

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning

December 17, 2004

MEMORANDUM – DAMASCUS MASTER PLAN

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: John A. Carter, Chief *JAC*
Community-Based Planning Division

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SUBJECT: Work Session No. 1: Damascus Master Plan

RECOMMENDATIONS

This is the first work session on the Damascus Master Plan. The items to be covered at this work session include:

- Item No. 1: Overview of Major Plan Recommendations
- Item No. 2: Housing Policy
- Item No. 3: Water and Sewer Policy
- Item No. 4A: Schools
- Item No. 4B: Community Recreation Facilities, Public Facilities, Public Safety
- Item No. 5: Historic Preservation

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Master Plan Evaluation

The existing Damascus Master Plan was completed 22 years ago (1982). The County Council requested an evaluation of the Master Plan. The reasons for preparing this Plan include:

- Changes to environmental regulations that placed additional restrictions on land in the Patuxent River watershed.
- Many recommendations of the existing master plan have been implemented and there is a need to assess their impact on the community.
- The commercial heart of Damascus needs a new vision for the future to revitalize locally oriented commercial activity and provide additional housing opportunities.
- A much stronger emphasis on non-vehicle connectivity in the community is needed – a layered approach of pedestrian access, bicycle connections, and regional trails.

Schedule

This staff report is part of the first work session for the Damascus Master Plan. The proposed review schedule includes the following:

- Completion of the Staff Draft: September 2004
- Planning Board Public Hearing: November 4, 2004
- Work Session No. 1: December 23, 2004
 - Review of Major Recommendations
 - Housing
 - Water and Sewer
 - Schools and Other Public Facilities
 - Historic Preservation
- Work Session No. 2: January 13, 2005
 - Transportation and Connectivity
 - Parks and Trails
 - Legacy Open Space
 - Environment
- Work Session No. 3: February 3, 2005
 - Town Center Land Use
- Work Session No. 4: February 24, 2005
 - Transitional Area Properties
- Work Session No. 5: March 10, 2005
 - Rural Area Land Use / Hamlets
 - Wrap-up and Transmit to County Council

Summary of Community Outreach for the Master Plan

Community participation in the Damascus Master Plan was through a series of Task Forces that addressed various elements. Membership on all of these Task Forces was open to any interested participant. Two to four Task Force meetings were held on each subject. Over 100 participants, many participating in multiple Task Forces, cumulatively comprised the Master Plan Review Committee. The Task Force groups included:

- Taskforce No. 1: Town Center Charrette
- Taskforce No. 2: Land Use, Housing, and Historic Preservation
- Taskforce No. 3: Environmental Issues
- Taskforce No. 4: Transportation Issues
- Taskforce No. 5: Parks, Trails, Open Space, and Community Facilities

Relationship to the 1982 Master Plan, and 1994 Master Plan Amendment

The 1982 Damascus Master Plan amended the 1966 Damascus Master Plan. The 1982 Plan significantly modified the 1966 Plan. Its major recommendations decreased employment potential in the Town Center, channeled most additional residential development to the sewerred Magruder Valley, removed a potential bypass of the Town Center, and created the protected Agricultural Reserve by reducing rural densities from 5-acre to 25-acre zoning. The reasons for that shift, as outlined in the 1982 Plan, related to a shift in county policies for Upcounty areas outside the transportation corridors, increased environmental concerns, and an increased emphasis on agricultural land preservation. The 1982 Plan stated that Damascus would continue as a rural community as recommended in the General Plan. The current land use patterns in the community strongly reflect the policies of that Master Plan.

The 1993 Amendment was a limited review restricted to only a few issues. Primarily it reconsidered the potential for a Bypass and concluded that it was premature to study a Bypass until the planned extension of Woodfield Road to Ridge Road (north of the town) was completed.

The 1982 Plan reflected a 1980 population of 8,500 in the central Plan area, 13,312 in the entire Plan area; and anticipated a 2000 population of 11,000 to 13,500 in the central Plan area. The 2000 Census reflected a population of 16,639 in the central Plan area; 29,184 in the entire Plan area.

The 1982 Damascus Master Plan anticipated 1,500 to 2,400 additional dwellings by 2000. The 2000 Census reflected a total of 5,559 housing units, 1,310 more than the 4,249 housing units in the 1980 Census. This seems to reflect that household sizes have been larger than anticipated in 1982, reflected in the crowding at the middle and high school. However, it must be noted that the census tract boundaries do not match the new Plan area boundaries, as traffic zones do not reflect census tracts; so the numbers may be a little off due to this discrepancy in certain portions of the planning area.

Housing Units and Population*

Year	Total Housing Units	Total Population
1980	4,249	13,312
2000	9,840	29,184
2003	10,005	31,575

*Source 1980 Census, 2000 Census, 2003 Montgomery County Census Update Statistics for Planning Areas 10, 11, 14, 15

Damascus Master Plan Study Area Boundary

The boundary of this Master Plan has been changed to correspond to the Traffic Area boundaries. A large area within the northeastern portion of the Goshen, Woodfield and Cedar Grove Planning Area (P.A. 14) (which has been within the Master Plan for the Preservation of Agricultural and Rural Open Space) has been included in the Damascus Master Plan. A large area within the southwestern portion of the Bennett and Little Bennett Planning Area (P.A. 10) has been excluded from the Damascus Master Plan, and will remain under the jurisdiction of the 1982 Damascus Master Plan. Both of these areas are within the low density Rural Density Transfer (RDT) Zone or the Rural Cluster (RC) Zone. This boundary change will not have a significant impact on these areas.

ITEM NO. 1 OVERVIEW OF MAJOR PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Vision

The focus of the Damascus Master Plan is to ensure the identity of central Damascus as the heart of the Master Plan area. Major issues include improving connectivity and cohesiveness, strengthening local retail and residential opportunities within and near the Town Center, enabling growth appropriate for the town vision, and protecting the surrounding rural areas. Opportunities for additional residential growth outside the Town Center are limited due to infrastructure concerns and to achieve other countywide environmental and housing policy objectives.

To implement these goals, the Master Plan includes recommendations to modify some existing zoning to ensure a mixed-use Town Center core, to allow smaller lot clustering in residential areas adjoining the Town Center, to provide some TDR receiving sites, and to better protect the character of rural crossroad villages.

Summary of the Major Recommendations

Land Use: Maintain the overall level of anticipated residential growth, but strengthen the potential for multi-family residential and mixed-use development in the Town Center. Encourage mixed-use and residential development in the Town Center, and cluster development in the areas beyond the Town Center. Limit residential opportunities in the Agricultural Reserve.

Town Center: Compress commercial uses along Main Street and at major downtown intersections to create additional opportunities for residential development that supports retail and service businesses in the core. Support guidelines for future development

and redevelopment to enhance Main Street identity, increase mobility and connectivity, and expand and enhance Community Open Space. Support mixed-use zoning that is appropriate for town-scale development; emphasizing proportion, design, and architectural context of structures, rather than separation of uses.

Transition Areas: Use the Rural Neighborhood Cluster (RNC) Zone with limited increase in density for developable sites in Neighborhood Transition Areas. Support two TDR receiving sites proposed in Transition Areas. Support a zoning change in the Rural Transition areas north and east of the Town impacted by the 1993 *Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River Watershed*, to reduce potential imperviousness.

Rural Areas: Confirm the existing extent of the Rural Density Transfer (RDT) Zone with adjustments for rural village centers.

Support a new mixed-use zone for designated historic rural villages that will protect and maintain their existing scale of development through appropriate types of uses and limited levels of intensity.

Support emerging agricultural methods and practices and agriculturally related businesses as the best – most efficient, effective, and economical – means to maintain a viable agricultural economy and protect the Agricultural Reserve.

Support proposed guidelines for Agricultural Conservation Development for residential subdivisions in the RDT Zone within this Master Plan, and Guidelines for Rural Vista Protection for Special Exceptions.

Housing: Support balanced housing objective and provide moderate-density development within the Town Center. Increase senior housing opportunities including consideration of joint development opportunities.

For single-family development, maintain the small town character of Damascus through small lot cluster development; creating TDR receiving areas; and limiting single-family cluster development to existing densities except in areas recommended for TDR receiving sites.

Public Sewer Service: Expand Community Sewer Service to properties proposed for the Rural Neighborhood Cluster Zone if those properties develop using the cluster method. Conduct a comprehensive study of designated neighborhoods for alternative ways to address failing septic systems. Limit use of grinder pumps per policy of WSSC.

Transportation: Use context-based street design techniques in the Town Center and entry street segments of Ridge Road, Woodfield Road and Damascus Road to address safety and community character issues.

Retain the existing two-lane roadway network outside the Town Center to protect the rural and agricultural character of the area, and evaluate modifications to improve the efficiency of the network through operational, design, and classification changes. Also:

- Establish a business street in the Town Center along the route formerly called Damascus Boulevard, designed to be a narrow street generally for local use.
- Remove two unbuilt primary residential roadways now considered not viable, and include a classification for several previously unclassified roadways reflecting their current function in the roadway network.
- Support a thorough analysis of the potential for a Bypass around Damascus, after the completion of Woodfield Road Extended.
- Improve connectivity of the *pedestrian system* through a network of sidewalks within the Town Center with extensions to key civic destinations in the Plan area.
- Improve the *bikeway system* through a network of shared-use pathways oriented toward the Town Center and Magruder Branch Trail connecting to area parks and the county trail systems, and on-road cyclist accommodations along arterial roadways.
- Improve *transit access* by developing an additional park-and-ride lot north of the Town Center to intercept long distance commuters.

Environmental: Protect existing forest corridors and reforesting stream valleys, protect high priority forest stands, encourage development techniques that minimize forest fragmentation, connecting existing forest stands, and promote the use of forest banking. Maintain existing stream buffers and associated habitats while increasing buffer widths for wetlands, springs and seeps, avoiding “channelizing” or enclosing streams in culverts, and encourage clustered development.

Parkland, Trails and Open Space: Develop or improve facilities at Seneca Springs Local Park, Woodfield Local Park, Damascus Recreational Park, and completing the Magruder Branch trail northward to a terminus in the Town Center and provide a Trailhead Park. Also add designated properties in the Little Bennett Creek Watershed Headwaters and the stream valley of the Western Tributary of Seneca Creek as parkland.

Amend the Countywide Park Trail Plan to reflect the east-west natural surface trail corridor being added to link the Seneca Trail to the west to the Little Bennett Trail system to the east; and provide a sidewalk or bike path along Valley Park Drive including access to Magruder Branch trail and special treatment at the Ridge Road intersection to ensure safety.

Protect designated properties as Natural Resource sites through parkland acquisition (in the Little Bennett watershed) or easements (in the Bennett Creek Headwaters and Upper Patuxent River Forest Area).

ITEM NO. 2: HOUSING POLICY

Staff Recommendations

The community of Damascus offers one of the most balanced housing markets in the county, offering more diversity of housing types and prices than most areas. Affordably priced housing in a small town setting, convenient access to employment centers, and the beauty of the surrounding agricultural and rural open space have attracted and maintained a growing number of young families in recent years.

The most significant additional housing proposed is in the Town Center, which will contribute to the viability of local businesses and create a livelier center for the Damascus community. Outside the Town Center, this Plan supports limited additional single-family housing. Damascus is in the rural north of the county with limited access to public sewer (a situation exacerbated by its topography), environmental constraints, and limited transit options. The staff also took into account the Transportation Policy studies from the early 2000's and other county policies that stress limiting significant housing in areas without frequent transit access. The Plan reflects compliance with this policy to help mitigate congestion along Ridge Road and Woodfield Road, where transit service is infrequent.

Environmental policy in general, and especially the areas in the Patuxent watershed, led the staff and Damascus Task Forces to limit additional development in areas with topographic challenges, wetlands, and stream valleys. All are very common in the valleys that fall off from the "ridge" roads that form the spines of Damascus – Ridge Road, Woodfield Road, Damascus Road, and Bethesda Church Road. Development can be problematic on these sites, which is why clustering was recommended as the most protective method of using the property. When limited sewer access (gravity flow only wherever possible) is combined with clustering, it provides the opportunity to allow full development yield while protecting sensitive environmental resources and providing new neighborhoods that are compatible with the small lot single-family neighborhoods that have been build in the adjoining (fully sewerred) Magruder basin. Thus, these properties will achieve greater density than they would under the RE-2C Zone without sewer.

This Plan's recommendations will protect environmental features and the agricultural economy of the area while providing sufficient additional housing opportunities and meeting community building goals. In the Master Plan vision, cluster housing is preferred on major developable parcels over standard low-density designs, mixed-use mid-rise buildings are preferred in the Town Center over single use, single story buildings, and additional residential opportunities are encouraged in the Town Center to build a customer base for additional locally oriented retail opportunities.

While the staff supports the Plan recommendations, this document also provides alternative scenarios with additional density for the transition area and rural area for the Planning Board's consideration

Research indicates that the one area of significant need is senior housing. Currently, there are very few housing options within the Damascus planning area that can accommodate the diverse needs of the expanding senior population. This Plan identifies alternative senior housing options that support countywide policies.

The major Housing recommendations for Damascus include:

- Support additional moderate-density development within the Town Center.
Additional multi-family, single-family attached, and live-work units within the Town Center will accommodate a significant portion of the need for moderately priced residential development in this community. Increased densities will also accommodate moderately priced dwelling units (MPDU) and contribute to the economic base for local retail and service business.
- Support single-family cluster development at existing densities except as recommended for TDR receiving sites.
A moderate amount of development potential remains in the RE-2C and Rural Cluster Zone in the eastern portion of the Master Plan. This Plan supports the eventual development of those properties using the cluster option for development.
- Support increased senior housing for residents of the Damascus area.
The anticipated demand for senior housing will support a moderate increase of approximately 150 units. Senior housing would be most appropriately and conveniently located within the Town Center. Two potential sites appropriate for joint development are discussed.
- Use cluster development methods to maintain the small town character of Damascus where feasible.
Developable sites within the Transition Areas are recommended for single-family cluster development within the designated sewer envelope.
- Support use of TDR receiving areas where appropriate.
Where infrastructure is available, TDR receiving sites create additional housing opportunities that also contribute to agricultural preservation goals. Two TDR receiving sites are recommended in the Plan, both in Transition Areas.

Discussion

Location in Master Plan: Housing Chapter (Page 41)

Existing Master Plan Recommendations: The existing Master Plan does not have a separate housing section. Housing recommendations are imbedded within the land use recommendations. The 1982 Plan removed a significant amount of apartment and higher density townhouse development potential outside the Magruder Valley, stating that development of this character is *“generally not within the current or future Damascus housing market, or these areas are situated on land which is difficult to*

develop.” Due to topographic and environmental constraints, the actual unit yields in the Damascus area were found to be “*generally much lower than the maximum the zoning permitted.*” The overall policy was to place most additional housing in the Magruder basin where public water and sewer were readily available; and to reduce housing potential outside the Magruder basin to reflect sewer policy, topographic restraints, and environmental concerns.

Summary of Testimony at Public Hearing: The Public Hearing testimony reflected a desire for additional density from a number of property owners or their representatives (most of whom participated in the Master Plan process), and support for the densities recommended in the Plan from a number of community residents who participated in the Master Plan process. As the residents noted, the Plan already reflects a balance between those who would have preferred no additional growth, and those who wish moderate or considerably higher additional density to be allowed.

Of those requesting additional density, the majority requested only moderately more, to the extent that is possible with the use of grinder pumps. A few others are looking for significantly more density than recommended. There was general support from the property owners and the public for the general use of clustering outside the Town Center and mixed-use with multi-family in the Town Center. Only one letter was received regarding potential housing for a property that had not been reviewed during the Master Plan process. That property is in the RDT Zone, just west of the Town Center. All other testimony was anticipated.

Staff Analysis

Housing in Damascus: The Town Center area contains some moderate density housing and single-family housing. The most extensive housing is in or adjoining the Magruder basin including moderate to lower density single-family and townhouse standard and clustered developments. One of the final significant developable properties is now under construction in this area, allowing the completion of Valley Park Drive. Beyond the central corridors, lower density housing of 1 to 5 acre density on well and septic predominates. Scattered older large lot subdivisions remain in the Rural Cluster and Rural Density Transfer Zone, predating the implementation of those zones.

- Over three-quarters of the housing stock is single-family detached.
- Only 7.3 percent of the housing is multi-family, compared to 30.7 percent countywide.

HOUSING TYPE	Damascus	% Damascus	County
Total Housing Units	5,559		334,632
Single-Family Detached	4,326	77.8%	51.2%
Townhouse	813	14.6%	17.9%
Multi-Family	407	7.3%	30.7%
Mobile Home	12	0.2%	0.2%

Source – 2000 Census

Most development is concentrated along the entry roads and in the Magruder basin. Some older smaller lot subdivisions exist in the outlying rural areas that predate the 1982 Master Plan. The majority of the development in the Magruder basin was built in the 1980's. The majority of growth in the 1990's was large lot luxury housing in the Rural Cluster Zone along Hawkins Creamery Road. The Master Plan area has basically developed as envisioned in the 1982 Master Plan.

Public Sites: There are no vacant publicly owned sites in the Plan area, other than one discussed as a potential senior housing site in the Town Center, that can be considered for additional housing opportunities. Two vacant school sites are in the Plan area, and one more is just outside the Plan area; but the Board of Education has no plans to surplus these sites. Even if they were to be considered for surplus, their size and infrastructure limitations would render them of limited usefulness for additional housing. They would be better considered for park and recreation resources as discussed in the Community Facilities recommendations.

Town Center: Creating senior housing opportunities and additional moderate density housing are the primary housing goals for the Town Center.

- Moderate Density Residential Development – The Town Center will accommodate a variety of housing types. Currently, less than 8 percent of the existing housing stock within Damascus is multi-family housing and most of that is within the Town Center. This Plan encourages further moderate density residential development (freestanding or as part of a mixed-use development) to enhance the vitality and character of the Town Center. The types of moderate density development that are contemplated include live-work units, townhouse and multi-family units.

As a basis of comparison, there are currently 357 dwelling units in the Town Center area of Damascus, less than 2 dwelling units per gross acre. As noted in the Table below, the existing allowed densities in the Town Center have the potential to allow somewhat more than 2,300 additional dwelling units, based on the maximum development potential of the existing ten zones in the Town Center, slightly more than 12 dwelling units per gross acre.

It may also be noted that this theoretical maximum exceeds the realistic potential market for development in Damascus, and most of this land is already in stable commercial, industrial, and residential uses. In fact, the largest segment of potential housing noted on the Table would be in the C-2 Zone, which contains the Damascus Shopping Centre. It is highly unlikely that the Centre property would convert to residential.

MAXIMUM YIELD FROM EXISTING ZONES IN TOWN CENTER

Zone	Acres	GFA	GSA	YPA	# Units	Notes
C-2	64.35	4,204,874	2,803,249	21.50	*1,384	
C-T	1.00	21,780	43,560	0	0	1
O-M	6.40	416,870	277,913	21.50	137*	2
PD-7	24.68	3,258	1,075,174	6.60	163	3
I-1	15.77	0	686,855	21.50	339	2
RE-2C	38.23	0	1,665,354	.40	15	
R-200	20.99	0	914,364	2.44	51	4
R-60	4.76	0	207,346	6.10	29	4
RT-8.0	6.03	0	262,474	9.76	59	
R-30	11.81	0	514,476	17.69	184	4
TOTALS	194.02	4,646,781	8,450,765	12.20		
Maximum Potential Residential Yield Town Center					2361	

GFA – Gross Floor Area GSA – Gross Site Area YPA–Residential Yield Per Acre (Theoretical Maximum)

*Permitted by Special Exception Only

1. Dwellings no longer allowed in C-T Zone

3. Zone can yield 8.5/acre if MPDUs are used

2. Highest yield through Productivity Housing

4. Includes 22% MPDUs.

Similarly, based on the proposed capacity for Town Center Zones (TCZ-1 and TCZ-2), the residential density calculation (using proposed densities of 20 and 15 dwelling units per acre respectively, with an anticipated approximate gross yield of 10.7 and 10.0 respectively per acre) generates a maximum theoretical total of slightly more than 2,000 dwelling units within the Town Center. While this may equally overstate realistic development potential, these zones will provide more flexibility for the property owners, and more design and scale certainty for area residents. While residential potential is not similarly increased, this proposed zone will make it easier to approve residential or mixed-use developments in the Town Center. It is believed that this alone will be an incentive for additional residential development.

**PROPOSED TOWN CENTER ZONES YIELDS
DEVELOPABLE PROPERTIES**

Zone	Density Per Acre	Acres	GFA (sf)	GSA (sf)	Proposed YPA	# Units
TCZ-1	20	162.0	1,860,092	7,056,087	10.7	1735
TCZ-2	15	32.0	1,278,150	1,394,678	10.0	322
TOTALS		194.0	3,138,242	8,450,765	10.6	
Maximum Potential Residential Yield of Developable Properties					2057	

GFA – NR Gross Floor Area

GSA – Gross Site Area

YPA – Residential Yield Per Acre.

- Senior Housing - Existing options for seniors (active, assisted, and care facilities) are limited in the Damascus area. Specialized housing for elderly residents in Damascus consists of two group homes that can accommodate a total of 15 residents. There are only three additional group homes in the rural up-county area: one each in Poolesville, Clarksburg, and Barnesville. Together, these facilities can accommodate a total of 20 residents. There are no nursing homes or age segregated apartments in the area.

Based on the 2000 Census data, current population trends in Damascus indicate that while there are many young families, approximately 43 percent of its residents have lived in Damascus for more than ten years. This suggests that Damascus offers great potential for providing a stable community for residents who wish to “age in place.” The “aging in place” concept provides the type of housing that will allow residents to remain in their homes despite the limitation that occur with aging. Successful aging-in-place communities provide a variety of services that accommodate the physical, mental, and psychological changes that accompany aging.

This Plan supports residences for active seniors and some assisted living. The anticipated demand for senior housing in Damascus will support a moderate increase of approximately 150 units. Two sites within the Town Center are particularly appropriate for this use due to their location to immediate services and convenient retail uses. If both were developed at the maximum proposed density within the proposed TCZ-1 Zone, they could provide the anticipated needed senior housing units.

Town Neighborhood Areas: Existing densities in the neighborhoods within and adjoining the Magruder Branch watershed generally range from 2-8 houses per acre and primarily consist of small lot single-family homes and townhomes with a moderate number of multi-family developments. Few developable parcels remain in this corridor, and no changes are proposed to housing policy. This corridor is the cornerstone of Damascus’ strength as a community offering a wide range of moderately priced single-family housing. These neighborhoods are convenient to schools, recreation facilities, shopping, and commuter routes.

Neighborhood Transition Areas: Beyond the immediate vicinity of the linear corridor development along Ridge and Woodfield Roads, residential development is characterized by development ranging from 1-3 houses per acre. This type of development was included in the Plan to serve as a transition area between higher density residential development within the Town Center and Magruder Branch, and the Rural Transition and Agricultural Reserve areas. Some developable properties still remain in these areas, and they can be expected to provide additional low-density single-family detached housing opportunities for the Damascus area.

Limited change is proposed for these areas. Some major developable parcels located along major roadways near the Town Center are recommended for smaller lot cluster, but little additional density is proposed. As previously stated, a combination of existing county policy including the intentions of the 2001 Transportation Policy Report approved by the County Council, sewer limitations, topography, environmental concerns led the staff to limit proposals for significant additional housing density. Several of the properties recommended for some additional density capacity in the RNC Zone will also provide moderately priced dwelling units, contributing to additional affordable housing within the Plan area. The Warfield Farm, located along Woodfield Road, is proposed to be a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) receiving area, contributing to housing and agricultural preservation goals.

Rural Transition Areas: The Rural Transition Areas are primarily zoned for large lot (five-acre cluster option) development. Development within this zoning has been particularly significant in the past decade in the eastern portion of the Master Plan area, particularly along Hawkins Creamery Road. This zoning was recommended in 1982 as a means to protect steep stream valleys and woodlands. The consequence of this recommendation has been to add a significant number of large new homes to the mix of housing in Damascus, an element previously missing. A number of developable parcels remain in this area, and they can be anticipated to provide some additional luxury housing opportunities for the Master Plan area.

Rural transition areas along Howard Chapel Drive and Ridge Road (the northeastern segment of the Master Plan area) are recommended for a change from two-acre to five-acre density which generally reflects the historical yield in this area of Damascus (for environmental reasons), and so will have limited housing impact in this portion of the Patuxent watershed. The entire area is beyond the potential sewer envelope and the soil types in this area are difficult for placing septic fields, making the five-acre density closer to the realistic development potential.

Additional housing at a somewhat higher density is proposed in the southwest segment of the Master Plan area on the Kingstead/Leishear properties. These properties are also recommended as a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) receiving area, contributing to housing and agricultural preservation goals. This property is also uniquely located so that its traffic impact on the Master Plan area will be very limited. While the actual number of dwellings proposed is moderate (71), that is a significant increase over the 26 dwelling units that would be allowed under the existing zoning.

Rural Areas: Due to the density limitation and restrictive land use policies of the Rural Density Transfer Zone, limited housing growth is anticipated in the rural areas of this Plan. Some additional housing may be anticipated in the existing rural communities, but wastewater treatment limitations curtail development potential.

Alternative Scenarios – Implications and Consequences

The staff sees the potential for additional density in one segment of the Transitional Area, and one adjoining segment of the Rural Area. This concept would allow some additional density at a location very close to the commercial, recreational, and educational attractors in and near the Town Center; without incremental use of sewer technology that is considered problematic by WSSC.

Town Center: Increased density would probably not lead to an increase in actual yield, since the existing densities available since 1982 led to fewer than 400 dwelling units being built in the Town Center. If the boundary of the Town Center were modified to include other properties, even those would face the topographic and environmental concerns that are major limiting factors in Damascus. And if the additional properties led to development higher than the 2,057 dwelling units anticipated, that would have impacts on traffic and school capacity; and ultimately compatibility with the intended vision for the community.

Transition Areas: Perhaps the most feasible idea to consider if additional density is desirable would be a holistic consideration of the development potential for the southwest quadrant – east of Ridge Road and south of Bethesda Church Road. The Rice and Smart/Miner properties have already been discussed in the Plan and at the Public Hearing, but there are other properties in this area (and immediately adjoining property in the Rural Area) that could be considered for development or redevelopment. Although this area faces traffic, sewer, school, wetland, and topographic issues; it also offers easy access (pedestrian and bicycles) to the Town Center, the High School, an Elementary School, and the new Recreation Center.

The major technical impediment to additional density beyond the Magruder basin is access to sewer. WSSC advises against frequent use of grinder pumps to provide access to sewer, as they have long-term reliability and maintenance problems. So the consequences of the overuse of grinder pumps for small developments could entail failing sewer treatment. But if a larger area were to be evaluated, the potential for a new pump station would be more feasible.

Rural: The Rural Area almost immediately abuts the Town Center to the west along Bethesda Church Road. Most of the land in that area is in the Rural Density Transfer (RDT) Zone. While the staff generally does not support rezoning of property in the RDT Zone, the TDR Task Force discussed a concept that also interested the Planning Board which might be useful to consider if additional housing potential is desired in Damascus.

A 115-acre property just beyond the Town Center, in the southwest quadrant of the Transition Area noted above, is zoned TDR. It is relatively flat to rolling, thus logical to consider for development potential. It could be considered as a test case (applicable in Damascus only) for the concept of “internal” TDR transfers. This was a concept to allow TDRs from outlying properties to transfer to designated properties on the perimeters of the RDT Zone near towns or villages, or maybe rail stations.

In this instance, the particular property is bounded on the east by the RE-2C Zone (a future RNC Zone property), and across the street from RE-2C properties. If a portion of this property were allowed to be a receiving site for a designated amount of additional density through internal TDR transfer; that portion, combined with other properties in the area between the Recreation Center and Bethesda Church Road might warrant construction of a small pump station to jointly serve them. This area is close enough to the Town Center to be convenient for pedestrians and bicycles to schools, recreation and the commercial center.

The staff believes that consideration of additional density through a holistic approach of this type is preferable to incremental requests by individual property owners that stretch technical capacity for septic treatment, and push against other policy considerations.

As with any other concepts for increasing potential development capacity in Damascus, this concept has policy and capacity implications for public facilities, the environment, and the road network; as well as the policy implication for the RDT Zone.

ITEM NO. 3: WATER AND SEWER POLICY

Staff Recommendation

Sewer: Recommendations to meet the Community Sewer goals of this Plan include:

- Provide community sewer service in the planning area in conformance with Water and Sewer Plan service policies. This excludes areas zoned for low-density development (RE-1, RE-2, and RC) not already approved for service from further extension of community service.
- Extend sewer service to designated areas of properties proposed for the RNC zone, provided that these properties develop using the cluster method.
- Comprehensively analyze designated neighborhoods for alternative ways to address failing septic systems including, but not limited to, the provision of community sewer service.
- Encourage innovative systems for new individual systems in residential areas facing failed systems. The Department of Permitting Services is requested to update its regulations to promote nutrient reductions by permitting innovative systems.
- All development seeking community sewer service under the provision of Private Institutional Facility Policy of Water and Sewerage System Plan should minimize their level of imperviousness so that it does not exceed the level anticipated under the base zone or as required within the Patuxent River watershed.

Water: The county's Water and Sewer Plan policy allows for the provision of community water service as required for public health throughout the majority of the master plan area except for the area zoned RDT. Previous policies allowed community water service to be extended to several neighborhoods now zoned RDT that predate the RDT Zone. The Water and Sewer Plan generally advocates community water service for areas zoned for moderate to high-density development only. In addition, areas zoned for 1 and 2-acre development and 5-acre cluster development can be considered for community water service on a case-by-case basis if factors such as maintenance of drinking water quality, the need to reduce fire hazard, and economic feasibility are present. Three properties (all adjoining the Town Center), the Souder Property, the Stanley/Leishear Property, and the portion of the Miller Property along Howard Chapel Road are recommended for community water service as discussed in the Land Use Chapter.

Some older subdivisions in the Plan area are reported to have well contamination. If confirmed by the Department of Permitting Services, this Plan recommends providing community service according to the policies of the Water and Sewerage System Plan. They would be unlikely to receive community water service for the foreseeable future unless the Master Plan recommends water service. Because of the concentration of homes in older subdivisions along Howard Chapel Road near its intersection with Gue Road, this Plan recommends that public water be extended along Gue Road or Howard Chapel Drive if WSSC determines that this is technically feasible.

Discussion

Location in Master Plan: Implementation Chapter (Page 106)

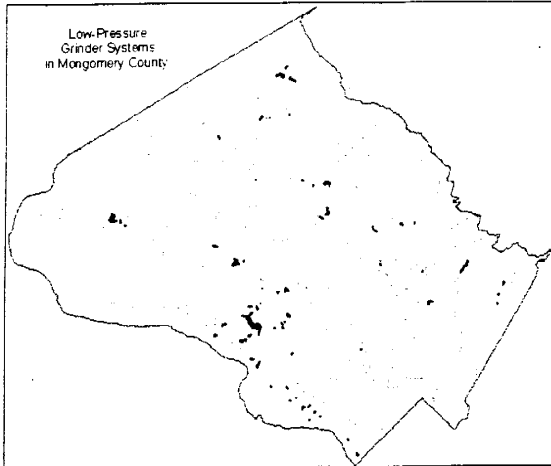
Existing Master Plan Recommendation: The 1966 Damascus Master Plan had envisioned much higher growth for the community, and to serve that growth sewer was anticipated in the Great Seneca basin as well as the Magruder basin. The 1982 Plan concluded that due to cost and environmental concerns the Great Seneca basin would not be sewered and extensive areas were rezoned at lower densities appropriate for development on well and septic service.

The 1982 Plan also considered the potential for obtaining additional sewage treatment capacity in the Magruder basin. That plant was expanded in the 1990s and is now at maximum capacity given the Magruder stream flow. There is capacity in the plant to provide additional service for properties outside the Magruder basin, but access is limited by the need to pump flow over the ridges (of Ridge Road, Main Street, and Woodfield Road) into the mainstem in the Magruder basin. The 1982 Plan does note the potential for land treatment or small package treatment plants as alternative methods.

Summary of Testimony at Public Hearing: A number of property owners testified that WSSC policy allows the use of grinder pumps, and that their density should not be artificially limited if they can use grinder pumps.

Staff Analysis:

Much of the testimony from individual property owners requested community sewer service via low-pressure grinder systems. This allows property on the other side of the gravity basin to pump wastewater over the ridge and into the gravity system. WSSC has stated that they do not favor the proliferation of grinder systems throughout the county. (see graphic showing existing systems) With few exceptions, this type of system has been used on the very edge of the sewer envelope for just a few homes.



Because of past experience with large systems that have chronic failures, WSSC discourages large new developments that exclusively use low-pressure grinder systems. Although the extension of community sewer service increases the development potential of each property, low-pressure grinder systems also adds long-term cost to the WSSC since this type of system is high-maintenance and everything within public right-of-way will ultimately be

their responsibility. These systems can be costly to install, but the current real estate market supports installation of these low-pressure extensions.

Many of the requests for low-pressure grinders in Damascus are hundreds of feet from existing gravity service making technical feasibility difficult without a significant critical mass of homes far greater than what has been recommended in the draft plan. This also would result in a significant imperviousness increase in sensitive watersheds.

Alternative Scenarios – Implications and Consequences

The WSSC would prefer to build a pumping station (also high-maintenance) for an entire drainage basin rather than for one or two properties. For a small number of homes, this option would be cost-prohibitive. In addition, unlike low-pressure grinders, a pumping station requires a gravity collection system as well as a pressurized sewer line. This infrastructure, as well as the many connections, is typically located within the stream valley requiring stream crossings, wetland and forest disturbance. In Damascus, with its many steep slopes leading down to wide stream valleys, the environmental damage can be significant.

ITEM NO. 4A: SCHOOLS

Staff Recommendation

Residents who participated in the Master Plan process reflected both pride in their schools, and frustration at the continuing overcrowding at the middle and secondary school level. They are aware that a new high school will soon be opening, but they felt the MCPS waited too long to build this school, as Damascus High is among the most crowded schools in the county. No major concerns with the elementary schools were expressed. The Master Plan area includes one high school, one middle school, four elementary schools, and two vacant elementary sites. There are no private schools. The Plan recommendations do not warrant further school site acquisition. The Public Hearing Draft supports the retention of two vacant school sites, and the modernization of existing schools as proposed by Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS).

Discussion

Location in Master Plan: Community Facilities Chapter (Page 83)

Existing Master Plan Recommendation: The 1982 Plan reflected schools at or below capacity through 1996. And it recommended modernization of two elementary schools.

Summary of Testimony at Public Hearing: There was no testimony regarding schools.

Staff Analysis: If MCPS decides in the future to surplus any vacant schools sites, the Plan recommends that they be considered for additional parkland to provide the anticipated recreation and open space opportunities they would have provided as schools. Due to the location, size, and lack of access to public sewer these sites would not be able to provide any significant additional housing capacity.

ITEM NO. 4B: COMMUNITY RECREATION FACILITIES, PUBLIC FACILITIES, PUBLIC SAFETY

Staff Recommendations

Community Recreation Facilities: Damascus is generally well served with community recreation facilities, although some additional uses at existing facilities are warranted. There is a 10,000 square foot Senior Center (co-located with the Library), and the Damascus Recreation Center opened in November 2004. The Public Hearing Draft contains three recommendations for community recreation facilities. One, related to sidewalks for the new Community Recreation Center has been completed, and is no longer relevant. The two other recommend a study of the need for aquatic recreation opportunities in the Upcounty, and the need for additional athletic fields, a roller hockey court, and a skateboard park in the area.

Public Facilities: There are no public facility recommendations. Damascus is well served with basic public facilities. The Damascus Library was built in 1990, a new Post Office opened in 2003.

Public Safety: Damascus is also basically well served by fire and police. The recommendations for public safety elements include the need for an aerial unit for the fire station, and the need for a study of fire suppression capacity given the limited municipal water supply and fire hydrants.

Discussion

Location in Master Plan: Community Facilities Chapter (Page 83)

Existing Master Plan Recommendation: The 1982 Plan recommended that local recreation centers and parks proposed on the outskirts of Damascus by the 1966 Plan be eliminated. The 1982 Plan did not discuss or evaluate Public Safety adequacy. The only other public facility discussed was the need for a new library by 1990. It was built in 1990.

Summary of Testimony at Public Hearing: No public testimony was received regarding community facilities.

Staff Analysis: The staff requests support for the public safety and recreational facility recommendations.

ITEM NO. 5: HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Staff Recommendations

The Public Hearing Draft recommended reconfirmation of the three existing historic sites that are designated on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. These designated historic sites located in the Plan area are the Druid Theater (#11/6-2), Mendelssohn Terrace (#10/12), and the Perry G. Etchison Farm (#15/23).

Discussion

Location in Master Plan: Historic Preservation Chapter (Page 87)

Existing Master Plan Recommendation: The 1982 Plan recommended that the Damascus Historic District (Resource #11/6) be removed from the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*, and instead that individual sites should be evaluated on their own merit. At that time only one site in the area, Mendelssohn Terrace in Browningsville, was included on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. The Druid Theatre was designated later, in 1988. The Perry Etchison House was designated in 1981, yet it was outside the boundary of the area considered in the 1982 Damascus Master Plan.

Testimony at Public Hearing: There were a number of speakers who testified about several recommendations in Planning Areas 11 and 14.

Staff Discussion: Historic resources in the Damascus area are being evaluated on a parallel but separate track from the Damascus Area Master Plan. There will be two phases of review for Damascus area historic resources.

The first phase covers historic resources in Planning Areas 11 and 14. On December 2, 2004, the Planning Board held a public hearing for the First Phase historic resources. The *Public Hearing (Preliminary) Draft Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation: Damascus Area Resources* reflects the recommendations of the Historic Preservation Commission, which reviewed the resources earlier this year. Planning Board worksessions on these resources are scheduled for January 6 and 20, 2005.

The second phase covers resources in Planning Areas 10 and 15. The second phase of historic resource review will be completed as time and staff resources will allow.

The staff recommends that the historic preservation review process continue to be considered separately from the Area Master Plan Update. In addition, staff recommends reconfirmation of the existing designated historic sites.

CONCLUSION

This staff report provides the basis for certain recommendations within the Damascus Master Plan. It discusses housing policy, and water and sewer policy as these are very important elements of the recommendations and evaluation by the Planning Board to discern whether they wish to endorse or direct the staff to change these recommendations is essential.

Community Facilities issues were not raised at the Public Hearing and the Public Hearing Draft contains no major recommendations on this topic. This work session affords the Planning Board the opportunity to raise any questions they may have regarding this element.

Although there were a number of comments regarding Historic Preservation at the Public Hearing this element is being reviewed separately. This work session affords the Planning Board the opportunity to discuss any aspects of this issue that might pertain to the other elements of the Master Plan.

The next work session (scheduled for January 13) will discuss the recommendations for Transportation and Connectivity, Parks and Trails, Legacy Open Space, and Environmental Protection. Subsequent Work Sessions will discuss the land use recommendations for the Town Center, Transitional Areas, and Rural Areas.

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Attachment: Letters