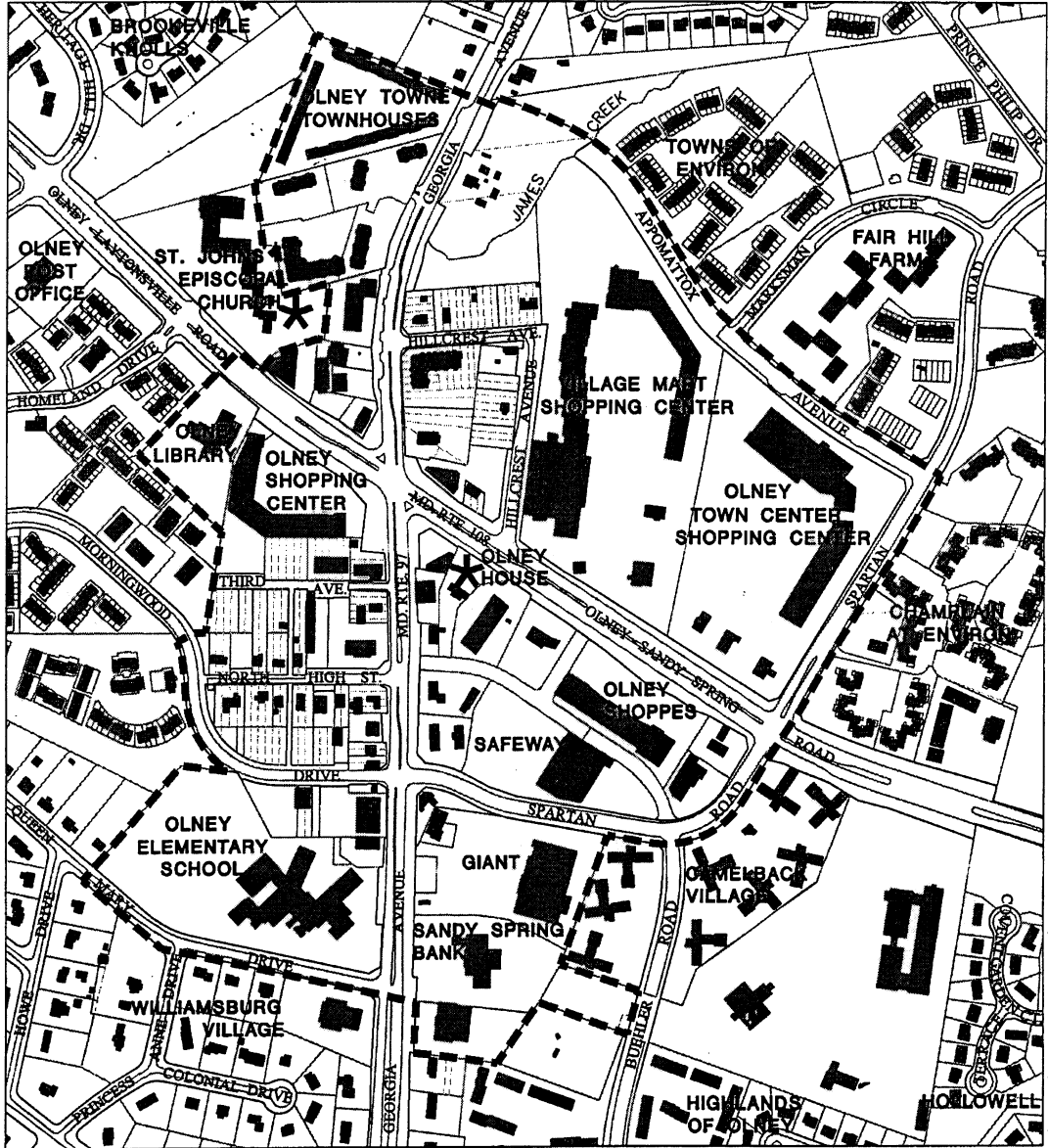


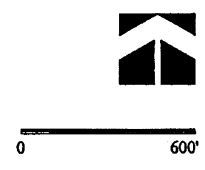


# Town Center Context



-  HISTORIC SITES
-  OLNEY TOWN CENTER BOUNDARY



# TOWN CENTER PLAN

## **Goals:**

*Create an economically healthy, attractive, pedestrian-oriented, and well connected Town Center to be the commercial and civic heart of the community. Explore the feasibility of a civic center (library, service center, police substation, community meeting space, teen center) in the Town Center.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Olney Town Center is the commercial area around the intersection of Georgia Avenue and MD 108. It covers approximately 90 acres and contains some 150 stores and other commercial establishments in more than 820,000 square feet of commercial space, approximately 550,000 square feet of it retail. Georgia Avenue and MD 108 intersect and divide the Town Center into four quadrants, which include four strip shopping centers—the two largest ones in the Northeast Quadrant—and numerous other businesses. The neighborhoods around the Town Center consist of townhouses, garden apartments and single-family houses.

The Town Center is located in the Upper Rock Creek and the Hawlings River watersheds. Both the Hawlings River and the North Branch of Rock Creek are sensitive watersheds, and the area around the Town Center is designated for several actions to improve water quality through watershed restoration action plans prepared by the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (see Environmental Resources Chapter).

## **MAJOR ISSUES**

Although the Town Center has been successful in adhering to the Master Plan policies and preventing the spread of commercial strips along major roads, it is presently a suburban crossroads with a collection of strip shopping centers and individual stores. It is not pedestrian-oriented and it lacks easy and convenient connections among the different shopping centers. A direct vehicular connection between Village Mart and the Olney Shopping Center in the Northeast Quadrant has been one of the more prominent circulation issues in the recent past. Long distances between shopping centers, created partly by large parking lots, and the lack of safe and pleasant walkways make pedestrian circulation in the Town Center challenging.

The Olney community has been exploring the possibility of a civic center in Olney where multiple public facilities could be sited in one location. In 2000, the Olney Community Center Task Force, a joint effort by the Greater Olney Civic Association and the Olney Chamber of Commerce, requested the County to not only expand and renovate the current library space but to “address the long standing problem of trying to locate a permanent home for a number of other County services such as the Olney Police satellite office and the Olney satellite office of the Mid-County Regional Services Center.” The goal was to have a place where a variety of County services can be located jointly, along with other community-based organizations such as the Olney Chamber of Commerce, a visitor’s center and a teen center.

The Town Center lacks a major open space, a place for the community to gather and to celebrate its festivals and events. It needs an outdoor public space that would accommodate the many civic functions and annual events that take place in Olney. Currently, they are held in parking lots or playgrounds. Ideally, the public space should be located as part of a mixed-use civic center project to function as the town commons.

The Town Center lacks a strong visual identity. Even though some structures provide a variety in building types and architectural styles, its character is mostly defined by the larger shopping centers and other commercial establishments along the two state highways. The views from these roads are generally dominated by parking lots. Two major highways, large parking lots, and lack of large shade trees or other distinct features create a monotonous landscape of hard surfaces. As some redevelopment occurs in the future, a strong visual identity through architecture, landscaping/trees, or other urban design elements should be created.

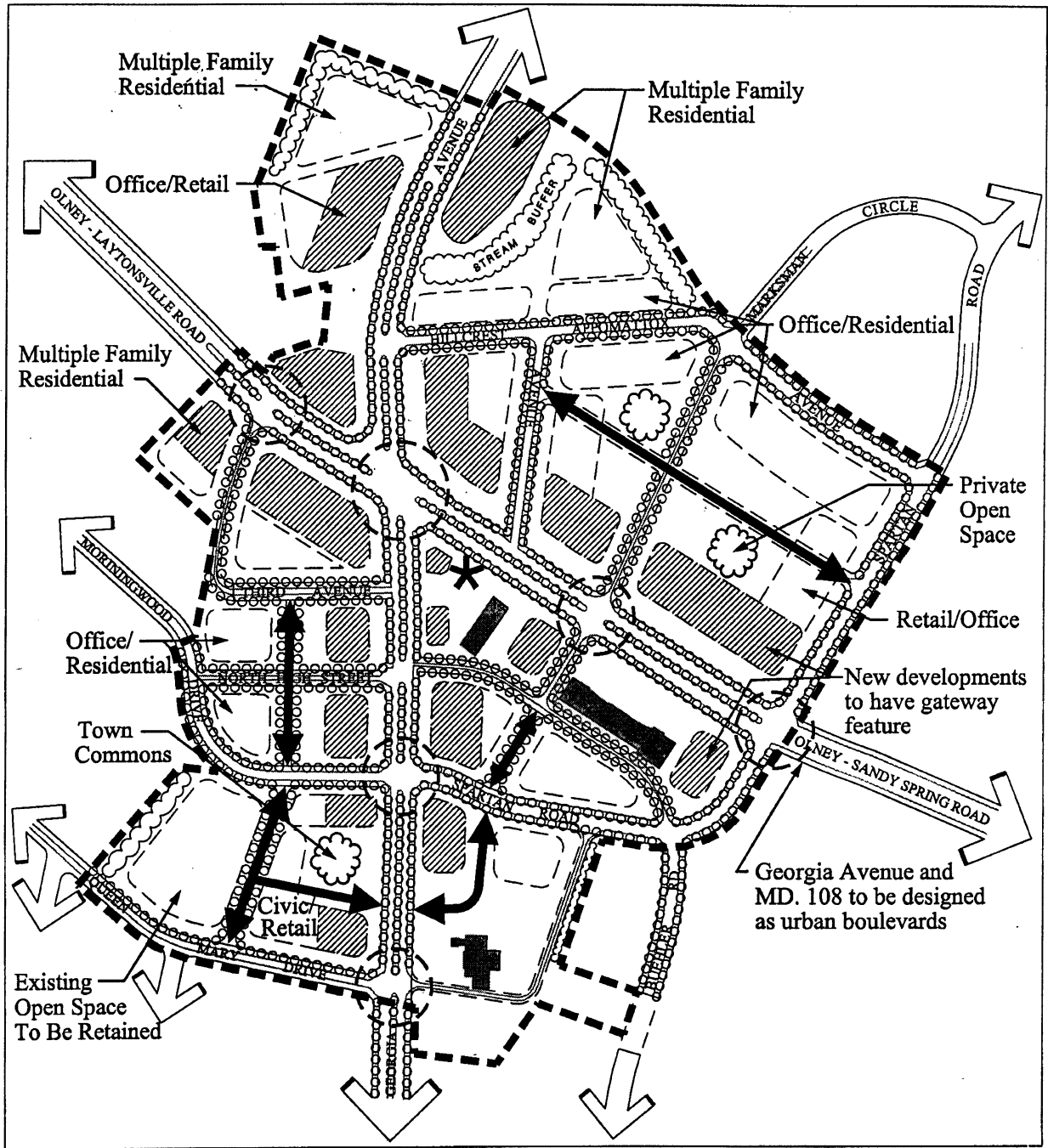
## **PROPOSED CONCEPT**

The proposed Town Center Plan is guided by the concept of Olney as a satellite town that functions as a local retail center rather than a regional shopping and employment center. The Town Center is envisioned as a low-scale, retail and service center containing a mix of commercial and residential uses in a variety of building types and sizes with safe and convenient pedestrian connections, public open spaces and other amenities. Georgia Avenue and MD 108 will continue to be the main thoroughfares and carry large volumes of local and through traffic, but landscaping, improved crosswalks, and urban design treatment will help manage the traffic and improve their character. Residential uses in the Town Center would be less dependent on cars for access to the Town Center, which would also help reduce parking demand there. A major public open space with a civic center will provide a focal point and a place for the community's civic life.

This vision cannot be achieved without additional growth in the Town Center. Since it is not feasible to accommodate any major new development with surface parking within the current boundaries of the Town Center, the proposed concept is based on a more compact pattern of development with some structured parking on larger properties. Although the proposed zoning framework would allow up to 300,000 square feet of additional commercial growth for an overall maximum development capacity of approximately 1.1 million square feet of commercial space and up to 400 residential units in the Town Center in the next 15-20 years, not all properties would be able to achieve the maximum permitted density because of their size, configuration, access and other constraints. Only the larger properties, and potential future assemblages of some of the smaller ones, are expected to be able to achieve maximum permitted growth and create public amenities in return.

Among the four quadrants of the Town Center, the Northeast Quadrant has the greatest potential for change because of the two large properties, Village Mart and the Olney Shopping Center. The Southeast Quadrant has some redevelopment potential on the Safeway property, which has been looking to relocate to another site in the Town Center. The Southwest Quadrant has potential for redevelopment through possible assemblage of some of the vacant and residential properties in the vicinity of North High Street. This quadrant also contains the Olney Elementary School site which has the potential to

# Town Center Proposed Concept



- Town Center Boundary
- \* Exist. Olney House (Historic)
- Existing Right-Of-Way/Street
- - - Proposed Right-Of-Way/Street
- Critical Pedestrian Crossings
- Existing Buildings
- Preferred Bldg. Location-New
- ▨ Preferred Taller Bldg. Location-New
- ↔ Internal Connection

accommodate a civic center/town commons if the site is not needed for school purposes in the future. The Northwest Quadrant, the smallest of the four, does not have significant development potential because of its size and configuration.

The proposed concept would be implemented through a combination of zoning mechanisms and design guidelines to shape the future redevelopment of the Town Center. It is designed to be flexible enough to address future variations and opportunities--sites may not be developed exactly as expected--not developed at all for a long time, or changes in ownership patterns may create unforeseen opportunities. If the new developments are in harmony with the Plan's overall vision, and carefully executed to achieve its goals, they will contribute to create a more desirable Town Center.

The proposed concept has four major elements:

1. Mixed Land Use;
2. A Civic Center and a Town Commons;
3. Pedestrian Circulation; and
4. Urban Design

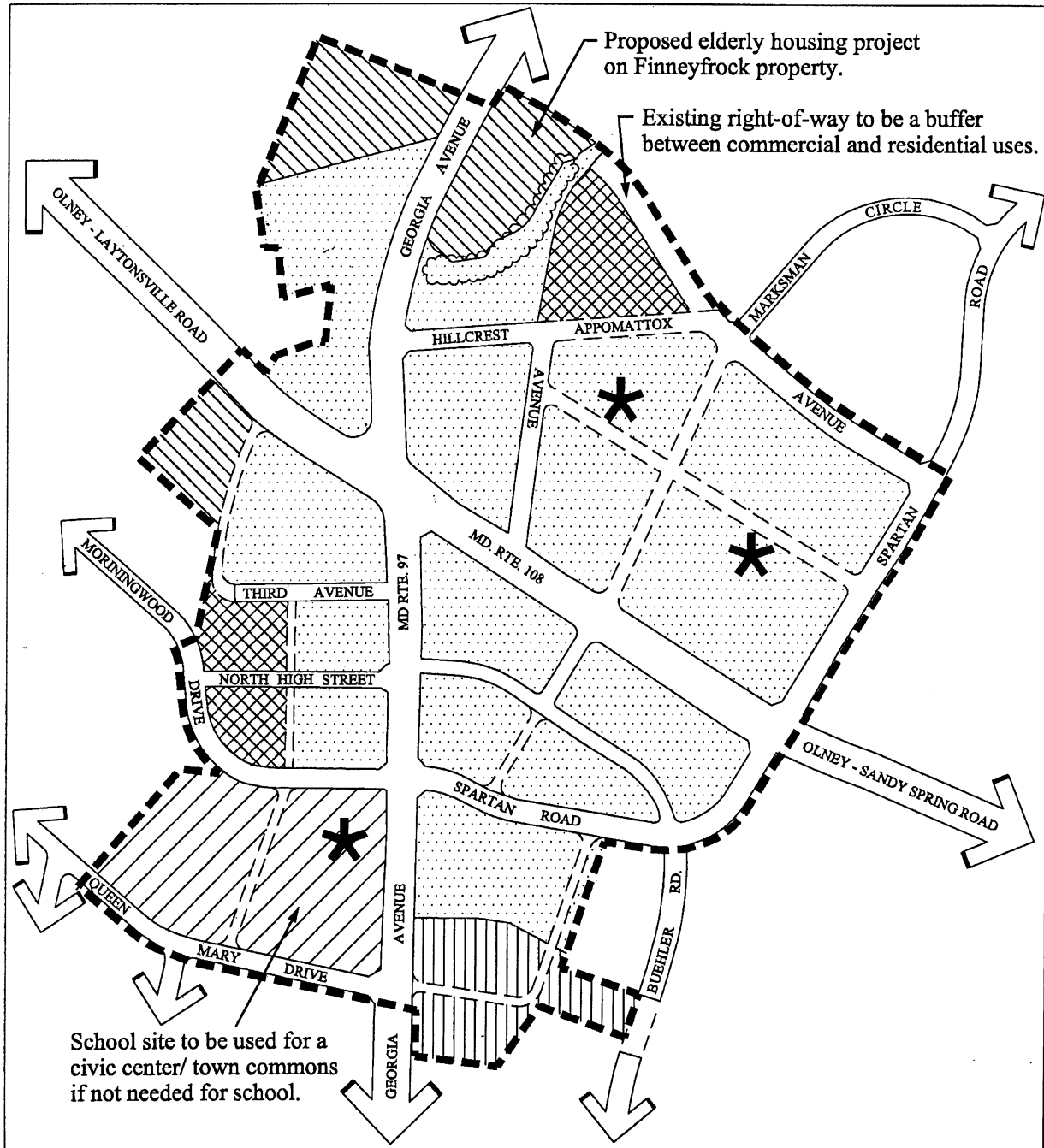
## **MIXED LAND USE**








A variety of uses in the Town Center is a major element of the proposed concept. All commercially zoned land in the Town Center should be allowed and encouraged to have residential uses to activate the core by increasing the number of people within walking distance of the stores and services. Residential buildings in the Town Center would also help break the linear monotony of the single-story shopping centers surrounded by large parking lots. The proposed concept is based on approximately 400 residential units in the Center, including the proposed 100 elderly housing units on the Finneyfrock property and another 300 units in the three large quadrants of the Town Center in a variety of building types and development scenarios.

In the Northeast Quadrant, two areas are especially suitable for residential uses: the Finneyfrock property on the east side of Georgia Avenue north of MD 108, where the Plan supports a proposed development of an affordable elderly housing project; and secondly, the Village Mart and the Olney Shopping Center properties, which have the potential to include residential uses due to their large sizes. The northern portion of the Village Mart property is especially suitable for a medium-density residential development of townhouses due to its configuration and its distance from MD 108.

In the Southwest Quadrant, the 3.9-acre enclave of vacant and single-family properties in the vicinity of North High Street, Third Avenue, and Morningwood Drive is a suitable area for assemblage and redevelopment as mixed-use retail/office or retail/residential. This area is currently zoned R-60 and was recommended for PD-7 in the 1980 Master Plan. Redevelopment of this area at a density higher than the current R-60 Zone for a residential, commercial or mixed-use development would be appropriate and help create the desired density to support commercial uses in the core.

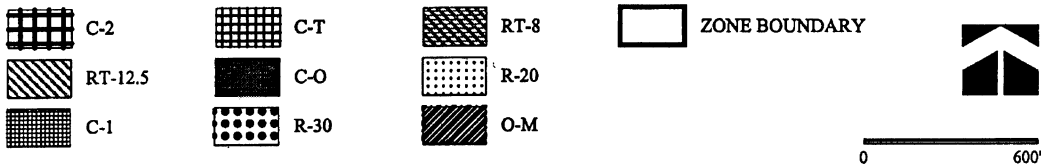
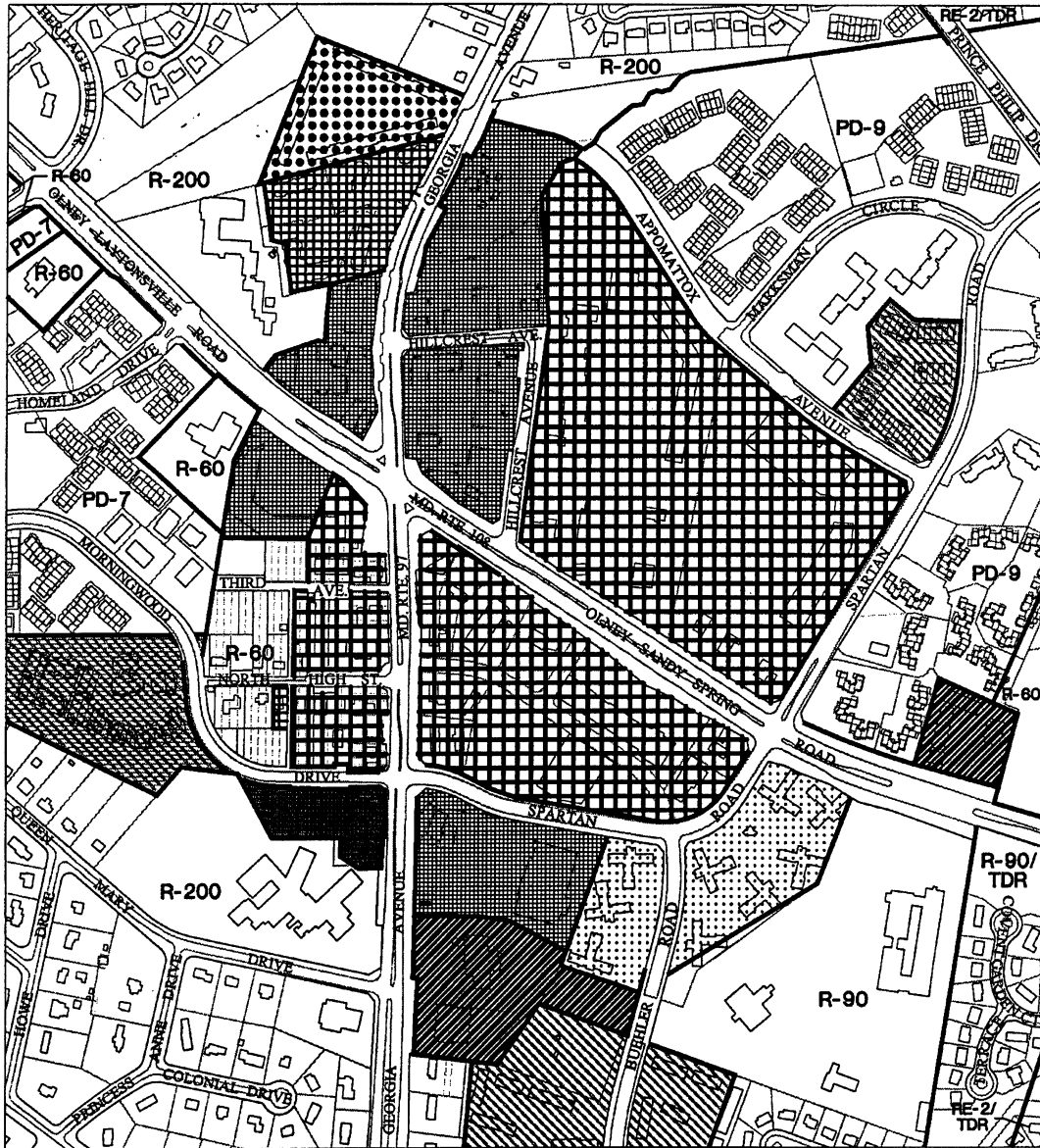
# Town Center Proposed Land Use Concept



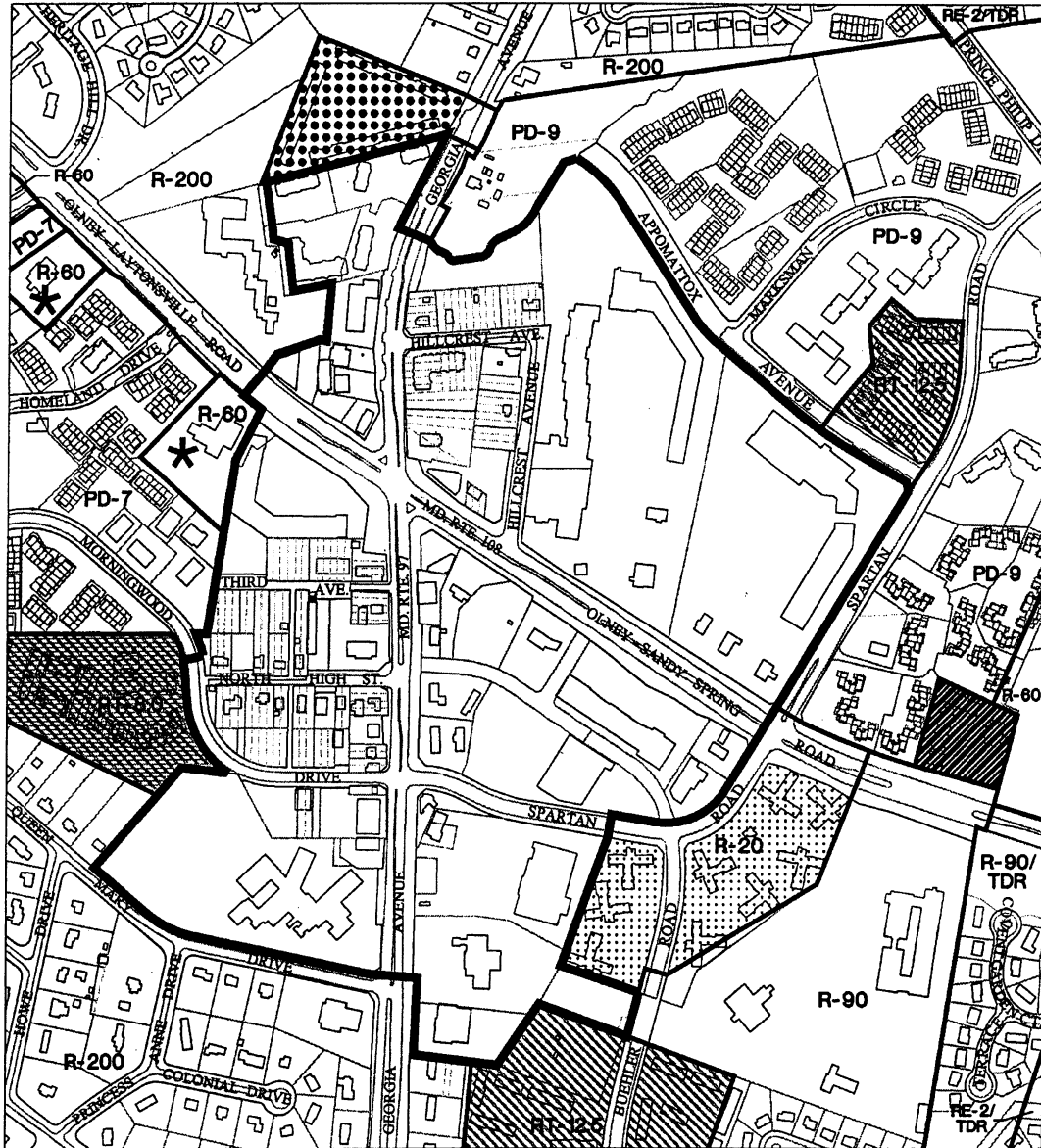
-  Residential
-  Primarily Retail; Residential & Office Allowed
-  Primarily Residential; Retail & Office Allowed
-  Primarily Office; Retail & Residential Allowed
-  Institutional, Retail
-  Town Center Boundary
-  Potential Public or Private Open Space








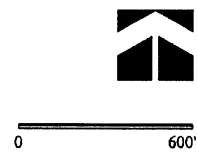
# Town Center Existing Zoning



# Town Center Proposed Zoning



-  RT-12.5
-  R-30
-  O-M
-  RT-8
-  R-20





The existing five different commercial zoning districts, C-1, C-2, C-T, C-O, and O-M, do not provide for a mix of uses and they are not appropriate tools to achieve the proposed concept. C-O, for example is more suited to regulate office uses in a higher density Central Business District than a local service center. C-2 is more appropriate for uses generally found in regional shopping centers, and clusters of commercial developments. Some of these zones, such as, C-1, specifically exclude residential uses such as elderly housing, which should be allowed in the Town Center.

A new mixed-use zone should be created to help implement the proposed mixed-use concept. All properties in the Town Center should be rezoned to that mixed-use zone. The Implementation Chapter describes the proposed mixed-use zone in more detail.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1. Encourage development of residential uses in the Town Center.**
- 2. Rezone all properties in the Town Center with a single, mixed-use zone.**

### **CIVIC CENTER AND TOWN COMMONS**

Olney Town Center needs a central public square, a town commons, preferably surrounded by, or adjacent to, retail activity and a civic center that would house the various public services currently located in and around the Town Center. It would provide an appropriate setting for these functions, provide a focal point for the whole area, and help create a sense of place for the Town Center. The town commons and the civic center should be located, preferably on the same site, within the Town Center to be a part of, and a complement to, the commercial activity already there.

Currently, there are no sites of approximately four to five acres within the Town Center to accommodate a joint civic center/retail/town commons project. Other sites and opportunities may become available in the future and should be explored. The proposed zoning mechanism is designed to produce public amenities in exchange for bonus floor areas for private commercial developments, especially on the larger shopping center properties. However, the scale and amount of permitted additional growth is not large enough to produce a civic center/town commons entirely through zoning and without major public contribution and support. The only publicly-owned site in the Town Center and large enough to accommodate a Civic Center/Town Commons is the 9.9-acre Olney Elementary School property. The site is currently zoned R-200 and located at the corner of Georgia Avenue and Queen Mary Drive. The school was built in 1954 and renovated in 1990. The property is large enough to accommodate a mixed-use project including retail, offices, a library, a teen center, and a civic center.

The site is currently needed for the Olney Elementary School which may continue to operate from this site for the life of this Master Plan. However, if the school needs change and the site is not needed for school purposes, the feasibility of a civic center/town commons on the site should be explored. If such a project is pursued on this site, the public open space should be at least one acre and located near the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Morningwood Drive so that it can be integrated into street closings of Georgia

Avenue for parades and street fairs. A public/private partnership mechanism should be explored to create a project that could be a catalyst for redevelopment of this quadrant and the Town Center. The existing ballfields and the open space should be preserved for community use and designated as a local park. The site should be rezoned as part of a new mixed-use zone recommended for the rest of the Town Center.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1. Explore opportunities for a civic center/town commons with retail, offices, a civic center, and a major public space of at least one acre in the Town Center through a variety of public and private mechanisms.**
- 2. Explore the feasibility of a civic center/town commons on the Olney Elementary School site if it is no longer needed for a school use.**
- 3. If the Olney Elementary School site is used for a civic center, the current ballfields and open space should be preserved and designated as parkland.**

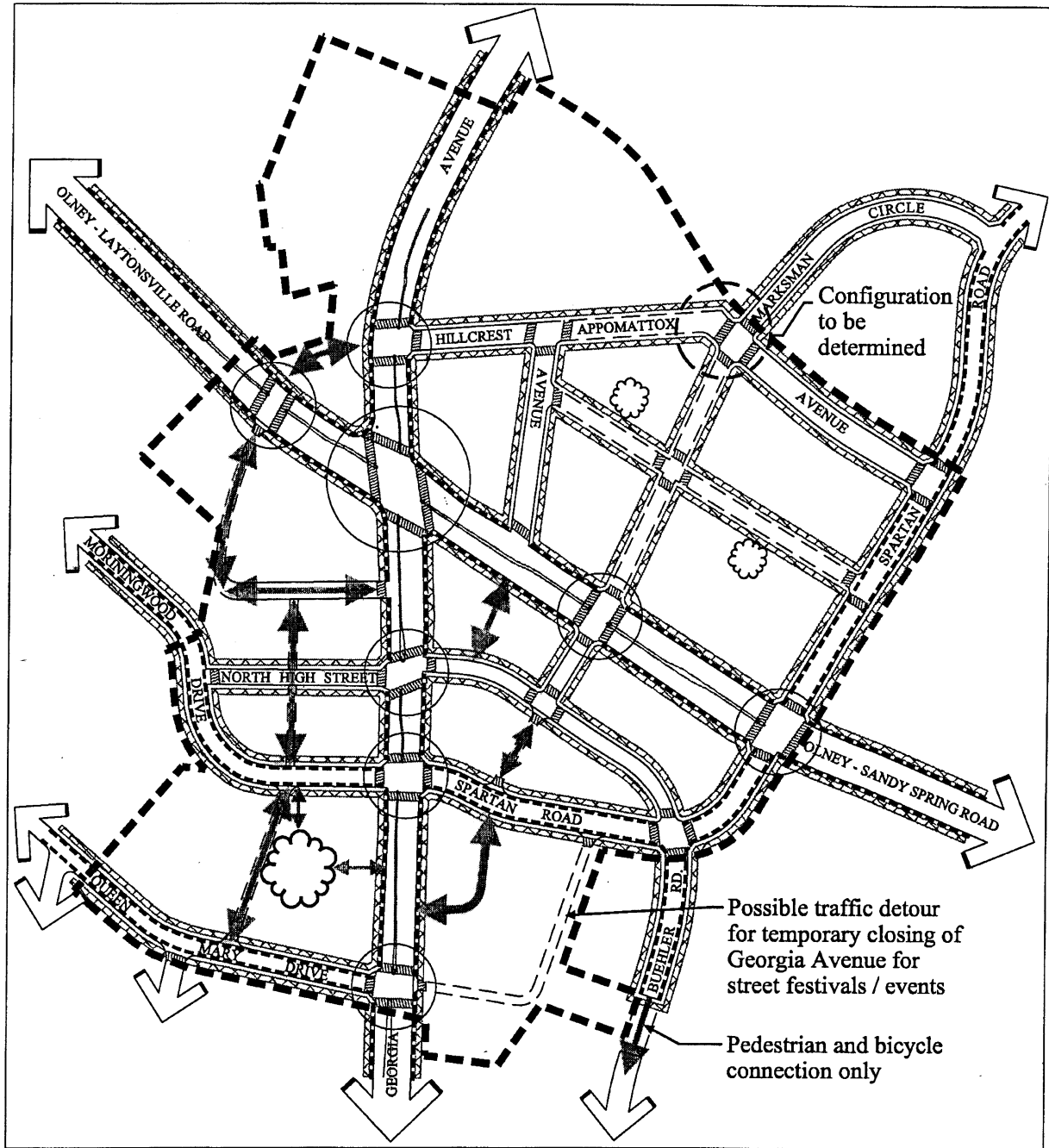
#### **PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION**

The current linear scale of the Town Center is car-oriented. It has very large blocks, which are more suitable for vehicular rather than pedestrian circulation. Safe and convenient pedestrian and vehicular circulation in and around the Town Center is essential for a pedestrian-oriented Town Center.

It needs an improved network of streets, sidewalks, with short and direct pedestrian connections among stores and different parts of the center. The proposed circulation concept is designed to break up the large blocks with a combination of vehicular and pedestrian connections. Other opportunities to create more pedestrian connections should be pursued as the redevelopment occurs in the future. In the Southwest Quadrant, North High Street should be connected to Morningwood Drive to connect the Town Center to the adjoining residential communities whereas Third Avenue should be connected to MD 108 via the Olney Shopping Center property at the corner of Georgia Avenue and MD 108 if possible through redevelopment of those properties. In the Northeast Quadrant, the two shopping centers should include a vehicular and pedestrian street between the two centers, and provide other internal connections and walkways with more direct connections to the surrounding residential community. Similarly, in the Southeast Quadrant, large blocks should be broken up with through-block pedestrian walkways, as well as vehicular driveways where feasible.

Any street improvements in the future, especially Georgia Avenue and MD 108, should be carefully designed to incorporate features that help reduce speeds and improve pedestrian safety. Lower speed limits, reduced pavement widths, curbside tree panels, on-street parking, and other design treatments should be used where appropriate to create a visual environment that discourages speeding through the Town Center.

# Town Center Pedestrian and Bicycle Circulation Concept



- Sidewalk/ Bike Path
- Internal Pedestrian Connection
- Crosswalk
- High Priority Pedestrian Crossings
- Proposed Open Space
- Shared Use Bike Path (off-road)
- Shared Roadway Bike Path



## **Recommendations:**

- 1. Provide easy and convenient pedestrian connections between the shopping centers and the adjoining residential areas.**
- 2. Create multiple, safe and pedestrian-oriented crossings of Georgia Avenue and MD 108.**
- 3. Provide a safe, convenient, and pedestrian-oriented vehicular connection between the Village Mart and Olney Town Center.**
- 4. Connect North High Street to Morningwood Drive. Explore the feasibility of connecting MD 108 to North High Street/Morningwood Drive at the time of redevelopment of the Olney Library and the Olney Shopping Center.**
- 5. Allow on-street parking where feasible on all streets except Georgia Avenue and MD 108.**
- 6. Create pedestrian-oriented streetscape through landscaping, traffic calming measures and other design features.**

## **URBAN DESIGN**

The Town Center concept is based on a more compact development pattern than exists today. A variety of building heights is encouraged to avoid the monotony of linear, single-story shopping centers. Buildings along Georgia Avenue and MD 108 should be higher than elsewhere in the Center and located closer to the street where feasible to discourage large expanses of parking lots as the predominant view from these roads. Buildings located along Georgia Avenue and MD 108 could be as high as four stories or 50 feet, whichever is higher. Maximum building height in the rest of the Town Center should be limited to three stories or 40 feet, whichever is lower. This height recommendation is based on the assumption that not all buildings along these streets would be able to reach the maximum permitted height, resulting in a varying profile of building heights. Additional flexibility in building heights should be provided to encourage and facilitate residential uses, especially affordable housing, in the Town Center. Since the proposed concept encourages buildings to be located closer to the street, no minimum front building setback is recommended.

A "Green Town Center" is envisioned for Olney. Generous landscaping and reforestation should be provided in the Town Center for aesthetic as well as environmental reasons. Trees and landscaping can help create a distinct identity that the Town Center now lacks. As a low-density suburban commercial center, Olney Town Center is not expected to become a compact downtown with streetwalls and store fronts. The Town Center concept uses trees and other landscaping elements to create an identifiable, attractive character. Special attention should be given to parking lots, which should be required to provide and retain large shade trees and plantings to soften the visual impact of hard surfaces.

Previous development in the Town Center has prevented much regeneration of forested areas that were removed by farming practices of the past. Current forest conservation regulations require that 15 percent of redeveloped sites consist of new forest planting. Depending on site conditions and needs, some of this requirement can be satisfied by landscaping and off-site forest banks, but the clearly preferred alternative is to address the requirements on site. This will encourage the greening of the Town Center over time. It is important that any redevelopment in the Town Center incorporate appropriate stormwater management measures that complement the restoration action plans and improve conditions in the Upper Rock Creek and the Hawlings River.

Georgia Avenue and MD 108 define the character of the Town Center more than any other street or property. They carry a large volume of local and through traffic and will continue to do so. These two thoroughfares should be designed as urban boulevards and their current traffic capacity should not be increased through additional lanes. The negative impacts of through traffic should be mitigated through landscaping such as green medians, street trees, sidewalks, at least six-foot wide curbside green panels, and other design features.

New developments should be encouraged to provide public open spaces in exchange for additional floor area. In addition to the one-acre open space recommended for the town commons, the proposed concept envisions other, smaller open spaces in the three large quadrants through redevelopment of properties that would be able to use the bonus floor area mechanism of the proposed new zone. These public spaces should be connected with the pedestrian walkways and provided with landscaping, benches and other amenities.

Some structured parking would be needed to meet the needs of the overall growth proposed for the Town Center. Parking garages should be carefully designed to fit in with the topography and become a part of the visual fabric of the Town Center. They should be safe, well lighted, appropriately located for pedestrian access, and incorporated into the main building instead of stand-alone structures.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1. Limit the height of any building within approximately 300 feet of Georgia Avenue and MD 108 to 50 feet or four stories, whichever is higher. In the rest of the Town Center, limit the building height to 40 feet or three stories, whichever is lower. Unoccupied features such as clock towers and spires may be higher than these maximum building heights.**
- 2. Pedestrian ingress, egress and interior walkways should be raised or separated from parking areas through change of materials, curbs, railings, grass panels or other design features.**
- 3. Provide benches, landscaping, light fixtures, trash receptacles, and other amenities in public spaces.**
- 4. Create visual breaks in larger parking lots through plantings and walkways.**

- 5. Encourage any redevelopment in the portion of the Town Center that drains to the Hawlings River to incorporate extraordinary stormwater management features that contribute to the restoration of the James Creek and Upper Olney Mill tributaries.**
- 6. Stormwater management techniques should include measures to improve the efficiency of existing down stream facilities and protect remaining streams in the Town Center.**
- 7. Accommodate forest conservation requirements on-site, where possible, to assist in greening the Town Center.**