

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 15, 2005

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

FROM: Melissa Cuñha Banach, Chief, Strategic Planning Division  
John Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning  
Karl Moritz, Chief, Research and Technology Center

SUBJECT: Revitalizing Centers, Reshaping Boulevards, and Creating  
Great Public Spaces: Program Status and Direction

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K. Moritz', is written over the 'FROM' field.

**RECOMMENDATION: Discussion**

---

**PROGRAM STATUS**

**Policy Framework.** *The attached Policy Framework was presented to the Planning Board and the County Council as a "working paper" for informal feedback in the Spring Bi-Annual Report. Subsequently, the Framework has been edited to reflect comments from the Board and Council (Attachment #1).*

The Framework more fully explains many of the economic and land use facts and trends associated with a maturing county nearing residential build-out. The Framework further articulates the shift in planning emphasis from outward expansion to reinvestment in existing residential and business communities, thereby reducing pressure to expand the development envelope into the Agricultural Reserve.

A more concise explanation of the shift in planning emphasis is provided by focusing on-- revitalizing existing, aging and often obsolete commercial centers; reshaping frontages of some major transportation routes into boulevards that become community assets; and creating vibrant public spaces that contribute to livability and overall quality of life.

The shift in planning emphasis will be accompanied by a refocusing of the master planning process to small area planning, rather than the large-scale master planning approach currently used. Small area planning is more sensitive to community needs and land use and development challenges posed by redevelopment.

The master plan approach is being reshaped so that attention and resources can more effectively be focused on redevelopment opportunities within the development envelope, sustaining the quality of life in areas *not* planned for additional growth, and on maintaining the vitality of the Agricultural Reserve.

As the Framework evolves through implementation of the Work Program and community involvement, the "people" aspect of growth and change will be expanded. Growth is not only about plans and square footage- it is also about important qualitative details that affect quality of life, such as vibrant public spaces, the provision of desired community amenities, and the availability of transportation options that become an asset to the community.

**Work Program.** *A Work Program has been developed to move the Center, Boulevard, and Public Space Program forward in a unified manner. Community outreach efforts are punctuated at key points throughout the Work Program. Staff will walk the Planning Board through the various elements contained in Attachment #2.*

The Framework provides an important planning rationale to consolidate a variety of planning initiatives, already in the Work Program, that focus on the planning needs of a maturing county -- specifically, the Council requested study of existing C-1 and C-2 zoned commercial centers; regulatory initiatives to encourage mixed commercial and residential uses at a smaller scale; and current master planning for some centers and major transportation routes.

The near-term Work Program is focused on technical assessment and studies to expand understanding of existing conditions within and around the commercial centers and along frontages of some major transportation routes in concert with national experts and the community.

After the technical studies are completed and "community livability guidelines and criteria" are framed, the Planning Board will be presented with a list of priority commercial center opportunity areas in February 2006.

In March, the technical studies and community livability guidelines and criteria for major transportation routes will be presented to the Planning Board. Opportunity areas will become part of a second phase of the work program. Timing to be determined.

Alignment of Department and County resources, policies, and programs will be needed to meet the complex challenges of place making in established communities.

**Community Outreach.** *Throughout the fall and early winter, a “roll-out” community outreach effort will help us better understand community visions, aspirations, and needs related to the creation of livable community spaces and places. The Department will continue to hone the message about “growing inward, rather than outward” and will work with community stakeholders to find way to ensure that concepts underlying the message resonate with the public.*

As redevelopment opportunities evolve, understanding of community needs will help formulate designs for livable and sustainable communities within established areas of the County. Hopefully, we can give people a reason to stay put, or come back to, these established areas, while also providing development opportunities that reduce the need to spread out.

One key element of the community outreach effort is the proposed Community Leadership Roundtable, scheduled for November 7<sup>th</sup> at Brookside Gardens. The Roundtable is intended to convene 75 representatives of the civic, business, and government leadership in the County to explore the planning implications associated with a maturing county, identifies important needs and community amenities that contributed to livable places and spaces, and frame potential opportunity areas ripe for redevelopment. National experts and local leaders will be thoroughly engaged in this day long Roundtable.

The discussion sparked at this Roundtable and subsequent planned community outreach opportunities will provide valuable guidance to the planning program. A proposed Roundtable Agenda will be distributed to the Planning Board during the staff presentation.

The Roundtable offers a good springboard to explore other venues to expand a community understanding and initiate dialogue related to the creation of livable communities in a maturing county. If the Planning Board would like to further explore this notion, staff is prepared to discuss some options.

**Reality Check.** *In February 2005, more than 300 regional leaders from 22 jurisdictions, including MCPB and staff participation, convened in a visioning exercise to take stock of the pace and growth confronting the Washington region.*

Reality Check began a dialogue about the region’s future and set the framework for implementation work to continue at the local level. The Department will take many of the principles formed in Reality Check and evaluate how they align with the Centers, Boulevards, and Public Spaces Program.