

# COMMUNITY IDENTITY & DESIGN

## SCOPE

Community identity is the collection of attributes that makes a community unique, makes it “home,” and separates it from other places. Physical, social, ethnic, political, geographic, economic, symbolic, and other characteristics contribute to perceptions about communities. Communities occur at many levels. They range from a few neighboring houses, to the County as a whole, and in some instances, to the entire region. They are realized by attitudes and actions which bond people together. Individual citizens can play a key role in establishing a community’s identity. Although the role of government in creating community is limited, Montgomery County can establish the framework on which communities can evolve. This goal is one which guides the County’s physical development so that it is conducive to the nurturing of community pride, social interaction, and identity.

## KEY CONCEPTS

The Community Identity and Design Goal directly supports the Wedges and Corridors concept as well as individual local area master plans. The key effect of the General Plan Refinement on community identity and design is to encourage attractive development that provides opportunities for social interaction. The creation or maintenance of centers and the preservation of historic and cultural resources expand these opportunities. One of the challenges is to create or enhance the identity of areas that are already developed. Another is to ensure that public safety is addressed. The Community Identity and Design Goal applies to existing and developing areas.

# IDENTITY

## CHANGES FROM THE 1969 GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

Community Identity and Design was not an explicit goal in the 1964 and 1969 General Plans, although both concepts were implicit throughout the Plans. The 1969 General Plan Update stated “each community should have an identity, which can be created by imaginative design.” Many of the Refinement’s objectives update concepts from the 1969 General Plan Update. Two objectives were added that deal with the need to recognize, reinforce, or create each community’s unique character and identity, and to ensure that centers are attractive, functional, visible, and highly accessible to their communities.

A number of strategies introduce new concepts to the General Plan Refinement. These include the appropriate preservation of cultural landmarks and the use of local place names for public places and buildings, such as the post offices and schools, to reinforce community awareness. The library system already uses this place name strategy.

## INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER GOALS

### Land Use

Community identity is recognized by the Land Use Goal

through the variety of community types found and planned in the County. In addition, the Land Use Goal encourages the compact concentration of residential and employment areas and recommends that development be channeled to under-utilized land in existing developed areas. In particular, areas around transit stations are identified for increased growth. The concentration of density in centers can create an active focal point for communities.

In addition, the Land Use Goal reinforces past practices of using the park system as a community amenity as well as a major element in the organization of new communities. Parks promote and focus some public activities that are elements of community identity.

### Housing

Social interaction is encouraged by the Housing Goal through the integration of residential and employment areas, and the provision of conveniently located community facilities. The design and location of housing benefits from the use of community design principles. In addition, the Housing Goal recommends that indoor and outdoor recreation/community facilities should be included in new and established residential communities to promote social interaction and community identity.

### Economic Activity

The provision of public and private services and facilities can improve a community’s appearance and identity and is

Strathmore Hall Community Arts Center.



Great Falls Tavern.



related to the economic health of the County. In addition, the general health of the economy can positively or negatively affect the perception of communities. Economic activity also has the potential to provide or help finance amenities which create community identity and spirit.

## Transportation

A positive community identity requires interaction among its members. The Transportation Goal addresses the need for interconnection by a variety of modes of travel. The design and location of transportation facilities can improve or detract from a community's appearance as well as physically draw together, connect, divide, or isolate a community. The Transportation Goal emphasizes that increased pedestrian accessibility is an important element in the development of functioning centers and that excessive through traffic can split communities and limit community interaction.

## Environment

Another way to improve community identity is through sensitivity to the environment during the development process and in the daily lives of residents and workers. This can result in more attractive surroundings in which the community takes greater pride. The concept of stewardship, in which people act responsibly towards protecting or improving the environment, can be a beneficial element in a community's identity. Respect for the natural environment and the protection of environmental landmarks aid in establishing a unique character in developing areas.

## Regionalism

A positive regional image brought about by regional cooperation can enhance local community identity.

Provide for land use patterns and land uses that offer ample opportunities for social interaction and promote a strong sense of community through public and private cooperation.

# GOALS, OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

## OBJECTIVE 1

**Recognize, reinforce, or create each community's unique character and identity.**

### Strategies

- A. Reinforce each community's natural and man-made qualities and features.
- B. Create clearly identifiable community boundaries.
- C. Use an area's geographic or historical place name for consistent identification and community identity.
- D. Ensure that infill development is compatible with the positive character and development and redevelopment patterns of the neighborhood.
- E. Design and locate public spaces and buildings to reinforce and express the community's unique character.
- F. Enhance or create focal points, views, vistas, and other landmarks.
- G. Require attractive transportation system elements and surroundings to reinforce community identity.
- H. Improve pedestrian and bike routes by streetscape enhancement and road design guidelines.
- I. Provide extensive and attractive pedestrian walkways and gathering places that facilitate access to stores, schools, and other destinations.
- J. Require transportation system elements to instill a sense of location, orientation, and destination at an appropriate scale for their functions.
- K. Implement programs for removing unattractive elements such as illegal signs, graffiti, litter, utility poles, and billboards.

## OBJECTIVE 2

**Ensure that centers are attractive, functional, visible, safe, and highly accessible to their communities.**

### Strategies

- A. Create or enhance community gathering points at convenient locations.

- B. Provide centers to reflect each community's unique character.
- C. Design transit facilities that are attractive and functional to create or enhance centers.
- D. Require compatible arrangements of buildings, activities, and open space to provide pleasant, attractive, and safe gathering places.
- E. Provide adequate locations for a variety of community activities.
- F. Encourage appropriate signage to identify communities.

### OBJECTIVE 3

**Identify and preserve significant historic, scenic, and cultural features and promote art in public areas.**

#### Strategies

- A. Evaluate historic resources for inclusion in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation.
- B. Preserve appropriate sites with their environmental settings and districts that are:
  - representative of a period or style,
  - architecturally important,
  - locations of important events or activities,
  - associated with important persons,
  - archaeological sites,
  - cultural landmarks, or
  - of historic or cultural value.
- C. Protect historic sites permanently.
- D. Encourage the preservation, restoration, and use of historic sites and community landmarks to foster community identity.
- E. Use financial incentives to minimize the impacts of maintaining and restoring historic properties.
- F. Promote art and cultural opportunities at appropriate public and private locations.
- G. Encourage compatible development that highlights and enhances historic resources in development or redevelopment near historic resources and in and around historic districts.

### OBJECTIVE 4

**Strive for government facilities with service boundaries that foster a sense of community.**

#### Strategies

- A. Locate and co-locate, where feasible, community-based facilities in identifiable centers of communities.
- B. Provide services that meet the changing needs of the communities they serve.
- C. Encourage the U.S. Postal Service to use local place names for post office addresses.
- D. Encourage public agencies (including schools) to consider local place names for public facilities.
- E. Explore whether some school sites could be planned to accommodate facilities necessary for other community programs, including but not limited to community center facilities, park/school combinations, and daycare.

### OBJECTIVE 5

**Create and maintain attractive, functional, and safe communities utilizing innovative approaches and regulatory processes.**

#### Strategies

- A. Utilize master plans and studies to establish the framework for communities.
- B. Provide design guidance for existing and planned communities that promotes opportunities for social interaction while recognizing the need for private space.
- C. Utilize zoning, subdivision, and other regulations to foster interaction, community cohesiveness, and community identity.
- D. Ensure compatible design for special exception uses.
- E. Encourage an appropriate mix of land uses to make neighborhoods more self-sufficient.
- F. Use various organizational structures, such as development districts, to provide facilities and services for designated areas.
- G. Provide design guidance for existing and planned communities that promotes safety.