

Chapter One

BACKGROUND

Definition of the Area

History of the Area

Planning History of the Area

The Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan Process

Definition of the Area

The Kensington-Wheaton planning area is located in the lower part of Montgomery County, Maryland. (See Illustration 1-1.) The planning area boundaries are shown in Illustration 1-2. The southern boundary is the Beltway. The eastern boundary is Sligo Creek Park, Wheaton Regional Park, and above it, Northwest Branch Park. To the west, the boundary is Rock Creek Park. The northern boundary is formed by the "Rockville Facility" right-of-way, an undeveloped strip of land that was originally reserved for the outer beltway.

It is important to note that the Plan does not address all of the area encompassed by these

boundaries. As noted below in the planning history of the area, five sub-areas within the Kensington-Wheaton area have been the subjects of recent scrutiny through individual sector plans. This Plan's relationship to the sector plans will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. A sector plan elaborates and details the *General Plan*, master plan, and growth policy recommendations for a small area of the County. The sector plan areas within Kensington-Wheaton are shown in Illustration 1-2. They include the town of Kensington, the Wheaton Central Business District (CBD), Glenmont, Capitol View, and Forest Glen. It should be noted that review of the *Sector Plan for Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity* has been initiated and is scheduled for completion in 1990.

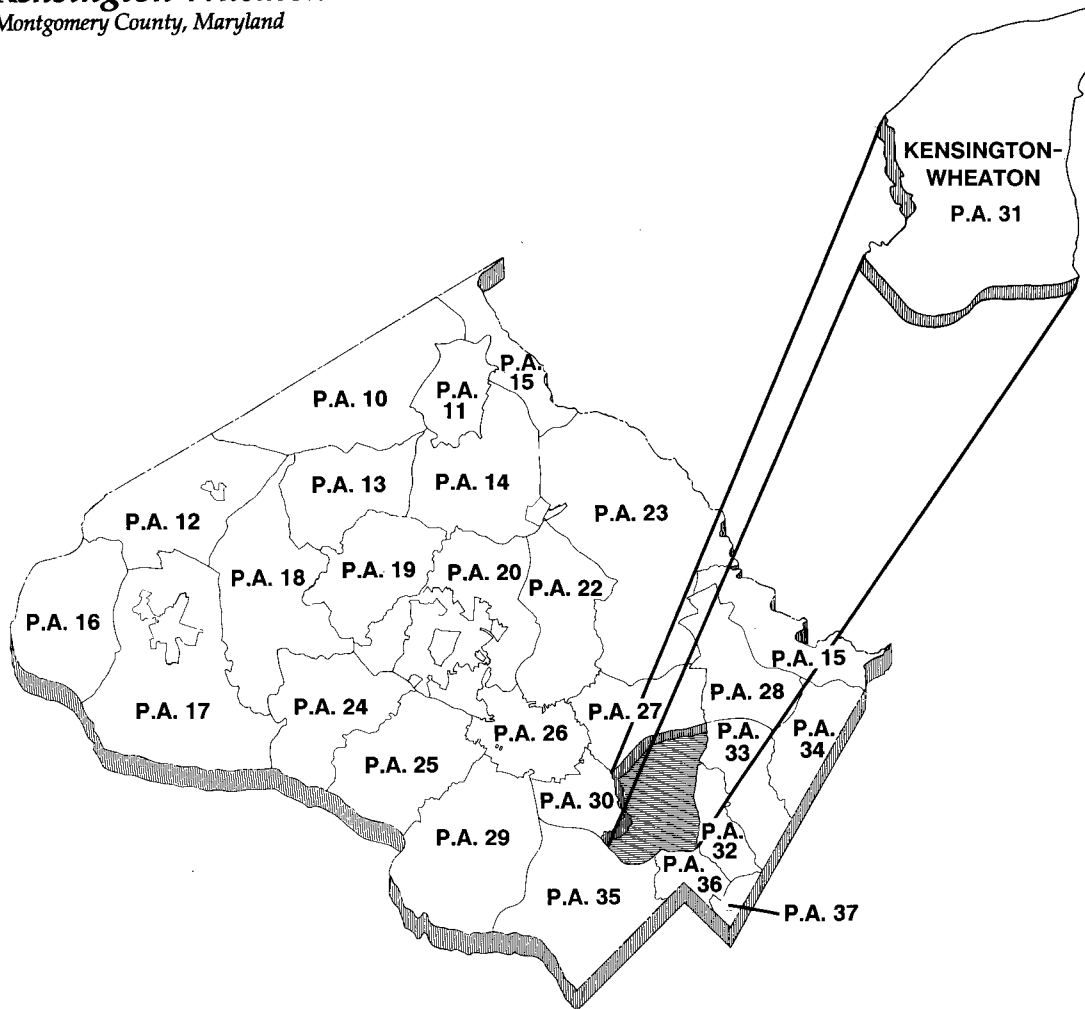
Concurrent with the development of this Master Plan, the Planning Board has approved a Master Plan for Wheaton Regional Park, part of which lies within the boundaries of this Plan.

History of the Area

Prior to the 1880's, the Kensington-Wheaton area was predominantly agricultural. The first wave of development occurred in the southern portion of the planning area in the areas now covered by the sector plans for Forest Glen, Capitol View, and Kensington. Early development was facilitated by the completion of the B&O Railroad through to Frederick in the 1830's and by the building of the Union Turnpike, now Georgia Avenue, in the 1840's. The major

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Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington Wheaton *Montgomery County, Maryland*



Regional Location

- P.A. 10** BENNETT AND LITTLE
BENNETT WATERSHED
- P.A. 11** DAMASCUS & VICINITY
- P.A. 12** LITTLE MONOCACY BASIN
DICKERSON-BARNESVILLE
- P.A. 13** CLARKSBURG & VICINITY
- P.A. 14** GOSHEN, WOODFIELD, CEDAR
GROVE & VICINITY
- P.A. 15** PATUXENT WATERSHED
CONSERVATION AREA
- P.A. 16** MARTINSBURG & VICINITY
- P.A. 17** POOLESVILLE & VICINITY
- P.A. 18** LOWER SENECA BASIN PARTS
ONE, TWO, AND THREE
- P.A. 19** GERMANTOWN AND VICINITY
- P.A. 20** GAITHERSBURG
- P.A. 21** GAITHERSBURG VICINITY
- P.A. 22** UPPER ROCK CREEK
WATERSHED
- P.A. 23** OLNEY & VICINITY
- P.A. 24** DARNESTOWN & VICINITY
- P.A. 25** TRAVILAH
- P.A. 26** ROCKVILLE
- P.A. 27** ASPEN HILL & VICINITY
- P.A. 28** CLOVERLY, NORWOOD
- P.A. 29** POTOMAC-CABIN JOHN &
VICINITY
- P.A. 30** NORTH BETHESDA GARRETT PARK
- P.A. 31** KENSINGTON, WHEATON
- P.A. 32** KEMP MILL, FOUR CORNERS
& VICINITY
- P.A. 33** COLESVILLE, WHITE OAK &
VICINITY
- P.A. 34** FAIRLAND, BELTSVILLE & VICINITY
- P.A. 35** BETHESDA-CHEVY CHASE &
VICINITY
- P.A. 36** SILVER SPRING & VICINITY
- P.A. 37** TAKOMA PARK

Illustration 1-1

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Sector Plan Areas

- PLANNING AREA BOUNDARY
- SECTOR PLAN BOUNDARY

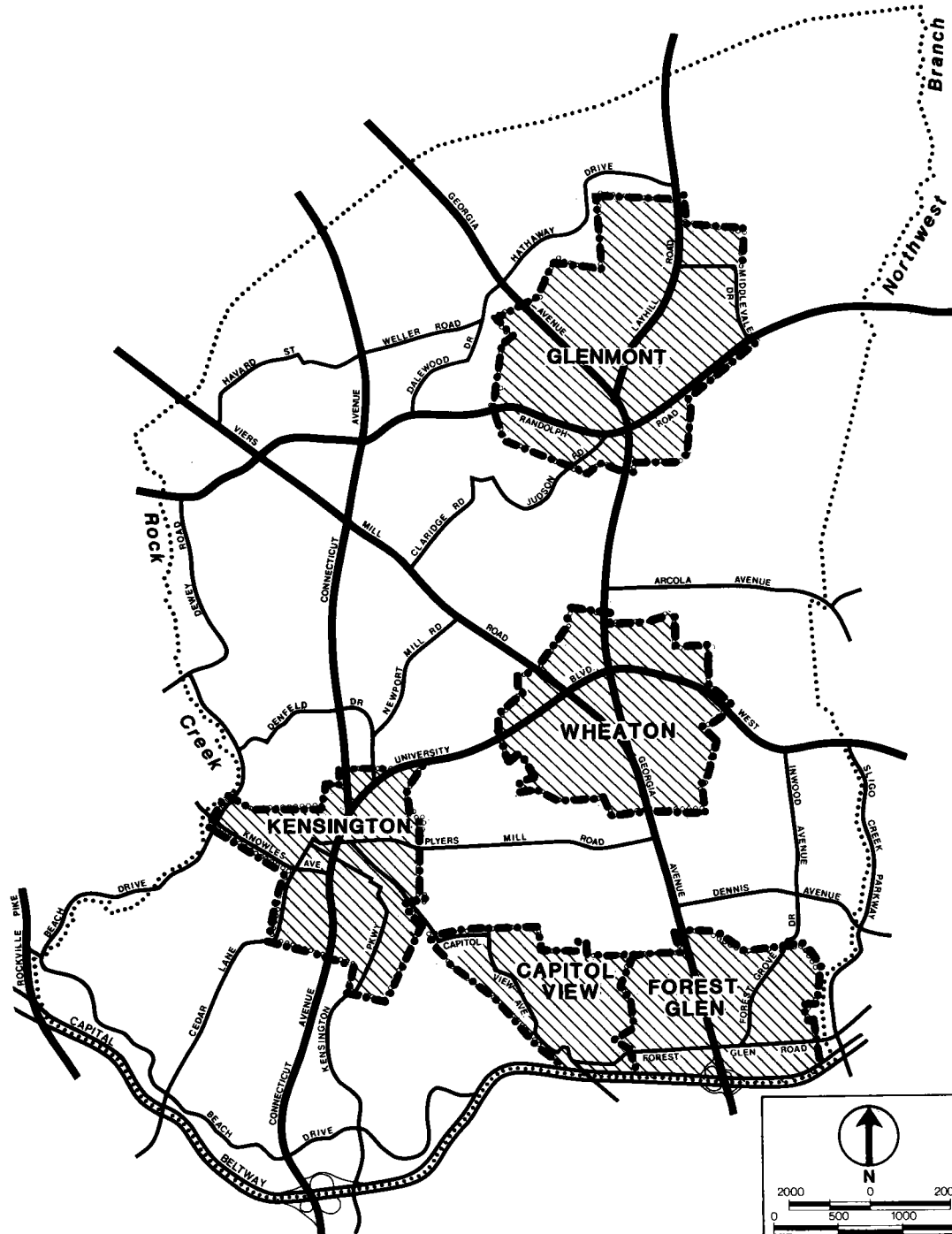


Illustration 1-2

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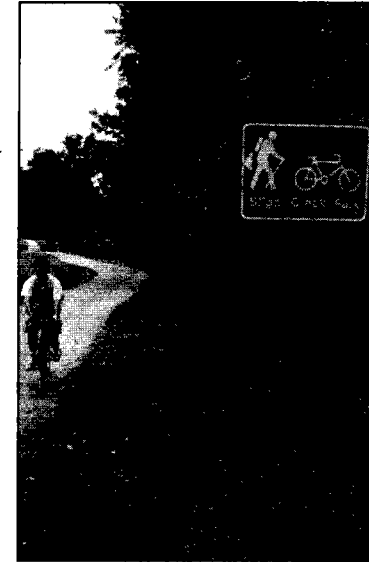
growth occurred when the Civil Service Act of 1883 created a stable, federal labor force. Montgomery County began to emerge as a suburb of Washington, D.C., and by the turn of the century, Kensington, Forest Glen, and Capitol View became bustling communities.

In contrast, the area just to the north grew very slowly. Wheaton, which began as a Civil War tavern at the corner of Union Pike and Old Bladensburg Road (now the corner of Georgia Avenue and University Boulevard), was still little more than a couple of stores in 1920. During the twenties, several other stores were built near this intersection, and, further north, another store was built on the corner of what is now Georgia Avenue and Layhill Road. The rest of the area remained predominantly farmland and large estates.

After World War II, the combination of continued growth in the federal government and needs of returning veterans created a critical housing shortage in the Washington area. Farmland in the Kensington-Wheaton area was sold for large developments of affordable single-family homes. Two of the earliest housing



developments were Twinbrook in 1947 in the city of Rockville and Veirs Mill Village in 1948. The area developed rapidly during the 1950's, and by 1959 the residential pattern for the Kensington-Wheaton area was well established. Its commercial centers, major roads, and public facilities were much as they are today. Georgia Avenue and University Boulevard had already become six-lane roads, and Wheaton Plaza had opened as a regional shopping center. Sewer constraints restrained development north of Arcola Avenue and east of Georgia Avenue, leaving this area predominantly vacant. Intense development of this area did not begin again until the 1970's. It continues along Layhill Road today.



Planning History of the Area

Planning for the Kensington-Wheaton area after World War II began with three initiatives. The *Zoning Plan for Georgia Avenue-Brookeville Road* was adopted in 1948 and covered a strip of land approximately one-half mile wide, centered on Georgia Avenue, and extended from Silver Spring northward to Brookeville in upper Montgomery County. A *Zoning Plan for the Town of Kensington and Vicinity* was adopted by the Commission in 1946, and, in 1948, a *Street and Highway Plan for Kensington and Vicinity* was adopted. Also in 1948, a *Zoning Plan for Veirs Mill Road* was adopted. In 1954, the *Street and Highway Plan for Kensington and Vicinity* was amended

to provide for wider rights-of-way for most major streets, and, in 1955, a new *Zoning Plan for Kensington* was adopted.

In 1959, the current *Master Plan for Kensington-Wheaton, Planning Area VII*, was adopted. The basic thrust of the 1959 Plan was the preservation and extension of already established residential patterns and the improvement of the existing road network. Apartment developments were to be encouraged around the commercial centers as buffers to lower density housing. Otherwise, the zoning plan confirmed mostly R-60 zoning with steadily decreasing density toward the environmentally sensitive northeastern section of the planning area. The Plan noted the "absence of ribbon commercial uses along highways" as "a striking feature of this locality" and attempted to establish limits on the expansion of commercial areas in an effort to "preserve the integrity of the area." Nearly every major highway was recommended for widening or extension to relieve increasing traffic congestion.

In 1961, the *Upper Northwest Branch Watershed Zoning and Highway Plan* was adopted, superseding the *Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan* in the area north of Randolph Road and east of Georgia Avenue. In 1969, the County adopted a regional rapid transit system and incorporated the "Glenmont Line" into the *General Plan*, precipitating a need to re-evaluate the future of Kensington-Wheaton.

In 1974, an effort was undertaken to revise the *Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan*. The Planning Board appointed an advisory committee and initial staff work was begun. In early 1975, the advisory committee recommended that the Kensington area be designated for detailed study as a sector plan. That recommendation was accepted by the Planning Board and the Council and resulted in the *Sector Plan for the Town of Kensington and Vicinity*, adopted in 1978. As a result of the planning work which was under way for the Glenmont Line of the Metro in 1976, the Planning Board modified the Kensington-Wheaton planning process to focus on the Transit Im-



pact Areas, the areas that would be affected by the sites of the Metro stations that had been selected. Consequently, sector plans were developed for Glenmont, Wheaton, and Forest Glen, all adopted in 1978.

Although each of these four sector plans, and the later 1982 *Sector Plan for Capitol View and Vicinity*, dealt in great detail with issues unique to each area, the goals of the original 1959 Master Plan remained constant. Recommendations reflected the need to protect and preserve the stable, predominantly single-family communities from intrusions of traffic, commercial development, and pressures to redevelop existing low density uses. High density uses were encouraged near Metro centers, decreasing to lower density around the edges. While recognizing a need for a variety of housing choices, each sector plan stressed the importance of compatibility when developing the little vacant land that remained.

This Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton is the last step in a long process of updating planning priorities for the Kensington-Wheaton area.

The Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan Process

Procedures for preparing and adopting master plans and amendments to master plans are outlined in the Montgomery County Code and the Regional District Act. A master plan is developed through a series of steps from its initial draft through the final approval and adoption of the document. The required steps in the master plan amendment process for Montgomery County are outlined in the introductory section of this Plan. The master plan process for the Kensington-Wheaton Plan is summarized in Illustration 1-3.

Every master plan process includes various opportunities for citizen participation. During the preparation of the Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan, an Advisory Committee composed of Kensington-Wheaton area residents, business leaders, and community organization representatives worked with the Planning Board staff. Its members are listed at the front of the Plan.

Staff and Preliminary Drafts: The early phases of the Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan process included numerous meetings with the Advisory Committee and staff from relevant County and State agencies. The meetings, initially scheduled for once a month, were increased to bi-weekly meetings to cover the numerous issues. Outlines for sections of the Plan were discussed at the meetings, and, finally, a detailed outline for the staff draft of the full Plan was developed. The various revisions of the outline reflected both staff's and citizens' concerns raised during the discussions.

The revised outline provided the basis for the preliminary staff draft of the Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan. The staff draft was reviewed by staff of the Executive Branch and was presented to the Planning Board during two joint worksessions with the Advisory Committee and at an additional Planning Board worksession.

The Preliminary Draft was the first formal proposal by the Planning Board to amend the Master Plan. The Preliminary Draft Amendment to the Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton was approved by the Planning Board at its worksession dated June 1, 1987.

The Preliminary Draft Amendment was published and distributed on July 2, 1987. A public hearing was scheduled for August 6, 1987, and advertised in the local press thirty days in advance. Because the hearing was scheduled for prime vacation season, the record was held open for further comments on the Draft until September 4, 1987. During the period set aside for comment on the Plan, the

Planning Board received written and oral testimony from the County Office of Planning Policies, two state agencies, four members of the Citizens' Advisory Committee (speaking as individuals), two members of the Wheaton Center Citizens' Advisory Board, thirty representatives of civic and citizen organizations, property owners, and citizens at large. The testimony addressed the full range of Plan topics from land use to transportation, community facilities, and the environment. The issues within

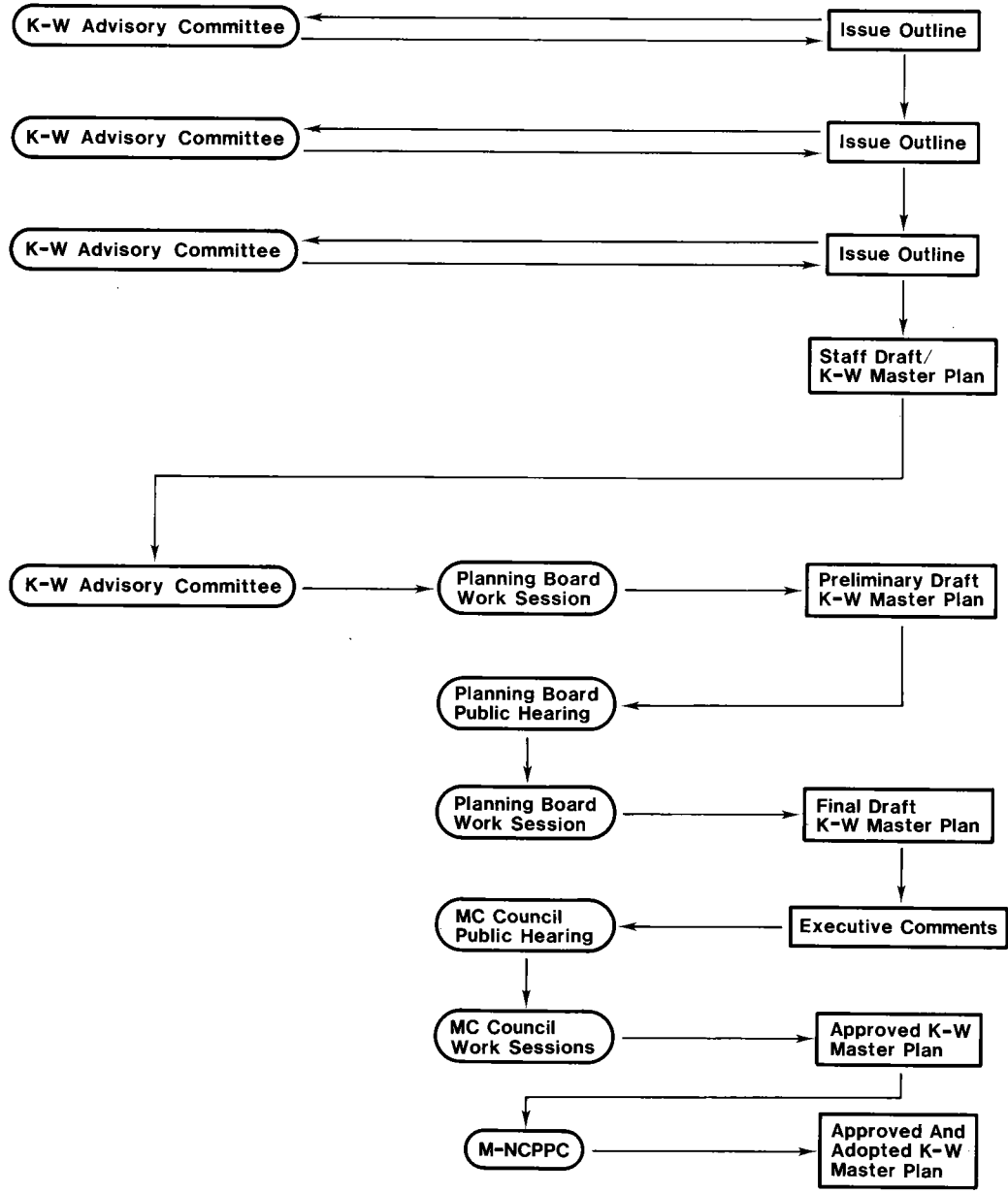


those topics that received the most attention were green corridors, street classifications and cut-through traffic, multi-use trails, and services and facilities for the elderly.

Final Draft: After the close of the public hearing record, the Planning Board met with its staff, staff from County agencies, and interested citizens at five worksessions to review public testimony and consider what revisions were needed in the Preliminary Draft Plan. These worksessions began on September 12, 1987, and concluded on June 13, 1988. After completion of the needed revisions, the Plan was approved on May 20, 1988, for transmittal to the County Executive as a Final Draft Amendment.

GROUPS/PROCESS

PRODUCTS



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*Master Plan for
the Communities of
Kensington Wheaton*
Montgomery County, Maryland

Master Plan Process

Illustration 1-3

The Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission