

# COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND DESIGN FACT SHEET

## INTRODUCTION

Community identity is the collection of attributes that make a community unique, make it "home," and separate it from other places. Physical, social, ethnic, political, geographic, economic, and other characteristics contribute to our perceptions about communities. The process of community design can help create neighborhood identity.

Although community identity and design was not a specific goal of the 1964 or 1969 Plans, these concepts were included throughout the text of both Plans. More specifically, the 1969 General Plan stated, "each community should have an identity, which can be created by imaginative design." Since 1969 the role of design review at the master plan, zoning, and subdivision levels has increased significantly.

This fact sheet will address the concepts of community identity and design in four sections: 1) who we are, 2) where we gather and interact, 3) how we govern ourselves, and 4) how we design communities.

The creation of communities occurs at several levels. At the County level, the General Plan envisioned Montgomery County as part of the Washington Metropolitan Area in which Washington served as the center of regional activity with wedges and corridors radiating outward. On a slightly smaller scale, the General Plan envisioned the wedges and corridors concept as a system to organize groups of communities. The communities in a wedge were intended to be different in scale and mix of uses from those in the corridor, and those in the corridor were intended to be different from those in the urban/suburban ring. Within these larger communities there are also smaller neighborhood communities. The functions and interrelationships of these commu-

nities will vary and often overlap. It is these functions and interrelationships which influence the way that a community is perceived, both by its residents and others.

Government activities can influence the function and interrelationships of communities, but in many ways, the government's ability to achieve community identity is limited. Government can affect some aspects of this goal but it can not be achieved solely by government action. The government can do such things as provide space for civic activities and some programming but can not demand attendance.

One aspect of community identity controlled by government is the place name used by the United States Postal Service. While addresses are seemingly insignificant, residents express confusion over why there are 16 zip codes that use Silver Spring as the place name, with areas ranging from the County's borders with Washington D.C. and Prince George's County to Howard County. Since a number of these zip codes also have individual post offices, the confusion is even greater and makes it harder to know where to find a business listed in the yellow pages or for individuals to explain where they live.

Community identity starts with an idea in the minds of citizens and is realized by attitudes and actions which bond people with their neighbors near and far. Ultimately, community identity only flourishes with each citizen's personal commitment.

## COMMUNITY IDENTITY AS A PLANNING ISSUE

Like other American suburbs, Montgomery County has developed into a place where cars are the most common means of travel. It was the auto-