Montgomery Planning

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Town of Laytonsville Draft Comprehensive Plan

Municipal Growth Area

DESCRIPTION

The Town of Laytonsville has drafted and shared the 2026 Laytonsville Comprehensive Plan, an update to the Town's 2015 Plan, for review and comment by Montgomery Planning and the Montgomery County Planning Board. The 2026 Draft Plan includes a vision and guiding principles, as well as recommendations for several elements including housing, economic development, transportation, community facilities, and municipal growth.

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INTRODUCTION

The State of Maryland entrusts local jurisdictions, including the Town of Laytonsville, with land use planning authority to guide growth and development through the Land Use Article of the Maryland Annotated Code. The Land Use Article requires each jurisdiction to enact, adopt, amend and execute a comprehensive plan with specific planning elements at least once every ten years. Local jurisdictions that exercise zoning authority, including the Town of Laytonsville, are required to include a municipal growth element in the comprehensive plan, and consult with the county in which the municipality is located.

Consistent with the requirements of the Land Use Article, the Town of Laytonsville has drafted and shared the 2026 Laytonsville Comprehensive Plan, an update to the Town's 2015 Plan, for review and comment by Montgomery Planning and the Montgomery County Planning Board. The 2026 Draft Plan includes a vision and guiding principles, as well as recommendations for several elements including housing, economic development, transportation, community facilities, and municipal growth.

The Laytonsville Planning Commission anticipates scheduling a public hearing in late 2026 and subsequently transmitting the Draft Plan to the Laytonsville Mayor and Council for review and approval.

Staff requests approval to transmit the following comments to the Laytonsville Planning Commission for their consideration:

1. Laytonsville faces housing affordability challenges that should be evaluated using both countywide and regional income measures to better understand the barriers confronting prospective residents. The Plan should identify opportunities to broaden housing choices while maintaining a scale and development pattern appropriate to the Town's rural setting.
2. The Plan's emphasis on preserving rural character, historic resources, and environmental features is consistent with the broader planning context of this part of Montgomery County. The Plan should more clearly relate its recommendations to county objectives for compact growth, complete communities, environmental resilience, housing diversity, and reduced reliance on greenfield development.
3. Future growth need not be substantial to advance these objectives. A focused strategy of infill, redevelopment, and context-sensitive compact development could strengthen the historic core, support local businesses, provide overnight stay opportunities for the Town and surrounding agricultural community, and improve long-term resilience.
4. The Town's interest in a western bypass reflects its desire to protect the historic core. Any bypass proposal, however, should be supported by additional analysis of environmental impacts, induced travel demand, and alternative multimodal transportation investments.

5. The Plan should also build on Laytonsville's emerging Main Street by pursuing designation in the State's Main Street program. Maintaining Route 108 as the Town's principal commercial and civic corridor, while strengthening pedestrian-oriented businesses and community gathering spaces, would help create a more complete community within Laytonsville's rural context.

LAND USE PLANNING

The Town of Laytonsville is in upper Montgomery County, bordering the Agricultural Reserve Zone. It is positioned along Route 108 (Olney Laytonsville Road) generally between Olney and Damascus, at the intersection of three master plan areas: the 1980 *Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan*, the 2004 *Upper Rock Creek Master Plan*, and the 2005 *Olney Master Plan.* While the Town is not subject to Montgomery County's General Plan, *Thrive Montgomery 2050* (Thrive), it is important to note that the Town is located at the transition between the "Limited Growth" area and the "Rural Areas and Agricultural Reserve" identified in the Thrive Growth Map, included on page 71 and defined on page 72 of the approved and adopted plan.

- The "Limited Growth" area "contains the mainly suburban residential communities where limited, organic growth is envisioned to meet localized needs for services, provide a diverse range of housing choices, and increase racial and socioeconomic integration to achieve Complete Communities."
- The "Rural Areas and the Agricultural Reserve" are envisioned to "continue to be dedicated primarily to agriculture, rural open space, and environmental preservation," but Thrive acknowledges that the area "can absorb some growth as agriculture evolves and existing residential communities' needs change over time."

Relatedly, the Town is located between Montgomery County's Growth Tier III and Tier IV, and therefore relies on private on-site septic systems, rather than public sewer infrastructure. The Town should continue coordination with the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on water and sewer issues affecting Laytonsville, including the implications of the County's 10-Year Water and Sewer Plan.

Recommendations:

1. **Connect the Draft Plan to county policy objectives.** The Plan should expressly connect its land use recommendations to Montgomery County's objectives for compact growth, complete communities, environmental resilience, and preservation of historic and rural character. Future development should be directed to locations where environmental impacts can be avoided or minimized.

2. **Prioritize infill and redevelopment.** The Draft Plan should place greater emphasis on infill and redevelopment within the existing Town boundaries before considering outward expansion.
3. **Strengthen Main Street as a walkable community center.** Support Route 108 as Laytonsville's Main Street with pedestrian-oriented businesses, gathering spaces, and context-sensitive infill development including potential overnight stays to support the Town and surrounding agricultural industry. Prioritize strategies that support people and community activity while limiting parking encroachment on the historic residential core.
4. **Expand housing choice.** The Plan should explore smaller and more diverse housing types that support aging in place, serve households at different life stages, and improve housing accessibility across a range of income levels.

MUNICIPAL GROWTH ELEMENT

The Draft Plan's Municipal Growth Element acknowledges that the Town, "will consider future annexations if the action provides distinct value to the Town, protects its borders from incompatible development, protects environmentally sensitive areas, or facilitates the construction of the planned western bypass to decrease traffic through Main Street and the Historic District." (Page 38)

The Draft Plan proposes limiting growth to the existing Town boundaries and through annexation of one undeveloped parcel, approximately 48-acres in size southwest of the Town near Layton Ridge Drive (Figure 1). A preliminary plan of subdivision (119831270), known as Buffington's Addition to Layton Ridge, was reviewed and approved for the undeveloped parcel by the Montgomery County Planning Board in 1984. A portion of the parcel is in agricultural use, with streams, stream valley buffers, floodplains, wetlands, tree canopy, and forest areas occupying the remainder of the parcel. The parcel is designated a "Priority Urban Forest Area" by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and about 1.5 acres are subject to a Category 1 Forest Conservation Easement, indicating substantial forest cover.

Acknowledging these constraints, the Draft Plan estimates that the municipal growth area could accommodate seven units through clustered development averaging one home per two acres. Page 37 states that new residential construction in the southwest, "would be limited to an average of one home per two acres, allowing clustered home sites to provide open space."

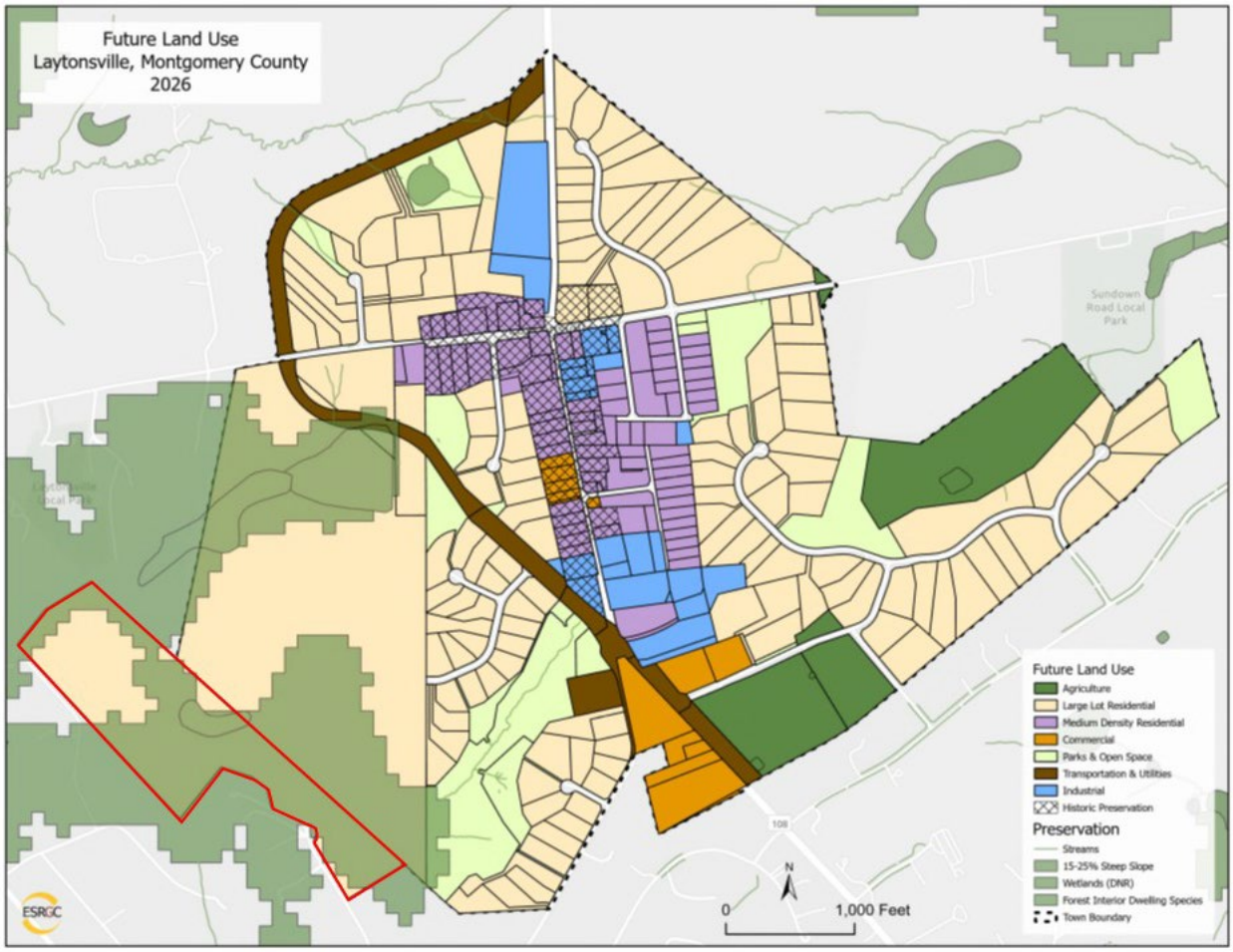

Figure 1: Laytonsville Future Land Use Map and Municipal Growth Area (Shown in Red)

Recommendations:

1. Distinguish theoretical capacity from realistic development potential. The Municipal Growth Element should further evaluate the Town's projected capacity of approximately 90 additional residential units. The analysis should account for environmental constraints, septic suitability, infrastructure availability, and transportation access rather than relying principally on large-lot residential zoning-based capacity.

2. Reassess the southwestern annexation parcel. The approximately 48-acre undeveloped parcel adjoining the Town's southwestern boundary near Layton Ridge Drive warrants a parcel-specific feasibility assessment. The property is identified by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources as a Priority Urban Forest Area, and approximately 1.5 acres are subject to a Category I Forest Conservation Easement, approved with the Final Forest Conservation Plan 120000490. A stream, stream valley buffer, floodplain, wetlands, and substantial tree canopy may further constrain development.

3. For the southwestern annexation parcel, verify prior approvals and site conditions. The parcel identified for municipal expansion received approval for seven lots in the late 1980s under Preliminary Plan No. 119831270 and the approval is no longer valid. Historic septic testing and the prior plan may provide background information, but they should not be used to calculate current development capacity without confirming present conditions and reassessing the property under contemporary standards.
4. The Plan must acknowledge uncertainty regarding development feasibility of the parcel identified for municipal expansion. The RE-2 zoning, historic septic testing, and open fields in the northern portion may indicate some development opportunity if approvable access can be established. Conversely, the conservation easement and extensive environmental constraints may substantially limit or potentially preclude development.
5. Apply a context-sensitive approach to future annexation. Historical subdivision approvals and underlying zoning may indicate possible development opportunities, but they do not establish feasibility. Any annexation proposal should be supported by current environmental, infrastructure, access, and development-capacity analysis before it is incorporated into a meaningful municipal expansion strategy.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Montgomery County's population is aging, and preferences are shifting to options for multigenerational living and aging in place. If this trend is also relevant for the Town, consider housing options in the already built areas that might allow for alternative housing types – such as transitioning from commercial only to mixed-use zones, if possible, with the septic constraints. This may require a more detailed demographic analysis of the Town's projected population, and corresponding housing needs.

Prioritize mixed-use and higher-density infill on existing medium-density residential, commercial, and institutional properties rather than housing in the annexation area. This approach would expand housing choices, limit outward large-lot development, and protect forests, streams, stream buffers, and wetlands, consistent with the Plan's implementation actions on page 91. As noted on page 89, future growth may be accommodated through septic systems, improved technologies, and public water connections that enable smaller lots and more efficient land use. Consider updating the Town's zoning ordinance to provide opportunity for mixed use development for both the Town and surrounding agricultural community on existing commercial and institutional land to efficiently use available land resources as possible under current septic constraints.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: 2026 Town of Laytonsville Comprehensive Plan, September 9, 2026 Draft