

IMPETUS FOR THE GENERAL PLAN REFINEMENT

It has been more than two decades since the last overall look at the General Plan. In addition to the passage of time, the need to refine the General Plan's goals and objectives was precipitated by several major events:

- two citizen committees recommended that the General Plan be refined;
- two long-range planning studies recommended that the General Plan be refined; and
- Montgomery County experienced significant change.



CITIZEN COMMITTEES

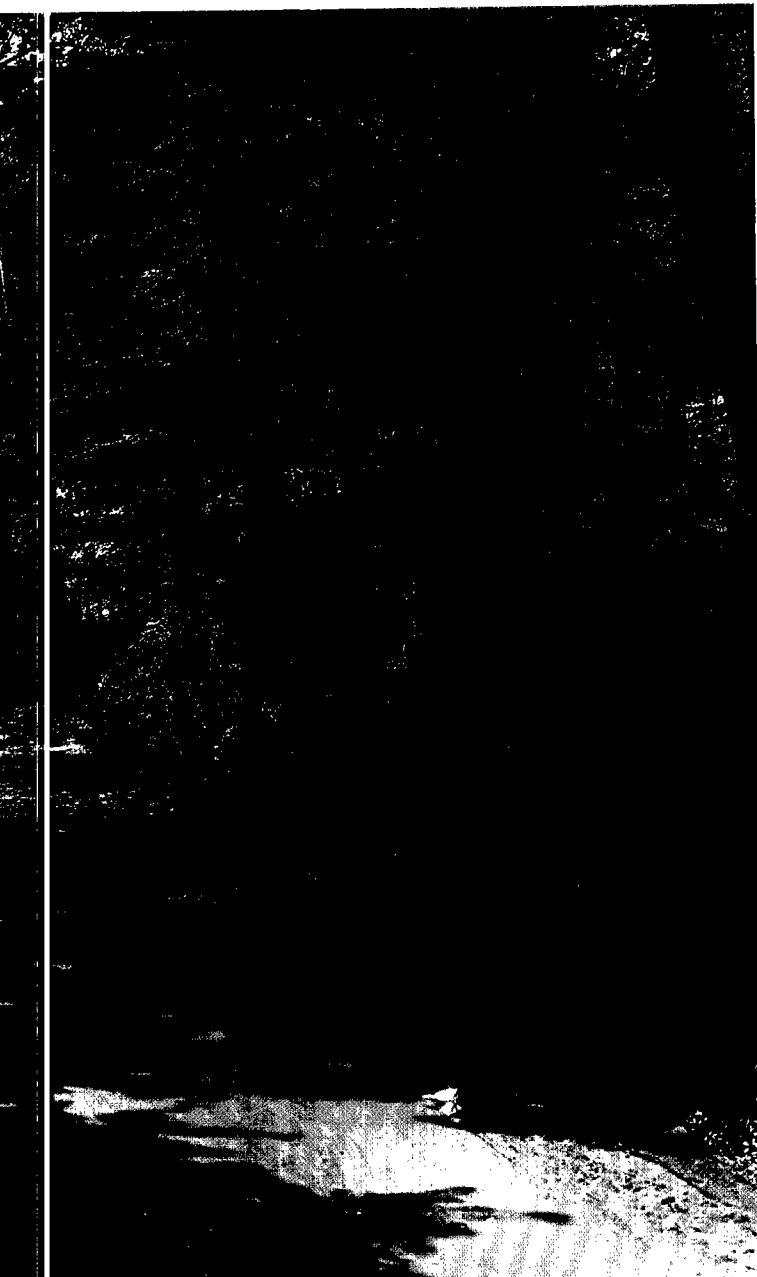
Two citizen committees, assembled to address long-range planning issues, called for a refinement of the General Plan. In its 1988 report, *Envisioning Our Future*, the 15-member Commission on the Future suggested that “what is still valid and good in the General Plan should be reaffirmed and what needs to be modified or changed should be changed.” Three years later, the 15-member Growth Management Advisory Work Group recommended that

Montgomery County “investigate the need to refine the General Plan or modify its goals and objectives.”

PLANNING STUDIES

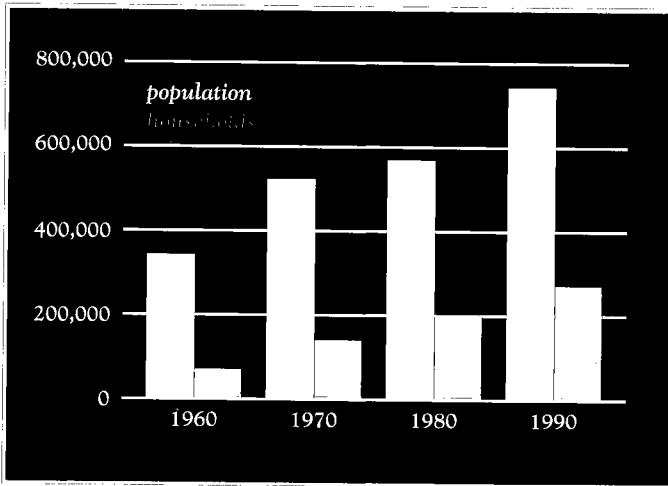
Two planning studies, the General Plan Assessment Study and the Comprehensive Growth Policy Study (CGPS), also paved the way for this General Plan Refinement. In 1988, the General Plan Assessment Study reaffirmed the Wedges and Corridors concept as the preferred development pattern for Montgomery County “since it still appears to provide a better solution to increasing critical transportation and environmental issues than a more sprawling development pattern.” According to the study, “the County’s development has been surprisingly faithful to the Plan’s basic principles.” The study also suggested further work on the imbalance between potential growth based on the zoning envelope and the ability of planned infrastructure to serve it.

The 1989 CGPS was a Planning Department technical study of current trends that affect growth and was intended to provide a background frame of reference for use, as appropriate, in future decision making. It offered a County-wide perspective which could be used by individual master and sector plans. The CGPS confirmed the validity of the General Plan’s principles, but found that traffic congestion would be excessive unless commuters in Montgomery County become less dependent on the single-occupant automobile. The study considered strategies to reduce car use, such as clustering households and jobs near transit and improving mass transportation alternatives, including trolley lines and high-occupancy-vehicle lanes.



SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

FIGURE 5 Population and Household Growth



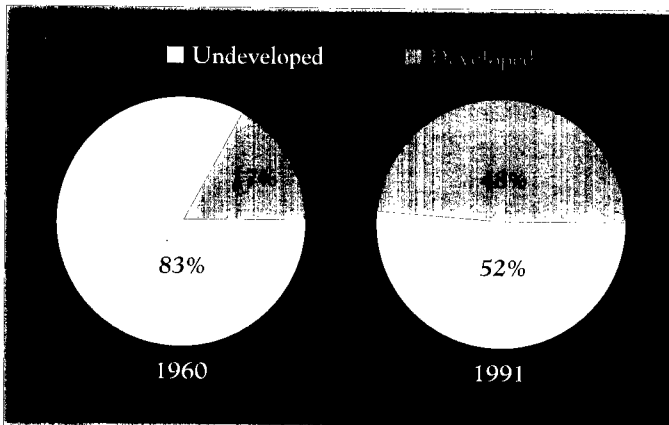
The calls for a refinement to the General Plan by the two planning studies and two citizen committees were, in part, a response to the significant changes that have taken place in Montgomery County since the completion of the 1969 General Plan Update. The magnitude of these changes is highlighted below. Most mirror demographic trends throughout the United States. However, Montgomery County's growth in population and the number of households were more rapid than the nation's. In addition, the County's increase in foreign born population was comparatively very large.

Land Use

Between 1960 and 1991, the amount of developed land more than tripled. In 1960, about 49,000 acres, or 15 percent of the County's total land area, were developed, compared with 155,000 acres, or 48 percent, in 1991. Residential uses increased from 7.7 percent to 28.9 percent of the County's land area, while office, commercial, retail, and industrial uses increased from 0.6 percent to 2.6 percent of the total land area. Land classified as vacant, forest, or agricultural declined to 51.6 percent of total land area.

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FIGURE 6 Amount of Developed Land has Tripled



Population

Montgomery County is now the most populous jurisdiction in Maryland, with 757,000 people in 1990. In 1970, the County ranked fourth with 522,800 people. More than one-quarter of the state's population increase since 1970 occurred here.

Montgomery County residents are older. In 1970, the median age was 27.9 years; in 1990, it was 33.9. Today, more than 10 percent of County residents are 65 years of age or older, compared to 6 percent in 1970.

Montgomery County residents are more diverse. Racial minorities made up almost a quarter of the County's 1990 population; in 1970 they were only 5 percent. In addition, the County's foreign born population also grew, from 7.5 percent of the total population in 1970 to almost 18.6 percent in 1990, significantly more than the nationwide increase from almost 5 percent to 8 percent.

Households

The number of households grew almost twice as fast as the population. From 1970 to 1990, the number of households increased 80 percent, while Montgomery County's population grew by only 45 percent.

Montgomery County households are smaller. The average household size dropped from 3.30 to 2.65 persons per household as the proportion of the population under age 18 declined and the proportion of single-person households increased.

Housing

Montgomery County has some 20 years of zoned capacity for housing remaining. The number of housing units in the County grew by 83 percent between 1970 and 1990, from 161,000 to 296,000. The County has the total estimated capacity to accommodate between 440,000 and 480,000 housing units on its residentially zoned land. Between 144,000 and 184,000 units remain to be built.

The affordability of new housing in the County has declined substantially since the mid-1970s. The median income household probably cannot afford a typical new house today, according to the housing affordability index. Nonetheless, there appears to be a better match between median incomes of County residents and median prices of new homes in Montgomery County than there is in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Statistical Area or the nation.

Employment

Montgomery County is no longer just a bedroom community; the County has become an employment center in its own right. Between 1970 and 1989, the number of jobs in Montgomery County more than doubled to 488,000 jobs. One out of every 5.5 jobs in the state is located here.

There has been greater growth in employment in Montgomery County than anticipated in the 1969 General Plan Update. The 1969 Update's "most probable" forecast for 1990 employment was 334,000 jobs, 32 percent less than the actual 1989 total of 488,000 jobs.

Montgomery County has some 45 years of zoned capacity for jobs. The number of jobs in the County grew by 150 percent between 1970 and 1990, from 182,000 to 455,000. As of January 1993, the County had a total estimated capacity to accommodate between 1 million and 1.2 million jobs. Recent revisions to master and sector plans and changes to the Zoning Ordinance have reduced this range of job capacity.

Women are a large component of Montgomery County's work force. Between 1970 and 1987, the female labor force participation rate rose from 44.8 percent to an estimated 65.6 percent.

Transportation

Montgomery County residents own more motor vehicles. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of cars and motorcycles residents own almost doubled to 489,000, while the population increased 45 percent.

There has been significant growth in commuting by transit since 1969. However, single-occupant vehicles remain the predominant means of commuting. Between 1968 and 1987, the share of Montgomery County resident workers who commuted by transit almost doubled to 12 percent. During the same period, the percentage of workers driving alone increased from 72 percent to 75 percent.

Environment

Landmark federal environmental legislation has had a major impact on land use decisions. Important new laws include the 1970 Clean Air Act (amended in 1990), the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act, the 1973 Clean Water Act (amended in 1977), and the 1973 Endangered Species Act.

The Metropolitan Washington Area's air quality is still below the national standard for ozone. The levels of some air pollutants have declined, but for almost every year since 1970, regional levels of ozone and carbon monoxide have exceeded federal air quality standards set by the Clean Air Act.