

A COMPREHENSIVE AMENDMENT
TO THE
UPPER ROCK CREEK MASTER PLAN

I. OVERVIEW

The General Plan for Montgomery County, known generally as "On Wedges and Corridors," was adopted by The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in 1964 and approved by the Montgomery County Council in 1969. Its purpose was to help establish overall policies for development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District and to relate these policies to the metropolitan framework.

The General Plan envisioned development radiating outward from the Federal city in a series of corridor cities along the major transportation corridors with wedges of lower density between them. The General Plan seeks to prevent urbanization of the open spaces, the wedges, that now exist between the radial corridors it describes.

"Wedge" is a term used in the General Plan that designates rural, open space, low density residential, rural village, and agricultural uses. The General Plan treats the wedge area as one large area needing protection yet provides no implementation strategy. Instead, it provided the foundation for the specific wedge protection recommendations expressed in the 1968 Upper Rock Creek Master Plan, as well as other area master plans.

Despite adopted County policy outlined in both the 1964 General Plan and the 1968 Master Plan to preserve the Upper Rock Creek Planning Area as a wedge, the area remains subject to development pressures. This wedge area is vulnerable to these pressures because it is situated like a nut in a nutcracker between the opposing thrusts of development from the Gaithersburg and Olney areas.

If the open space concepts are eroded, or significantly changed in character, central Montgomery County might well lose a unique wedge area. Without adherence to the "wedges and corridors" concept, Montgomery County will grow without form or direction.

This Amendment to the Master Plan affects the land use, zoning, water distribution, and sewerage system policy for selected areas in the Upper Rock Creek Planning Area. These proposals will further the intent of and strengthen the 1968 Upper Rock Creek Master Plan.

The intent of the Master Plan focused on the protection of the wedge and Lakes Needwood and Frank - an 11 million public investment made in the late 1960's. The objectives are clearly stated -

"To provide a permanent solution to the problem of development pressures in the area consistent with the principles established in the General Plan "On Wedges and Corridors;

To provide for continuous recognizable open space, both public and private, so as to prevent a coalescence of the dense development in the 70S Corridor with that of the Olney satellite to the east;

To provide permanent protection to the two lakes within the Rock Creek Basin. . .in respect to flood control and the protection of important park and recreation areas." ¹

The character and stability of the planning area has been firmly established by the 1968 Master Plan and the General Plan itself. Although this Amendment embraces the goals and objectives set forth in its predecessors, it recommends achieving those goals in slightly different ways.

A. AMENDMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The Comprehensive Amendment to the Upper Rock Creek Master Plan:

- Supports the General Plan, the 1968 Master Plan, and Comprehensive Planning Policies (CPP) which designate the Upper Rock Creek Planning Area as a low-density, residential, open space wedge area;
- Supports all amendments made subsequent to the Master Plan's adoption in 1968 and the recommendations expressed in the Shady Grove Sector Plan, Olney Master Plan, Gaithersburg Vicinity Master Plan, and Master Plan for Historic Preservation.
- Changes the name of the 1968 Rock Creek Master Plan to the Upper Rock Creek Master Plan to reflect more accurately the location of the planning area within the upper reaches of the Rock Creek watershed.

Land Use

With regard to land use, the Amendment:

- Recommends that the established low-density residential character be maintained for most of the planning area;
- Uses natural land forms to provide the framework for land use and zoning recommendations, as expressed in the 1968 Master Plan;
- Provides for low-density development in the RE-1 Zone generally along ridge lines and in valley wall areas;
- Provides for low-density development in the RE-2 Zone generally on the valley floor and in areas adjacent to the stream valley park system;
- Reduces residential densities from two units per acre to one unit per acre in selected areas to reflect environmental constraints;
- Reaffirms the existing land use and zoning pattern in the vicinity of the proposed Intercounty Connector (ICC) Alignment and Airpark Road Extended;

¹ Upper Rock Creek Master Plan, October 1968, M-NCPPC, p. 6-7.

- Recognizes the desirability to change a limited number of land use and related zoning designations; and
- Supports the existing framework for identifying and preserving historic buildings and sites.

Environment

With regard to environmental considerations, the Amendment:

- Emphasizes protection of the sensitive headwater areas and continuation of stringent watershed management practices;
- Recommends conservation easements up to 200 feet in width in selected sensitive headwater areas;
- Recognizes the significant adverse impact associated with the extension of sewer lines into the stream valley and headwater areas and therefore, does not recommend the expansion of the sewage collection system;
- Responds to current funding limitations and competing priorities for major public improvements, particularly sewerage lines;
- Recognizes the possibility of expanding community water service above Muncaster Mill Road in RE-1 zoned areas to (a) allow further utilization of existing and programmed lines, or (b) resolve health problems generated by individual water system failures. The actual extension of community water above Muncaster Mill Road will be considered upon completion of a County Executive study, undertaken in cooperation with the WSSC and MCPB staff, regarding the provision of such service to low-density areas; and
- Proposes that a cooperative program be developed to improve the severe water quality problems of the Southlawn Branch; the program should involve existing and potential industrial users as well as government officials.

Transportation

With regard to transportation elements, the Amendment:

- Supports the construction of the ICC and Airpark Road Extended;
- Identifies an alternative primary roadway crossing of the North Branch of Rock Creek (P-5) to avoid degradation of sensitive headwater areas;
- Identifies a realignment of a primary roadway intersection at P-2, Dorsey Road and MD 108 to correct a potential geometric design problem; and
- Recommends that a report be prepared by the MCPB Transportation Division to address unresolved transportation questions focusing on the Muncaster Mill Road and Intercounty Connector area.

- Recommends that the mitigation measures outlined for Airpark Road Extended be incorporated in the planning, design, construction, and operation of the road.
- Recommends that mitigation measures be developed for the ICC, Shady Grove Road Extended (M-42) and P-5, prior to planning and incorporated in the design, construction, and operation of these roads.

Community Facilities

With regard to community facilities, the Amendment:

- Supports the park acquisition and development program; and
- Supports the desirability of recognizing throughout the stream valley park system an equestrian trail system and hiker-biker trails.

Business Area

With regard to the business area, the Amendment:

- Continues to concentrate commercial activities in the Redland Center area; and,
- Continues to concentrate industrial activity in the Gude Drive and Southlawn Lane areas.

Implementation

With regard to the implementation strategies, the Amendment:

- Recommends amending the County's Comprehensive Water Supply and Sewerage Systems Plan to reflect water and sewer recommendations;
- Proposes comprehensive rezoning of the Upper Rock Creek Planning Area with the Amendment's land use and zoning recommendations;
- Proposes to rezone approximately 1,250 acres of R-200 zoned land to the RE-1 Zone above Muncaster Mill Road;
- Proposes to rezone approximately 4,200 acres of RE-2C zoned land to the RE-2 Zone;
- Proposes to retain approximately 3,700 acres of RE-1 zoned land in the RE-1 Zone;
- Proposes to rezone approximately 49 acres of R-150 zoned land to the I-4 Zone in the Southlawn Lane industrial area; and
- Proposes to rezone approximately 6 acres of currently RE-2C zoned land to the R-200 Zone.

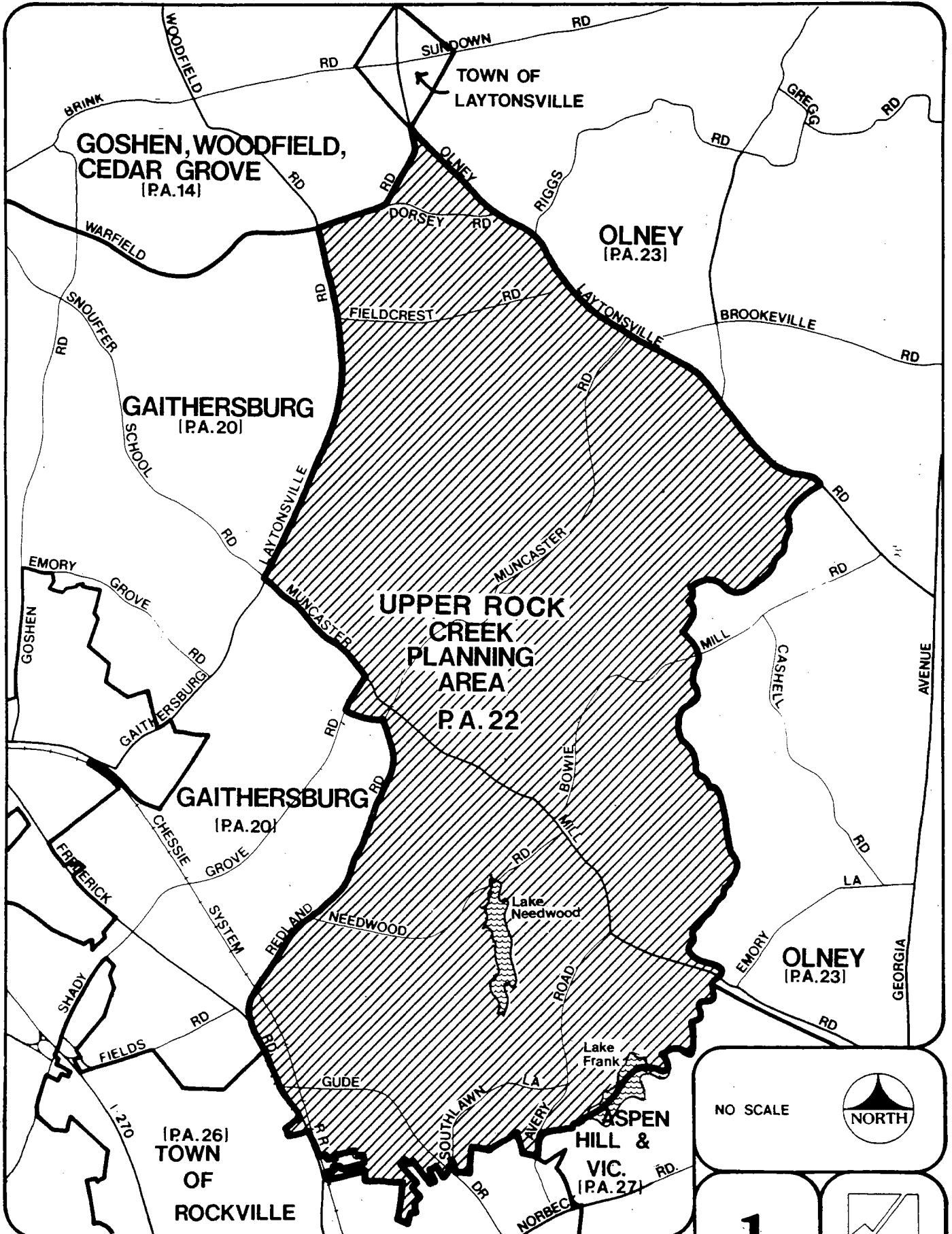
NOTE: Table 1 provides an explanation of zoning categories used throughout this Amendment.

The County Council's support of a low-density residential resource area, as expressed in this Amendment, does not represent a deviation from its commitment to the provision of a diverse housing supply. The Council and Planning Board remain committed to providing an adequate supply of land to encourage the maximum opportunity for housing choices in Montgomery County.

The County should provide housing choices for people having varying incomes and lifestyles and having a need for different housing types and forms of tenancy in order to permit households with changing needs to find suitable accommodations in many parts of the County.

This commitment to a diverse housing supply must be balanced against other competing County priorities. Just as the housing supply is one of the County's most important resources needing protection, it is important to protect the wedge concept and the sensitive headwater areas of Rock Creek. The portion of the Rock Creek Watershed above Muncaster Mill Road contains particularly sensitive water resources. It is one of five areas in the County classified as a Class III watershed by the State Water Resources Administration (WRA). These waters require careful protection to maintain and enhance existing water quality.


Low and moderate cost housing opportunities, generally, are provided in the designated corridor areas of the County in higher density zoning than those generally recommended in this Amendment. Such housing opportunities are provided in all planning areas to the extent possible within the constraints of sewer service, public facility availability, and master plan compatibility. Priorities to expand housing opportunities are designated in areas which are deficient in such housing and are otherwise suitable for it. The Upper Rock Creek Planning Area cannot support higher density zoning since it may be detrimental to water quality in the sensitive Upper Rock Creek watershed.



MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT FOR
ROCK CREEK
 MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

PLANNING AREAS

NO SCALE



NORTH

1
 FIGURE



MNCPPC