

BETHESDA DOWNTOWN PLAN DEVELOPMENT CAP: NEXT STEPS



Description

To conclude discussion of the Planning Board response to the Bethesda Overlay Zone development “soft cap” being exceeded, in consideration of testimony provided to the Planning Board, Planning staff is revising its recommendation to proceed at this time only with a minor master plan amendment to the Bethesda Downtown Plan in FY25 to address implementation issues, and to defer further action until its completion.

COMPLETED: 1.11.2024

MCPB
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SUMMARY

The 2017 *Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan* (Sector Plan) established for downtown Bethesda a development cap of 32.4 million total square feet. Page 151 of the Sector Plan states: “Once total development-including approvals reaches 30.4 million square feet, the County Council may require certain actions before additional development is permitted.” The Planning Board approved a Site Plan in September 2023 that increased total development above 30.4 million square feet. In response to this Sector Plan recommendation, the Planning Board may provide to the County Council comments and/or recommendations for next steps, based on Staff recommendations and public comment.

On September 28, 2023, Planning staff briefed the Planning Board on its assessment of the Sector Plan’s implementation and recommendations for next steps. On October 6, 2023, Planning staff met with the Bethesda Downtown Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) to hear their thoughts and concerns and discuss potential next steps. On October 12, 2023, the Planning Board heard testimony from representatives of the IAC, the Town of Chevy Chase, and the development and resident communities.

In consideration of the testimony and feedback, Staff is revising its recommendation to proceed at this time only with a minor master plan amendment to the Sector Plan to address implementation issues, and to defer further action until its completion. Accordingly, Staff recommended and on November 16, 2023, the Planning Board approved the addition of a Minor Master Plan Amendment for the Bethesda Downtown Plan to Planning’s FY25 draft work program. The County Council will review the draft work program as part of the upcoming budget review cycle.

Staff recommends that the Planning Board transmit this recommendation to the County Council for their use and consideration.