



Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan, Work Session #12

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Description

Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan: Work Session #12

Summary

Work session #12 will begin with the summary of the density that has been added to the Plan to-date through previous work sessions with the Planning Board, as well as an analysis of density that has been realized between the previous two Sector Plans.

Staff will then present the transportation sensitivity analysis prepared as a result of increases in density throughout the Plan during the previous work sessions with the Board. Following the transportation presentation staff will provide options for addressing the overall density in the Sector Plan as well as provide a detailed view of the building heights and density approach as recommended in the May 2015 Public Hearing Draft (working draft).

Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan		
Work Session Density Results as Recommended by the Board as of April 28, 2016		
DISTRICT	Square Feet (SF) Reduced	Square Feet (SF) Added to Plan
Wisconsin Ave	-35,069	549,002
Bethesda Row		4,196
Woodmont Triangle	-56,119	97,214
Pearl District		252,804
Arlington North		95,488
Arlington South		257,492
Battery Lane		1,093,621
Eastern Greenway		651,153
South Bethesda		0
TOTAL	91,188	3,000,970
NET ADDED DENSITY		2,909,782

DISCUSSION

Vision

In 2035, Bethesda residents will have a downtown that is a model for sustainability, accessibility, equity and innovation. There will be more affordable choices of housing in close proximity to jobs, shopping and recreation. They will safely walk and bike along shaded streets to stores and offices, past new energy-efficient buildings and familiar landmarks. New parks and open spaces will provide green, tranquil places for the residents, their families and friends to gather, socialize and relax. Nearby Metrorail and new Purple Line stations will be quickly reached via green corridors that line streets and sidewalks to meet the needs of both the residents and visitors to Downtown Bethesda.

This vision stems from the goals and recommendations within this Sector Plan to enhance Downtown Bethesda over the next 20 years. The aim of the Plan is not to radically transform the community but to achieve a truly sustainable downtown through incremental measures addressing its economic, social and environmental future.

Planning Framework

Overarching Goals:

Specifically, the Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan builds on the past successes of Downtown Bethesda to create a truly sustainable downtown by focusing on recommendations to increase:

- Affordable Housing
- Parks and Open Space
- Environmental Innovation
- Economic Competitiveness

Strengthened Centers of Activity:

Bethesda is distinguished by multiple downtowns within its greater Downtown. Identified in Chapter Three are nine districts, including the established centers of the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor, Bethesda Row and Woodmont Triangle; emerging centers of the Pearl and Arlington South Districts; and residential and edge districts of Battery Lane, Eastern Greenway, South Bethesda and Arlington North. The Plan explores ways to strengthen these centers of activity through the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainability.

Transportation

As a result of the Planning Board's work sessions on the Plan's land use vision through February 5, 2016, an additional 2,873,528 square feet of gross square footage has been tentatively added to the plan area beyond the land use density recommended in the Working Draft. This increase over the Working Draft vision raised concern that additional density may jeopardize implementation of the plan. As a result, staff outlined several points for the Board to consider as additional land use increases were discussed in subsequent work sessions. Those points included:

- Additional traffic analyses may be required by the County Council if the Planning Board Draft land use density is substantially different from that evaluated in the Working Draft.
- Staff may need to identify vehicular capacity improvements within the limits of the Downtown Plan area if the Planning Board land use density exceeds the anticipated 2040 transportation capacity. Currently, the Working Draft does not require, and staff does not recommend, any intersection improvements specifically designed to add automobile capacity within the Plan area due to the negative impact such improvements have on the built environment including mobility, safety, and comfort for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Operational scenarios, such as the one-way/ two-way street conversion and Arlington Road "road diet" may not be feasible with increased vehicular traffic demand.
- From a regulatory perspective, adding more land use density than the transportation network can accommodate could also leave development potential "on the table" for potential developments unable to mitigate intersection congestion to the applicable CLV.

February 2016 Transportation Sensitivity Test Methodology

In an attempt to bring the Board's increased density closer to the density recommended in the May 2015 Public Hearing Draft, the Planning Board directed staff to evaluate a maximum future development total of 33.8M GSF. The February 2016 sensitivity test included a new analysis of the regional traffic model with the same ratio of Jobs-to-Households (J/HH), tested as part of the Working Draft traffic analysis, increased proportionally to the 33.8M GSF scenario. Due to the interim nature of the requested analysis (an in-process plan), the February 2016 analysis did not go into the same level of detail as the Working Draft analysis for either conceptual intersection improvements or operational analysis using the Synchro tool. This methodology can best be characterized as a sensitivity analysis of the most congested intersections within the Bethesda Downtown study area so the Board can make informed decisions about the potential for increased density as the Plan moves forward. Additional traffic analysis will likely be required for any increased density beyond the 32.3M GSF recommended in the Working Draft before the plan is transmitted to the District Council.

Staff will present its findings to the Planning Board and provide options and recommendations at the request of the Planning Board for their use in making informed decisions regarding future density discussions on the Plan.

Land Use and Zoning Approach

The work session on July 20, 2015 provided a brief recap of the zoning strategy (as outlined in Work Session #1) as it relates to the recommended density and height increases across the Sector Plan area. Transportation analysis and school capacity was a factor in determining how much density may be increased without over-burdening the infrastructure in the Downtown. A comparative analysis was prepared with other similar urban downtown areas (White Flint, Silver Spring, Wheaton and Friendship Heights) in terms of acreage of planning area; Sector Plan vision build-out and vision build-out square feet per acre. Strategy objectives included:

- Accommodate projected growth over the next 20 years.
- Incentivize redevelopment in the expanded centers of activity and emerging centers (priority areas in the Plan) by increasing density and maximum allowable heights in the expanded centers of activity around proposed civic gathering spaces, such as the areas immediately around the Farm Women's Market, the Bethesda Metro Station, and Veteran's Park (the major civic gathering spaces).
- Balance opportunities for redevelopment and compatibility with adjacent neighborhoods.

Attachments

Board decisions on property owner zoning requests from April 28, 2016 work session
Recent Correspondence between April 21 – May 5, 2016