

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

“The Plan shows in detail land use, transportation systems, community resources and zoning, and represents the strong desire of the community to remain rural.”
- 1980 Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan

The community's commitment to preserve the area's rural character is just as strong today as it was 15 years ago. **This Plan continues the 1980 Plan's emphasis on maintaining the aesthetic qualities and rural character of Sandy Spring/Ashton.**

Although the 1980 Plan emphasized a commitment to preserving rural character, there is no clear definition in the Plan of what constitutes rural character. The 1980 Plan essentially relied on a large-lot, low-density development pattern, with clusters of development in the village centers to “help continue the rural surroundings and life style that have traditionally characterized Sandy Spring/Ashton.” The 1980 Plan’s reliance on a zoning strategy that permitted large-lot, low-density development pattern and clustering around the village centers has not been as effective in maintaining the rural character, as originally envisioned. Use of the RE-2 zone, in particular, has resulted in a pattern that reflects the underlying capacity of land to develop under well and septic systems, rather than development that would preserve the rural landscape.

This Plan explores what constitutes rural character and concludes that a different planning strategy must be implemented if Sandy Spring/Ashton's special rural features are to be preserved. This is especially true given the location of large, undeveloped properties near the village centers and most significantly near the historic Sandy Spring and the Meeting House Road area. This Plan looks closely at these properties and makes land use, design and zoning recommendations to ensure that future development responds to the character of these special places.

COORDINATION WITH NEIGHBORING COMMUNITY MASTER PLANS

The relationship of Sandy Spring/Ashton to the region and to neighboring planning areas is shown in Figures 4 and 5. Planning coordination with Eastern Montgomery County has focused primarily on issues related to transportation and environmental protection.

In terms of the *Olney Master Plan*, this Plan continues to reinforce a separate identity for Sandy Spring/Ashton. This Plan expands the 1980 Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan boundaries to help

accomplish this objective. The areas affected are located north of MD 108 and include properties that straddle the 1980 Plan boundaries: Dellabrooke and Brooke Grove Manor Nursing Home.

MASTER PLAN PROCESS

During the Master Plan process there were over 30 meetings of the Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), Planning Board worksessions, community workshops on a variety of planning topics, property owners meetings, and technical workgroup meetings with governmental agencies affected by the Plan's recommendations.

The time and commitment represented by the Plan is not due to the size of the Master Plan area or the amount of acreage available for development. This Plan has commanded a high level of interest among residents and property owners because it addresses the rural character of Sandy Spring/Ashton. The remaining developable acreage in Sandy Spring/Ashton includes properties which define and shape the setting of Sandy Spring/Ashton. The level of interest in this Plan process has been very high because recommendations for the remaining acreage will define the rural character of Sandy Spring/Ashton.

This Plan also reflects consideration of Planning Board and County Council public hearing testimony and a collaborative effort between property owners and nearby neighborhoods to reach agreement on certain controversial issues.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MARYLAND PLANNING ACT OF 1992 AND THE GENERAL PLAN FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY

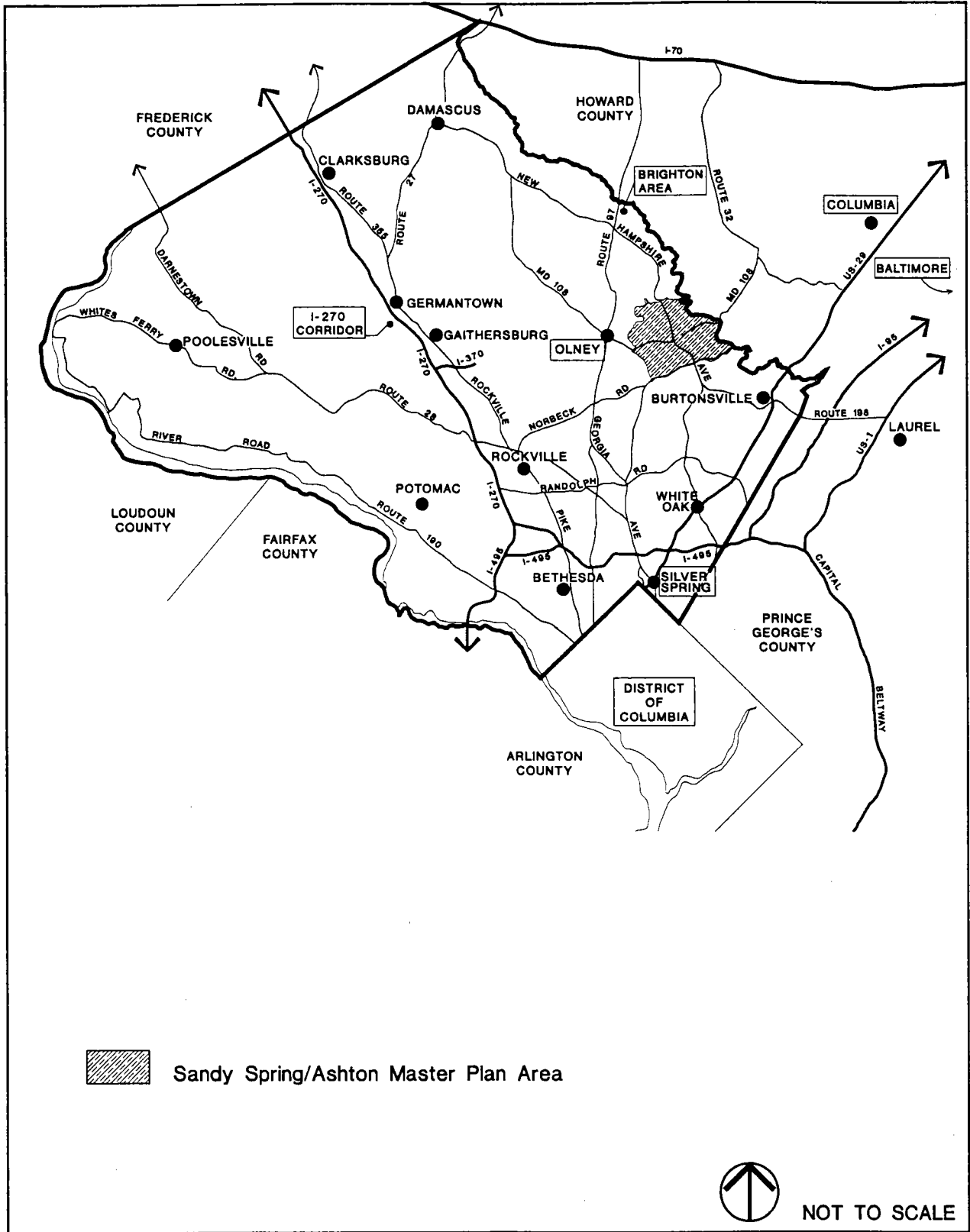
The seven visions of the Maryland Economic Development, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992 (the Planning Act) and the 1993 *General Plan Refinement of the Goals and Objectives for Montgomery County* together establish state and county-wide planning objectives that must be reflected in local master plans.

The seven visions of the 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; and
7. Funding mechanisms are to be addressed to achieve these objectives.

REGIONAL LOCATION

FIGURE 4



In addition 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 Planning Act as 100-year floodplains, streams and buffer areas, habitats of threatened and endangered species, and steep slopes. This Plan supports and confirms these seven visions. The Environmental Resources chapter responds to the sensitive areas element requirement of the Planning Act.

The *1993 General Plan Refinement of the Goals and Objectives for Montgomery County* amends 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. It provides clear guidance regarding the general pattern of development in Montgomery County while retaining enough flexibility to respond to unforeseeable circumstances.

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, they confirm two distinct sub-areas of the Wedge—an Agricultural Wedge and a Residential Wedge. They also recognize the transitional areas (Suburban Communities) of generally moderate density and suburban character that have evolved between the Wedge, Corridor and Urban Ring. Sandy Spring/Ashton lies within the Agricultural and Residential Wedges. (See Figure 6.)

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 geo-graphic components. The goals, objectives and strategies provide a future vision for Montgomery County and establish a frame of reference for decision-making to make that vision become a reality. The seven goals relate to Land Use, Housing, Economic Activity, Transportation, Environment, Community Identity and Design, and Regionalism.

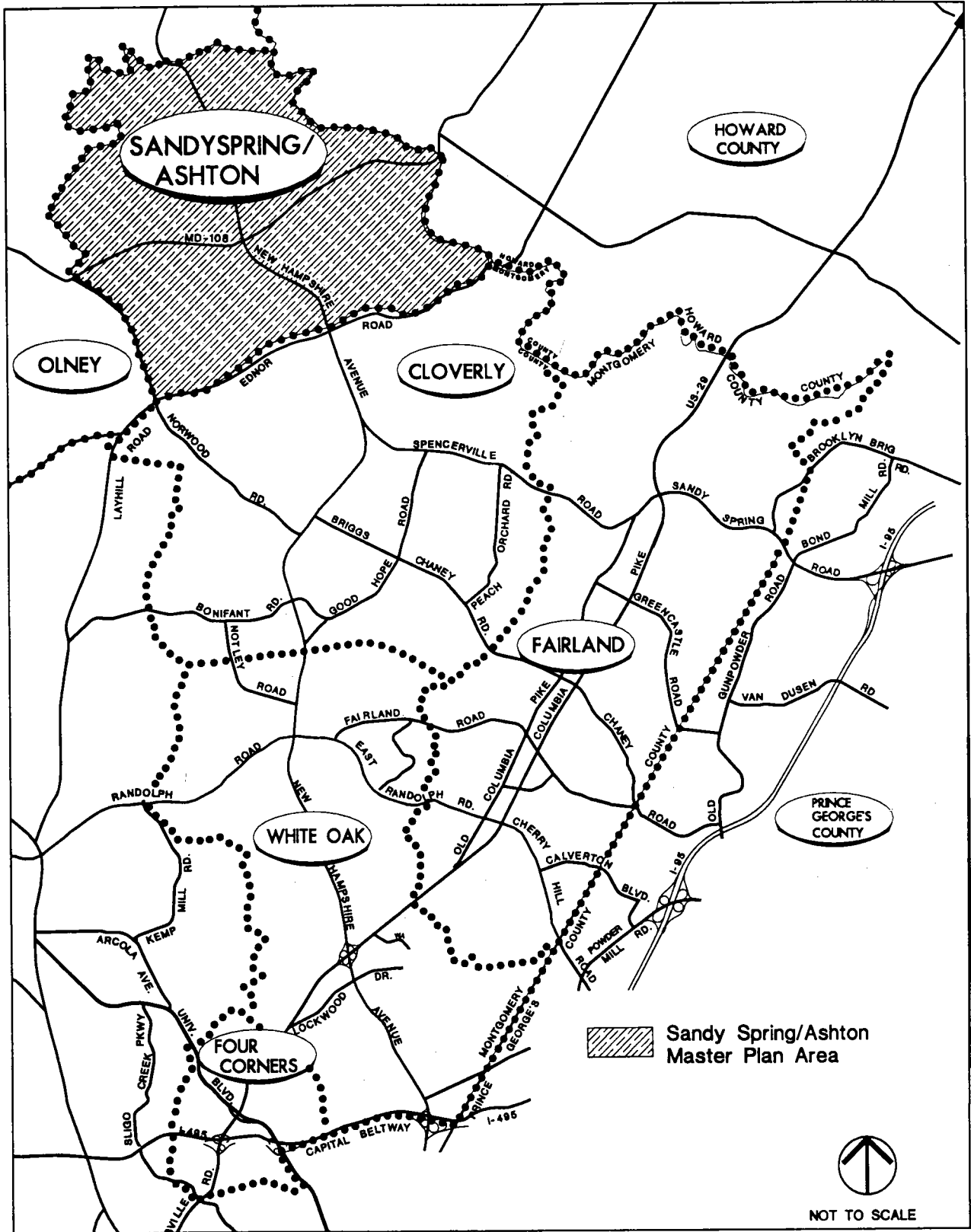
The visions established in the State Planning Act generally coincide with the General Plan Refinement goals. This Plan fulfills these visions by proposing a continuation of the established rural character of the area. The following discussion is keyed to the seven goals of the General Plan Refinement and includes discussion of this Plan's relationship to the 1992 Planning Act.

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

This Plan directly supports the Land Use Goal and Wedges and Corridors Concept by maintaining low-density residential zoning and rural open space to create a transition from more developed areas to the Agricultural Wedge (Agricultural Reserve). This contributes to a county-wide variety in development densities. This Plan also supports the continuation of identifiable centers of community activity—the village centers. In addition, it provides a coordinated system of parks and open space and introduces a new strategy for clustering of the low density development to create rural open space instead of relying solely on large-lot development. This conforms with Vision 1 of the Planning Act—development is to be concentrated in suitable areas.

RELATIONSHIP TO EASTERN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

FIGURE 5



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.

This Plan ensures that the area will continue to offer a wide choice of housing that is consistent with rural character. New housing will be primarily single-family detached in a range of sizes with accessory units encouraged. This Plan also provides for expansion of apartments and other group care options for the elderly and encourages some apartments above commercial uses in the village centers.

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

This Plan seeks to retain the existing small scale business, service and employment opportunities in the village centers and at campus institutional uses such as Friends House Retirement Community. This Plan also recognizes that Sandy Spring/Ashton is not an appropriate location for any significant increases in these areas. These recommendations are in accord with Vision 6 of the Planning Act—economic growth is encouraged in existing areas of development.

Transportation: Enhance mobility by providing a safe and efficient transportation system offering a wide range of alternatives that serve the environmental, economic, social, and land use needs of the County and provides a framework for development.

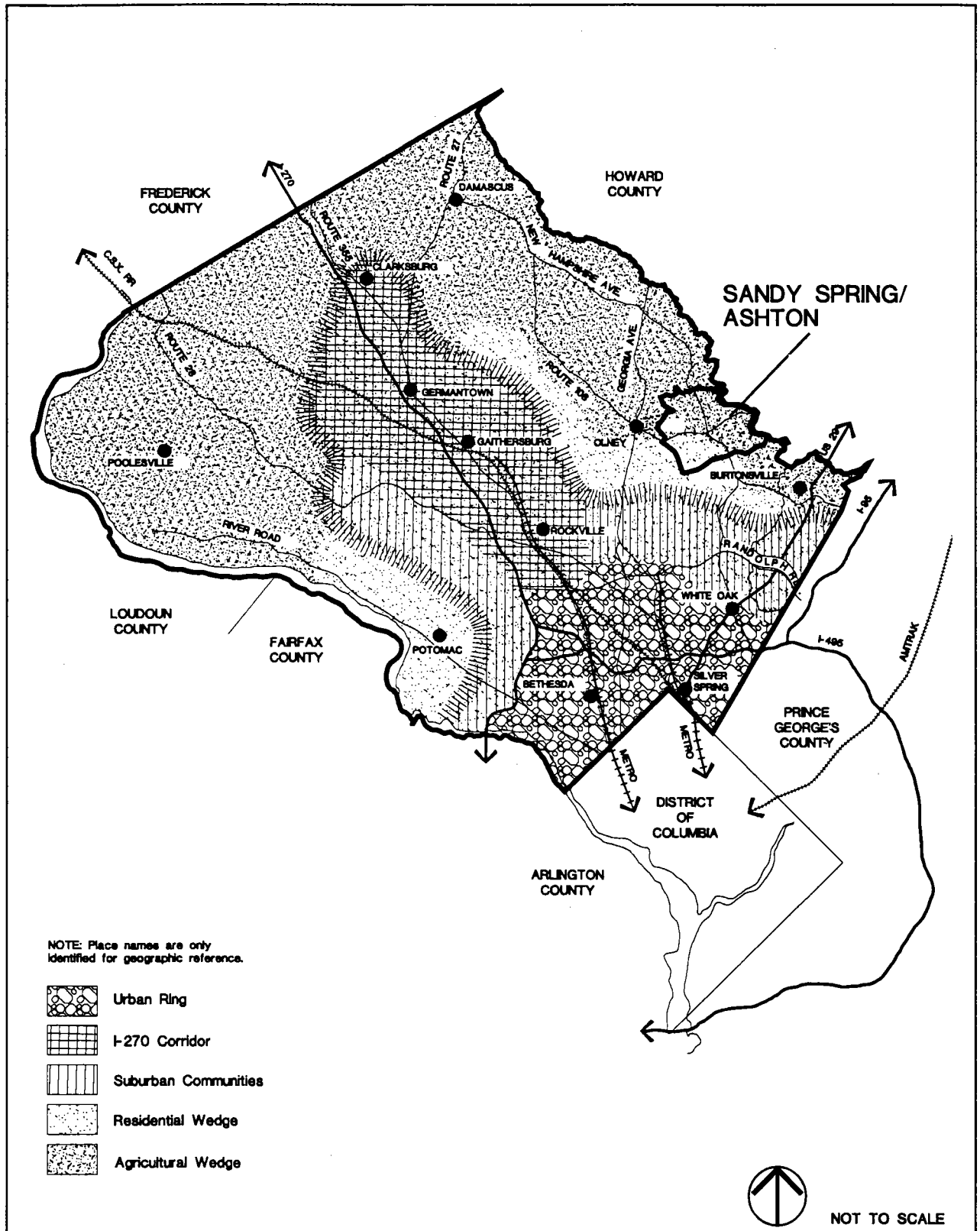
This Plan reflects several General Plan objectives and strategies related to transportation: it ensures that access is provided to each parcel of property in the County and establishes network plans for all modes of transportation. This Plan provides pedestrian and bicyclists safe, direct and convenient means of travel for transportation and recreation. This Plan places a special emphasis on providing better pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular access for the village centers.

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.

Stream quality, wetland, forest cover and floodplain protection are environmental issues addressed by both this Plan and the General Plan Refinement. This Plan pays particular attention to protecting the existing high quality of streams. It calls for low-density residential development as the main protection strategy in the headwaters areas of the Northwest Branch and the Patuxent drinking water reservoir watershed, with development concentrated in existing development areas (Vision 3). This Plan also identifies a greenway system for conservation and uses strategies to increase and conserve forest. It addresses the provision of the extension of water and sewerage service in an environmentally acceptable way into the Patuxent watershed to protect rural character and reinforce the Sandy Spring village center. In these ways, this Plan provides for stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land (Vision 4).

WEDGES AND CORRIDORS - Geographic Components

FIGURE 6



Community Identity and Design: Provide for land use patterns and land uses that offer ample opportunities for social interaction and promote a strong sense of community through public and private cooperation.

This Plan strongly supports this Goal. It builds on the community's current strong sense of identity as a rural area—and its Quaker and African-American heritage. The Plan identifies a Rural Legacy Area, south of MD 108, and recommends a rustic Rural Legacy Trail through that area, connecting many special features of historic and cultural importance to the community. The Plan recommends preservation of rural open space within the setting of the Rural Legacy Trail. As an implementation strategy, this Plan proposes the new Rural Neighborhood Cluster Zone that will ensure preservation of open space and encourage new neighborhoods to preserve long-standing rural qualities of the Sandy Spring/Ashton community.

Another important feature of the Plan is its emphasis on the vitality and character of the village centers that contribute to the community's rural character. This Plan proposes strategies to ensure that the village centers continue as distinct entities, while providing for the community-serving businesses. This Plan recommends a detailed design concept be developed for Sandy Spring village center that includes a village green and a new fire station as a civic focal point. The design concept is to be accompanied by detailed recommendations for implementation. As one implementation strategy, this Plan proposes the Sandy Spring/Ashton Rural Village Overlay Zone that will provide for flexibility and encourage attractive village scale and character.

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

This Plan's commitment to protect water quality, especially in the regional drinking water reservoir, conforms to the General Plan Refinement's strategy to "attain and maintain regional standards for matters of regional significance."

RATIONALE FOR CHOSEN PRIORITIES

The General Plan Refinement recognizes that conflicts will occur in the achievement of the various goals, stating that "it is only within the master plan context, where decisions about individual parcels of land are made, that any reasonable prioritization of competing goals and objectives can be made."

This Plan makes the preservation and enhancement of the area's rural character its top priority, closely balanced with another high priority goal, which is environmental protection. These two priorities were identified by many members of the Sandy Spring/Ashton community. These priorities reflect the area's location as a transition between the Residential Wedge and the Agricultural Wedge.