

2024 - 2028 GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE POLICY WORK SESSION #1 - SCHOOLS

Description

Montgomery Planning is undertaking the quadrennial update of the Growth and Infrastructure Policy (GIP). On Thursday, May 23, 2024, the Planning Board held a public hearing for the 2024 GIP draft. Over the next five weeks, the Planning Board will have the opportunity to review and provide commentary on each recommendation throughout a series of work sessions. The first work session will focus on recommendations for the schools element of the Policy.

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MCPB

2425 Reedie Drive

Item No. # 5

Floor 14

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Wheaton, MD 20902

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Summary

- The GIP addresses the adequacy of public facilities as it relates to the regulatory or development review process. It sets standards for evaluating individual development proposals to determine if the surrounding public infrastructure, such as transportation networks and school facilities, can accommodate the demands of the development. It also outlines requirements for mitigating inadequate infrastructure.
- This staff report outlines the recommendations for schools in the 2024 – 2028 Growth and Infrastructure Policy (GIP) update.
- The County Code directs the Planning Board to transmit a draft of the GIP to the County Council by August 1, 2024, and for the County Council to adopt the 2024-2028 policy by November 15, 2024.

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Background

In Montgomery County, development is largely, though not entirely, characterized by infill and redevelopment in our urban core and along our transit corridors. Once dominated by greenfield development that created single-family housing for nuclear families, the county’s growth pattern has shifted to infill development, where multi-family housing and non-family households define residential communities. The 2016–2020 *Subdivision Staging Policy* and the 2020–2024 *Growth and Infrastructure Policy* (GIP) recognized the varying and changing growth contexts throughout the county and created flexible policies that moved the growth policy from a one-size-fits-all policy to one that recognized the need for greater flexibility.

The 2024–2028 GIP builds upon the transformational growth policies of 2016 and 2020 to further refine and enhance them. A primary goal of the 2024 update is to ensure the policy is aligned with the County’s priorities and the current growth context. The Public Hearing Draft of the GIP ensures adequacy while improving development conditions in the county by enhancing predictability, transparency, and proportionality in the approval process.

Schedule

Chapter 33A of the County Code requires a quadrennial review of the GIP, with the current review to be completed in 2024. The Planning Board must transmit its policy recommendations along with a report on the county’s growth context to the County Council by August 1, 2024. The Council will adopt the updated policy via resolution by November 15, 2024. The following table highlights the upcoming timeline for GIP milestones and activities.

Milestone	Dates	Notes
Work Session #1	May 30, 2024	Schools
Work Session #2	June 6, 2024	Transportation
Work Session #3	June 13, 2024	Transportation, Impact Taxes
Work Session #4	June 20, 2024	Impact Taxes
Work Session #5	June 27, 2024	Track Changes

Milestone	Dates	Notes
Planning Board approval of Planning Board Draft and Resolution	July 25, 2024	Transmit to the County Council and County Executive by August 1
County Council Public Hearing	September 2024	
County Council Review and Approval	September – November 2024	Council adoption is required by November 15, 2024

Schools Overview and Recommendations

Between 2008 and 2020, strong enrollment growth resulted in overutilization at many schools, and as a result, an increasing amount of the county was placed in residential development moratoria. An analysis of the student enrollment and housing data, however, revealed that in most areas of the county, the majority of enrollment growth derived from the turnover of existing single-family homes rather than the construction of new homes. While some parts of the county were experiencing considerable amounts of infill or redevelopment in the form of multi-family structures, newer developments in these areas were generating far fewer students on a per-unit basis and were contributing to a very small share of the enrollment growth overall.

To address this mismatch between the source of enrollment growth and the policies used to alleviate school overutilization, the 2020–2024 GIP overhauled the school element of the county’s growth policy. School Impact Areas were introduced, and the residential building moratorium was replaced with a tiered Utilization Premium Payment system, which allows the Planning Board to approve development even when a school is overutilized.

However, enrollment trends have taken a turn since then. Shortly after the new policy went into effect, the county’s public schools switched to virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and MCPS saw a sudden drop in enrollment, particularly at the lower grade levels, in the 2020–2021 school year. While enrollment is rising from that initial post-pandemic dip, the latest trends and projections continue to show a slowdown of growth in comparison with previous years, which reflects the county’s continuous decline in birth rates.

Given the short amount of time that has passed since implementing the new policy, and the post-pandemic transition during the past few years, the current 2024–2028 GIP update for schools hones the tools and elements introduced in 2020. The following recommendations are therefore focused on making the policy more equitable, fair, and effective.

- Recommendation 2.1:** *Modify the School Impact Area boundaries so that they align with the proposed Transportation Policy Area boundaries, and classify each area into Infill, Turnover, or Greenfield based on an updated analysis of their latest growth context and potential (Figure 1).*

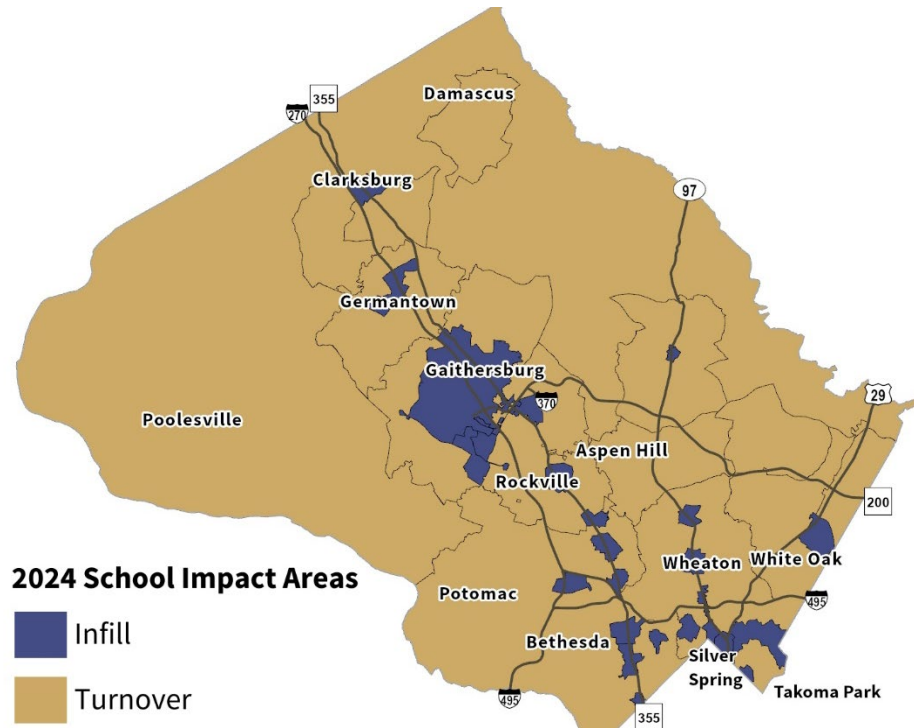


Figure 1. Recommended School Impact Area Classification

- Recommendation 2.2:** *Adjust the seat deficit thresholds of each UPP tier to align with MCPS’s CIP guidelines for classroom additions and maintain the existing utilization rate thresholds (see Table 1).*

Table 1. Comparison of Recommended vs. Current Annual School Test Thresholds

	Tier 1 Current Thresholds	Tier 1 Proposed Thresholds	Tier 2 Current Thresholds	Tier 2 Proposed Thresholds	Tier 3 Current Thresholds	Tier 3 Proposed Thresholds
Utilization Rate	105%	105%	120%	120%	135%	135%
ES Seat Deficit	85	74	102	92	115	110
MS Seat Deficit	126	120	151	150	170	180
HS Seat Deficit	180	160	216	200	243	240

- **Recommendation 2.3:** Allow funds collected as UPPs to be used for capital projects adding capacity at schools adjacent to the school for which the funds were collected, as outlined in the School Utilization Report.
- **Recommendation 2.4:** Reclassify stacked flats and similar housing unit types that deviate from the traditional single-family or multi-family classifications from the current multi-family low-rise category to the single-family attached category.

Table 2. Student Generation Rate of each housing unit type by proposed School Impact Area reflecting reclassification of stacked flats

Proposed Impact Area Type	Stacked Flats	Single-Family Detached Units	Single-Family Attached Units (including stacked flats)	Multi-family Low-Rise Units (excluding stacked flats)	Multi-family High-Rise Units
Infill	0.239	0.489	0.406	0.146	0.079
Turnover	0.411	0.437	0.495	0.232	0.092

- **Recommendation 2.5:** Monitor the countywide early childhood program projections through the School Utilization Report. When the enrollment is projected to be more universal, include them in the elementary school student generation rate calculations.

Attachments

[Attachment 1 – 2024 Growth and Infrastructure Policy Update – Public Hearing Draft](#)

[Attachment 2 – 2024 Growth and Infrastructure Policy Update – Appendices](#)