

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

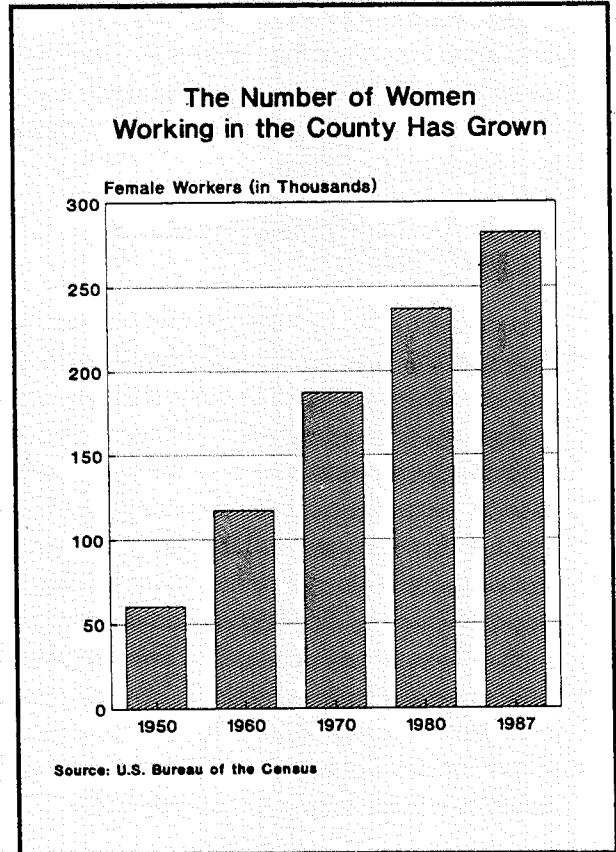
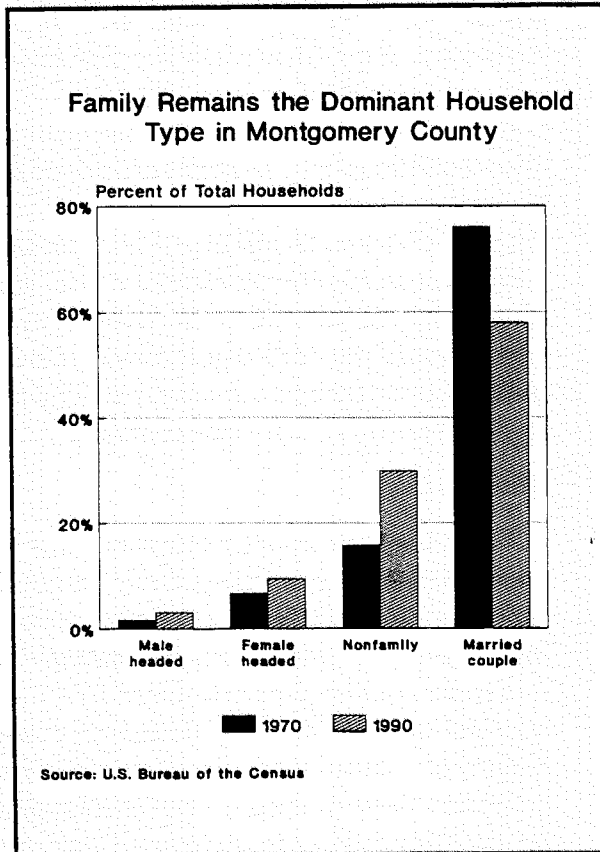
two-wage earner families, single parent families, and how often residents move, when combined with the distances between areas where we gather and interact, have made it more difficult to establish and maintain a sense of community. This section will discuss some of these changes and how they affect our collective and individual sense of community identity.

\* The percentage of family households in Montgomery County was relatively stable between 1980 and 1990. In 1990, approximately 70 percent of all households were families. However, the percentage of family households did decrease from 85 percent to 73 percent between 1970 and 1980. The percentage of families headed by single parents grew from 3 percent in 1970 to 14 percent in 1990. This was accompanied by an increase in nonfamily households as well as the number of individuals who live alone. Some of the short-term characteristics of these changes are an increase in latch-key kids, day care, greater demand for housing for single adults, and neighbor-

hoods that are relatively deserted during the weekdays.

In addition, the number of divorces in Montgomery County increased from 872 in 1970 to 2,238 in 1988. The impact of the declining dominance of the two-parent family, in concert with the number of two-wage earner households, leaves people with less time to achieve a sense of community.

\* The percentage of women in the workforce has doubled, from 32 percent in 1950 to 66 percent in 1990. By 1987, almost one-half of the married couple households had two workers. In addition, several lifestyle changes have evolved. Among the changes are a) rapid increase in the total number of workers, b) decrease in the birth rate in the early 1970s while women deferred childbearing in the early stages of their careers, c) rapid increase in the birth rate during the 1980s when women began having children at later ages, d) increase in the numbers of latch-key children, e) difficulty in two-income families living in loca-



tions that are convenient for both jobs, f) a decrease in volunteerism, and g) an increase in day care providers. The need for day care service is particularly evident. Currently, there are 283 licensed group child care facilities and 1,500 licensed home day care providers. An additional but unknown number of day care providers are unlicensed.

For families with two workers, as well as single parent families, the amount of time available for volunteer activities is reduced by the time spent on work, children, chauffeuring, housework, and social activities. Furthermore, neighborhoods no longer benefit from the sense of community that results from the interaction of family members at home during the day.

\* The median Montgomery County household in 1987 had occupied their current house for 5 years, down from 6.1 years in 1974. According to Montgomery County Census Update Surveys, residents in single family houses tend to move less often than those in multi-family units (7 years versus 3 years in 1987). Homeowners also move less often than renters (8 years versus 2 years in 1987). The mobility of Montgomery County residents can make the establishment of community ties difficult.

## **II. WHERE WE GATHER AND INTERACT**

Not only do the residents and workers of Montgomery County have different lifestyles than twenty years ago, but the places where we gather and interact have also changed. As discussed in the previous section, the way that Montgomery County residents live has changed. These changes have created the need for new services and limit the residents' ability to participate in community activities. This section describes some of the places where residents gather and interact and how these influence community identity. (The governmental actions that affect the pattern of private development and the location of public facilities will be discussed in Section III.)

The number of demands on an individual's or a family's time have long appeared to be endless but today they are increasingly dispersed. Typically, this hectic pace is characterized by a large number of activities spread over long distances. A family with school-aged children can easily find their evenings and weekends filled with shuttling children between practices, libraries, and friends. Families and individuals also combine home life with meetings, shopping and social activities, and work. Large numbers of activities, combined with personal mobility, result in residents using a wide range of "centers," both in location and type. This dispersed lifestyle often makes it difficult to establish a sense of community. This section discusses some of the centers of activities and organizations that influence our community life.

### **COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTERS**

\* County government centers are the sites of a wide array of community service functions. Montgomery County operates five government centers to concentrate government services in different parts of the County. The government centers are located in Silver Spring (2), Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Wheaton, and Germantown. Services vary by location and include satellite locations for the Health Department, Addiction, Victim/Mental Health Services Department, community psychiatric services, legal services, and social services. The community oriented services provided at government centers causes them to become community activity centers for different groups in the community.

### **SCHOOLS**

\* Schools are the sites of a wide array of community service functions. They are not only places for children to learn, but also to get to know their neighbors and to participate in clubs and sports, and for parents to attend PTA meetings and back-to-school nights. Eighty percent of County elementary schools have on-site day care providers, there are special after-school programs for latch-key children in grades 3-8, County and