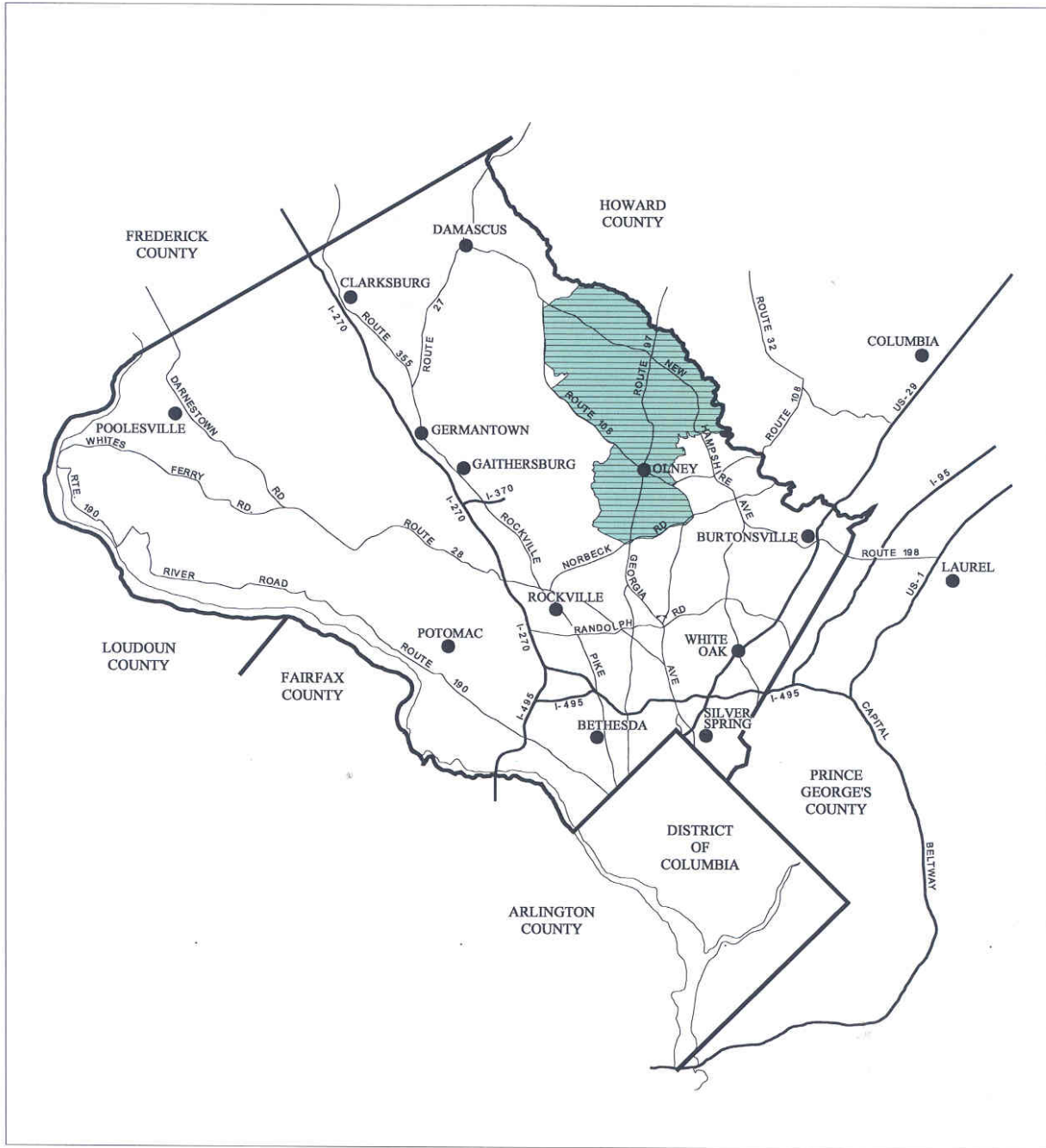




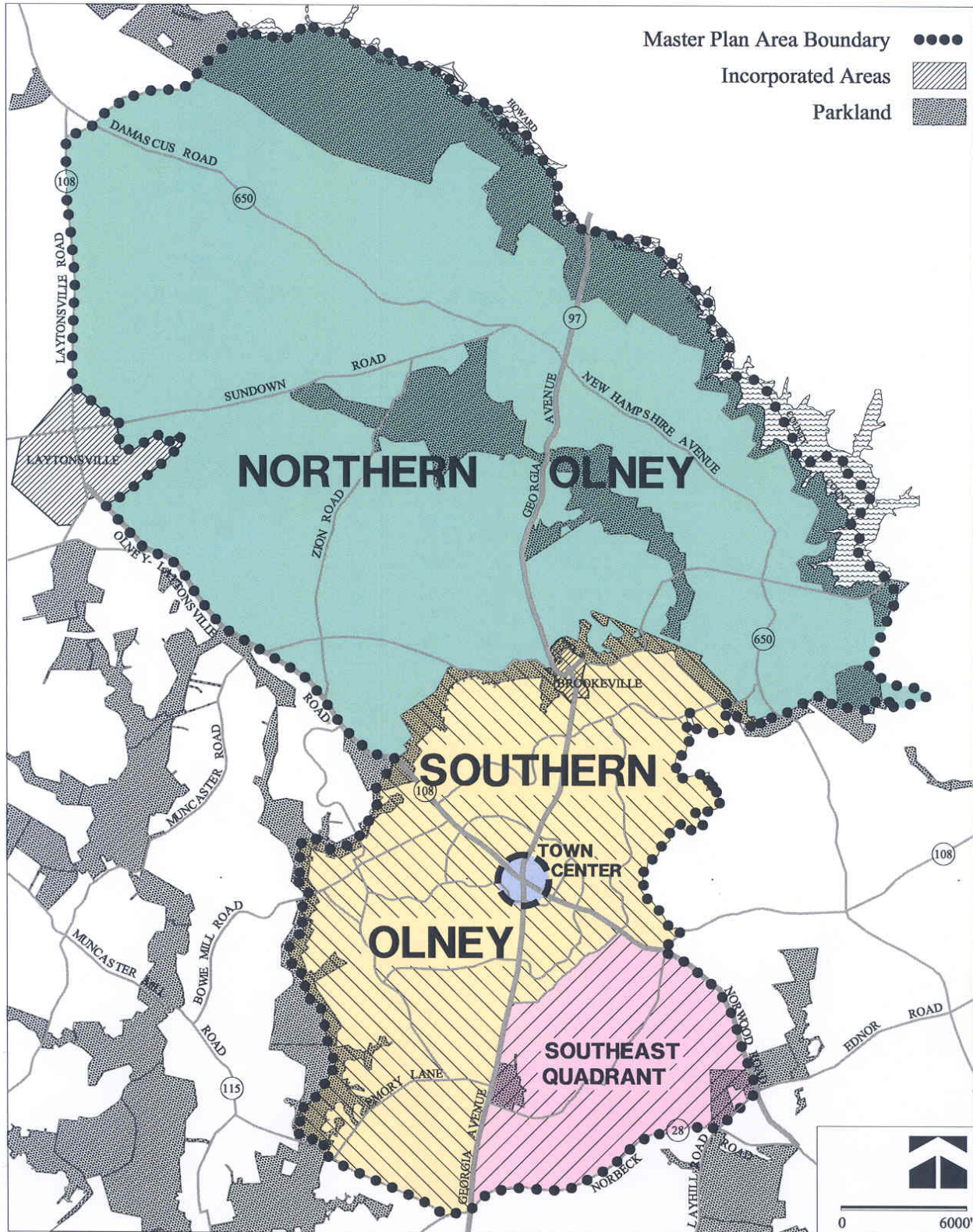
Regional Location



-  Olney Master Plan Area
-  County Boundary



Geographic Areas



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Starting from a small settlement at the intersection of Georgia Avenue and MD 108, Olney has evolved into an attractive residential community of approximately 39,000 people. The Olney Master Plan Area encompasses approximately 30,600 acres (48 square miles) in the northeastern part of the County. It is bounded by the Patuxent River to the north and northeast; Hawlings River, parts of James Creek, MD 108, Dr. Bird, Norwood and Layhill Roads to the east; Norbeck and Muncaster Mill Roads to the south; and North Branch of Rock Creek Stream Valley Park and its eastern spur to MD 108, MD 108 to Laytonsville, MD 108 to Hipsley Mill Road, and Hipsley Mill Road on the west. The Town of Brookeville is not part of the Olney Master Plan since it has its own planning authority.



The Olney Master Plan Area has two distinct geographic components. Northern Olney is the area generally north of the Town of Brookeville and Reddy Branch Park. It includes the Agricultural Reserve on the west side, and the rural open space on the east side of Georgia Avenue. Southern Olney is the rest of the Master Plan area to the south and includes the Town Center around the intersection of Georgia Avenue and MD 108, and the Southeast Quadrant, which is the area bounded by Old Baltimore Road, MD 108, Dr. Bird Road, Norwood Road, Layhill Road, Norbeck Road, and Georgia Avenue. More than 91 percent of the Master Plan area's housing units are located in southern Olney.

The Olney Master Plan was last updated in 1980. This amendment presents an opportunity to review comprehensively the current planning policies and community concerns in the area, and employ the latest planning tools to achieve them. The current amendment is a part of the planning review of master plans in the Northern Headwaters of Montgomery County including the Upper Rock Creek Area Master Plan to the west and the Damascus Master Plan to the northwest of Olney. It will also bring the planning area up to date with the 1998 update of the Master Plan for the Sandy Spring/Ashton area located to the east of the Olney Planning Area.

Master Plan Process

The Master Plan update was initiated in July of 2001. The first phase was designed to collect requisite data and identify the issues that would be addressed in the Plan. The Planning Board approved the Final Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report in March 2002 and also appointed a 40-member Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG) to bring the community's perspective to the planning process. The second phase consisted of exploring and analyzing alternatives and developing staff recommendations for the proposed Plan. Twenty public meetings, including evening meetings, weekend charrettes, open houses, and focus groups, were held during the amendment process on a variety of topics. All master plan meetings were open to the public, providing equal opportunities to MPAG members and the general public alike. A Community Issues Survey distributed through MPAG meetings, the Olney Library, the Longwood Recreation Center, public schools, and the Commission web site drew more than 920 responses.

Two other documents, prepared during the master plan update process and published separately, formed the basis of some of this Plan's recommendations. They are: *Olney and Vicinity Environmental Resources Inventory* of April 2002; and *Olney Parks and Trails Analysis*. Supporting technical information published separately as an appendix to this Plan (but not part of the Master Plan) includes the summary of the results of the Olney Community Issues Survey; the Demographic Profile of Olney, the Commercial Profile of Olney; and the Muncaster Mill Corridor Study.

Relationship to Other Master Plans

The Master Plan amends all other area and functional master plans applicable in the Olney Planning Area. The relationship of the Olney Master Plan to other adjoining area master plans is shown in the location map. The Plan modifies the boundaries of the adjoining Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan to incorporate a portion of the Mess property that was previously included in the Sandy Spring Master Plan. The Plan does not propose land use and zoning for the towns of Laytonsville and Brookeville since they have their own planning and zoning authority.

PLANNING HISTORY

The recent planning history of the area starts with the 1964 General Plan for Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, which identified Olney as a satellite community in one of the wedge areas of its "Wedges and Corridors" concept.

The 1966 Olney and Vicinity Master Plan built upon the 1964 General Plan's vision of wedges and corridors with Olney as one of three satellite communities. It envisioned Olney as a suburban residential community of no more than 29,000 people with a 75-acre shopping district. It was based on an overall average density of 4.0 persons per acre in a pattern of single-family homes on large lots, which was achieved by reducing densities on some 11,000 acres in the Hawlings River watershed from one-half acre to two-acre lots. The basic land use concept was that of a greenbelt community.

The 1980 Olney Master Plan further crystallized the concept of Olney as a satellite town. It determined that the preservation of farmland and rural open space was a critical issue and that the upper portion of Olney should remain rural. It recommended that most of the new development be concentrated in and around the intersection of Georgia Avenue and MD 108. The principal mechanism for achieving this goal was the innovative Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program, which transferred potential development from farmland to designated locations south of Brookeville. The program was instrumental in expanding the range of housing opportunities to create a full lifecycle community in Olney, a major goal of the 1980 Master Plan.

The 1980 Master Plan reinforced the Town Center by discouraging expansion or creation of commercial areas outside the commercial core. It also proposed some other provisions such as wider stream buffers that later became standard Countywide.

The 1980 Functional Master Plan for Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space expanded the 1980 Olney Master Plan's concept of agricultural and open space preservation to the rest of the County's agricultural area. Along with zoning, and sewer and water policies, the TDR program has preserved more than 40,000 acres of land Countywide through permanent easements.

The 1992 Maryland Planning Act defined seven visions that are affirmed by this Plan: 1) development to be concentrated in suitable areas; 2) sensitive areas to be protected; 3) in rural areas growth to be directed to existing population centers and resources to be protected; 4) stewardship of Chesapeake Bay and the land to be considered a universal ethic; 5) conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption to be practiced; 6) economic growth to be encouraged and regulatory mechanisms to be streamlined to achieve objectives one through five; and 7) funding mechanisms to be addressed to achieve these objectives. The Olney Master Plan affirms these seven objectives.

The 1993 Montgomery County General Plan Refinement updated the goals and objectives of the 1964 General Plan on Wedges and Corridors. It affirmed the Wedges and Corridors concept as a framework for development in Montgomery County.

The 1993 Patuxent River Watershed Functional Master Plan established policy recommendations to restore and maintain water quality in the river's watershed in Montgomery County.

The 1995 Amendment to the Master Plans for Gaithersburg Vicinity, Upper Rock Creek, Olney, and Aspen Hill was a limited amendment that changed the roadway classification of Muncaster Mill Road from a Primary to an Arterial in Olney.

The 1996 Rustic Roads Functional Master Plan provided a system for evaluating, protecting and enhancing scenic roadways that reflect the County's agricultural and rural origins. The Plan designates all or parts of roads with rural vistas and other attributes as Rustic, Exceptional Rustic, Country Arterial, and Country Roads. It also identifies some of the roads as Interim Rustic, which must be analyzed in the relevant master plan updates, and either determined as Rustic or removed from the Rustic Roads Master Plan altogether.

Maryland's 1997 Smart Growth Policy supports growth in appropriate areas and limits development in agricultural and other resource areas by limiting State resources to existing communities and not subsidizing infrastructure in other areas. The Policy's Priority Funding Areas concept includes criteria for counties to designate additional funding areas. In 1998, the Planning Board designated areas of higher than one unit per acre densities in and around Olney's Town Center as Priority Funding Areas.

The 1998 Countywide Stream Protection Strategy is a comprehensive review of stream quality and habitat that helps public agencies identify and provide funding for specific watershed-based resource protection initiatives.

The 1998 Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan explores future demand for recreational facilities within the County's 28,000-acre park system and determines which natural and historic areas should be preserved as open space.

The 1998 Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan strengthened the rural character of these communities and their cultural heritage through preservation of large open spaces, creation of a Rural Legacy Trail, and preservation of scenic vistas from the trail. It included some properties formerly within the Olney Master Plan Area and thus amended the Olney Plan's eastern boundary.

The 1998 Countywide Park Trails Plan is a blueprint for creating a system of interconnected hard and natural surface trails in parkland. The plan's objective for the Olney area is to connect the Rock Creek and the Northwest Branch Trail corridors to the Patuxent River corridor.

The Department of Park and Planning's 1998 Georgia Avenue Busway Study evaluated the feasibility of providing an express busway along Georgia Avenue between Olney and the Glenmont Metro Station, and confirmed that such a busway is needed and feasible.

The County's 2001 Legacy Open Space Functional Master Plan supports protection of natural and cultural resources through public acquisition and easements for properties that otherwise would not be protected through standard regulatory controls. The plan identifies known resources and also defines a process for selecting sites, setting spending priorities, implementing the program and measuring its progress.

The Planning Board's 2002 Transportation Policy Report recommended a vision and principles for future land use and transportation plans and described a recommended transportation network that will be reflected through the Master Plan of Highways and appropriate area master plans. It also included an alternate Land Use Plan that improved the jobs and housing balance throughout Montgomery County to increase opportunities to live near employment places.

POPULATION PROFILE

The 1980 Master Plan was based on a projected 1995 population of 26,000 to 32,000 people. The 1997 estimated population was 33,300. The biggest increase occurred between 1984 and 1997 when the area population grew 84 percent from 18,100 to 33,300. This rate of growth far exceeded the County's level of 36 percent. The 2000 Census counted 35,600 people in Olney--4 percent of the County's total population, while the 2003 Census Update survey by the M-NCPPC estimates Olney's population to be 39,260. The following are the key findings of the Master Plan area's population and housing statistics.

Nearly 89 percent (nine out of ten) of Olney households are families (two or more related persons) compared to 75 percent Countywide. Most households have one or more children. Almost seven out of ten households are composed of three or more persons. With an average size of 3.24 persons, households in Olney tend to be larger than the County's average of 2.7 persons per household.

The Olney area differs from the County in that it has more of its total population in the 5 to 17-year age range. In 2003, Olney had slightly more than 24 percent of its population in this age group while the County had 19.5 percent. The two also differ in terms of the 65 and older age group: Olney had 7.3 percent in that group versus the County's 12.2 percent. This profile is consistent with the fact that most of the housing stock in the area is fairly new and has attracted younger households.

Minorities make up a smaller share of the total population in the area than at the Countywide level even though the area's minority population increased from nearly 7.5 percent in 1984 to 20.5 percent in 2003. Asian Americans, the second largest group in 2000, are now (2003) the largest minority group at 9 percent of the population in Olney, followed by African Americans at 8.2 percent. (Countywide, African Americans are still the largest minority at 14 percent.). Persons of Hispanic origin at more than 4.5 percent are the third largest minority group in Olney.

Olney is one of the more affluent areas of the County. In 2003, the local median household income was \$104,745 while the Countywide median income was \$79,115. Only six other County planning areas (out of a total of 21) had median income higher than Olney.

Thirty percent of Olney residents earned a graduate degree and 37 percent hold a bachelor's degree. The graduate degree numbers are slightly less than the County's 34 percent, but for the population that holds a bachelor's degree the area is ahead of the County.

In 2003, 72 percent of households in Olney resided in single-family detached units compared with 50 percent for the County. Only six other planning areas had the majority of their housing stock in detached houses. Home prices in the area are the thirteenth highest out of the 21 planning areas in the County.

Of the planning area's 22,190 employed residents, 64 percent work within Montgomery County. Of the 36 percent who work outside the County, 16 percent work in the District of Columbia, 8 percent in Virginia, and the remaining 12 percent work at other locations in the region.

Based on the Census 2000 estimates, of the 64 percent who work within the County, nearly 50 percent work at locations outside the Beltway: 18 percent in Rockville, 13 percent in Aspen Hill/Olney area, 6 percent in Gaithersburg, and the remaining 13 percent at various locations around the County.

A large majority of the area workers, approximately 81 percent, travel alone by car, 4 percent car pool, 8 percent use public transit, 5 percent work at home, and less than 2 percent walk or bike to work. The average commute time for Olney area residents is 33 minutes, 3 minutes longer than the County average.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Olney is bordered to the north and east by rural areas of Montgomery and Howard Counties and to the south and west by more densely populated residential and commercial areas. Georgia Avenue and MD 108 are two State highways that connect Olney to its surrounding communities and beyond. They will continue to carry increasing amounts of through traffic generated by new growth in the region, as other jurisdictions in the region will continue to grow and add more through traffic in the planning area. Traffic congestion, over-development, and loss of open space were cited most often by the community in surveys and other forums as the biggest issues facing the area today. The overarching challenge for the Olney Master Plan is maintaining the area's quality of life in the face of local and regional growth and related future traffic congestion.

Protection of environmental resources and open space is another major concern for the Olney area. Northern Olney comprises approximately two-thirds of the Master Plan area—almost all of it in the Patuxent River Watershed, which includes the Hawlings River watershed. This area is designated as agricultural and rural open space and drains into the Triadelphia Reservoir. Although a combination of 25-acre and 5-acre zoning and agricultural preservation programs have helped protect environmental resources in the area, more needs to be done to protect the Patuxent River watershed as an environmental and drinking water resource.

The Southeast Quadrant of Olney contains the headwaters of Northwest Branch and significant environmental resources, some of them on vacant and redevelopable parcels. Batchellors Forest Road, the only through road in this quadrant, has visual attributes that qualify it as a Rustic Road. This quadrant also has the largest grouping of vacant and redevelopable land—approximately 880 acres—in Southern Olney. The challenge here is to preserve the environmental resources and rustic character of Batchellors Forest Road through zoning and other regulatory controls.

Olney is an attractive housing location. Its high quality of life also results in higher housing costs. The average new single-family house or townhouse is out of the reach of a family with income in the median range. One of the Plan's challenges is to expand the inventory of affordable housing in the area to meet the County's goal of providing adequate housing for its low to middle-income families and young professionals.

Another challenge for the Olney Master Plan is the Olney Town Center, which defines the identity and character of Olney. The current Town Center is a collection of strip shopping centers. It is car-oriented and lacks public amenities and a civic focus. The community wants an attractive, pedestrian-oriented Town Center with an identifiable character that can serve as a place for the community's civic events and festivals. The challenge is to create a zoning and regulatory mechanism that, through redevelopment of existing properties over a long period of time, would result in a Town Center that meets the community's desires and needs.