

THE GENERAL PLAN 21 YEARS LATER FACT SHEET

WHAT IS ... ON WEDGES AND CORRIDORS?

Both the 1964 General Plan and the 1969 Updated General Plan have guided the general land use pattern and the transportation network in Montgomery County for more than two decades. The Plan's name, "... On Wedges and Corridors," comes from the land use pattern it recommends. The General Plan has shaped Montgomery County by channeling growth into transportation corridors and an urban and suburban ring around Washington, D.C. At the same time, it preserves wedges of green open space, farmland, and lower density residential uses.

Conceived in 1961, wedges and corridors was the growth pattern first proposed for the entire national capital area by the "Policies Plan for the Year 2000," a plan prepared by the National Capital Planning Commission and the National Capital Regional Planning Council (a forerunner of the Council of Governments). Montgomery County is the only jurisdiction in the Washington region that officially adopted the wedges and corridors concept to guide its development. The concept was originally based on six corridors of urban development, one of which is in Montgomery County, the I-270 Corridor. Another, the I-95 Corridor, straddles the Montgomery County-Prince George's County line. The corridors radiate out from the District, the region's employment center, like the spokes of a wheel and were to be separated by the wedges, land reserved for rural open space.

The I-270 corridor consists of several cities, including Rockville, Gaithersburg, and Germantown, linked with one another and with Washington by Metrorail. For the 21st Century, the 1964 plan recommended another corridor city, Clarksburg, along the I-270 Corridor. The later plan downsized the scale of this community to a town. Proposed cities for the I-95 Corridor included a new city, east of Fairland, and Laurel.

Served by transit, the corridor cities were to be located about four miles apart so they could grow large enough to support a real mixed use downtown with high-rise buildings, housing, offices, and a host of shopping and cultural amenities. A ring of residential communities consisting of a variety of housing types with their own local shopping, recreational and educational facilities were to surround the core.

The General Plan envisioned the wedges as green open space with low density housing needed to help shape the corridor cities, to provide recreational opportunities and a rural environment for farming, and to conserve and protect natural resources, such as the public water supply. Generally, stream valley parks and lower density housing have separated the wedges from the corridors.

In 1969, the Montgomery County Council reaffirmed the wedges and corridors concept by approving the updated General Plan and revising the 1964 Plan's goals and objectives.

WHY IS MONTGOMERY COUNTY REFINING THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE GENERAL PLAN?

Although the wedges and corridors concept is sound and has basically been followed, Montgomery County has changed in many ways during the past two decades as discussed earlier. Thus, it is an ideal time to look at the General Plan's goals and objectives as the County prepares for the 21st century. This Refinement is the culmination of 22 years of working with the General Plan, two recent Planning Department studies, a report from a government working group, and a series of citizens committees.

In 1988, three important reports were issued. The first was "Envisioning Our Future," the report of the Montgomery County Commission on the Future. It recommends solutions to current and

anticipated problems affecting the County. The second is the "General Plan Assessment Study" which assesses how well the County would work if the County continued to develop according to the General Plan. The third report by the Working Group to Evaluate the Agricultural and Rural Open Space Preservation Programs reaffirmed the importance of the agricultural and open space lands.

The following year, 1989, saw the release of the four-volume Comprehensive Growth Policy Study (CGPS), also prepared by the Planning Department. A follow-up to the Assessment Study, the CGPS concluded that traffic congestion would be intolerable unless development patterns and people's driving habits change.

Two major findings of the above reports, that the General Plan's basic "wedges and corridors" concept is still valid and that it is time to refine the goals and objectives of the General Plan, were echoed in a 1991 report, "Action Agenda, Recommendations of the Growth Management Advisory Work Group to the Montgomery County Planning Board." The above five reports are summarized below.

Commission on the Future

In 1986 the Montgomery County Council created a 15-member citizens commission to make recommendations concerning the County's future trends and policies in the coming 30-year period. This group, the Commission on the Future, drafted a report, then met with more than 900 citizens at 17 forums to discuss and refine the draft. After 18 months, the Commission on the Future issued a final report, entitled "Envisioning Our Future," in June 1988.

The Commission's purview went well beyond land use issues to include such subjects as education, public services, and cultural activities. One of the Commission's primary concerns, however, was growth, and four of the trends it identified were directly related to the General Plan. These are:

- "The 1960s radial corridor concept as a pattern for development of the national capital region will all but disappear, since Montgomery County, alone among the metropolitan jurisdictions, has organized its development along these lines."
- "At-place employment increases will greatly exceed projections and the assumptions of the General Plan, although housing production has been pretty much as anticipated and population gains significantly below the Plan's assumptions."
- "...in the I-270 and Route 29 corridors the form of the 'corridor cities' and regional activity centers envisioned by the General Plan is being eroded increasingly by market pressures for spreading, low-density (housing and) highway-oriented workplaces."
- "Neither Route 29 nor Georgia Avenue was originally slated to become a development corridor, but both are emerging as such because of ... commercial zoning decisions, and the Wheaton-Glenmont alignment choice for Metro."

The Report also gave credit to the General Plan for "our excellent park system" and for the Agricultural Reserve. It called for slower job growth and increased housing production, particularly near selected Metrorail stations, indicating that this would be more consistent with the Plan. Finally, among its recommendations are that "the General Plan needs to be reassessed...What is still valid and good in the General Plan should be reaffirmed and what needs to be modified or changed should be changed."

General Plan Assessment Study

The Planning Department's 1988 "General Plan Assessment Study" was the first step in refining the 1969 Updated General Plan. It analyzed how well Montgomery County would function if the County continues to develop according to the General Plan, as amended by master plans and

functional plans. The Assessment reaffirmed the wedges and corridors concept "since it still appears to provide a better solution to increasingly critical transportation and environmental issues than a more sprawling development pattern...the County's development has been surprisingly faithful to the Plan's basic principles."

The Study's three main findings are:

- The total amount of development allowed by current zoning in Montgomery County will generate more traffic than the presently-planned transportation system can handle. If the amount of commercial development and jobs allowed by zoning is reduced and transit lines are added, less traffic will be created and congestion levels will be more tolerable.
- The total amount of development allowed by current zoning in Montgomery County will require substantial additional sewer capacity.
- A Comprehensive Growth Policy Study should be undertaken as a next step.

Working Group to Evaluate the Agricultural and Rural Open Space Preservation Programs

The Montgomery County Council appointed the Working Group to Evaluate the Agricultural and Rural Open Space Preservation Programs. The group's 1988 report reaffirmed the agricultural and rural open space programs in Montgomery County and in particular the 1980 Functional Master Plan for the Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space (Agricultural Plan). The 90,000-acre Agricultural Reserve represents one of the most significant tools to implement the General Plan's Wedge concept.

The Report's main findings and recommendations are:

- The rate of farmland conversion to residential use decreased substantially in the Agricultural

Reserve between the adoption of the Agricultural Plan in 1980 and 1988.

- The four preservation programs (private sale of TDR, Maryland Environmental Trust Easements, State Agricultural Easements, and Montgomery County Agricultural Easements) active in the County "contain important aspects that are essential to the preservation of prime farmland and each program area should be continued although some modifications are recommended." These programs have been maintained.
- The County should continue its commitment to the RDT, Rural and Rural Cluster zones. The densities, minimum lot sizes, development standards, and the area covered by the zones were endorsed. These standards have been maintained. Further examination of the zoning in transition areas may be appropriate at a later time, as well as a proposal to transfer development rights (TDR) to rural villages were suggested.
- The transfer development rights (TDR) program should be retained essentially unchanged with an increased emphasis on the public purchase of easements and the designation of additional receiving areas. This recommendation has been, and continues to be implemented.
- The County should develop a priority easement acquisition program to acquire strategically placed farmland and rural open space. This recommendation has been implemented.
- Agricultural preservation through the state tax laws should be continued, with transfer tax revenues being used to fund priority local easement programs. This recommendation has been maintained.

Comprehensive Growth Policy Study

The Planning Department's 1989 "Comprehensive Growth Policy Study" (CGPS), an analysis of future development scenarios, also confirmed

the General Plan's wedges and corridors concept, but found that traffic congestion would be excessive unless we each drive less than we do today. CGPS tested ten development scenarios, which varied by amount, location, and concentration matched with a transportation system emphasizing travel by single-occupant car, car-pool, bus, or transit.

The study recommended that Montgomery County set a goal of reducing the average auto driver share of work trips from 75 percent to somewhere near 50 percent. To accomplish this, the study suggested ways to reduce car use such as:

- clustering housing and jobs near transit;
- improving mass transportation, including trolley lines, expansion of bus routes, carpool and bus lanes; and
- taking actions to help people reduce the car habit, such as auto/transit pricing, pedestrian oriented design, and providing more bikeways and sidewalks.

CGPS found that "the pattern of urban growth...is much more important than either the pace of growth...or the jobs to housing proportion of growth..." The study recommended that "Without losing sight of Wedges and Corridors, we should consider shifting our policy focus towards a vision called "Centers and Trails."

Although the CGPS study focused primarily on transportation, it also looked at water and sewerage systems needs for the next several decades and concluded that a serious problem in locating and building a major new sewage treatment plant will need to be solved by about the year 2000.

The study also concluded that Montgomery County probably can afford the costs of growth but that "the County's fiscal fate will be hostage to...influential external factors..." such as real income and property appreciation and state and federal funding. As we all know, recent actions of the Governor and State Legislature reducing State aid

to Montgomery County, have proven this true. The CGPS suggested that funding patterns need to shift from the private sector (i.e., reduce private expenditure on automobiles and increase public sector revenue for transportation) to the public sector and that some ways to achieve this are to:

- tax the use of the private automobile (gas tax, parking fees, etc.) and
- obtain more direct state and federal aid for road and rail construction.

Growth Management Advisory Work Group

In October 1990, the Planning Board began the third step of the Refinement, by appointing a 15-member citizens group to advise the Board regarding the process of managing growth in Montgomery County. The Work Group concluded that "the General Plan has served the County well" and that "its vision of development interspersed with green space remains sound." After 12 meetings the Group issued a report, "Action Agenda", in May 1991. This report presents over 30 recommendations to the Planning Board on managing growth in Montgomery County. Three of its major recommendations deal with the General Plan as follows:

- "Investigate the need to refine the General Plan or modify its goals and objectives."
- "Evaluate the degree to which the General Plan has successfully accommodated actual growth and how successfully it can be expected to accommodate future growth..."
- "Define necessary changes, if any; and assess their effects, accounting for current and future needs..."

Other major recommendations include:

- Determine the appropriate time frame and geographic area(s) over which jobs and housing should be balanced.
- Evaluate current growth management tools.

- Foster regional cooperation in planning.
- Investigate a wider range of housing choices and locations.
- Study changing travel patterns and creative ways to reduce traffic.
- Identify, reserve, and establish priorities for funding new rights-of-way for transportation.
- Determine the level and pattern of growth that is financially sustainable.

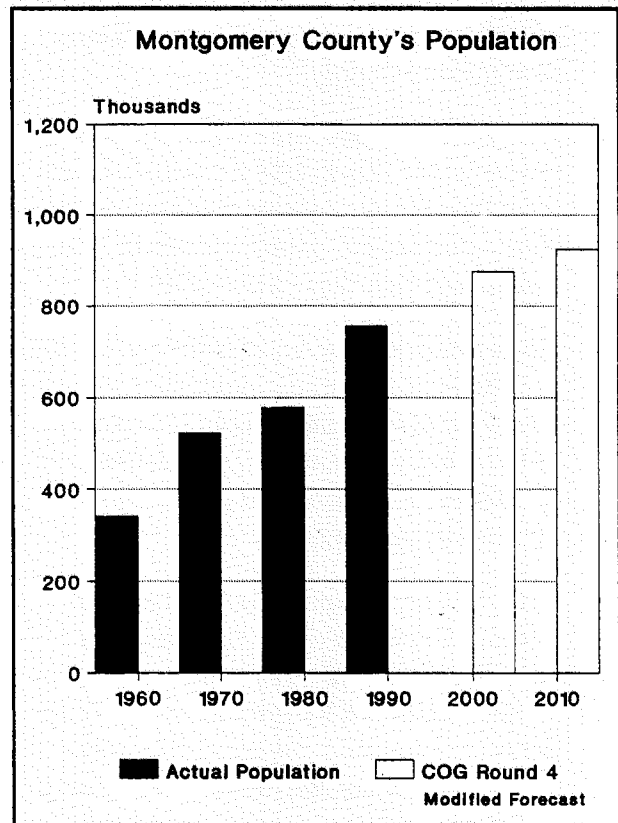
After receiving this advice, the Planning Board recommended that the Montgomery County Council amend the work program of the Planning Department. This General Plan Refinement is a result of the Work Group's advice and the specific recommendations of the Planning Board.

HOW HAVE WE CHANGED SINCE THE GENERAL PLAN WAS APPROVED?

Montgomery County has changed in many ways since the 1969 General Plan was approved. The following describes some of the major changes. At later workshops on particular goals such as housing, environment, economic activity, land use, and transportation, more detailed information will be presented.

Population

- *We are now the most populous jurisdiction in Maryland, with 757,000 people, about 235,000 more than in 1970.* In actual numbers of people, we grew almost as much in the 1980's as we did in the 1950's and in the 1960's, and less than expected in the forecast done for the 1969 General Plan. Population growth is expected to slow down during the next two decades. By 2010, Montgomery County is expected to be home to about 170,000 more people, bringing total population to about 925,000.



- *More than one-quarter of Maryland's population increase between 1970 and 1990 occurred here in Montgomery County.* The Maryland suburbs of the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) accounted for 37 percent of the state's population in 1990, up from 34 percent in 1970. About one-fifth of the State's population growth between 1990 and 2010 is expected to occur in Montgomery County. We expect to grow faster than the state overall, but slower than the Washington, D.C. MSA.
- *Our regional population concentration has shifted from the city to the suburbs.* In 1970, Washington, D.C. accounted for about 25 percent of the MSA population and was the most populous jurisdiction in the MSA. By 1990, Washington, D.C. represented only 15.5 percent of the MSA's population and was surpassed by three suburban jurisdictions: Fairfax County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County. Similarly, in 1970 Baltimore City was the most populous jurisdiction in Maryland.