

mobile that enabled so many people to move away from their downtown homes and jobs in the first place, and it was the near-universal use of the automobile that enabled suburban houses to be located so far from each other and from shopping centers, employment centers, and everywhere else in the suburbs that we routinely drive to.

It is easy to have a feeling of belonging somewhere, a "sense of place," when the majority of one's daily activities happen in a single town or village. In Montgomery County, though, a family's and individual's activities usually happen in several different places. Just naming where you live can be a challenge for some County residents. The need to fortify this sense of place and community identity is the focus of the Community Identity and Design Section of the General Plan refinement. In addition there is a growing perception that good design is essential to creating strong communities.

Montgomery County has undergone a major transformation in the last two decades, changing from a bedroom community of Washington, D.C., to a major employment center. Our orientation has changed from downtown Washington to our own urban ring and corridor areas. We now look for our identity within Montgomery County. In addition, the composition of our families, households, workforce, and lifestyles have changed dramatically. Many feel that these changes and the pace of change have resulted in a loss of community identity, both here in Montgomery County and throughout the United States.

As part of the *Comprehensive Growth Policy Study*, the predecessor to this General Plan Refinement, the Montgomery County Planning Department hosted a public workshop. Workshop participants were asked to name other suburban places in the United States that seem to have a better quality of life than Montgomery County. The places named were all similar in that they all were perceived to have a strong sense of community or a "village" atmosphere. When the groups

listed the attributes that they would most like to bring to Montgomery County, there also were a lot of similarities. Two attributes were mentioned most: sense of community with a "village" atmosphere, and an efficient transportation system that allows access by non-car methods.

The workshop summary stated that "The other top attributes from all of the groups were: community identity, more mixed land uses, ease of use of many modes of transportation, neighborhood access (especially by foot and bicycle), convenience shopping, neighborhood focus in government and issue resolution, increased use of mass transit, environmental protection, scenic and cultural amenities, sense of community, affordability, and jobs and housing."

THE ROLE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

One of the challenges of the General Plan is to provide guidance for creating community identity. The General Plan, by being general, will not provide a specific prescription for each individual community. However, this fact sheet lists some of the attributes that are important in creating a community identity.

Local area master plans, long term operating and capital budgets, and individual subdivision and zoning actions provide more specific guidance, on adjusting these various elements to establish community identity and design. While government can influence location, layout, and some functional aspects, it is the community itself that determines its identity and how it functions. The General Plan's role is to provide guidance to foster an environment in which individuals can get a sense of pride in their community.

I. WHO WE ARE

The demographic characteristics of Montgomery County residents have changed dramatically during the last twenty years. In short, the changes in household composition, number of