several of its constituent groups reflects residents' strong belief that a County recreation center should serve Kensington and Vicinity. Planning staff has also determined that the approved FY09-14 CIP includes facility planning funds for site selection of a Kensington Community Recreation Center.

### *Staff Recommendation*

Add language to the Sector Plan strengthening formal support for a Kensington Community Center and endorsing the use of the closed Kensington Elementary School for that purpose, should HOC elect to move its administrative offices and the property is not needed by the MCPS for use as an elementary school.

## **Libraries**

The Sector Plan does not include a section on Libraries, and the Executive's comments recommend inclusion of such a section. The Sector Plan area is adequately served by a public library on Knowles Avenue and another smaller children's library on Carroll Place. Planning staff concurs with the Executive's recommendations that to achieve a more complete section on community facilities, the Plan should include a description of library services in the Sector Plan area. This will be drafted and included in the Planning Board Draft to be reviewed by the Board on October 1.

### *Staff Recommendation*

Include a short, descriptive section on library services in the Plan.