

II. LAND USE

CRITIQUE

The fundamental feature of land use policy expressed in the General Plan is the wedges and corridors pattern of development. There have been both successes and failures in the implementation of this concept of the General Plan. A beginning has been made in the development of several of the new-town or corridor city type developments projected by the General Plan,¹ but far more development has been of the scattered variety. Relatively little of the great areas planned as open space wedges has been permanently preserved from urbanization, and the use of the wedges as a means of guiding development into the corridors has had little effect thus far; but a good deal of stream valley and other land has been acquired as park land, thus protecting an important part of the wedges. The goal calling for the staging of development has not been implemented to any great degree until recently; a capital improvement program is now being prepared as the first step in developing a staging program.

Thus there has been a degree of success in the application of the wedges and corridors goal. As for its continued validity, this goal should continue to be pressed and implemented in accordance with the stated policy of the County Council, the Planning Commission, and the Committee to Evaluate the General Plan.

However, it is clear that additional tools are needed if implementation is to be accomplished. Greater incentives for new town and clustering techniques of development must be enacted so as to increase their use. Zoning and other controls, including new ones, must be used more imaginatively and forcefully in order to deflect development out of the open space wedges, but at the same time positive elements, including selective utility service planning, must also be added. The corridors must be made more attractive to the developer and the wedges less desirable for urban development. It must be recognized and accepted that public acquisition is the answer for only a small part of the open space needed and that other uses than recreation under public ownership must be found for most of the wedge areas.

¹It should be pointed out that the Plan proposes substantial growth to begin in these development areas only after 1980. However, growth in the County since the Plan has been much faster than anticipated. Hence it would be reasonable to expect earlier development in the corridor cities also.

A difficult problem in this connection is posed by the present zoning map and the manner in which the wedge areas are treated in the General Plan. The General Plan map indicates a residential density of one dwelling for every two acres in these areas, but the present zoning permits suburban residential development, mostly on one-half acre lots. This is an unrealistic type of regulation for implementing this policy of the Plan. A rural, primarily nonresidential zone such as is proposed in the text of the General Plan would be more to the point, or at least a regulation that would require a much lower density of residential development. However, there is no mechanism available that could reasonably be expected to bring about the realization of the policy, namely the preservation of a rural character in those areas.

In its policy statements on land use, the General Plan repeatedly stresses the use of zoning as a means of channeling urban growth, while emphasizing the importance of detailed area master plans and their direct translation into zoning changes and the need for additional zoning categories.

The policies of the General Plan appear to assume (1) the use of area master plans which are little more than desirable future zoning maps, and (2) control and guidance of development almost entirely by means of conventional zoning. New planning techniques developed in recent years reveal this view as both too narrow and ineffective. While the importance of zoning as a control must not be minimized, greater emphasis must be placed on planning as a process. The process must include methods for arriving at the accepted goals without attempting to forecast or impose, many years in advance, a rigid and detailed picture of specific future developments.

The General Plan does not offer a method of accomplishing its purposes in a way that will be both flexible enough to accommodate unforeseeable future conditions and yet able to provide better control over development. The following are needed:

- (1) A set of area plans devoted more to showing policies to be accomplished and less to specific and detailed geographic patterns of development.
- (2) A set of zoning and other development controls that invite the accomplishment of the policies through initiative and originality in design rather than specific standards which often fail to do so in spite of their rigidity.

- (3) Changes in State and local law, where necessary, that will enable these new controls and regulations to be set up. Some proposals along this line were put forward in an appendix² which was a part of the General Plan as originally proposed but was not adopted.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Past estimates of population and employment have been consistently low. Hence, either more land will be needed or the land must be used more efficiently.

The corridor pattern requires adequate transportation facilities in order to enable it to function effectively. The possibility of serving the corridors by the highway network shown on the Plan, assuming the estimated 1990 population, has been tested and found to be unworkable.³ Attempts to solve the problem by different arrangements of corridors also failed to cure the weaknesses of the system. A workable alternative appears to be an increase in developmental densities in close proximity to high-volume rapid transit facilities. The increased density at those locations will result in increased use of the transit and a strengthening of the whole community economic structure. Tests of the transportation network against the ultimate population and employment capacity of the Plan (rather than the 1990 estimate) serve to reinforce this conclusion.⁴

Sewers are another major determinant of land use patterns and must be planned to serve the same pattern. Most of the I-70S corridor is served by the Potomac Interceptor, whose capacity is far short of the population indicated for the whole corridor. Either the interceptor must be augmented (an extremely expensive undertaking) or some of the sewage must be pumped into other trunk lines. The impact of this on the other systems has not been evaluated. Limited access sewers will also be needed in order to serve the corridor plan and preserve the low intensity wedges.

²Appendix to General Plan for the Maryland-Washington Regional District: Priority Changes in Legislation, Ordinances, and Regulations Needed to Carry Out the General Plan. MNCPPC, October, 1962.

³A Transportation Study for Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, Maryland, Interim Report 1, prepared for the MNCPPC by Alan M. Voorhees & Associates, 1969.

⁴Ibid.; also unpublished results of the testings.

The relationship between land use patterns and service facilities described above points to the need for:

- 1) development in the corridors in connection with transit stations at higher intensity than previously contemplated in area master plans, and
- 2) much less development in the wedge areas than past plans or present zoning concepts indicate.

While this pattern is at variance with the General Plan map it is directly in accord with the text of the Plan.

Living Areas. References to residential land use in the General Plan are concerned almost exclusively with the proposed new towns or corridor cities. Much of the development that is taking place now and in the future will be in other types of areas, and policies to control and guide it are essential to the proper development of the living areas of the County.

Policies are also needed with respect to the relationship of residential areas to employment locations and other community uses.

Another area of policy on which the Plan is silent is the maintenance and protection of established residential areas. The Clarksburg plan contains some statements which touch upon this subject, but a clear and definite commitment to this policy should be enunciated.

Employment Areas. As in the case of residential areas, the General Plan statements on employment areas confine themselves almost entirely to employment areas in the centers of future corridor cities. Yet many centers of employment are not and will not be in such locations but in various suburban locations, especially during the earlier years of the life of the Plan. This deficiency is recognized in some of the objectives and guidelines included in various area master plans since 1964. Some of these policy statements stress the need to avoid scattered commercial activities and to provide employment centers with good transportation, while avoiding highway strip development.

Community Facilities. While the policies stated in the 1964 General Plan are eminently sound, implementation has not always been successful. In large part, the lack of implementation has been due to piecemeal development by means of the traditional zoning and subdivision procedure and the lack of responsibility of the developers to make provisions for the community facilities needed to serve the development. Consequently, not only were the facilities often not provided

(with the exception of such profit-making ventures as retail centers) but the sites on which public agencies could provide the necessary libraries, fire stations, and similar facilities were either occupied by residential development or priced out of reach by the very presence of the development itself. In many cases, especially with respect to public schools and parks, developers have voluntarily dedicated such land or made it available at reasonable prices; but this method has not been reliable and many of the sites have had to be provided by the public at inflated costs or have not been provided at all.

The use of clustering and planned unit methods of development has resulted in the provision of a number of sites. Under these techniques, sites for public facilities can be provided without loss of development density by the developer or can be required as a part of the development design. Increased use of these incentive techniques is foreseen in the future when they have been revised and broadened in order to make them more widely usable, and this should result in the provision of more sites for community facilities in the process of development.

In those already developed areas where the necessary community facilities are lacking or deficient, efforts must focus on finding ways to provide them. The Capital Improvement Program will be an important instrument for providing these facilities.

Agriculture, Open Space, Parks, and Recreation. The open space policies of the General Plan remain essential requirements for the carrying out of the wedges and corridors pattern of development. As stated earlier, they have been moderately successful in the sense that actual urban development in the wedges has been limited, but in the absence of suitable zoning categories and other supporting regulations and incentives it has not been possible to implement the policies. Hence there has been little success in the preservation of these areas from the possibility of development at any time in the future.

This failure appears to be due to (1) the absence of a rural zoning category as is called for by the Plan, and (2) the lack of the other accompanying measures proposed that are essential as back-ups to zoning, such as the requirement for restrictions on use as a condition for the special agricultural assessment, and the acquisition of limited rights in land. Thus, not only is it impossible for zoning alone to preserve open space, but even the zoning power itself is not available.

The objectives for parks are adequately stated in the General Plan but more specific guidelines are needed. The statement entitled "A Policy for Parks" adopted by the Planning Commission in December, 1968, details the policies by describing the various types of parks required, outlining development and management policies, and setting forth guidelines for public-private cooperation in recreational and open space activity.

Much of the difficulty in planning for agriculture, open space and park areas results from a lack of clarity, in the General Plan and elsewhere, as to what open space is. It is important to understand the various types of open land the purpose for which each is intended, and the manner in which each should be treated. The Report of the Committee to Evaluate the General Plan recognized this problem and suggested that each area of open space belongs to one of six types or some combination of them:

- a) for acquisition as public park;
- b) for residential development at low density;
- c) to be incorporated within and form the framework for the suburban development pattern;
- d) for long range agricultural use;
- e) for natural resource conservation;
- f) as a reserve for future unforeseeable needs.

Policies are needed with respect to the use of each of these kinds of rural land, just as is the case with the various types of urban land.