

DEFINITION OF THE GENERAL PLAN

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The General Plan is a comprehensive framework for guiding physical development and managing limited resources in Montgomery County, Maryland. It is a policy document whose concepts are general in nature. As the County's longest-range and most visionary document, it provides a broad image of how the County will evolve in the future and establishes a frame of reference for decisions to make that vision become a reality.

To blaze a reasonable path into the future, the General Plan must:

- identify the general location, function, intensity, and pattern of various land uses;
- provide direction for integrating future development and redevelopment with existing development;
- address the relationship between human activity and the built and natural environments;
- address the varying needs and desires of a diverse and changing County population and economic community; and
- promote connections among all areas of the County and between the County and the region.

The General Plan is an evolving and dynamic document that provides the basis for more specific area master plans, functional plans, and sector plans. Each master plan, sector plan, and functional plan, after approval by the County Council and adoption by The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, constitutes an amendment to the General Plan.

The General Plan is specific enough to provide clear guid-

DEFINITION

ance for realizing its vision, while retaining enough flexibility to respond to unforeseeable circumstances as they arise. To achieve this, the General Plan Refinement presents broad brush concepts.

Although the General Plan Refinement provides general guidance for land use and public investment in Montgomery County, it does not recommend detailed zoning patterns for the County, nor does it provide development guidelines for specific parcels of land. The Refinement loosely describes the character and location of four geographic components and a regional transportation network. It does not delve deeply into County governance beyond the purview of land use planning. Social services, education, and other such issues are not addressed. In addition, the Refinement does not suggest specific floor-to-area ratios, development caps, road alignments, or specific locations or timetables for the provision of public facilities.

Flexibility in implementation, not rigidity, will allow the General Plan Refinement to guide development into a future that is not fully known.

The General Plan Refinement seeks a harmonious balance of land uses. One principal element of that balance is the relationship between housing and job opportunities. A reasonable mix of housing and jobs encourages shorter commuting distances, allows the residential and commercial sectors to share the local tax burden, and moderates pressures on housing costs. An oversupply of jobs or housing may lead to traffic congestion, inequitable distribution of the tax burden, and high housing prices.

As buildout approaches, the ratio of jobs and housing is increasingly difficult to change. Because it will take a longer time to build out the employment zoning capacity than housing capacity, maintaining a balance over time will be a significant challenge. Changes in the composition of the workforce and workplace locations will influence the balance as well. In order to achieve a desirable balance, a key County-wide objective for this Refinement is that all employees in Montgomery County should have the opportunity to live in the County.

When the number of jobs for each housing unit equals the number of workers living in the typical household, this

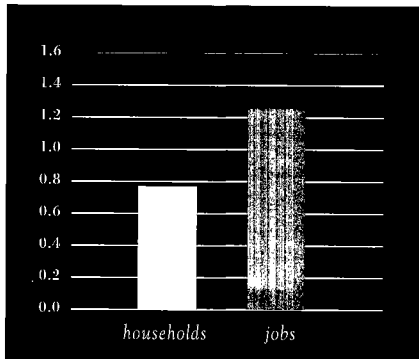
balance is theoretically achieved. In 1990, Montgomery County's jobs and resident workers were almost perfectly balanced. The ratio of jobs to existing housing was 1.54 jobs for every housing unit as compared to a ratio of workers per household of 1.55.

In view of the dynamic and complex nature of the relationship between jobs and housing, the balance which this Refinement seeks is not quantified. Instead, this Refinement prefers to set a policy goal to achieve an appropriate balance of jobs and housing on a County-wide basis and fine tune the details through master, sector, and functional plans as well as other County plans and programs.

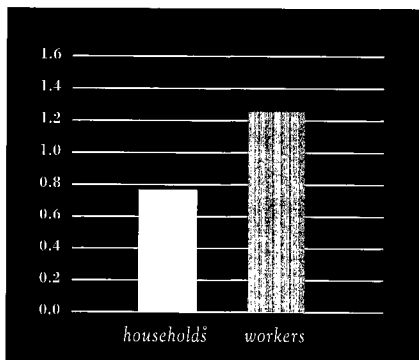
The County monitors the relationship among land uses on an on-going basis. Each major master and sector plan review examines the contributions of the area to balancing employment and housing on a County-wide basis and meeting the County's goal of offering an adequate supply of housing for employees in the County. Based on this analysis, the plan's land use and zoning may be adjusted as appropriate, in the context of the unique features and needs of the individual planning area. For example, plans adopted since January 1993, Silver Spring Central Business District (CBD) and North Bethesda, have reduced potential employment areas and increased potential housing areas in response to current conditions. The Annual Growth Policy also monitors and directs growth as it allocates public facilities' capacity for new jobs and housing on a yearly basis. In addition, amendments to the Zoning Ordinance have provided an opportunity for a mix of housing and jobs on the same site. Other Zoning Ordinance amendments have reduced the development densities permitted in industrial zones.

While the County's jobs and housing are reasonably balanced now, the concern is for the future. If Montgomery County were to build all of the employment capacity (jobs) permitted under current zoning, the County's ability to provide facilities, especially roads and housing, would be overloaded, and the opportunities for Montgomery County workers to live in the County would be far more limited. Fortunately, this may never occur. Reaching

FIGURE 2 Balance of Jobs and Housing in Montgomery County



1.54 jobs per household



1.55 workers per household

the County's zoning ceiling would require the redevelopment of all existing properties to their maximum, plus maximum development of all vacant land despite site constraints. Estimating the potential buildout of housing units has similar problems.

Numerous social changes and policy decisions affect the jobs-to-housing ratio. This means that the jobs-to-housing ratio is constantly changing. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the master and sector plans and other plans and policies to respond to such social and development trends in a timely manner and to monitor the ratio of employment and housing on a master plan level as well as on a County-wide basis.

CONTEXT OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan is implemented through many governmental regulations, guidelines, zoning text amendments, budget decisions, and other legislative endeavors. Montgomery County now has many development guidelines which help the County realize the type of development it desires. For example, the County now prohibits development in the 100-year floodplain and requires stormwater management controls. The County also uses "Local Area Transportation Review Guidelines" at the time of subdivision to better match the timing of development with future traffic improvements. During the 1970s and 1980s, many new zones were added to the Zoning Ordinance, limiting development in rural areas, allowing mixed use high density development in transit station locations, and increasing the number of residential zones to expand housing choices.

The General Plan provides the comprehensive policy framework for land use, growth management, and resource management in Montgomery County. The General Plan presides over a hierarchy of increasingly specific plans and policies, leading to decisions on the use and intensity of use on individual parcels of land, the staging of development, and the capital expenditures to support and respond to growth in the County. As one descends through this hierarchy, each level is more and more specific, usually in the context of a smaller geographic area and a shorter time frame.

Adopted master plans, sector plans, and functional plans are a principal means of implementing the General Plan. By definition, these plans have a smaller scope than the General Plan, but they add the detail necessary to resolve particular land use issues within their domain. Although these plans are adopted as amendments to the General Plan, they are expected to conform to the General Plan. Deviations will be infrequent and minor in nature. When a master plan or sector plan diverges from the General Plan, the change and its rationale will be highlighted by the Planning Board and approved by the County Council.

All of the goals and objectives within the General Plan

Refinement are important to the vision for Montgomery County. Every effort will be taken to simultaneously address every goal. There may be occasions, however, where this cannot occur and compromises between conflicting goals and objectives must be achieved. The resolution of such conflicts is left to master plans, sector plans, and functional plans so that the issues can be addressed in the appropriate detail unique to each community. It is only in the master plan context, where decisions about individual parcels of land are made, that any reasonable compromises can be made.

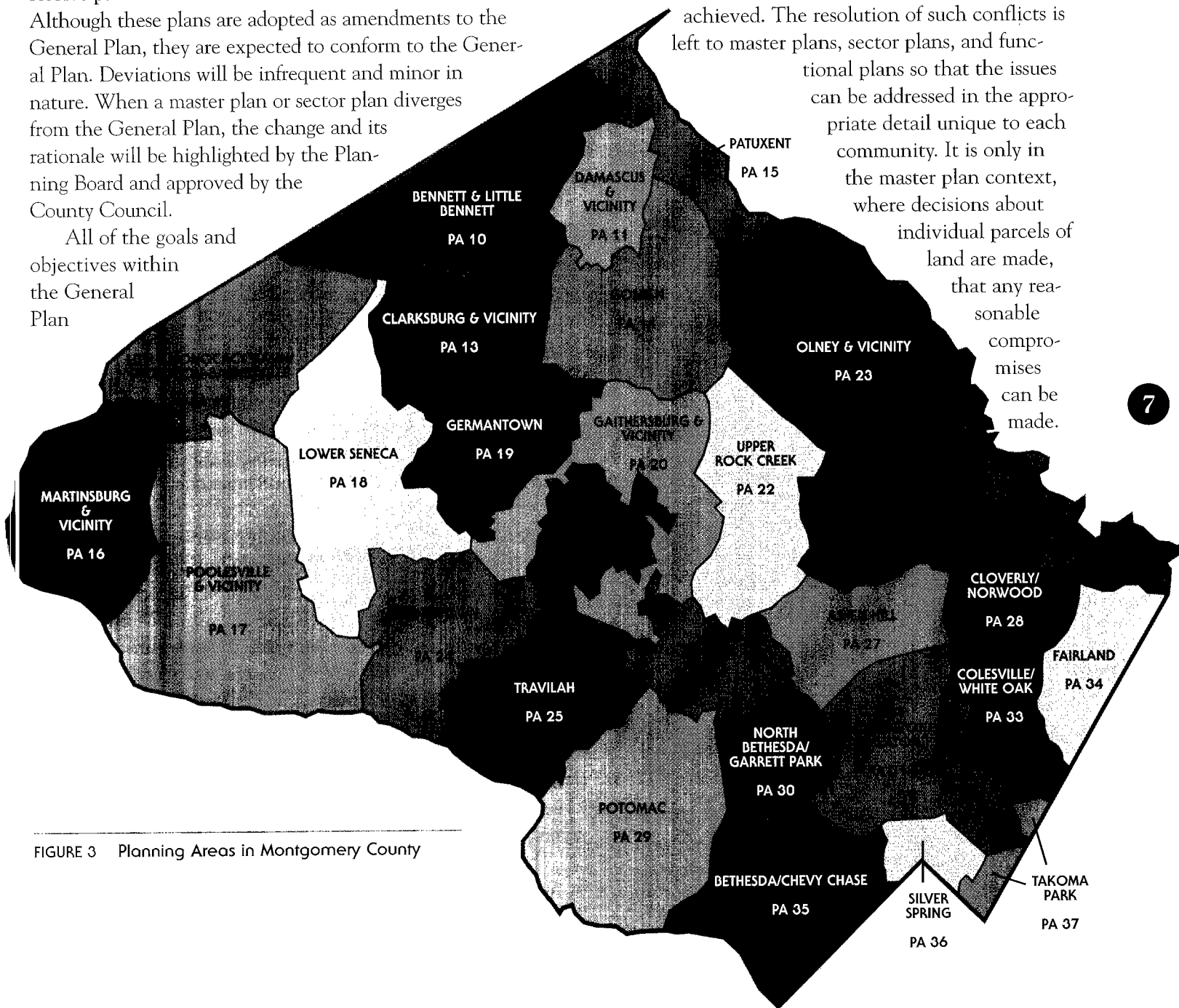
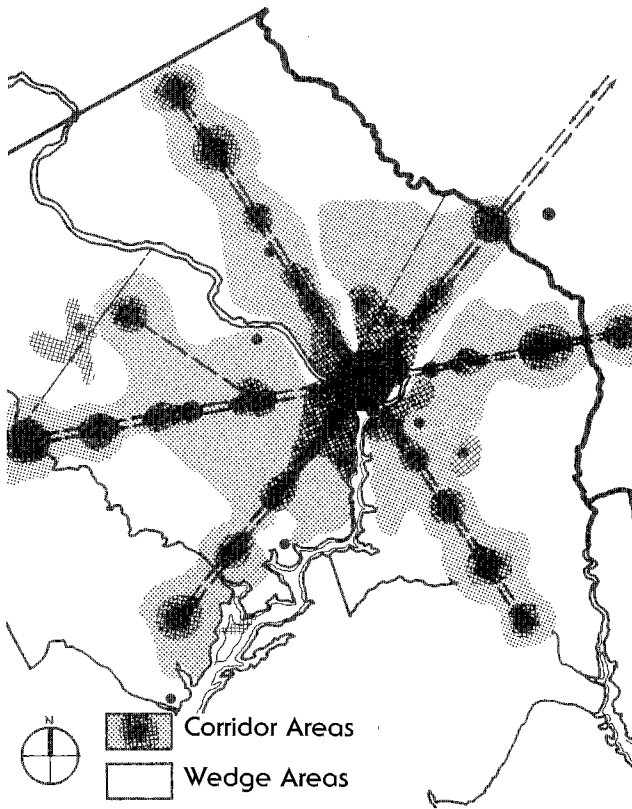


FIGURE 3 Planning Areas in Montgomery County

FIGURE 4 Year 2000 Wedges and Corridors Regional Concept



In order to ensure that each master plan and sector plan becomes a tool for advancing the vision of the General Plan, each plan must briefly demonstrate: 1) its conformance with the overall land use patterns and concepts presented in the General Plan Refinement, highlighting any changes, 2) a rationale for its chosen priorities when conflicting goals are evident, and 3) its conformance to the seven visions of the Maryland Economic Development, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992.

"...ON WEDGES AND CORRIDORS"

Both the 1964 General Plan and the 1969 General Plan Update (approved in 1970) have guided the land use pattern and the transportation system in Montgomery County for more than two decades. The 1964 Plan, "...On Wedges and Corridors", was developed as a bi-County General Plan for Montgomery County and Prince George's County. Its name comes from the regional land use pattern it recommends. The Wedges and Corridors concept has shaped the County by channeling growth into the development corridors and an Urban Ring around Washington, D.C. At the same time, Wedges of open space, farmland, and lower density residential uses have been preserved.

Conceived in 1961, the Wedges and Corridors concept was first proposed for the entire National Capital Region by the Policies Plan for the Year 2000 (Figure 5, page 8). Montgomery County and Prince George's County are the only jurisdictions in the area that officially adopted the Wedges and Corridors concept to guide their development. The concept was originally based on six Corridors of urban development. The Corridors radiated out from Washington, D.C. like spokes of a wheel and were to be separated by the Wedges. The I-270 Corridor is located in Montgomery County. The I-95 Corridor is located immediately to the east of Montgomery County.

The I-270 Corridor consists of a series of Corridor Cities, including Rockville, Gaithersburg, and Germantown, that are linked with one another and with Washington, D. C. Another proposed Corridor City, Clarksburg, was scaled down in size by the 1968 Clarksburg Master Plan. This change is reflected in the 1969 General Plan Update. In addition, the 1964 General

Plan proposed Corridor Cities for the I-95 Corridor, including Laurel and a new city east of Fairland. The 1981 Eastern Montgomery County Master Plan removed the plan for a Corridor City in Fairland.

The Corridor cities were to have intensively developed downtowns located about four miles apart with high-rise buildings containing housing, offices, and a host of shopping and cultural amenities. A ring of residential communities consisting of a variety of housing types and local shopping, recreational, and educational facilities were to surround the downtown. Each of the Corridor Cities was planned to support a population of up to 100,000 people.

In 1970, the County Council reaffirmed the Wedges and Corridors concept and updated the General Plan by approving the 1969 updated General Plan. This Plan, which also supplements the 1964 goals and objectives, is commonly referred to as the 1969 General Plan Update. To accommodate a predicted doubling of the County's population within two decades, the 1969 Update proposed three key recommendations:

- increase the stock of affordable and clustered housing;
- protect farmland and rural open space, and expand parkland in the Wedge; and
- balance development with the provision of public infrastructure.

During the past two decades, Montgomery County has responded to those recommendations. The Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit Program was designed to provide home ownership and rental opportunities to families with moderate incomes. It increased housing affordability by giving density bonuses and design flexibility to developers. A preferential agricultural zone, in conjunction with a transferable development rights system, was developed and implemented in concert with a comprehensive farmland preservation program to protect some 91,000 acres of farmland. The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance and the Annual Growth Policy were conceived to coordinate the timing of development with the

provision of public infrastructure. The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance provides the legal foundation to postpone subdivision approval if existing and planned public facilities would be overburdened by the proposed development. It also provides an indication of need for further public investment in infrastructure.

“Wedges and Corridors” is a shorthand means of describing an enduring vision that will continue to serve Montgomery County well into the next century. Despite the job growth in the surrounding suburbs, the District of Columbia remains the heart of the region's economy. The Wedges and Corridors concept recognizes that the District of Columbia is the geographic, economic, and cultural center of the region and that the region depends on a healthy core. The “Urban Ring” around that center and the radial “Corridors” leading from it are as important today as they were in 1964. The Urban Ring and I-270 Corridor offer the best pattern for transit serviceability and provide the area in which major compact centers can flourish.

The critical need for commuting between the development corridors within the region does not justify deviations from the Wedges and Corridors pattern. This Refinement acknowledges the need for improvements in east-west travel but not with an intent to create an east-west development corridor(s). If better east-west transportation links are to proceed, they will traverse areas not planned and not intended for intensive development.

The Wedge is as important today as it was 30 years ago. It permits the renewal of our air and water resources and the protection of natural habitats. It is very much the green lung of Montgomery County. In addition, the Wedge provides the opportunity for the agricultural industry to continue. The proximity of the Wedge to the Corridor provides a sanctuary for those who need a change from the concrete and glass of more urban settings. The Wedge provides a low density and rural housing opportunity which adds to the diversity of land use in Montgomery County.