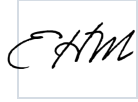


## BETHESDA DOWNTOWN PLAN MINOR MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT

### SCOPE OF WORK

#### Description

Planning staff requests approval of the Scope of Work for the Bethesda Downtown Plan Minor Master Plan Amendment, including a proposed boundary for the Plan Area.



Elza Hisel-McCoy, Chief, Downcounty Planning  
[elza.hisel-mccoy@montgomeryplanning.org](mailto:elza.hisel-mccoy@montgomeryplanning.org), 301-495-2115

## SUMMARY

Planning Staff requests approval of the proposed Scope of Work for the Bethesda Downtown Plan Minor Master Plan Amendment (MMPA). The purpose of the Plan Amendment is to revisit the implementation-related recommendations of the 2017 *Bethesda Downtown Plan*, within the same Plan Area.

## MASTER PLAN INFORMATION

Topic

Bethesda Downtown Plan Minor Master Plan  
Amendment Scope of Work

Date

June 20, 2024

Lead Planner

Elza Hisel-McCoy

Planning Division

Downcounty Planning

Staff Contact

[Elza.Hisel-McCoy@montgomeryplanning.org](mailto:Elza.Hisel-McCoy@montgomeryplanning.org)

301.495.2115

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	4
BACKGROUND.....	4
COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT .....	4
PLAN AREA .....	6
PLANNING FRAMEWORK .....	7
PREVIOUS PLANNING INITIATIVES .....	7
COUNTYWIDE PLANNING INITIATIVES .....	7
PLAN ELEMENTS.....	9
ELEMENTS TO EXPLORE .....	9
QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS.....	9
RELATED ANALYSES.....	10
PLAN SCHEDULE.....	10

## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND

What began as a crossroads village in 1871 is today a thriving urban center and one of the county's most desirable communities, with more than 17,000 residents, over 33,000 jobs including the two largest employers in the county, Marriott and the National Institutes of Health, and a diversity of housing types. With excellent public transit access, numerous restaurants, shops, art galleries and entertainment choices, including performing arts, live music and movies, Bethesda is an arts and entertainment destination and a center of the nightlife economy in southern Montgomery County.

Bethesda's most recent success was made possible by the innovative 2017 [Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan](#). Following years of community collaboration, the plan defined a 20-year vision for a truly sustainable urban community by balancing additional building height and density with a new Park Impact Payment to help address the high cost of park development in the downtown, in addition to all of the other public amenity and transportation and schools infrastructure improvements paid for by private development.

Beyond the standard measures used all over the county to ensure that public facilities and infrastructure will be in place to serve new development, the plan included several measures to track the implementation of plan recommendations for development, parks, transportation, and more. These included a cap on total development in downtown Bethesda of 32.4 million square feet, including existing and approved new development, based on a transportation analysis conducted at the time the plan was being developed. Once total development came within 2 million square feet (approximately 10 200-unit apartment buildings) of the cap, the plan recommended that the Planning Department and Planning Board check in with the County Council to see if additional recommendations are needed to help implementation of public amenity and infrastructure recommendations like new parks and transportation-related improvements.

In fall 2023, total development in downtown Bethesda reached the 2 million square-foot checkpoint. After public engagement and comment, Planning staff and the Planning Board recommended that the County Council authorize the development of a Minor Master Plan Amendment (MMPA).

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

The MMPA is a technical update to the 2017 *Bethesda Downtown Plan*. The MMPA will not re-open the entire 2017 plan. The existing zoning, parks, transportation, and other recommendations will remain unchanged while we explore how better to implement those recommendations. Engagement will be similarly tailored.

Staff will continue to engage with the communities that make Bethesda their home. Acknowledging the technical nature of MMPA, these include foremost the Bethesda Downtown Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC). A unique partner comprised of volunteer representatives from the resident and real estate development communities, many of the IAC members were involved in the

development of the 2017 plan and offer unique insights into and experience with the implementation of the plan recommendations. Staff has developed the MMPA schedule based in significant part on the IAC meeting schedule, to collaborate with them at each step of the process.

To help introduce the MMPA to the larger community, staff attended the Bethesda Farmers Market on Sunday, May 19, and hosted two community meetings, on Wednesday, May 29, at the Bethesda library, and on Saturday, June 1, in the Chevy Chase Town Hall.

Staff has been meeting with community, business, and development groups, including the East Bethesda Citizens Association, the Bethesda Chamber of Commerce, NAIOP, and developers represented by Selzer Gurvich and Lerch Early & Brewer.

Staff has begun meeting with appropriate County agencies, including the Department of Transportation and the Department for Housing and Community Affairs.

Additionally, staff has been working to update Montgomery Planning's webpage to better provide information about the implementation of the 2017 Plan recommendations and the MMPA. Staff also maintains an eLetter mailing list with over 1,300 subscribers, who have signed up between the 2017 Plan process and today.

Moving forward, in addition to working with the IAC, staff is planning summertime information sessions about the master plan "implementation toolbox" and anticipates additional public meetings in the fall.

## PLAN AREA

The proposed Plan Area is the same as for the approved and adopted 2017 *Bethesda Downtown Plan*.



Figure 1. Proposed Plan Area

## PLANNING FRAMEWORK

### PREVIOUS PLANNING INITIATIVES

#### *2017 Bethesda Downtown Plan*

Downtown Bethesda's diverse, mixed-use and residential districts have created a distinct character and an identity that residents and visitors value. The 2017 *Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan* creates a framework that maintains Bethesda as a center of economic vitality, as well as promotes all the elements that are fundamental to keeping Bethesda unique and competitive in the years to come.

The Sector Plan is being implemented through focused coordination between public and private interests to promote increased parks and open space, affordable housing, environmental innovation, economic competitiveness and design excellence.

The Plan recommends 13 additional parks and envisions the continuation of downtown Bethesda as a thriving urban center with a regional draw for employment, shopping and entertainment. The Plan estimates an additional 14,200 jobs by 2040, a 38% increase above existing levels. In addition, the Plan envisions a continued focus on housing by proposing a diverse mix of residential choices throughout downtown Bethesda to accommodate more workers and reduce commuter traffic congestion. The Plan estimates a maximum of 8,456 additional multi-unit residential units if limited commercial development occurs.

As mentioned above, the Plan includes a cap on total development in the Plan Area of 32.4 million square feet, based on a transportation analysis conducted at the time of the plan. Today, there is over 30.4 million square feet of development in the Plan Area that is existing, under construction, or covered by a Site Plan application approved by the Planning Board.

### COUNTYWIDE PLANNING INITIATIVES

Several countywide initiatives that will guide the planning process and the development of the MMPA, including:

- *Thrive Montgomery 2050 (2022)* - Montgomery County's General Plan establishes a framework to guide the county's future land use policies, including master plans. This plan will rely on *Thrive Montgomery 2050* for guidance and work to further the Thrive's goals within the Plan Area.
- [The Racial Equity and Social Justice Act](#) – 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.



- [The Growth and Infrastructure Policy](#) – The Growth and Infrastructure Policy (GIP) is the tool by which the County ensures its essential public facilities, particularly schools and transportation systems, keep pace with development. It tests the County’s infrastructure for adequacy based on projected capacity, growth, and future development, and guides the Planning Board’s determination that public facilities are adequate to serve every proposed development. The policy is updated every four years to ensure that the tools used for evaluating the impact of development on essential public facilities, such as a delay-based transportation test or student generation rates, reflect the latest growth patterns of the County. The Planning Board is currently reviewing the draft GIP for years 2024-2028, to be submitted for County Council review and approval later this year.
- [Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative](#) – This initiative is focused on increasing the diversity of housing options across more of Montgomery County. The Planning Board recently approved a report for transmittal to the County Council this summer with a Zoning Text Amendment to follow later in 2024.
- [Urban Loading & Delivery Management Study \(2024\)](#) – This study identified regional, national and international best practices and policy options to better balance loading and delivery functions with through-movements of people and goods in urbanizing areas of the County.
- [Bicycle Master Plan \(2018\)](#) – The Bicycle Master Plan sets forth a vision for Montgomery County as a world-class bicycling community, where people in all areas of the County have access to a comfortable, safe and connected bicycle network, and where bicycling is a viable transportation option that improves our quality of life. The plan is a key element in Montgomery County’s [Vision Zero](#) plan to eliminate traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries.
- [Pedestrian Master Plan \(2024\)](#) – The Pedestrian Master Plan is Montgomery Planning’s first comprehensive vision to create safer, more comfortable experiences walking or rolling around the county, and to make getting around more convenient and accessible for every pedestrian. The Plan provides detailed, actionable recommendations in line with national and international best practices to improve the pedestrian experience, from more and better places to cross the street to a data-driven, equity-focused approach for the county’s future pedestrian/bicycle capital investments
- [Complete Streets Design Guide \(2024\)](#) – Complete Streets are roadways that are designed and operated to provide safe, accessible, and healthy travel for all users of the roadway system, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists. This document provides a one-stop guide for designing new streets and reconstructing or retrofitting existing streets for safety, sustainability, and vitality. The guide provides policy and design guidance on the planning, design, and operation of county roadways and will be used when designing

future streets or reconstructed streets in an area experiencing redevelopment, when implementing a capital improvement project, such as the construction or reconstruction of a street, intersection, or bridge, and when resurfacing a street or conducting major work in the street, which may create an opportunity to reconsider some aspects of the street’s design.

- **Local Housing Targets** – An effort to establish and allocate countywide housing targets for 2030, 2040, and 2050 to 22 small areas of the county. Anticipated to be adopted by the Council in 2024, these targets will allow both community members and decision-makers to better contextualize and understand the housing shortage at a more local level—and to develop strategies that help the county meet its housing goals, in line with *Thrive Montgomery 2050*. As a next step, the Planning Department will consider how master plans and policies, such as the Growth and Infrastructure Policy, Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative, and the Bethesda Downtown Plan Minor Master Plan Amendment, can help to achieve the 2040 and 2050 Local Housing Targets.

## PLAN ELEMENTS

### ELEMENTS TO EXPLORE

As noted above, the MMPA will not re-open the entire 2017 plan. The existing zoning, parks, transportation, and other recommendations will remain unchanged while we explore how better to implement those recommendations. The MMPA will focus on implementation strategies for the following and related elements:

- economic development
- park development
- transportation improvements
- schools
- affordable housing
- community recreation center.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS

The MMPA will consider the following questions, among others:

- Is a development cap necessary in downtown Bethesda? If so, does it need to be raised? Are there alternative approaches that would work better?
- How do we ensure that public infrastructure can support future growth?

- What are the top-priority public improvements recommended in the plan (e.g., parks, capital crescent trail tunnel, community recreation center, and/or others) and does the MMPA need to provide additional incentives to realize them?
- Is the park implementation strategy in the 2017 plan still the right one?
- Could any of the current implementation recommendations be modified to better achieve the goals of the plan?

## RELATED ANALYSES

To inform the MMPA recommendations, staff will analyze the following and other areas as necessary:

- development density
- transportation
- economic development
- climate
- racial equity and social justice.

## PLAN SCHEDULE

Staff initiated work on the MMPA in the Spring of 2024 and the Planning Board Draft is anticipated for transmission to the County Executive and County Council late 2024/early 2025. Significant milestones are outlined below.

<b>Scope of Work</b>	Spring 2024
<b>Preliminary Recommendations</b>	Summer 2024
<b>Working Draft</b>	Summer – Fall 2024
<b>Planning Board Public Hearing and Work Sessions</b>	Fall 2024
<b>County Executive Review, County Council Review and Work Sessions</b>	Winter 2025
<b>Commission Adoption of Plan</b>	Winter 2025