



Ashton Village Center Sector Plan Scope of Work

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Description

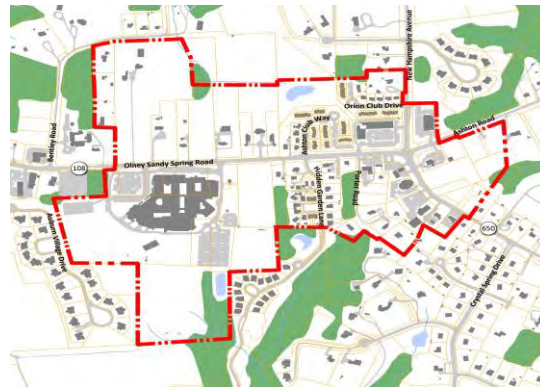
Ashton Village Center Sector Plan Scope of Work

Staff Recommendation

Approval of the proposed Scope of Work

Summary

The Ashton Village Center Sector Plan comprises approximately 125 acres in the northeast portion of Montgomery County. This Scope of Work includes the following sections:



- Introduction
- Background
- Planning Framework
- Development Activity
- Master Plan Purpose
- Community Outreach
- Plan Schedule

Introduction

At the direction of the Montgomery County Council, the Montgomery County Planning Department has begun the Ashton Village Center Sector Plan, a small area plan for the village of Ashton, east of Olney and centered on the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue (MD 650) and Ashton Road (MD 108), in the northeastern portion of Montgomery County. This Scope of Work offers background, planning context and highlights issues to be considered as the Plan develops. It also proposes a geographic boundary, an outreach strategy and a schedule for the Plan.

Background

The earliest inhabitants of Ashton settled the area in the 18th Century. Many of them were members of the historic Friends Meeting House in nearby Sandy Spring. Homes associated with prominent Quaker families—the Bentley and Thomas families, in particular—adjoin the village center itself. This part of Montgomery County also is home to black communities established at the turn of the 19th Century. The Brooke Road-Chandlee Mill community, between Ashton and Sandy Spring, is one of the oldest Black settlements in the county, and descendants of the original inhabitants live there today.

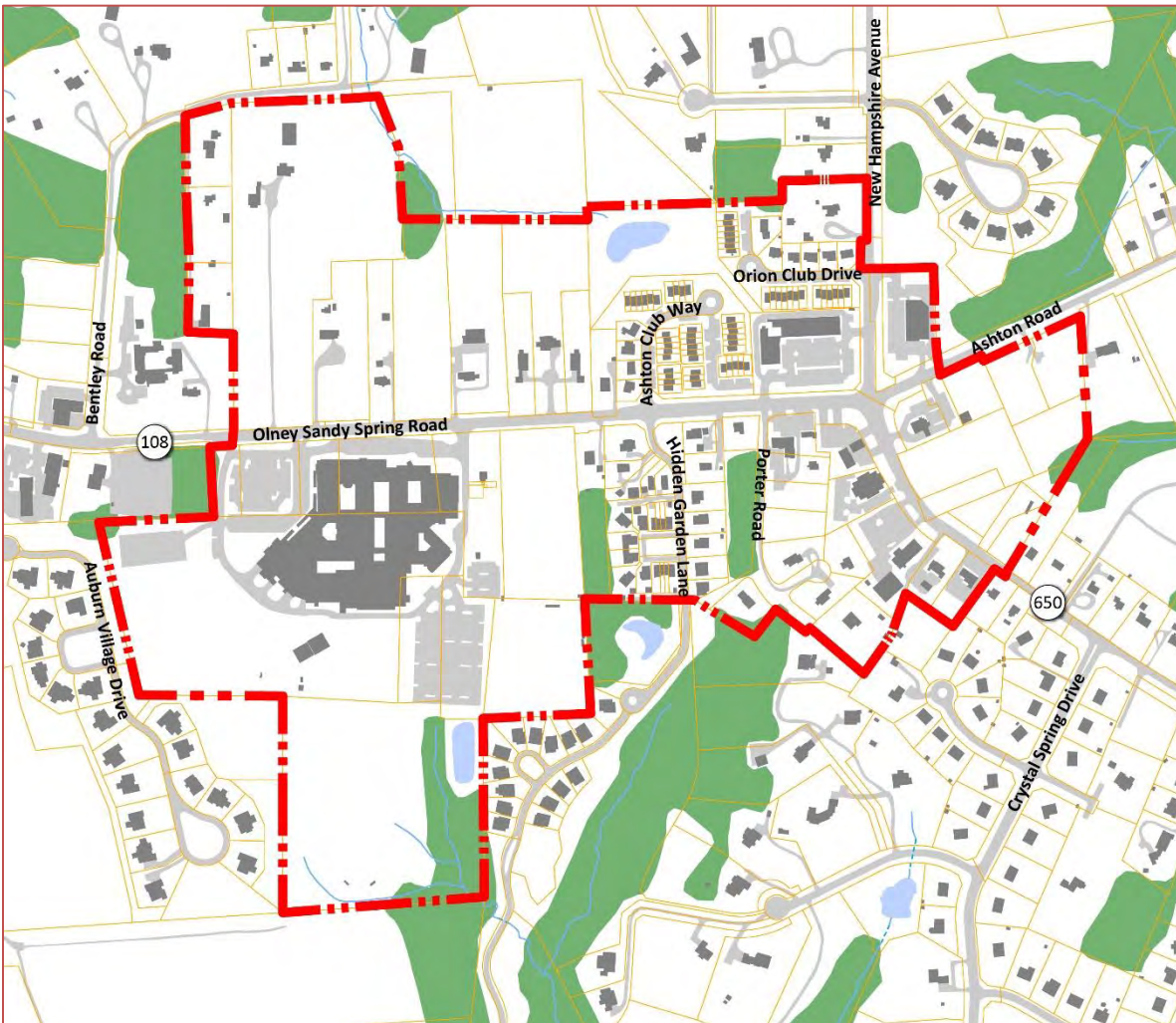


Figure 1 Proposed Master Plan Boundary

Ashton, as noted above, sits at the intersection of important roads. MD 108, known as Olney-Sandy Spring Road to the west of New Hampshire Avenue and as Ashton Road to its east, is a well-travelled route that crosses northern Montgomery County and includes one of the handful of Patuxent River crossings that connect Montgomery County with Howard County and Baltimore. New Hampshire Avenue is a north-south route that offers access to northern Montgomery County and to the District of Columbia. A modest commercial center is now located at the intersection, with business activities in all four quadrants of the intersection. These businesses are generally neighborhood serving, and include restaurants, a dry cleaner, a pharmacy, a service station and a bank. Significantly, the US Postal Service continues to maintain a post office that serves the Ashton community.



Figure 2 Wyndcrest

The compact village center at the intersection is surrounded by residential neighborhoods. In the northwest quadrant, a mix of detached and attached single-family housing is immediately adjacent to a small shopping center, called the Ashton Village Center. Single-family homes on larger lots adjoin the Village Center on the north side of MD 108 to Bentley Road. In the southwest quadrant, small single-family homes are located on Porter Road; closer to MD 108, a townhouse community is planned. To the west, on the south side of MD 108, is the small residential community of Wyndcrest and Sherwood High School. To the south, along New Hampshire Avenue, is a mix of office,

institutional and retail uses. In the northeast quadrant, a community of single-family homes clustered within undeveloped open space recently developed next to the local pharmacy. In the southeast quadrant, an undeveloped area designated for single-family housing is adjacent to a branch of the Sandy Spring Bank, a prominent local institution.



Figure 3 Ashton Village Center Towns

Zones reflecting these uses are in place in Ashton. Three of the four quadrants of the intersection are in the Commercial-Residential Town (CRT) Zone, with overall densities ranging from 0.75 FAR (floor area ratio) to 1.25 FAR. The northwest quadrant, containing both commercial and residential uses, is in the Planned Development (PD) Zone, which allows residential development at five units to the acre as well as commercial uses. Commercial uses in the center total about 20,000 square feet of floor area. To the west of the village center, on the north side of MD 108, the residences are in the Rural Cluster (RC) Zone, with an allowable density of one unit for every five acres. On the south side of MD 108, the Porter Road area is in the Townhouse Floating Zone, with a density of 10 units to the acre; properties further south on Porter Road are in the R-90 Zone as is the Wyndcrest subdivision. Sherwood High School, one of the oldest in Montgomery County, is in the Rural Neighborhood Cluster (RNC) Zone. East of the intersection, residential zones are in place adjacent to the commercial area. North of MD 108, the cluster residential community is in the Rural Neighborhood Cluster Zone at a recommended density of one unit for every 2.2 acres. South of MD 108, the undeveloped land immediately adjacent to the bank is in the R-60 Zone.

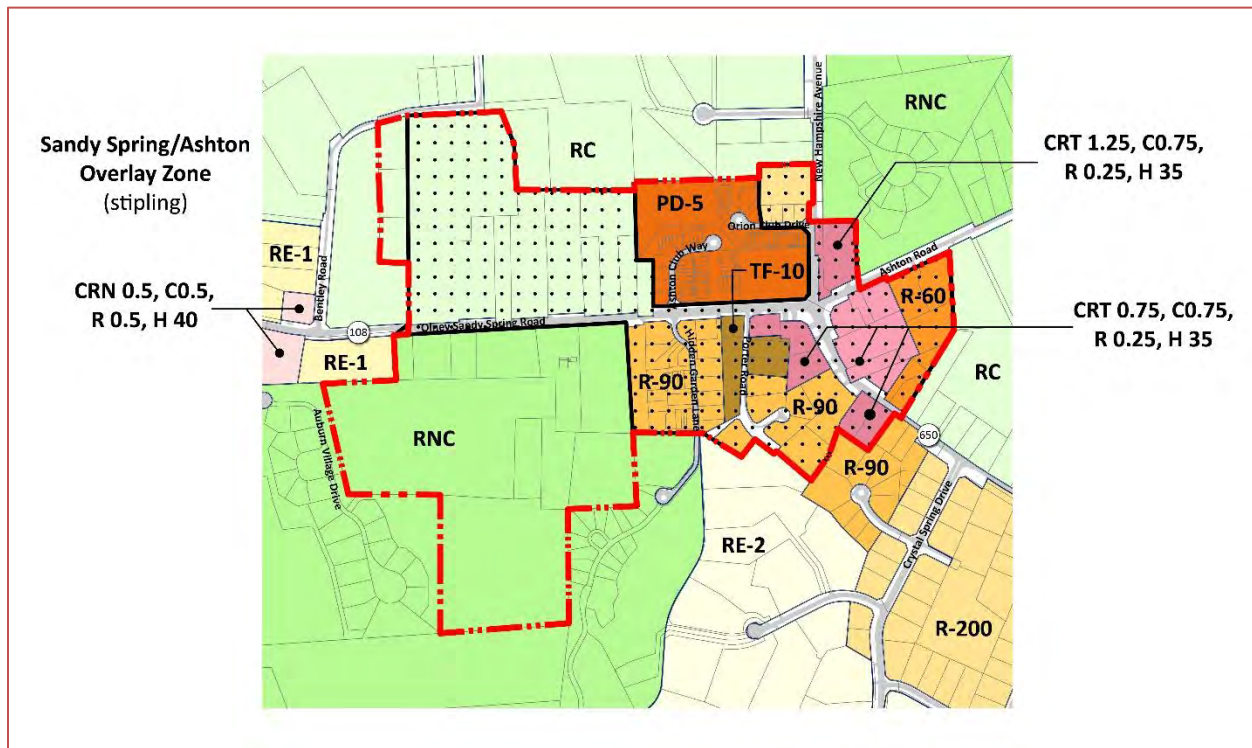


Figure 4 Existing Zones

Much of the village center is also in the Sandy Spring-Ashton Rural Village Overlay Zone. The Overlay Zone was created to ensure a “village scale” of development in the business districts of both Sandy Spring and Ashton. It limits uses, commercial densities and building heights. The PD-5 portion of the village center was not included in the Overlay Zone. It should be noted as well that the Overlay Zone was created prior to both the comprehensive revision of the county Zoning Ordinance and the creation of the Commercial-Residential family of mixed-use zones. The limits it sets reflect the aim of creating “village scale development” under the previous zoning regime.

Planning Framework

Local planning in Montgomery County is anchored in the county’s General Plan. The General Plan—*on wedges and corridors*—recommended that development in the County proceed in a corridor along Interstate 270 and MD 355 and west of a second corridor along Interstate 95. The General Plan recommended a rural pattern that would act as a wedge, molding the more urban corridors, providing open space for recreation, enabling the continuation of farming, natural resource activities and mineral extraction. A series of cities would be established along the corridors, with the wedges devoted to more rural and agricultural activities. The General Plan did recognize two “satellite towns,” Olney and Damascus, as more intensely developed areas outside the corridors.

Both Ashton and Sandy Spring and their environs are in the Olney Planning Area. This plan proposes to cover about 125 acres around the New Hampshire/MD 108 intersection. It includes all land in Ashton included in the Overlay Zone, as well as the Planned Development community around Ashton Village

Center, the residences on the north side of MD 108 to the Sandy Spring Museum and Bentley Road as well as Wyndcrest and Sherwood High School. This allows a contiguous boundary with the previously approved Sandy Spring Rural Village Plan.

Two area master plans have analyzed the Ashton area. The first, the *1980 Sandy Spring-Ashton Special Study Plan*, accompanied the 1980 Olney Master Plan. The Special Study extracted about 5,900 acres from the southeastern portion of the Olney Planning Area and sought “to balance the sensitive rural environment with today’s modern pressures: regional transportation demands, the cost of housing, open space preservation, rural sanitation and need for improvements to commercial areas.” (plan summary, unpaginated) For Ashton, the 1980 Plan recommended modest commercial and medium density residential development in the village center; large lot development on Ashton Road and New Hampshire Avenue to set the village off from adjacent rural development; and reductions in the recommended right-of-way for MD 108 through the village center, recognizing that recommended rights-of-way through the village would permit roadway cross sections that would damage the rural character of the village center.

Almost 20 years later, the *1998 Sandy Spring-Ashton Master Plan* “strengthens the 1980 Plan’s commitment to maintain and preserve the aesthetic qualities and rural character of Sandy Spring/Ashton.” (p. xii) The Plan evaluated about 6,000 acres, a small increase from the 1980 Plan. The Plan made recommendations designed to emphasize the separate characters of Sandy Spring and Ashton and confirmed the 1980 Plan’s recommendation for right-of-way widths on MD 108. The Plan also proposed design guidelines for New Hampshire Avenue north and south of the Ashton village center that would maintain its essential rural atmosphere and character by recommending wooded edges along the road where feasible and preserving open space along the road. For Ashton’s village center, the Plan proposed a small increase in commercially zoned land to create an incentive for revitalization and limited residential development in the southeast quadrant of the New Hampshire-MD 108 intersection to single-family detached housing. It applied a new residential zone, the Rural Neighborhood Cluster Zone, to land in the northeast quadrant to allow for cluster development with the provision of public sewer and with significant amounts of undeveloped open space. Finally, it proposed the Rural Village Overlay Zone for the village center.

The proposed plan for Ashton also complements the 2015 *Sandy Spring Rural Village Plan*. The 2015 Plan fulfilled a recommendation of the 1998 Plan for a detailed study to enhance rural character on the north side of Olney-Sandy Spring Road, improve the pedestrian realm through the village center, create an open space that would serve as a civic attraction and continue to manage land uses to preserve a village scale of development. This Plan also recognized that the comprehensive zoning code revision was unlikely to convert the existing zones to appropriately scaled new zones and made appropriate zoning recommendations. The recommended zones allowed the Overlay Zone to be removed from much of the Sandy Spring village center.

Development Activity

Much of the proposed sector plan area is developed. Ashton Village Center, the mixed residential and commercial area in the northwest quadrant, dates from the 1980s. The Wyndcrest community, a mix of single-family detached and attached homes, incorporates several older homes with newer dwellings of exceptional design. The new houses were built in the mid-1990s. On the north side of Olney-Sandy Spring Road is a mix of older single-family homes built in the 1950s and more contemporary homes constructed in the 2000s. Cloverly, built in the mid-19th Century and designated by the Master Plan of

Historic Preservation for the county, is at the western edge of the sector plan area, adjacent to the Sandy Spring Museum.

More recently, three development proposals have been reviewed in the proposed sector plan area. In 2005, Ashton Meeting Place proposed a largely commercial development for the southeast quadrant of the New Hampshire Avenue/MD 108 intersection. The proposal included nearly 100,000 square feet of commercial space, as well as six apartment dwelling units. This proposal prompted considerable controversy and the Planning Board in 2007 denied both the Preliminary Plan of Subdivision and the Site Plan associated with the proposal, determining that they could not meet the master plan's objectives of preserving village scale and character and did not follow design guidelines crafted to meet those objectives. The project developer subsequently proposed less commercial development and replaced the apartments with single-family units. The Planning Board approved the project at this reduced scale, but the developer did not construct it.

Almost a decade later, in 2014, a development team proposed a pharmacy on a two-acre property at the northeast corner of New Hampshire Avenue and MD 108. At the time, the property was in the county's General Commercial (C-2) Zone; the property was reclassified by the comprehensive revision to the zoning ordinance to the CRT Zone, with a maximum density of 1.25 FAR. The Planning Board approved regulatory plans for the project, concluding that it met the design guidelines in the 1998 Master Plan as well as the standards of the Overlay Zone. The project, for a CVS Pharmacy, has been completed.



Figure 5 CVS Ashton

The third project, reviewed in 2018, proposed to reclassify land on Porter Road from a detached residential zone to a town house floating zone. The Local Map Amendment to the county zoning ordinance covered a tract totaling about 2.6 acres and proposed the Townhouse Floating (TF) Zone, with a development plan that contemplated 20 units, a density of nine units to the acre. The development plan also included proposed development for an adjoining parcel in the same ownership zoned for mixed uses. The Hearing Examiner and County Council approved the Local Map Amendment, determining that the proposal was consistent with master plan objectives and met the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance for floating zones. The Planning Board subsequently approved a Preliminary Plan of Subdivision and a Site Plan for the project.

Master Plan Purpose

The Ashton Village Center Sector Plan will evaluate land uses, zoning, design and other relevant issues in the sector plan area. Following the lead of the 2015 Sandy Spring Rural Village Plan, this plan will review the Overlay Zone in light of the comprehensive revision of its zoning ordinance. Zones applied through the revision have enabled finer grained management of land uses, densities and building heights than was possible under the previous ordinance. Should adjustments to the Overlay be needed, the Plan will

make appropriate recommendations. In addition, the Plan will consider appropriate zones in the new Zoning Ordinance for the Ashton Village Center, now in the PD-5 Zone along with the adjacent residential community. The new ordinance kept the planned development zones but precluded their future use. Master Plans done since the revision was approved in 2014 have evaluated land in the retained zones and proposed appropriate reclassifications from the new ordinance.

The Plan will also closely evaluate design and streetscape options that increase walkability and meet Vision Zero objectives for increasing pedestrian and bicyclist safety. Approved recommendations in the 2015 Sandy Spring Rural Village Plan include recommendations for shared use paths and added landscaping that will enhance the pedestrian realm and increase safety. Extending these recommendations from Sandy Spring to Ashton will be carefully considered. Development of the Plan will include evaluation of current travel conditions on MD 108, including traffic counts and mode of travel analysis.

Finally, the proposed Plan area is part of Montgomery County's Heritage Area, created to raise awareness of the county's rich array of cultural and historic resources. Analysis, development of goals and objectives and recommendations will consider Ashton's placement within the Heritage Area and the potential to impact nearby resources and the Heritage Area as a whole.

Community Outreach

Throughout the Spring, planning staff met with interested residents, landowners and other stakeholders. Staff also visited Ashton, reviewing recent development and taking inventory of existing residential and commercial uses. On May 16, staff held an Open House for the Sector Plan at the Sandy Spring Museum, where residents and stakeholders learned about the planning process and provided guidance on the Plan's objectives.

The Communications Plan prepared for this plan highlights resources and tools for encouraging community participation in the Plan's development. Planners will use social media, electronic communications and other innovative tools to convey information about the Plan's development and solicit participation. These efforts will include community meetings and meetings with interested community organizations. The Plan will include a website that will serve as clearinghouse for information on the Plan. Staff has begun to plan a design workshop for community residents and is targeting mid-June for the event.

Information on meetings, other events and staff reports for the Plan will be posted on the project's website: <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/communities/area-3/ashton-village-center-sector-plan/>.

Plan Schedule

Transmittal of the Planning Board Draft Sector Plan is currently scheduled for October 2019. Here are the Plan's major milestones:

Schedule for the Germantown Plan for The Town Sector Zone

May 2019	Scope of work
October 2019	Planning Board Draft
December 2019	County Council public hearing
Spring 2020	Commission adoption
Summer 2019	Sectional map amendment (rezoning)

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Project Webpage

<https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/communities/area-3/ashton-village-center-sector-plan/>.

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