



April 17, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: John A. Carter, Chief *JAC*
Urban Design and Preservation Division

FROM: Karen Kumm Morris, Project Planner/Urban Designer
Urban Design and Preservation Division *KKM*

Michael Brown, Urban Designer
Urban Design and Preservation Division

John Marcolin, Urban Designer
Urban Design and Preservation Division

SUBJECT: Draft Urban Design Guidelines for the
Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Transmit the Draft Urban Design Guidelines to the County Council to assist in their review of the Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan.

DISCUSSION

The development of the Urban Design Guidelines represents a creative effort by the Planning Department to assist in implementing the recommendations in master plans. The guidelines are intended to accomplish the following:

- Foster design excellence in community building in accordance with the vision in an approved master plan or sector plan
- Clarify design expectations for streets, open spaces and buildings
- Provide guidance that recognizes the need for flexibility and allows for the most creative solutions to community building

The graphics and text included in the guidelines are also intended to assist in the visualization of the recommendations in master plans and to assist the Planning Board, staff, property owners, County Council, and others during the review and approval of a master plan or sector plan. The combination of a comprehensive master plan with Urban Design Guidelines will provide a unique planning tool for Montgomery County. This new planning tool is needed as density increases, the mix of land uses becomes more complex, and compatible transitions to existing neighborhoods need to be provided.

The Urban Design Guidelines for the Germantown area will be followed by guidelines for the Gaithersburg West and White Flint areas. A similar format will be used for each of these documents.

Previous Actions

On February 5, 2009, the Urban Design Guidelines for the Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan were presented to the Planning Board as a draft. In response to the actions of the Planning Board during this meeting, the following items have been incorporated into the attached document:

- Guidelines have been added for all the districts in the Germantown Employment area including the areas located west of I-270, and landscaping along I-270
- A foreword to the document has been added to clarify that a set of guidelines for streets are required, and the guidelines for open space and buildings are more flexible
- The foreword also indicates that the guidelines will be reviewed and updated approximately every six years
- A Draft Resolution to be approved by the Planning Board after the Sector Plan is approved by the County Council has also been added

Scope of Design Guidelines

The document provides design guidance for the basic building blocks of a community as follows:

- **Streets** Using the framework established in the Sector Plan, the Design Guidelines establish the character for the street network in accordance with the Road Code. The guidelines for streets will create an attractive, tree lined character for Germantown's streets, reinforce the sense of identity for each district, and promote walking and biking.
- **Open Spaces** Based on the Sector Plan's open space concept, the Design Guidelines establish goals and specific guidelines for each category of open space (public parks, urban open spaces, and natural open spaces). The guidelines will ensure a variety of open spaces within each district. The guidelines address safety, accessibility, visibility, amenities and maintenance.
- **Buildings** The Design Guidelines expand the guidance in the Sector Plan for building form and heights. The intent is to ensure a form of development that is attractive, sustainable and compatible with adjacent residential communities. The guidelines also identify retail priority streets.

Outreach and Coordination

Since the Planning Board meeting on February 5, 2009, the staff continued outreach efforts as follows:

- March 10, 2009 - Draft Guidelines presented to the Germantown CAC. A second meeting is scheduled for April 21, 2009.
- March 16, 2009 - Presented the draft guidelines to MCDOT and received initial comments addressing their concerns that have been incorporated into the April, 2009 document attached to this report
- March 17, 2009 - Presented the draft guidelines to representatives of the County Executive

The MCDOT has reviewed the guidelines. As the lead agency regarding infrastructure and design in the public right-of-way, they are concerned that the recently approved Road Code standards may need to be modified by the County Council. The MCDOT wants to avoid conflicts between the proposed guidelines and the standards in the Road Code when development plans are approved by the Planning Board. The MCDOT comments are summarized in the following:

- Clearly state the County Executive's responsibility is to approve design standards and guidelines for rights-of-ways
- Concerned with narrow streets, turning radii at intersections, and access to buildings
- Concerned with the Sector Plan's recommended public right-of-ways that are not included or do not comply with the Road Code such as the transitway

Staff has revised the Street Standards and Guidelines Table to clarify which elements are approved by the Executive agencies including DPS and the MCDOT, and the staff has revised the guidelines for corner turn radii and other elements to be in conformance with the Road Code. Guidelines that address streetscape characteristics such as sidewalk pavement cut-outs for trees, existing tree preservation in the medians, and street lighting are not found in the Road Code.

NEXT STEPS

- Incorporate any Planning Board comments into the Draft Urban Design Guidelines
- Transmit the Draft Urban Design Guidelines to County Council for use in their review and approval of the Germantown Sector Plan prior to the public hearing
- Hold worksessions, revise the guidelines, and approve the Urban Design Guidelines by the Planning Board after the County Council approves the Sector Plan

The final products will include a printed document and a design resource to be located on the M-NCPPC web site.

Attachment:

- Draft Urban Design Guidelines for the Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan, dated April 2009