MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

July 14, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Glenn Kreger, Acting Chief, Area 2 Planning Division *ßK*

Khalid Afzal, Team Leader, East County Team, Area 2 Planning Division *ḾA*

FROM: Luis R. Estrada Cepero, Planner Coordinator/Urban Designer (301/495-4641)
East County Team, Area 2 Planning Division *LREC*

SUBJECT: Draft Urban Design Guidelines for the Wheaton Sector Plan

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RECOMMENDATION: Review and approve the Draft Urban Design Guidelines for the Wheaton Sector Plan

Summary

The purpose of the Urban Design Guidelines is to illustrate how key design related recommendations of the Sector Plan might be addressed. They will also serve to clarify general design expectations and most importantly, to provide applicants and staff with a framework for project review, and a tool to help achieve an enhanced public realm in Wheaton.

Organization

Planning staff has continued to refine the organizational structure of the guidelines, which are organized in four sections:

Section 1: Introduction – Purpose and limitations of the guidelines
Section 2: Context - Relationship to Sector Plan, description of issues
Section 3: Guidelines – Goals, and strategies to achieve them
Section 4: Resources – County Code and other relevant information that would be useful for implementation purposes

Outreach

Staff presented the draft guidelines to the Wheaton community and to the County Executive staff in June 2011. We will continue to work with interested parties on the preparation of the draft Urban Design Guidelines for the Wheaton Sector Plan between now and the approval of the Sector Plan by the County Council. Thereafter, staff will prepare the guidelines for final review and approval by the Planning Board.

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Attachment: Draft Wheaton Urban Design Guidelines (Power Point Presentation)

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URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

Wheaton Sector Plan
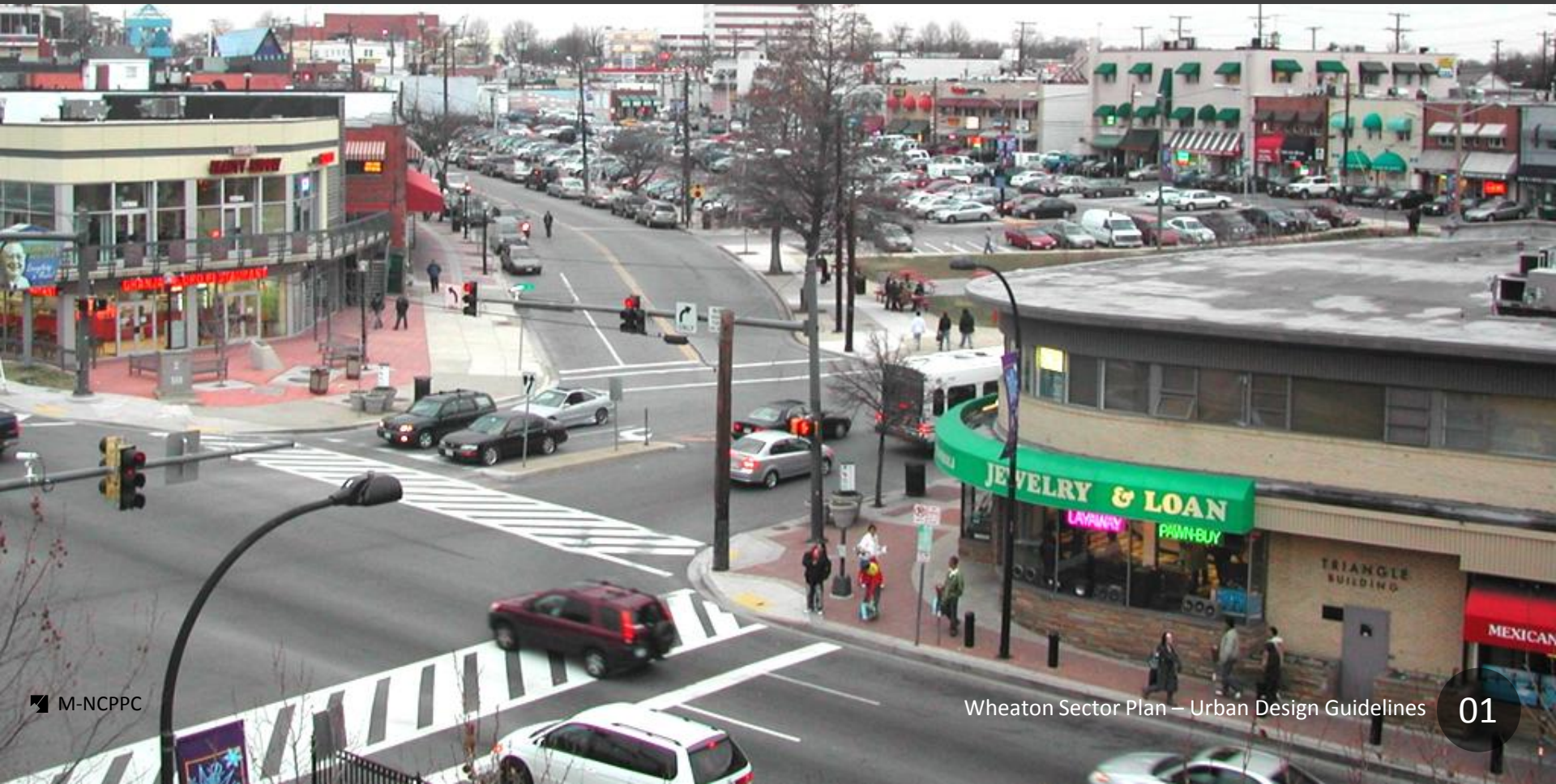
Organization

Section 1:
Introduction
- **Purpose**
- **Limitations**
- **General Considerations**

Section 2:
Context
- **Area Description**
- **Goals**

Section 3:
Guidelines
- **Goal 1 / Guidelines**
- **Goal 2 / Guidelines**

Section 4:
Implementation and Resources
- **Listing of Laws, Regulations, and Design resources**

Section 1: Introduction

Purpose
- **To illustrate** how Sector Plan recommendations might be met
- **To inform applicants** of design expectations and possible resources to accomplish them
- **To provide staff** with a framework for project review and a tool for obtaining enhanced design and related amenities.

Limitations
- **ARE NOT** a substitute for zoning code requirements
- **ARE** subordinate to "higher" regulatory mechanisms
- **DO NOT** amend the recommendations of the Sector Plan
- **DO NOT** set architectural styles
- **ARE ONLY** applicable during discretionary reviews

General design considerations are not site specific, and are applicable to all locations within a planning area with the purpose of transforming transitional suburban neighborhoods into active urban places centered on transit. Their goal is to encourage urban building approaches, and to promote safe areas defined by buildings, that include attractive gathering places. General considerations include:
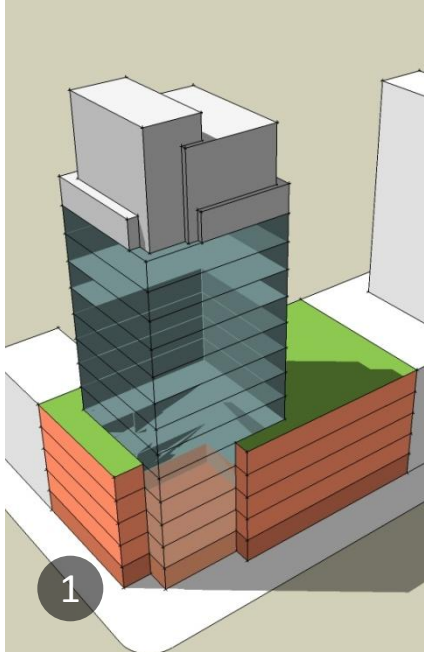
1 Buildings
Promote compact urban environments
Create consistent street walls
Conceal Parking

2 Streets
Provide active pedestrian environments
Promote pedestrian safety
Encourage undergrounding of utilities

3 Open Space
Create networks of open spaces
Create activated gathering spaces
Promote consolidation

General Guidelines

1. Building Components
Design mixed-use structures to have a lower component (podium) that will define and contain the street, and a taller component (tower) to concentrate density vertically.

2. Mix of Building Types
Promote compatibility between building components in adjacent structures to establish continuity in the public realm.

3. Street Defining Buildings
Define pedestrian priority streets with consistent street walls.

4. Urban Corners
Establish urban corners with architectural articulation and activating uses.
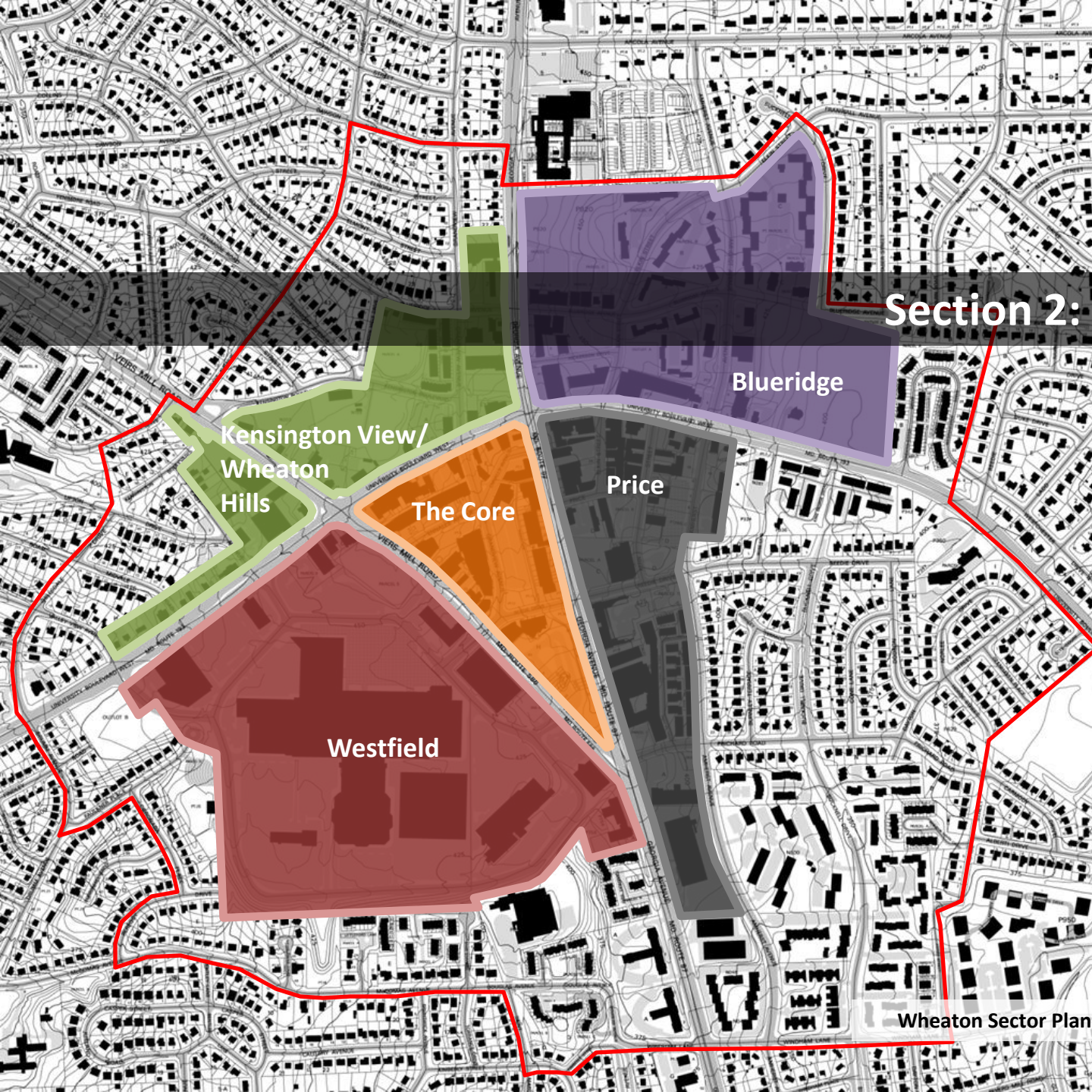
5. Parking
Minimize parking exposure along pedestrian priority street frontages.

6. Façade Articulation
Articulate facades to promote pedestrian activity and enhance overall urban environment

Additional Considerations

Section 2: **Context**

The Sector Plan identifies five districts surrounded by residential communities. Plan recommendations are aimed at integrating the districts into a functioning downtown by building on their existing diversity of uses, and by providing opportunities for increased density to expand the connections between the CBD and surrounding residential communities.

Blueridge

Kensington View/ Wheaton Hills

Price

The Core

Westfield
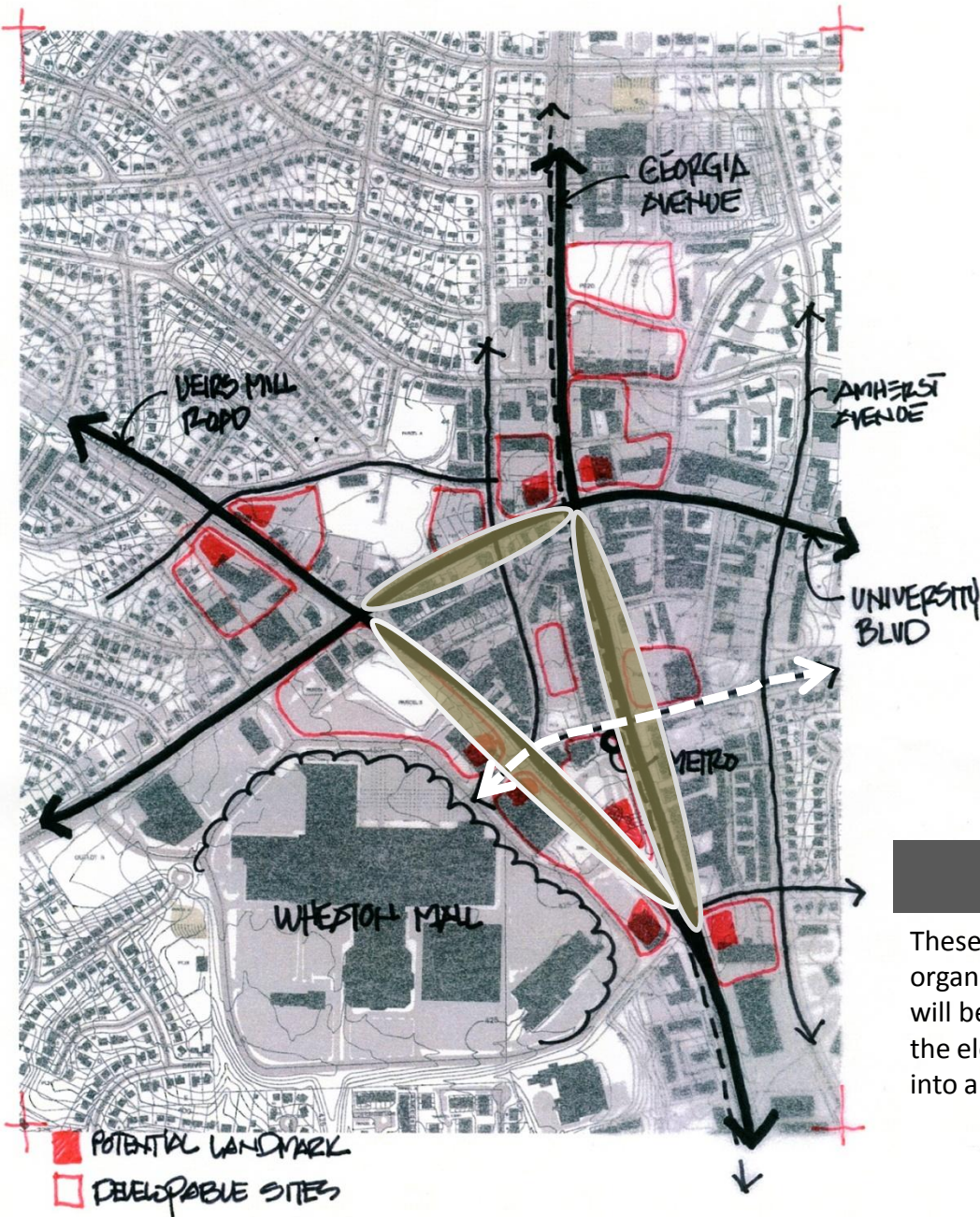
1. "Wheaton's center, on the triangle of land surrounding the Metro station, will be identifiable by the intensity of uses, a signature streetscape style, and visible, attractive landmarks." (p. 27)

2. "Wheaton's buildings will continue to be an eclectic mix, and infill redevelopment will create an increasingly compact and street-oriented pattern. A variety of heights and densities will ensure that new developments are compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods." (p.27)

3. "Redesign Georgia Avenue, Veirs Mill Road, and University Boulevard as urban boulevards with enhanced medians and crosswalks, street trees, and street-oriented retail where appropriate." (p.60)

4. "Provide an interconnected system of parks, trails, and public open spaces where people can gather, enjoy the outdoors, and conduct business." (p.77)

Sector Plan Urban Design Goals

These recommendations will be summarized into goals to organize the Design Guidelines. The priorities for the Guidelines will be to describe urban building approaches, and to focus on the elements that can best contribute to transform Wheaton into a working downtown.

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Section 3: Urban Design Guidelines
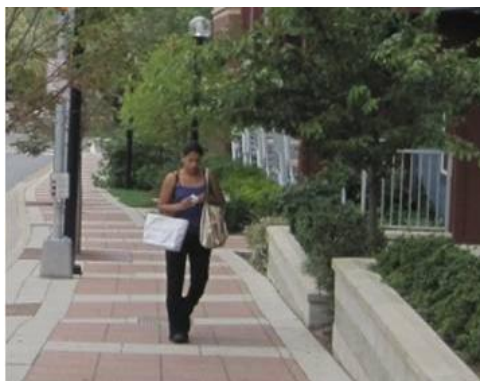
The Design Guidelines will provide guidance for future development in Wheaton by focusing on the following **goals**:

1. Create an identifiable center

2. Improve the Public Realm

Legend:
- EXISTING
- LANDMARK
- OPEN SPACE
- DEFINED EDGE
- TRANSITIONS

Map labels: GEORGIA AVENUE, VEIRS MILL RD., UNIVERSITY BLVD., REEDIE DR., METRO, WHEATON MALL

Goal 1: Create an Identifiable Center

Redevelopment in Wheaton should define the edges around the Core, establishing existing commercial clusters as the center of downtown. Mix-use development can also provide customers to support the retail and service sector that are currently the mainstay of Wheaton's economy. **Design objectives** include:

1. Create boulevards around the Core
2. Enhance important connections
3. Establish possible landmarks
4. Promote appropriate transitions
5. Enhance existing small businesses

Create Boulevards around the Core

Strategies

1. Establish activated pedestrian environments along the highways surrounding the core:
   a. Veirs Mill Road
   b. Georgia Avenue
   c. University Boulevard
2. Breaks along street walls should be encouraged in block frontages 200ft or longer, away from block corners
3. Street walls should be between two and three stories high
4. Set back taller building components to reduce their impact on the street below
5. Consider mid-block pedestrian connections at safe locations to reduce distances in larger blocks. Street walls should continue into pedestrian connections.
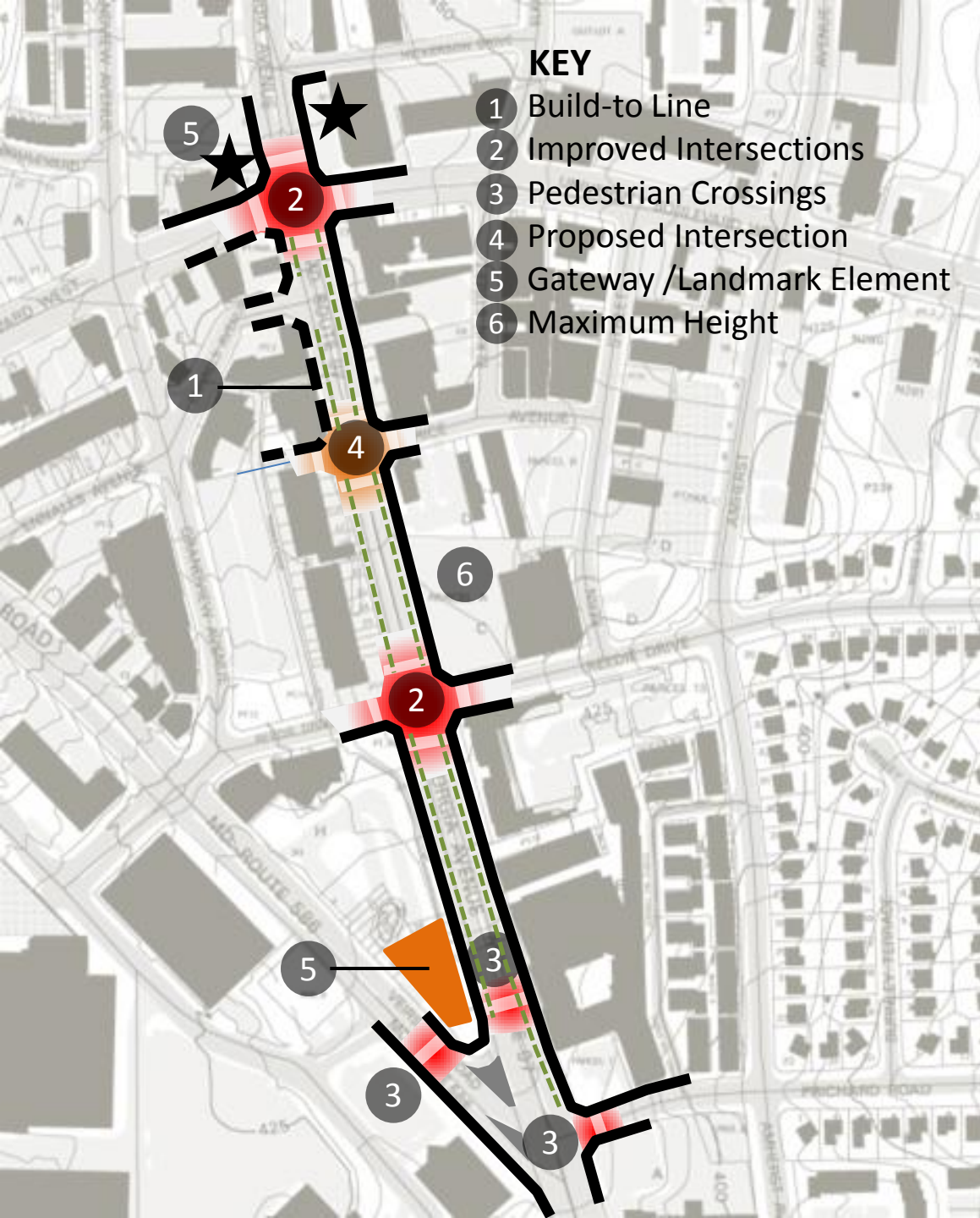
a. Veirs Mill Road
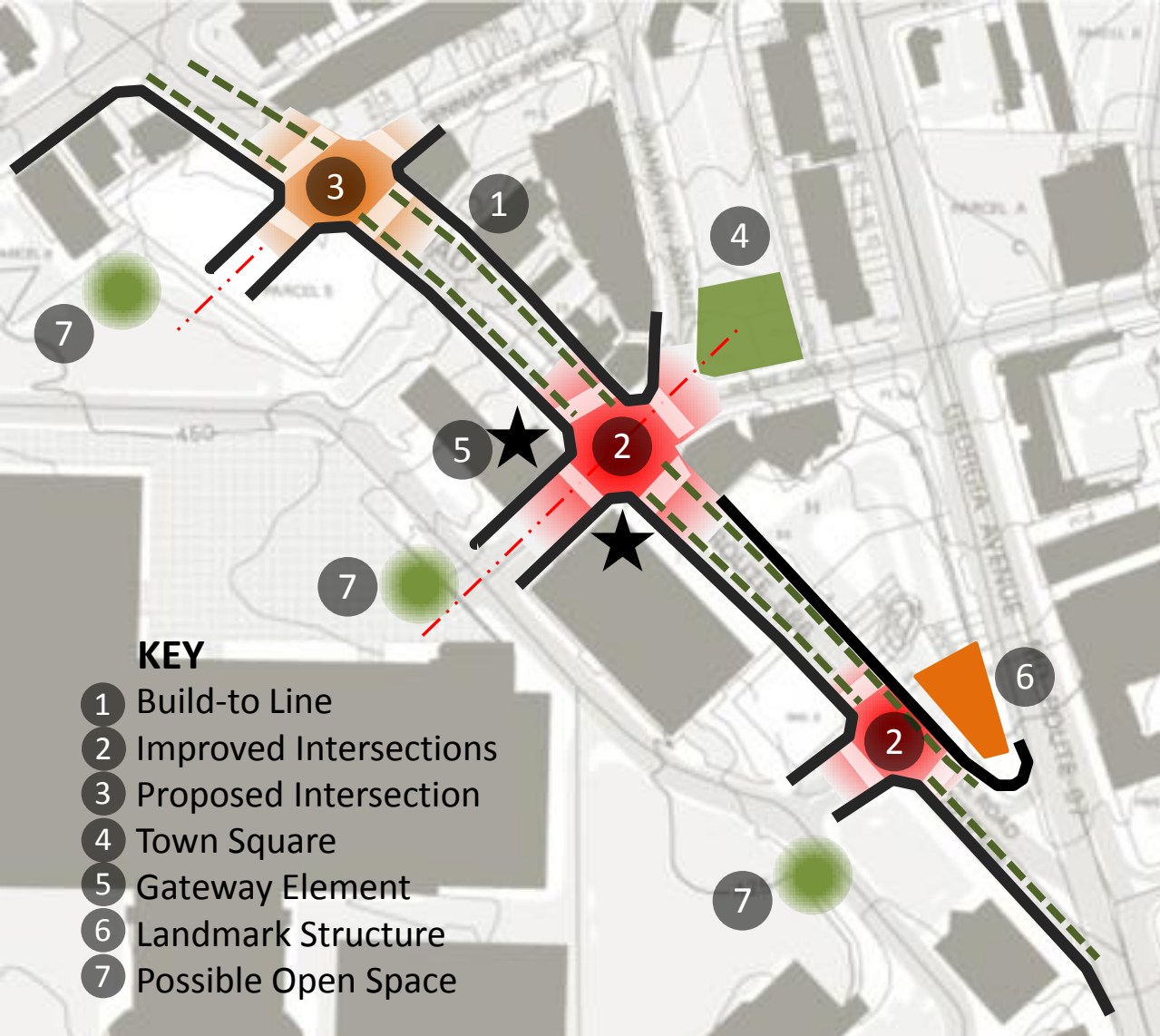
1. Establish build-to lines to create consistent street walls where possible. Street walls should be a minimum 2-3 stories tall, and should include activating uses wherever feasible. Taller building components should be set back from the street wall.
2. Provide boulevard treatment along both sides of Veirs Mill Road. Encourage planted medians wherever feasible.
3. Redevelopment at the Reedie Drive entrance to the Westfield property should consider architectural gateway elements.
4. Redevelopment should consider landmark structures or elements at the entry point to the downtown core (e.g. corner of Veirs Mill road and Georgia Avenue, or corner of University Boulevard and Veirs Mill road).
5. Consider incorporating substantial spaces for public use within the Westfield property.

KEY

1 Build-to Line
2 Improved Intersections
3 Proposed Intersection
4 Town Square
5 Gateway Element
6 Landmark Structure
7 Possible Open Space

KEY

1. Build-to Line
2. Improved Intersections
3. Pedestrian Crossings
4. Proposed Intersection
5. Gateway /Landmark Element
6. Maximum Height

b. Georgia Avenue

- Create street walls along Georgia Avenue to follow already developed properties near Metro.
- Consider a landmark structure or element at the Veirs Mill Road / Georgia Ave intersection to establish the entry to the downtown area.
- Consider gateway elements at the intersection of Georgia Avenue and University Blvd.
- Continue the boulevard streetscape treatment already existing at various locations along the Avenue.

c. University Boulevard

- Promote the creation of street walls along University Boulevard, where possible
- Consider landmark structures to establish the Veirs Mill Road / University Boulevard intersection as a place.
- Continue the boulevard streetscape treatment already existing at various locations along the Avenue.

KEY
1 Build-to Line
2 Improved Intersections
3 Gateway Element
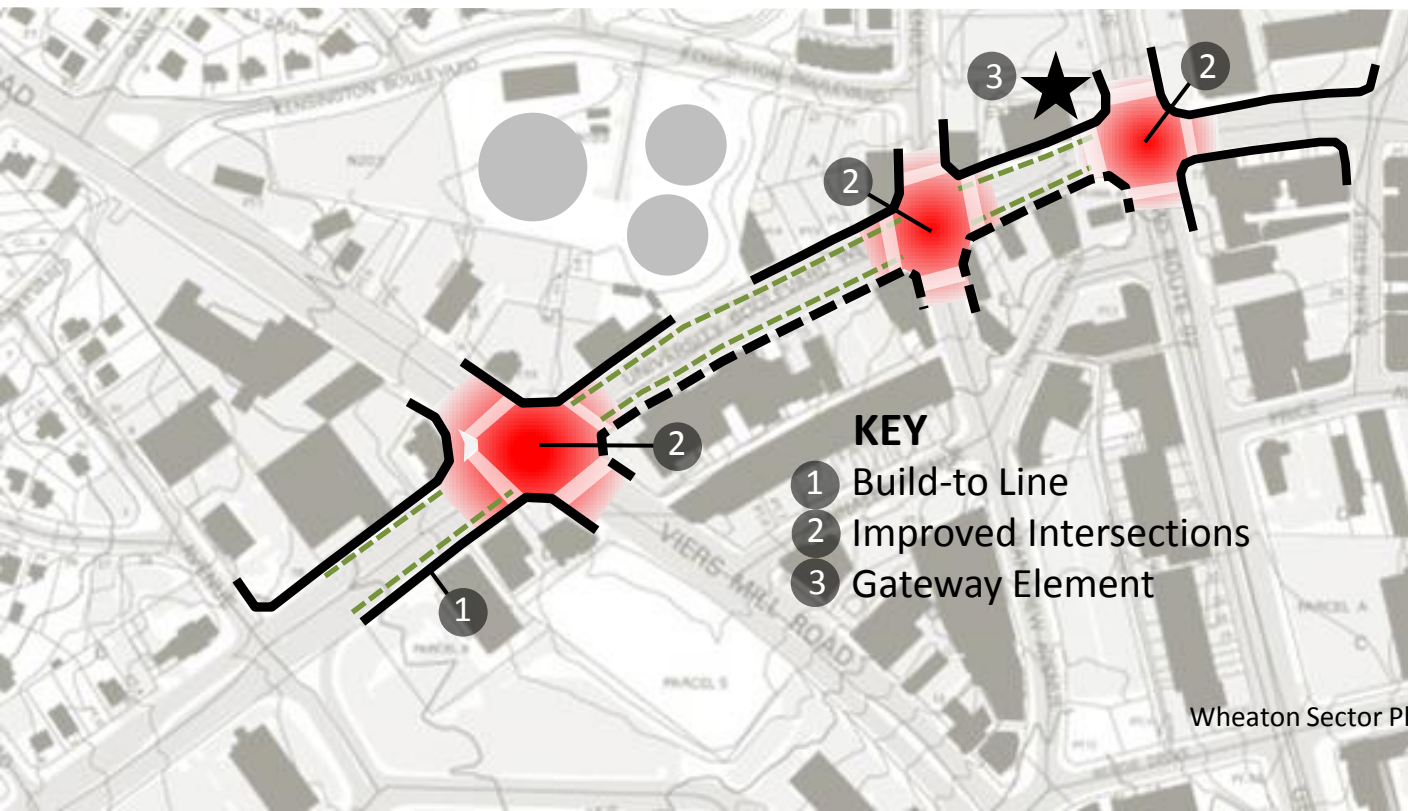
Enhance Important Connections

Strategies

1. Organize building components to reduce their impact on the scale of the street.
2. Consider architectural focal elements on important reference points (e.g. the western terminus of Reedie Drive, on the Westfield District)
3. Locate building entrances along sidewalks or facing important intersections.
4. Enhance links to adjacent open spaces, and to transit opportunities
5. Consider roundabouts to establish traffic transitions into the downtown core from surrounding communities.
6. Improve safety at all pedestrian connections.

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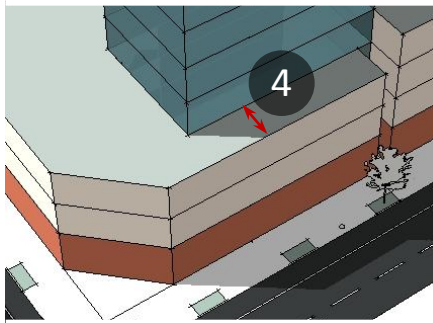
Reedie Drive

- Consider gateway elements on redeveloping properties at the western end of Reedie Drive (along Veirs Mill Rd)
- Create street walls on both side of Reedie Drive along build-to lines shown
- New streetscape should be consistent with recently rebuilt adjacent sidewalks.
- Consider roundabout at the intersection of Amherst Avenue and Reedie Drive

KEY
1. Build-to Line
2. Improved Intersections
3. Town Square
4. Gateway Element
5. Veterans Park
6. Roundabout
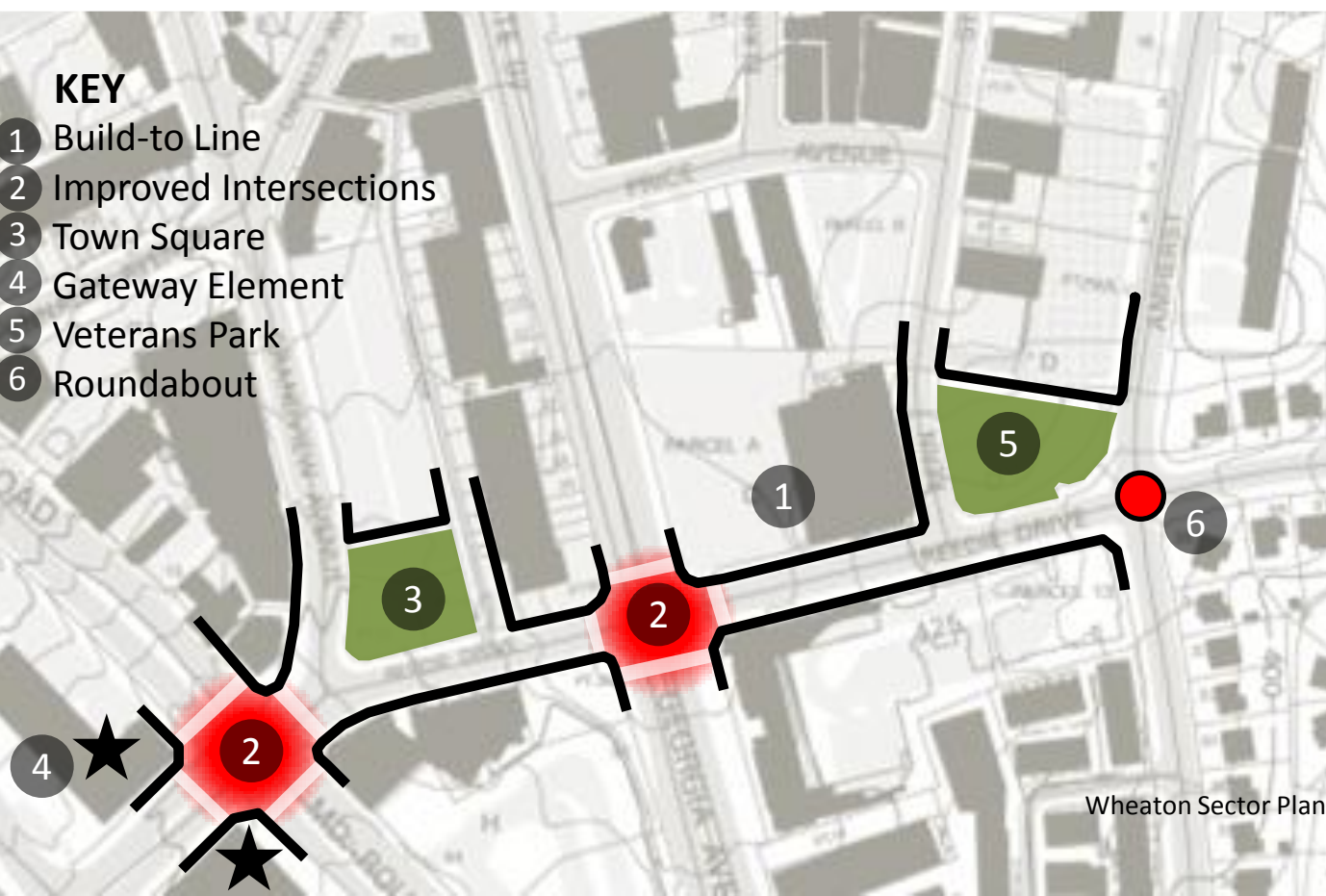
Create Landmarks

Strategies

Create landmark structures or elements at strategic locations that could serve as identifying features for the area. Considerations could include:

1. Interesting building form or material usage
2. Striking building design
3. Water features
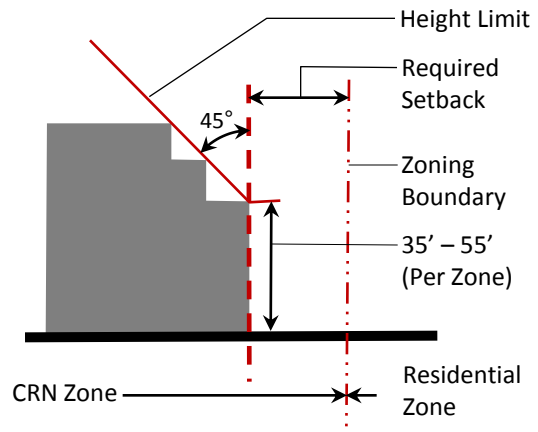4. Locate places for urban sculpture
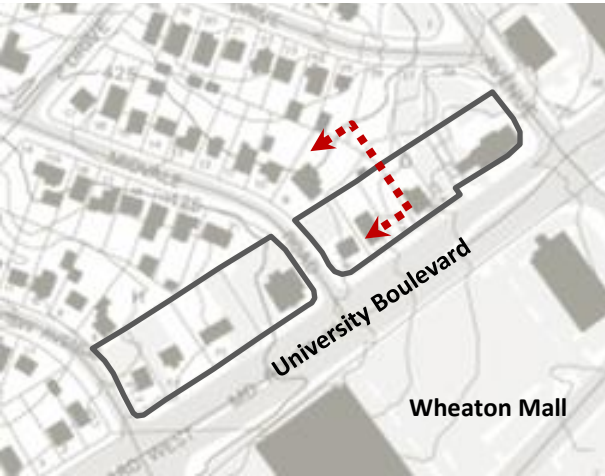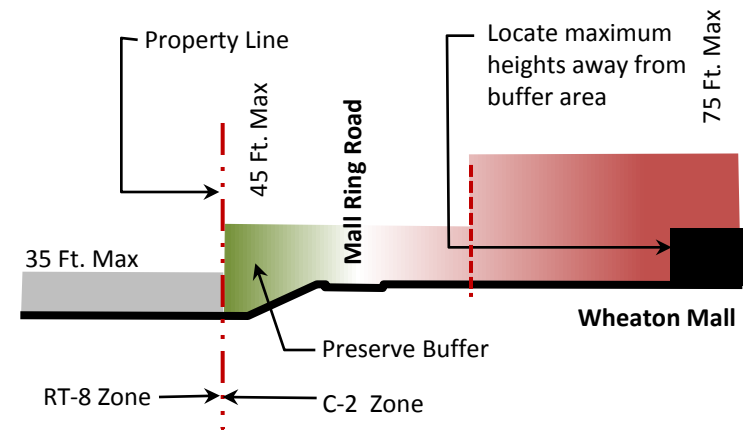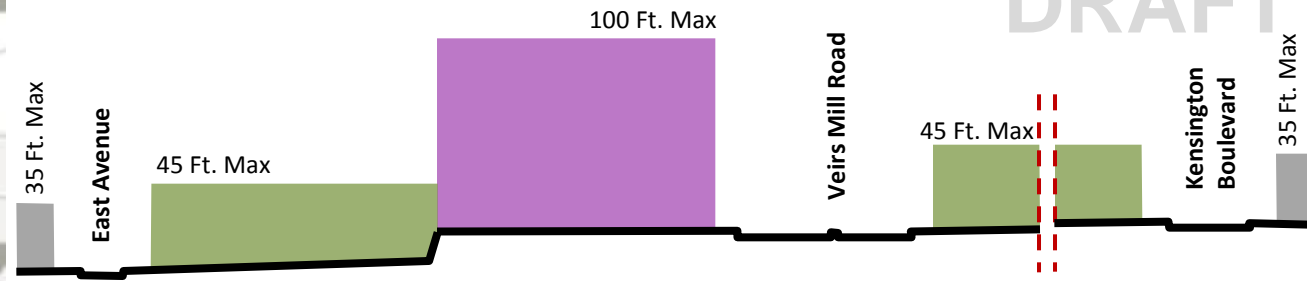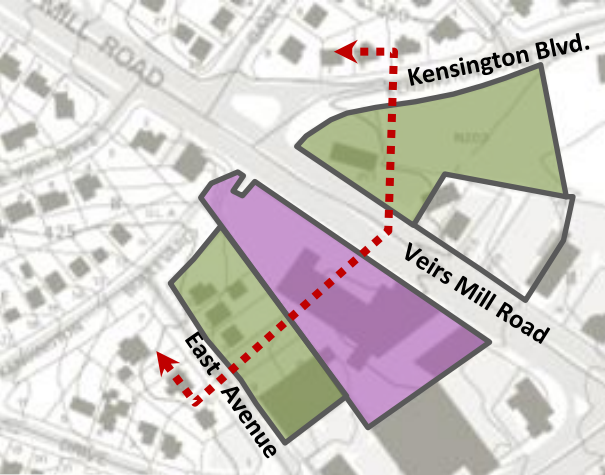5. Special building illumination

Transitions

Strategies

1. Provide adequate transitions and compatible uses in close proximity to single family residential neighborhoods.
2. Concentrate tallest component of new mixed-use structures along major avenues or important intersections.
3. Recommend consistent street walls with activating uses along major avenues.

Kensington Blvd.

Veirs Mill Road

East Avenue

35 Ft. Max

East Avenue

45 Ft. Max

100 Ft. Max

Veirs Mill Road

45 Ft. Max

Kensington Boulevard

35 Ft. Max

Wheaton Mall

Mall Ring Road

Property Line

Locate maximum heights away from buffer area

45 Ft. Max

75 Ft. Max

Mall Ring Road

35 Ft. Max

Preserve Buffer

Wheaton Mall

RT-8 Zone

C-2 Zone

University Boulevard

Wheaton Mall

Height Limit

Required Setback

45°

Zoning Boundary

35' – 55' (Per Zone)

CRN Zone

Residential Zone

Transitions
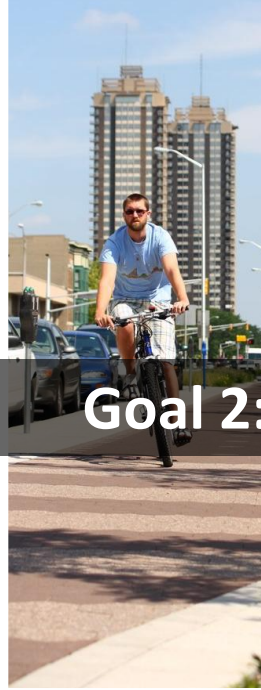
Wheaton Sector Plan – Urban Design Guidelines

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Enhance existing businesses

Strategies

1. Utilize available mechanisms such as façade improvement and streetscape improvement programs to improve the quality of the public realm around existing properties

Goal 2: Improve the Public Realm

Improving the quality of the public realm, including vehicular, pedestrian networks, is a priority for the Wheaton Sector Plan . **Design objectives** include:

1. Improve Pedestrian Areas Along Streets

2. Create a Town Center Square

3. Promote Spaces for Public Use

4. Create Pedestrian Links

Improve pedestrian areas on streets

Strategies

1. Provide Boulevard treatment along highways surrounding the core
2. Provide buffer zones between pedestrian areas and the roadway.
3. Improve the quality and safety of important intersections connecting the downtown core with surrounding development (i.e. Reedie Dr./Veirs Mill Rd., Reedie Dr./Georgia Ave).
4. Improve pedestrian areas in front of existing commercial strips by expanding walk zones and providing protection for pedestrians.

Create a Town Center Square

Strategies

1. Provide flexible space suitable for a variety of gatherings.
2. Integrate with adjacent Triangle Lane.
3. New development should locate activating uses in close proximity to the square.
4. Include areas for both active and passive recreation.
5. Include both shaded and sunny areas.
6. Include flexible seating options.
7. Consider buffering elements between the square and Reedie Drive.
8. Consider incorporating focal elements such as water features.
9. Ensure access to those with limitations on mobility.

Proposed Town Center Square

Promote spaces for public use

Strategies

The Sector Plan recommends building on Wheaton's tradition of creating temporary public use of various areas to support existing businesses and emerging resident populations. Considerations should include:

1. Include features for both passive and active recreation
2. Incorporate flexible areas for group events

Create pedestrian links

Strategies

Pedestrian through-block connections can be used to shorten walking distances, to create connections between open spaces, and to promote additional retail activity. The Sector Plan recommends pedestrian connections at various locations. Design considerations should include:

1. Promote retail that does not compromise retail activity along adjacent streets.
2. Create spaces that can be well monitored
3. Maintain continuity with street walls along adjacent streets wherever feasible.
4. Create safe spaces that are well illuminated and adequately furnished.

Implementation and Resources

Following is a list of resources that might be of relevance for property owners considering redevelopment. The list is provided as a reference tool, is for informational purposes only, and is not intended to be exhaustive.

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National

Americans with Disabilities Act
www.ada.gov/stdspdf.htm

County

DPS / Building Construction – Building Codes & Standards
http://permittingservices.montgomerycountymd.gov/dpstmpl.asp?url=/permitting/bc/nfbldc.asp

Zoning Code Directory
http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/development/about/zoning_legend.shtm

Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance
http://www.amlegal.com/montgomery_county_md/

MNCPPC Development Manual
http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/development/development_manual/index.shtm

MNCPPC Wheaton Sector Plan
http://montgomeryplanning.org/community/wheaton/

MNCPPC Wheaton Sector Plan Urban Design Guidelines
http:

Wheaton

Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee
http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/midtmpl.asp?url=/content/RSC/midcounty/tier2/boards/wrac/index.asp

Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee
http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/midtmpl.asp?url=/content/RSC/midcounty/tier2/boards/wudac/index.asp

Wheaton Redevelopment Program
http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgtmpl.asp?url=/content/DGS/Dir/OPD/wheaton/wheaton.asp

Wheaton Enterprise Zone
http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/DGS/Dir/OPD/resources/WEZpacket.pdf