

montgomery county
planning department



setting

Montgomery County, once defined as a Washington, D.C., bedroom community, is now Maryland’s economic force, with a growing, diverse population and a unique identity.

As envisioned in the General Plan, much of the County’s growth trended suburban between 1960 and 1990. Although Metro extended the Red Line to Shady Grove and Glenmont, residents were accustomed to driving to work, shopping, and recreational activities.

Starting in the 1990s, Montgomery County began an evolution. With few remaining large tracts of undeveloped land, suburban development slowed. Today, a lack of land for big houses, high gas prices, and environmental concerns encourage more residents to locate near transit and jobs.

The innovative planning of the General Plan of the ’60s served us well. Montgomery County’s stellar reputation was built, in part, on good planning. Now it’s time to refine that vision as we look ahead embrace change, and build on it to stay competitive in the region and the nation.

Montgomery County has earned an identity. Just how that identity will reflect our values – of sustainability, vigorous economic growth, diversity, inclusiveness, and opportunity – remains our mutual challenge.

the big idea

With change comes the need to refine our ideas about planning, growth, and development.

Most new growth will occur as redevelopment in as large surface parking lots along major roadways, office parks challenged to survive by high energy costs, and tracts positioned by transit ideal for a mix of uses.

We want compact, well-designed, mixed-use urban communities strategically located along transit corridors that showcase opportunities for walking and bicycling.

We want communities that are diverse, energy efficient, focused on environmental conservation, and feature connections between well-landscaped streets, transit stations, jobs, services, promenades, parks, and trails.



Downtown Bethesda provides one of the county’s best examples of active sidewalks.



And we want livable, human places with a variety of housing types and mixed uses that invite people to walk or bike to work, to shop, and to participate in community life without a long commute by car.

In short: More people should have the opportunity to walk to work in the morning and stop along the way for a cup of coffee or to read the newspaper. More workers should venture outside during lunch to enjoy a well-designed public space. And in the evening, more people should be near enough to retail to run errands or stop by school or an after-care program to pick up their children on foot.

We call our new direction in planning growing smarter: sustainable development+design. Growing smarter means rethinking how we manage growth, not just basing it on traffic or school capacity, but on the amenities that enhance quality of place in our community, such as:

- an attractive, active human environment that promotes social interaction along our sidewalks and provides a hierarchy of urban spaces
- centers with lower carbon footprints and buildings that generate power for their energy needs
- density around transit
- quality projects that contribute to a positive perception of our communities
- a range of housing opportunities for all income groups
- development linked to our system of great parks and natural areas
- a network of neighborhoods linked through trails and corridors

When we provide communities with interactive downtowns or areas of relative quiet and repose, we attract a range of residents who create the sustainable growth we seek and generate the need for a diverse range of services.

And as we develop, we must emphasize terrific design in buildings and spaces, leading and inspiring with quality public projects.

getting started

The 2007-2009 Growth Policy laid the groundwork for sustainable growth. For the first time, the policy includes transit options as strategies for developers to overcome congestion caps. In addition, it requires policymakers to set sustainability indicators that measure the county’s progress toward achieving healthy and sustainable communities.



Careful redevelopment of historic sites like Silver Spring’s National Park Seminary provides a unique sense of place.

Last summer, the Board approved new local and policy area review guidelines recommended by our transportation planners that emphasize those alternatives – transit, bicycling, and walkable environments. In what planners call a true paradigm shift, the new LATR/PAMR guidelines developed in the last six months place transit, walking, and biking on an equal footing with car trips.

what we've done

reorganization

The growing smarter initiative requires us to adapt. To support our vision to create livable communities, the planning director, working with department leadership and the board, reorganized the agency to be more effective and flexible.



Organized in six divisions – including a new urban design and preservation unit – planners better support new and existing functions by expanding and sharing responsibilities.

The department is more efficient, too. A hard look at ways we could do more with less revealed ways to streamline. Now, thanks to a retirement incentive program and the reorganization, we have two fewer division chiefs (three, counting the Commissioners' Office) and one less planning supervisor. We've got a lean, hard-working team that's well-positioned to carry out our innovative new strategies.

Divisions such as community-based planning continue to carry out core responsibilities, envisioning great communities across Montgomery County. We organize our master plan work both geographically and by type, with a focus on corridors (such as the series of I-270 plans), Metro stations, and neighborhoods and centers. Our structure serves the community well, with each new project supporting our integrated growing smarter vision.

By softening traditional lines, the reorganization gives us new flexibility. Now, a community planner is assigned development review responsibilities and vice versa, with new teams tackling diverse work programs. If development applications temporarily plateau, reviewers can deploy to master plan work now familiar to them.

A larger pool of planners trained across divisions ensures that core functions receive the benefit of diverse viewpoints. Cross-training also creates advancement opportunities for staff.



Historic Preservation planners have reviewed hundreds of potential historic resources on the Locational Atlas “wish list.” Just 200 of the original 2,000 remain to be evaluated. *Pictured: Wild Acres in Bethesda, recommended as a historic resource in July.*

The reorganization enables our growing smarter strategy. Our job is to envision, enable, and create well-designed, appealing communities where people want to live. Master planners envision the communities. Urban designers create design guidelines. Development review planners ensure that each application follows those rules. And throughout, support teams from transportation, environment, research, and historic preservation provide invaluable input.

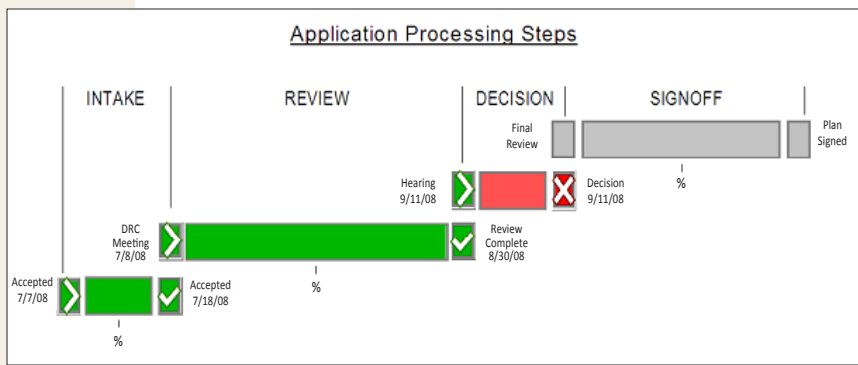
Finally, an integrated communications team – including publication management, mapping and graphics, web, media relations, and outreach – folded into the Management Services Division creates a one-stop shop for spreading the word.

staffing

The retirement incentive and typical turnover have resulted in 17 vacancies, with five more occurring by January 1. Recognizing the FY09 and FY10 challenging fiscal climate, we are carefully evaluating which of those positions to fill. To address the demands of our heavy work program, we are considering alternatives to career staffing such as consultants, interns, and contractual employees. We also are fortunate to attract several talented volunteers.

measuring performance

In response to the Council’s direction, the Department is designing a performance measurement system that reports major outputs and indicators at the program element level. This bottom-up approach is resulting in revised program elements that articulate goals and provide the basis for outcomes we can measure.



Growing smarter depends on effective, timely review of development proposals. To achieve that goal, we have committed to improved project tracking and have

incorporated a series of performance indicators that rate progress toward achieving key work program components.

The department’s Hansen database now tracks key milestones on virtually all department projects, from an application for a site plan to development of a master plan.

The Hansen system will identify delays and where those delays occur – whether with planning staff or outside agencies.

We have premiered our improved measuring and tracking system in a few of our units and will expand in the months ahead.

rethinking zoning

Planners are developing a diagnosis of what’s wrong with the zoning ordinance, the first step in a comprehensive revision that addresses overlapping regulations, unnecessary districts, and outdated zones. In the end, the revision will feature fewer, more meaningful zones, more tables and diagrams to graphically illustrate concepts, and better organized content. The new zoning code will highlight urban design guidelines and sustainability.

In late summer, planners launched a public input process by inviting code users to participate in a roundtable discussion and soliciting input in an online survey. The diagnosis informs the revision, which we will deliver in 2011.

Creating specifications for a zone that regulates mixed uses continues. The Council is completing work on a new Transit Mixed Use or TMX zone the Board proposed to regulate development in transit station areas outside central business districts. The TMX zone supports growing smarter, partly by allowing more density in areas designated as receiving zones for buildable development rights agreements.

master planning

Community planners are incorporating growing smarter and sustainable principles into each plan. Upcoming plans seek to focus mixed-use development in areas that are well-served by public transit. Plans in the I-270/MD 355 corridor seek to address the balance between jobs and housing while enhancing access to transit.

In Germantown, planners are establishing land uses and densities to support future Corridor City Transitway (CCT) stations and to create a thriving town center that will serve as a focal point and center of community life for the area. In July, the Board conducted a public hearing on the draft Germantown Master Plan that drew close to 200



Planners have begun working on a master plan amendment for Wheaton’s Central Business District and Vicinity.

Plans in the I-270/MD 355 corridor seek to address the balance between jobs and housing while enhancing access to transit.

participants. In September, the Board held worksessions to finalize its draft of the plan. We expect to deliver the plan in the winter.

The White Flint Master Plan, scheduled for transmittal to Council in early 2009, calls for thriving, diverse, urban-style neighborhoods with highest density close to Metro and along Rockville Pike.

Master Plan Schedule			
plan	goal	delivery	rationale
Germantown	Spring '08	Fall '08	development of TMX zone
White Flint	Spring '08	Spring '09	include financial feasibility analysis
Gaithersburg West	Spring '08	Summer '09	coordinate with CCT process

Urban designers are crafting design guidelines to help achieve a sense of place in White Flint. Much of their work is focused on transforming Rockville Pike into an urban boulevard with a center median, street trees, and crosswalks near gathering

spaces and retail uses. White Flint planners also are assessing the fiscal impacts of the plan's recommendations.

This winter, expect a new blueprint for the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center as part of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. Home to Shady Grove Adventist Hospital, Johns Hopkins University Montgomery County Campus, the Universities at Shady Grove, and biotechnology companies, the area has largely achieved the original vision of County leaders. However, Gaithersburg West retains a sprawling, single-use, auto-oriented focus.

The new plan will envision the future of the Life Sciences Center as a more vibrant, dynamic, and walkable community. The plan will recommend a preferred route and station locations for the CCT to place the transit near development.

Staff is working with the Council and its staff toward adoption of the Twinbrook Sector Plan. The effort includes a new TMX zone that accepts additional density from the termination of buildable lots in the Agricultural Reserve.

limited plan amendments

Asked to move quickly, but without compromising quality, planners drafted a limited plan amendment for the Wheaton Sector Plan that covers three properties. Although under the 1990 plan, the properties were designated for office use, the limited plan amendment sent to



Planners are working on a plan that will transform the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center into a more vibrant, dynamic, and walkable area.

the Council in June recommends mixed uses that serve as a transition between the high-density central business district and a residential area. The plan also recommends that the properties be developed under the optional method to increase density and require developer contributions to public space.

The quick response to a critical planning need has encouraged the Council and Planning Board to consider other, similar situations for limited master plan amendments in the year ahead, including areas such as:

- Fenton Street
- Bethesda Metro
- Land uses near proposed Purple Line transit stops

Depending on the Council’s priorities for limited plan amendments, the Department may need to re-prioritize its 2010 work program.

regulatory caseload

Development review staff analyzed, researched, and collected comments from other planning divisions, County agencies, and the public to make recommendations to the Board on development applications. The number of plans submitted declined over the past six months compared to the previous year, but many of the projects were more complex and required an innovative balancing of an applicant’s intent with the public interest.

Personnel	Rec’d	Brought to PB	Pending
Preliminary	49	45	112
Project	0	3	7
Site	37	36	38
Forest Conservation	51	36	74
Mandatory referrals	37	12	16

Development review staff continued to work to prepare draft resolutions on Planning Board decisions. In the last six months, the Board approved 37 resolutions and expects 31 more in the coming weeks.

development review special revenue fund

Responding to improvements required in response to the violations uncovered in Clarksburg, the Council at the end of 2006 established a Development Review Special Revenue Fund to pay for an increase in the number of staff reviewing applications. The fund was intended to define the costs of development application reviews, including staff review time; support from research, transportation, and environmental staff; administrative and technical support; legal advice; and a portion of the department’s overhead.

As of August 31 projected revenues for FY09 are \$666,450, which is \$1,143,550 or 63% below the needed budgeted revenues.



The Board approved a site plan for 112 townhouses next to Strathmore Hall Arts Center after environmental planners brokered a noise abatement agreement and recommended planting of a 3-acre urban forest using native species.

No seed money was provided for the fund because County officials anticipated an accumulating balance. But that has not proven to be the case. By the end of FY08, the Development Review Special Revenue Fund performed as follows:

- Revenue generated from development applications dropped more than 46% from FY07.
- The number of applications filed dropped only 2 percent within the same time frame.
- In FY08, the average per application fee was \$4,472, down 45 percent below the FY07 average, which was \$8,156.
- In FY08, the Planning Department requested and received a special appropriation of \$749,000 to offset the revenues losses in the fund.
- Revenue from fees was lowered from \$3.2 million in FY07 to slightly over \$1.8 million in FY08.

To accommodate this reduction, the Department transferred nearly \$1.8 million from the Administration Fund. However, it is difficult to predict FY09 revenues. In the first two months of the fiscal year, funds collected amounted to only \$109,445, which, when projected out, would indicate that FY09 fees would be only \$656,670 or 36% of projected fee revenue.

Yet in September, development review fees totaled \$323,282, which would become \$432,727 over three months or \$1.7 million for the year – just \$79,090 less than anticipated in the budget. With only three data points on the trend line – July, August and September – it is difficult to estimate. Given current economic conditions, we still assume that projecting \$1.8 million in fee revenue may be too high, although we will continue to monitor the fund closely.

The Planning Board and Planning Department continues to believe that the Development Review Special Revenue Fund should be merged with the Administration Fund.

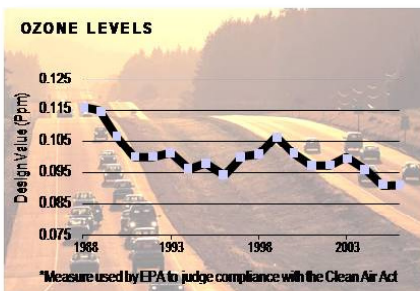
legal activity

Given the number of decisions the Board makes each week, the number of lawsuits filed against the Board continues to keep the agency’s legal staff extremely busy.

healthy and sustainable communities

Following Council’s direction in the 2007 Growth Policy, environmental planning staff delivered recommendations for a countywide Healthy and Sustainable Communities project that sets environmental policy goals and indicators, or ways to measure progress. The Board approved the full set of recommendations in September, part of a process that will help policymakers and community members judge how their policies, programs, and actions contribute to achieving goals such as clean air and water.

Case type	Planning	Parks
Cases filed with MNCPPC named as a party	6	3
Administrative appeals: 5		Other: 4
Other active cases		
Other active cases	10	1
Administrative appeals: 4		Other: 7
Other active cases resolved		
Other active cases resolved	4	5
Administrative appeals: 4		Other: 5



The report, drafted in a partnership with the County Department of Environmental Protection, evolved from public input gathered at a Healthy and Sustainable Communities workshop in June. We also welcomed comments contributed online at the Planning Department’s website where

people could submit comments – and view what others said – on each of six indicators.

The report, which was transmitted to the Council in September, specifies six goals and recommends a number of indicators that will help measure the County’s collective efforts toward reaching those goals. We see the project as a starting point and will work with the County Executive to create more indicators to measure our mutual goals.

icc bikeways

Interest in a proposed shared-use path for hikers and bicyclists along the Intercountry Connector peaked in July at a well-attended public hearing. In September,



the Planning Board adopted staff recommendations for combining new bike paths with bike routes along existing roads and delivered its draft to Council. The proposed route reflects planners' concerns about building new hard-surface trails through environmentally sensitive areas and provides a series of routes that meets the needs of all trail user groups and ability levels.

designing green

At the center of our growing smarter initiative are vibrant public spaces that draw people and solidify communities. With our new Urban Design Division, we expand our ability to achieve quality public spaces and buildings.

Planners tackled the need for public space in downtown Silver Spring in a draft Green Space plan presented to the Planning Board in April. The plan visualizes potential green spaces using 3D technology that enabled aerial "fly-throughs" of surrounding streets. The approved Green Space Plan ultimately will guide planners reviewing project applications in the Silver Spring Central Business District. Many of those applications will come with public amenity requirements that developers might fulfill by contributing to one of the green spaces envisioned in the plan. The Green Space Plan will help fulfill the original vision of the 2000 Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan for a green downtown.



The Silver Spring Green Space plan seeks to formalize guidelines and identify sites for public spaces within the Silver Spring Central Business District.

protecting farms

In keeping with the recommendations of the Council-appointed Ad Hoc Agriculture Advisory Group, planners and the legal staff worked on proposed legislative changes to Montgomery County Code Chapter 2B to include provisions for a Building Lot Termination (BLT) program. These amendments complement other proposals sent to the Council in 2007.

Although more than 50,000 acres are protected through TDR easements in the Agricultural Reserve, those easements limit uses and the number of allowable homes permitted in the RDT Zone. In most cases, property owners are allowed one house per 25 acres, meaning that a substantial number of potential building lots remain viable in the Reserve.



The Planning Board has recommended changes to Chapter 2B to help implement a BLT program. To preserve land for farming and prevent fragmentation in the Reserve, planners and County leaders are seeking some method of compensating landowners for the value of those buildable TDRs. The BLT program is a major tool to help accomplish that. Much of the planners’ work focused on establishing recommendations for densities that would be permitted for BLT easements and how much each BLT would be worth in commercial and residential areas.

reaching out

The success of our work depends on our ability to inform residents and property owners of our efforts. We have built upon efforts to make board actions transparent through online live broadcasting, posting agendas and streamlined staff reports online, and noticing meetings in major publications and through press releases.

Continuing our successful collaboration with County Cable Montgomery, we produced several more episodes of Montgomery Plans as a way to educate residents about in-depth planning topics.

In response to our call for photos as part of our new Great Communities photo contest, we received close to 150 entries that we will use to build our library of images.

As part of the contest, we built public support for and knowledge of planning as the underpinning of what makes great communities. Many of the photo contest entries appear on the cover and throughout the report.



Planner and team leader Callum Murray on the October Montgomery Plans.

what’s next

The Planning Department looks forward to a busy six months, as staff delivers two master plan drafts and progresses on six more. Planners have begun intensive analysis in preparation for the 2009 Growth Policy, drawing on our best ideas for responsible development following grow smarter principles. All of the projects will occur in the context of a reduced budget and leaner staffing.

The Planning Department is up to the task, however. Energized by a reorganization that both strengthens teamwork approaches and provides more opportunities for individuals, staff stands ready to tackle the challenges ahead.

