



COMMUNITY FACILITIES PLAN

Public facilities and services are the building blocks of community. Fire and rescue services ensure safety, and public schools, day care, and elderly services address the needs of all generations. Libraries, post offices, and recreation centers help build a community among people with shared needs, interests, and values.

The Bethesda CBD provides its residents with a variety of services. As a growth center and commercial focus for Bethesda-Chevy Chase and southern Montgomery County, Bethesda CBD's services and facilities reach a population beyond the Sector Plan boundary. This chapter describes existing services and makes recommendations for additions to facilities that can respond to future commercial and residential growth.

8.1 PLAN OBJECTIVES

1. Provide public facilities to meet the human service, recreation, security, educational, and other needs of the community.
2. Encourage flexibility in space and programming to adapt to future needs.

8.2 HUMAN SERVICES

A. CHILD CARE SERVICES

The Central Business District's role as a job and transportation center makes it an appropriate location for child care services for both employees and nearby residents. The CBD currently has a number of privately run child care facilities, located in churches, community centers, and office buildings. The Metropolitan Park project at Garage 49 will have day care space, perhaps with extended hours, to support employees in restaurants and other businesses concentrated nearby. It will also serve the large existing and proposed residential components of the TSR and Woodmont Triangle Districts.

The Plan can have an effect on the life of young children in the CBD in other ways. One is to create a "child-friendly" environment with parks, wide sidewalks, and safe street crossings. These issues are addressed elsewhere in the Plan.



The second way is to encourage private developers to provide subsidized child care facilities in appropriate locations. Proximity to parks and open space and location of play spaces away from busy roads are important criteria when reviewing sites. The high land value of CBD property often prices child care services out of the market and limits the provision of outdoor play space for children.

Recommendation

The Plan recommends that child care facilities be encouraged in the CBD. Subsidized child care facilities are among the amenities considered appropriate for optional method development, pending future study of CBD zones. (See Section 10.1, Plan Implementation, Zoning.)

B. FACILITIES FOR THE ELDERLY

While the Bethesda CBD generally attracts younger residents, its nature as an established and compact community with concentrated services and Metro access also makes it attractive to elderly residents who are not comfortable driving.

Most of Bethesda's seniors have relatively high incomes and home equity, which have enabled them to turn to the private sector for the services they need. As the population ages, the market has responded with housing, entertainment, and services geared to an affluent elderly population. However, elderly people between the ages of 75 and 80 often begin to lose the ability to care for themselves and their homes. Because of an inadequate supply of housing in the CBD for such service workers, the in-home care they need is not always readily available.

The growing elderly population in the CBD and the surrounding area also includes less affluent residents who need the option to "age in place" or in a familiar environment near their former homes. The County Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) currently operates Waverly House, a senior citizen development of 158 apartments on East-West Highway that partially addresses this need.

Recommendation

Although policies beyond the scope of this Plan have primary impact on the lives of the elderly, some local measures can add to their quality of life. The land use recommendations are designed to create an environment that is concentrated and walkable, affording elderly people increased mobility and independence.

Private and public housing options should meet the needs of a range of people, including hired caregivers who cannot afford market-rate housing in the CBD, family caregivers who need the space and special design features to take care of older relatives at home, and the elderly themselves. Assisted care facilities and up to 25% of the proposed new housing units should be designed for elderly or near-elderly residents.

Improved transportation can provide better access to groceries and services. The proposed loop bus or a special bus service that could possibly extend to the Friendship Heights elderly community would provide increased mobility and independence. The financing of such a service must be explored further.

Other services, like the nutrition program, recreation programs, and adult day care, are currently available in the CBD, including those provided at Waverly House and the Leland Community Recreation Center. Additional services should be consolidated in a visible and accessible public space, convenient to housing, as discussed below. (See Section 8.6 A.)

C. FACILITIES FOR THE HOMELESS

Despite Bethesda's status as an employment center and the high education and income levels of its residents, the CBD has a homeless population. The amount of homelessness varies with the strength of the economy and with community responses to the problem. Among the homeless population are veterans, families, and the mentally ill, all with different needs requiring different responses.

The Bethesda community has responded with Bethesda House, a men's shelter, and Bethesda Cares, a lunch program sponsored by the Bethesda First Baptist Church and the Christ Lutheran Church. Greater urbanization and other factors may increase the homeless population. The Department of Family Resources estimates that there are at least 400 homeless people on the streets of Montgomery County on any given night. The current day and night shelter capacity in the County is approximately 200 beds.

Recommendation

Although the increase in jobs and housing may offer opportunities to some segments of the homeless community, many more will probably not be served by the market. Since many of the service jobs that will be created will likely not pay enough to meet current housing costs, new housing options should be considered, such as Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings, perhaps reusing small CBD hotels. SRO housing typically consists of a one-room unit with limited-sometimes shared-cooking facilities. SRO's are not currently permitted by the County zoning ordinance, though boardinghouses are. Consideration should be given to a zoning text amendment allowing SRO's in appropriate locations in some CBD zones.

D. CRISIS CENTER

The County Crisis Center, run by the Department of Addiction, Victim and Mental Health Services, is currently located in the Woodmont Triangle in the former BCC Rescue Squad building adjoining Public Parking Lot 36. The center provides client telephone crisis services, walk-in crisis services, a mobile crisis team, triage, and evaluation beds. The center is also responsible for various supportive services.

Recommendation

The County is attempting to relocate the center to a site that is more central to the entire County. When a new and enlarged facility is available, reuse options for the existing building, owned by the Parking District, could include a teen facility, shelter, or other public uses. If the building is torn down and a new parking structure built on the entire site, the Plan recommends that mixed-income housing be provided.



8.3 PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

The Department of Parks manages five urban parks in the Bethesda Sector Plan area. They are small between one and two acres and are located on the edges of the CBD, where they provide appropriate transitional uses between single-family residential neighborhoods and the CBD. These green open spaces also provide a valued respite from the dense urban environment and offer recreational opportunities to apartment residents and workers. Urban parks are particularly popular with lunchtime visitors, who eat, read, socialize, and relax. Neighborhood children often use the play equipment on weekends.

All of the urban parks include landscaped sitting areas and walkways, in addition to other features. The two-acre Elm Street Park buffers the Town of Chevy Chase from CBD commercial uses and includes a playground, paddle tennis courts, ping-pong tables, and a horseshoe court. It is scheduled for renovation, which may replace some of these facilities with others preferred by the community and with more green space. The two-acre Battery Lane Urban Park is a bicycle and pedestrian link between NIH and the Bethesda CBD, as well as providing recreational facilities. The Chase Avenue Urban Park (one-half acre) and the Cheltenham Drive Urban Park (one-third acre) buffer the East Bethesda neighborhood from commercial activity on Wisconsin Avenue and provide sitting and play space for small children. The one-acre Caroline Freeland Urban Park on Arlington Road between Hampden Lane and Elm Street provides a stable transitional use at the edge of the Edgemoor neighborhood and includes a small playground.

In addition to these urban parks, the two schools in the Sector Plan area and a community center just outside it meet some of the area's recreation demand. The playing fields, gym, stage, and meeting rooms of Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School are available for community use. Bethesda Elementary School's facilities provide a recreational resource for both the residents of the adjacent single-family neighborhood and the apartments in the area zoned Transit Station Residential, across Arlington Road.

The Leland Community Recreation Center, at 4301 Willow Street in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Planning Area, has a gymnasium, meeting rooms, a playground, and tennis courts, as well as housing a privately operated child care center and offices for the Town of Chevy Chase. The outdoor recreational facilities are maintained by the Department of Parks. The Department of Recreation offers various programs at this location for area residents. Local parks just outside the CBD include Norwood Local Park and Lynbrook Local Park.

The 1988 Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan established criteria for the acquisition and location of urban parks. The criteria include the need for beautification and open space, passive recreation areas, and buffering of residential neighborhoods or transition between different uses or districts. Employment centers, transit stations sites, commercial areas, and high density residential areas are considered appropriate locations for urban parks.

Montgomery County has long enjoyed a reputation for a superior park system. In an era of increased fiscal constraints at all levels of government, public dialogue is desirable on several issues of importance to Bethesda and the County, including the following:

1. How can we pay for acquisition, development, and maintenance of new parks and open spaces? What is the relative responsibility of public agencies versus private sector developers in meeting recreational needs generated by growth?

Should Bethesda Urban Partnership funds be used to acquire, develop, and/or maintain parks and open spaces? Is maintenance most economical and effective if coordinated by one entity?

2. How should priorities be assigned for public expenditure between the urbanizing, down-County sector plan areas and the up-County demands for traditional suburban park and recreation areas?

Despite the high land values in the CBD, there are opportunities to enhance the park and open space network. A privately funded, publicly accessible park-like open space in the center of the CBD, on the Hot Shoppes site, would complement Metro Plaza and provide an amenity for the elderly residents of adjacent Waverly House. Small landscaped open spaces can be provided on land already in public ownership to buffer the residential neighborhoods. Existing parks can be linked with streetscape improvements to increase their visual impact. The Capital Crescent Trail will also bring a green swath with unique recreational value into the CBD. (See discussion in Section 5.5.)

Recommendations

Innovative approaches for acquiring, developing, and maintaining urban parks and open spaces are needed, considering the capital and operational cost burden that new parks place on the Department of Parks. Programmed public expenditure involving several County agencies and private redevelopment should combine to create a linked park and open space system in the CBD.

The Plan recommends green open spaces and parks in the following locations (see Figure 8.1, Existing and Proposed Community Facilities):

1. **Expansion of Battery Lane Urban Park**

The existing park should be expanded with landscaping, path extension, and a possible seating area for workers in the Woodmont Triangle and adjacent residents. This expansion, which would involve public right-of-way, would improve visibility and public access from the Woodmont Triangle to this well-used park. The design must provide parking for the two houses to the west.

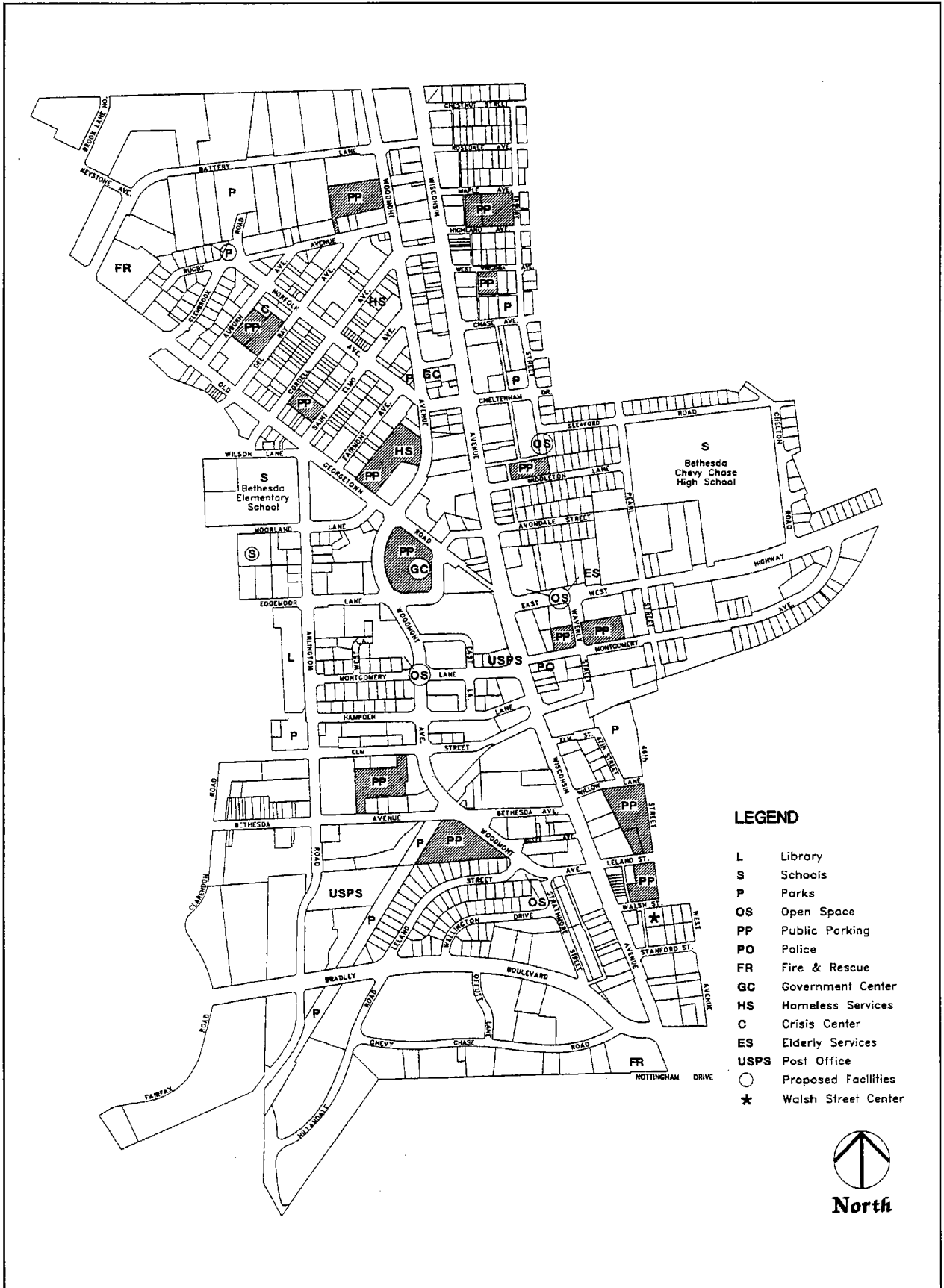
2. **Northwest corner of Woodmont Avenue and Montgomery Lane:**

This small urban green space could include a landscaped seating area. It would require combined acquisition and development by new and existing TSR projects.

3. **Sites used for below-grade parking and mixed-income housing:**

Lot 31: Site development should include landscape screening along the southern edge of the site to buffer the single-family houses in the Sacks subdivision. Pedestrian and bicycle access to the Capital Crescent Trail should also be provided and the possibility of a staging area for trail users should be explored.

Lot 36: This small urban open space is primarily intended for young adults, including apartment residents and retail/office workers. It should provide landscaped seating areas.



4. Parking Lot 42 and Beta Corporation Lot:

Open space in the southeast corner of the proposed joint development site should create a park-like setting and provide a pedestrian pathway from Tilbury Street to Middleton Lane to allow pedestrian access for new and existing residents.

8.4 PUBLIC SECURITY

A. POLICE STATION

In response to plans to relocate or renovate the Bethesda Police Station on Montgomery Avenue, the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan recommended two criteria for making that decision.

1. Meet the service and operational requirements for efficient access and for size.
2. Avoid locations that cannot be easily secured or buffered from nearby residential communities.

Planning Department and County staff analyzed several sites in the BCC area. After a public hearing, the hearing examiner made a recommendation. The County Executive postponed the decision to relocate the station because of County fiscal constraints and the development of the police strategic master plan.

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Recommendations

If a location in the CBD is considered for a new station as a result of the strategic master plan, it may be a site that is recommended for housing in this Sector Plan. The relative priority of housing or police use should be resolved at the time of site selection.

Should the police station relocate, leaving the existing 21,700-square-foot building vacant, this Plan recommends the following criteria for reuse of the site and/or building:

1. The use should advance the goals of the Plan, giving priority to public and community uses.
2. The use should not exceed the density or height limits set by the Plan.
3. The use should be compatible with adjacent land uses.

Possible uses could include the following:

1. Bethesda-Chevy Chase Government Services Center. The center is currently in a rented building in the Woodmont Triangle District. The police station would offer a more central location for community services with improved parking and Metro access, if plans to locate the government center at Garage 49 are not realized.
2. Bethesda Urban Partnership offices, including “cultural district” management (Section 10.3).



3. Subsidized artist studios to enhance the objectives of the Bethesda "cultural district."
4. Programs for the elderly or a teen center.
5. Housing. Subsidized or mixed-income housing on the police station parking lot, or on the whole site if the building were demolished, should be considered. The site is a low priority for housing because of limited size and lack of adjacent amenities for residents. The site would be more attractive for housing if it could be combined with the private lot that fronts onto Waverly so that the entrance to the complex could be on a pedestrian-friendly street. The lot would also be an appropriate location for elderly housing if the police station were reused for community facilities, including an elder care center.
6. A mix of private and public uses. An appropriate mix of community services with some private uses might provide an income stream to help operate and maintain the building.

B. FIRE AND RESCUE STATIONS

The Bethesda CBD has two fire and rescue facilities. The fire station is located at the southern edge of the planning area at the corner of Wisconsin Avenue and Bradley Boulevard (6600 Wisconsin Avenue). The rescue squad is located at the northern end of the planning area at 5020 Battery Lane.

These facilities are able to serve the CBD adequately at this time. With an increase in the elderly population and an increase in office workers, the Fire and Rescue Planning Division anticipates an increase in demand for emergency medical services and hospital transport trips. This demand can be met by the existing facilities.

There is no anticipated increase in the demand for fire services since current demand is being met and new buildings will have internal sprinkler systems. A significant increase in CBD traffic congestion, however, could affect the response time of both services.

8.5 EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

A. LIBRARY

The Bethesda Regional Library, at 7400 Arlington Road, serves the CBD. Along with its regular collection, it features an extensive reference collection and meeting rooms, all of which are well used. The Bethesda Library is an active community gathering place. It is one of the busiest libraries in the County, attracting both business and residential users.

Despite a projected population increase in the CBD, future demand can be accommodated in the existing facility with some increase in staffing levels. The County has plans to renovate the Bethesda Library before the year 2000. At that time the emphasis will be on internal reconfiguration and installing electronic data systems. The primary impact of

increased growth and demand will be on the materials budget as well as the need for additional staffing.

Recommendations

Rather than investing in large capital expenditures, like a building expansion, the library prefers to move into the community with small facilities and through electronic connections to homes and businesses. Staffed “mini-libraries” or unstaffed information kiosks at Metro stations can provide such services as electronic access to community and collection information, reserve book pickup, and a small selection of lending paperbacks.

The Plan recommends creating and encouraging opportunities for the library to provide expanded services to the community at appropriate locations in the CBD. The Plan supports locating a kiosk at the Bethesda Metro station.

B. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

There are two public schools in the Bethesda CBD, Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School and Bethesda Elementary School. Both are on less than optimum sites, but expansion opportunities are limited and expensive due to their CBD locations.

Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School is located on East-West Highway on a 16-acre site. The site does not meet present standards, which recommend a 30-acre site. Limited funds and site options make expansion of the high school site unlikely. BCC has a stable enrollment and was renovated in the 1970s. No expansion or change is anticipated. The Plan designates the school on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation. (See Chapter 9.0.)

The Bethesda Elementary School, like Somerset and Chevy Chase Elementaries, is also on an undersized site by current standards. In the 1970s, the School Board planned to expand this less-than-five-acre site by acquiring single-family properties between Moorland Lane and Edgemoor Lane. (See Figure 4.40.) The Board purchased several properties, but did not complete the purchases originally intended because of budget limitations, the increasing price of real estate, and changes in the anticipated size of the school population.

The school system's Vision Center occupies a structure across Moorland Lane from the school. It includes a special library and serves both students and adults. Relocation of the Vision Center will be considered in connection with plans for the modernization of Bethesda Elementary, now scheduled for the end of the decade. The School Board has no immediate plans for use or sale of the houses it owns in the block between Moorland Lane and Edgemoor Lane. The intent of the 1976 Sector Plan to maintain the properties in public ownership should be carried forward until the School Board makes a specific modernization decision for Bethesda Elementary School.

The Bethesda Elementary School gym, meeting rooms, and outside play area are significant assets to both the single-family and the multi-family residential neighborhoods on either side of Arlington Road. Any planning for nonschool use of the school's facility in the future should take this recreational use into consideration.



8.6 OTHER PUBLIC FACILITIES

A. GOVERNMENT SERVICES CENTER

Bethesda is not an incorporated municipality, but the County has found it efficient to decentralize its provision of services in small government services centers throughout the County. These centers can respond to the needs and interests of the residents and businesses in their areas.

The Bethesda-Chevy Chase Government Services Center is located at 7815 Woodmont Avenue in rental space of about 3,000 square feet. The center serves as a clearinghouse for community events and services. It also provides two meeting rooms, used by community and business groups.

The County's lease for the Government Services Center space will soon expire and there is a strong probability that the center will relocate. It will continue in its role as a focus of community activities and location for meetings, an information and referral clearinghouse responding to the demands of a changing population, and a site for satellite office space for County departments. The appropriate location can help ensure the effectiveness of the center in serving the community.

Recommendation

In considering a new site for the Government Services Center, a central site in the CBD should be selected for maximum visibility and accessibility. The Planning Board has approved the Housing Opportunities Commission's (HOC) plans to locate the center in the office building portion of the mixed-income housing project above Garage 49. Should this not occur, other possible sites are the Lorenz site, or the police station site if the station is relocated.

If the functions are increased, a larger facility than the existing leased space would be required. The center could house a variety of consolidated services and community functions such as the Bethesda Urban Partnership and elder day care.

B. WALSH STREET CENTER

The Walsh Street Center is a County-owned building formerly operated as a community center. This publicly owned property presents a valuable opportunity in an urban area with high land costs to accommodate a variety of uses over the next 20 years.

The County has decided to retain ownership and has leased the building on a long-term basis to the Writers Center. By retaining title, the County will have the flexibility to change tenants depending on local demand and interests.

Recommendation

The Plan recommends continued County ownership of the building to further the objectives of the "cultural district" or other community objectives.

C. POST OFFICE FACILITIES

The Bethesda CBD is currently served by two post offices. The post office at 7400 Wisconsin Avenue, near Metro Plaza, is on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation and is a community landmark. It is a retail, public-service facility. The site, while centrally located and convenient for Metro users, is accessible by car from one-way streets only. It has limited customer parking in the rear, and no on-street parking.

The post office at 7001 Arlington Road is designed as a carrier annex where mail is sorted for delivery. This location's retail facilities are limited. Although there is a large off-street parking lot, most of it is used by mail trucks and access is difficult because of the curve in Arlington Road.

The 110,758-square-foot site is privately owned. However, the U.S. Postal Service owns the 16,000-square-foot building and has a ground lease that expires in 1999, with options to renew that extend until 2015-beyond the life of the Plan.

The Postal Service will implement a corporate automation plan in 1995, which may reduce the numbers of employees on the site. But it is also possible that the Service might choose to expand the building if automation suggests a consolidation or extension of distribution functions on the site. Given the high land values and the difficulty of finding a site in Bethesda, the Postal Service considers the site attractive because of the possibility it provides for expansion and extensive parking.

Recommendations

Although the Postal Service does not currently believe it necessary to expand retail service substantially on this site, an increase in jobs and housing in the Bethesda Sector Plan area would increase postal service demand. The site has the potential to be redeveloped for uses which could include a retail post office.

If the Postal Service does not renew the lease, the site could be developed for a combination of retail use along the Arlington Road frontage and multi-family residential uses for the remainder of the site. (See Section 4.12.) Residential use would not be compatible with continued function as a carrier annex on any portion of the site because of the hours of operation.

