

that while they bring a large number of people together, there is little social interaction.

The locations of major existing community retail centers, regional shopping areas, and malls are shown in the following map. Community retail centers were defined as a grocery store and other retail stores that total around 50,000 square feet. Rural centers are clusters of retail uses, including a major grocery store that serve the surrounding rural area.

Regional malls often serve as activity centers on a much larger scale than community retail centers. In many areas, regional malls have become the primary gathering points for residents. Also, the street life of old downtowns is often transferred into regional malls. Regional malls also may host community oriented activities. In a sense, regional malls often serve some of the functions of a town square, although on private property and enclosed, as well as informal gathering places for teenagers and elderly.

* The County's commercial revitalization program seeks to improve existing shopping centers that have traditionally served as community retail centers. The revitalization program covers various suburban shopping centers as well as Central Business Districts (CBD's). These improvements usually consist of streetscaping and improvements to business operations, including facade renovations. The program is designed to encourage private reinvestment in commercial properties. The revitalization of these centers is an important element of the public and private efforts towards the maintenance of existing retail centers. In addition, revitalization follows the General Plan's guidance to improve the appearance of the County. The following shopping centers are included in the program: Long Branch, Flower Avenue, and Dale Drive in Silver Spring; Colonial Center in Wheaton; and Damascus Center. Silver Spring and Wheaton are the two CBD's included in the program.

The County's revitalization program for Wheaton consists of streetscaping and building fa-

cade improvements along all major streets. The County's program for Silver Spring CBD consists primarily of streetscaping and putting utilities underground along Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road and some facade improvements.

III. HOW WE GOVERN OURSELVES

Montgomery County residents are represented by levels of government and government-like organizations. These levels of government include federal, State and County, but can also include city, town, special taxing districts, and homeowners associations. Our sense of community identity can be affected by governmental actions. This section discusses some of the levels of government and private organizations that contribute to community identity.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

* Montgomery County government serves a diverse area of 500 square miles with an equally diverse 757,000 residents. The County has a larger population than 6 states. The various agencies of County government provide services such as schools, police, fire, recreation, Ride-On bus service, housing assistance, libraries, and social services. Planning is provided by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

The County centralizes administration and some services while locating other services throughout the County such as schools, libraries, fire stations, and County Government Centers. These local facilities often serve as activity centers and contribute to community identity at the neighborhood level.

MUNICIPALITIES

* Living in a municipality can give residents a feeling of belonging to a recognizable place. Montgomery County has 17 municipalities: Rockville, Gaithersburg, Takoma Park, Poolesville, Chevy Chase, Chevy Chase Section Three, Kensington, Somerset, Garrett Park, Martin's Addition, Chevy Chase Village, Chevy Chase Section Five, Washington Grove, Laytons-

ville, Glen Echo, Barnesville, and Brookeville, listed in order of 1990 population. Most of these are historical and functional centers.

Each municipality is governed by elected officials with varying amounts of independence from the County. Rockville and Gaithersburg offer a wide range of services including planning and zoning, police departments, recreation and parks departments, trash collection, and other services. Other municipalities have more limited services. Municipalities have the authority to tax their residents and businesses. These taxes are in addition to regular County taxes.

Municipalities are one type of identifiable community, but as they grow in area, they can lose some of the closeness that they had when they were smaller. In addition, some growth, especially through annexation, can conflict with adopted County master plans.

URBAN DISTRICTS

* **Montgomery County utilizes urban districts to maintain and improve the character and appearance of the County's Central Business Districts (CBD's).** The County's urban districts include the Bethesda, Silver Spring, and Wheaton CBD's. They were created in 1986 to maintain and enhance our urban centers. The County Council created these districts to 1) increase maintenance of streetscape and amenities, 2) provide additional public amenities such as landscaping, seating, and bus shelters, 3) promote the commercial and residential interests of the CBD's, and 4) program community activities. The 1964 Plan emphasized the importance of maintaining developed areas in the County.

HOMEOWNERS' ASSOCIATIONS

* **Homeowners' associations regulate a subdivision's or development's appearance, foster community interaction, and give residents some control over their communities.** The main functions of homeowners' associations are to 1) maintain and manage commonly-owned areas and facilities, such as open space and recreational

equipment, and 2) regulate changes to individual units and to the subdivision or complex as a whole to protect its appearance and character. They influence changes in a subdivision's appearance by regulating such elements as house colors, signs, vehicle parking, building additions, TV antennas, and storage sheds. Some HOAs also enhance a sense of community through giving residents a say in how their community is run, information dissemination such as newsletters, and social events like picnics and pool parties.

There are approximately 400 homeowners' associations (HOAs) registered with the County's Commission on Common Ownership Communities, covering almost 62,000 dwelling units (22 percent of all dwelling units in the County). The subdivisions with HOAs range from a 10-unit townhouse development to an 800-unit high-rise condominium to a 1,500-unit single-family and townhouse development.

The 1964 General Plan recommended cluster development to promote "variety in development and flexibility in urban design." In addition, the Plan noted that cluster development can be more efficiently served by public facilities and an increase in open space. HOA's are often necessary in cluster subdivisions to maintain common open space.

CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS

* **Civic associations provide residents with opportunities to work together to improve their neighborhoods.** There are nearly 500 civic associations registered with M-NCPPC. Some of them cover individual subdivisions or neighborhoods, some are umbrella organizations covering several neighborhoods, and some civic associations are county-wide. Many associations are vigilant watchdogs, alert for new development in their areas. Citizen's associations are notified of master plans, subdivisions, and special exceptions in their areas. The associations often follow a development proposal throughout the development process, presenting their opinions and views.

Some of the associations also work on master plans and other projects.

The participation of citizen groups, clubs, and business associations was encouraged by the 1969 Plan. In addition to civic associations, there are business groups such as the Chambers of Commerce, the I-270 Employer's Group, and the North Bethesda Transportation Action Partnership. These groups and others participate in the development review process and in civic affairs in a variety of ways.

PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS

* A wide variety of social, religious, charitable, and recreational clubs are available to County residents. These groups serve as a way of gathering with people of similar interests. Many of these clubs work towards improving their community and helping others. In addition, there are a number of businesses specializing in recreation, health, and social activities.

IV. HOW WE DESIGN COMMUNITIES

As discussed in the three previous sections, the way County residents live together where residents gather and interact, and how we govern ourselves affect our community identity. The County's influence on these changes ranges from none (for example, on family mobility) to extensive (on schools and shopping locations). This section focuses on the influence that the planning and development processes have on the function and appearance of communities.

The 1964 *General Plan* stated that "Economy, convenience, and pleasant surroundings are the key concepts of the Plan," where economy "...arises from the compact form of development, easily reached by public services." In addition, the 1969 *General Plan* stated that "each community should have an identity, which can be created by imaginative design."

The pattern of development during the last two decades has been influenced by the 1964 and 1969 *General Plans*. The 1969 Plan recommended

that the County "incorporate urban design considerations into all aspects of the planning and development process." Since then, revisions to master plans and to the development process and regulations have instituted major changes in an effort not only to improve the quality and compatibility of development, but to guide the design of communities and neighborhoods in a manner that instills a sense of community and identity.

MASTER PLANS

* Master plans play an important role in establishing the pattern of public and private development, which can foster a greater sense of community identity. Master plans have increased the amount of design guidance since 1969. Master plans adopted in the late 60's and early 70's focused on land use, zoning, and roads. Master plans have now evolved to include several levels of design guidance as well as an increased emphasis on mixed uses and transit accessibility. The design guidance ranges from townscape to streetscape and often focuses on areas of significant planned activity. These include the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center and the Germantown Streetscape Study, as well as pending amendments for the Germantown Town Center and the Clarksburg Town Center.

DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

The 1964 and 1969 *Plans* both recognized that the existing development process needed improvement to achieve the vision of the wedges and corridors concept. Current efforts by the County to re-shape the development process illustrate that these processes are constantly being adapted to achieve the County's goals and objectives.

The development review process generally begins with master plan recommended zoning and land use. The zoning designation, in addition to the subdivision regulations, determines development standards such as the minimum lot size, building setbacks, and street and open space locations. Individual development proposals also