



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

July 26, 2002

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: John A. Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning Division *JAC*
Khalid Afzal, Team Leader, Georgia Avenue Planning Team

FROM Frederick Vernon Boyd, Georgia Avenue Planning Team (301/495-4654) *fvb*

SUBJECT: Staff Draft, Upper Rock Creek Area Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION: Approve Staff Draft as Public Hearing Draft and set October 3, 2002 as Public Hearing date.

BACKGROUND

This Staff Draft Upper Rock Creek Area Master Plan is the culmination of three years of work by a team from the Community-Based Planning, Environmental Planning, and Transportation Planning groups. The Park Planning and Resource Analysis, Research and Technology, and Historic Preservation units developed recommendations in their fields as well. From the Executive Branch, staff from the departments of Public Works and Transportation, Permitting Services and Environmental Protection advised the planning team and reviewed ideas as they developed. The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission's staff offered technical expertise.

A Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG), made up of civic association representatives, individual residents and landowners, advised the planning team as well. The MPAG met 24 times in an 18-month period. As analyses of environmental impacts, highway alternatives, and potential infrastructure improvements were completed, the planning team outlined their findings for the MPAG and sought to create a context for developing recommendations. The planning team sought the MPAG's advice on its draft land use recommendations before finalizing them for this Staff Draft.

As draft recommendations for this Plan were under discussion, a number of civic associations formed a group to discuss the use of large-lot development with septic fields and private open space to retain residential character. The planning team met several times with this group, called the Upper Rock Creek Coalition, in an effort to find a mutually agreeable approach to land use development in the Planning Area.

SUMMARY

The basic aims of this Upper Rock Creek Area Master Plan are little changed from those of previous plans. This Plan strives to protect environmental resources and maintain stream quality by keeping streams, forests, and wetlands in their natural state. This Plan builds on and extends the Upper Rock Creek watershed's open space heritage, recognizing that public ownership of open space or easements on privately owned land can achieve this goal. The Plan also preserves residential character by maintaining low densities. It maintains the area's small-scale commercial center and augments it by providing a modest amount additional housing adjacent to the center. The Plan also connects the area's neighborhoods with transit, recreational and other opportunities by recommending a bikeway and trail network.

To extend the open space heritage and preserve resources, this Plan:

- Directs development away from stream valleys, forests, and other sensitive areas;
- Establishes low density zones for remaining large undeveloped properties in the planning area to insure that open space can be preserved; and
- Increases public open space through dedication or acquisition as land develops.

To preserve rural residential character, this Plan:

- Encourages future development that is consistent with the character of neighboring communities;
- Maintains lowest densities adjacent to stream valleys and low densities along ridges;
- Encourages integration of new and existing communities, with emphasis on design and preservation of open space in those areas where new and existing communities meet;
- Recommends design and preservation methods that retain the character of existing local roads; and
- Recommends protection of significant views and open spaces that contribute to community character.

To enhance neighborhood centers and industrial areas, this Plan:

- Recommends additional housing adjacent to the Redlands commercial area; and
- Retains existing industrial zones.

To connect communities, this Plan:

- Recommends development of a bikeway and trail network that enhances access to community facilities and commercial areas and connects to regional bicycle and trail systems.

On the broad goals, there is agreement among the advisory group, the Upper Rock Creek Coalition, landowners and professional planners. In addition to devising broad goals, this Plan offers concrete ways to reach those goals on specific properties. There are six large undeveloped properties that are discussed in this Plan. On two of them, the Hendry and Fraley properties, there is agreement that low-density development using septic systems is appropriate. On a third, the Dungan property, residents and planners agree that the property should be acquired to preserve forest and wetlands, while the property's owner has proposed cluster development in the Rural Neighborhood Cluster Zone for the property. A majority of MPAG members agree with the latter proposal.

On the remaining three, the Casey, Freeman and Woodlawn properties, there are disagreements over the appropriateness of limited cluster development on the properties. The Upper Rock Creek Coalition and at least two MPAG members strongly believe that these properties should be restricted to development using septic systems and that this type of development will afford sufficient privately-owned open space to meet environmental goals while limiting development densities. Other MPAG members believe that the Casey and Freeman properties are suitable for limited cluster development in their existing zones, which would preserve open space through public or institutional ownership while allowing lot sizes to be reduced somewhat. The MPAG took no advisory position on the Woodlawn property.

This Staff Draft Plan offers two options for the Casey property. It prefers an option allowing limited cluster development using existing community sewer lines only while reducing zoning densities on the property. At the same time, the Plan recognizes that septic development on this property will meet its goals and objectives. The Plan offers a single recommendation for limited cluster development and reduced zoning densities on the Freeman property, because the property contains more clearly sensitive contiguous forests and wetlands. It recommends limited cluster development at the existing density for the Woodlawn property, allowing for preservation of areas near proposed major highways and for additional open space next to Rock Creek Regional Park.

The Environmental Resources Plan examines the broad range of natural resources in the Upper Rock Creek watershed and makes recommendations designed to preserve sensitive wetlands, forests, and ecosystems. In general, the Plan recommends preservation of significant forests and wetlands by creating easements during the development process, by acquiring land through dedication, or in the case of the Dungan property, by purchase. Importantly, the Plan recommends no new sewer lines

in stream valleys, recognizing that construction of such lines is damaging. Where cluster development is considered, existing sewer lines are used.

The Transportation Plan makes several recommendations for intersections in the Planning Area and removes a connection across a sensitive part of North Branch. The Plan focuses on the important issue of east-west transportation through the Upper Rock Creek watershed. It draws on master plan and Transportation Policy Report analyses of alternatives and makes three main recommendations: it maintains the classification, right-of-way and two-lane section for Muncaster Mill Road; maintains the classifications, rights-of-way and numbers of lanes for the Intercounty Connector and Mid-County Highway Extended; and it recommends project planning studies for a four-lane arterial between I-370 and MD 28 east of Georgia Avenue in the ICC alignment or an extension of the Mid-County Highway between Shady Grove Road and MD 28, using the ICC right-of-way east of Muncaster Mill Road.

CONCLUSION

The planning team appreciates the opportunity to work with the MPAG, the coalition and others during this first phase of the Master Plan process. We appreciate in particular the time and effort voluntarily invested by MPAG and coalition members to help guide land use planning in the Upper Rock Creek watershed. We look forward to the public hearing and to the worksessions.

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