

# CHAPTER VII: THE NEXT STEP



Montgomery County now has reached a turning point in its growth and development. It can, by allowing development to proceed as it has in the past, allow its basic character to be permanently altered. Or it can, by forming an effective partnership of private and public interests, rural and urban philosophies, new and old ideas, revitalize and sustain its agrarian heritage in a way that is not only environmentally wise but legally and economically practical.

This chapter focuses on the actions which should be taken to implement and supplement the agricultural preservation recommendations of the Plan. If the Agricultural Preservation Study Area is to develop in an orderly fashion--in the proper places, at the proper times, and in the proper sequence, a series of decisions about zoning, capital improvements, subdivisions and other County policies and programs must be made. Moreover, it will be necessary to establish a continuous process of monitoring development so that these policies and programs can be fine tuned.

The preservation program can be carried out by taking the following actions:

## PLANNING ACTIONS

- A. APPROVE and adopt this Functional Plan and proceed with the Sectional Map Amendment process immediately - MCPB and Council.
- B. APPROVE use of a County Development Rights Fund, to purchase development rights - MCPB and Council.
- C. UTILIZE master plans and master plan text amendments to identify TDR receiving areas - MCPB and Council.

- D. INITIATE an update of the 1968 Clarksburg Master Plan - MCPB.
- E. CONTINUE master plan revision for the Damascus Planning Area - MCPB.
- F. APPROVE and adopt Poolesville Vicinity Master Plan land-use recommendations as consistent with this Plan - MCPB and Council.
- G. DIRECT public open space policies toward protecting farmland - MCPB.

The acquisition of public open space can be utilized to separate suburban uses from critical mass areas. The "greenbelt" concept in Germantown is a good illustration of this principle.

- H. SUPPORT open space recommendations in the Darnestown, Sandy Spring/Ashton, Upper Rock Creek, and Cloverly - MCPB and Council.

Preservation of these areas will serve to protect the Agricultural Reserve by providing low density buffer areas.

- I. INITIATE selected Rural Community master plans - MCPB.
- J. INVENTORY all public lands in the Study Area to identify possible surplus sites or other sites that might be leased to County farmers until such time that the government needs the land - MCPB.

Productive farmland, in public ownership, should be leased to farmers for active farm use under requirements for proper management of the land, until such time that the government needs the land for other uses.

Surplus public lands in appropriate areas should be sold as farmland without any development rights. The Clarksburg Site (Site 30) which the County acquired as a potential landfill site might be an example of such an opportunity. Its sale (or lease) by the County would be a strong statement of its intention to promote agriculture.

Sludge sites, once used, should be sold or leased to farmers without development rights. Although the land cannot be put back into food chain production for an indefinite period of time it could be used for sod farming, nursery products, horse grazing, or crops useful for energy production.

- K. MONITOR disposition of Rural Open Space Zone lands - MCPB.

The development of such an open space inventory is important so that farmers can be kept aware of leasing opportunities within the zone, thereby fully utilizing the open space for agricultural purposes when possible.

- L. INITIATE watershed studies similar to the one prepared by the State and Federal Soil Conservation Services and the Environmental Division of the MCPB, entitled, Seneca Creek Watershed so that agricultural land management policies can be established for other areas in the Agricultural Reserve - SCS and MCPB.

## PROGRAMMING ACTIONS

- M. REVISE 10-year Water and Sewer Plan text which includes rural sanitation policies and Capital Improvements Program projects to reflect recommendations included in this Plan - DEP and Council.

Generally limit Capital Improvements Program spending in the Agricultural Reserve, except for safety and general maintenance projects.

## REGULATORY ACTIONS

- N. APPROVE use of agricultural activity protection notice on final plats for residential uses in the Agricultural Reserve - MCPB.

In order to create a positive understanding of the intent of the Agricultural Reserve, a notice should be included on all final plats creating residential building sites in the Agricultural Reserve to read as follows:

"Agriculture is the preferred use in the Rural Density Transfer Zone. All agricultural operations shall be permitted at any time, including the operation of farm machinery and no agricultural use shall be subject to restriction because it interferes with other uses permitted in the Zone.

- O. EXAMINE nuisance laws on State and County levels so that legislative action can be taken to protect farms in the Agricultural Reserve - County Attorney.

- P. DEVELOP criteria for public development right purchases - Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board and Committee and Office of Economic Development.

Since funds will be limited, criteria should be developed for the purchase of easements that have the greatest public benefit in terms of farmland preservation.

- Q. REVISE tax laws to respond to recommendations of this Plan - MCPB, Council and State.

## SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIONS

- R. CONTINUE and expand marketing information programs for the small or new farmer - Office of Economic Development.

Marketing assistance by local government can be of material help, particularly to small cash crop producers. The newly approved Roadside Farm Market Zoning Text Amendment and the opportunities available at the County sponsored farmers markets should be highly publicized.

- S. INVESTIGATE how County sponsored low interest loans could be made available to County farmers or farming associations in the Study Area or in agricultural districts for the purpose of capital improvements or agri-business endeavors - Office of Economic Development.

- T. WORK with the Board of Education to enlighten students in selected schools about careers in the agricultural industry and respect for agricultural property - County Agricultural Extension Agent.
- U. REQUIRE County to assess Federal, State, and County programs to measure impact upon agricultural land - Office of Economic Development.
- V. ENCOURAGE federal, state, county, foundation and private conservancy acquisition programs or voluntary covenants for the preservation of farmland and open space - Office of Economic Development.

As part of the comprehensive growth management effort in the County, the Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board and the Council should actively encourage the formation of voluntary agricultural districts particularly where they are strategically important to the preservation of farmland and open space.