

GERMANTOWN SECTOR PLAN AMENDMENT SCOPE OF WORK



Description


Planning Staff will request approval of the scope of work for the Germantown Sector Plan Amendment, including a boundary for the plan area.

Completed: February 13, 2025

MCPB
Item 8
February 20, 2025

2425 Reddie Drive
Floor 14
Wheaton, MD 20902

Planning Staff

	Jamey Pratt, Planner III, Upcounty Planning Division Jamey.Pratt@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-4588
	Audrey Vogel, Planner II, Upcounty Planning Division Audrey.Vogel@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-2104
	Donnell Zeigler, Planning Supervisor, Upcounty Planning Division Donnell.Zeigler@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-4511
	Patrick Butler, Chief, Upcounty Planning Division Patrick.Butler@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-4561

SUMMARY

The Germantown Sector Plan Amendment is an update to the 2009 *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan* and is a continuation of the 2024 Germantown Employment Area Study. The Germantown Sector Plan Amendment is a comprehensive master plan amendment that will evaluate recommendations for land use, zoning, urban design, transportation, environment, and community facilities, as well as incorporate countywide initiatives and policies. This memorandum presents the Scope of Work for the Germantown Sector Plan Amendment, including the proposed plan boundary and purpose, the context and background of the plan area, overall planning framework, elements to explore, public engagement strategy, and the plan schedule.

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this document is to define the Scope of Work and boundary for the Germantown Sector Plan Amendment (“Plan”). The Plan will amend the approved and adopted 1989 *Germantown Master Plan*, 2009 *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan*, 2019 *MARC Rail Communities Plan*, 2020 *Germantown Plan for the Town Sector Zone*, 2022 *Corridor Forward: The I-270 Transit Plan*, and various functional master plans.

The 2009 *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan* (“2009 Plan”) established a vision to transform Germantown’s central employment core into a vibrant town center with mixed-use districts established along the I-270 corridor. To accomplish this vision, the 2009 Plan recommended investing in the town center core envisioned in the 1964 General Plan, attracting employers, organizing communities around transit, enhancing connections to Germantown’s greenbelt and stream valley parks, pursuing design quality and sustainability in the public and private realms, and building on existing cultural, historic, and civic facilities.

In 2024, Montgomery Planning Staff began the Germantown Employment Area Study, an effort to assess the state of employment in the plan area and evaluate the 2009 Plan’s land use and zoning recommendations. The study included community outreach and engagement, an employment and economic analysis, and scenario modeling of potential alternative futures for the Germantown activity centers along I-270. The initial findings of the study indicated that a plan amendment is necessary to respond to changing market conditions and provide recommendations that will better guide the plan area’s future. During the Fall Semiannual presentation on November 12, 2024, the County Council approved an update to the Planning Department’s work program to transition the Germantown Employment Area Study into an amendment of the 2009 *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan*.

The Germantown Sector Plan Amendment will build on the employment area study to examine the trends and conditions of the Plan area and ultimately make recommendations on zoning, land use, housing, transportation, the environment, public facilities, economic development, and more. The plan aims to transform Germantown into a more complete and better-connected community, featuring compact neighborhoods with safer streets and ample opportunities for residents to recreate and interact.

PLAN AREA

The proposed Germantown Sector Plan Amendment boundary, shown in Figure 1, largely maintains the original boundary of the 2009 Plan. The 2009 Plan defined seven districts that make up the planning area, including the Germantown Town Center and mix of employment centers, shopping centers, and residential neighborhoods on both sides of I-270. As shown in Figure 1, a portion of the 2009 Plan overlaps with the 2019 *MARC Rail Communities Sector Plan* (“MARC Plan”) boundary. Although guided by recent recommendations, the MARC train station area is an integral part of the

Germantown employment area and including it in the Sector Plan Amendment provides an opportunity to comprehensively plan for this area. Staff also proposes adding a portion of Black Hill Regional Park near I-270 at the north end of the 2009 Plan area to investigate a potential future hiker/biker trail to better connect the Clarksburg and Germantown Town Centers. This connection is also being contemplated and coordinated in the adjacent and ongoing Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan.

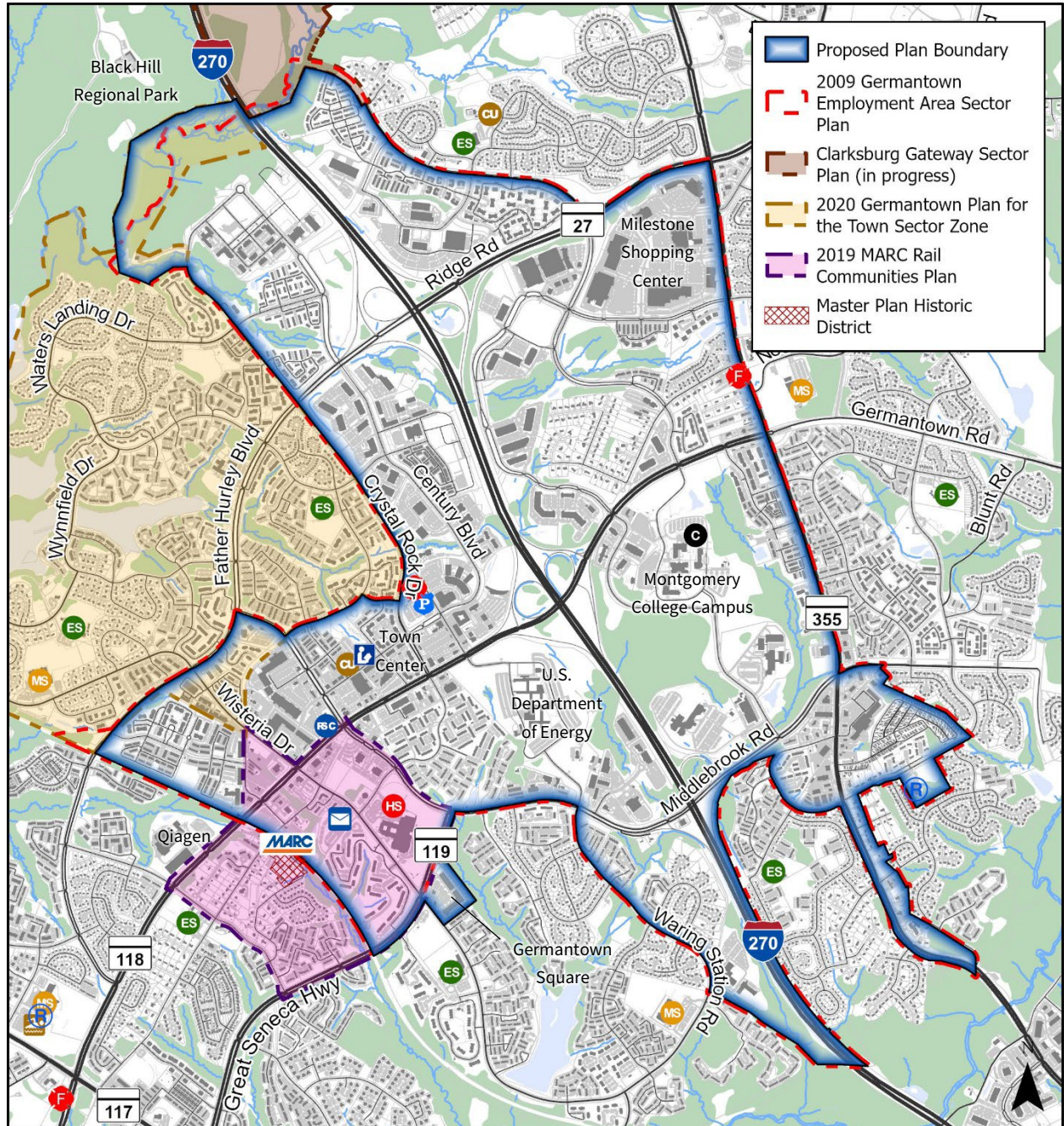


Figure 1. Proposed plan area for the Germantown Sector Plan Amendment

In addition, the proposed plan area includes the Germantown Square Shopping Center site, which is located on the east side of MD 119 (Great Seneca Highway), outside of the 2009 boundary. The developers of the Germantown Square Shopping Center have expressed interest in being included in the plan amendment. This shopping center is part of a larger Planned Development zone (PD-9), which made a recent site plan amendment on the site more difficult and could complicate future revisions of the site.

PREVIOUS PLANNING INITIATIVES

The General Plan: 1964-1993

The County's 1964 General Plan, *On Wedges and Corridors*, envisioned Germantown as a "corridor city." Wedges and Corridors planned for the extension of an urban corridor northwest from Bethesda and Rockville along I-270. The plan anticipated a regional rapid transit route connecting Germantown with the Washington, DC urban core, extending north as far as Clarksburg.

The corridor cities envisioned in *Wedges and Corridors* included a "densely built but well-designed core in the center, with a rapid transit station under a pedestrian plaza. The tall buildings around the plaza will house shopping facilities, offices, and apartments, all within easy walking distance. Urban parks, appropriate landscaping, and modern architecture will give a sense of spaciousness. The need for automobiles in the core will be kept at a minimum, but adequate parking space will be provided at the edge of these city centers for those who arrive by auto rather than by transit. Social, cultural, and educational activities will also be provided in each core so that the 'downtown' area will have a vital function even after the workday is over" (*Wedges and Corridors* p. 30).

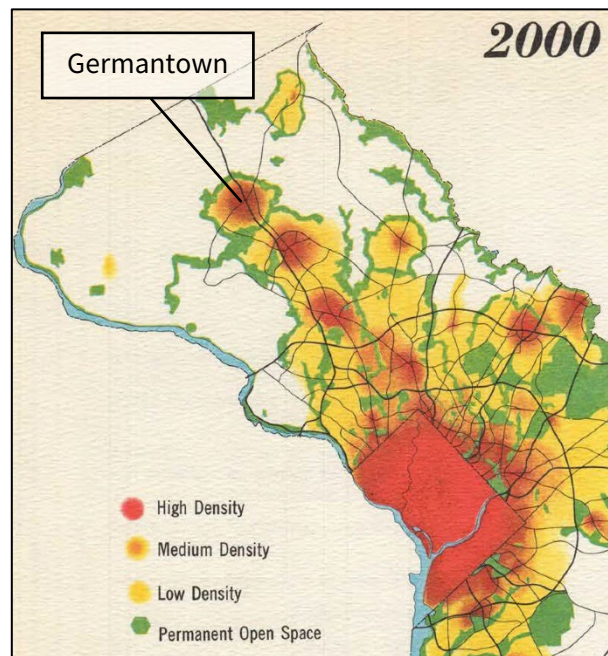


Figure 2. Map from *Wedges and Corridors* showing projected development by 2000 (*Wedges and Corridors* page 77)

1989 Germantown Master Plan

The 1989 *Germantown Master Plan* (“1989 Plan”) refined and reinforced the “corridor city” concepts set forth in the General Plan. The 1989 Plan recommended increased densities near planned transit stations; encouraged additional R&D facilities and “major corporate office” development in a mixed-use “Employment Corridor;” and concentrated retail activities, with the goal of discouraging strip shopping centers along major roadways, in seven places: the Town Center, a new regional shopping mall (to be located where the Milestone Shopping Center sits today), and in five of the six village centers (Figure 2). A “Town Center Design Guide” was subsequently developed to focus on the creation of a “vital ‘downtown’” for

Germantown. The 1989 *Germantown Master Plan* also created an expansive greenbelt border protecting the important major streams surrounding Germantown.

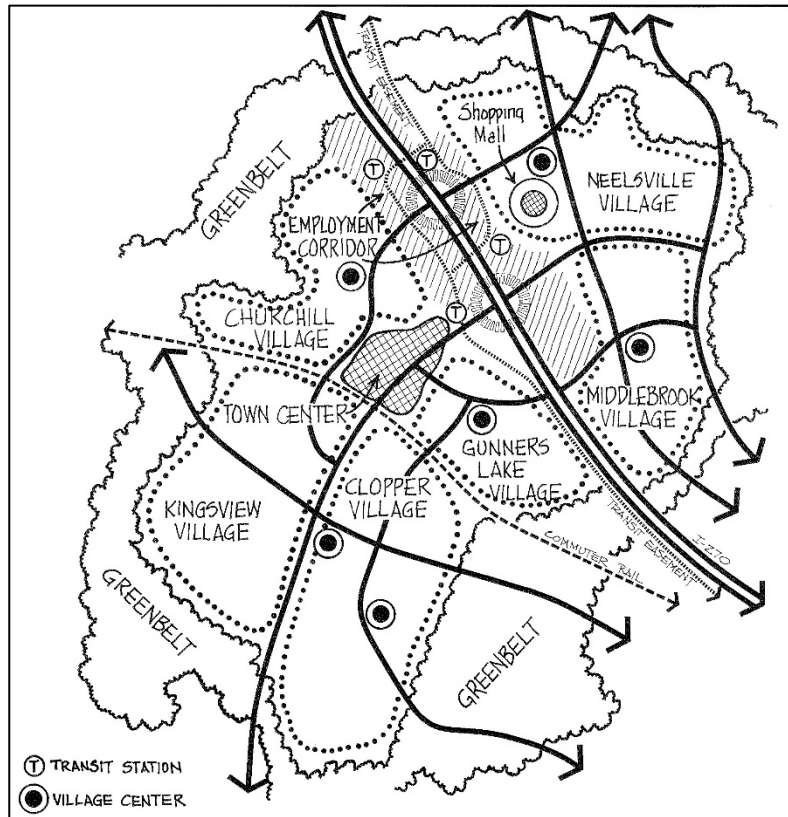


Figure 3. Community Concept Plan from 1989 *Germantown Master Plan* (1989 Plan page 10)

2009 Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan

The recommendations in the 2009 *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan* were designed to complete the economic core of the “corridor city” envisioned in the earlier plans. The goals of the 2009 Plan were to increase employment, organize communities around transit, and enhance connections to the greenbelt surrounding the city while emphasizing quality design and environmental sustainability. The 2009 Plan’s boundary can be seen in the larger context of the 1989 Plan’s boundary area in Figure 4Figure 3.

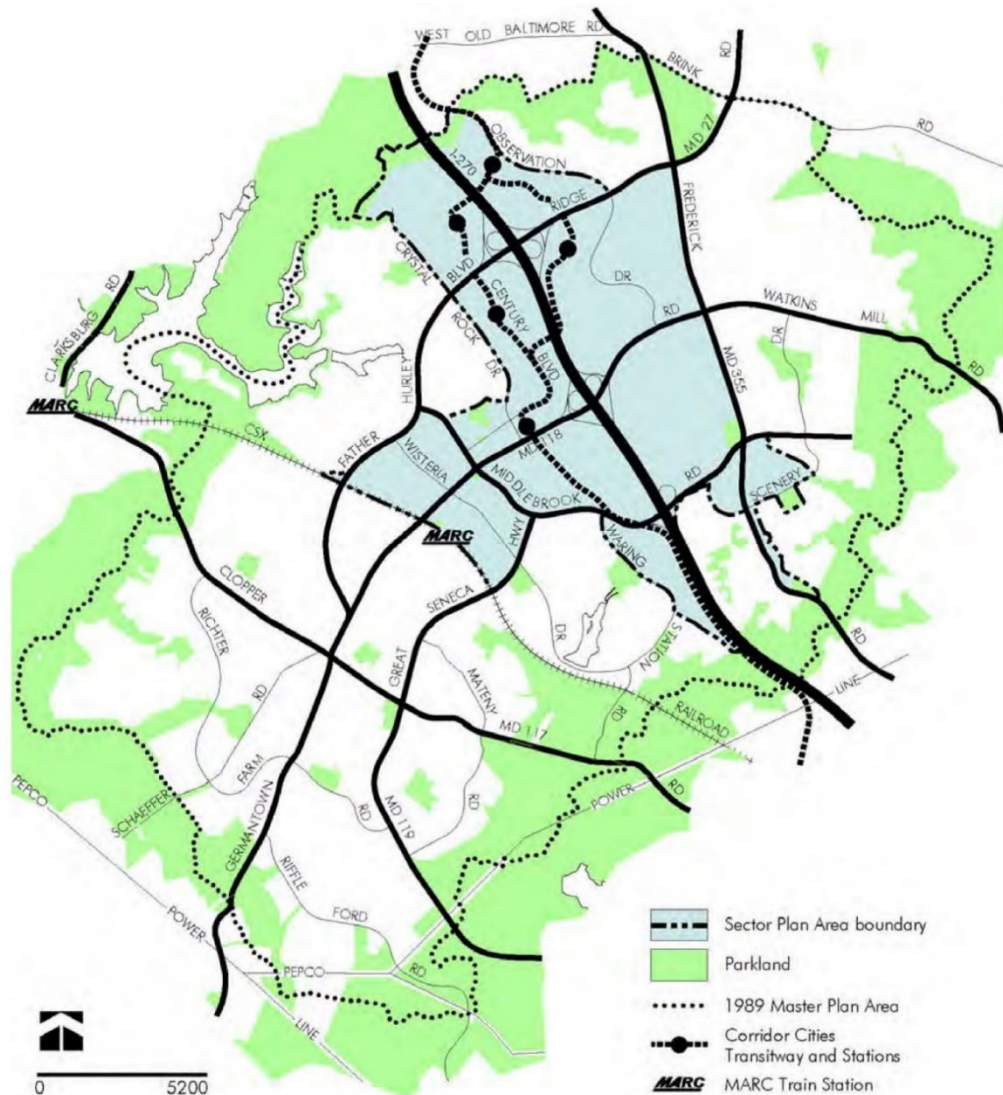


Figure 4. 2009 Plan area (blue) shown within the context of the 1989 Germantown Master Plan's area (dotted line). The "Germantown Greenbelt" is prominent on this map. (2009 Plan page 11)

The 2009 Plan divided the economic core of Germantown—the “employment area” referred to in the plan name—into seven districts (Figure 5) and made property-by-property recommendations for every parcel within each district. The 2009 Plan directed most new land uses, activity, and design attention to the Town Center, which was to contain a mix of uses complemented by offices on Germantown Road (MD 118) and by Montgomery College on the east side of I-270.

Germantown Districts

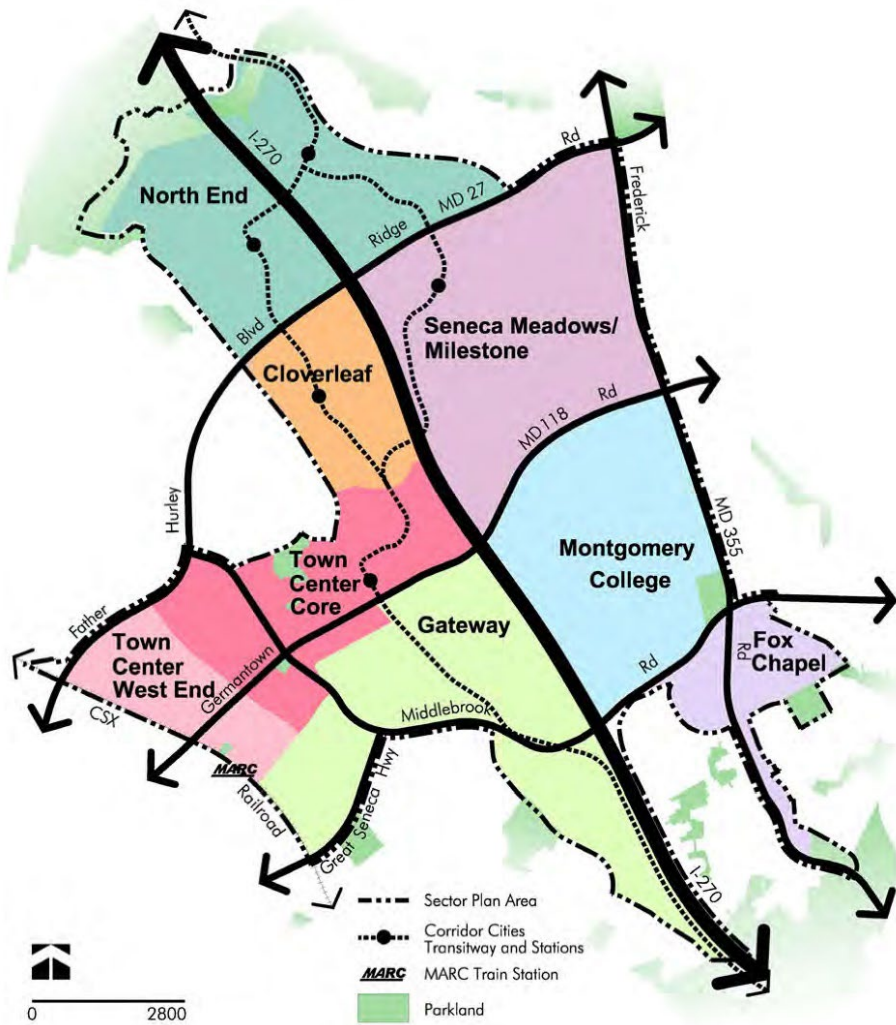


Figure 5. Planning districts in the 2009 Plan (2009 Plan page 13)

The 2009 Plan organized communities around transit. A major component of transit in the 1989 Plan and several surrounding master plans was the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), which is shown as a dotted line in Figure 5. The CCT was planned to connect Clarksburg, Germantown, and Gaithersburg to the Metrorail system at Shady Grove via the Life Sciences Center, with longer-term plans to connect all the way to Frederick. Within the 2009 Plan area, the CCT had two planned crossings over I-270 and another over Ridge Road. Both of the recommended bridges were for transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists, while the northern crossing over I-270—in the North End District along the Dorsey Mill Road alignment—would also accommodate vehicular traffic.

2019 MARC Rail Communities Plan

The 2019 *MARC Rail Communities Sector Plan* (“MARC Plan”) makes recommendations that support and better utilize existing transit assets, improve transportation connections, and traffic safety around both the Boyds and Germantown MARC stations. The MARC Plan proposes ways to revitalize

the built environment around these stations in a manner that appropriately complements surrounding residential neighborhoods and historic resources. At the same time, the MARC Plan is a preservation strategy that aims to protect and enhance valued historic rural character and resources.



Figure 6. Illustrative concept plan from the 2019 MARC Rail Communities Plan (MARC Plan p. 73)

As shown in Figure 6, the MARC Plan provides a concept for extensive redevelopment of the area northwest of the Germantown MARC Station. The concept only extends southwest of the tracks in the immediate vicinity of the train station on either side of Liberty Mill Road. The MARC Plan did not make any new land use recommendations for the largely residential area southwest of the station and the tracks, which includes the Germantown Historic District.

2020 Germantown Plan for the Town Sector Zone

The primary purpose of the 2020 *Germantown Plan for the Town Sector Zone* (“2020 GPTSZ”) was to assign new zones from the 2014 Zoning Ordinance to replace the obsolete Town Sector zone based on

what is already on the ground. The plan did not make new land use recommendations in the area of overlap between the 2020 GPTSZ and the 2009 Plan.

Corridor Forward: The I-270 Transit Plan

The Corridor Cities Transitway had been a fixture in a variety of master plans starting with the General Plan and continuing with the 2013 *Countywide Corridors Plan* and the 2014 *10 Mile Creek Plan* until its replacement in the 2022 *Corridor Forward: the I-270 Transit Plan* (“Corridor Forward”). Each iteration of the CCT had included dedicated transit lanes to connect the Clarksburg/Germantown corridor with the I-270 Life Sciences Corridor and the Metrorail system. Due to changing projected land uses and fluctuating demands for the service, subsequent iterations of the CCT failed to push it beyond the preliminary design phase.

Corridor Forward re-envisioned the CCT as a network of dedicated bus lanes called “Corridor Connectors” that link the I-270 corridor communities to the county’s existing and planned rapid transit network.

The New General Plan: Thrive Montgomery 2050

Thrive Montgomery 2050, an update to the county’s General Plan, was adopted and approved by the County Council on October 25, 2022. The ideas and the recommendations in the update are organized to achieve three overarching goals: economic competitiveness, racial and social equity, and environmental sustainability. While the web of corridors and centers has grown since the 1960s, *Thrive Montgomery 2050* continues to champion growth along corridors in defined centers. It recognizes the crucial role of transit, vibrant mixed-use development, and attainable housing in supporting our economic competitiveness, environmental sustainability, and equity initiatives. Thrive Montgomery also champions the ideas of 15-Minute Living and Complete Communities.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 identifies Germantown as a Medium Center, a term used to describe areas in the county with the second highest level of intensity of development. Medium Centers typically include significant clusters of existing or planned residential density and clusters of commercial density, such as large shopping centers and office campuses. Medium Centers are likely to be close to transit.

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Several countywide efforts will inform and guide the planning process and the development of the Plan Amendment’s recommendations.

RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

In 2019, the Montgomery County Council passed the Racial Equity and Social Justice Act (Bill 27-19), which requires the Planning Board to consider racial equity and social justice impacts when preparing

a master or sector plan. Montgomery Planning’s Equity Agenda for Planning is an ongoing commitment to systemically dismantle the institutional and structural racism that exists in and has long influenced planning and zoning processes and to prevent that influence in the future. We remain committed to confronting the legacy of racism and its ongoing effects and to using this equity lens in all our plans, policies, practices, and other work. Through these commitments—and with the community’s help—we will learn and begin to advance our efforts to create a Montgomery County where all people can thrive.

CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

The county’s *Climate Action Plan* (CAP), completed in June 2021, is Montgomery County’s strategic plan to cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 100% by 2035. The CAP includes strategies to reduce GHG emissions and climate-related risks to the county’s residents, businesses, and the built and natural environment. It provides guidance on building resilient communities through clean energy, resilient and efficient buildings, a sustainable transportation system, integrated nature-based strategies for sequestration, and necessary resources and infrastructure to withstand the impacts of climate change. The various strategies in the CAP stress the importance of focusing on those in the community who are most vulnerable to climate impacts. The CAP advocates for the development of a more efficient transportation network. It outlines specific strategies for increasing investment in public transit systems, encouraging more walkable communities, and promoting bike-friendly infrastructure. Like *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, the CAP is centered around racial equity and social justice. Where appropriate, Staff will incorporate guidance from the *Climate Action Plan* into the Plan Amendment and develop recommendations to assist the county in achieving these goals.

VISION ZERO

In the fall of 2016, the County Council formally adopted a resolution that delineated countywide the Vision Zero approach to transportation planning and policy efforts. Vision Zero’s primary tenet is the elimination of all preventable transportation-related deaths and serious injuries countywide, with a goal of zero traffic fatalities and severe injuries by 2030. Consistent with the guidelines presented in the county’s adopted Vision Zero initiative, the Plan Amendment will examine the existing roadways and transportation infrastructure within the plan area and will prioritize safety and equity in its recommendations to improve accessibility and multimodality within the Plan area, to improve safety measures along specific corridors.

COMPLETE STREETS DESIGN GUIDE

The *Complete Streets Design Guide* (CSDG) provides a framework for countywide roadway design that prioritizes safety, accessibility, mobility, and sustainability for individuals walking, rolling, biking, riding transit, and driving. Complete Streets are context sensitive, and Planning Staff will work to ensure that roads are given the proper roadway designations based on the guide.

BICYCLE MASTER PLAN

The *Bicycle Master Plan* stipulates four goals for improving the county’s current bicycle network: increasing cycling rates countywide, creating a low-stress and connected bike network, providing equitable access to bicycle infrastructure, and improving bike safety. The *Bicycle Master Plan* also includes a bikeway classification system for varying types of bike infrastructure and a data-driven approach that examines levels of bicycle stress on roads.

PEDESTRIAN MASTER PLAN

The *Pedestrian Master Plan* is an important element in the county’s *Vision Zero 2030 Action Plan* and *2021 Climate Action Plan*. It supports *Thrive Montgomery 2050* goal to "develop a safe, comfortable, and appealing network for walking, biking, and rolling". The plan documents the pedestrian experience in Montgomery County today and makes recommendations in line with national and international best practices to make the experience even better. These recommendations include, but are not limited to, identifying opportunities to be more proactive in sidewalk construction and maintenance, providing more and better places to cross the street, prioritizing data-driven approaches to future pedestrian/bicycle investments, and ensuring state highways can be rebuilt in line with local master plan visions.

2022 PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE (PROS) PLAN

The Montgomery County Parks Department updated the *Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan* (“PROS Plan”) in 2022 to guide the future development and management of our park system. Parks, recreation, and open spaces provide active, social, and leisure opportunities that are essential for a high quality of life for Montgomery County residents. The focus of the 2022 PROS Plan was to provide equitably activated central community spaces that meet recreational needs and protect and manage natural and cultural resources for future generations. The PROS Plan update was coordinated with the then-developing *Thrive Montgomery 2050* general plan, which showcases how great places with equitable access to opportunities produce strong communities and people.

The 2022 PROS Plan serves as the planning policy for parks and recreation in Montgomery County to the year 2027 and beyond.

ELEMENTS TO EXPLORE

Below is a list of elements that will be explored through the planning process for the Germantown Sector Plan Amendment. It is anticipated that additional elements will be added as the analysis and engagement efforts continue. No issue is studied in a vacuum; all plan recommendations will be considered as part of a holistic approach to shaping the future of the Germantown area.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY, CONNECTION, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

The people who live, learn, work, and play in the proposed Plan area are incredibly diverse—with unique needs and interests. However, the area lacks a strong sense of place—a unifying identity. Planning Staff will engage community members and organizations to understand the cultures and elements unique to the area. Planning Staff will explore strategies to highlight community identity through art, urban design, placemaking, open space planning, and more.

Planning Staff will align efforts with the Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce (GGCC) and the Blackrock Center for the Arts, two non-profit entities and stakeholders with an interest in creating a sense of place and brand identity for the Germantown Town Center.

LAND USE

The 2009 *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan* envisioned a robust employment corridor along I-270, with over 16,000 dwelling units, 24 million square feet of commercial space, and 69,000 jobs. Despite the anticipated growth, the plan area has not realized the substantial employment, density, and vibrant mixed-use development envisioned in the 2009 Plan. The Plan Amendment will analyze the office and employment sector in the Plan area and explore whether employment opportunities can be better facilitated or adjusted, or whether alternative land uses should be pursued.

The main factors identified thus far that are preventing a shift in Germantown from a suburban-style development—with low-rise buildings and large areas of surface parking—into the kind of compact, walkable place envisioned in the past plans and *Thrive Montgomery 2050* include:

- A downward trend in office market development that began prior to the 2007-2009 Great Recession,
- A shift towards teleworking catalyzed by COVID-19,
- The BLT purchase requirement disincentivizing building above a density of 0.5 FAR in Germantown,
- Site-specific commercial-to-residential development targets that favor commercial development,
- A lack of access to transit that would attract businesses and office workers, and
- A lack of safe pedestrian and bike connections and infrastructure.

The Plan will evaluate the current zoning designations in the Plan area. Staff will explore right-sizing zoning—examining if the zoning allocated assumes too much, too little, or just enough height, density, and mix of uses. The Plan Amendment will also address any zoning or regulatory barriers that are hindering development in the Sector Plan area.

HOUSING

The county and the region have not produced enough housing to meet growing demand, creating a housing supply mismatch with negative, secondary effects on our neighborhoods, schools, environment, transportation infrastructure, and economic health. The county's economic health is

dependent on an adequate and attainable supply of housing for workers. The Plan Amendment will look for ways to encourage the production of more housing to better match supply with demand, plan for a wide range of housing types and sizes to meet diverse needs, and promote racial and economic diversity in housing in every neighborhood. Efforts to achieve racial and social equity in housing will include exploring ways to make housing attainable for residents at all income levels, including the creation of more income-restricted affordable housing.

The Montgomery County Council adopted a resolution in 2019 to support a regional housing target, including the need for Montgomery County specifically to add an additional 10,000 housing units over the forecasted amount of 31,000 by 2030. The most recent calculations in the county's ongoing Local Housing Targets project allocates 1,134 additional housing units in Germantown by 2030 and 2,549 more units by 2050. To help get there, Planning Staff will examine existing zoning and land uses in the Plan area and work with housing partners to determine how, where, and what types of new residential development should be pursued.

Additionally, the Plan Amendment will operate under the guidance of the adopted *Thrive Montgomery 2050* housing goals, which include policies that promote a range of housing types (including income-restricted affordable housing) located near major transit, along corridors, near employment centers, all within the framework of creating Complete Communities.

TRANSPORTATION, ACCESS, AND CONNECTIVITY

Transportation and land use are closely linked, and a successful master plan allows for a combination of development patterns that support various transportation options. The Plan Amendment will examine existing and planned roadways, transit facilities, and other transportation infrastructure to identify potential changes to the roadway, transit, bike, and pedestrian network.

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation has identified several of the deadliest High Injury Network (HIN) road segments in Germantown. Germantown is crisscrossed by numerous state highways and other major roads that were designed for throughput of vehicular traffic with less concern about the experience of those walking and rolling along the roads. These roads were planned based on the idea that Germantown would become a major employment center, but the changes in the office market are making this increasingly unlikely. As a result, many of the roads are overbuilt with the greatest emphasis in design placed on the throughput of motorized vehicles. They are unnecessarily wide, making crossings and sidewalks uncomfortable or unsafe, and detracting from safe walking and rolling. The cancellation of the CCT has also led to several recommendations in the 2009 Plan that must be revisited.

The plan will promote a multimodal, socially equitable, environmentally sustainable framework for future development. With the backing of existing countywide transportation strategies, the plan will seek to build upon the goals outlined in previous plans.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE

The impacts of climate change—including extreme heat, increased precipitation, flooding, storms, habitat loss, tree and wildlife loss, impervious cover, and carbon emissions—affect a community’s health, safety, and climate resiliency. This Plan will explore these issues, and others, to improve climate resiliency, reduce inequities and vulnerabilities, while improving biological health and welfare for all life. The recommendations for the Plan area will align with the goals and objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050 and the Montgomery County Climate Action Plan.

URBAN DESIGN

Planning Staff will examine the pattern of development of the Plan area and explore alternatives to better align the Plan recommendations with current development trends and future growth projections. Planning Staff will explore strategies for attracting a broader mix of uses to individual developments and districts and enhancing building and sustainable site design. Planning Staff will assess existing pedestrian connections and open spaces and explore strategies to create a seamless network of parks, trails, and public spaces.

Planning Staff will work with Plan stakeholders to develop design guidance within the Plan area. Additionally, Planning Staff will confirm or suggest modifications to the transit stop locations and will also determine if there is a need to develop urban design guidelines for future development in the Plan area.

PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND RECREATION

Parks and open space serve as critical places for recreation and civic engagement and are essential to quality of life. This Plan will examine existing parkland and park amenities and resources within the Plan area to determine if they are sufficient to address the current and anticipated needs of the community. The Plan will then offer recommendations for improvements to existing parks, potential new parks should they be needed, and ways to improve access to parks, trails, and open spaces. Park design, maintenance, and safety will be considered, and the Plan effort will anticipate trends and promote important goals from the 2022 *Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan*, such as health and social equity.

This work will also evaluate walkable and equitable access to parks and priority park facilities, including playgrounds, athletic fields, courts, picnic shelters, restrooms, community gardens, skate parks, dog parks, and park activity buildings (PABs). Today, the Plan boundary has fewer facilities per person than elsewhere in urban or Corridor Focused Growth areas, and much of the area has been identified as Experience Improvement Areas, which indicate locations that lack access to parks and park facilities for physical activity, contemplation, and social gathering.

Parks and Planning Staff will work with the community and plan stakeholders to develop a vision for future community gathering and play spaces, consistent with existing and proposed land uses,

community characteristics, and trends in recreation. Staff will also work with the community to identify ways to improve bicycling, walking, and transit access to parks, trails, and open spaces.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Community facilities, in concert with parks and open spaces, contribute to quality of life and cohesion. Staff will examine the existing recommendations for community facilities as well as the needs for expanding existing facilities or additional community facilities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Montgomery County has a large, robust, and competitive economy: well-paying jobs, a highly educated workforce, a world-class life sciences and biotechnology industry, and several major federal government agency headquarters and satellite agency locations. The Plan area contains a mix of big-box retailers, small businesses, and life sciences and technology businesses. Germantown has a high concentration in two of the county's key exporting sectors: communications equipment manufacturing and biotechnology. Communications equipment manufacturing is a small high-technology sector that designs and manufactures satellite, radar, and other types of communication systems. The sector is especially competitive in Montgomery County, and Germantown is its hub. Germantown is a secondary hub for biotechnology, which is one of the county's main economic drivers. The Department of Energy also provides hundreds of high-tech jobs at its large campus alongside I-270 between Middlebrook and Germantown roads.

The restaurant, bar, and retail sectors are also a significant presence in Germantown, with several large strip shopping centers and pad retail sites. Although many questionnaire respondents suggested that Germantown lacks dining, drinking, and retail options, the data show that these sectors constitute a larger share of Germantown's employment compared to their share of the county's overall employment. Planning Staff will examine ways to capitalize on current strengths to support existing businesses and cultivate new ones.

Employment in the Plan area fell far short of expectations from the 2009 Plan, but in retrospect, those expectations appear too ambitious. Montgomery County has experienced stagnant economic growth since 2009, and the 2009 Plan area's job growth trends are in line with the county's. While Germantown did not perform worse than the county, it did fall far short of its expectations as a target for a large portion of the county's expected growth.

To continue to foster a competitive 21st-century high-technology cluster, planners will continue to study market trends to ensure that the Plan Amendment's recommendations are grounded in current market conditions and future demand scenarios. Planning Staff will work with stakeholders and community members to inform decisions and outcomes for this area and will examine ways to meet the needs of existing and future demand to ensure a resilient economy for everyone.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

There are several historic resources within the proposed plan area. Cultural Resource Planners will conduct research and community outreach to expand our understanding of the development of communities within the plan. An architectural survey may be conducted to determine whether any additional individual resources and/or districts should be considered for designation in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

OVERVIEW

A central element of the Germantown Sector Plan Amendment process will be a robust, equitable engagement strategy to gather input of community members, business owners, nonprofit and other organizations, experts, and county government departments and commissions. Most significantly, as Planning Staff engages community members, our approach will adapt and consider how best to gather meaningful input and interpret it to shape the Plan.

The Community Feedback Report summarizes the outreach conducted for the Germantown Employment Area Study, which included a series of community open houses, questionnaire, community events and pop-ups in the plan area. Building off these initial phases of engagement, staff will lead outreach efforts to determine what the future of the area may look like and how we can best enable a version that is equitable and viable and reflects what people love about their community.

Ultimately, we aim to gather the input that explores and characterizes life in the Plan area to consider its future character. Throughout our various phases of Plan development and outreach, we will create significant, substantive opportunities for community input and subsequent engagement on its more technical aspects, and Planning Staff will continue using information from previous engagement activities to ensure that location selection and session formats are equitable and accessible.

GOALS

The communications and engagement strategy will support the overarching master plan process and emphasize the importance of building in-depth, effective community relationships and support for our work. Stated goals include:

- **Equitable Public Engagement:** Spark sufficient interest and input from various and diverse organizations and community members who live and/or work in the Plan area to ensure that the resulting Plan represents community interests, perspectives, and visions
- **Explore New Outreach Activities:** Employ and measure the success of external-facing activities, particularly in reaching more diverse stakeholders meaningfully and developing a baseline for what inclusive community engagement by Montgomery Planning can look like

- Effective Community Partnerships: Build new and deepen existing relationships with and respectfully leverage community partners to become advocates for this Plan and its vision
- Generate Support for the Plan’s Recommendations: Gain support through transparent, engaging interactions with community members, partners, life sciences and technology industry leaders, and other key stakeholders to successfully implement the recommendations of the Plan.

ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The engagement efforts for master plans are typically implemented in six phases over the course of the planning process and our outlined below. The Germantown Sector Plan Amendment will build from the foundation of community engagement completed for the Germantown Employment Area Study, which constitutes phases I and II of the engagement process.

Phase I: Prepare

To build awareness of Montgomery Planning, Montgomery Parks, the master planning process, and the current planning initiative, the first phase focuses on building connections with diverse community groups, institutions, residents, and businesses, and on establishing channels for future collaboration.

Phase II: Listen

The second phase consists of listening sessions where Plan participants share feedback about what they like and don’t like about the Plan area and how it can be improved. The planning team will follow up with leaders and stakeholders to collaborate on meetings and other events. We will directly reach out to our audience by phone, email, in-person canvassing, and mailed communication, as needed. Planning Staff further anticipates a hybrid engagement method including both in-person and virtual events, such as pop-up meetings, listening sessions, and online town halls. Proposed listening opportunities may include:

- Canvassing to distribute informational flyers and in-person interviews of hard-to reach residents and populations.
- Attendance at regular meetings of established community, business, and civic organizations.
- Participatory in-person events such as farmers’ markets, festivals, and other community events, as well as virtual events, as feasible.
- Other initiatives that may arise throughout the process.

Phase III: Explore

The third phase gives the planning team the opportunity to take what we heard in the listening sessions and begin to explore ideas and solutions. It will include a series of stakeholder workshops focused on collaborative, interactive discussions regarding a comprehensive, long-term vision for the

Plan area. Planning Staff will use information from previous engagement activities to ensure that location selection and session formats are equitable and accessible.

Phase IV: Consult

The fourth phase will be concurrent with the finalization of the preliminary recommendations and their presentation to the Planning Board. This will allow the planning team to refine the recommendations prior to the formal presentation of the draft Plan to the Planning Board and the public. The methods to present recommendations to the community for feedback will necessarily vary based on audiences and their interests. Planning Staff will use the information gained from previous engagement activities to determine the best methods of disseminating information.

Phase V: Endorse

The fifth phase will be the presentation of the Public Hearing Draft, the approval of the Planning Board Draft, and the County Council work sessions. In this phase, stakeholders will see and be able to comprehensively respond on the record to the draft Plan. Planning Staff will need to educate and inform the residents on how best to engage with the public hearing processes. This phase prioritizes showing the community how its input was used to develop the draft Plan and address community concerns. Outreach is focused on motivating and equipping community members to advocate for the various draft plans to the Planning Board and the County Council. This may be accomplished via a combination of emails to the Plan’s distribution list, community meetings, pop-ups, and/or presentations to community organizations. We will also continue to clarify for participants how their initial thoughts and ideas contributed to this larger, more final document.

At the conclusion of County Council’s work sessions, the Council will vote to approve the Plan with revisions and the Plan will be sent back to Montgomery Planning and the full M-NCPPC Commission for final approval and adoption.

Phase VI: Implement

After approval and adoption, as the final phase, the Plan will move to partner agencies and the development community to implement. Montgomery Planning, Montgomery Parks, and the Planning Board will review any development proposals or public sector projects in the Plan area and engage with members of the community as recommendations in the Plan are implemented.

PLAN SCHEDULE

Staff initiated the scope of work for the Germantown Sector Plan Amendment in January 2025, building off the engagement and analysis in 2024 for the Germantown Employment Area Study. The Planning Board Draft is planned for transmission to the County Executive and County Council by Winter 2025-2026. Significant milestones are outlined below.

February – December 2024	Germantown Employment Area Study, Initial Outreach & Existing Conditions
February 2025	Presentation of Existing Conditions and Community Feedback Reports and Scope of Work/Plan Area Boundary to Planning Board
Spring 2025	Engagement, Analysis, and Plan Development
Summer 2025	Preliminary Recommendations Develop Working Draft
Fall 2025	Planning Board Public Hearing Planning Board Work Sessions
Winter 2025-2026	County Council Public Hearing
Spring 2026	County Council Work Sessions
May 2026	Sector Plan Approved & Adopted

STAY CONNECTED

Staff Contacts

Jamey Pratt, Planner III

301-495-4588

Jamey.Pratt@montgomeryplanning.org

Audrey Vogel, Planner II

Telephone: 301-495-2104

Audrey.Vogel@montgomeryplanning.org

Project Webpage:

montgomeryplanning.org/germantown-sector-plan-amendment

X/Twitter: [@montgomeryplans](https://twitter.com/montgomeryplans)

Facebook: [Facebook.com/montgomeryplanning](https://www.facebook.com/montgomeryplanning)