

Complete Communities: Mix of Uses and Forms

Part 1: What is the problem / existing conditions that fall short?

- While the 1964 Plan advocated a transit-oriented, compact form of development with commercial, cultural and social services as well a variety of living spaces, it expected that these uses would be physically separated yet ultimately work together to achieve a “pleasant and economically feasible whole.”
 - The Plan was a product of its time and recommended implementation via Euclidean zoning, with distinct zones for multifamily, townhouse and single-family housing along with isolated commercial and industrial zones. It included an express admonition to “exclude residences from all existing commercial and industrial zones” and said “*commercial and industrial zones should exclude residences both because good residential neighborhoods cannot be maintained in such areas, and because business and industry can function more effectively where space allotted them is uninterrupted by housing.*”
 - The Plan emphasized the desirability of barriers, buffers, and transitions between land uses to achieve harmony and compatibility, stating: “*long established commercial centers expand into nearby residential neighborhoods, causing more transitional problems. The end result is a disease known as urban blight. This disease is contagious and is almost sure to spread where preventative measures are not taken.*”
- This rigid approach based on separation of uses and building types was not entirely successful in producing pleasant and economically vibrant commercial districts, and it failed to anticipate – much less meet – demand for housing in mixed use centers of activity. While a handful of locations have attracted investment in office, retail, and residential elements, most lack the mixture of uses and elements needed to achieve a vibrant community, including a compact form with diverse housing types, commercial uses, transit, and a walkable public realm. Moreover, the areas surrounding these nodes largely remain characterized by a separation of land uses and uniform lot sizes, lot coverage, and building forms.
- Homogeneity in uses as well as lot sizes, development standards and building forms has had the effect – whether intentional or not – of discouraging connections among people and places as the geographic separation of different uses and building types has made access to the full range of economic, educational, and cultural opportunities (as well as services, amenities, and infrastructure) depend on the access to cars. By separating uses and investing heavily in roads we have made driving the only practical way for many residents and workers to meet their daily needs – trips that should be feasible on foot, by bicycle, or via train or bus.
- The concept that uses must be physically separate – with transitions to achieve harmony and compatibility – became a basic assumption of land use plans and policies. The idea that neighborhoods where single-family detached houses are the only permissible land use and housing type should be maintained at all costs has produced grossly inefficient use of land, left residents cut off from retail and other services, and encouraged construction of stand-alone public facilities. This pattern of locating housing, employment and public services in isolation has limited our ability to achieve inclusive, vibrant neighborhoods characterized by

a mixture of uses and forms and contributed to the economic, racial and social equity, and environmental sustainability challenges discussed in further detail in the Affordable and Attainable Housing as well as the Transportation and Communication Networks chapters.

- The polycentric urbanism embodied by the 1964 plan's concept of corridor cities was fundamentally sound, but the corridor cities neither achieved the densities nor provided for the variety of uses, building types, and services necessary to maximize their value in attracting workers and residents looking for more vibrant, exciting locations to live and work.
- The social and economic context for future development has evolved. The county has more people, is more diverse and older, and our households have evolved from the stereotypical nuclear family to a range of conditions, ranging from single households and multigenerational households. Likewise, the county has evolved from a bedroom community serving Washington, D.C., to a county with several distinct employment centers.
- While land use plans and policies have evolved over the last decade to advocate for a mixture of uses and forms, particularly adjacent to Metrorail, implementation of mixed-use development has been limited, due to market realities and constraints.
- Many neighborhoods have some of the features needed to build complete communities, but most lack one or more elements. For example, some locations may include office and retail uses but lack diversity in housing. Other locations may include housing and retail but lack walkability and access to transit. Still others have a significant employment presence but do not have the housing to support 18- or 24-hour-a-day activity.

Part 2: Proposal of Policies and Actions

To ensure that demand for future development in Montgomery County is harnessed to create complete communities – both by building new ones along corridors and by making existing centers of activity more complete – the county will pursue the following policies:

- Identify and integrate elements needed to complete centers of housing, retail, and office development.
 - Update zoning allocations and standards to encourage the integration of varied uses, building types and lot sizes.
 - Apply flexible approaches to accommodate infill and redevelopment that improves access to amenities, active transportation, parks and open spaces and a broader range of housing types at the neighborhood scale.
 - Prioritize neighborhood-level land-use planning as a tool to enhance overall quality of community life and avoid reinforcing outdated land-use patterns.
 - Allow sufficient densities to make a wide range of uses economically viable in complete communities. Encourage densities sufficient to support convenience retail and other local-serving amenities at the neighborhood level. Provide guidance for accommodating additional density in a context-sensitive manner.
 - Ensure that complete communities are supported by a public realm that encourages social interaction and physical activity through the configuration of its sidewalks, paths, landmarks and gathering spaces.
 - Adopt planning approaches that prioritize providing more complete communities in service to improving the quality of community life throughout the county.

- Encourage co-location and adjacency of all essential and public services, especially along growth corridors and complete communities.
 - Maximize the utility of existing and new public facilities by extending their reach into the surrounding neighborhoods through active transportation improvements.
 - Develop standards for colocation of public facilities that promote mixing of uses or services and compact development strategies. Encourage public-private partnerships and ensure that they promote social interaction and physical activity.

- Retrofit centers of activity and large-scale single-use developments to include a mixture of uses and diversity of housing types and to provide a critical mass of housing, jobs, services and amenities for a vibrant, dynamic complete communities.
 - Ensure employment uses in economic clusters develop in a mixed-use format along with housing, retail, amenities and transit, and are integrated into the surrounding communities.
 - Allow creation of co-located subsidized housing, discussed further in the Affordable and Attainable Housing Chapter, for industries that employ large numbers of employees (permanent or seasonal).
 - Encourage higher density economic and housing cooperatives (live/work areas such as home occupations, artist villages, farmers market/village, tech/life-science startup incubators).

Part 3: Furthering Key Objectives

- Planning for complete communities represents a departure from the automobile-oriented neighborhood and single use district planning of the last several decades. Complete communities require a true integration of uses, including jobs, services, housing and amenities in a compact form. These communities further our ability to attract workers (and their employers) as well as residents, because they offer convenience, walkability and a quality of place not available when a neighborhood or district is planned around the needs of cars instead of the needs of people.

- The mix of uses and diversity of building types and lot sizes contemplated by this plan will help to make housing more affordable and attainable. These strategies complement and benefit from transportation policies that emphasize walking, biking, rolling and transit. They also support physical and social health by integrating parks, recreation, and opportunities for social gathering and interaction in our neighborhoods.

- The integration of these elements is essential to attracting and retaining jobs and employment-related uses. In an era with limited demand for new office construction, and a strong market preference for locating businesses in high-quality, mixed-use, walkable and transit-oriented areas, one of the best strategies available to local government to attract and retain employers is the implementation of complete communities. As existing centers of activity become more complete, through a range of housing types at a range of prices and rents, services, amenities and improved walkability, these centers become

more desirable and attractive to employers, creating a variety of jobs across incomes and industries.

- The creation of vibrant, dynamic complete communities, which including housing, jobs, services, amenities and opportunities for social gathering and interaction will attract employment, advancing our economic performance and competitiveness.
 - Creating capacity for and incentivizing development of housing – in all prices, types and forms – in concentrated centers of activity will facilitate investment in services, amenities and public realm improvements and achieve the livable community desired by employers and employees.
 - The achievement of complete communities, based on current market realities, may require responding to the housing demand, but doing so in a neighborhood characterized by a variety of uses, will ultimately attract jobs and advance the county’s desirability.
 - Market preferences are increasingly shifting toward transit-oriented, mixed-use communities with a unique sense of place.
 - Employers are not identical and have different needs. Complete communities with a mixture of lot sizes, building types and uses, positioned within centers of activity along transit-corridors, offer the ability to accommodate unique employer needs.
 - Highly educated workforce desires a diverse range of housing options, quality schools, community amenities and a mixture of uses. Accommodating these lifestyle preferences within complete communities, which vary by scale and location, attracts employees – and their employers.
 - The implementation of complete communities will be organic and incremental, through infill development and redevelopment within centers of activity along corridors as well as within existing downtowns, town centers and rural villages. The incremental implementation will be primarily market driven and accompanied by public benefits, such as streetscape improvements, public open space and schools. This private investment, coupled with public investment in capital improvements, will create more complete communities.
- A variety of uses, lot sizes, building types and development standards enable a diverse range of housing types to meet the needs of households of different sizes, incomes and preferences. For example, the integration of accessory dwelling units, duplexes and multi-family buildings within a community supports a broader range of household types and incomes, reduces the concentration of poverty and increases racial and economic equity. Similarly, a diverse range of uses and forms with flexible development standards, also increases the diversity of employment types, including an assortment of retail, office and live-work spaces designed to fit the needs of individual businesses. The diversity of housing and employment types provides a means for renters, first-time homebuyers or new business owners to access and participate in competitive markets.
- Flexible use and development standards that allow variety in lot sizes and building types as well as greater flexibility in building placement offer an opportunity to increase

commercial and residential diversity within neighborhoods, as well as economic competitiveness for the county.

- Small retail storefronts integrated into the ground-floor of residential buildings, for example, can be attainable options for small, locally owned businesses as well as provide opportunities for social engagements. Likewise, varied lot sizes can increase the diversity of housing types and provide opportunities for affordable or attainable housing, thereby increasing racial and socioeconomic diversity of neighborhoods.
- A mixture of lot sizes, buildings, land uses and amenities within neighborhoods, coupled with a built environment that is conducive to social intimacy will create vibrant, livable and integrated communities for people across the ethnic, racial, social and economic spectrum to coexist and interact.
 - Neighborhoods with a variety of buildings, land uses, amenities and services, create the opportunities for lifelong neighborhoods, which are welcoming regardless of stage of life.
 - The mixture of uses and forms, coupled with a built environment that encourages walking, biking, rolling and transit, results in regular physical activity and social interaction, which improves public health and advances social capital.
- Complete communities will apply a hierarchy of place, referred to as an urban-to-rural transect. While complete communities will vary by location and scale from downtowns to town centers to rural villages, each will embrace a mixture of uses including employment opportunities and diverse housing types to accommodate as many daily needs as possible.
 - While growth should be concentrated in centers of activity along corridors, limited, organic growth is permitted to achieve a diversity of housing types in existing residential neighborhoods outside the defined growth areas to make them more complete, particularly in existing centers of activity or development.
 - Limited, strategic increases in housing diversity in existing residential neighborhoods outside the defined growth areas will allow these neighborhoods to evolve over time to address current and future housing needs and become more racially and socioeconomically integrated.
- Complete communities allow more trips to be completed by walking, biking, rolling and transit, thereby reducing automobile reliance, vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions and increasing opportunities for social interaction.
- The co-location or adjacency of public services and amenities improves environmental resilience at the county and neighborhood scale by reducing the ecological footprint of the county's buildings.
 - Dispersing, rather than co-locating public services and amenities requires residents to travel longer distances to access these uses. Their co-location provides an opportunity to maximize community use and minimize travel.
- Complete communities will create long-term sustainability for both human and environmental health.

- These communities facilitate physical activity by walking, biking and rolling as well as active lifestyles.
- The mixture of uses reduces building footprints and associated heat island effect as well as energy use.

Part 4: Tracking Progress

- Include criteria associated with the following measurable factors measured on a multi-year/decade timescale or in different time intervals:
 - Population density
 - Diversity of structure and use
 - Racial, ethnic, and income diversity
 - Median age/life stages concentration
 - Percentage of employment growth overall and by area of the county
- Other significant metrics:
 - Car ownership levels
 - Transit usage for inter-county travel
 - Weekend transit usage
- Numbers of co-located facilities/amenities
- Public investment ratios for walking, biking, transit, and automobile
- Median vehicular expense per county household
- Median housing expense per county household
- Emergence of key population and mixed-use centers
- Increasing commercial activity in otherwise residential neighborhoods