

THE FUTURE OF BETHESDA

1.1 VISION

The future Bethesda will be a bustling downtown ringed by quiet neighborhoods, where residents can watch a play or visit an artist's studio, eat at an ethnic restaurant or sit at an outdoor café, meet friends while shopping on the main street or the farmers' market, listen to a band concert in summer or ice skate in winter in the center of town. They can catch the Metro to the nation's capital or walk to work on brick sidewalks under leafy trees.

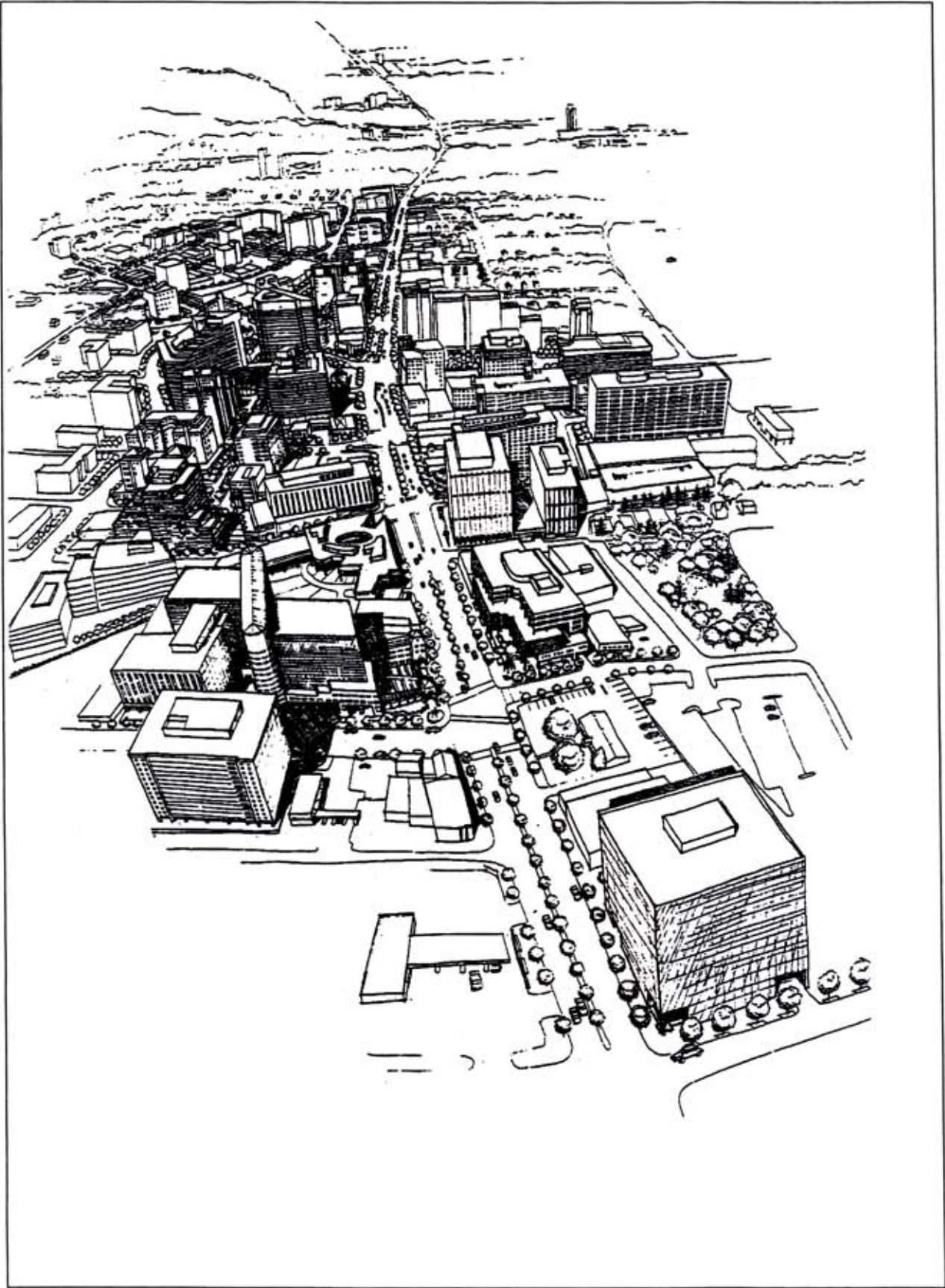
Bethesda already has many of the elements of this vision. It is a mature suburban downtown for Bethesda-Chevy Chase and southern Montgomery County; a major concentration of office employment; a regional destination for restaurants, specialty goods, and services; a neighborhood convenience shopping center; a government services and educational center, and a transportation hub. Bethesda is fast becoming both a prime urban residential neighborhood and a focus for culture and the arts.

This Sector Plan is a fine-tuning of earlier Sector Plans, a reevaluation of original goals and the resulting environment rather than a radical change of direction. Consistency of County policy helps create a community that is confident in its future and whose citizens are committed to improving that community. (See Figure 1.1, Aerial of Downtown Bethesda.)

Much of the Core development around the Metro station is in place. While preserving what is successful, the Plan provides opportunities for new development. A key component of the Plan is to complete the Metro Core, still intended as the focus for most intense development, with high-quality infill structures, green open space, and streetscape improvements such as trees, special paving, and seating. The Plan expands its vision to include commercial and residential districts surrounding the Core. It aspires to give each a distinctive character through less intense redevelopment and incremental improvements, while knitting them together into a complete fabric.

The vision includes expanded opportunities to live in the downtown in a variety of settings, from single-family neighborhoods to high-density apartments, at varied price ranges. The Plan also preserves surrounding neighborhoods, which contribute to a sense of continuity and community.

Bethesda will continue to play a major role in regional and local markets. The Plan seeks to increase the diversity of employment and shopping opportunities to serve current and future workers and residents. The strong retail sector, with its special shops and restaurants, is expected to expand, reinforced by cultural spaces and activities. The Plan endorses the concept and vision of Bethesda as a "cultural district."



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The physical environment will be safe and welcoming to pedestrians, cyclists, and commuters. The Plan envisions a future Bethesda in which more of its residents and employees ride the Metro, use a carpool, cycle, or walk to work and other activities. Bethesda will be a greener place, carrying out the design theme of Bethesda as a “garden,” as new street trees are planted, and as a combination of private development and public initiative adds open spaces at all scales from small landscaped areas to a regional hiker/biker trail linking Bethesda to an extensive regional park system.

1.2 GOALS

The Plan vision describes the kind of place we want Bethesda to be. The Plan goals represent the milestones on the path to reach the city we have envisioned. They include the following:

1. DOWNTOWN

Realize the vision of Bethesda as a diverse and lively downtown for Bethesda-Chevy Chase. Continue well-designed redevelopment within the Metro Core and reinforce the physical character and varied activities of districts radiating out from the Core so that each district has a distinct identity yet is linked into a coherent whole.

2. URBAN FORM

Encourage infill development that complements the underlying physical form of Bethesda. Create a high-quality built and pedestrian environment, including a network of pathways and open spaces. Enhance Bethesda’s commercial and residential districts with improvements appropriate to the character of each.

3. HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Encourage and maintain a wide range of housing types and neighborhoods in and around Bethesda for people of all incomes, ages, lifestyles, and physical capabilities, in keeping with County goals. Provide an adequate supply of housing, including affordable units, to reinforce Bethesda as a place to live as well as work. Protect adjacent neighborhoods from commercial intrusion, undue traffic, and environmental degradation.

4. EMPLOYMENT

Provide opportunities for additional jobs in this major down-County employment center, in keeping with County policy to concentrate growth in the urban ring near Metro stations and to increase the County’s revenue base.

5. COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Enhance Bethesda as an appealing environment for working, shopping, and entertainment. Strengthen its attraction as a destination for visitors while ensuring that residents find a sense of community. Reinforce a unique sense of place through the themes of Bethesda as a “garden” and a “cultural district.”

6. CIRCULATION

Provide a safe and functional transportation system to serve the current and recommended



land uses. Achieve a significant shift of travel from drive-alone auto use to transit, car-pooling, and other alternatives. Enhance the pleasure, safety, and convenience of walking and bicycling.

The goals for the Sector Plan area reflect the goals in the *Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan (1990)*, which is intended to guide the overall development of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase (B-CC) planning area, including the Bethesda Central Business District (CBD) and the two other Sector Plan areas. The Sector Plan goals presented above are also consistent with the direction of the *General Plan Refinement of the Goals and Objectives for Montgomery County*. (See Section 1.5.)

1.3 SECTOR PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

Chapter 2 of this Sector Plan establishes the context for the Plan. Section 2.1 describes the area covered by the Plan geographically and makes certain recommendations to amend the Sector Plan boundary. It sets forth the local and regional roles of Bethesda as a community center, market, and transportation hub, and it summarizes Bethesda's planning history. Section 2.2 presents a profile of the area as it exists today: its people, land use, employment, and housing.

Chapters 3-9 contain objectives which further develop the Plan goals. These chapters make a series of recommendations to meet the goals and objectives that will allow the public and private sectors to realize the Plan vision.

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A. LAND USE AND ZONING PLAN

This chapter presents land use and zoning recommendations as well as design concepts and guidelines. The Bethesda CBD Sector Plan envisions the Sector Plan area as a regional employment center with the potential addition of about 16,400 jobs by the year 2010 above the existing 1993 level. The Plan also envisions establishing a stronger housing balance with the potential to add about 2,700 housing units by the year 2010.

Metro Core District

A major Plan objective is to achieve a compact central core and complete development of the center.

The Plan recommends optional method employment uses on most CBD-2 (Central Business District) sites at 4 FAR (Floor Area Ratio). Optional method residential use is also allowed at 5 FAR. County-sponsored mixed-income housing is recommended for Garage 49 on Woodmont Avenue near the Metro station.

The Hot Shoppes site, on a critical corner at the heart of the Core, receives considerable discussion. The Plan recommends designating the site CBD-3 with a density of 615,000 square feet of office. Optional method development of 750,000 square feet may be approved, if a professional theater or housing is provided.

The Plan allows optional method office development above the historic Bethesda Theatre Cafe, if the interior design is preserved and a performance use is provided.

Transit Station Residential District

The Plan recommends creation of a high-density, low-rise “urban village” that steps down in height from 6 floors along Woodmont Avenue to 3 floors along Arlington Road, and provides from 45 up to about 100 dwelling units per acre. The Plan retains and revises the TS-R (Transit Station-Residential) Zone to achieve this vision.

Woodmont Triangle District, Old Georgetown Road Corridor, and the Wisconsin North and South Corridors

The Plan seeks to preserve the low-density commercial character of these areas while encouraging the addition of housing. Current zoning is CBD-1, with 1 FAR of housing allowed under the standard method of development in addition to 1 FAR of commercial use. Revisions to the CBD-1 Zone provide an additional incentive for housing under the optional method. CBD-R1 or -R2 zoning is recommended for some sites. Housing may be constructed as part of future parking structures on Lot 36 and Deck 35 in the Woodmont Triangle.

Battery Lane and Bradley Boulevard Districts

The Plan recommends preserving existing multi-family residential use to maintain variety in housing type and affordability. It also recommends higher density multi-family zoning on four sites along Battery Lane to increase the number of dwelling units accessible by Metro. The Plan also recommends maintaining the single-family neighborhood along Leland Street and Wellington Drive.

East Bethesda, Town of Chevy Chase, and Edgemoor Transition Areas

The prime objective for these areas is to ensure stability of the adjacent single-family neighborhoods. The Plan recommends guidelines to limit special exception approvals and supports measures to discourage cut-through traffic.

In East Bethesda, the Plan recommends the confirmation of existing R-60 (residential, one-family) zoning with additional commercial transition (C-T) zoning on selected lots. The Plan also recommends moving the Sector Plan boundary closer to the CBD. Townhouse development is recommended in the parking lot behind the Bethesda Theatre Cafe and would also be allowed on Public Lot 25 on Tilbury Street.

In Chevy Chase, the recommended use for properties between Walsh and Stanford Streets is predominately residential townhouses. The Plan recommends the R-60/TDR (transfer able development rights) Zone, allowing up to 12.5 dwelling units per acre. In Edgemoor, the Plan supports confirming the R-60 Zone in the block bounded by Moorland Lane, Arlington Road, and Edgemoor Lane.

Montgomery Triangle Corridor

The Plan recommends infill development on the remaining sites in this district. It supports a density of 1.5 FAR in the current C-O (commercial office) Zone for properties along East-West Highway and Pearl Street (northeast), O-M (office building, moderate intensity) zoning for the small lots east of Pearl Street and south of East-West Highway, and C-T and O-M zoning for the triangle of land created by East-West Highway,



Montgomery Avenue, and Pearl Street.

Arlington Road District

The Plan seeks to preserve and enhance this district as a community retail and business service area. It recommends concentrating redevelopment along Bethesda Avenue – the district’s “main street” – with a focus at the intersection of Bethesda Avenue and Arlington Road. The Plan designates a C-2 retail preservation overlay zone limited to .5 FAR for the southern portion of the Arlington Road District.

The Plan recommends a combination of mixed-income housing, main street retail, and parking on Public Parking Lot 31 under the existing R-60 base zone and a floating TS-M Zone, and a staging area for the Capital Crescent Trail. About 100 dwelling units could be developed.

B. TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Transit and Other Non-Auto-Driver Modes

The Sector Plan recommends a major shift of travel from drive-alone auto use to transit, carpooling, and other alternatives, by the following measures:

- Establish a transportation management organization (TMO).
- Establish an internal loop bus circulation system.
- Locate a terminal within the Bethesda CBD for the Silver Spring-Bethesda Trolley.
- Provide a second, southern entrance to the Bethesda Metro station.
- Provide pedestrian access improvements.
- Create a bicycle network that provides connections to the Metro station and throughout the Sector Plan area. The Capital Crescent Trail is a major Class I route into and through Bethesda.
- Limit the supply of employee parking in Bethesda. Since the Plan may require as many as 3,500 new spaces, all existing public parking sites must be reserved for possible structured parking. New parking structures on certain sites could also include mixed-income housing.
- Achieve 37 percent non-auto-driver travel during peak travel periods.

Highway System

The Transportation Plan seeks to provide a balanced transportation system, where the area-wide level of congestion remains within acceptable levels and where congested roads and intersections are improved, when feasible. Recommendations related to the highway system include:

- Rely on the area-wide recommendations of this Plan and the Annual Growth Policy in reviewing specific development applications.

- Improve the intersection of Connecticut Avenue with East-West Highway, which is already congested and will get worse in the future.
- Study improvements to intersections of Rockville Pike with Cedar Lane and other roads in the vicinity of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Connecticut Avenue with Bradley Lane, and Old Georgetown Road with Arlington Road/Wilson Lane.
- Realign Arlington Road south of Bethesda Avenue to reduce the curve and provide better sight distance.
- Provide adequate right-of-way along East-West Highway at Wisconsin Avenue to allow sidewalks, five auto travel lanes, and a park-like landscaped area on the north side.
- Recognize the possible future need for a peak-period reversible lane on Old Georgetown Road from Woodmont Avenue to Huntington Parkway.

C. STREETScape PLAN

Streetscape recommendations include:

- Extend the Metro Core streetscape system along Wisconsin Avenue and Old Georgetown Road. These are urban boulevards that will serve increasing amounts of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
- Install underground utilities in these additional priority areas: East-West Highway, Bradley Boulevard, Woodmont Avenue, Norfolk Avenue, Arlington Road, Bethesda Avenue, Montgomery Avenue, Miller Avenue, Fairmont Avenue, and Montgomery Lane.
- Stage new streetscape improvements in response to limited public financial resources and to include private sector participation at the time of development.

D. ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES PLAN

Environmental objectives are achieved through implementation of ongoing programs and cooperation with County agencies. These objectives include improving air quality, increasing recycling, reducing noise impacts, mitigating stormwater impacts, and ensuring sufficient water supply and sewerage facilities.

E. COMMUNITY FACILITIES PLAN

Recommendations regarding community facilities to meet future needs include:

- Create additional green open spaces.
- Consider joint public uses and housing in any redevelopment of the existing police station site.
- Provide an expanded Government Services Center to better meet community and public service needs.



F. HISTORIC RESOURCES PLAN

Protecting Bethesda's historic heritage is achieved through the County Master Plan of Historic Preservation, which designates a property as a historic resource. The Sector Plan designates Brooks Photographers, the Little Tavern, Mrs. Withers' (Leslie W. Beall) House and the Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School.

G. IMPLEMENTATION

Recent zoning text amendments applicable to this Plan include:

- A new CBD-R2 Zone.
- An amendment to the CBD-1 and CBD-2 Zones to allow the addition of 1 FAR of residential use in standard method development, with similar additions in the other CBD zones. The amendment also allows a lower percentage of residential use for optional method, mixed-use projects in the CBD-1 and CBD-2 Zones.

Zoning ordinance amendments recommended by this Plan include:

- Amend the TS-R Zone to allow a greater building coverage, a wider range of commercial uses, and a smaller assemblage requirement.
- Amend the PD Zone to allow townhouses near single-family detached houses and to allow urban densities on some small sites.
- Create a new C-2 Overlay Zone for part of the Arlington Road District.

Staging recommendations include:

- Stage I allows new employment and housing development in the Sector Plan area. During that time, transportation management measures will go into effect and new pedestrian, bicycle, and roadway facilities will be provided.
- Stage II begins when a transportation study is completed and the Annual Growth Policy approves more ceiling capacity to allow more development in the Sector Plan area.
- Stage III begins when a new traffic study is completed for a Sector Plan amendment.

Growth in the Bethesda CBD, Friendship Heights, and Westbard Sector areas and at federal facilities should be staged so that public facilities can be coordinated to serve new development.

The Sector Plan favors cooperation between the public and private sectors to administer and coordinate public services and private initiatives in the Bethesda CBD. The Plan recommends that the Bethesda Urban Partnership provide programs and improvements in support of the vision and recommendations of the Plan.

1.4 MARYLAND PLANNING ACT OF 1992

The Bethesda CBD Sector Plan embraces and confirms the seven visions of the Maryland Economic Development, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992 (the Planning Act).

The seven visions of the State Planning Act, as stated in Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland, are:

1. "Development is to be concentrated in suitable areas;
2. Sensitive areas are to be protected;
3. In rural areas, growth is to be directed to existing population centers and resource areas are to be protected;
4. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is to be considered a universal ethic;
5. Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption is to be practiced;
6. To assure the achievement of paragraphs 1 through 5 above, economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are to be streamlined;
7. Funding mechanisms are to be addressed to achieve these objectives."

In addition to the Sector Plan's conformance to the seven visions, the Planning Act requires the implementation of a sensitive areas element designed to protect environmentally impacted areas. Sensitive areas are described in the Act as 100-year floodplains, streams and their buffer areas, habitats of threatened and endangered species, and steep slopes.

The Environmental Resources chapter of the Sector Plan complies with the sensitive areas requirement of the Planning Act, along with appropriate strategies for protecting these areas.

Flexible development regulations, streamlining the development process, and innovative economic development techniques are also required by the Planning Act. The Sector Plan uses flexible development standards in several instances where significant new development is contemplated.

1.5 GENERAL PLAN FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY

The 1993 *General Plan Refinement of the Goals and Objectives for Montgomery County* amends the 1964 General Plan, commonly called "... on Wedges and Corridors" and the 1969 *Updated General Plan for Montgomery County* (approved in 1970). The General Plan Refinement provides the framework for the development of more specific area master plans, functional plans, and sector plans. Its purpose is to provide clear guidance regarding the general pattern of development in Montgomery County, while retaining enough flexibility to respond to unforeseeable circumstances as they arise. (See Figure 1.2.)



The General Plan Refinement divides Montgomery County into four geographic components: the Urban Ring, the Corridor, the Suburban Communities, and the Wedge. Each area is defined in terms of appropriate land uses, scale, intensity, and function. The geographic components provide a vision for the future while acknowledging the modifications to the Wedges and Corridors concept that have evolved during the past three decades. In particular, the General Plan Refinement confirms two distinct sub-areas of the Wedge—an Agricultural Wedge and a Residential Wedge. It also recognizes the transitional areas of generally moderate density and suburban character that have evolved between the Wedge, Corridor, and Urban Ring as Suburban Communities. Emphasis remains on intensification of the Corridor.

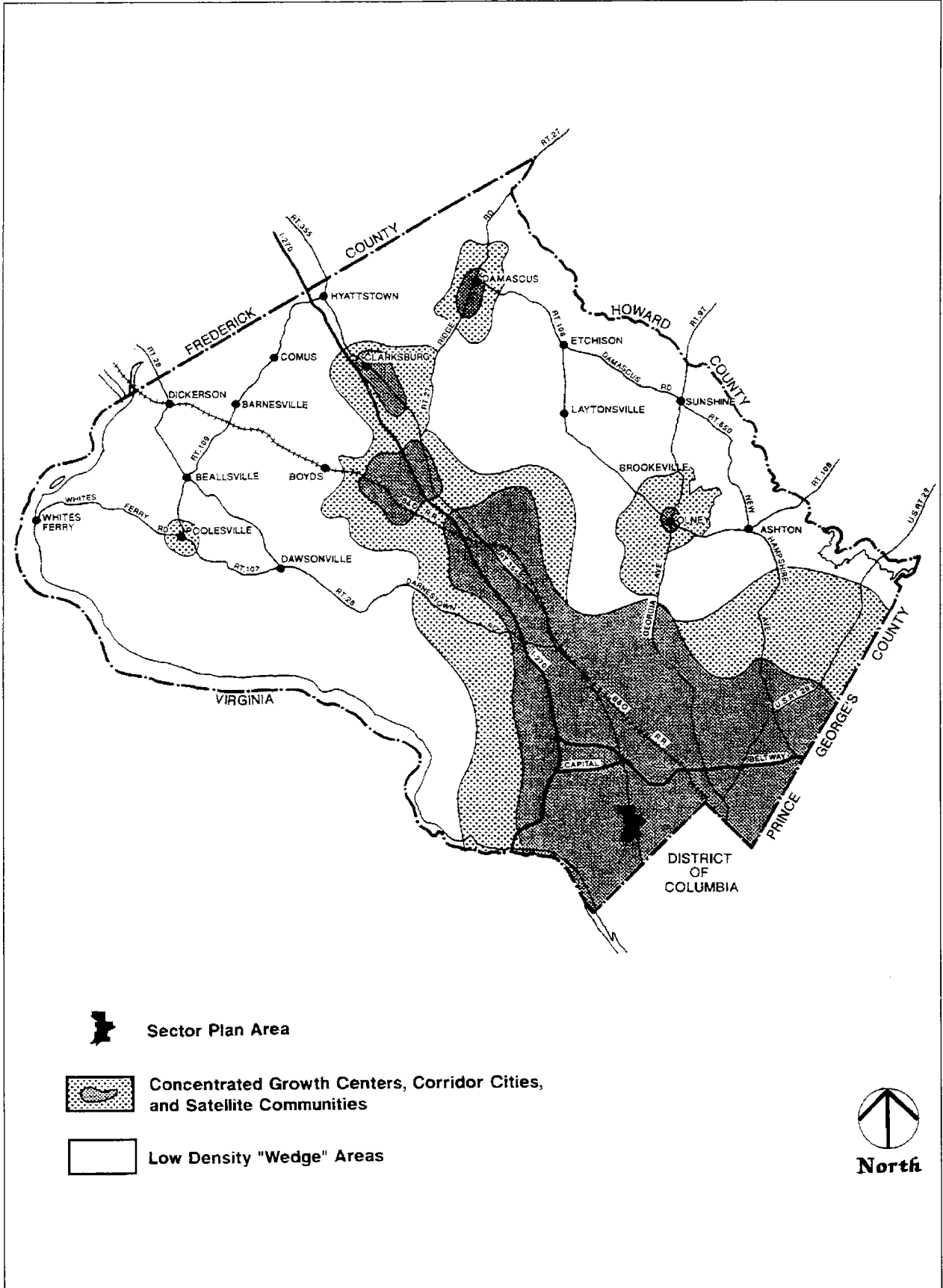
In addition to defining geographic components, the General Plan Refinement provides seven goals and associated objectives and strategies that give guidance to development within those geographic components. The goals, objectives, and strategies provide a future vision for Montgomery County and establish a frame of reference for decision-making to ensure that the vision becomes a reality. The seven goals relate to Land Use, Housing, Economic Activity, Transportation, Environment, Community Identity and Design, and Regionalism.

Conformance with the Maryland Planning Act of 1992 and General Plan for Montgomery County

The land area covered by the Bethesda CBD Sector Plan is within the boundaries of the Urban Ring. The vision for the Urban Ring, as described in the General Plan Refinement, is characterized by “well-established, lively centers with job and housing opportunities; strong residential neighborhoods; varied transportation options; relatively dense development; active public reinvestment; and commercial revitalization.”

The Sector Plan will fulfill this vision by proposing a continuation of the established urban character of the area. Bethesda will continue to be a vital retail and employment center, with expanded opportunities for new housing. Neighborhoods within and adjacent to the Sector Plan area will be protected. A comprehensive bicycle network will include connections to the Metro station and the Capital Crescent Trail. Improvements are also planned for the pedestrian, transit, and roadway systems. Large-scale commercial development will complete the center of Bethesda surrounding the Metro station. Public facilities and amenities will be provided from both public and private sources. Commercial activity will be supported by the Bethesda Urban Partnership.

The Sector Plan also addresses each of the seven goals and related objectives and strategies of the General Plan Refinement, along with the visions of the Maryland Planning Act.





A. LAND USE

Achieve a variety of land uses and development densities consistent with the Wedges and Corridors pattern.

The Sector Plan directly supports the Wedges and Corridors concept by directing higher-density development to the Urban Ring in a transit serviceable area (Objective 1). A mix of uses is planned throughout the Plan area, while ensuring suitable transitions to adjacent residential communities (Objective 2). The Plan recommends rezoning some properties to TDR zones, in support of the agricultural wedge (Objective 4). A large increase in housing is provided, in balance with increased employment (Objective 7). The Plan also conforms with the Maryland Planning Act by concentrating development near transit (Vision 1), providing for transferred development from rural areas (Vision 3), and supporting large-scale employment development (Vision 6).

B. HOUSING

Encourage and maintain a wide choice of housing types and neighborhoods for people of all incomes, ages, lifestyles, and physical capabilities at appropriate densities and locations.

The Sector Plan anticipates an expansion of multi-family housing, including garden, mid-rise, and high-rise apartments, as well as some townhouses (Objectives 1-3 and 6). Mixed-income housing is supported on certain publicly owned parking lots and moderately-priced dwelling units will be included within private housing development (Objectives 4 and 6). The scale of development on the edges of the Sector Plan area will ensure compatible transitions to adjacent neighborhoods (Objective 5). The Plan conforms with the Maryland Planning Act by concentrating residential development near transit (Vision 1).

C. ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Promote a healthy economy, including a broad range of business, service, and employment opportunities at appropriate locations.

The Sector Plan provides opportunities for new high-quality office employment and also for the continuation and expansion of existing retail and service businesses (Objectives 1, 4, and 6). An improved streetscape and pedestrian amenities will support the business environment, and the Bethesda Urban Partnership will provide maintenance and activity programming (Objectives 2 and 5). Mixed-use projects and mixed-income housing are planned (Objective 3). The Plan conforms with the Maryland Planning Act by supporting expanded employment opportunities (Vision 6).

D. TRANSPORTATION

Provide a safe and efficient transportation system that serves the environmental, economic, social, and land use needs of the County and provides a framework for development.

The Sector Plan supports a transportation system that connects all transit modes to the Metro station and provides bicycle, pedestrian, and auto access to the station (Objective 1). A transportation management organization is recommended to help reduce peak travel demand (Objective 3). The Plan includes options for a transit station location

for the Bethesda-Silver Spring Trolley and recommends a southern entrance to the Metro station (Objective 4). An extensive bicycle network and improvements to the streetscape and pedestrian environments, including consideration of extending the existing pedestrian tunnel, are planned (Objectives 6 and 8). The Plan conforms with the Maryland Planning Act by supporting conservation of vehicle fuel resources (Vision 5) and by identifying capital facilities to be funded by a variety of sources (Vision 7).

E. ENVIRONMENT

Conserve and protect natural resources to provide a healthy and beautiful environment for present and future generations. Manage the impacts of human activity on our natural resources in a balanced manner to sustain human, plant, and animal life.

Implementing ongoing programs, in cooperation with County agencies, will protect environmental values. Policies and recommendations to protect the environment in the area surrounding the Bethesda CBD are also addressed in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan (1990). The Sector Plan recommends a transportation management program, which will increase awareness of environmentally prudent travel behavior (Objective 1). The Plan provides for street trees and new open spaces (Objective 2 and 8), mitigation of stormwater impacts in new development (Objectives 3 to 5), transportation alternatives to improve air quality and efficient use of energy (Objectives 7 and 14), increased recycling by business and residents (Objective 9), and reduced noise impacts in residential development (Objective 11). The Plan ensures sufficient water supply and sewerage facilities (Objective 12) and recommends installing public utilities underground (Objective 13). The Plan conforms with the Maryland Planning Act by demonstrating efficient and sensitive use of land through concentration of development near transit (Visions 1 and 4) and encouraging efficient use of fuel and solid waste resources (Vision 5). Sensitive areas surrounding the Bethesda CBD are addressed in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan (1990) (Vision 2).

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F. COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND DESIGN

Provide for attractive land uses that encourage opportunity for social interaction and promote community identity.

The Bethesda CBD has an identity as the downtown for the greater Bethesda-Chevy Chase area because of the amount and character of employment, shopping, services, and housing. The concentration of density, the confluence of transportation services, and the high-quality public environment all reinforce the image of Bethesda as a downtown serving a larger community (Objective 1). The Arlington Road District also provides a major community-oriented shopping environment. The Plan seeks to build on existing public parks and open spaces and improve the pedestrian and bicycle links throughout the Sector Plan area and to the adjacent neighborhoods (Objectives 2 and 5). Preservation of historic resources, recognition of a "cultural district" theme, and the recommendation to provide a professional theater reinforce Bethesda's identity (Objective 3). The Plan recommends an expanded Government Services Center and highlights other public service needs (Objective 4).



G. REGIONALISM

Promote regional cooperation and solutions of mutual concern to Montgomery County, its neighbors, and internal municipalities.

The expansion of employment in Bethesda will support a healthy regional economy (Objective 1). Concentration of development near Metro supports the region's efforts to attain Clean Air Act standards (Objective 2). A representative of the Town of Chevy Chase served on the Sector Plan advisory committee and was consulted during the preparation of the Plan (Objective 3).