

# INTRODUCTION

The Upper Rock Creek Master Plan Area lies in the east central part of Montgomery County. The Master Plan Area is adjacent to the City of Rockville to the south, the Olney Planning Area to the north and east, the Gaithersburg Vicinity Planning Area to the west, and the Town of Laytonsville to the north.

The Upper Rock Creek Master Plan Area encompasses the upper reaches and headwaters of Rock Creek. The upper part of the watershed, generally located north of the MD 28 crossing of the stream, totals about 29.5 square miles of drainage area and includes more than 100 miles of stream length. Two main stream systems run generally north and south within the watershed: the mainstem of Rock Creek and its tributaries in the west and North Branch and its tributaries to the east. About 60 percent of the Upper Rock Creek watershed lies in the Master Plan Area.

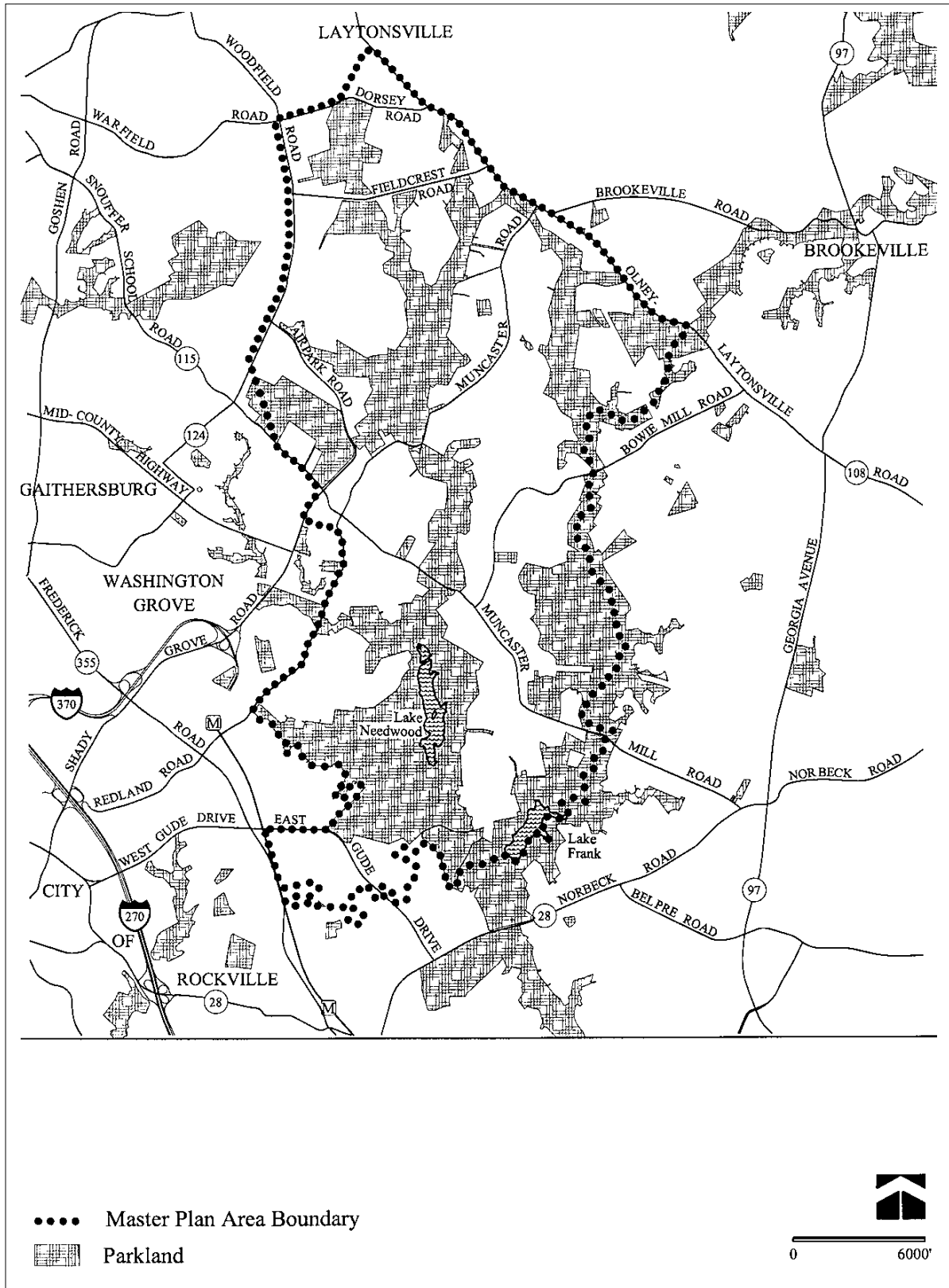
The Planning Area is bounded by the City of Rockville on the south; Paramount Drive, Chieftain Avenue, Redland Road, Mill Run Drive, Shady Grove Road, Muncaster Mill Road and Woodfield Road on the west; Warfield Road and MD 108 on the north; and the North Branch of Rock Creek on the east. The southwest corner of the Planning Area, bounded roughly by Gude Drive on the south, the City of Rockville on the west, Paramount Drive and Chieftain Avenue on the north and the Crabbs Branch stream valley on the east, will be included in the Shady Grove Sector Plan.

## PLANNING HISTORY

Sporadic subdivision activity occurred in the Upper Rock Creek Planning Area before 1960 and was focused on five areas: in Derwood, along the B&O Railroad; along Avery Road, north of the confluence of Rock Creek and North Branch; in Laytonia, at the intersection of Muncaster Mill and what is now Woodfield roads; along Redland Road between Needwood and Muncaster Mill Roads; and along Muncaster Road north of Rock Creek.

Managing development to protect the watershed and its stream valleys has been a land use planning goal in Montgomery County for more than four decades. The 1961 *Master Plan for the Upper Rock Creek Watershed* articulated the premises that connected existing and future development to watershed protection. It identified two sites for lakes that would reduce downstream flooding that threatened existing development and protect public investment in park and recreation facilities elsewhere in the Rock Creek valley. The lakes also would provide recreational opportunities. The 1961 Plan recognized that future development would require densities consistent with soil and water conservation, and it recognized that the area was relatively distant from employment centers, which strengthened arguments for relatively low densities.

# LOCATION MAP



To implement these recommendations, the 1961 Plan recommended three low density residential zones—half-acre, one-acre and two-acre—for much of the watershed, with the Upper Rock Creek Planning Area divided primarily between half-acre and two-acre zones. The Plan recommended the two-acre Residential Estate Zone for the southern part of the Planning Area between the proposed lakes, arguing that large-lot development, which had already begun to occur, would protect the lakes. North of Muncaster Mill Road, the Plan recommended the half-acre Rural Residential Zone, again reflecting patterns of development that had already begun. The assumption was that land in the half-acre zone would develop using community sewer systems. There were no plans for extending existing lines into the area, and the land remained largely undeveloped.

Montgomery County's General Plan, *...on wedges and corridors*, approved and adopted in 1964, recommended that development in the County proceed in a corridor along Interstate 270 and west of a second corridor along Interstate 95. The General Plan recommended a rural pattern—including the Upper Rock Creek watershed—that would act as a wedge, molding the urban corridors, providing open space for recreation, enabling the continuation of farming and natural resource activities and conserving natural resources. The General Plan anticipated that community sewer service would be staged, and would be in place in portions of the Rock Creek and North Branch stream valleys in 1970. This plan proposed lower densities in the Planning Area than had been recommended in the 1961 Plan.

Residential development in the early and middle 1960s did not entirely conform to the General Plan's policy recommendations, which in this area translated into residential densities of about one unit for every two acres. Land along Needwood and Redland Roads was reclassified to half-acre zones—in part because trunk sewer lines had already reached the area—and residential subdivisions were approved at this density. North of Muncaster Mill Road, virtually the entire area carried half-acre zoning—and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission had proposed in its 1965-70 Capital Program extensions of trunk lines in both the mainstem of Rock Creek and North Branch. The Planning Commission warned the County Council in 1965 that approving sewer extensions in the Rock Creek valley threatened the foundation of the General Plan.

The Commission decided to undertake a comprehensive master plan for the area. The new master plan had three goals: to devise an approach to resolving the development pressures in the area; to prevent “complete suburban sprawl;” and to provide for “continuous recognizable open space, both public and private” that would preserve the wedge between development in the I-270 corridor and in the satellite community of Olney. The Commission recognized that “...if the intent of the General Plan was to be followed, a generally low density type of residential land use was in order for most of the area. But did this mean blanketing the area with two-acre residential zoning...or would some variation in low-density use serve the same purpose and perhaps provide a more desirable community structure...?”

The 1968 *Master Plan for the Rock Creek Planning Area* emphasized stream valley protection. It focused development to the ridges above the stream valleys, which have fewer constraints on development than land on steeper slopes nearer the streams. This development pattern would protect and enhance the valleys' natural resources—forests, slopes, and the streams themselves. The Plan therefore proposed to reclassify portions of the area north of Muncaster Mill Road from a half-acre zone to a two-acre cluster zone, with the idea of encouraging development in clusters that would provide flexible design and contiguous open space. The Plan also proposed the one-acre zone for portions of the same area.

In 1977, a *Sector Plan* for the area around the proposed Shady Grove Metro Station was completed. The Plan included a substantial amount of then-undeveloped land in the southwest portion of the Upper Rock Creek Planning Area. It recommended a planned development zone for the area, as a means of maintaining existing land contours and creating conservation areas along Crabbs Branch and its tributaries, which traversed the area. This area subsequently developed as Derwood Station.

The *Functional Master Plan for Conservation and Management in the Rock Creek Basin*, approved and adopted in 1980, set out a series of policy recommendations that would constitute a comprehensive management scheme for the entire watershed. These recommendations included completion of the stream valley park system, water quality monitoring programs throughout the watershed, use of “best management practices” designed to control urban and agricultural pollution, adherence to erosion, sediment control and stormwater management regulations, and targeted efforts to mitigate the impacts of major transportation projects.

The most recent *Comprehensive Amendment to the Upper Rock Creek Master Plan*, approved and adopted in 1985, reaffirmed the 1968 Plan’s emphasis on stream valley protection. To alleviate ongoing concerns with the stormwater management consequences of development on half-acre lots, the Amendment recommended reclassification of remaining land in the half-acre zone (R-200) to the one-acre zone (RE-1). Because similar stormwater management issues had been raised following cluster development, the Amendment recommended elimination of the cluster option for properties in the two-acre cluster (RE-2C) zone. The Amendment also set priorities for water and sewer service in the Master Plan Area, recommending that the portion of the area north of Muncaster Mill Road should not receive sewer service.

Considerable residential development occurred following the approval of the 1985 Plan and the implementation through Sectional Map Amendment of its zoning recommendations. Much of it took place on land that had formerly been farmed. Nearly 900 units were approved on almost 1,900 acres in the Master Plan Area between September 1, 1985 and November 30, 1999. In addition, two substantially sized projects using transferable development rights were approved on land adjacent to the Upper Rock Creek Master Plan Area in Olney. These projects totaled more than 800 units on more than 350 acres of former farmland. The majority of development wholly located in the Master Plan Area—about 575 units on almost 1,550 acres—was approved for use of septic fields for wastewater disposal.

## **THE MARYLAND PLANNING ACT OF 1992**

The Upper Rock Creek Area Master Plan embraces and confirms the seven visions of the Maryland Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Act of 1992, which established statewide planning objectives that would be implemented through local master plans. The visions are:

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

The Planning Act requires local plans to address environmentally sensitive areas. The Upper Rock Creek watershed's 100-year floodplains, its streams and their buffers, its habitats of rare, threatened and endangered species, and its steep slopes are considered in the Environmental Resources Plan, which complies with the Planning Act and suggests protection strategies.

## **POPULATION**

Four demographic characteristics prevail in Upper Rock Creek.

- The population increased modestly between 1987 and 1997, when the County's most recent Census Update was completed. Total population increased by 1,825, to 10,345 in 1997, a 21 percent increase that nearly matches the whole County's 22 percent population increase. Regional forecasts indicate that population in Upper Rock Creek will decline slightly between 1997 and 2005.
- Households are made up mainly of married couples with dependents. Eight in ten households are comprised of a married couple, a higher percentage than in the County as a whole. Average household size, 3.23 persons in 1997, is also higher than in the County. Almost one-third of Upper Rock Creek's households consisted of four persons.
- The community is affluent. Median household income, \$103,065 in 1997, was considerably higher than the County's median income, \$66,085. Housing costs are higher than in the County as a whole for homeowners and for renters. The median price of a home was higher than the County's figure as well.
- The community is stable. Six in ten residents in 1997 reported to the Census Update Survey that they had lived in the same house five years earlier. At the same time, almost three-quarters of residents in 1997 moved to the area after 1985.

**CONCEPT: A COMMUNITY FOR THE RESIDENTIAL WEDGE**

