

EMPLOYMENT/ ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

SCOPE

Economic Activity is a new goal introduced in this General Plan Refinement. Discussion of economic activity in the earlier General Plans focused on employment and was included as part of the Land Use Goal. During the Refinement process, a clear consensus emerged that economic activity was of sufficient importance to merit a separate goal.

The new goal views employment as a primary indicator of economic activity. This section addresses jobs located in Montgomery County and goods and services available for purchase here. Government employment is addressed along with private sector and nonprofit employment in this section. Issues such as tax policies are generally excluded as being outside the scope of the General Plan Refinement.

KEY CONCEPTS

The intensity and location of economic activities are, of course, expected to conform to the Wedges and Corridors concept. In addition, the goal supports implementation of a strategic economic development program for the County, which would also guide economic activity.

The 1964 General Plan and the 1969 General Plan Update encouraged the development of "new towns" and Corridor Cities. Both were expected to include residential and employment land uses. In addition, the 1964 General Plan included the objective that "the growth of employment centers should closely parallel the growth of population." And the 1969 General Plan Update included the objective, "Provide an environment capable of attracting new employment to the region."

ACTIVITY

goals, objectives and strategies

Montgomery County has experienced substantial economic growth in the intervening years and has matured as an economy. As a result, the General Plan Refinement introduces several new concepts to its employment philosophy. It does not set a specific target for economic growth, but instead, calls for a “healthy” economy and “a stable and competitive business climate.” Montgomery County is also expected to be a “world class center” of business and technology. A new objective gives special emphasis “to retain and enhance” existing businesses throughout the County. Overall, this section views economic activity as a quality of life issue and as one important source of revenue for the County.

The General Plan Refinement also offers some guid-

ance about the types of businesses the County should particularly encourage. These include corporate headquarters, knowledge-based industry, biotechnology research, and public/private institutions. Federal research and regulatory agencies, small businesses, and incubator businesses are also specified. “Knowledge-based industry” refers to the wide spectrum of businesses that produce and distribute information or depend on or expand human knowledge. These range from many aspects of the communications industry to financial to political or scientific “think tanks.” The definition is very broad. At the same time, the General Plan Refinement guides the County away from the intense industrial types of use that were expected at the time of earlier General Plans.

Silver Spring Central Business District.



CHANGES FROM THE 1969 GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

The decision to include a separate Economic Activity Goal reflects the change in the character and extent of economic activity in Montgomery County since the 1960s. During this time, the number of jobs in the County has more than doubled. The federal government now employs a smaller proportion of the resident labor force, and although many of the emerging businesses work with or under contract to the federal government, the County's economy is more diversified. In addition, the County now imports as many workers as it exports each day.

The amount of land used for employment has grown more rapidly than expected by the 1969 General Plan. Employment land use has also been more intensive than envisioned and oriented toward office and service uses rather than the anticipated industrial and manufacturing uses. Retailing has followed residential growth. In addition, women have entered the work force in record numbers. The increased number of dual income families affects the way the County does business by increasing demands for day care, compatible transportation options, and increased weekend and evening business, shopping, and cultural opportunities.

The amount of non-residential land and its density have land use and planning implications for the County. The 1964 and 1969 Plans recognized the importance of economic activity and employment in their narrative discussions and as Land Use objectives, but did not devote a separate goal to them. These Plans expected the County to become more self-sufficient economically, but were primarily oriented toward the issues common to bedroom suburbs, such as housing and commuting.

INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER GOALS

Land Use

The Land Use Goal addresses the appropriate locations for employment activities and other economic activity. Its objective on public facilities directs the focus of government spending on infrastructure, which also influences the placement of employment uses. Because it strongly affects the geographic location of economic activity, the Land Use Goal both supports and constrains the Economic Activity Goal.

Housing

Housing provides the work force for employment and the consumers to buy goods and services. The two goals are so intimately related that the Economic Activity Goal includes the objective "provide opportunities for the current and future work force of Montgomery County to live in Montgomery County." Residential uses may create constraints to economic activity, however. The relationship requires careful attention to compatibility issues which must be addressed through the master plan and development review processes.

Transportation

Like housing, transportation is basic to economic activity. It is the means of getting workers to jobs, and goods and services to their markets. A primary focus of this General Plan Refinement is to generally encourage the location of economic activity near transportation centers to facilitate orderly and efficient conduct of business. Individual master plans may recommend that certain areas with high levels of transportation access are inappropriate for economic activity due to community impact, environmental impact, or other considerations.

Environment

The Environment Goal offers a number of potential conflicts with the Economic Activity Goal. Its objectives may be constraints to business locations and densities, particularly if a business works with hazardous material, produces emissions which might get into the air or water, or is noisy. Parking lots raise special environmental concerns because of the amount of impervious surface and the composition of the stormwater runoff. The General Plan Refinement calls on development to mitigate potential negative impacts in order to balance the human need for places to live, work, and play with the need to protect the environment. Any conflicts must be resolved by master plans and the development review process.

Community Identity and Design

Economic activity contributes to Community Identity and Design, both as part of the fabric of communities and as a source of revenue for streetscape and other amenities. Ensuring compatibility and connections between employment uses and other uses that define communities is particularly important.

Regionalism

In many ways, Economic Activity is a regional issue. As part of a larger, regional community, the County's own expenditures and the businesses it attracts often cannot be reasonably considered in isolation from those of its neighbors. Montgomery County enjoys both the benefits of its location in a major economic region and the competition from other jurisdictions in the region. The Regionalism Goal addresses the kinds of coordination needed to facilitate the necessary communication between jurisdictions.

Compliance with Maryland Planning Act of 1992

The Economic Activity Goal responds to four of the Maryland Planning Act's visions. Strategies 2B and 2C,

regarding the revitalization and maintenance of existing businesses and fostering the agricultural industry, relate to concentrating development in suitable areas (Vision 1) and directing growth to existing population centers in rural areas (Vision 3). Encouraging economic growth (Vision 6), and methods to provide funding mechanisms to support other Planning Act visions (Vision 7) are also echoed throughout the Economic Activity section, particularly in the strategies of Objective 5. Strategy 6A addresses the Act's requirement to encourage streamlining, innovation, and flexibility.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

Promote a healthy economy, including a broad range of business, service, and employment opportunities at appropriate locations.

OBJECTIVE 1

Encourage new and existing businesses that complement the County's strengths and serve the County's needs.

Strategies

- A. Promote Montgomery County as a "world class" center for research, development, and technology, as part of a strategic economic development program that complements the Wedges and Corridor concept.
- B. Ensure that land use decisions support the County's economic development objectives of retaining and attracting headquarters, knowledge-based industry, biotechnology research, institutions, and federal research and regulatory agencies.
- C. Provide flexibility in land use and other policy decisions to accommodate entrepreneurship, incubator businesses, and developing technologies.

- D. Develop land use and other policies that encourage and protect small businesses, minority businesses, and special population businesses.
- E. Develop land use and other policies that support and expand land use opportunities for professional and technical education in the County.
- F. Develop programs to ensure that an adequate supply of housing for workers, with the skills needed by employers, will be available in future years.
- G. Recognize that non-profit organizations may provide an appropriate means of achieving this objective.

OBJECTIVE 2

Retain and enhance existing businesses consistent with master plans.

Strategies

- A. Provide opportunities for the growth of existing businesses and federal agencies.
- B. Facilitate revitalization and maintenance in business areas.
- C. Foster the agricultural industry, particularly activities in the Agricultural Wedge.

OBJECTIVE 3

Provide opportunities for the current and future work force of Montgomery County to live in Montgomery County.

Strategies

- A. Ensure adequate housing opportunities and choices for employees in the County at all income levels.
- B. Encourage mixed-use development, including employment and residential uses.
- C. Encourage public/private partnerships to create opportunities to live and work in the same community.
- D. Provide appropriately zoned land to accommodate a diversified array of employment activities which will

provide work opportunities for people with a variety of educational backgrounds.

- E. Encourage business support for employee housing.

OBJECTIVE 4

Provide zoned land for a variety of types and intensities of employment activities at appropriate locations.

Strategies

- A. Concentrate employment activities where there is adequate infrastructure, with an emphasis on sufficient public transportation.
- B. Designate and encourage an adequate and conveniently located supply of land for local retail and services in proximity to businesses and residences.
- C. Create and enhance appropriate connections between employment activities and residential communities.
- D. Plan for the locational needs of a wide range of businesses, including start-up and recycling-based businesses.
- E. Provide access to employment areas in such a manner as to avoid introducing large volumes of traffic onto local residential streets.
- F. Discourage development which would preempt master planned intensification, and prohibit development which would conflict with other master plan recommendations.
- G. Provide zoning for a limited number of sites for appropriate manufacturing and industrial activities in suitable locations that support the County's other well-established knowledge-based industries.

OBJECTIVE 5

Foster a stable and competitive business climate through appropriate land use decisions.

Strategies

- A. Provide public and foster private investments to ensure timely, appropriately located, and orderly economic development.
- B. Coordinate land use decisions with the County's management of resources to facilitate economic vitality and quality of life.

Shady Grove Office and Retail.

OBJECTIVE 6

Concentrate the highest density employment in the Urban Ring and I-270 Corridor, especially in suitable transit station locales.

Strategies

- A. Continue to assess the development review process to determine ways to streamline the process and to encourage economic growth within the Urban Ring and I-270 Corridor.
- B. Designate the highest density and the most flexible zoning in transit station locales to attract development.
- C. Promote the advantages of higher density locations to existing and future employers considering locations in Montgomery County.

