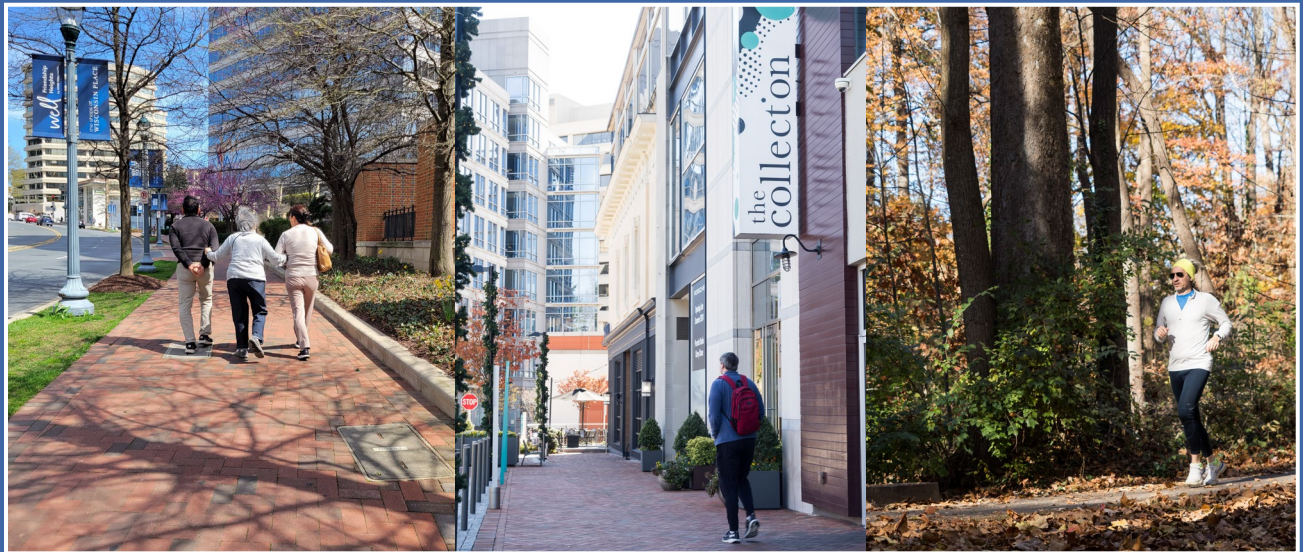


FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS SECTOR PLAN

ENGAGEMENT UPDATE



Description

Planning staff will brief the Planning Board on key takeaways from community engagement efforts for the Friendship Heights Sector Plan since the Plan kickoff in Fall 2024.

MASTER PLAN INFORMATION

Topic

Friendship Heights Sector Plan Engagement Update

Date

November 20, 2025

Lead Planner

Atara Margolies

Planning Division

West County Planning

Staff Contact

Atara.Margolies@montgomeryplanning.org
301-495-4558

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	Atara Margolies, Planner III, West County Planning atara.margolies@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-4558
	Larissa Klevan, Master Plan Team Supervisor, West County Planning larissa.klevan@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-1326
	Elza Hisel-McCoy, Chief, West County Planning elza.hisel-mccoy@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-2115

SUMMARY

Since November 2024, the Friendship Heights Sector Plan team has been gathering feedback on the future vision for Friendship Heights through in-person workshops, virtual meetings, online questionnaires, and dozens of meetings with community groups, property owners, business owners, residents, and other stakeholders. Staff will present an overview of the year-long engagement process, along with a demographic analysis of participants, and key takeaways on a range of issues.

ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

ENGAGEMENT GOALS

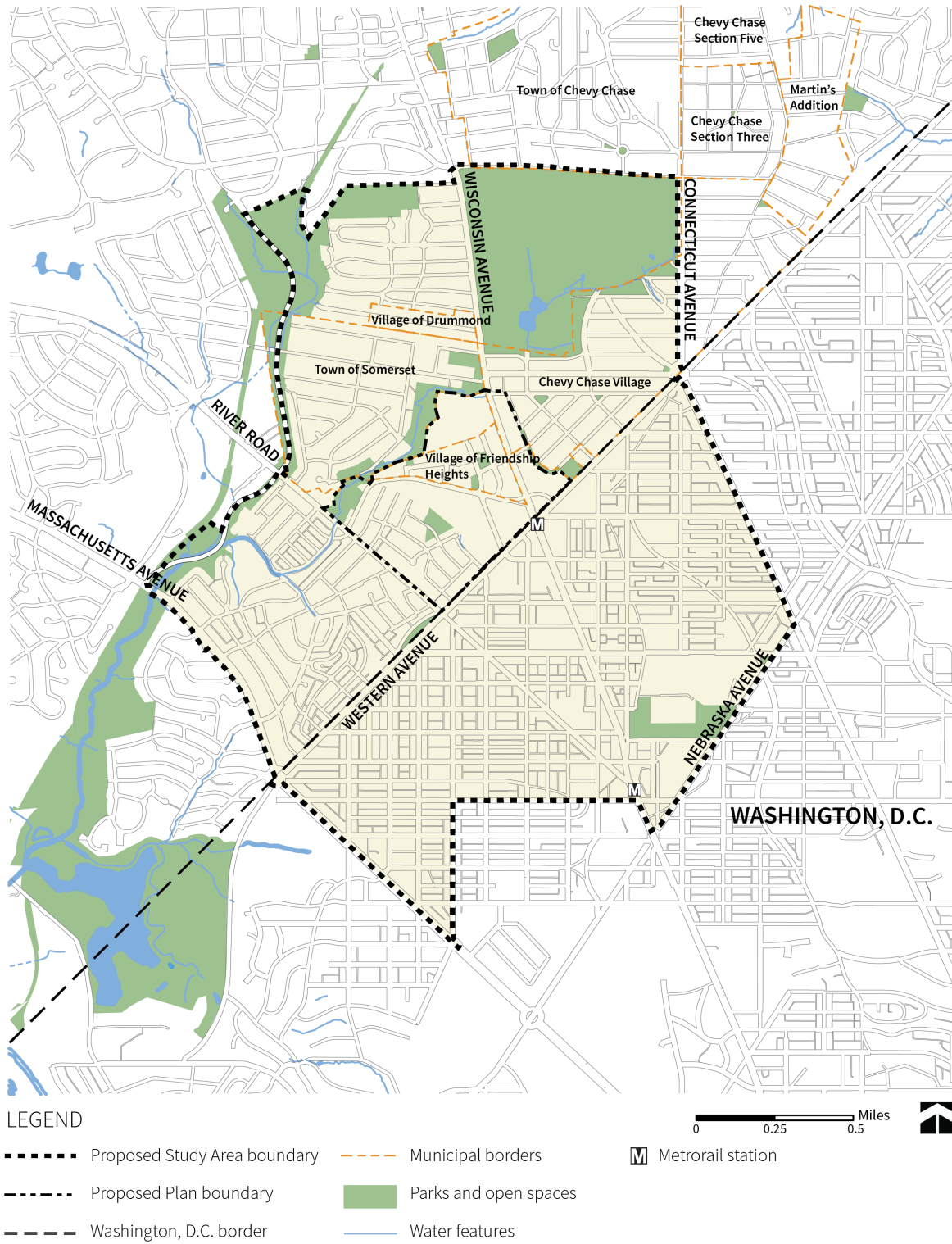
At the start of the pre-scope engagement in November 2024, the team identified five goals for the engagement process:

- Reach a wide range of stakeholders
- Deliver clear and straightforward messaging
- Provide a variety of opportunities so that people of all ages and stages can participate
- Collaborate with community partners and agencies
- Meet people where they are.

Throughout the engagement process the team returned to these goals to ensure that the engagement process was transparent, accessible and collaborative.

Due to the relatively small size of the Plan Area and the cross-jurisdictional nature of Friendship Heights, the team focused on attracting a wider range of individuals from a larger Study Area. Over 90% of all engagement participants came from neighborhoods or communities at least partially within the Study Area (Map 1). The community with the largest percentage of participants overall was The Village of Friendship Heights, which is fully located within the Plan Area (Map 2).

Map 1: Study Area



Map 2: Plan Area



LEGEND

- · — · — Plan boundary
- — — Washington, D.C. border
- - - - - Municipal borders
- Parks and open spaces
- Water features
- M — Metrorail Red Line and Stations

ENGAGEMENT CONSULTANT

Montgomery Planning retained engagement consultant Brick & Story to support the Sector Plan team. With staff direction and collaboration, they created an overall engagement strategy, helped with the design and planning of public events, and supported those events with staff on-site to assist the team. Brick & Story also provided in-depth engagement data analysis.

ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

Over the last year, the team has engaged with over 1,000 people in and around Friendship Heights at in-person events, in virtual gatherings, at community happenings, via email, and in numerous other meetings and conversations.

Milestone Engagement Events

- November 2024: Montgomery Planning held an in-person workshop for community members at the Wisconsin Avenue Community Recreation Center. Sector Plan team staff asked open-ended questions about the participants' hopes and concerns for the future of Friendship Heights. A virtual workshop was also held that mirrored the format of the in-person one to allow more people to participate. These events were held before the Scope of Work and Plan Boundary were approved by the Planning Board to spread awareness about the Plan and the planning process.
- June 2025: To kick off the visioning phase, Montgomery Planning held an open house workshop in Friendship Heights as well as a virtual option. Participants rotated among stations focused on the identity of the area, the experience along Wisconsin Avenue, the pedestrian network, and parks access and amenities.
- July-August 2025: After identifying several groups of stakeholders that were underrepresented in Plan participants thus far, planners and Brick & Story staff led focus groups for business owners, renters, and parents of children 18 and under.
- July – August 2025: Montgomery Planning also issued a questionnaire about housing and amenities to all stakeholders, while brief questionnaires were sent to Town of Somerset and Chevy Chase Village residents to raise awareness about the Plan and to learn more about how they access Friendship Heights.
- September 2025: The Sector Plan team held an in-person visioning workshop at the Wisconsin Avenue Recreation Center. This workshop focused on sector plan implementation, including how plans shape development, and how amenities that are recommended in a master or

sector plan are eventually delivered. Participants engaged in discussion groups about the possibilities of development and amenities at three potential redevelopment sites in the Plan area. In the weeks that followed this workshop, an interactive web-based activity that mirrored the workshop content was live on the Plan website. This allowed the team to receive feedback from a wider range of individuals.

Additional Engagement

Over the past year, Planning staff has met with more than 20 community groups in over 35 meetings (see Attachment A). Often these meetings were regular monthly meetings of a group or an organization, including monthly coordination meetings with the DC Office of Planning. These meetings were an opportunity for the staff to update the community on the plan progress, process and schedule, and for the community to ask questions and provide feedback. Staff will continue to meet with groups as the plan progresses, supporting the engagement goals of delivering clear messaging and meeting people where they are.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

Participant demographic information was collected at every public event hosted by the Planning team. By comparing this data to the demographics of the Plan Area and the Study area, the team can identify where there are gaps in the engagement effort. For example, this is what led the team to convene focus groups for specific cohorts such as parents and renters.

As noted in the existing conditions analysis for this Plan, the demographics of Friendship Heights are unique when compared to the rest of Montgomery County. One of the unique characteristics of the Plan Area is that it has a higher percentage of seniors (people ages 65+) than the rest of the county. This was echoed in the demographic engagement numbers, where nearly half of participants were over 65. Conversely, although the Study Area has 15% residents between ages 18-34, this was the hardest group to engage with, and only a small number of our engagement participants fell into that cohort.

While Montgomery County is a diverse population, with only 40% of residents identifying as non-Hispanic White, the Friendship Heights area is over 70% non-Hispanic White. In the categories of race/ethnicity and primary language, the demographic engagement numbers roughly aligned with the Study Area percentages. One notable data point where there was a difference was housing tenure. Approximately 84% of engagement participants were homeowners, while in the Study Area, only 65.7% of households are owner-occupied, despite targeted outreach to renters and rental apartment buildings

WHAT WE HEARD

Across all engagement events and platforms, staff identified several key takeaways:

- **Increased population is needed for a vibrant future:** Overall, community members were supportive of added population and hoped for more diversity in Friendship Heights. A majority of participants identified that more people would help support a stronger retail corridor with restaurants and desired community amenities. At the same time, many participants shared concerns about potential increases to traffic and density and a decrease in green space.
- **Affordable housing is crucial:** In any discussion of housing, community members emphasized the need for diverse, affordable housing, specifically housing for seniors, young families, and first-time homeowners. However, there was a variety of opinions on housing types, density levels and potential location of housing.
- **Prioritize pedestrian safety:** Participants stressed the need for safer places to walk, particularly at night. Parents also expressed concern about safety of kids and teens who are more likely to be walking or using transit than driving. Feedback received included comments about protected bike lanes, safer intersections with greater pedestrian refuge areas, and increased street lighting.
- **Preserve parks and open spaces:** Open, green space was identified as a key priority for most stakeholders. Across engagement events, one of participants' biggest concerns about any future development was the loss of existing open space and trees.
- **Desire for new community amenities:** Throughout the engagement process, participants stressed that their vision for a vibrant Friendship Heights included new amenities that would draw people to Friendship Heights and provide "third spaces" for community connection and gathering. Top suggested amenities included new parks and green gathering spaces, a movie theater, a pharmacy with extended hours, a library, and an arts center.

PLAN SCHEDULE AND NEXT STEPS

This briefing concludes the Visioning phase. The team has begun work on preliminary recommendations and will be returning to the community and the Planning Board in the first quarter of 2026 to discuss. Significant Plan milestones are outlined below. The Planning Board Draft is scheduled for transmission to the County Executive and County Council by the end of 2026.

Scope of Work:	February 2025
Existing Conditions Analysis:	Winter – Spring 2025
Visioning	Spring – Fall 2025
Preliminary Recommendations	Winter 2026
Working Draft:	Summer 2026
Planning Board Work Sessions and Public Hearing:	Fall 2026
County Executive Review, County Council Review and Work Sessions:	Winter 2027
Commission Adoption of Plan and Sectional Map Amendment:	Spring 2027

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Engagement Activities Summary Tables