

The General Plan Refinement community participation and public education efforts were designed to provide opportunities for meaningful dialogue with interested citizens throughout Montgomery County. These efforts were intended to be as far reaching as possible to involve those familiar with the planning process and those who were not.

Beginning with a day-long symposium entitled, "The General Plan—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," the stage was set for a year of outreach activities intended to involve citizens in the Refinement process and to educate citizens to increase their knowledge of the General Plan and planning in Montgomery County. In October 1991, approximately 250 people, including many of the original authors and subsequent implementers of the General Plan, gathered to establish an understanding of the "Wedges and Corridors" concept and accompanying goals and objectives.

To spread the word about the General Plan Refinement to the largest number of people, a four-page insert to the County Connection was used. Approximately 85,000 copies of this newspaper were distributed explaining the process and how to participate, highlighting the goals and objectives of the 1969 General Plan Update, and describing how the County has changed in the past two decades.

Beginning in November 1991, a series of eight community workshops were held at dispersed locations throughout the County. Each workshop focused on a different goal and related objectives of the General Plan Refinement. These workshops provided an opportunity for information exchange between cit-

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izens and Planning Department staff prior to the preparation of the Staff Draft. Comments received were shared with the Planning Board at eight subsequent worksessions on draft language for each goal. A special hotline telephone number was created to provide current information on dates, times, and locations of these meetings.

An important focus of this public participation effort was outreach to citizens who had not traditionally been involved in planning issues but who could be affected by the General Plan Refinement. Two groups that were specifically targeted were minority populations and high school students. Mailings were made to approximately 300 leaders of various minority organizations. Several meetings were held with these leaders to better understand how these sectors of the population could become involved and to hear their ideas on the future of the County. Fliers about the General Plan Refinement were prepared in Spanish for distribution as well.

A major effort was initiated to offer high school students an opportunity to be involved in planning for the future of Montgomery County. Staff visited a dozen different classes at six high schools throughout the County to obtain a cross-section of student views. One high school class presented recommendations to the Planning Board on the General Plan Refinement.

Many outreach methods were used to keep the public informed about the Refinement: posters encouraging participation were distributed to all libraries, government centers, recreation centers, and large grocery stores; notices of all meetings were included in the Planning Board's Agenda, which is mailed to approximately 2,500 people weekly; fliers announcing the workshops and worksessions were distributed at the government centers and regional libraries; press releases were prepared on various aspects of the project; and videos were available to the public on topics relevant to the General Plan. In addition, most of the Planning Board's worksessions were televised on cable TV, as were other special feature broadcasts about the Refinement.

Upon conclusion of the eight community workshops and Planning Board worksessions, Planning Department staff developed a Staff Draft of the General Plan Refinement Goals and Objectives in July 1992. This Draft was then reviewed and edited by the Planning Board and presented to the public for comments as the Public Hearing (Preliminary) Draft in August 1992. A public hearing and two Planning Board worksessions were held on the General Plan Refinement during the fall of 1992. The oral and written testimonies of more than 45 citizens, civic associations, business organizations, County groups, and public officials were considered by the Planning Board, which completed its work on the Final Draft in January 1993.

The results of these efforts are contained in two documents: the Final Draft Refinement and a Supplement. The Final Draft Refinement incorporates suggested changes presented in public testimony on the Public Hearing (Preliminary) Draft and also includes new sections that highlight the Plan's compliance with the Maryland Economic Development, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992, in addition to other Planning Board revisions. The Supplement provides important background information on the development of the General Plan Refinement. The Supplement includes a fact sheet for each of the seven General Plan Refinement goals and a fact sheet that focuses on general changes in Montgomery County since the 1969 General Plan Update. Together, these fact sheets examine changes and trends to the physical, social, and economic development of Montgomery County during the past two decades. Graphs, maps, charts, and text are used to highlight this information.