



Wheaton Sector Plan, Draft Design Guidelines

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description

- Draft Design Guidelines for the Draft Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan

summary

- Review and approve the Draft Design Guidelines for transmittal to the County Council.

On July 14, 2011, staff presented a PowerPoint presentation of the Draft Design Guidelines to the Planning Board, and sought the Board's comments and approval to produce a draft document of the guidelines for general distribution. The attached draft is a result of the Planning Board's comments and the feedback received from the public to date. The draft guidelines will be available to the public and the County Council during the Council's review of the Planning Board Draft of the Wheaton Sector Plan. Upon approval of the final Wheaton Sector Plan by the Council, this document will be revisited to incorporate any changes stemming from the Council review and approval of the Sector Plan.

The draft guidelines report is organized into four sections:

1. Introduction – purpose and limitations of the guidelines
2. Context – relationship to the Sector Plan and design guidelines approach
3. Design Guidelines – goals and strategies
4. Implementation Resources – relevant information for implementing the guidelines

Staff recommends approval of the attached draft guidelines for transmittal to the County Council.

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Attachment

October 2011

DRAFT

Wheaton

Design Guidelines



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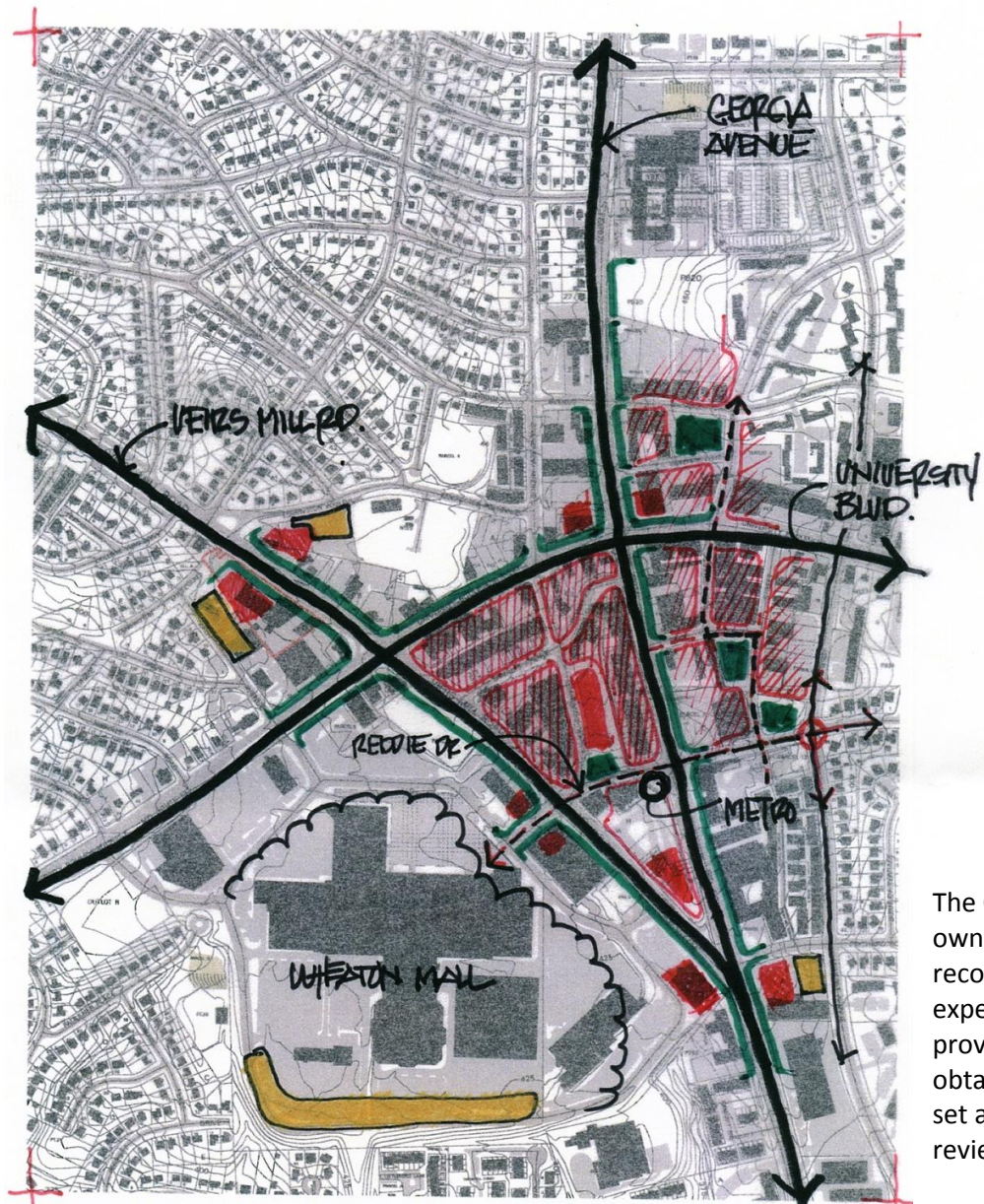
Section 1: Introduction

The Wheaton Design Guidelines represent the County's and the community's design aspirations for the future of downtown Wheaton. They should be used as a resource by all stakeholders while exploring ways to enhance the quality of urban design in Wheaton.

Urban Design is concerned with the physical characteristics of an area, and the Design Guidelines consider the design implications of planning decisions on the public realm. An urban design strategy should serve as an integrating tool to coordinate how various development proposals will affect the city *physically*, with a principal focus on the **public realm**: the public faces of buildings, spaces for public use, and the streets, sidewalks, parks and plazas that provide the outdoor public venue for everyday activities.

The guidelines assist in the implementation of recommendations in approved and adopted master plans or sector plans by encouraging urban building attitudes in properties considering redevelopment, and by promoting the creation of safe pedestrian environments and attractive gathering places defined by buildings.





The Guidelines are approved by the Planning Board for use by property owners and Planning staff. Their intent is to illustrate how plan recommendations might be met, to inform applicants of design expectations and possible resources to accomplish them, and to provide staff with a framework for project review and a tool for obtaining enhanced design and related amenities. Guidelines do not set architectural styles, are only applicable during discretionary reviews, and will be revised and updated as necessary.

Section 2: Context

Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan (Wheaton Sector Plan), page 7

“Wheaton is envisioned as a major mixed-use center for the Georgia Avenue corridor and eastern Montgomery County. It will have regional shopping, culturally diverse retail and entertainment, business and government services, and transit-oriented residential and office uses that serve a population with a broad range of incomes.”



To fulfill the Plan’s vision, the guidelines are organized around elements that frame the public realm; a defined center, edged with boulevards, linked to connected open spaces, with a compact and varied streetscape that makes appropriate transitions to surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Physical context

The center of Wheaton's downtown is located at the geographic triangle created by the intersection of three major roads (University Boulevard, Georgia Avenue, and Veirs Mill Road). This Core district includes a cluster of small specialty retail establishments and restaurants, a Metro station, and a bus transfer hub. The eclectic small retail mix, and significant variations in topography within the Core are its defining characteristics, as well as the presence of the Wheaton Westfield Mall along the Veirs Mill edge of the Core. The area has several large properties that could be developed to give the area a strong unified identity.

The Plan divides the commercial center of the plan area into five districts, and provides detailed zoning and land use recommendations for each. Portions of various single-family residential communities are also included within the Plan boundary; while these communities are not intended to change, their inclusion facilitates the articulation of appropriate transitions between them and a future redeveloped downtown.



Wheaton Sector Plan, Design Elements, page 27

"Wheaton's center, on the triangle of land surrounding the Metro station, will be identifiable by the intensity of uses, a signature streetscape style, and visible, attractive landmarks."

"Georgia Avenue, Veirs Mill Road, and University Boulevard will be treated as boulevards that visually tie Wheaton together."

"...Wheaton will have a system of large and small connected public use spaces where people can gather, enjoy the outdoors, and conduct business."

"Wheaton's buildings will continue to be an eclectic mix, and infill redevelopment will create an increasingly compact and street oriented pattern. A variety of heights and densities will ensure that new developments are compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods."

Section 3: Design Guidelines

The central urban design problem in Wheaton, as in many of the County's emerging centers, is legibility. While its central triangular core could be physically recognizable as a center, its edges are quite porous, and the roads that bound it carry at times large volumes of traffic making them barriers that create difficult pedestrian connections with adjacent districts and surrounding residential neighborhoods.

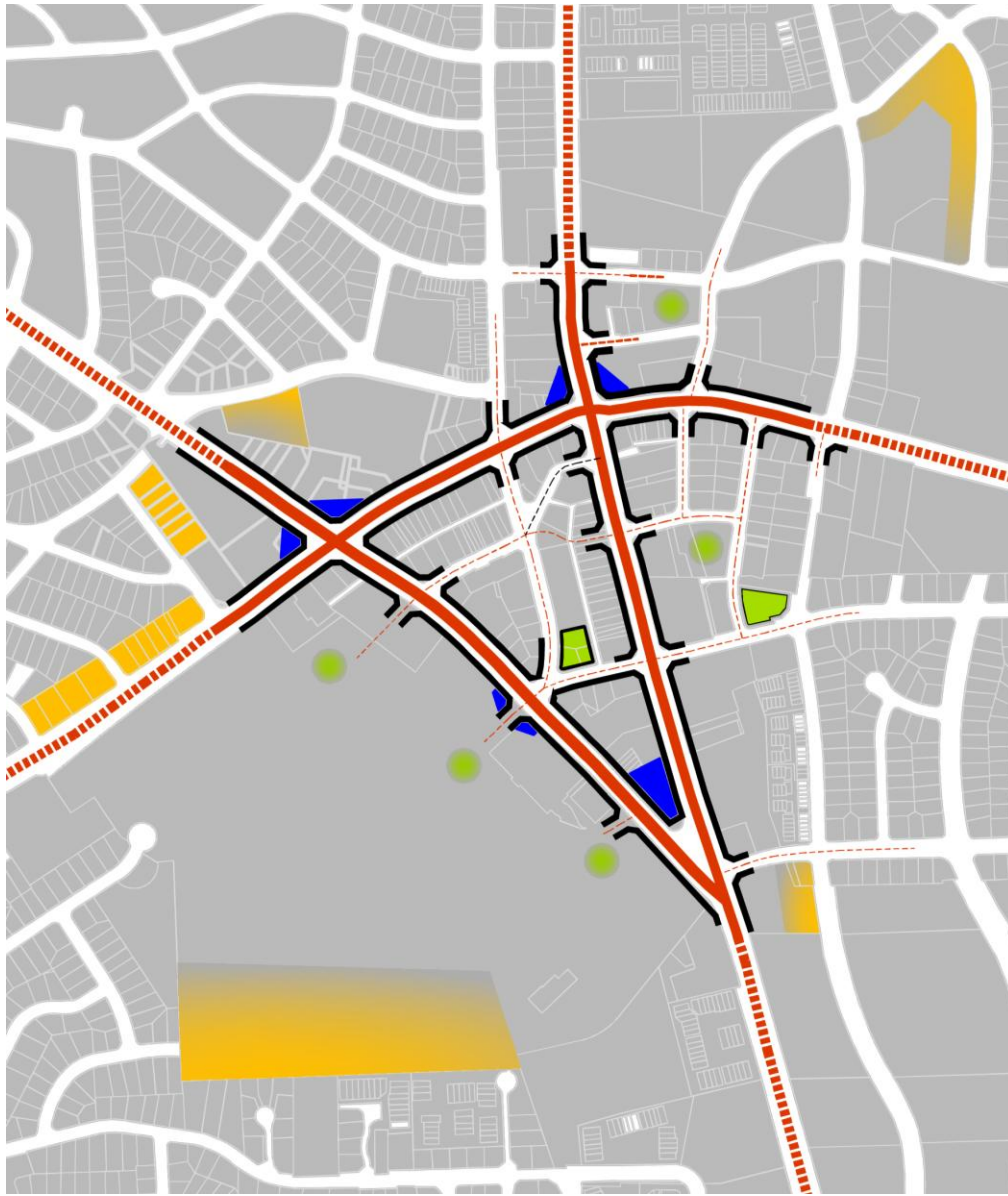
To improve pedestrian connectivity and to transform these barriers into unifying seams, the Design Guidelines will focus on the Plan's recommendation of transforming them into urban boulevards.

This document summarizes the Plan's design elements into three broad goals, which are further divided into design objectives and strategies to achieve those objectives. The guidelines main goals are:

1. Create an identifiable center
2. Create appropriate transitions
3. Improve the public realm



Goal 1: Create an Identifiable Center



Improving legibility requires the careful weaving of various elements to create a well integrated environment. The guidelines identify several of these elements in the objectives to follow, but places special importance in the role played by buildings (e.g. their placement along sidewalks and block corners, massing distribution, or their relationship to open spaces and existing neighborhoods) in the process of improving public realm definition in emerging centers such as Wheaton.

As a priority, redevelopment in Wheaton should redefine the edges around the Core as pedestrian-friendly zones, establishing its existing commercial clusters as the center of a mixed-use downtown. Redevelopment projects should consider the following objectives:

1. Create boulevards around the Core
2. Enhance important connections
3. Establish possible landmarks
4. Enhance existing buildings

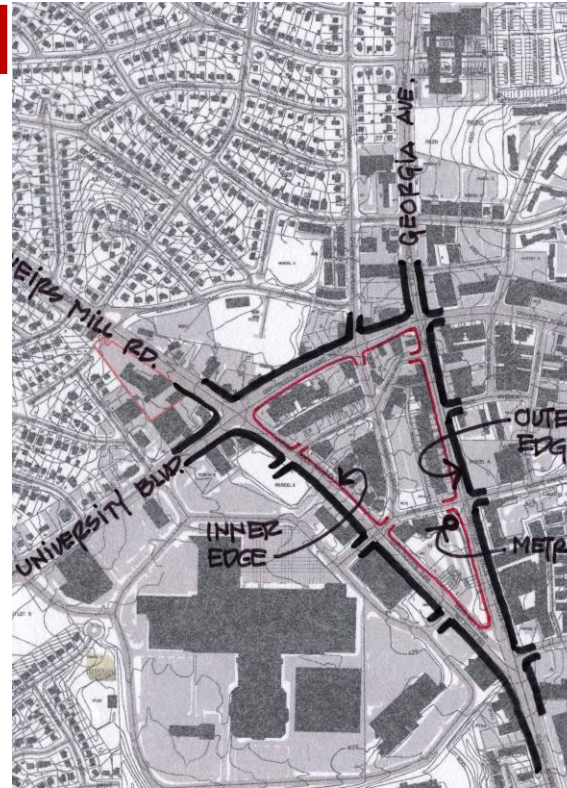
Legend

- Built-to-line
- Proposed Boulevard
- Boulevard Extension
- Suggested Open Space
- Public Open Space
- Landmark / Gateway Element
- Transition Area

Objective 1: Create Boulevards around the Core

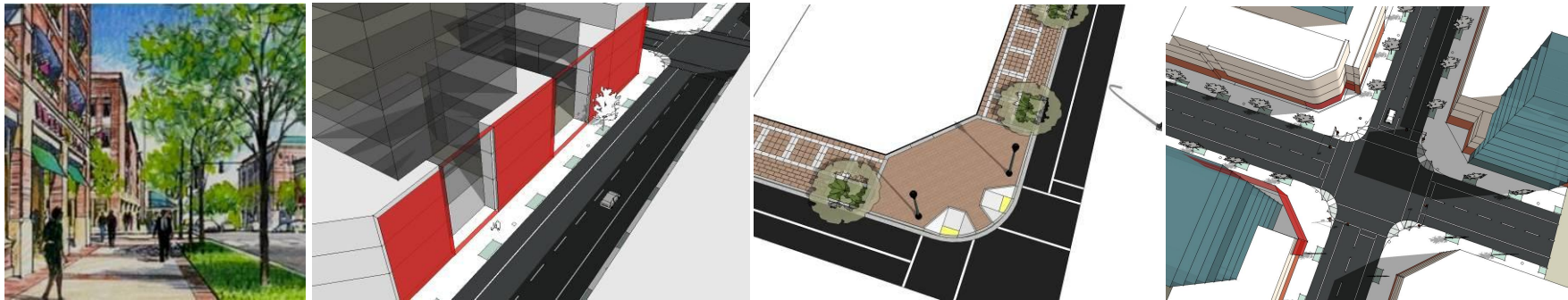
The State highways surrounding the Core should be transformed into urban boulevards through enhanced medians and crosswalks, and street trees. This streetscape treatment will be complemented by build-to-lines that promote the creation of street-oriented buildings with consistent street walls, including retail, where appropriate. Establishing build-to-lines will also ensure enough curb-to-building face area is provided to apply the Wheaton Streetscape Standards uniformly.

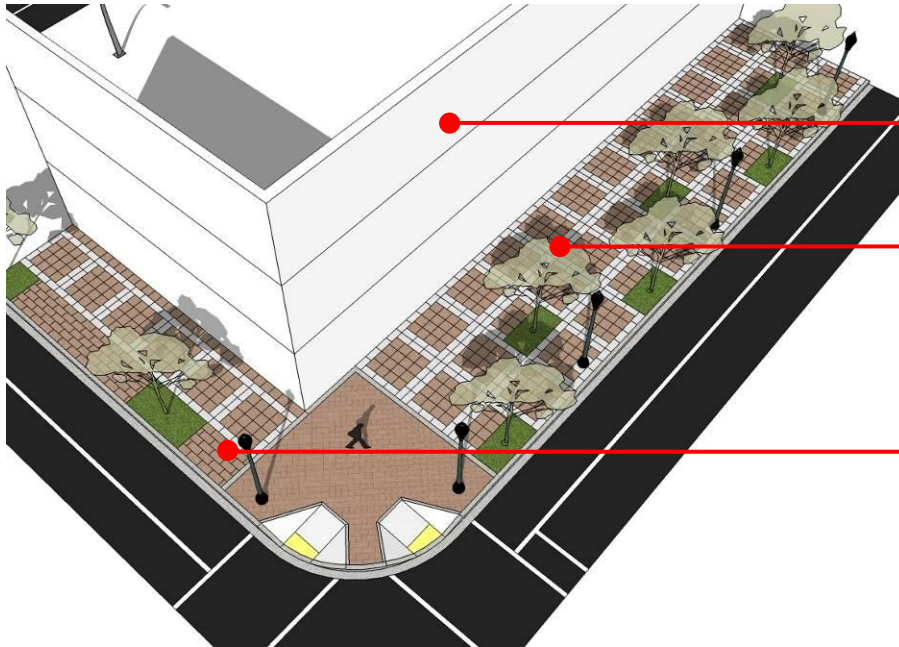
Larger properties considering major redevelopment should implement the Wheaton Streetscape Standards to include a double row of trees in individual pits. Smaller properties likely to remain should consider streetscape and facade improvements in keeping with Wheaton Streetscape Standards, to ensure public realm continuity with larger properties being redeveloped.



Strategies

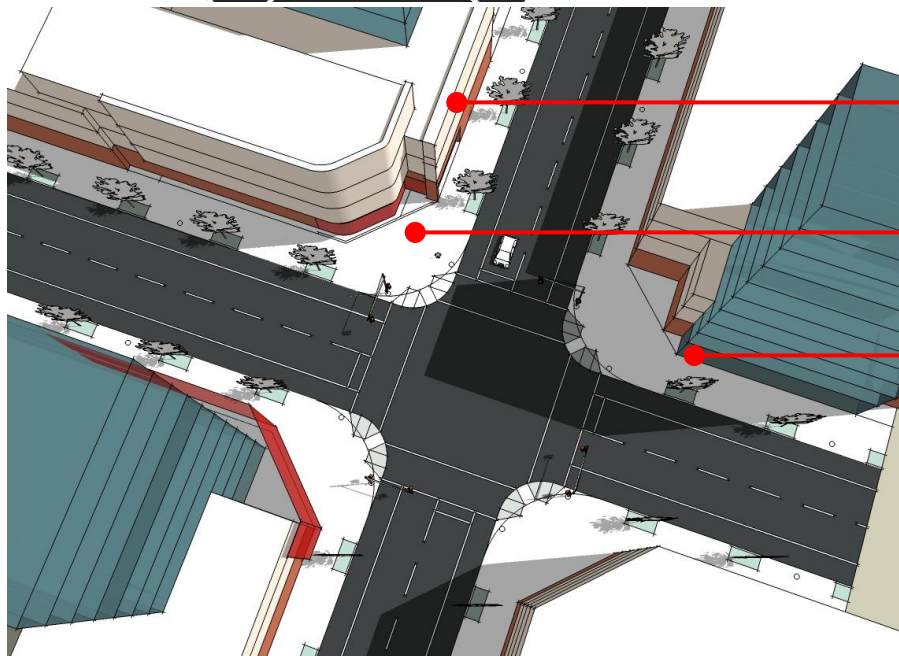
1. Establish **activated pedestrian environments** along the highways surrounding the Core:
 - a. Veirs Mill Road
 - b. Georgia Avenue
 - c. University Boulevard
2. Establish **build-to-lines** that locate building facades at the sidewalks, to create consistent street walls. Build-to-lines should be at 24'-0" from existing curb, to allow for type A-3 sidewalk treatment (Wheaton Streetscape Standards). Promote massing distributions that create building bases between two and five stories tall, located at built-to-lines, and taller building components that concentrate density upward and set it back from the street wall, to reduce its impact on the street below.
3. Provide **boulevard treatment** wherever possible along the highways surrounding the Core, to include:
 - a. Type A-3 sidewalk treatment. Consider relocating staggered tree pits so the first row sits at curb, to improve pedestrian safety. Modifications to the basic standard might be discussed with Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) and Planning staff to suit particular site conditions.
 - b. Consistent street walls along sidewalks.
 - c. Activating uses along street walls, wherever possible.
4. Create **enhanced intersections** at various points along the highways around the Core to improve connectivity with surrounding districts. Enhanced intersections should include the following:
 - a. Street defining buildings at all corners, with entrances and/or activating uses oriented toward the corner.
 - b. Sidewalk streetscape elements (including trees) that pull away from the corner to improve visibility across the intersection for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.
 - c. Corner building configurations that allow for sufficient space at the corner for pedestrians to congregate safely, away from vehicular traffic.
 - d. Consider speed-reducing measures at the road surface such as alternative materials at crosswalks. This would require MCDOT approval and coordination.
5. The Plan designates segments of University Boulevard and Georgia Avenue as **priority retail streets**. Promote the creation of retail entrances on the ground floor of buildings along these highways. Promote similar considerations on Veirs Mill Road, along the edges of the Core.
6. Consider **mid-block pedestrian connections** where indicated on the sector plan (Wheaton Sector Plan, p.59), or at safe locations, to reduce distances in larger block frontages: block fronts should not exceed an average length of 250 feet. Streetscape treatment should be consistent with adjoining properties.





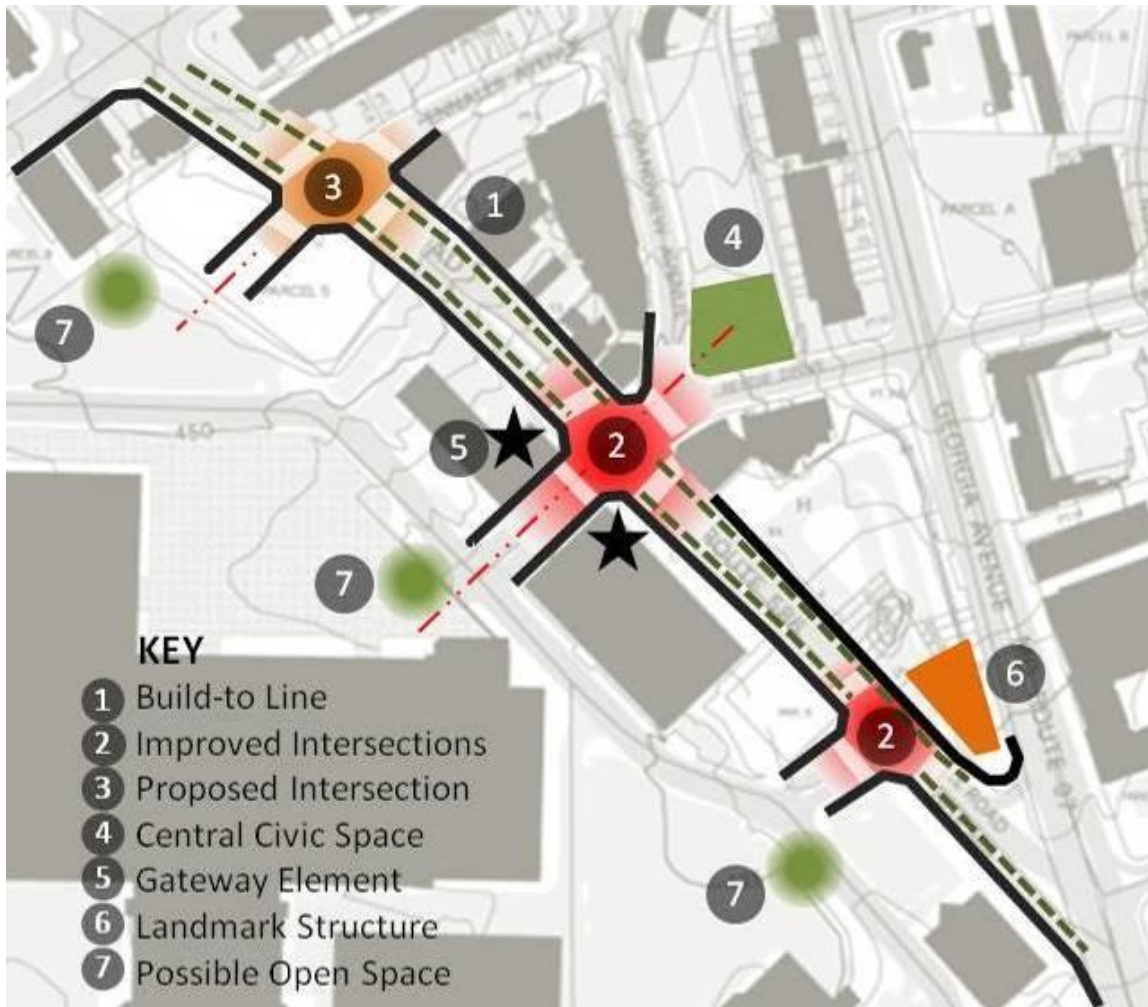
Boulevard Treatment

- Consistent street wall to align with sidewalk, including activating uses.
- Type A-3 sidewalk treatment, per Wheaton Streetscape Standards, along highways. Diagram shows modified location for staggered tree pits, with first row starting at curb.
- Modify sidewalk pattern as needed to suit narrower returning sidewalks.



Enhanced Intersection

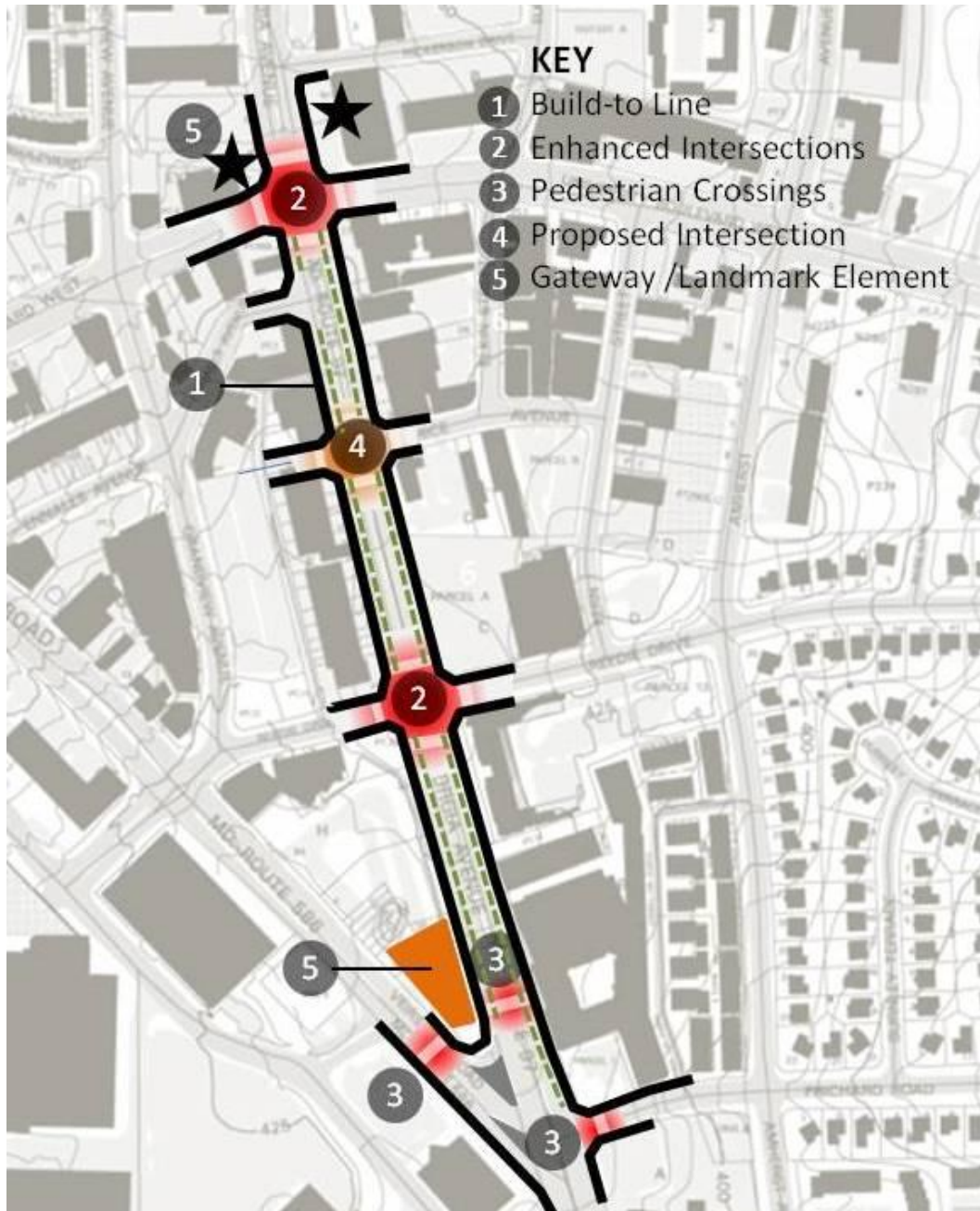
- Street-defining buildings at all corners, with entrances or activating uses oriented to the corner.
- Set back buildings from corner to allow safe space for pedestrian to gather.
- Maintain visibility across intersection by keeping trees and other obstructions away from corners.



a. Veirs Mill Road

1. Provide boulevard treatment along both sides of Veirs Mill Road. Encourage planted medians wherever possible.
2. Redevelopment at the Reddie Drive entrance to the Westfield property should consider architectural gateway elements.
3. Redevelopment at the intersections of Veirs Mill/Georgia Avenue and Veirs Mill / University Boulevard should incorporate landmark elements to highlight these intersections as the entry points to the downtown Core.





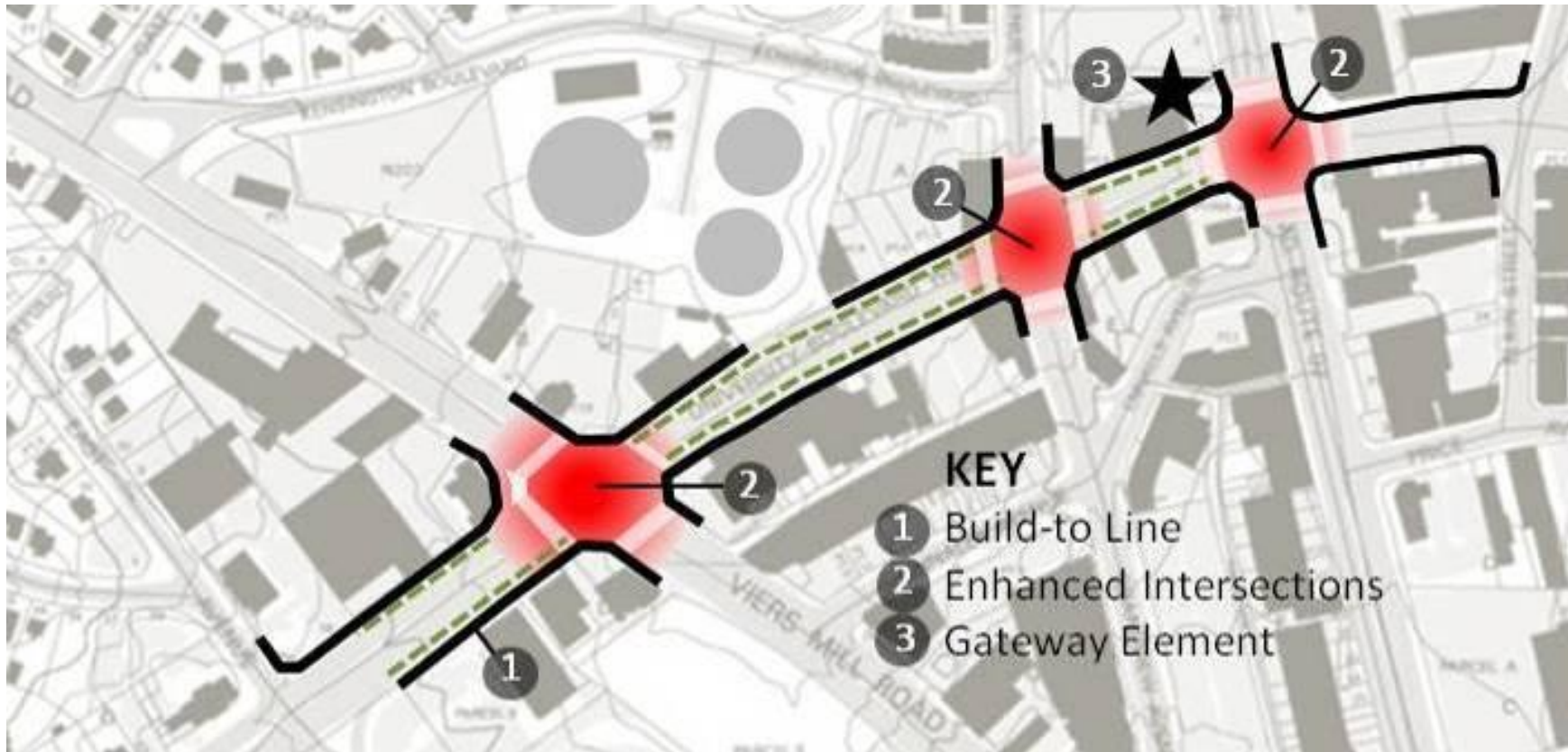
b. Georgia Avenue

1. Buildings at the intersections of Georgia Avenue / University Boulevard, and Georgia Avenue / Veirs Mill Road, should have distinguishing elements (sculptural elements, unique building shape, interesting façade articulation, etc.) to mark these intersections as gateways to the Core district.
2. Continue the Wheaton streetscape standard existing at various locations along the avenue.



c. University Boulevard

1. Consider landmark structures to establish the Veirs Mill Road/University Boulevard intersection as an important place.
2. Continue the streetscape treatment per Wheaton Streetscape Standards already existing at various locations along the avenue

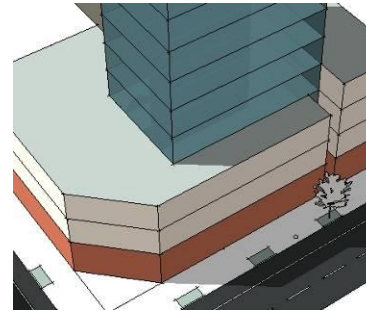


Objective 2: Enhance important connections

A well-connected street grid is essential to improved connectivity. Paths that create opportunities for cross-connectivity are needed to provide travel alternatives, and to connect to surrounding neighborhoods.

Reedie Drive

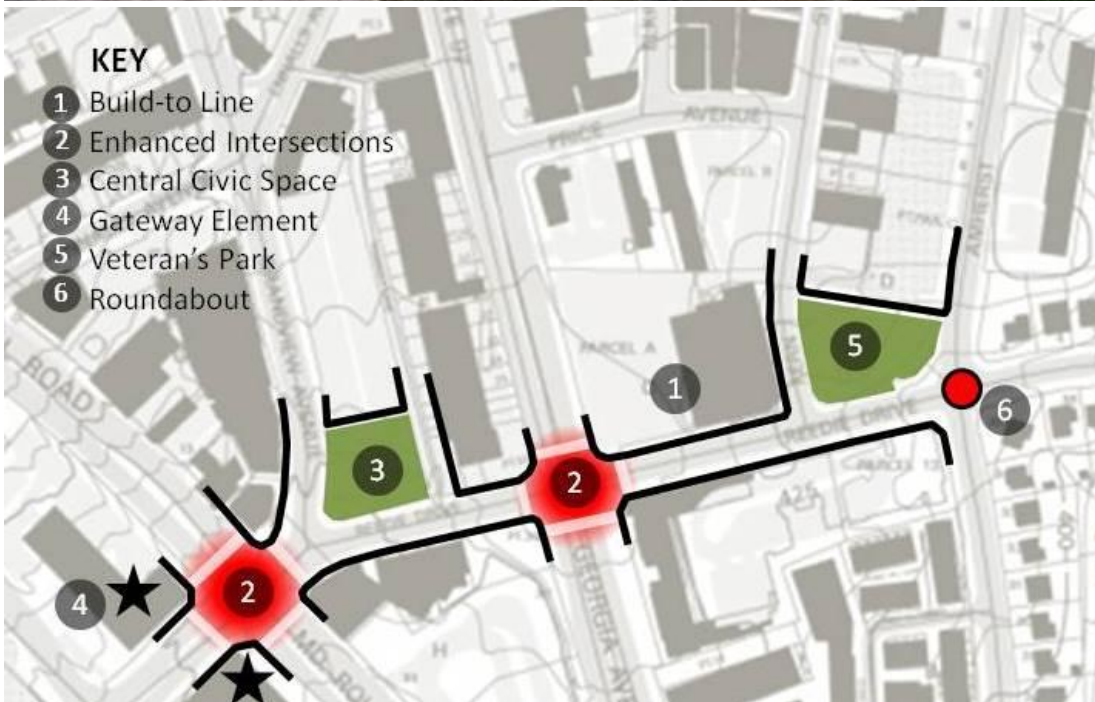
Reedie Drive is an important east-west route, connecting a stable residential neighborhood at the eastern end and the Westfield Mall at the western end. It connects public spaces (Veterans Park, proposed Central Civic Space), mass transit (Metro station, bus depot), and retail at existing and proposed mixed-use developments along the way. It should be designed to accommodate both vehicular and pedestrian traffic in a safe and attractive manner with distinctive buildings and public spaces.





Strategies

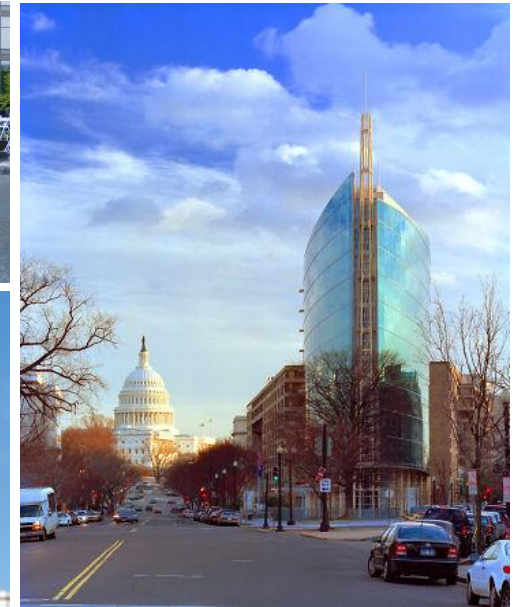
1. Organize building components to enhance public realm definition (sidewalks, open spaces) along the street.
2. Consider gateway elements at the western terminus of Reddie Drive, on the Westfield property.
3. Locate building entrances along sidewalks, open spaces, or facing important intersections.
4. Enhance links to adjacent public use spaces, and to transit opportunities.
5. New streetscape should be consistent with the Wheaton Streetscape Standards.
6. Consider a roundabout at the intersection of Amherst Avenue and Reddie Drive.



Objective 3: Establish landmark locations

Visual and architectural elements can provide points of orientation for both pedestrians and motorists. A key element of a landmark is its singularity; the quality that makes it stand out from its context. They should be easily identifiable, whether by clear form, contrast with their background, or because of prominence or special location. In Wheaton, the triangular geometry of the Core provides opportunities for landmark structures at the three intersections to identify the area as a whole, and establish gateways into the downtown area. Landmark elements can also signal transitions to neighboring communities, or highlight access to mass transit or to prominent public spaces.

1. Integrating building form and use of special material
2. Striking building design
3. Water features, sculptures, open spaces
4. Special building illumination



Objective 4: Enhance existing buildings

As larger properties redevelop, groups of smaller retail establishments remaining could become gaps that interrupt the continuity of the public realm. To date, various County programs have been implemented to enhance building facades, or to provide limited streetscape improvements to enhance pedestrian zones. These programs should continue to aid small businesses improve their properties and enhance pedestrian environments adjacent to them.

Strategies

1. Utilize available mechanisms such as facade improvement and streetscape improvement programs to improve the quality of the public realm around existing properties.



Goal 2: Create Appropriate Transitions

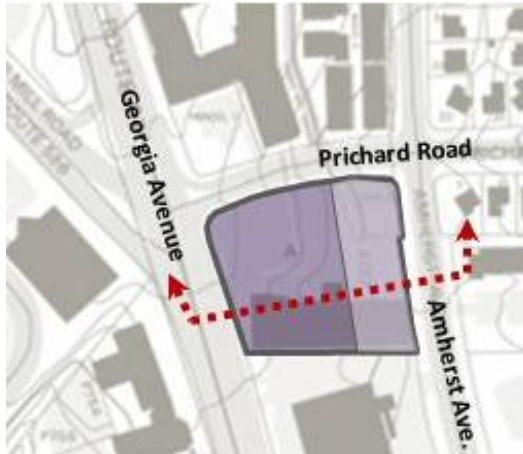


Protecting existing single-family neighborhoods from possible negative impacts resulting from new development is a major concern of the Plan. The Plan recommends **appropriate transitions** from new development when located adjacent to, or across the street from, single-family residential clusters. The CR Zone, proposed for transitional properties, includes features such as yard setbacks and building height planes, that would limit the extent of new building mass near single-family zones. The guidelines promote new development that is appropriately placed and scaled to be compatible with existing residential structures, by **illustrating** the transitional strategies outlined in the Plan.

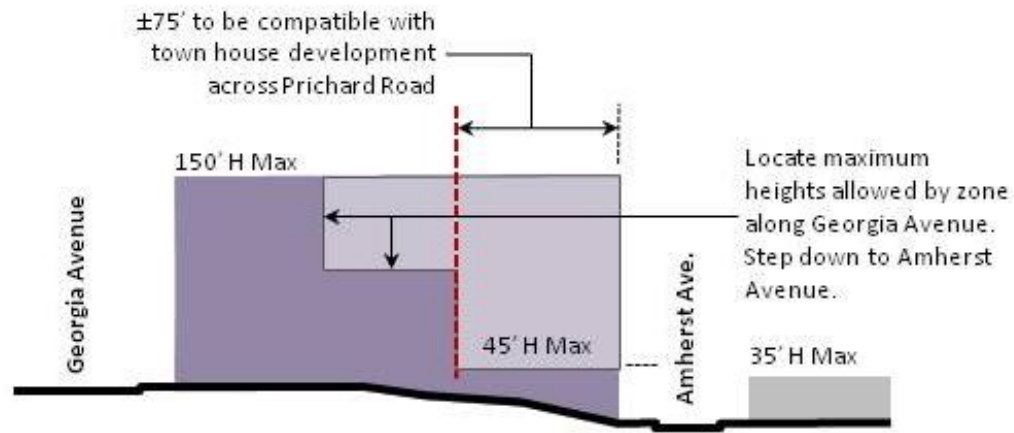
Redeveloping properties should:

1. Provide adequate transitions through appropriate building heights and setbacks adjacent to or across the street from single-family structures.
2. Concentrate the tallest component of mixed-use structures along major avenues or important intersections.
3. The Plan identifies several areas where groups of properties should consider specific recommendations, per proposed zoning or as outlined in the Plan, because of their proximity to existing single-family neighborhoods:
 - a. Price District - North end of block A2
 - b. Blueridge District - North and East edges of block R
 - c. Westfield District - Southern border of Parcel 10
 - d. Kensington View/Wheaton Hills District - Block A at the corner of Kensington Boulevard. and Veirs Mill Road.; Block B2 at Veirs Mill Road.; Block F at East Avenue and Kensington Boulevard.; Blocks G and H at University Boulevard.; and Block 44 at Grandview Avenue.

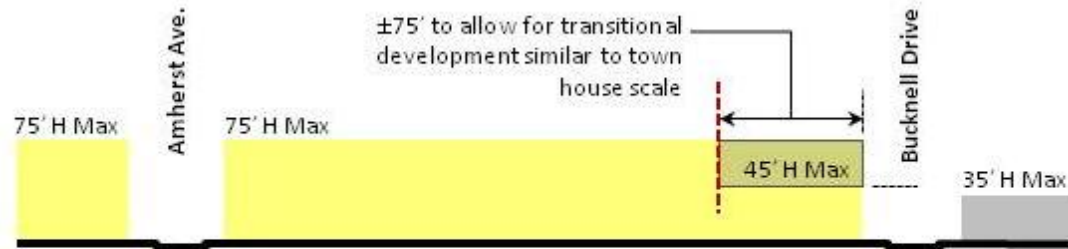




Price District

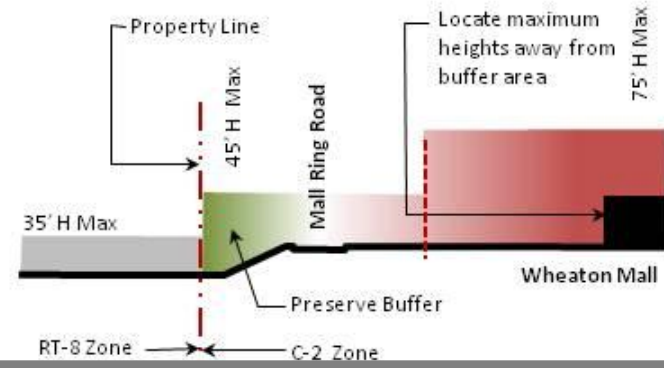


Blueridge District

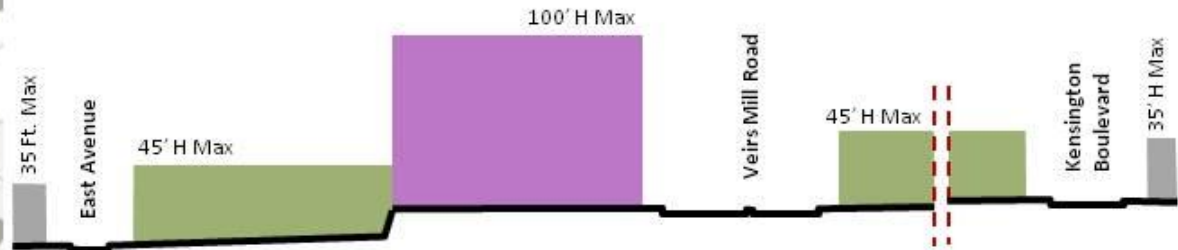




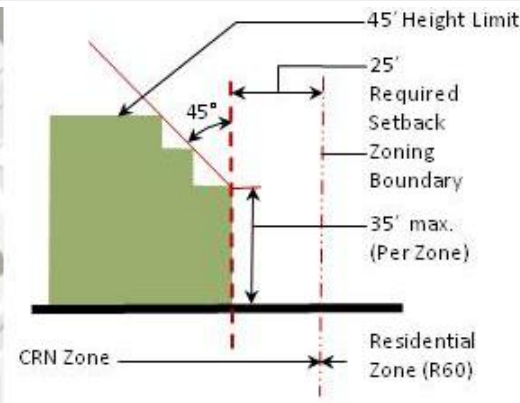
Westfield District



Kensington View/Wheaton Hills District



Kensington View District



Goal 3: improve the public realm



Improving the quality of the public realm, including vehicular and pedestrian networks, is a priority of the Wheaton Sector Plan.

Design objectives include:

1. Improve pedestrian access along streets
2. Create a Central Civic Space
3. Promote temporary spaces for public use
4. Create pedestrian links

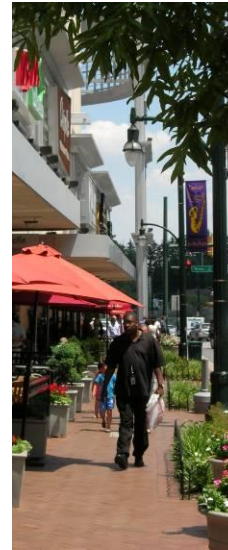


Objective 1: Improve pedestrian access along streets

The Wheaton Streetscape Standards have been applied throughout the central business district area in a variety of ways, to achieve continuity in at least one element of the public realm. This effort should continue as properties within the Core redevelop. The streetscape standards should be applied to create active and safe zones that can provide options for pedestrian activities and travel.

Strategies

1. Provide boulevard treatment along highways surrounding the Core.
2. Provide buffer zones (along the edge of the curb, to include street trees, utility poles, other street furniture, and lighting) between pedestrian areas and the roadway, to increase pedestrian safety.
3. Improve the quality and safety of important intersections connecting the downtown core with surrounding development (e.g. Reddie Drive / Veirs Mill Road, Reddie Drive / Georgia Avenue) through crosswalks, street trees at the curb, planted medians, and with well designed structures defining block corners.
4. Improve pedestrian areas in front of existing commercial strips by expanding pedestrian zones and providing protection for pedestrians through:
 - a. locating pedestrian zone away from the curb;
 - b. creating areas along the curb for plantings and street furnishings, that can serve as buffer zones between pedestrians and traffic;
 - c. continuing the standard Wheaton sidewalk pattern in all areas.



Objective 2: Create a Central Civic Space

The Plan recommends a major civic space in the vicinity of Parking Lot 13 for community events (page 25), as part of the public/private development on the WMATA triangle. This space should:

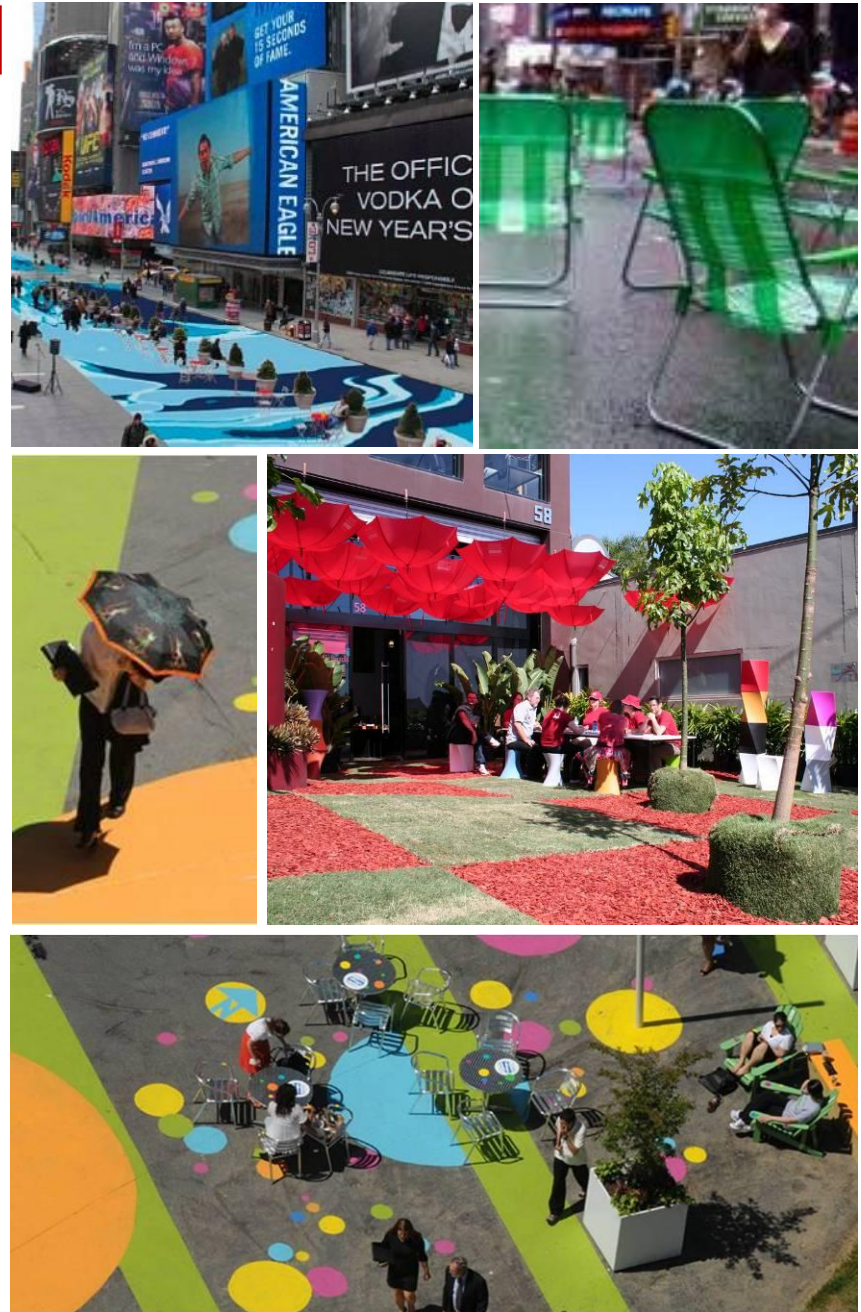
1. provide flexible space suitable for a variety of gatherings.
2. be designed to integrate with adjacent Triangle Lane.
3. be surrounded by retail and other street activating uses.
4. include areas for both active and passive recreation.
5. include both shaded and sunny areas.
6. include flexible seating options.
7. consider buffering elements between the square and Reedie Drive.
8. consider incorporating focal elements such as water features.



Objective 3: Promote temporary spaces for public use

The Plan recommends creating interim open spaces on publicly-owned properties through inexpensive improvements to enliven Wheaton until permanent open spaces are created through redevelopment and public/private partnerships (p. 21). The following examples of temporary public spaces on parking lots and other public areas would provide the gathering space needed for various community wide activities, on a per activity basis, while avoiding the investment to create a permanent space before the right location is identified. Design considerations should include:

1. Features for both passive and active recreation
2. Flexible areas for group events

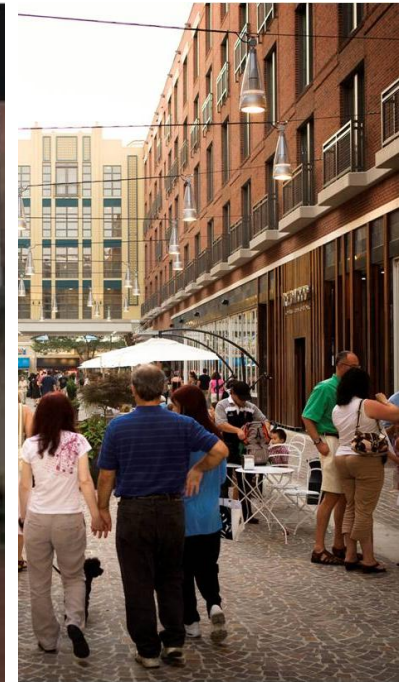


Objective 4: Create pedestrian links

The Plan recommends pedestrian through-block connections to shorten walking distances, to create connections between open spaces, and to promote additional retail activity.

Strategies

1. Maintain continuity with street walls along adjacent streets, wherever feasible.
2. Create safe spaces that are well monitored, well illuminated and adequately furnished. Use CPTED principles in designing pedestrian links as effective public spaces.
3. For proposed locations, refer to Map 18 on the **Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan**, p.59.



Section 4: Implementation Resources

The following is a list of resources relevant for property owners considering redevelopment in Wheaton. It is provided for reference and informational purposes, and is not intended to be exhaustive.

National

Americans with Disabilities Act

http://www.ada.gov/2010ADASTandards_index.htm

State of Maryland

Maryland State Highway Administration

<http://sha.md.gov/Home.aspx>

Maryland's Stormwater Management Act of 2007

<http://www.mde.state.md.us/programs/Water/StormwaterManagementProgram/Pages/programs/waterprograms/sedimentandstormwater/swm2007.aspx>

Montgomery County

Department of Housing and Community Affairs - Wheaton Streetscape Standards

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Apps/DHCA/index.asp>

Department of Permitting Services / Building Construction – Building Codes & Standards

<http://permittingservices.montgomerycountymd.gov/dpstmpl.asp?url=/permitting/bc/nfbldc.asp>

Zoning Code Directory

http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/development/about/zoning_legend.shtm

Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance - Chapter 59

http://www.amlegal.com/montgomery_county_md

Montgomery County Code

http://www.amlegal.com/montgomery_county_md

Montgomery County Road Code

http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/council/pdf/SCANNED_DOCS/20070715_48-06.pdf

Department of Transportation, Pedestrian Safety

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dotmpl.asp?url=/Content/dot/dir/pedsafety/index.asp>

Wheaton

Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/midtmpl.asp?url=/content/RSC/midcounty/tier2/boards/wrac/index.asp>

Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/midtmpl.asp?url=/content/RSC/midcounty/tier2/boards/wudac/index.asp>

Wheaton Redevelopment Program

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgtmpl.asp?url=/content/DGS/Dir/OPD/wheaton/wheaton.asp>

Wheaton Enterprise Zone

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/DGS/Dir/OPD/resources/WEZpacket.pdf>

Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

M-NCPPC Development Manual

http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/development/development_manual/index.shtm

Wheaton Sector Plan

<http://montgomeryplanning.org/community/wheaton/>

County Bikeways Functional Master Plan

http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/transportation/bikeways/A_A/contents.shtm

Other

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

<http://www.cpted.net/>

