

CLARKSBURG GATEWAY SECTOR PLAN EMERGING IDEAS BRIEFING



Description

A briefing to the Planning Board on emerging ideas for the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan update.

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SUMMARY

- The Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan is an update to a portion of the 1994 *Clarksburg Master Plan & Hyattstown Special Study Area*, which was last amended in part by the 2014 *10 Mile Creek Area Limited Amendment*. The Sector Plan update focuses on an area east of I-270, envisioned as an employment-oriented Transit District Corridor in the 1994 Plan.
- This memo includes a summary of the planning team's approach since approval of the Scope of Work, community outreach conducted to date, and a summary of feedback received, and the planning team's emerging ideas that will inform the preparation of plan recommendations to be presented to the Planning Board at a later date.
- During the Planning Board briefing, Planning Staff will identify major topics addressed by emerging plan recommendations and invite feedback from the Board.

MASTER PLAN INFORMATION

Plan Phase

Emerging Ideas Briefing

Report Date

03-20-2025

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Planning Board Information

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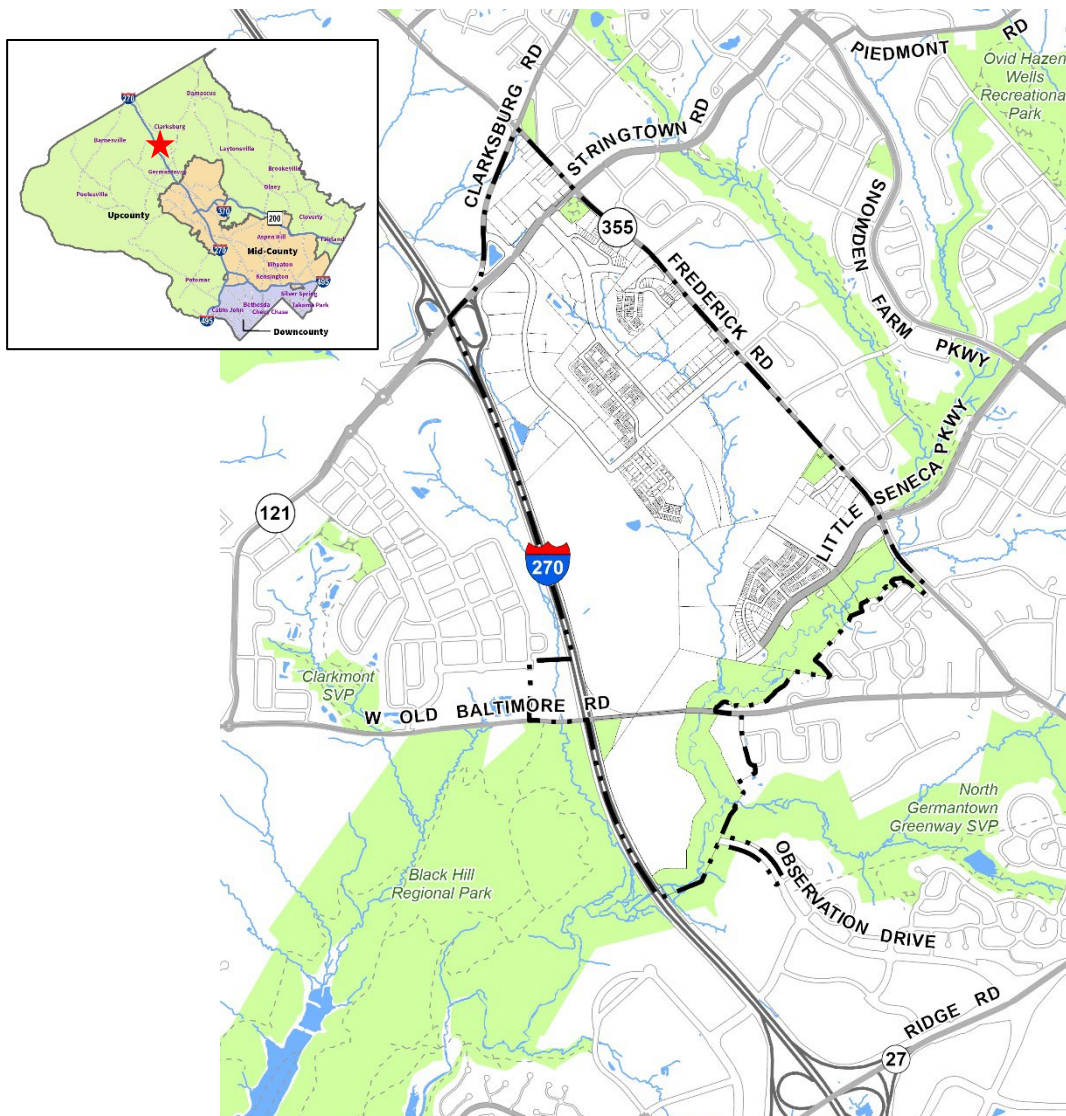


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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

This report complements the Planning Board briefing on emerging ideas for the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan (“Sector Plan”). The Sector Plan is an amendment to a portion of the 1994 *Clarksburg Master Plan and Hyattstown Special Study Area* (“the 1994 Plan”), which was previously amended by the 2011 *Clarksburg Master Plan and Hyattstown Special Study Area Limited Amendment* (“2011 Amendment”) and the 2014 *10 Mile Creek Area Limited Amendment* (“2014 Amendment”).

The Sector Plan update considers whether changes to land use, transportation, environmental, historic preservation, or other master plan policies are appropriate for the future of Clarksburg. These changes may apply to land use mix, density, and design standards, master planned street alignments and designs, historic designation, and environmental protection and mitigation measures, and may also amend other countywide functional planning policies, such as the *Master Plan of Highways and Transitways* and the *Bicycle Master Plan*.

The project webpage for the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan is www.montgomeryplanning.org/cgsp/.

PLANNING APPROACH

Since the Planning Board approved the Scope of Work for the Sector Plan on June 22, 2023, the planning team has completed several phases of the master plan update process, including existing

conditions analysis, community outreach and engagement, community listening sessions and visioning sessions, and the preparation of emerging ideas and draft recommendations. Community feedback received, and a greater understanding of the Sector Plan area gained, during this period has informed the planning team's approach to the plan and its preparation of emerging ideas now before the Planning Board.

Implementing the approved Scope of Work, the planning team retained four consultant teams to supplement work by Planning Staff in the disciplines of community engagement, architectural design, economic analysis, and transportation analysis.

As part of the initial listening phase of the Sector Plan update process, the non-profit community engagement organization, Everyday Canvassing, was hired to organize door-to-door canvassing of Sector Plan area neighborhoods. Everyday Canvassing staff, volunteers, and Montgomery Planning staff engaged with Plan Area residents to learn what people in Clarksburg think about their community and how they wish to see it change.

The architectural design firm, Fu Wilmers Design, was retained to prepare design concepts for adaptive reuse of the former COMSAT Laboratories building and new development scenarios on the COMSAT property. Planning Staff worked closely with Fu Wilmers Design to consider how development scenarios that establish a compact, mixed-use village center on the COMSAT property might support retention of the former COMSAT Laboratories building as a designated historic structure that can accommodate adaptive reuse.

Montgomery Planning commissioned HR&A Advisors, Inc., a national real estate, economic development, and public policy consulting firm, to assess the feasibility of the adaptive reuse and development scenarios prepared by Fu Wilmers Design. The Planning Board received a briefing on the findings of the analysis by Fu Wilmer Design and HR&A Advisors on November 21, 2024, at which time the planning team indicated that, due to the estimated prohibitive cost of adaptive reuse of the former COMSAT Laboratories building and an goal of supporting compact, transit-oriented development on the property, historic designation of the building was deemed infeasible and not expected as a plan recommendation by the planning team.

Concurrent with the investigation of potential adaptive reuse of the former COMSAT Laboratories building, Montgomery Planning Historic Preservation Staff researched the historic significance of the COMSAT building to consider a recommendation of eligibility for historic designation to the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). On January 22, 2025, the HPC received a staff presentation and held a public hearing to receive public testimony on the eligibility of the former COMSAT building for historic designation. Following the public hearing, the HPC found that the former COMSAT Laboratories satisfied six (6) of the nine (9) designation criteria as outlined in Section 24A-3(b), Historic Resources Preservation, of the Montgomery County Code. The HPC unanimously approved a recommendation to the Planning Board and Montgomery County Council that the former COMSAT Laboratories building, and a delineated environmental setting, be listed as a historic site in

the *Master Plan of Historic Preservation*. The planning team expects to recommend against historic designation of the former COMSAT Laboratories building in its Working (Staff) Draft Plan.

At a previous HPC meeting on January 8, 2025, Historic Preservation Staff presented their findings and recommendations for historic designation eligibility of two additional properties within the Sector Plan area, the Clarksburg Heights subdivision and Community of Faith United Methodist Church. Following public hearings to receive testimony on these two properties, the HPC voted unanimously to recommend both sites for historic designation in the *Master Plan of Historic Preservation* and to forward their recommendation to the Planning Board and Montgomery County Council along with the Sector Plan. The planning team expects to support the HPC recommendation to designate the Clarksburg Heights subdivision and Community of Faith United Methodist Church as a historic district and historic site, respectively, in the forthcoming Working (Staff) Draft Plan.

A transportation consulting firm, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin (VHB), was retained by Montgomery Planning to perform detailed traffic analysis of existing and proposed intersections in the Plan area for existing, currently master planned, and planning team-proposed scenarios, based on regional travel demand model results prepared by Montgomery Planning. This consultant work is ongoing at this time and the planning team will provide traffic analysis results to the Planning Board prior to future scheduled work sessions on the draft plan.

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

Since the Planning Board’s approval of the Scope of Work in June 2023, the planning team conducted community outreach and engagement to support the planning team’s preparation of the Sector Plan. In addition to attending individual meetings with stakeholders, property owners, public agency staff, and community groups, the planning team held the following community meetings as part of its outreach and engagement efforts.

Community Kickoff Meeting and Open House

On July 26, 2023, the planning team hosted a community “kickoff” meeting and open house in an activity building at Clarksburg Neighborhood Park. This meeting was the planning team’s first touchpoint with the Clarksburg community and an opportunity to invite their feedback and collaboration to the planning process. Attendees were asked to post sticky notes on topic-specific boards set up around the room, and the planning team took notes to capture spoken comments. Overall, 139 comments were recorded from over 75 attendees at this meeting.

The planning team launched a community questionnaire at the kickoff meeting asking about the character of Clarksburg, what amenities the community felt were missing, what type of engagement would work best for them, and what would make this a successful new plan. The questionnaire was posted on the sector plan’s website until mid-December 2023 and resulted in 126 completed submissions digitally; an additional four were completed by hand at the kickoff meeting.

Door-to-Door Canvassing

Between June and August 2023, the planning team collaborated with the non-profit organization Everyday Canvassing to interview the community to gain an understanding of what the people of Clarksburg think about their community today and what they would like to see in the future. Everyday Canvassing attempted to knock on every door within the five large residential neighborhoods within the plan area and a random sampling of residences surrounding the plan boundary. Their efforts resulted in 177 conversations which were transcribed in real-time. Several of the interview conversations are extensive, filling over a page of text, while others are brief at only a sentence or two.

Community Listening Sessions

The planning team held four “listening sessions” throughout October 2023, each focused on different topics of discussion. The first listening session was a virtual meeting and covered Transportation and Environment with the remaining three listening sessions held in person at Rocky Hill Middle School in Clarksburg. The second listening session focused on Housing, Economic Development, and Employment; the third listening session was on Parks and Trails, Historic Resources, Community Facilities, Community Identity, and Urban Design; and the fourth listening session was a catch-all meeting that included all the topics from the three previous sessions. Between the four listening sessions, the planning team collected 309 comments, most as short sentences, sentence fragments, and even single words captured by the note takers.

Please Note: A summary of feedback received during the community kick-off, door-to-door canvassing, and listening session phases is available online through the planning team’s [Community Feedback Report](#), presented to the Planning Board on February 15, 2024.

Community Visioning Workshops

In the summer of 2024, the Clarksburg community was invited to envision the future of the Sector Plan area and explore solutions to community needs. The planning team held four community visioning workshops, on May 21 and 23 and June 10 and 12. All meetings were held in-person within the Sector Plan area (Rocky Hill Middle School and Clarksburg High School). Participants were asked to share reactions to proposed emerging ideas from the planning team and offer feedback to help guide the preparation of emerging ideas.

Across the four visioning workshops, meeting participants provided 233 comments on topics including community design, environment, historic preservation, housing, land use and zoning, parks and open space, and transportation. The planning team also spoke with attendees during the ‘open house’ phase of the meeting to gain a deeper understanding of the community’s interests.

A copy of the presentation and meeting materials from the visioning workshops is available on the [Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan project website](#).

Emerging Ideas Meetings

The planning team shared their emerging ideas with the Clarksburg community at two meetings in January 2025 to seek feedback on recommendations being prepared for the draft plan. An in-person meeting was held on the evening of January 14, 2025, at Rocky Hill Middle School, with an attendance of about 40 participants, and a virtual evening meeting was held on January 16, 2025, via Zoom with an attendance of about 60 community members.

In advance of these meetings, the planning team released an online feedback map and short questionnaire to share highlights of the emerging ideas presented at the meetings and to provide an additional opportunity to receive feedback outside of the scheduled meetings. The planning team received six completed questionnaires to supplement the feedback from the two January meetings.

The online feedback map garnered much more interest than the online questionnaire, with 63 total comments submitted on various map elements. The map was organized in four categories: Street Network, Land Use, Active Transportation, and Transit Network. Commenters were generally supportive of the proposed street changes, yet most desired the planned I-270 interchange to remain. Emerging ideas for proposed bus rapid transit on Observation Drive was supported by several commenters, as long as stations provided space for park-and-ride facilities and the future routes lead to major destinations. Land use concepts that indicated allowing more residential uses and greater densities on the former COMSAT property and others garnered comments that sought a balance of land uses along with new residential development, including commercial and recreational uses. Several commenters supported proposed recommendations to establish new and connecting trails and paths throughout the plan area.

A copy of the presentation and meeting materials from the emerging ideas meetings, as well as a link to the online feedback map, is available on the [Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan project website](#).

Key Takeaways from Community Feedback

The people of Clarksburg care deeply about their community and want to make it better. Some love it as it is, some want to see more shopping, dining, and recreation amenities and transportation infrastructure, while others feel that it is already overcrowded and overbuilt. The planning team's challenge is finding a balance between what we heard from community members, goals for improving and building better communities in the county's General Plan, *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, responding to the desires of residents, business owners, and landowners in the plan area, and meeting county policies for greater housing, equity, transportation safety and access, and environmental protection.

Major topics from community feedback received to date can be understood in four general themes:

Transportation: Community members would like to see a completed road network, better pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure, and more public transportation options. A major touchpoint throughout all community feedback and conversations is a planned highway interchange where Little Seneca Parkway is planned to cross over Interstate 270. Establishing a

high-quality, rapid regional transit service to serve Clarksburg was also top of mind for many community meeting participants.

Public facilities: Residents want a library, a community center with recreation options and meeting rooms, and a public swimming pool open year-round. They believe that the rapid growth is residential development that has taken place in recent years is not served by adequate public infrastructure and amenities. Currently, a new public library is in the planning stages on a site just east of the Sector Plan area, at the intersection of Frederick Road (MD 355) and Stringtown Road. There is an acknowledged need for a community recreation center by the county’s recreation department, though a location, schedule, or funding source is not yet identified.

Quality of life: Meeting participants consider Clarksburg to be generally peaceful and appreciate its small-town feel and population diversity, yet they desire a “complete community,” with restaurants, shopping amenities, and convenient public facilities. Many are worried about overdevelopment, especially if more houses are built without the inclusion of amenities the community currently lacks.

Environment and parks: Participants appreciate Clarksburg’s natural environment and frequently expressed a fondness for the forested areas, open spaces, and other green spaces, especially the trails and regional parks in the area. However, many are concerned that not enough will be done to protect water quality and forests as development continues, especially within the Sector Plan’s watershed that captures water for the Little Seneca Reservoir, which serves as an emergency raw-water supply source for county residents during droughts. Many Clarksburg residents would also like to see more local parks with active recreation opportunities for people of all ages.

A selection of photos from community engagement conducted to date:



The audience at the kickoff community meeting for the plan on July 26, 2023.



Members of the Everyday Canvassing team during the door-to-door canvassing effort.



Community members and Planning Staff at the third listening session.



Visioning workshop attendees share comments with Planning Staff

MAJOR TOPICS CONSIDERED

Over the course of the planning team’s research and engagement with the Clarksburg community, several areas of interest arose that the planning team has carefully considered in the preparation of its emerging plan recommendations.

- Potential for changes to zoning districts that allow for new residential and commercial development on undeveloped land or increased residential density for properties currently zoned for low-density residential uses.
- Exploration of design scenarios and financial feasibility, with consultant assistance, for adaptive reuse of the former COMSAT Laboratories building as mixed-use, residential, retail, and recreational development, accompanied by development of new compact, residential and commercial uses on the surrounding property.
- Preservation of existing natural areas and the potential for low-impact, environmental site design practices as part of new development to protect habitats and stream water quality.
- Potential for new and expanded parkland as part of new development on the former COMSAT Laboratories property.
- Alternative roadway alignments and designs and transit facilities from the current (i.e., 1994 Plan) master planned streets and bridges of Observation Drive and Little Seneca Parkway. Also considered was removal of certain unbuilt roads planned since 1994, including segments of Observation Drive and Roberts Tavern Drive and an I-270 interchange at the planned Little Seneca Parkway overpass.

EMERGING IDEAS

The Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan area is a small portion of the 1994 *Clarksburg Master Plan* area and represents one of the last remaining districts of the 1994 Plan that has yet to be fully realized. While the planning team believes that the 1994 Plan’s vision for the Sector Plan area as an light industrial and employment-oriented district is no longer viable, we believe it still has the potential to become a new transit-oriented activity center in Clarksburg.

With recommendations to align new roadways away from sensitive stream valleys, support transit-oriented development along a planned bus rapid transit service between Clarksburg and Germantown, allow medium-density residential development where not permitted today, and expand parkland and environmental protections, the planning team envisions a new future for this crossroads in Clarksburg that better connects area neighborhoods, provides for greater housing choice and diversity, and balances environmental protection with community development.

DRAFT PLAN VISIONS AND GOALS

The planning team has conceived draft visions and goals for each of the eight topic areas expected to be covered in the forthcoming Working Draft Plan. These visions and goals were shared with participants of the two recent ‘emerging ideas’ community meetings and posted online for review and feedback. They have also informed the planning team’s preparation of emerging ideas.

Overall Plan Vision

The Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan envisions a harmonious balance between thoughtful, sustainable development and natural resource preservation while fostering a vibrant, connected, and resilient neighborhood that enhances quality of life for all residents.

For the complete list of draft plan visions and goals, please see Attachment A.

DRAFT CONCEPT FRAMEWORK PLAN

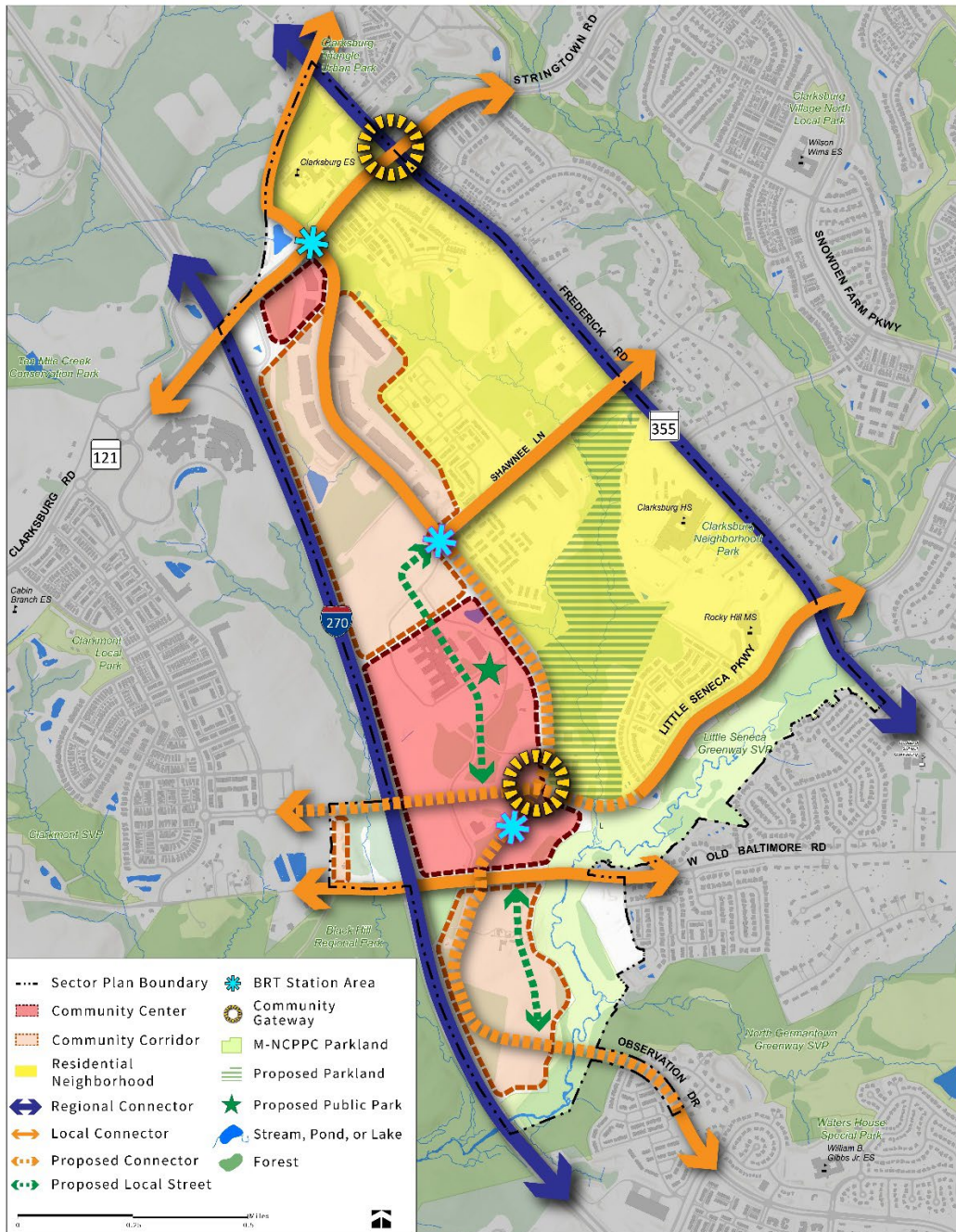
Staff’s proposed Concept Framework Plan seeks to realize the plan’s visions and goals by coordinating public improvements and private investments supporting to a more complete, compact, and connected community in Clarksburg. Descriptions of the Concept Framework Plan elements shown on the following page are explained below.

Concept Framework Plan Descriptions

- **Community Centers** are envisioned for compact, medium-density, mixed-use development, with building heights between 3 and 7 stories, safe, comfortable, and attractive streetscapes and pedestrian realms, and activated ground floors, parks, and open spaces. Structured and surface parking areas should be located to the side or rear of public streets and wrapped by storefronts or other building entryways, architectural or artistic treatments, and/or landscape screening, where feasible.

- **Community Corridors** are envisioned for low- to medium-density residential, commercial, and/or employment uses that are linked to Community Centers and Residential Neighborhood areas through a hierarchy of streets, paths, trails, and open space.
- **Residential Neighborhoods** should be primarily residential in character, with a mix of densities and housing types that respects the scale of nearby properties, in addition to small-scale commercial or institutional uses that fit within the broader residential character. Public parks and institutional uses should be accessible and compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.
- **BRT Station Areas** are envisioned as activated public gathering spaces served by transit stations and high-quality streetscapes and pedestrian realms. They should provide safe, comfortable, and attractive spaces to board or alight buses and meet up with others while offering shade, furniture, lighting, and wayfinding.
- Public streetscape improvements and private development at **Community Gateways** should incorporate public art installations, unique architectural elements, safe and comfortable pedestrian facilities, and community gathering spaces that heighten the public realm and convey a sense of ‘arriving’ at these locations.
- **Proposed Parkland** is recommended along a segment of the Coolbrook Tributary to protect sensitive environmental features and provide for passive recreation opportunities, as well as a **Proposed Public Park** on the COMSAT property as part of future development of the site.
- **Connectors and Local Streets** are existing and proposed roadways with a ‘Complete Street’ designation in the *Master Plan of Highways and Transitways* that seek to accommodate safe and comfortable travel by all modes. Connectors are intended primarily for travel through the Sector Plan area while Local Streets are intended to provide access to development sites, with street-facing building and entries, activated ground-floors, and bike and pedestrian amenities.

Draft Concept Framework Plan



KEY EMERGING IDEAS

A selection of key emerging ideas is listed below. These recommendations are called out by the planning team as having the potential to make a significant impact on the future quality of life of the Clarksburg community, received the most attention by community stakeholders during the plan's community engagement efforts, and/or may be the most contentious of the planning team's recommendations.

Planning Staff will review these key emerging ideas as part of their briefing to the Planning Board and Commissioners are invited to seek further clarification or provide feedback on them to the planning team.

1. On select properties in the Sector Plan area, change existing employment-oriented zones to commercial-residential zones (CR and CRT) to add land use and development flexibility for new development projects, with modest increases to maximum allowable development density.
2. For development projects seeking approval under the Optional Method of Development in the Commercial-Residential (CR) and Commercial-Residential Town (CRT) zones, the following are prioritized public benefits.
 - a. For all projects, incorporate sustainable features into their site design.
 - b. For projects with a residential component, a greater percentage of Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs) than the minimum master plan-recommended level of 15% of total dwelling units.
 - c. For projects with a residential component, inclusion of three-bedroom or larger units.
 - d. If the former COMSAT Laboratories building is proposed for full or partial demolition, public benefits required under an Optional Method of Development application should provide mitigation commensurate to the loss of historic resources that advances public knowledge about the past, promotes the public interest, and enhances the preservation of other resources eligible for or listed in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.
 - e. A Major Public Facility should be considered on the COMSAT property, such as a community recreation center, public school, or public park.
3. New residential developments should provide at least 15% Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs).
4. Re-locate the master planned Observation Drive alignment away from the Coolbrook Tributary stream valley, avoiding removal of Clarksburg Elementary School, to instead align with existing roadways and accommodate better access infill opportunity sites, including the former COMSAT Laboratories property and Linthicum Family farmhouse property.
5. Recommend a new master planned street through the former COMSAT Laboratories property to establish a central 'main street' as part of new development.
6. Remove from the *Master Plan of Highways and Transitways* an unbuilt highway interchange on I-270 between existing Exit 16 (Ridge Road) and Exit 18 (Clarksburg Road), instead construct a bridge over I-270 with the future completion of Little Seneca Parkway.
7. Establish the Clarksburg-Germantown Corridor Connector Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route, as planned in the *Corridor Forward: I-270 Transit Plan*, to travel through the Sector Plan Area in dedicated bus lanes along the master planned alignment of Observation Drive and Gateway Center Drive and study an extension of the route's northern terminus into Clarksburg Town Center.

8. Complete a comfortable, continuous network of low-stress biking, walking, and rolling opportunities through implementation of the Bicycle Master Plan, primarily through the construction of shared use paths along existing and new roadways within the Sector Plan area with the goal of connecting existing and new neighborhoods, local shopping and dining destinations, and area parks.
9. Conserve land along the stream valleys of Little Seneca Creek tributaries by private conservation easement or by establishing or expanding public parkland as a conservation park.
10. Avoid or minimize development impacts on Little Seneca Creek tributaries by designing new roadways and developments to avoid harming sensitive or established natural features (e.g., wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes, threatened and endangered species habitats, forests), minimize grading and land disturbance, treat stormwater on-site through best management practices (BMPs), and minimize impervious surface area.
11. Establish design guidelines to encourage a complete, compact, and attractive built environment, featuring building frontages and facades that help to define and activate streetscapes, locate parking facilities to the rear or side of buildings, and create distinctive gathering spaces and well-designed streetscapes that enhance the public realm .
12. Designate the Community of Faith United Methodist Church as a Historic Site in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.
13. Designate the Clarksburg Heights subdivision as a Historic District in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.
14. Do not designate the former COMSAT Laboratories building or property as a Historic Site in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.

NEXT STEPS

Following this briefing, planning staff will incorporate the Planning Board’s feedback into a full set of preliminary recommendations that are already well underway and begin to prepare the Working (Staff) Draft Plan around them. The planning team expects to bring the Working Draft Plan to the Planning Board for their consideration of accepting it as the Public Hearing Draft in July 2024. Once the Planning Board accepts the Working Draft as the Public Hearing Draft and sets a Public Hearing date, Planning Staff will distribute the Draft Plan for public comment according to the Planning department’s notification guidelines.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Draft Plan Visions and Goals