



Montgomery Planning Downcounty Planning

Bethesda Minor Master Plan Amendment

Preliminary Recommendations



Agenda

- Introduction and Background
- What is the BMMPA?
- Implementation Questions
- What We've Heard
- Preliminary Recommendations
- Next Steps



Introduction and Background

Bethesda **Wow!**

- **Thriving urban center**
- **Economic engine for the county**
- **One of MoCo's most desirable communities**

17,000 residents

33,000 jobs

Parks, shops, the arts,
movies and more

Excellent transit,
pedestrian and bike
networks

2017 Bethesda Downtown Plan

- 4-year collaboration between residents, property owners, staff, Planning Board, and County Council
- 20-year vision of sustainability, accessibility, equity and innovation:
 - Affordable housing near jobs, shopping, and recreation
 - Safe tree-lined sidewalks, bikeways, & streets
 - New parks and open spaces



Bethesda
Downtown Plan



Approved and Adopted May 2017
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Implementation progress

- **Planning Board approved over 7M sf of development, over 3M sf built**
 - Office: 1.25M sf
 - Retail: 320,000 sf
 - 2,800 residential units
 - Over 400 MPDUs



Implementation progress

- Parks progress: Civic Greens, Eastern Greenway, Montgomery Avenue
- New bikeways and pedestrian improvements
- Traffic and schools operating within standards



So, where are we now?

- Plan **capped total development at 32.4M sf**, based on 2016 assessment of transportation infrastructure capacity
- Plan recommends **check-in at 30.4 million sf**
- Since 2017, completed many new buildings, but **not as many new public amenities**
- \$15M in PIP payments; no new parks complete

→ **Bethesda Minor Master Plan Amendment (BMMPA)**

What is the BMMMPA?

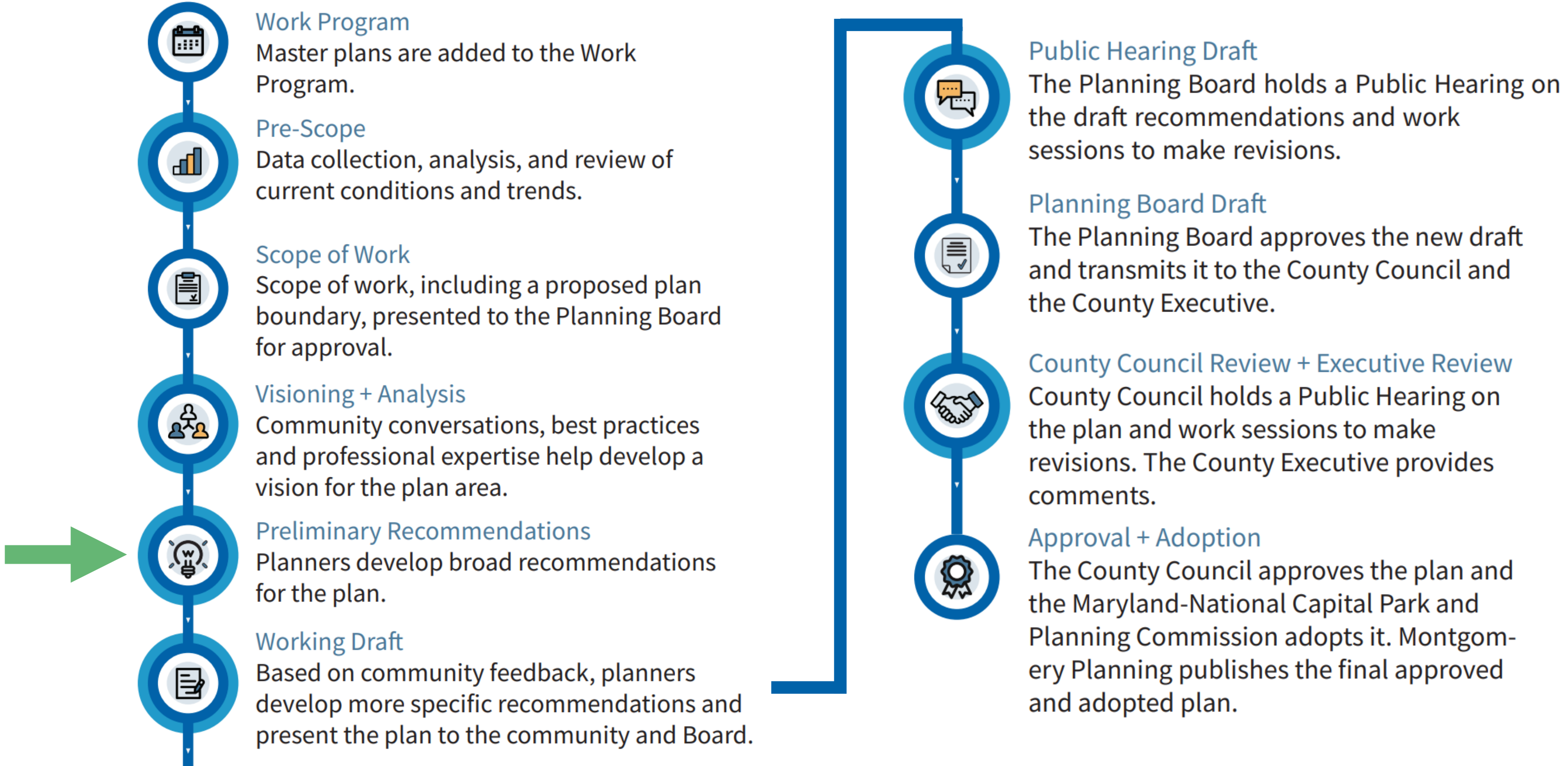
Scope of Work

- Same Plan Area as Bethesda Downtown Plan
- **Focus solely on implementing current recommendations**
- No changes to specific zoning, park, or other recommendations
- Follows Master Plan Process



Master Plan Process

○ MASTER PLAN MILESTONE ○ COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Implementation areas to explore

- Economic development
- Park development
- Transportation improvement
- Schools
- Affordable housing
- Community recreation center



Implementation Questions

BMMPA: Questions considered

- 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, and does the MMPA need to provide additional incentives to realize them?

BMMPA: Questions considered

- 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?

What we've heard

Engagement

- On-going since May
- Farmers Market
- In-person and virtual meetings
 - Introduction & Invitation
 - How Plan Visions are Built
 - Preliminary Recommendations
- Talks with IAC, residents, developers



Top community priorities

- New parks
- New recreation center
- Improvements to existing pedestrian network
- Preserving naturally occurring affordable housing
- Expanding tree canopy



Resident comments

Bethesda is a growing urban center, but some are concerned development has been coming too fast.

The development cap should be tied to achieving public infrastructure and amenities

Religious & non-profit properties should be exempt from any development cap for modest improvements

Construction-related interruptions to the pedestrian network need to be better managed.





Resident comments

Bethesda needs more affordable housing at all income levels.

Loading and delivery management remains an issue.

Driving in Bethesda can be a challenge.

Development community comments

-  New development brings many benefits to Bethesda
-  Real estate market not expected to pick up in near future & development cap creates significant uncertainty
-  Front-loaded Park Impact Payment is a financing challenge
-  Implementation of new Civic Greens delayed not by lack of park funding but by Purple Line construction, multi-party contract negotiations, and property owners uninterested in selling

Preliminary Recommendations

Is a development cap
necessary in downtown
Bethesda?

Building the Master Plan vision

- Master Plans address many interconnected pieces of the built environment
- Implementation requires many partners, many tools
- Plan visions are for 20 years, but built project by project
- Markets guide the pace of development and public investment
- The MMPA is looking at ways to make the tools work better for downtown Bethesda, including density levels

Why and how Plans set density levels

- Master Plans use building height and density to **shape a vision for the built future of a community**
- Master Plans set density levels typically based on the recommended zoning “mapped” to each site
- Building height and densities allowed in downtown Bethesda balance high-rises on Wisconsin Avenue transitioning to lower buildings at the single-family-scale communities at the edges

Why and how Plans set density levels

- Master Plans also set density levels to **make sure the transportation and other support networks can accommodate the recommended growth** over the next 30 years
- Plans include recommendations to enhance and expand those networks, including transportation, schools, and other improvements

Density levels in Bethesda

- In 2017, the Plan capped development at a level based on projection of how long it would take car drivers to get through particular intersections in 2045
- Beginning in 2020, the measurement changed to **evaluate growth's larger impact on the surrounding areas broadly, increasing focus on non-motorized modes of travel and access to desired destinations**
- MMPA development level will be based on new measurement

Master Plan transportation impact: 5 metrics

- Projected impacts from Plan-recommended development are now reviewed against 5 metrics:
 - Auto and transit job accessibility within 45 minutes
 - Auto and transit travel times for any purpose
 - Vehicle miles traveled per capita
 - Percentage of trips not taken by single-occupant vehicle (“NADMS”)
 - Access to low-stress bicycle infrastructure

Measuring MMPA transportation impact

- **Every master plan has a measurable density limit, typically based on the recommended zoning “mapped” to each site**
- In downtown Bethesda, developers may purchase density above mapped zoning
- This makes it difficult to predict the likely new development in Bethesda over the 20-yr life of the Plan

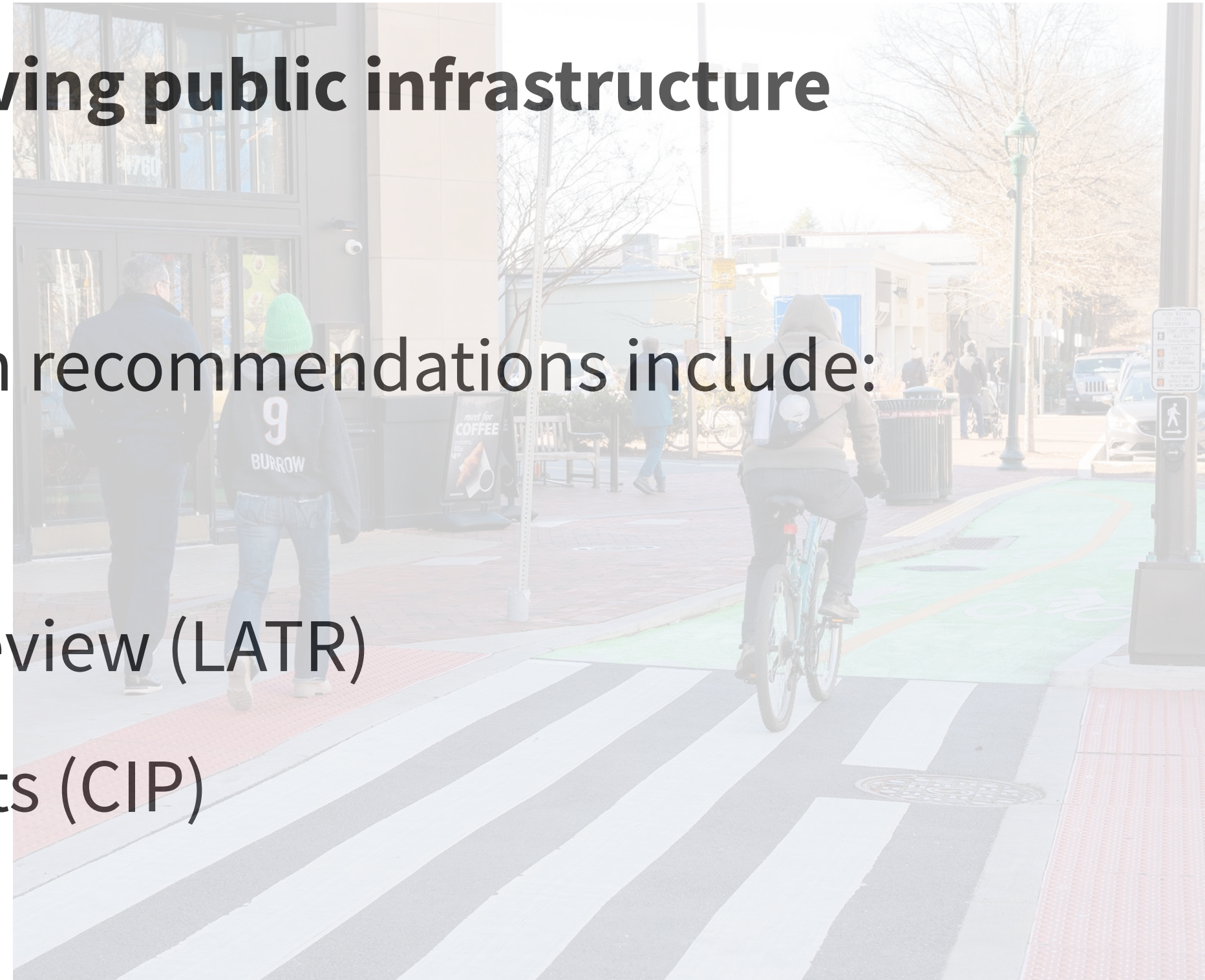
Density levels in Bethesda: MMPA

- Measure transportation impact based on density **absorption:** amount of density approved by Planning Board since 2017
- **Conservative estimate** very unlikely to be sustained over Plan life
- Staff is testing development scenarios **for the life of the Plan (2035-2045)**
- Will include and address potential schools impact

How do we ensure public infrastructure can support future growth?

Existing transportation implementation

- **Development is tied to achieving public infrastructure**
- Existing tools that achieve plan recommendations include:
 - Frontage improvements
 - Local Area Transportation Review (LATR)
 - Capital Improvement Projects (CIP)



Transportation improvements

- Continue LATR per Growth and Infrastructure Policy (GIP) to improve pedestrian, bike, and transit-related alternatives to driving
- Support implementation of Loading Management Districts recommended in *Urban Loading Study*
- Support Planning/DOT Curbside Management Study



Transportation improvements

- Support DPS/DOT management of construction-related sidewalk closures
- Support DOT study of enhanced transit service connecting downtown Bethesda to nearby centers
- Update priorities for CIP project completion



Incentivizing top-priority public improvements

New parks & park improvements

- Parks Department will:
 - Continue to work to implement the BDP parks recommendations
 - Refine implementation strategies as necessary to adapt to changing conditions
 - Continue to seek advice from the Bethesda IAC
- Update the PIP?



What a PIP! (the Park Impact Payment)

- In downtown Bethesda, developers can request density above the zoning mapped to their site: BOZ density
- At building permit, developers make Park Impact Payments to the Parks Department based on the amount of BOZ density they are approved for
- Parks department uses PIP funds to buy new land for a park recommended in the Plan or to build the new park

What a PIP! (the Park Impact Payment)

- In 2017, BOZ set the PIP rate at \$10/sf of BOZ density, with inflationary adjustment every 2 years; in 2023 to \$12.49/sf
- Consultant analyzing overall development costs in downtown Bethesda, including PIPs, and quantifying benefits locally and countywide
- Based on that analysis, the MMPA will consider updating implementation of the PIP

PIP update?

- Is the current PIP rate right? Would the benefits of a higher rate outweigh the cost?
- Are there other changes to the PIP that would make development more market-responsive and therefore more likely to happen and generate more PIPs?
- Changes to the structure and timing of the PIP could be coupled with increases to the PIP rate

New recreation center

- Incentivize public/private partnerships or developer amenity
- Provide PIP credit for area dedicated
- Designate as a “major public facility” for CR priority Public Benefit
- Allow additional building height to accommodate



Supporting more affordable housing

- Incentivize family-size units, deeper affordability
- Strive for no net loss of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH)
- Support codified standards for NOAH

Update the Bethesda
Overlay Zone (BOZ) to better
achieve the goals of the Plan

What is an “overlay zone”?

- Overlay zones are master plan-specific sections in the Zoning Ordinance that override the requirements of the underlying zone(s) of a given area
- They provide specific requirements and standards necessary to achieve the planning goals and objectives in a master plan
- **Many recommendations of the Bethesda Downtown Plan are implemented via the Bethesda Overlay Zone (BOZ).**

What does the BOZ say?

- BOZ density
- Development Cap
- Park Impact Payment (PIP)
- 15% MPDUs
- Public Benefit Points
- Public Open Space Fee-in-Lieu
- BOZ density: Use or Lose

Improving the BOZ: buying BOZ density

- CR zones set total maximum density and maximum proportion of commercial uses and residential uses
 - e.g., CR-5.0 C-4.0 R-4.75 H-175
- BOZ now requires using “all” mapped density before buying BOZ density
- Some CR-zoned properties are not able to be single-use (e.g., solely residential) and purchase BOZ density

Improving the BOZ: buying BOZ density

- To promote flexibility to meet market conditions, allow purchase of BOZ density for projects using all mapped commercial **or** residential FAR
- Results in higher Park Impact Payment

Improving the BOZ: “Use or Lose”

- To prevent hoarding of BOZ density, zone requires building permits within 4 years of approval or approval is revoked
- This reduces flexibility to respond to market conditions
- Subdivision Ordinance Adequate Public Facilities finding requires building permit in 5 years

Improving the BOZ: “Use or Lose”

- To promote flexibility to meet market conditions, remove duplicative “use-or-lose” provision

Improving the BOZ: Public Benefits?

- CR zone requires specific categories of Public Benefits
- 2017 Plan effort had significant discussion on Public Benefits
- BOZ has very specific language and requirements
- Planning Department is working on county-wide re-examination of Public Benefits: Incentive Zoning Update
- Address relationship between BOZ & Incentive Zoning Update

MMPA Schedule

June 2024	Scope of Work at Planning Board
Summer 2024	Public workshops on tools to implement recommendations
September 2024	Preliminary Recommendations Submit Comments!
October 2024	Draft MMPA
November 2024	Planning Board Public Hearing Testify!
December 2024- January 2025	Planning Board Worksessions & Planning Board Draft to County Council
Winter 2025	County Council Public Hearing, County Executive review & County Council review and approval Testify!

Staying Connected and Involved

- <https://montgomeryplanning.org/bethesda-mmpa>

- Sign up for e-Letter

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