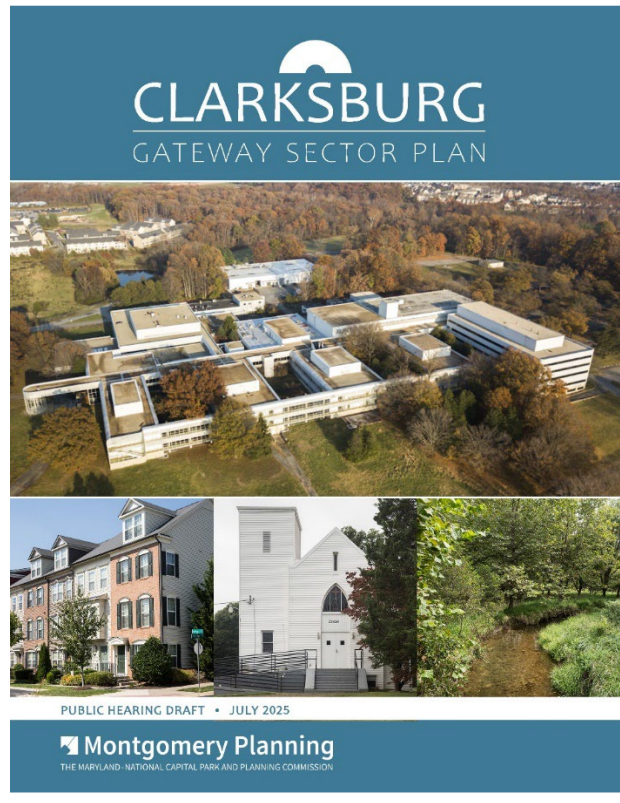


PUBLIC HEARING DRAFT OF THE CLARKSBURG GATEWAY SECTOR PLAN

PLANNING BOARD WORK SESSION #5



Description

A work session to review testimony submitted to the Planning Board related to Environment, Parks, Open Spaces & Recreation, and Community Facilities recommendations in the Public Hearing Draft of the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan.

Planning Staff

CL

Clark Larson, Lead Planner, Upcounty Planning Division,
Clark.Larson@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-495-1331

Steve Findley, Environmental Planner, Environment & Climate Division,
steve.findley@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-495-4727

Christina Sorrento, Chief, Environment & Climate Division, christina.sorrento@montgomeryplanning.org,
301-495-4649

DZ

Donnell Zeigler, Master Planning Supervisor, Upcounty Planning Division,
Donnell.Zeigler@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-495-4583

PB

Patrick Butler, Chief, Upcounty Planning Division,
Patrick.Butler@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-495-4561

Parks Staff

Lily Murnen, Long Range Planner, Park Planning & Stewardship Division, Lily.Murnen@montgomeryparks.org,
301-495-1337

Henry Coppola, Planning Supervisor, Park Planning & Stewardship Division,
henry.coppola@montgomeryparks.org, 301-495-2476

Christie Ciabotti, Chief, Park Planning & Stewardship Division, christie.ciabotti@montgomeryparks.org,
301-650-4365

SUMMARY

- This report highlights the major topics raised by testimony submitted to the Planning Board related to the Public Hearing Draft of the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan's Environment, Parks, Open Spaces & Recreation, and Community Facilities recommendations.
- The Planning Board received 29 comments from 15 individuals on Environment recommendations, 12 comments from 19 individuals on Parks, Open Spaces & Recreation recommendations, and 4 comments from 3 individuals on Community Facilities recommendations.
- Environment recommendations are in Chapter 3, Section E, pp. 63-69, Parks, Open Spaces & Recreation recommendations are in Chapter 3, Section F, pp. 70-79, and Community Facilities recommendations are in Chapter 3, Section H, pp. 86-91.
- For a summary of all related testimony for these work session topics, see "Attachment A – Testimony Summary," which includes a sequential comment number, alphabetic letter assigned to original testimony exhibits, commenter name, draft plan section and page (if applicable), a comment summary and brief description, and staff response.
- Original testimony identified in the Testimony Summary by alphabetical letter is included with this report as "Attachment B – Written Testimony".

MASTER PLAN INFORMATION

Plan Phase

Public Hearing Draft Work Session #5

Lead Planner

Clark Larson, AICP

Staff Contact

Clark.Larson@montgomeryplanning.org
301-495-1331

Report Date

October 30, 2025

Park and Planning Divisions

Upcounty Planning Division
Environment and Climate Division
Park Planning & Stewardship Division

Planning Board Information

MCPB Item No. 7
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CLARKSBURG GATEWAY SECTOR PLAN

WORK SESSION #5:

ENVIRONMENT, PARKS, OPEN SPACES & RECREATION, AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan area covers approximately 969 acres in northern Montgomery County, Maryland, near the crossroads of Interstate 270 (I-270) and Clarksburg Road. The Sector Plan establishes a new vision for a more complete, connected, and sustainable Clarksburg community with recommendations to shape future development and transportation networks, provide additional recreational opportunities for area residents, advance the county's housing and economic goals, and preserve and protect the natural environment.

The Public Hearing Draft of the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan ("Draft Plan") contains the text and supporting maps and figures for a comprehensive amendment to a portion of the Approved and Adopted 1994 *Clarksburg Master Plan & Hyattstown Special Study Area* (the 1994 Plan) and a portion of the 2014 *Ten Mile Creek Area Limited Amendment* (the 2014 Plan). It also amends *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, as amended; the 2025 *Master Plan of Highways and Transitways*, as amended; the 2018 *Bicycle Master Plan*, as amended; the 2022 *Corridor Forward: The I-270 Transit Plan*; the 2023 *Pedestrian Master Plan*; and the 1979 *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*, as amended.

The Planning Board held two Public Hearings for the Draft Plan on September 25, 2025, the first in the Montgomery County Planning Board auditorium at 2425 Reddie Drive in Wheaton and the second at the Upcounty Regional Services Center at 12900 Middlebrook Lane in Germantown. The public record remained open for written testimony through October 3, 2025. The Planning Board advertised the Public Hearings in the *Washington Times* on August 25, 2025, and a supplemental public hearing advertisement was published in the *Washington Times* on August 29, 2025.

Planning Staff identified about 220 unique comments submitted to the Planning Board from 68 individuals or organizations, either as written testimony or as oral testimony during the two public hearings. These comments include both support and opposition for various Draft Plan goals and recommendations, including topics on community design, community facilities, the environment, historic preservation, housing, land use, parks, plan implementation, and transportation.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

ENVIRONMENT

After reviewing testimony submitted to the Planning Board on the environmental recommendations of the Public Hearing Draft of the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan (“Draft Plan”), Planning Staff has identified the following major topic for discussion at this work session. A summary of this testimony is provided below, along with a brief Planning Staff response for the Board’s consideration. The Planning Board is welcome to raise additional comments and questions during the work session, as well.

Environmental Impacts from Development

- Comment #89, 97, 164: Testimony expresses concern about excessive land constraints on the COMSAT property that would reduce “viable, market-ready uses,” stating that the Draft Plan’s proposed recommendations (i.e., environmental, transportation, urban design, and recreational) result in constraints that significantly reduce available land for development.
- Comment #28, 32, 38, 106, 121, 122, 133, 141, 161: Testimony collectively acknowledges the environmental recommendations in the Draft Plan yet encourages the plan to go further to protect and restore the health of streams, conserve forests, and ensure a clean drinking water supply. Commenters suggest various ways to accommodate growth while maintaining—or even increasing—these critical natural resources:
 - Requiring 50% overall tree canopy coverage per site
 - Identifying and preserving key forest areas through conservation easements
 - Preserving all mature forests (75+ years old) that are at least 1 acre in size, and at least 75% of mature forests that are 2 acres or larger
 - Prohibiting stormwater management waivers within SPAs, consistent with the heightened environmental sensitivity of these areas
 - Avoiding the construction of new roadways through forests, parks, streams, stream valleys, and wetlands
 - Limiting development, hence impervious surfaces, on the site of the historic COMSAT building

Staff Response: There is a tension between these two sets of comments as to whether the Draft Plan’s environmental recommendations are sufficient or overly burdensome. Aware of the diverse interests of Clarksburg residents, property owners, and others during the public engagement phase of the plan’s update, Staff crafted a Draft Plan that seeks to strike a balance among these concepts. The Draft Plan envisions future development in the Sector Plan Area to realize greater compact and connected community development within Clarksburg and the county’s I-270 Growth Corridor, while recognizing the need to protect sensitive environmental resources of the Little Seneca Reservoir watershed and Clarksburg Special Protection Area, establish healthy and safe wildlife and human habitats, and contribute to a sustainable and resilient future in Montgomery County.

Staff does not recommend revisions to the Draft Plan in response to testimony but welcomes the Planning Board’s discussion and direction on the matter.

Forest Preservation

- Comment #97, 194: Testimony warns against excessive land constraints on the COMSAT property that would hinder viable, market-ready uses. Does not support the draft plan's recommendations to retain upland forests since this could impact the development potential of the COMSAT property and others in the plan area.
- Comment #34, 35, 37, 106, 114, 115, 123, 141, 161: Testimony urges the Draft Plan to preserve and increase forest and tree canopy within the Sector Plan Area. Multiple commenters suggest that the forested areas directly south of the COMSAT building be prioritized for preservation as this area consists primarily of mature to old age forest—over 75 years in age—which is typically of higher ecological quality

Staff Response: The Draft Plan does not identify specific upland forest stands for preservation due to the uncertainty of future development characteristics, but instead recommends that new developments, "maximize the retention of on-site trees and vegetation, especially on properties with Forest Interior Dwelling Species areas and within the Priority Urban Forest areas," (Rec. 3.E.2.c, p. 67) and, "prioritize afforestation and reforestation where gaps in contiguous forest corridors exist, especially within stream buffers and between high-quality forest stands" (Rec. 3.E.5, p. 67).

For the COMSAT property specifically, the Draft Plan recommends to, "preserve existing open space, topography, mature shade trees, and forest stands as part of the planned development in [the COMSAT] neighborhood where feasible" (Rec. 4.B.12, p. 95). This recommendation goes on to say that, "the existing forest stands along the northern property line and south of the former COMSAT Laboratories property should be prioritized for preservation and incorporated into any required open space, especially on forested slopes."

Staff does not recommend revisions to the Draft Plan in response to testimony but welcomes the Planning Board’s discussion and direction on the matter.

Tree Canopy Coverage on Parking Lots

- Comment #102: Testimony requests removal of the Draft Plan’s recommended 50% tree canopy coverage over surface parking lots as overly constraining on development and a challenge to implement in this part of the county (Recommendation 3.E.4, p. 67).
- Comment #38: Testimony supports this plan recommendation since it includes specific, measurable targets that are likely to be the most effective in advancing environmental protection and enhancement.

Staff Response: Staff requests that the Planning Board retain this recommendation. Unshaded surface parking lots are some of the hottest areas in a community during the summer months, exposing people, vehicles, and infrastructure to extreme heat. The Draft Plan encourages

shading at least half of the area of surface parking lots, either from shade trees or alternatives such as solar canopies or other shade structures.

Staff does not recommend revisions to the Draft Plan in response to testimony but welcomes the Planning Board's discussion and direction on the matter.

Green Cover Recommendation

- Comment #98, 131, 136, 177: Testimony states that imposing a minimum green cover area of 35% over the property's developable area is too restrictive and would impact developability and the provision of housing (Recommendation 3.E.10, p. 69). One comment suggests the policy should be lowered to 25%, similar to green cover policies in other parts of the county, as long as green cover within forest conservation easements is not excluded from this calculation.
- Comment #38: Testimony supports this plan recommendation since it includes specific, measurable targets that are likely to be the most effective in advancing environmental protection and enhancement.

Staff Response: This plan recommendation is intended to ensure adequate green or shaded areas within the built environment for the health and enjoyment of people, beyond the otherwise protected environmental areas like stream buffers and forest conservation easements. The Draft Plan's proposed language allows flexibility in on how the green cover standard can be applied through a combination of methods: intensive green roof (6 inches or deeper); shade tree canopy cover, including street trees; vegetative cover or landscaped areas deeper than 6 inches; rain gardens, bioswales, and other stormwater management areas; open space and recreation areas; and rooftop solar panels.

The inclusion of forest conservation easement areas from the calculation of green cover, as proposed by testimony, would be contrary to the intent of the recommendation since these areas are not the hardscapes and active areas occupied by the residents or visitors of a site that the green cover is intended to address.

Contrary to the testimony about other green cover policies in the county, several recent master plans (e.g., the adopted Bethesda Downtown Plan, the adopted Takoma Park Minor Master Plan Amendment, the adopted Great Seneca Plan, and the draft University Boulevard Corridor Plan) have applied variations of this green cover recommendation, but at the 35% level as proposed in this plan. This Draft Plan adds greater flexibility by allowing street trees and other green cover within the public right-of-way to be an acceptable element of green cover.

Staff recommends revising recommendation 3.E.10 to clarify that the 35% green cover area is calculated from the total developed area, excluding existing, retained forest cover on the property (rather than "net tract area").

PARKS, OPEN SPACES, AND RECREATION

After reviewing testimony submitted to the Planning Board on the parks, open spaces, and recreation recommendations of the Public Hearing Draft of the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan (“Draft Plan”), Planning Staff has identified the following major topics for discussion at this work session. A summary of this testimony is provided below, along with a brief Planning Staff response for the Board’s consideration. The Planning Board is welcome to raise additional comments and questions during the work session, as well.

Clarksburg Gateway Local Park (“Constellation Park”)

- Comment #111: Testimony supports the Draft Plan's recommendation to set aside 8 to 10 acres of open area of the COMSAT property for community use, such as a local park, community gardens and other community-oriented facilities to support educational, recreational, and cultural activities.

Comment #165: Testimony states that a new major park is not necessary on the COMSAT property as there are existing parks in Clarksburg that are still in need of completion (i.e., Ovid Hazen Wells).

Comment #100: Testimony suggests that the Sector Plan should consider a coordinated series of public open spaces and/or parks instead of the recommended 8- to 10-acre, centrally located and designed Clarksburg Gateway Local Park. Recommends sharing public facility responsibilities across properties, removing park dedication language, and utilizing existing locations for public parkland and open space (i.e., Linthicum East School Reservation Site).

Staff Response: The draft plan aims to address long-term park and recreation needs in the Clarksburg area over a twenty-year timeframe. Likewise, establishing and updating parks and park amenities is a continuous and ongoing process. There are existing unmet community recreation needs that cannot currently be met within the plan area, even if additional amenities are added to other parks nearby. These unmet needs would only increase with any future housing development in the plan area.

In response to Comment #100 and after consultation with the property owner of the COMSAT property and Planning Staff, Montgomery Parks Staff suggest revising the Draft Plan to allow for greater flexibility in achieving the Plan’s goals of addressing long-term park and recreation needs.

Staff recommends replacing the “Clarksburg Gateway Local Park” section beginning on Draft Plan page 74 with the following:

Clarksburg Constellation Park

Although the larger Clarksburg area is surrounded by high-quality parks, there are very few places for recreation that are centrally located within the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan area. During this master planning process, Clarksburg area residents emphasized the importance of active park amenities that invite people to do more, stay longer, and enjoy themselves in different ways. Furthermore, the 2022 *Parks*,

Recreation & Open Space (PROS) plan calls for the integration of parks and recreational amenities that encourage healthy physical activity and social interaction in every neighborhood.

12. In response to the community's input on parks and in accordance with the 2022 PROS Plan, this Sector Plan recommends the creation of the Clarksburg Constellation Park to serve the growing Clarksburg community. Establishing new public park and recreation amenities will meet community needs by contributing to a high-quality, community-defining set of facilities and spaces. These amenities should be designed to integrate with and contribute to the successful redevelopment of the Plan Area.

- a. **Design** – The new recreation amenities may be implemented as either a single public park or as a network of connected public parks with distinct uses that achieve the goals described in this section of the Plan. The park(s) should be centrally located in the Plan area, along or near the new alignment of Observation Drive. Park elements should be configured to complement the Plan's goals for public and private development. They should be connected to one another and the surrounding community, readily accessible by people walking, biking, and rolling, and give the feeling of a truly integrated park experience. The recreation elements must include a variety of amenities that encourage physical activity and social interaction, as described in the following Amenities and Implementation Process sections.
- b. **Amenities** – The delivery of adequate park amenities will be crucial to the overall success of new development in the Plan Area. The most important measure of success for the park(s) recommended in this Plan is the delivery of high-quality active amenities and experiences.

Recreation amenities within the Clarksburg Constellation Park should be connected to each other and adjacent neighborhoods by high-quality and attractive multi-use paths. Navigation into and between park amenities should be both intuitive and inviting to visitors from the surrounding community. At a minimum, the following elements must be included in the new park(s) to ensure that sufficient park amenities have been provided to serve the community, and the park areas must be large enough to provide all of the following amenities. These elements may be modified by Parks staff at the time of the development review process.

- a medium or large dog park,
- pickleball courts
- basketball courts
- one or more playgrounds and types for differing age groups
- a skate park or adventure park features
- community garden
- walkways or paths

In addition to these amenities, supporting elements such as lighting, signage, drinking fountains, shelters/shade structures, seating, restrooms, and parking should be part of the overall plan.

3. **Implementation Process** – The scale, form, location, and configuration of the Clarksburg Constellation Park will be determined by the Planning Board during the development review process. Likewise, the final design and location of the parkland will depend on the intensity and mix of uses ultimately approved in the Plan Area as part of any new development. The manner of implementation envisioned through this Plan for parkland and park amenities listed above includes some combination of land dedication/conveyance, construction of park infrastructure, and/or installation of park amenities by private developers, as determined by the Planning Board during the regulatory review process. Each property owner within this defined area must provide a proportional contribution toward new parkland and amenities as part of their development projects.

Community Recreation Center

- Comment #146, 150, 190, 191: Testimony is supportive of the Draft Plan’s recommendation for a new Community Recreation Center and/or Aquatic Center to be in the Sector Plan Area due to a lack of these facilities in the Clarksburg community. One letter from a second grader provided with the testimony reads, "on the open field (COMSAT), I want to have a pool and activity center like the YMCA or a soccer field."

Staff Response: The Draft Plan recommends that a community recreation and/or aquatic center should be considered as a co-located facility with the new Clarksburg Gateway Local Park recommended on the former COMSAT Laboratories site (Rec. 3.F.16).

Staff recommends retaining this recreation recommendation but removing the phrase referring to co-location with a park to align with staff revisions to the “Constellation Park” recommendation.

Expanded Parkland along Little Seneca Greenway Stream Valley Park

- Comment #117: Testimony suggests that on the Linthicum property (north and south of West Old Baltimore Road), the County should preserve more land either through private conservation easements or public parkland dedication in the following locations to provide better stream protection: along the western edge of Little Seneca Creek, and along the western edge of the Cool Brook Tributary, above its confluence with Little Seneca Creek.

Staff Response: The Draft Plan recommends protection of the Cool Brook Tributary stream valley upstream from Little Seneca Greenway Stream Valley Park, either through conservation easement or parkland dedication (Recommendation 3.E.6.a, p. 68 and Recommendation 3.F.13, p. 76). Parks Staff does not support an additional plan recommendation to expand Little Seneca Greenway Stream Valley Park along the eastern property line of the Linthicum Property. Preservation of any sensitive environmental areas in this location, including as

protected stream buffer, forest conservation easement, or park land dedication, may be considered as part of future development review.

Staff does not recommend revisions to the Draft Plan in response to testimony but welcomes the Planning Board's discussion and direction on the matter.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

After reviewing testimony submitted to the Planning Board on the community facilities recommendations of the Public Hearing Draft of the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan ("Draft Plan"), Planning Staff has identified the following major topics for discussion at this work session. A summary of this testimony is provided below, along with a brief Planning Staff response for the Board's consideration. The Planning Board is welcome to raise additional comments and questions during the work session, as well.

Adequate Public Facilities to Serve New Development

The Planning Board received the following testimony on the Draft Plan's recommendations pertaining to the provision of adequate public facilities to serve new development.

- Comment #2, 4, 51, 121, 160: Testimony is collectively concerned the Draft Plan's recommendations will result in growth that is unsupported by future infrastructure and public services. Allowing higher-density residential development without guaranteed transportation and school capacity improvements, some comment, could worsen these problems and reduce quality of life for current residents. Testimony recommends tying any new residential zoning to firm commitments for infrastructure, including road upgrades, public transit expansion, and school capacity.
- Comment #144, 151, 159, 179: Other testimony is supportive of the Draft Plan's vision for future development, opportunities for new employment, dining, and shopping destinations, and community placemaking.

Staff Response: The Public Hearing Draft recommends transportation infrastructure, roadways, transit service, and bike/pedestrian facilities that Planning Staff believe will adequately serve the transportation needs of the Clarksburg community as growth occurs. This infrastructure will be provided either by public investment and/or private contributions as development is proposed. Furthermore, approval of the Sector Plan is not expected to require dedication of a new school site at the elementary, middle, or high school level to accommodate estimated enrollment impacts from new development projected at a maximum build-out of the Sector Plan's land use vision or zoning recommendations. (See also the Community Facilities Chapter's School Adequacy Test section, p. 87.)

Staff does not recommend revisions to the Draft Plan in response to testimony but welcomes the Planning Board's discussion and direction on the matter.

WORK SESSION SCHEDULE

A schedule of remaining Planning Board work sessions by topic is provided below. This schedule is subject to change at the Planning Board's discretion.

October 16	Historic Preservation (<i>completed</i>)
October 23	Transportation (<i>completed</i>)
October 30	Land Use, Housing, Neighborhoods, and Community Design (<i>completed</i>)
November 6	Environment, Parks, Open Spaces, & Recreation, and Community Facilities
November 20	Follow-up on any remaining discussion items and possible consideration of approval of the Planning Board Draft of the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan for transmittal to the County Council

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Testimony Summary

(an extract of testimony summaries for these topics)

Attachment B: Written Testimony

(Original testimony submitted to the Planning Board for these topics, identified in the Testimony Summary attachment by alphabetical letter. Individual items are bookmarked in the Adobe PDF for quick reference.)