

FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS URBAN DESIGN STUDY

SCOPE OF WORK



Description

Planning staff will brief the Planning Board on the proposed scope of work for the Friendship Heights Urban Design Study.

STUDY INFORMATION

Briefing

Friendship Heights Urban Design Study

Date

July 13, 2023

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SUMMARY

The Friendship Heights Urban Design Study will analyze how people experience the open spaces, pedestrian and transit networks, activity centers and public life in Friendship Heights today. The study will include a significant community engagement component and will highlight the urban design strengths and needs of this cross-jurisdictional transit-oriented community.

BACKGROUND

Friendship Heights is an urban area along Wisconsin Avenue on both sides of the Washington, D.C. and Maryland border. Friendship Heights has a centrally located Metro station, with entrances in both jurisdictions.

Within Montgomery County it was one of the County's four designated "Central Business Districts" (CBDs) along with Bethesda, Silver Spring, and Wheaton (The 2016 zoning ordinance update eliminated CBD zoning and designation). Retail, office, and restaurant uses cluster along Wisconsin Avenue on both sides of the border, while high-rise office and residential uses are predominant on the Montgomery County side.

Friendship Heights includes the incorporated municipality of the Village of Friendship Heights. The area is bordered on all sides by single-family residential neighborhoods, which include several towns and incorporated municipalities such as Chevy Chase Village to the east and the Town of Somerset to the north. The neighborhood of Brookdale borders Friendship Heights to the west.

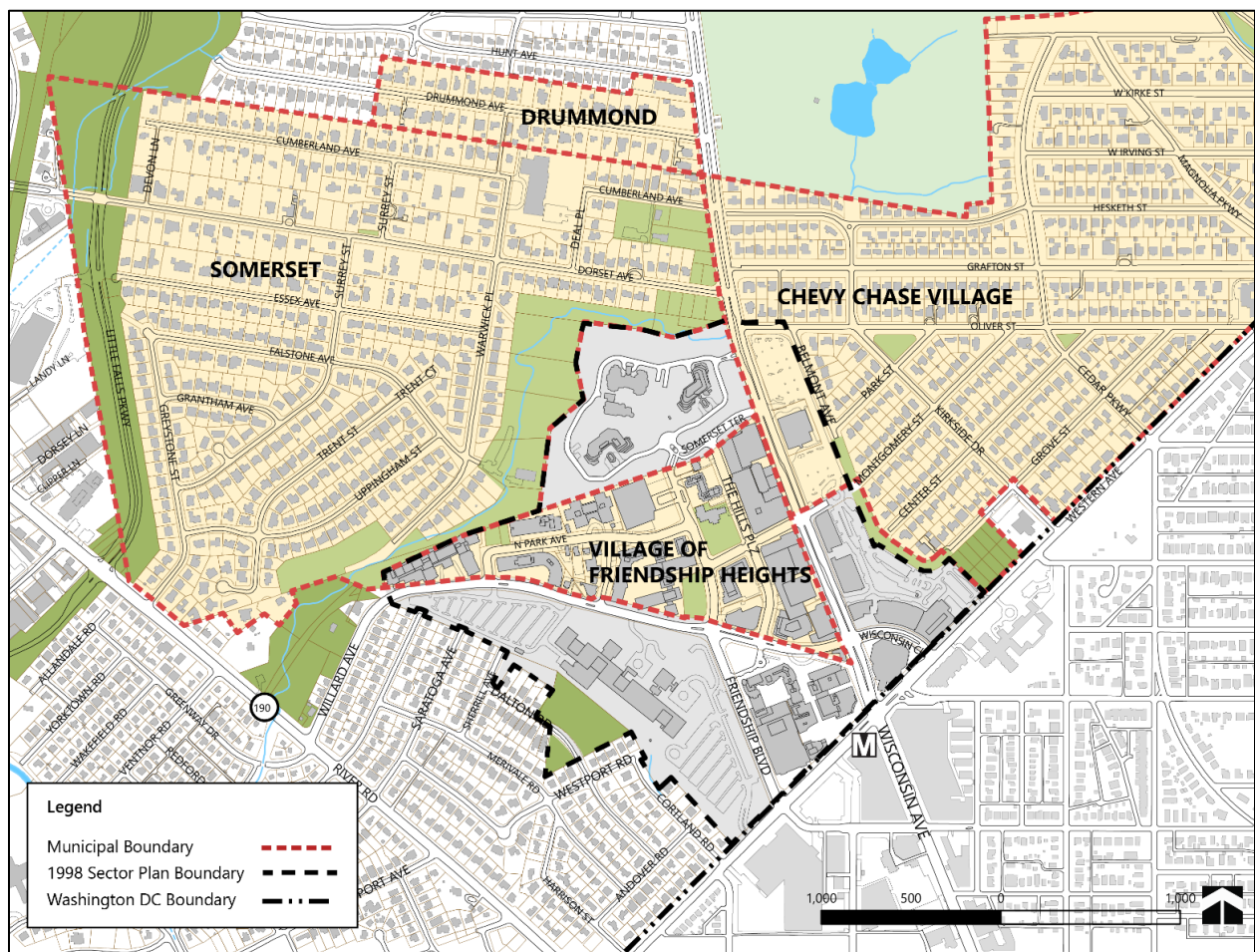


Figure 1: Map of Friendship Heights and surrounding context, including municipalities

FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS TODAY

Today, Friendship Heights is a mixed-use neighborhood, although recent years have seen rising retail and office vacancies, compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic. With limited new development in the past 20 years, the population of Friendship Heights has remained relatively static. Since the 1998 *Friendship Heights Sector Plan*, larger development projects have been limited to Wisconsin Place, which added multi-family apartment units, a Whole Foods supermarket and other retail, a community center, and The Collection, a refresh of the shopping center along the east side of Wisconsin Avenue. On April 13, 2023, the Planning Board approved a mixed-use development at 5500 Wisconsin Avenue, which will add new multi-family apartment units and retail to a site with an existing hotel.

The challenge of office and retail space in a post-pandemic era is present on both sides of the border, and the Washington, D.C. Office of Planning is currently working on a Wisconsin Avenue Development Framework focused on opportunities for housing and other development along the corridor.

METHODOLOGY

The goal of the Friendship Heights Urban Design Study (Study) is to analyze how people experience the open spaces, pedestrian and transit networks, activity centers and public life in Friendship Heights today. Inspired by similar studies in the District of Columbia, the study will include a significant community engagement component (described below) and will highlight the urban design strengths and needs of this cross-jurisdictional transit-oriented community.

Staff will generally focus on the area within the 1998 *Friendship Heights Sector Plan* boundary but will also be considering the context around that area on all sides.

ENGAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

In June 2023 staff briefed the Friendship Heights Village Council, Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers, the Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights and the Western Montgomery Citizens Advisory Board on the draft approach to the Study.

Staff will continue to meet with municipalities, community groups, and stakeholders throughout the study to provide updates and answer questions. Staff has also developed a project website and a subscription e-letter to help stakeholders stay informed.

The study will include a significant community engagement component anticipated for the fall of 2023. The engagement is expected to include both in-person and online events so that as many stakeholders are able to participate as possible. Staff will be working with an engagement consultant to organize and implement public engagement.

In addition, Downcounty Planning staff meets regularly on an-ongoing basis with staff at the Washington, D.C. Office of Planning (DCOP) to share information and insights on planning and development efforts, issues, and trends on the other side of the county line. DCOP is currently wrapping up the [Wisconsin Avenue Development Framework](#) and staff will continue to coordinate with that office to share lessons learned.

SCHEDULE

Staff anticipates that the study will be completed and presented to the Planning Board by the end of 2023 and then presented to the Council at the beginning of 2024.

PROPOSED STUDY SCHEDULE

July 2023: Scope of Work

Summer – Fall 2023: Analysis and Engagement

Winter 2023 – Early 2024: Present findings to Planning Board and County Council