

### III. THE COUNTY'S REGIONAL ROLE

\* **Montgomery County was historically an agricultural area dotted with small towns from colonial times until the late 19th century. In the late 19th century, new rail and streetcar lines into Montgomery County enabled workers to commute to their jobs in the District of Columbia. These workers commuted from homes which were being developed in the Chevy Chase, Takoma Park, Kensington and Silver Spring communities.**

\* **In the years immediately following World War II, Montgomery County assumed the role of a bedroom community. At that time, the County's population increased rapidly as government workers flocked to jobs in the District of Columbia and found housing in the suburbs. Between 1940 and 1950 the County's population nearly doubled from 84,000 to 164,000.**

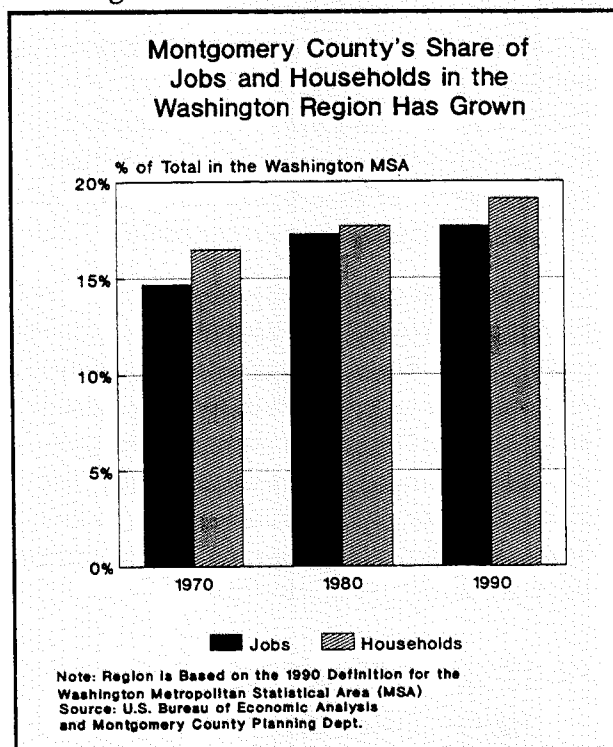
\* **The suburbanization of retail trade enabled Montgomery County residents to be less dependent on downtown Washington, D.C. for shopping. In the late 1940s, Silver Spring's business district became the shopping district for Montgomery County and northern Washington. It was soon supplanted by Wheaton Plaza and Congressional Plaza in the mid-1950s, among the first of the suburban shopping malls. This was the beginning of large-scale regional commerce in the suburbs.**

\* **Montgomery County has become a major regional employment center that is no longer dependent on downtown Washington for the majority of residents' jobs. Fairfax and Prince George's Counties are also major sources of jobs as well as residences, resulting in county to county commuting.**

\* **The economic strength of Montgomery County has bolstered the County's role as a center of economic development in Maryland. The County brings in 21 percent of the total state taxes**

and has a strong proportionate share of statewide and regional economic activity. In the past two decades, about one-third of the growth in new employment in Maryland occurred in Montgomery County.

\* **The County's share of jobs and housing in the metropolitan MSA has grown since the adoption of the 1969 General Plan. The regional share of at-place employment in Montgomery County has grown from 14.7 percent in 1970 to 17.7 percent in 1990. Similarly, the share of households has risen from 16.5 percent to 19.1 percent. Montgomery County trails the District and Fairfax in shares of at-place employment in the Washington MSA.**



In 1970, both the District of Columbia and Prince George's County had more households than Montgomery County and Fairfax County. By 1990, Montgomery County had more households than any jurisdiction in the State and the District of Columbia, but less than Fairfax County. Over the next 20 years, it is expected that the County will grow at a slower rate than the Washington, D.C. MSA overall, and that the share

of total households will slip to about 18 percent of MSA households.

**\* The role that the County has played in addressing regional issues has varied over time and by issue.** The County's involvement varies over time because of the wide variety of issues and the manner in which different elected and appointed officials, and staff have participated in addressing and resolving these issues. As a general trend, the County's role in addressing regional problems has grown, as the challenges have grown.

Within the Council of Governments, the County has always participated, and in many cases played a lead role in the development of regional solutions. Within the state government, the number and thus the power of the County's elected officials in Annapolis is growing. In addition, some election districts cross County lines, with the elected officials representing residents and interests from more than one county.

One of the challenges facing the County policy makers is how to participate in the various regional arenas. With growing federal mandates for regional cooperation in solving environmental and transportation related issues, for example, the County is likely to increase its activity in regional organizations. The County must choose how its energies will be directed and the particular regional role it wants for itself.

#### **IV. ISSUES THAT NEED REGIONAL APPROACHES**

There are a number of issues which will need regional approaches in order to be appropriately addressed. Some of these were identified in the previous fact sheets prepared for the General Plan Refinement. The following discussion presents these regional issues according to the goal and objective subject areas from the previous work: housing, environment, land use, transportation, community identity, and economic activity. They are discussed in the order in which the goal

subject areas were previously reviewed with the Planning Board.

This section covers some of the more pertinent regional activities before and after the 1969 General Plan for a longer-term perspective and context for the various regional activities of the past two decades.

##### **A. HOUSING**

**\* The Washington, D.C. MSA is one of the ten least affordable housing markets, as measured by affordability ratios by the National Association of Realtors.** Lack of affordable housing is a region-wide problem. The rise in the number of homeless families, difficulty in attracting workers, and increased development in outer areas of the region are all manifestations of the region's affordable housing problem.

**\* In 1972 MWCOG developed a regional Fair Share Program, where local jurisdictions recommended the percentage of federal housing subsidies to go to each jurisdiction.** This program was quite effective until the early '80s, when federal formulas to determine funding allocations changed. The total amount of federal funding for housing also decreased substantially in the 1980s.

**\* Public and private programs have also been established to deal with other regional housing issues, particularly that of producing affordable housing.** In 1989 MWCOG presented a list of housing initiatives, including: inclusionary zoning, employer-assisted housing, developing a common format for housing linkages, and local inventories of vacant land and buildings. Another initiative, a task force to investigate a public/private housing partnership, resulted in the Washington Area Housing Partnership, which serves as a broker in affordable housing development, as an advocate for low-cost housing, and as a provider of technical assistance.

The Metropolitan Washington Planning and Housing Association (MWPFA), which advocates policies and programs that improve the