

2025 BETHESDA DOWNTOWN SECTOR PLAN ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT



Description

Review of the 2025 Bethesda Downtown Plan Annual Monitoring Report and request approval to transmit to County Council.

COMPLETED: 1/30/2026

PLANNING BOARD HEARING DATE: 2/26/2026

MCPB ITEM NO. 5

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SUMMARY

- The 2025 Bethesda Downtown Plan Annual Monitoring Report (BAMR) provides an update on the implementation of the transportation, parks, and schools recommendations of the 2017 *Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan* since last year's report.
- The Bethesda Downtown Plan website is updated at least every six months and contains more information about progress toward implementing the Plan recommendations.
- Staff provided the draft BAMR to the Bethesda Downtown Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) for their review on February 2, 2026. Comments provided by the IAC are included in Attachment A.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION	3
SECTION 2: TRANSPORTATION.....	3
NON-AUTO DRIVER MODE SHARE (NADMS)	3
SECTION 3: PARKS.....	3
OVERVIEW.....	3
PROGRESS	4
SECTION 4: SCHOOLS.....	5
REVIEW OF 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR ENROLLMENT AND SIX-YEAR PROJECTION.....	5
SHIFTING TREND: ENROLLMENT DECLINE LEADS TO ABUNDANCE OF SURPLUS CAPACITY.....	6
SCHEDULED CAPITAL PROJECTS AND SOLUTIONS IMPACTING THE CLUSTER	8
RECOMMENDATIONS	8
SECTION 4: IAC COORDINATION	8
SECTION 5: CONCLUSION	8
ATTACHMENTS	8

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

As required by the Sector Plan, the BAMR provides annual updates on implementation of transportation, parks, and schools recommendations. Additional information about implementation of other recommendations, including development activity, the Design Advisory Panel, and more can be found on the Sector Plan website: <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/communities/west-county/bethesda-downtown-plan/>.

SECTION 2: TRANSPORTATION

In alternating years, the BAMR provides detailed information on progress toward the Plan’s NADMS goals and the results of the Road Adequacy Test. The Road Adequacy Test will be reported in even-numbered years and the Non-Auto Driver Mode Share (NADMS) goal in odd-numbered years.

NON-AUTO DRIVER MODE SHARE (NADMS)

Non-Auto Driver Mode Share (NADMS) measures the percentage of non-drivers making commute trips to or from locations within a defined area during the peak period. Employee NADMS reflects commute trips to the area from any origin, including origins inside or outside the area. Residential NADMS reflects commute trips by residents of the area to any work destination, including destinations inside or outside the area. “Non-driver” includes all commuters traveling to work via non-driving modes, including transit, biking, walking, etc., and includes those who telework instead of traveling to a worksite. NADMS includes carpool and vanpool passengers but excludes carpool and vanpool drivers.

The County’s Commuter Survey Report¹ for the AM peak period (7-9am) in the Bethesda Transportation Management District indicates an Employee NADMS of 51.4% and a Residential NADMS of 65.2%, resulting in a Blended NADMS of 54.2%, which is just below the Blended NADMS Goal of 55%.

SECTION 3: PARKS

OVERVIEW

The *Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan* recommends new and enhanced parks and open spaces in downtown Bethesda, including new civic greens at Veterans Park, Montgomery Farm Women’s

¹ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dot-dir/commuter/commuter-survey-results.html>

Cooperative Market, and the Capital Crescent Trail (CCT), and new urban parks, neighborhood greens, pathways, and gateways to major trail systems.

The overarching parks and open space goals of the *Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan* are to:

- Support the centers with civic gathering spaces.
- Provide linkages and signature gateways to the major trail systems.
- Create livable communities and appropriate transitions by greening and buffering the edges.
- Create green neighborhood parks.
- Add to the existing park, trail, and open space system.

PROGRESS

Since the 2024 Annual Monitoring Report, the following progress has been made towards achieving the parks and open space goals of the Plan, with major projects moving into new stages of development:

Elm Street Park: The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) began constructing Phase 2 of the Capital Crescent Surface Trail project in October 2025. Construction is expected to be completed by Spring 2026, weather permitting. Phase 2 construction includes a shared-use path along 47th Street, a park entry plaza, and new sidewalks, lighting, and trees. Future improvements to the Elm Street Park playground area will occur as part of Phase 3 construction.

Eastern Capital Crescent Greenway: Montgomery Parks is planning interim park uses for the two properties it acquired on Montgomery Avenue. These properties will be part of the future Eastern Capital Crescent Greenway.

Development Approvals:

- **PLD Lot 25 Redevelopment:** This project will provide the anchor portion of the north end of the Eastern Greenway between Maple Avenue and Highland Avenue. (Approved in March 2025.)
- **7025 Strathmore Street:** This project will make a Park Improvement Payment (PIP) in the amount \$932,907.69. (Approved in November 2025.)

Additional information on the status of the parks and open space recommendations in the Bethesda Downtown Plan can be found in the Parks and Open Space section² of the Implementation Monitoring webpage for the Plan.

² [Bethesda Implementation Monitoring – Parks and Open Space - Montgomery Planning](#)

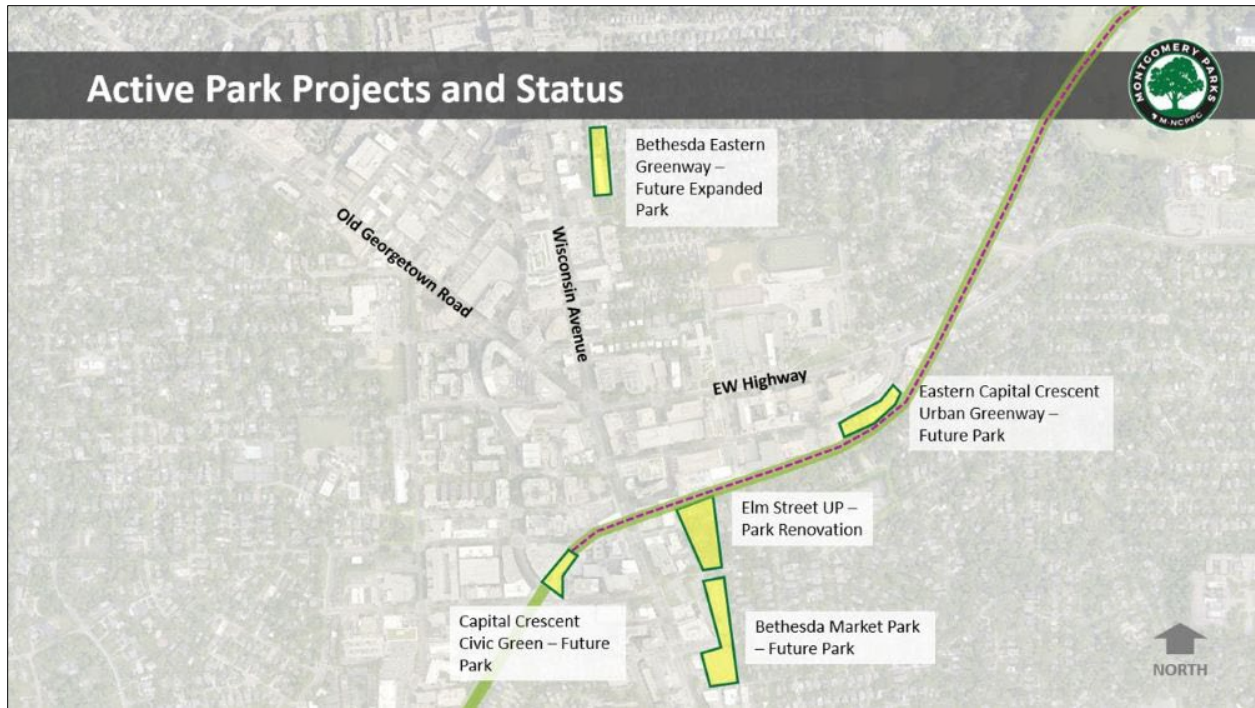


Figure 1: Bethesda Park Projects

SECTION 4: SCHOOLS

As a process of monitoring the adequacy of school facilities in relation to the *Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan*, this report reviews the latest enrollment and capacity data of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase (B-CC) Cluster collectively at each school level. For the 2025 Monitoring Report, the actual enrollment and capacity reported for the 2024-2025 school year and projections for six years later (2030-2031)³ are analyzed. The projections for the cluster’s middle schools and high school, however, are subject to change following the results of the Charles W. Woodward High School boundary study.

REVIEW OF 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR ENROLLMENT AND SIX-YEAR PROJECTION

The cluster saw another year of decline in its total K-12 enrollment. At the elementary school and high school levels, enrollment increased nominally by 15 students, or 0.5%, and 9 students, or 0.4%, respectively. The middle school enrollment however decreased by 41 students, a 2.5% decrease. As a result, the cluster-wide utilization rate remains 81.1% at the elementary school level, has decreased to 80.3% at the middle school level, and has increased slightly to 96.0% at the high school level.

³ Provided by MCPS in the FY 2026 Educational Facilities Master Plan and the FY 2025-2030 Capital Improvements Program

MCPS is no longer projecting an increase in enrollment at the elementary school level. In the 2030-2031 school year, the cluster-wide utilization rate is expected to drop to 80.8%, which is barely within the 80 to 100 percent utilization rate range that MCPS considers efficient for an individual school to be operating at. At the secondary school level, the FY 2026 projections indicate that middle school enrollment will rebound by the 2030-2031 school year and high school enrollment will see a slight increase. However, these projections do not reflect any potential change in enrollment that would occur when the Woodward High School boundary study results are approved, and students are reassigned accordingly in 2027.

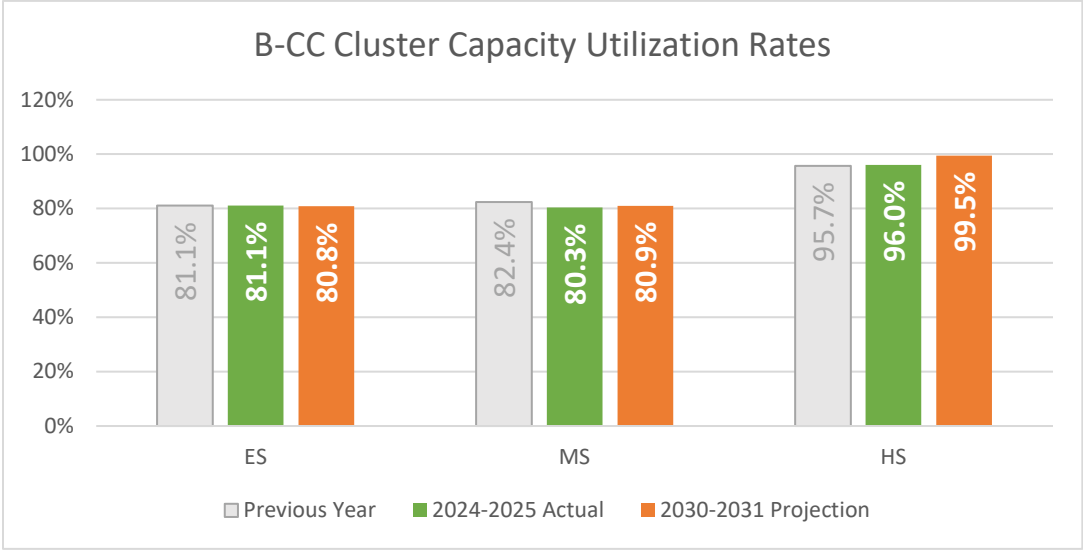


Figure 2: Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster Capacity Utilization Rates

SHIFTING TREND: ENROLLMENT DECLINE LEADS TO ABUNDANCE OF SURPLUS CAPACITY

The Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster received significant capital investment throughout the past fifteen years to address a strong wave of enrollment growth it had been experiencing since 2008. The cluster’s total capacity increased by more than 1,400 seats at the elementary school level, more than 1,000 seats at the middle school level, and more than 750 seats at the high school level. The cluster’s enrollment however has peaked since, in 2016 at the elementary school level and in 2019 at the middle school level. The cluster now has a considerable amount of surplus capacity available. Projections for the 2030-2031 school year indicate that there will be more than 775 surplus seats available at the elementary school level cluster-wide, which is more than the number of students enrolled at any of the feeder schools. There are also more than 375 surplus seats projected at the middle school level.

The following table shows the capacity, enrollment, and surplus capacity available at each individual school and the cluster-wide total for the 2024-2025 school year and the 2030-2031 school year projections.

Table 1: Surplus Capacity of Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster and Feeder Schools

	2024-2025 Capacity	2024-2025 Enrollment	2024-2025 Surplus Seats	2030-2031 Capacity	2030-2031 Enrollment	2030-2031 Surplus Seats
Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School	2475	2377	98	2475	2463	12
Cluster Total – Middle School	1979	1590	389	1979	1602	377
Silver Creek MS	915	751	164	915	762	153
Westland MS	1064	839	225	1064	840	224
Cluster Total – Elementary School	4053	3287	766	4053	3275	778
Bethesda ES	560	645	-85	560	631	-71
Chevy Chase ES	483	434	49	483	471	12
North Chevy Chase ES	391	237	154	391	250	141
Rock Creek Forest ES	771	690	81	771	681	90
Rosemary Hills ES	650	499	151	650	487	163
Somerset ES	550	314	236	550	340	210
Westbrook ES	648	468	180	648	415	233

During the Bethesda Downtown Plan development stage, a build-out enrollment estimate of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase cluster was calculated under a hypothetical scenario in which the residential capacities allowed in all recently adopted plan areas would be built out to their maximums. This estimate included impacts of the *Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan*, *Greater Lyttonsville Sector Plan*, *Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan*, *Friendship Heights Sector Plan*, and *Westbard Sector Plan*. It also assumed that the enrollment from existing residential areas will remain stable throughout the life of the Plan. However, the cluster’s declining enrollment has invalidated that assumption, undermining the approach of using max build-out enrollment estimates to gauge the long-term adequacy of school capacity. For example, when the build-out enrollment estimate was calculated in 2018, the cluster’s total elementary school enrollment was projected to be 3,690 students for the 2023-2024 school year. The actual enrollment that was reported in the 2023-2024 school year however was only 3,272 students, 418 students less than what was projected. This is despite the development and approvals in the Bethesda Overlay Zone reaching the 30.4 million square feet threshold in September 2023.

SCHEDULED CAPITAL PROJECTS AND SOLUTIONS IMPACTING THE CLUSTER

On March 28, 2023, the Board of Education decided on the scope of a boundary study to establish the service area for the reopening of Charles W. Woodward High School. The scope includes the high school and middle schools serving the Bethesda-Chevy Chase cluster, in addition to those serving the Downcounty Consortium, Walter Johnson, and Walt Whitman clusters. The scope, however, does not include any of the elementary schools.

Once Woodward High School reopens with its new facility on 11211 Old Georgetown Road, which is currently scheduled for the 2027-2028 school year, a student reassignment process will start taking effect. This will likely alter the enrollment and utilization projections of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase cluster high school and middle schools. The current enrollment projections, however, do not reflect any of this potential change. MCPS's projections will typically start reflecting any change to boundaries once the decisions are made by the Board of Education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The enrollment trends of the schools that serve the Bethesda Downtown Plan Area should continue to be monitored as recommended by the Sector Plan. However, given the increasing amount of surplus capacity becoming available within the cluster and across the County, if an individual school, e.g. Bethesda Elementary School, is projected to reach a level of overutilization that warrants relief, reassigning students to adjacent schools with surplus capacity available should be considered.

SECTION 4: IAC COORDINATION

The Annual Monitoring Report was shared with the Bethesda Implementation Advisory Committee on February 2, 2026, for review and comment. The Committee provided comments which are included as Attachment A.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

The next step will be to transmit the 2025 Bethesda Annual Monitoring Report to the County Executive and the County Council.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Bethesda IAC Comments

Bethesda Downtown Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) comments on the 2025 Bethesda Downtown Annual Monitoring Report

Parks:

The report does not make mention of any future plans for disposition of the parcel bought by the Parks Department at the corner of Wisconsin and Norfolk Avenues. A large chunk (I believe \$10 million) of Park Improvement Payment (PIP) funds was used to purchase the property, thereby tying up a significant amount of PIP funding for an indefinite period of time. The report should provide an update on plans and timing for the disposition of this parcel and refunding of the PIP funds for other park improvements/expenses.

There is no mention of the property at the corner of Woodmont and Bethesda Avenues long occupied by Purple Line construction. The report should provide an update on the timing for cessation of use by the MTA and how much the MTA will now owe the county for the long-term occupancy of the parcel that may then be used to construct the anticipated park at the site.

Schools:

The report highlights an unanticipated drop in enrollment at the Bethesda Cluster schools over the past few years, post pandemic. What is not explained is any reason for the drop. Many families made transitions to private schools during the pandemic, whom never returned to public school. In addition, several thousand multifamily housing units were added to downtown Bethesda during the same period, many of which remain rented at a low capacity or percentage. The report should provide some background on these two items, first where did the kids who were previously enrolled go? Second, how many students will be expected in the next five to ten years if and when the vacancies in the multifamily units already constructed are filled and the hundreds of additional planned units are constructed.