
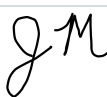



UNIVERSITY BOULEVARD CORRIDOR PLAN



Description

Scope of Work for the University Boulevard Corridor Plan.

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SUMMARY

The University Boulevard Corridor Plan is a new comprehensive plan for an approximate three-mile segment of University Boulevard (MD 193), between Amherst Avenue at the edge of the Wheaton Central Business District (CBD) to the area immediately south of the Capital Beltway (I-495). This memorandum presents the Scope of Work for the University Boulevard Corridor Plan, including the proposed plan area boundaries, context and background, planning framework, issues to address for the plan, public engagement, and the plan schedule.

MASTER PLAN INFORMATION

DRAFT

Scope of Work

Date

2/16/2023

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Planning Board Information

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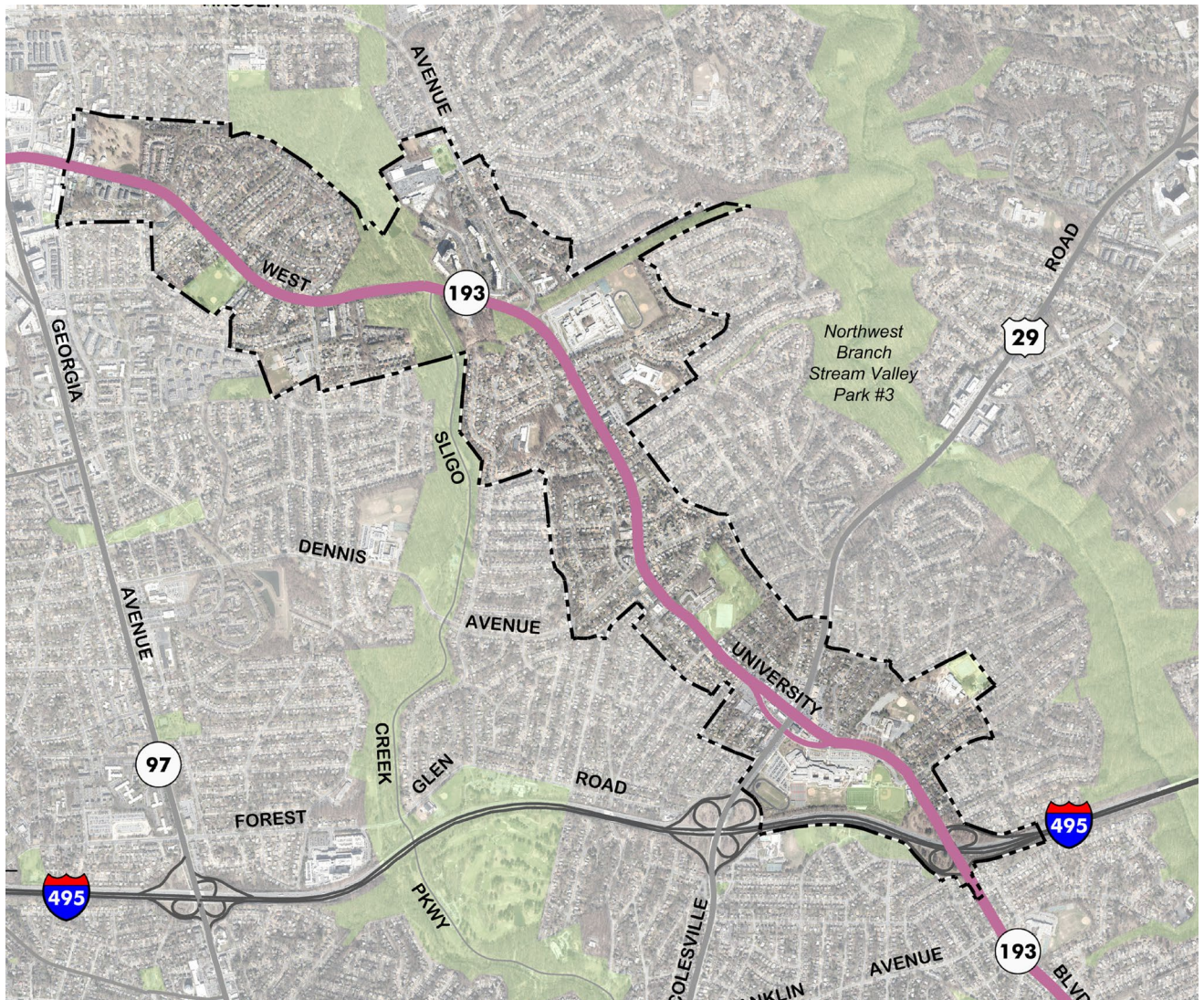


TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
Background and Context	4
Plan Area	4
History	7
Specific Communities: Wheaton, Kemp Mill, and Four Corners	7
Previous Planning Initiatives	9
Approved Plans	13
PLANNING FRAMEWORK	17
Countywide Initiatives	17
State Highway Administration Multi-Modal Shared Streets Project	18
Tactical Bus Only Lanes	18
Racial Equity and Social Justice	18
ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED	20
Plan Purpose	20
Land Use and Housing	20
Safety, Mobility, Access and Connectivity	21
Environmental Sustainability	22
Urban Design	22
Historic Resources	23
Development Activity	23
Community Facilities	24
Schools	24
Parks and Open Spaces	24
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	25
Public Engagement and Outreach	25
Outreach Goals	25
Public Engagement Strategies	25
PROJECT SCHEDULE	27
STAY ENGAGED	27

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The purpose of this document is to define the Scope of Work and proposed boundaries for the University Boulevard Corridor Plan. This Corridor Plan will amend the 2012 *Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity Sector Plan*, 1989 *Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton*, 1996 *Four Corners Master Plan*, and 2001 *Kemp Mill Master Plan*.

PLAN AREA

The proposed University Boulevard (MD 193) Corridor Plan area is a new plan area. The boundary of this plan includes properties along both sides of University Boulevard between the eastern edge of the Wheaton Central Business District (CBD) and the Capital Beltway (I-495), Figure 1.

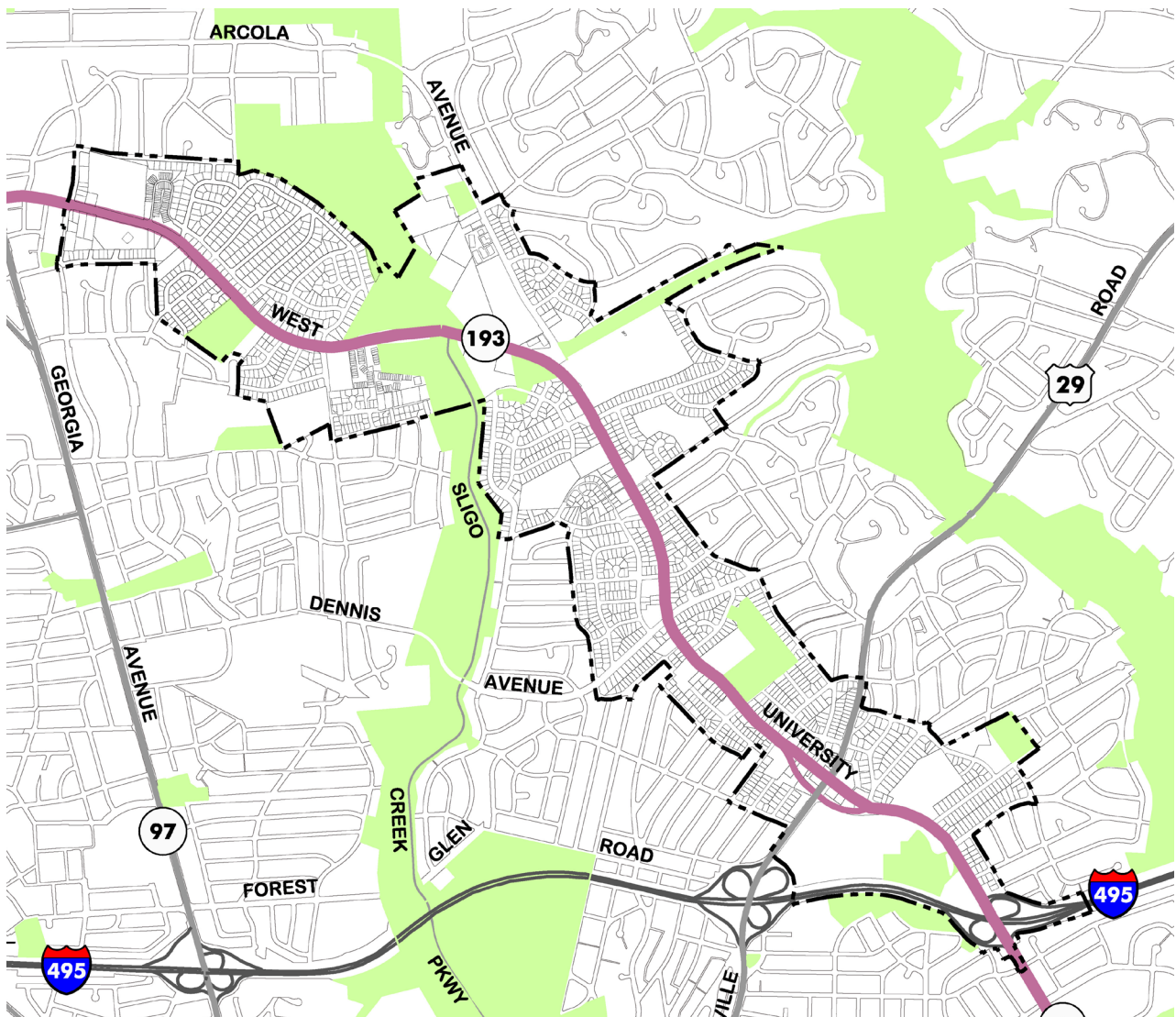


Figure 1: University Boulevard Corridor-Proposed Plan Area

As proposed, the plan boundary includes both sides of University Boulevard to include segments of residential neighborhoods, public facilities, such as schools and parks, and institutional uses, including places of worship. Throughout this process, Montgomery Planning will strive to understand community needs as they pertain to multimodal safety, regional connectivity, environmental sustainability, and economic development. The team will also explore potential opportunities for new infill development, bikeways, and future bus rapid transit (BRT). The team will also consider the potential to create a complete street—a boulevard with wider sidewalks, comfortable public transportation stops and safe access.

The northern portion of the proposed corridor plan area begins at Amherst Avenue, which is adjacent to the Wheaton CBD, and continues to the Arcola Avenue area. The proposed plan boundary includes key residential and commercial properties along Arcola Avenue, including Kemp Mill Shopping Center, Yeshiva of Greater Washington, and the Warwick Apartments. The plan area also includes the Kemp Mill Urban Park, the Northwood Chesapeake Trail, which is adjacent to Northwood High School, and a segment of Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park.

The Four Corners area serves as the central portion of the plan area with commercial and institutional properties, including the Woodmoor Shopping Center, a Safeway grocery store, Montgomery Blair High School, and Saint Bernadette Catholic Church and School. Colesville Road (US 29), another major highway with the existing Flash (BRT) service, intersects with University Boulevard creating a high traffic volume area. The proposed southern boundary for this plan area ends just past the Capital Beltway (I-495) at East Indian Spring Drive. The southern area of the plan includes several parks: North Four Corners Local Park, Pinecrest Local Park, and Blair Local Park.

While University Boulevard extends from Kensington to Prince George's County, it is challenging to pursue one plan for the full length of the corridor due to the myriad of existing and potential conditions. For this reason, Montgomery Planning proposes to divide the corridor into three planning phases, beginning with this plan. The second phase of planning is anticipated to occur as part of the Silver Spring Communities Plan, led by the Downcounty Planning Division. The Silver Spring Communities Plan will address the portion of University Boulevard inside the Capital Beltway, and will update the Silver Spring East Master Plan. A Scope of Work for the Silver Spring Communities Plan is anticipated for presentation to the Planning Board in fall 2023. A third and final phase for the corridor will include the area between the Wheaton CBD and Kensington-Wheaton plan areas.

Each corridor plan will address the following principles to ensure overall consistency among plans:

- Support environmental sustainability measures that advance climate change initiatives.
- Promote racial equity and social inclusion for the corridor, and celebrate the people who live, work, and experience the area.
- Encourage economic vitality that provides opportunities for new infill development and identifies opportunities for compact, corridor-focused growth, including more types of housing at all price points.
- Foster a safe environment for all modes of transportation that advance Vision Zero principles, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable users.
- Create a multimodal corridor that enables implementation of fast, convenient, and reliable Bus Rapid Transit.
- Strengthen the social and physical health of communities along the corridor by providing opportunities for social interaction and active lifestyles.

HISTORY

Prior to Europeans arrival here, Native groups, including the Piscataway and Nacotchtank, lived in what is now Montgomery County. European settlement in the plan area dates to the 1680s. During the 17th and 18th centuries, prominent families owned large tracts of properties, including William Joseph, who owned more than 3,800 acres in the 1690s, and the Carroll family that owned more than 2,000 acres. Property owners named these large properties after areas in Ireland, including Balamona and Hermitage.

African enslavement is a critical event in the county's historic past. According to the Montgomery County Historical Society, "A Survey of Slave Housing in Montgomery County" (1984), in 1790, Montgomery County had a population of 18,003, of which 6,030, or 33 percent were enslaved Africans. A later Census in 1860 reported a similar percentage of slaves. Slavery continued in the State of Maryland until emancipation on November 1, 1864. Although slavery was officially abolished in 1864, racial segregation and other vestiges of slavery continued. It would take another century until African Americans would become full citizens in the county via the several Civil Rights laws passed by the Federal Government.

Key roadways in the area, including Georgia Avenue and University Boulevard also date back to the 1600s. Today's Georgia Avenue was called Brookeville Road and it served as a toll road from Washington, D.C. to Brookeville, Maryland. University Boulevard was called Old Bladensburg Road and connected lower portions of Montgomery County to the Bladensburg port in Prince George's County.

SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES: WHEATON, KEMP MILL, AND FOUR CORNERS

Wheaton

Wheaton is named after the Civil War's Union General Frank Wheaton, who served in the 1864 Fort Stevens battle in Washington, DC. In the early 1800s, the area was called Leesborough and was later called Mitchell's Crossroads. Commercial activity at the University Boulevard and Georgia Avenue crossroads also dates to the Civil War era.

Wheaton is known as the birthplace of the first television transmission. Charles Francis Jenkins held the first U.S. television license (W3XK) and operated the first television transmissions from his home. Several radio and television broadcasters transmitted from Wheaton, including WTOP and WGAY.

Wheaton's residential growth occurred after World War II as large farms became residential subdivisions. Commercial growth also expanded with the construction of Wheaton Plaza Shopping Center, now Westfield Wheaton, in the 1950s. In 1952, Georgia Avenue was widened from two lanes to six lanes to accommodate the residential and commercial growth.

Kemp Mill

European settlement in the Kemp Mill area dates to the 1790s when Evan Thomas, a Quaker minister, developed a small community around a grist mill. Francis Valdenar purchased the mill in 1833 and sold it to George Kemp in 1857. Kemp's family operated the mill until 1905 and the name has continued to be associated with the area.

Residential growth in Kemp Mill accelerated after World War II, including new subdivisions like Kemp Mill Estates. This residential development is located north of Northwood High School and east of Arcola Avenue. It is one of several residential communities developed in the county with restrictive racial covenants that excluded African Americans. Multi-family residential developments, including University Towers along Arcola Avenue, were built in the 1960s.

Four Corners

During the 19th century, the Four Corners area was primarily an agricultural community centered around the crossroads of Bladensburg Road (now University Boulevard) and Colesville Road. Several prominent families owned large properties, as well as individuals in the area, such as the Beale family between 1850 and 1890 (Figure 2). In the late 19th century, Colesville Road was paved from Silver Spring to Ashton, encouraging improved mobility and new residential development.

Single-family residential developments increased between World Wars I and II, including the Woodmoor and Indian Spring Village neighborhoods. Most of the Four Corners area was developed by the early 1960s.

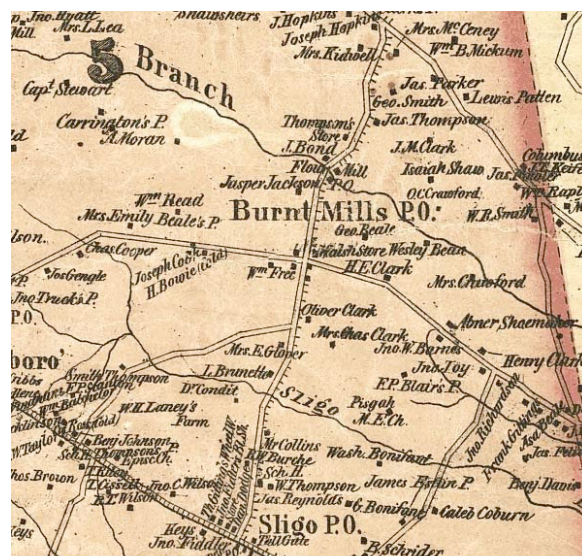


Figure 2: Four Corners area, Martenet and Bond, Montgomery County Map, 1865

Holly View and the Polychrome Houses are two designated historic resources in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation in the Four Corners area, although both are outside the proposed corridor plan boundary. Holly View is the former residence of James L. Bond, who operated a flour and grist mill between 1858 and 1888. Former Civil War Union officer Colonel Oliver Kinsman later purchased the property, and the house is preserved in the Kinsman Farm residential neighborhood. The Polychrome Houses, located at 9900 and 9904 Colesville Road and 9919, 9923 and 9925 Sutherland Road were built between 1934 and 1936. These residences, created by John Joseph Earley, incorporated Art Deco features and are clad with prefabricated mosaic concrete.

PREVIOUS PLANNING INITIATIVES

The following prior planning initiatives provide guidance on the history, context, planning challenges, and previous policy recommendations. The University Boulevard Corridor Plan proposes to carefully evaluate the recommendations of prior planning initiatives and consider opportunities to further advancement of economic health, racial equity and social inclusion, environmental resilience and consistency with the following countywide initiatives and policies.

The General Plan

The Approved and Adopted *Thrive Montgomery 2050* Plan (The General Plan) lays out an overarching vision for the county's future that notes the importance of corridors, such as University Boulevard. The General Plan states that corridors “create a web, connecting residents to existing and future centers of activity and Complete Communities. These corridors also either have robust transit service in place or planned or are located close to existing concentrations of jobs, services, and infrastructure in ways that lend themselves to supporting more intensive development...” (p.40).

Thrive Montgomery 2050 also designates different growth areas in the county including the Corridor-Focused Growth area, Limited Growth area and the Rural Areas and Agricultural Reserve. University Boulevard is included in the Corridor-Focused Growth area, an area that The General Plan states “should have the largest share of new growth” as it “encompasses the most developed part of the county with highest-density population and employment centers, and the infrastructure to support existing and new development” (p.42). Within



Figure 3: Existing and proposed BRT Stations along the MD 193 corridor and US 29

the growth areas, the General Plan also identifies “several existing and potential centers of activity at a variety of scales, including Large, Medium, and Small as well as Villages and Neighborhood Centers” (p.43). Along the University Boulevard Corridor Plan area, Wheaton is included as a large center and Takoma-Langley is included as a medium center.

The future implementation of Bus Rapid Transit along University Boulevard would advance a key mobility objective of *Thrive Montgomery 2050* (Figure 3). The Plan recommends “providing a safe and efficient transportation system offering a wide range of alternatives that serve the environmental, economic, social, and land use needs of the County and provide a framework for development” (p.63).

2013 Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan

University Boulevard (MD 193) is identified as a future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Corridor in the 2013 *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan* (Figure 4). The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) recently implemented the county’s first BRT service on US 29 and is currently examining other BRT corridors in the county, including Rockville Pike (MD 355), New Hampshire Avenue (MD 650), Veirs Mill Road (MD 586) and North Bethesda Transitway.

The Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan (Transit Corridors Plan) recommends a countywide 102-mile BRT network to provide “high-quality transit service to County’s most densely developed areas, areas planned for redevelopment, and areas planned for new dense development. As parts of the County urbanize, BRT will provide the transit service needed to move more people to and from jobs, homes, shopping, and entertainment areas” (p.25).

The Transit Corridors Plan acknowledges residentially focused corridors, such as University Boulevard, noting that “most of the BRT corridors pass through residential areas and in addition to serving the transportation function of moving people, the system

should be implemented in such a way that it enhances the surrounding area and minimizes negative impacts to the extent possible” (p.16).

The Transit Corridors Plan also states that the proposed “BRT service on the recommended transit corridor network will provide service between dense redeveloping areas inside the Beltway, emerging mixed-use activity centers, and commuter corridors. BRT is a flexible service with a number of potential combinations of attributes. Some BRT corridors include an exclusive transitway with little or no conflicts with other vehicles. Other corridors may take advantage of off-board fare payment, traffic signal priority, and/or increased distance between stops, but not other attributes most often associated with BRT” (p.15-16).

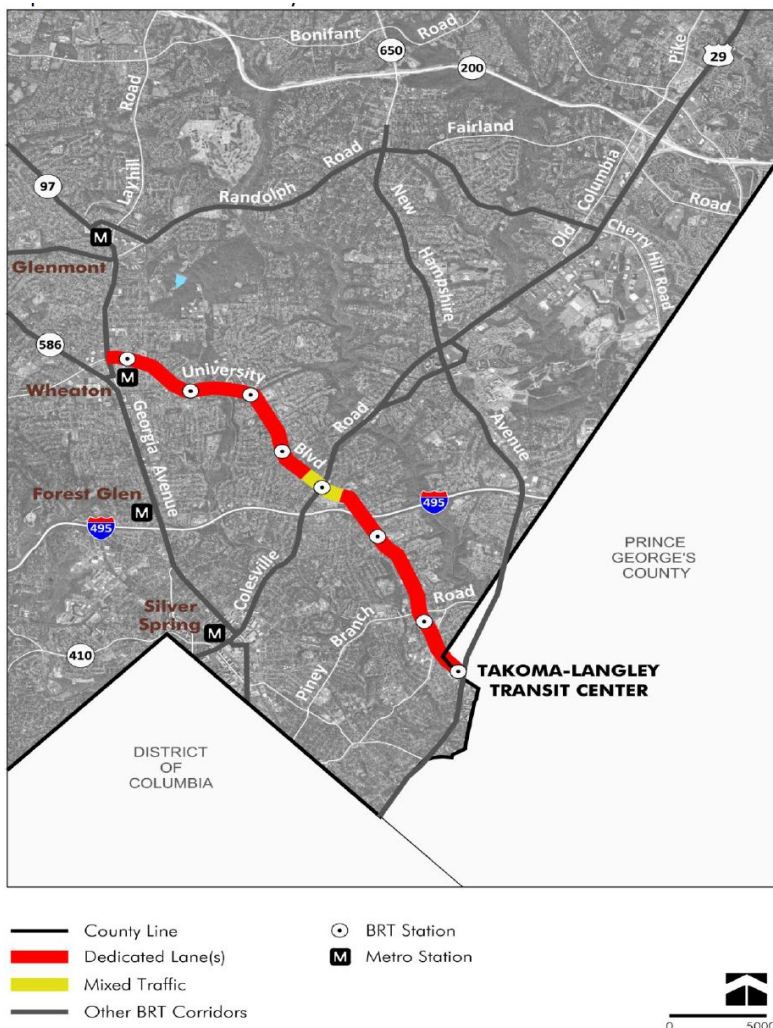


Figure 4: Transit Corridors Plan-University Boulevard BRT Route

The Transit Corridors Plan notes that University Boulevard links activity areas, such as Wheaton and Four Corners, and has the traffic features of a commuter corridor with peak-directional movement. The corridor provides east-west connectivity from Kensington to Prince George's County, including the University of Maryland and future Purple Line Stations along University Boulevard.

The Transit Corridors Plan recommends a variety of proposed rights-of-way for University Boulevard:

- Amherst Avenue to Dayton Street: 150' right-of-way with 1 additional transit lane
- Dayton Street to Easecrest Drive: 124' right-of-way with 1 additional transit lane
- Easecrest Drive to Lorain Avenue: 124' right-of-way with 1 additional transit lane

The following BRT stations are proposed in the plan area:

- University Boulevard (MD 193) at Amherst Avenue
- University Boulevard (MD 193) at Inwood Avenue
- University Boulevard (MD 193) at Dennis Avenue
- University Boulevard (MD 193) at Arcola Avenue
- University Boulevard (MD 193) at Colesville Road (US 29)

The University Boulevard Corridor Plan will reevaluate the recommendations of the Transit Corridors Plan, including the master planned rights-of-way, transit lanes, and station locations, as well as explore if new development opportunities could be accommodated in the vicinity of the stations.

US 29 Corridor

In October 2020, the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) implemented the first phase of FLASH service along US 29, between Burtonsville and the Silver Spring Metrorail Station. This corridor is identified as a BRT corridor in the Transit Corridors Plan. Two FLASH stops are located within the Four Corners area, including at Blair High School and at the northwest quadrant of US 29 and University Boulevard (MD 193). The second phase of US 29 Flash is currently in Preliminary Design and will include moving existing stations to the median of the roadway.



Existing Flash on US 29

APPROVED PLANS

The proposed University Boulevard Corridor Plan will amend several existing plans, including the Wheaton CBD and Vicinity, Kensington-Wheaton, Kemp Mill, and Four Corners Master Plans (Figure 5). These plans were approved from an earlier era, between the late 1980s to the early 2000s.

Wheaton Central Business District Sector Plan

The 2012 *Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity Sector Plan* envisions Wheaton as a major mixed-use center in Eastern Montgomery County that is centered around the area's diverse retail and cultural businesses. An urban district, parking lot district and a State designated Arts and Entertainment District support Wheaton's existing growth and development, including marketing and streetscape maintenance.

Wheaton is uniquely located along three Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) highways: University Boulevard West (MD 193), a major east-west road, Georgia Avenue (MD 97), a major north-south corridor and Veirs Mill Road (MD 586), which connects Wheaton to Rockville.

The new M-NCPPC office building at the intersection of Reddie Drive and Grandview Avenue reflects the Sector Plan recommendation for new intense development at the Wheaton Metrorail Station. The Sector Plan permits more intense development at the Metrorail Station, up to 250 feet in height and a Floor Area Ratio (FAR), up to 6.0.

Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan

A small portion of the proposed plan area boundary between the edge of the Wheaton CBD and west of the Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park is included in the 1989 *Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton*. The 1989 Master Plan consists of a large geographic area between Glenmont and Kensington.

The 1989 Plan noted several challenges associated with single-family residential development that fronts onto a major roadway, such as University Boulevard. The 1989 Plan indicated that the “intensity of highway traffic tends to threaten the long-term residential viability of houses which front on these highways. It is a basic tenet of this Plan that to allow further changes in the residential character of the corridors, either through neglect or by allowing for more conversions to non-residential use, would erode the interior neighborhoods that abut them” (p.70).

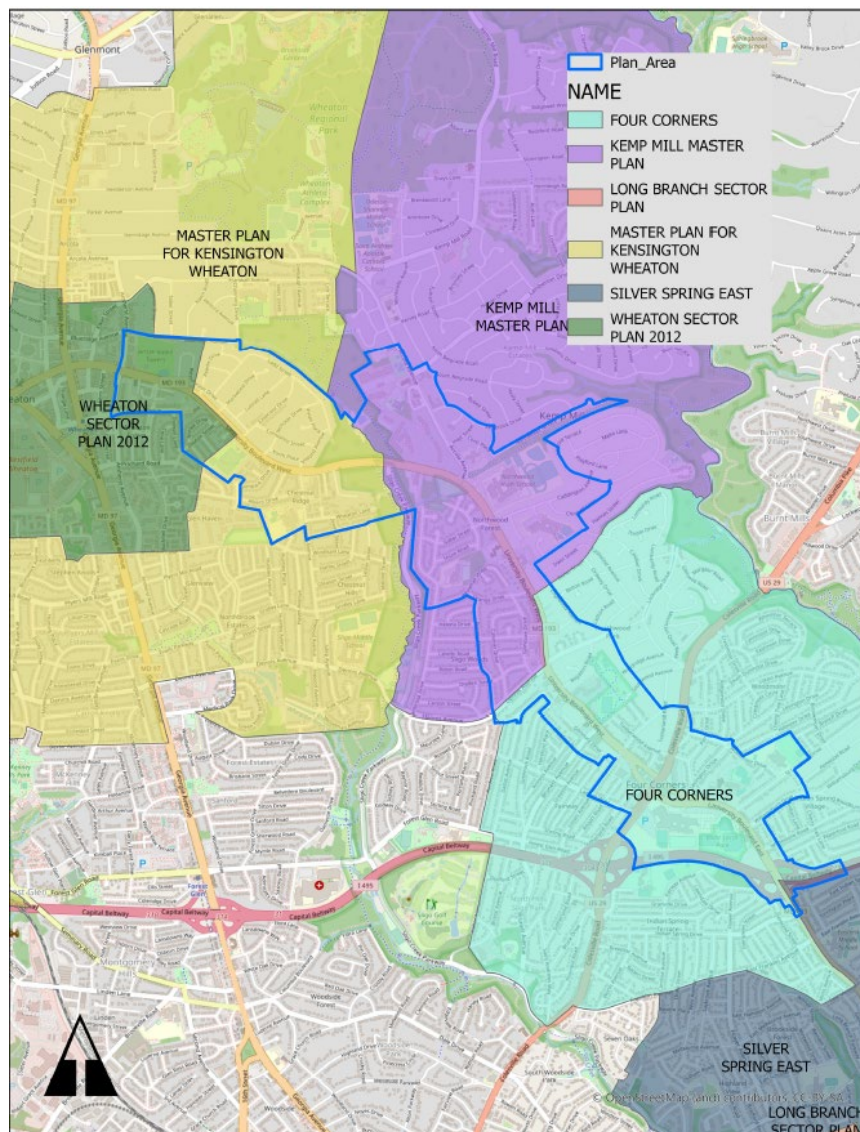


Figure 5: Existing plan areas and the proposed UBC plan area

The 1989 Plan noted the potential negative impacts between increased traffic and residential development along major highways. It noted the following:

Traffic on major highways in the Kensington-Wheaton area has increased since the area was developed after World War II; so has car ownership in modest homes on small lots abutting the highways. Therefore, homes facing the major highways experience a situation very different than it was with the lesser traffic of 30 and 40 years ago. There is increased access conflict between single-family properties and the heavy traffic along the corridors. This aspect of the problem is typified by individual driveways entering directly onto the main lanes of

traffic. As there is no longer any on-street parking and the roadbed is so close to the right-of-way line, some homeowners have widened their driveways or paved all or part of their front yards so that they can avoid backing into traffic. In addition, reduced setbacks and landscaping often preclude the possibility of buffering home from traffic noise (p.70).

To address these challenges, the 1989 Plan recommended a “Green Corridors Policy” which sought to improve the physical appearance of the roadway and to implement a “mechanism to ameliorate the impact of residential areas abutting major highways and to strengthen community stability by creating attractive highway corridors” (p.72).

Kemp Mill Master Plan

The 2001 *Kemp Mill Master Plan* is located east of the Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan area and north of the 1996 Four Corners Master Plan area. A portion of University Boulevard serves as the southern boundary for the Kemp Mill plan area. The 2001 Plan acknowledges the stable nature of Kemp Mill’s residential neighborhoods and the commercial center along Arcola Avenue, which serves as a focal point for the community. The 2001 Plan’s land use and zoning recommendations confirmed residential zones for most of the plan area and commercial zones for commercial sites. The 2001 Plan notes that University Boulevard functions as a major highway with high morning and afternoon peak commuter traffic.

The proposed corridor plan area includes a portion of properties along Arcola Avenue, including the Kemp Mill Shopping Center, Kemp Mill Urban Park and Young Israel Shomrai Emunah of Greater Washington.

Four Corners Master Plan

The 1996 *Four Corners Master Plan* is composed of five distinct neighborhoods, including Woodmoor-Pinecrest, South Four Corners and North Four Corners. These neighborhoods are predominately in the R-60 Zone.

Residential uses are approximately 70 percent of the 1996 Plan area and commercial uses are approximately two percent of the land area. The Woodmoor Shopping Center, which is located at the northeastern intersection of US 29 and University Boulevard (MD 193), and Blair High School, located between US 29 and I-495, are two focal points in the plan area. The 1996 Plan’s zoning recommendations reinforce Four Corners as a community of residential neighborhoods and made recommendations to strengthen the community’s commercial center by providing guidelines for the planned public projects, including the intersection of US 29 and University Boulevard (MD 193).

Colesville Road (US 29) and the one-way couplet for University Boulevard (MD 193) contribute to defining the commercial core of this plan area. Commercial and institutional uses are located in this commercial core. The 2014 District Amendment rezoned single-use commercial properties into the Commercial Residential Town (CRT) Zone, allowing for both non-residential and residential uses.

Improving pedestrian safety, especially at transit stops in the commercial area, promoting transit use, rather than roadway widening, and limiting neighborhood cut-through traffic were key mobility recommendations of the 1996 Plan.

The University Boulevard Corridor Plan proposes to carefully evaluate the recommendations of prior planning initiatives and consider opportunities to further advancement of economic health, racial equity and social inclusion, environmental resilience and consistency with the following countywide initiatives and policies.

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

COUNTYWIDE INITIATIVES

Several countywide initiatives will guide this corridor plan, including:

- [Vision Zero](#): In 2016, Montgomery County adopted Vision Zero as an inclusive transportation strategy to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe roadway injuries by 2030. Vision Zero will be a key feature in developing mobility recommendations for this plan.
- [Predictive Safety Analysis](#): Montgomery Planning completed a countywide Predictive Safety Analysis in July 2022 that identified multiple locations along University Boulevard as among the top 200 locations in Montgomery County at risk for specific crash types.
- [Thrive Montgomery 2050](#): Montgomery County’s new General Plan, *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, establishes a framework to guide the county’s future land use policies, private development, and public investment. The new General Plan includes three outcomes: economic health, community equity, and environmental resilience. These three outcomes, coupled with the plan’s other important objectives of improving public health, encouraging active lifestyles, elevating quality of design, and highlighting the role of arts and culture will contribute to the plan’s development.
- [Climate Action Plan \(CAP\)](#): The CAP is the county’s strategic plan to cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 80 percent by 2027 and 100 percent by 2035 compared to 2005 levels. Increasing tree canopy, protecting existing forests, promoting climate resilience policies, and other CAP recommendations will be included in the plan development.
- [Complete Streets](#) are roadways that are designed and operated to provide safe, accessible, and healthy travel for all roadway users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists. The 2021 *Montgomery County Complete Streets Design Guide* will guide the roadway recommendations for University Boulevard and other key streets in the proposed plan area.
- [Pedestrian Master Plan](#): Montgomery Planning is developing a Pedestrian Master Plan for the county. The Pedestrian Level of Comfort (PLOC) methodology will be utilized to define existing roadway conditions for pedestrians. In preliminary information from the plan, most of University Boulevard and Colesville Road are shown as undesirable for pedestrians.
- [Bicycle Master Plan](#): The 2018 *Bicycle Master Plan* developed a bicycle stress analysis that classifies University Boulevard as high stress (inappropriate for children and most adults). The 2018 Plan also includes an approved bicycle network that indicates a shared-use sidepath—providing two-way travel for walking, bicycling, jogging, and rolling—along the north side of University Boulevard. A sidepath is also recommended along the east side of Arcola Avenue.

- [Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments \(MWCOG\) Housing Targets](#): The Montgomery County Council adopted a resolution in 2019 to support a regional housing target, including the need for Montgomery County specifically to add an additional 10,000 housing units over the forecasted amount of 31,000 by 2030. To help get there, staff will examine existing zoning and land uses in the plan area and work with housing partners to determine how, where, and what types of new residential development should be pursued.

STATE HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION MULTI-MODAL SHARED STREETS PROJECT

The Maryland Department of Transportation's State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) implemented a temporary protected bike lane on University Boulevard, between Amherst Avenue and Arcola Avenue. The temporary bike lane was implemented between June to December 2021 as part of MDOT SHA's Multimodal Shared Street Pilot Project.

The project reduced the number of vehicular through travel lanes from three to two on westbound and eastbound University Boulevard (MD 193), and lanes were repurposed as a protected bikeway. The temporary bike lanes attracted approximately 40 new daily bicyclists and travel times were minimally impacted, approximately 15 seconds, with two lanes in each direction.

The bike lanes were removed in January 2022. MDOT SHA indicated that the project "proved safe and provided efficient mobility for all users, [but] significant indicators such as right turning safety concerns, low bicycle lane ridership, as well as strong negative community feedback, do not lead us to support the construction of a permanent bike lane at this location" (MDOT SHA Virtual Meeting, January 26, 2022). This Corridor Plan will explore and consider the appropriate bikeway recommendations for the area, as well as recommendations to further achievement of the county's Vision Zero goal.

TACTICAL BUS ONLY LANES

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation, along with Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and MDOT SHA, are considering a pilot project for tactical bus only lanes for the area between Amherst Avenue and Dennis Avenue. Tactical bus lanes are low-cost bus only lanes, which are typically painted for the exclusive use of buses, or in some instances, also include bicyclists. It is anticipated that this project will be implemented in 2023.

RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

In 2019, the Montgomery County Council passed the Racial Equity and Social Justice Act (27-19) that requires the Planning Board to consider racial equity and social justice impacts when preparing a Master or Sector Plan. Montgomery Planning acknowledges the centrality of social equity considerations to the master planning process and eventual master plan recommendations.

Staff will apply an equity lens to policies and practices in the planning process. Staff will investigate adverse impacts of past interventions while developing relationships and partnerships with communities that may have been underrepresented or disenfranchised in the past. Staff will consider the guidance from the American Planning Association which states, “Planning for Equity means applying an equity lens—for just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential—to everything planners do. From the way planners work with community members creating a shared vision for their neighborhoods to advocating for policies that connect people to opportunities at the local, state, and federal levels, planning for equity is planning for all.”

First in this equity focused approach is the role of public engagement and outreach. Staff will reach as many stakeholders and constituents as possible and understand their perspectives and seek their insights. The University Boulevard plan area has a growing and diverse population where approximately 24 percent and 27 percent of residents are African Americans and Hispanic/Latino, respectively. In addition, approximately 10 percent of residents are Asian. The diverse nature of this corridor, including residential populations and institutional uses, will require broad, thoughtful outreach to ensure that the equity considerations are represented in the planning process.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

PLAN PURPOSE

The purpose of the University Boulevard Corridor Plan is to comprehensively review the built, natural, and social environment along the corridor and consider opportunities to further the outcomes and objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050. Throughout this process, Montgomery Planning will strive to understand community needs as they pertain to traffic safety, regional connectivity, environmental sustainability, and economic development. The team will also explore potential opportunities for new infill development, bikeways, and future bus rapid transit (BRT). The team will also consider the potential to create a complete street—a boulevard with wider sidewalks, comfortable public transportation stops and safe access.

An initial list of issues to address for the corridor plan is indicated below. It is expected that additional issues will emerge during public engagement and plan development. Future recommendations will be guided by these issues as well as others that emerge during the plan creation.

LAND USE AND HOUSING

Single-family residential neighborhoods are the predominant feature along the University Boulevard corridor. These neighborhoods were built prior to or following World War II and are primarily in the single-family residential (R-60) Zone. These residential areas represent the type of suburban growth that occurred nationally in the mid-20th century.

Sixty-nine percent of the residential properties in the plan area are owner-occupied, which is higher than the countywide average of approximately 65 percent. The average asking rents for multifamily residential is \$1,594 for the plan area, which is less than countywide average asking rents of \$1,974. The median household income for the plan area is approximately \$18,000 less than the countywide median income of \$121,242.

Over the last few decades, there has been a small amount of new development along the corridor. Most of the commercial development, approximately 64 percent, was built between 1950 and 1970. Less than one percent of the commercial development has been built since 2010.

This corridor plan will explore strategic opportunities where alternative housing types could be accommodated at key locations. The proposed BRT stations identified in the 2013 *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan* will serve as a framework to explore potential infill development. In addition, large institutional properties, such as churches, will also be investigated for infill opportunities.

SAFETY, MOBILITY, ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY

Transportation and land use are symbiotic factors in development. This Plan's mobility approach will focus on making the roadway safer for all users, especially vulnerable pedestrians and bicyclists. It will also establish a framework for future implementation of BRT.

- **Climate Resilience:** The county's 2020 *Climate Action Plan* aims to reduce 100 percent of the county's carbon emissions by 2035. This plan will integrate these actions into its transportation analysis and considerations.
- **Existing Transportation Network:** The Plan will inventory existing conditions, including both roadway, transit, and nonmotorized infrastructure, as well as review the existing non-auto driver mode share.
- **Vision Zero:** Consistent with the county's approved Vision Zero policy, this Corridor Plan will focus on improving safety for all roadway users, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable – those walking, biking, and rolling. University Boulevard, between Georgia Avenue (MD 97) and US 29, is one of the highest High Injury Network (HIN) roadways for State controlled roadways in the County.
- **Transit Service:** The Plan will seek to link the planned BRT route with land-use recommendations, along with enhanced Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and Ride On services.
- **Pedestrian and Bicycle Networks:** The Plan will consider pedestrians' and bicyclists' safety and comfort through Montgomery Planning's Pedestrian Level of Comfort, Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress, and the Predictive Safety Analysis.
 - The Four Corners area, along US 29 and University Boulevard (MD 193) and between Lorain Avenue and Williamsburg Drive, is identified as a Bicycle Pedestrian Priority Area. Bicycle Pedestrian Priority Areas (BiPPAs) are defined in the Maryland State Code as a geographical area where the enhancement of bicycle and pedestrian traffic is a priority.
- **Emerging Issues:** The Plan will explore the importance of technological innovations, such as micro-mobility, ridesharing and other emerging trends.

In 2020, the County Council's Planning Housing and Economic Development (PHED) Committee directed the Planning Board to use the following measures to evaluate transportation adequacy: auto and transit accessibility, auto and transit travel times, vehicle miles traveled per service population, non-auto driver mode share, and low-stress bicycle accessibility. The Plan will employ these measures, and potentially additional analysis to evaluate transportation adequacy.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Climate change and its local impacts, such as increased rain, flooding, and extreme heat, are increasing in the county. The 2021 *Montgomery County Climate Action Plan* (CAP) recommends a broad range of actions for the transportation, energy, buildings, and other economic sectors that must be implemented to address climate change. The recommended actions in the CAP will build upon the environmental recommendations in the General Plan update, *Thrive Montgomery 2050*.

Environmental sustainability is a critical component of comprehensive planning that focuses on improving water and air quality, enhancing biological diversity, increasing forest and tree coverage, reducing impervious areas, and improving public health.

Understanding current environmental conditions along the corridor, including water quality, tree cover, and developing new sustainability recommendations that will contribute to achieving the county's climate change goals will be explored.

URBAN DESIGN

Establishing new urban design recommendations will be a key feature for this Corridor Plan. Prior approved master plans, such as the 1996 *Four Corners Master Plan* and the 2001 *Kemp Mill Master Plan*, did not create specific urban design recommendations. Urban design recommendations will complement the proposed land use and transportation recommendations.

Staff will explore the following urban design considerations for the corridor:

- Transform University Boulevard into a multimodal and complete street that is safe, walkable and bike-friendly.
- Identify nodes that could support a mix of uses to create neighborhood-serving centers anchored by future transit, including public gathering spaces.
- Utilize future bus rapid transit station locations as opportunities to establish local neighborhood identity and to build connections between the corridor and neighborhood amenities or public facilities.
- Seek opportunities to improve the frontages of public facilities, including parks and schools, to enhance access to recreation opportunities.
- Explore whether and/or where new uses at strategic locations could occur along residential areas that front onto the corridor.
- Promote compatibility in scale and massing between proposed intensified areas and existing areas to remain.
- Investigate large institutional properties for infill development opportunities that could support new residential or mixed-use development.
- Encourage innovative dwelling unit types that contribute to diversifying residential development at key locations.

During the public engagement phase for this Plan, staff will work with residential and non-residential property owners and other stakeholders to further define the urban design parameters for the corridor, especially for areas where redevelopment is recommended.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Cultural Resource Planners will perform archival research and conduct community engagement to expand our understanding of the history of communities located on University Boulevard that may have been historically and systemically underrepresented. In addition, the team will conduct an architectural survey to determine whether any individual resources and/or districts should be listed in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* or studied for the *National Register of Historic Places*. Resources to be evaluated will include but not be limited to the Romeo W. Horad House, Woodmoor Shopping Center, and religious institutions within the plan boundary.

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

A limited amount of new residential or commercial development has occurred along the corridor since the Four Corners Master Plan was completed in 1996. The construction of Blair High School in 1999 was the last significant development along the corridor.

Most of the existing single-family residential units were built either before or after World War II. These single-family dwellings are in the single-family (R-60) Zone. Residential townhouses along the corridor were built during the 1980s and 1990s, including Montgomery Knolls in 1980 and Glen Haven in 1990. The residential townhouses are either in the Residential Townhouse RT-12.5 or RT-10 Zones. All Residential Townhouse zoned properties will be rezoned to another zone during the future Sectional Map Amendment (SMA) process. The 2014 Zoning Ordinance requires that properties in some zones should be rezoned when a new plan is created. There are three senior housing projects within the plan area, including the Oaks at Four Corners, which is in the Four Corners area and was built in 1986, and the Korean Community Senior Housing, located at 440 East University Boulevard, which was completed in 2012.

The University Towers Condominium and the Warwick Apartments, which are in the northwestern quadrant of Arcola Avenue and University Boulevard (MD 193) are the only high-rise residential buildings in the plan area. These properties were built in 1969 and 1966, respectively.

In September 2022, the Planning Board recommended approval to the Montgomery County Hearing Examiner for a 90-unit Independent Living Facility for Seniors building at the Har Tzeon-Agudath Achim Synagogue property, which is located at 1910 University Boulevard at the edge of the Wheaton CBD.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

SCHOOLS

The University Boulevard Corridor Plan area is included in the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Downtown Consortium. Students living in the Silver Spring and Wheaton areas can attend five different high schools and the associated elementary and middle schools. Specifically, Northwood High School and Montgomery Blair High School are the principal school clusters along the corridor.

Based on the *proposed* FY 2023-2028 Capital Improvements Program (CIP), Montgomery Blair High School is currently over its enrollment capacity, and it will remain over capacity into the future. The new Northwood High School will be completed in 2026, adding additional high school capacity. Classroom additions are anticipated by 2024 at Silver Spring International Middle School and Highland View Elementary School by 2025. Most middle schools and elementary schools will be within the proposed program capacities. The proposed plan will assess how additional residential development will impact the applicable school cluster.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

The plan area has several parks, including Wheaton Forest Local Park, Breewood Neighborhood Park, Kemp Mill Urban Park, North Four Corners Local Park, Pinecrest Local Park and Blair Local Park. The Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park is located to the west and the Northwest Branch Stream Valley Park is further east. A portion of Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park is located within the plan area. There are existing trails that link existing parks to residential communities, most notably the Northwood-Chesapeake Bay Trail that links the Sligo Creek Trail with the Northwest Branch Trail partially passing through land owned by the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration and is adjacent to Northwood High School. This corridor plan will seek opportunities to enhance existing parks and trail connections as well as identify potential new parks or open spaces on properties that could redevelop in the future.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

This comprehensive plan's public outreach and engagement will be broad based and inclusive of community members, business owners, religious and institutional uses along University Boulevard. The proposed outreach efforts aim to provide meaningful insight into the community's needs, concerns, and desires. Further, the overall public outreach and engagement approach will be flexible to address issues during the plan development.

OUTREACH GOALS

The proposed outreach goals will seek to inform all corridor stakeholders regarding the potential to create a safe and comfortable multimodal environment, including future BRT and potential infill development. Specific outreach goals are to:

- Establish meaningful communications that engage a broad representation of the community, including using formal data and opinion collection mechanisms, and demonstrate to all audiences a clear connection between their feedback/opinions and the plan, whether their direct input is incorporated or not.
- Elevate the voices of people not typically involved in planning conversations to ensure planning outcomes are driven by a broad representation of the community.
- Explore the University Boulevard Corridor Plan as an illustrative example of corridor-focused growth.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The public engagement strategies will include:

1. Gathering representative input through institutional relationships.
 - Explore partnerships with public schools in the plan area to connect with students, staff, and parents through the lenses of education, mobility, and common spaces.
 - Seek creative feedback from students about the future of the corridor.
 - Work with religious leaders' networks for outreach as well as potential real estate development opportunities for housing, co-location, and other uses.
 - Enable partner institutions to represent the plan and planning process accurately.
 - Incorporate Vision Zero goals and Complete Streets Design Guide to strengthen a safer community.

2. Meeting individuals where they are for substantive engagement.
 - Frame planning processes and potential changes in plain language.
 - Attend community and institutional events to connect with people who typically do not participate in the planning process.
3. Communicate what a complete multimodal street means in plain language.
 - Emphasize safety and equity elements of the Complete Streets vision.
 - Connect community participation directly to planning outcomes and impacts.
 - Create visuals, including maps and artists' renderings of what key redevelopment areas and roadways could look like in the future.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

The University Boulevard Corridor Plan began in May 2022. The Planning Board is scheduled to review the plan in the Fall of 2023. The County Executive and County Council are scheduled to receive the Planning Board Draft in Spring 2024.

- Spring 2022-Fall 2023: Outreach, Plan Analysis and Staff Review
- Fall 2023-Spring 2024: Planning Board Review
- Spring 2024: County Executive Review
- Summer-Fall 2024: County Council Review and Approval

STAY ENGAGED

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