

Planning Framework

The Germantown Planning Area is located in Montgomery County, Maryland, some 25 miles northwest of Washington, D.C., along Interstate Highway I-270. It contains approximately 11,000 acres within a three-by-five mile area. This planning area is bisected by I-270 and is bounded by Great and Little Seneca Creeks and their tributaries.

The *General Plan* for Montgomery County, known generally as "*On Wedges and Corridors*," was adopted by The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in 1964 and approved by the Montgomery County Council in 1969. Its purpose is to help establish overall policies for development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District and to relate these policies to the metropolitan framework.

The *General Plan* envisioned development radiating outward from Washington, D.C., in a series of corridor cities along the major transportation corridors, with wedges of lower density between them. The basic concept of the *General Plan* is to focus growth along the I-270 and I-95 corridors and to prevent urbanization of the wedges between these radial corridors. The intent is to preserve those areas for agriculture and open space uses and to provide low-density residential transitions from the more densely developed corridors. Gaithersburg, Germantown, and Clarksburg are the three corridor cities designated by the *General Plan* along I-270. Diagrammatically, a "corridor city" as originally envisioned in the *General Plan* was to have a single center of employment and shopping activities surrounded by residential development. The residential area decreased from high-density, adjacent to the core, to low-density, at the edge of the corridor city.

Several events have occurred since the late 1960's to alter this idealized concept for a corridor city. The rapid rail transit system envisioned in the *General Plan* has not been extended through the Corridor Cities and the roadway network proposed in the *General*

Plan has been modified. These changes, plus the land use policies of the City of Gaithersburg, have resulted in a multi-nodal Corridor City development pattern. Despite these events, the principal purposes and objectives of the "wedges and corridors" concept are still valid and remain the basic policy guide for the County.

The intent of the 1974 *Master Plan* was to fulfill the objectives of the *General Plan*. More specifically, the 1974 *Master Plan* recommended that Germantown develop into a "new community" similar to new communities such as Reston and Columbia. Unlike these new communities, however, Germantown could not be developed by a single developer, because the land ownership was fragmented among many different parcel holders. To offset this problem, a new community was proposed where the County government would seek to coordinate the efforts of many individual landowners to create as cohesive a "new town" as could be achieved within the existing powers available. This approach was a "first" in the United States. Local government was going to attempt to guide and stage development through its planning, zoning, subdivision and capital programming processes.

The major objectives of the 1974 *Master Plan* were to:

- support the development of Germantown as a distinct community having its own identity;
- surround Germantown with a greenbelt of parks;
- establish a Village Center and Town Center Concept;
- concentrate employment areas along I-270 and the B&O railroad;
- balance traffic generated by the land uses with the capacity of the transportation system;
- provide a broad range of housing types and prices; and

- provide policies for staged development, based on the provision of additional sewer service and transportation capacity.

This Plan confirms the spirit and intent of the 1974 *Master Plan* while recommending modifications that respond to a series of changes that have evolved during the past thirteen years:

- The population characteristics of those now living in Germantown are significantly different from those projected during the development of the 1974 *Master Plan*.
- The lifestyle and the composition of Germantown households are different from those anticipated in the 1974 *Master Plan*.
- Townhouses and other single-family attached units have become the predominant housing type for reasons primarily related to the private sector market that produces the housing stock; as a consequence, single-family detached units currently represent a very small portion of the existing and approved housing stock.
- Some development has occurred in Germantown that is not consistent with the intent of the 1974 *Master Plan*; therefore, more detailed development guidelines are needed to assure that the objectives of the 1974 *Master Plan* are achieved.
- Experience now indicates that a new community, encompassing land in many ownerships and evolving over several years, requires stronger implementation measures than those of the 1974 *Master Plan* in order to assure that the objectives of this kind of community can be realized.
- Two supermarket-anchored convenience retail centers have been built in the Town Center. These shopping centers have absorbed the market for retail uses in the Churchill Village Center and have delayed the development of the Gunners Lake Village Center.

One significant objective of this Master Plan is to improve the appearance of Germantown, which includes the predominance of attached homes, as well as the lack of landscaping and other visual amenities. It is important to understand the background of Germantown's recent development in order to put this objective into perspective.

Current development in Germantown, to a large extent, is a response to the economic forces that were present during its early years of growth, the late 1970's and early 1980's. During the late 1970's and early 1980's, the energy crises affected the entire housing market, and sewage treatment capacity limitations restricted the local market for development approvals. Housing prices throughout the County escalated rap-

idly. Interest rates rose so high that the market rate exceeded the legal limit in Maryland. In order to bring down interest rates, builders further increased housing prices.

The high interest rates and rising prices, coupled with Germantown's location on the suburban fringe, resulted in a strong market for townhouses. Housing at the developing edge of a metropolitan area is generally less expensive as the purchaser is trading price for a longer trip to and from work. Townhouses met the needs of first home buyers for a relatively affordable house. Thus, there was a strong market for townhouses during the period of Germantown's early growth. The duration of these economic conditions contributed to the existing predominance of townhouses in Germantown.

The economic uncertainties during Germantown's early growth created significant financial problems in the building industry generally, and in Germantown in particular — builders were concerned about their survival. Builders' attention focused on producing a readily marketable product. Builders' concern about quality and diversity of product were not considered as important when they were defaulting on their loans and declaring bankruptcy.

As a result, several subdivisions in Germantown were built by a succession of builders. Each successive turnover decreased commitment to and awareness of amenity features shown on site plans. In response to this condition, the Planning Board and County Council ultimately established requirements for site plan enforcement agreements signed by the developer and created staff positions for urban designers responsible for compliance with site plans.

Another factor affecting Germantown's present appearance is a result of its agricultural heritage. The extensive farming activities in Germantown have created bare fields with mature trees only in the stream valleys. As a result, the only vegetation in most subdivisions is that planted by the builders and the residents. It will take a few more years yet before these trees make a significant contribution to Germantown's appearance, but ultimately they will make a difference.

Many objectives expressed in the 1974 *Master Plan* have been achieved, particularly in terms of public facilities. These successes are the result of the combined efforts of the community organizations, the Planning Board, the County Council, the County Executive, and the actions of the responsible agencies. The Germantown Campus of Montgomery College has been established; police and fire stations have been built; and the public ownership of the greenbelt of parks has increased. The Planning Board's staging of development has deferred development on land where public facilities were not programmed, or

where premature development would preclude the development of the Mixed-Use Center. Because of this previous withholding of zoning in a staged manner, the recommendations of this Plan to reduce residential densities in certain areas can still be implemented with a minimum of rezoning. Also, the designation of highway alignments in the master plan has enabled rights-of-way to be preserved by the Planning Board through the subdivision process.

On balance, it does not seem wrong to conclude that Germantown today is a qualified success, in terms of the master plan's objectives, but that it can and should be improved as it moves further towards completion. It is the intent of this Plan, through its various recommendations and development guidelines, to improve the visual and functional quality of Germantown.

This Plan modifies the 1974 *Master Plan* in the following four areas:

Housing Mix: The intent of this Plan is to promote a mix of housing types that can accommodate families of varying ages and income levels and allow opportunities for them to continue living in Germantown as their needs and tastes change. At present, Germantown lacks an adequate supply of detached homes. The land use and zoning recommendations proposed in this Plan respond to this concern.

Specifically, this Plan recommends reduced residential densities in several environmentally sensitive areas to densities that result primarily in single-family detached units. Further, a range of lower densities are recommended so that a variety of lot sizes can be achieved. The Plan also recommends that the percentage of attached homes in most subdivisions be lower than is currently permitted.

Community Identity: The intent of this Plan is to develop a greater sense of community identity. (See Figure 3.) A positive sense of "place" at the Village and Town levels is very important. To date, community identity is focused on individual and fragmented subdivisions. The development guidelines and the recommendations of the Townscape Design chapter of this Plan respond to this concern. The importance of the visual appearance of Germantown is also reflected in the guidelines in that chapter.

In addition, each of the Village Centers, with the exception of Neelsville Village, is recommended to be developed under the Planned Development Zone. The requirement for both development plan and site plan review will provide detailed review of Village Center development. The Neelsville Village Center is

recommended for a new RMX (Residential Mixed-Use) Zone, which will also provide for a detailed review of development plans through project plan and site plan reviews. The zones recommended for use in the Town Center are zones which require site plan review prior to development. The zones recommended for the Mixed-Use Center, the Retail and Service Park, and the potential Regional Shopping Mall require site plan review.

Community Facilities: The intent of this Plan is to provide appropriate locations for community facilities. Since the adoption of the 1974 *Master Plan*, there have been significant demographic changes, as well as changes in the nature and scale of community facilities desired by residents. For these reasons, the number, location, and nature of community facilities have been re-examined to assure that the recommendations of this Plan meet the existing and anticipated needs of Germantown residents.

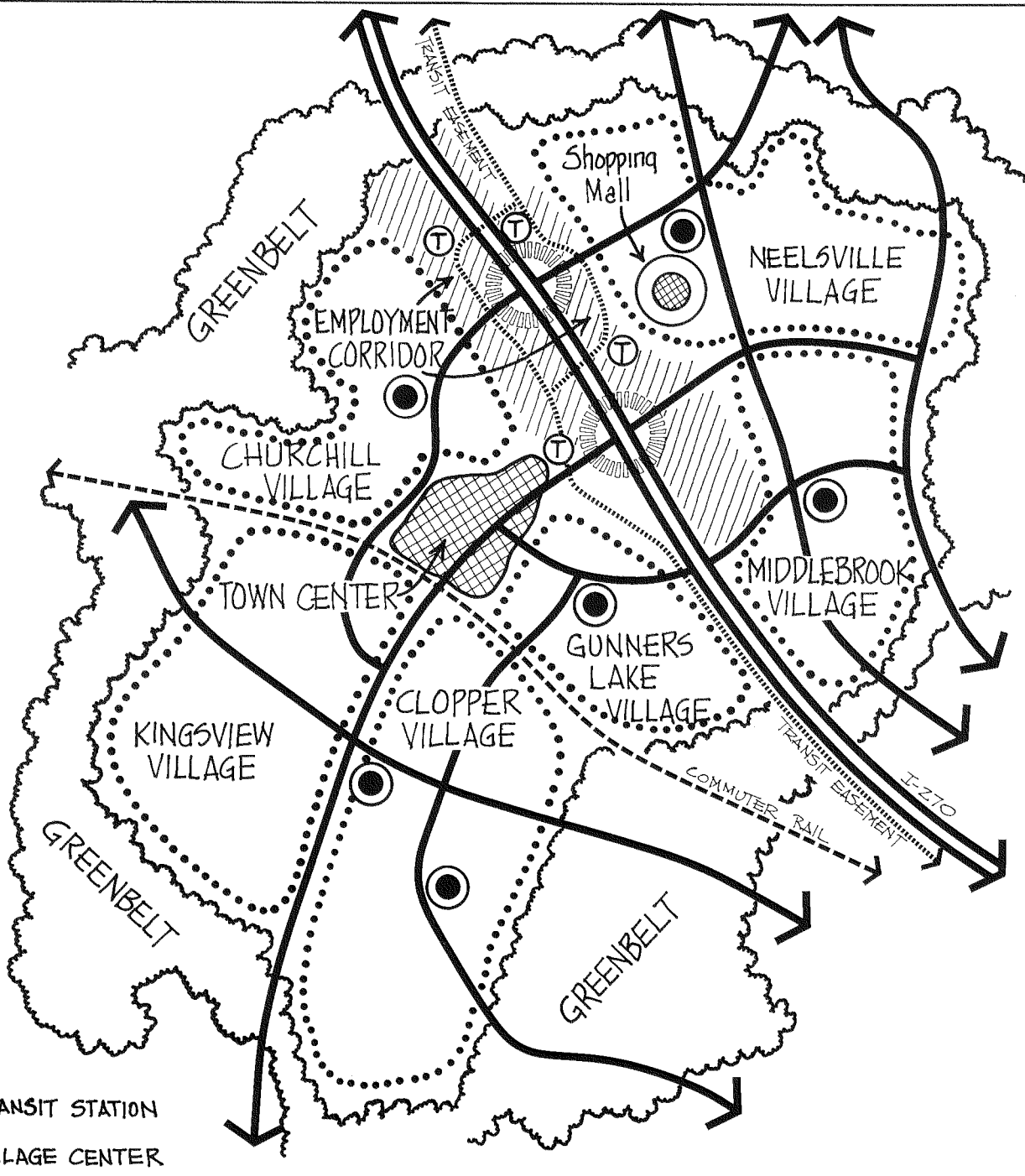
This Plan proposes the construction of six new elementary schools, two new middle schools, and a new high school. The total number of elementary schools recommended in Germantown has been reduced from 28 to 12. This reduction is a result of the reduced average number of school-age children per household, and the increase in the enrollment capacity at the new schools. The number of senior high and junior/intermediate schools also has been reduced from three to two of each. Because of the increased size of new elementary schools, the minimum size of the school sites is recommended to be increased from 10 acres to 12 acres, including 10 acres usable for school buildings, parking and recreation facilities.

The reduction in the number of school sites could adversely affect the adequacy of community recreation facilities because the estimates of the 1974 *Master Plan* of local park needs took into account the recreational opportunities of school fields and courts. This Plan addresses this increase in local park requirements.

Balance Between Housing and Employment Opportunities: The intent of this Plan is to provide greater opportunity for people to both live and work in Germantown. A reasonable objective is that expressed in the 1974 *Master Plan*: 25 percent of the resident work force of Germantown should also work there. The 1987 Census Update Survey,¹ however, indicates that only 10 percent of the resident work force works in Germantown. (See Figure 16.) This is due primarily to the fact that residential development has occurred at a faster pace than employment develop-

1 Research Division, Montgomery County Planning Board

Figure 3



- Ⓣ TRANSIT STATION
- VILLAGE CENTER

Community Concept Plan



Comprehensive Amendment
to the Master Plan for Germantown

Montgomery County, Maryland

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

ment. The transportation analysis done for this Plan has estimated that about 30 percent of the resident work force will be working in Germantown by the time development is built out.

Although there is no direct means by which government in a free society can ensure the achievement of this objective, the recommendations expressed in this Plan will at least provide the opportunity for its realization. Furthermore, the recommended increase in the percentage of single-family detached housing and the provision of a broad mix of housing types and prices will increase the opportunity for more Germantown employees to live in the community.

In addition, the internal roadway system is designed to facilitate intra-Germantown travel which, in turn, will reduce work trip miles for those living and working in Germantown.

The comprehensive development of a new community is a complex undertaking at any time or place. It is particularly difficult in Germantown because of the fragmented land ownership pattern. With multiple developers, and limited police powers, it is not easy for government to ensure that a single, coherent development program for the entire 11,000-acre area can be achieved. It is certainly more difficult than if Germantown had been developed by a single owner as in other new communities. In those instances adjustments to the development program can occur on almost a daily basis.

Furthermore, the sense of long-term commitment and accountability are inherently stronger in a new

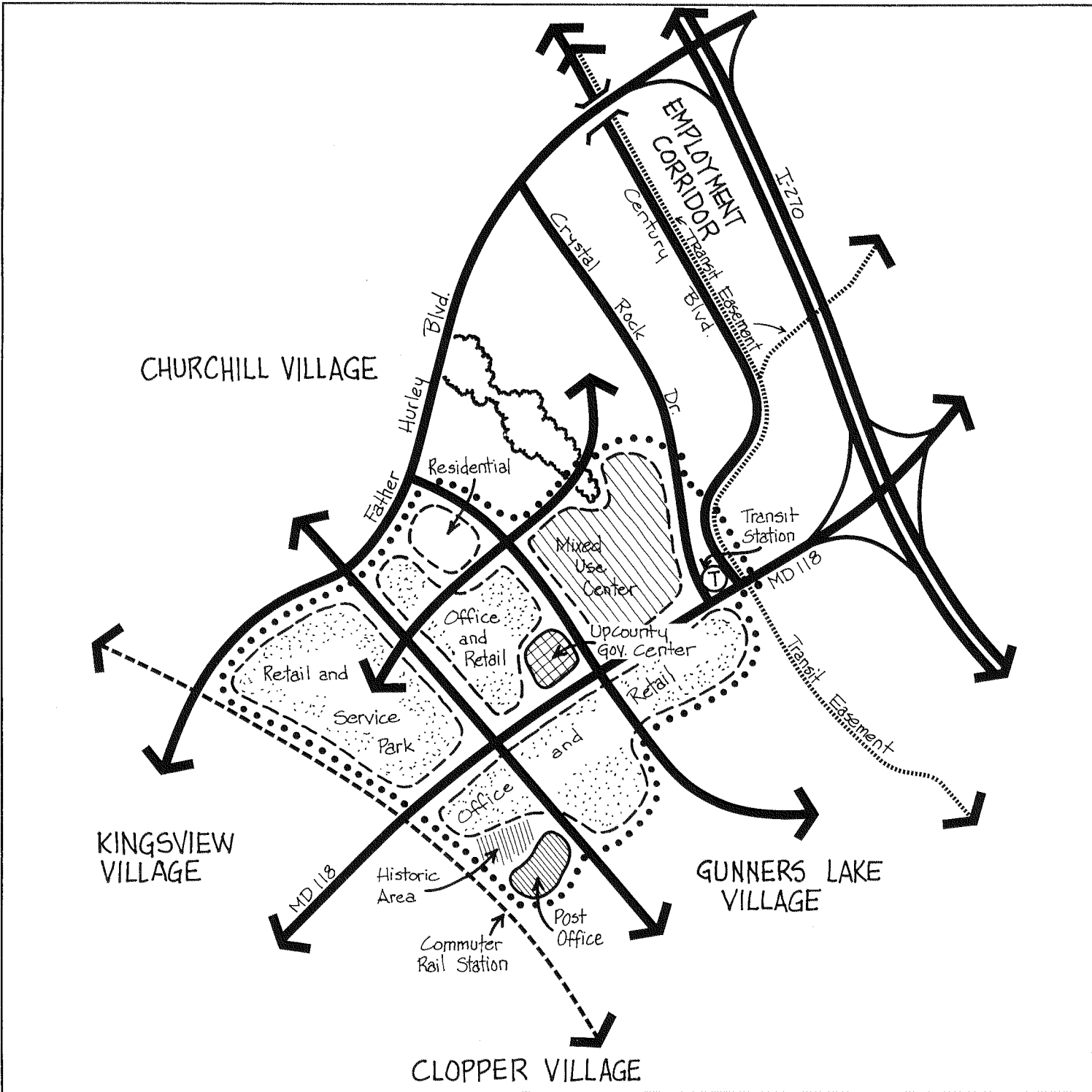
community built by a single developer instead of by a series of smaller developers. Smaller developers are generally more focused on the marketing needs of their individual subdivisions than on elements that would improve the quality of Germantown as a whole. The Germantown situation creates the need for an extra special public commitment to orchestrate the coordination of private development within well-defined public policy guidelines.

There are several factors beyond the control of the County government that could influence the outcome of this Master Plan. The likelihood and effects of these influential external factors are difficult to predict because they would result from actions or factors not subject to County government control, such as the actions of the Federal government, changes in energy supplies, and changes in lifestyle. In addition, technological research and invention are capable of changing patterns of everyday life but are also beyond the control of County government.

These larger political, environmental, economic, and technological factors are global or national in nature. While beyond the scope of this Master Plan, they would nonetheless significantly impact the County.

The *Comprehensive Growth Policy Study* considers several broad County-wide trends that are beyond the control and time frame of this Master Plan. The results of this Study may be useful in suggesting future modifications to the recommendations expressed in this Master Plan.

Figure 4



Town Center: Concept Diagram



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