

PART IV: APPENDICES

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

According to the 2000 Master Plan Status Report, Damascus residential growth in recent years has been strong, although traffic congestion continues to be a major local issue. Key achievements in implementing the recommendations of the 1982 Damascus Master Plan include:

Land Use – Most of the recommendations from the 1982 Master Plan have been implemented including:

1. 860 acres removed from the Agricultural Reserve and designated for residential development - and an additional 1,050 acres elsewhere added to the Agricultural Reserve.
2. 100 acres of employment and industrial land uses along MD 108 rezoned for residential use.
3. Zoning Ordinance change to permit cluster development with septic systems and public water when recommended by a Master Plan.
4. Zoning Ordinance change to extend service, non-retail commercial uses along Lewis Drive and accommodate local light industrial needs.
5. Completion of road improvements to address congestion at the intersection of MD 27 and Main Street.
6. Most new residential development channeled to the Magruder Valley, with limited low-density residential along major ridge roads, and a low-density buffer provided along portions of MD 124 and MD 27 - reflecting environmental constraints.
7. A new shopping area built east of Ridge Road, on the south side of town in the designated PD Zone.

The remaining issue is the status of the older shopping center that will be a focus of the master plan amendment process. The long-term best use for the older shopping center needs to be considered, as it currently has un-leased or under-leased space.

Environmental - All environmental recommendations of the 1982 Master Plan, primarily related to critical watershed and stream valley protection policies and regulations have been completed.

Transportation - This is the area with the most remaining unresolved issues. There are nine remaining unresolved recommendations to be discussed during the master plan review process related to the downtown area, roads traversing the Magruder Valley, the upper Patuxent watershed, rural area connector roads, and bikeways.

Though traffic issues continue to plague Damascus during rush periods, and relief must be provided. The Master Plan designates the construction of the extension of Woodfield Road north to Ridge Road (A-12 on the Master Plan) as the next step in this process. At this time the Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) is at work on final design plans for this road. In addition, traffic issues related to the safety of MD 27 north of the Woodfield Road extension intersection are being evaluated and are under consideration at Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT).

Successes in this area include the "Park and Ride" lot (currently under construction), the approval of construction of "P-6" to eliminate a difficult curve in Hawkins Creamery Road, the completion of Bethesda Church Road from Ridge Road to Woodfield Road, and improvements to Sweepstakes Road.

Parks - Two recommendations have been completed and the three that remain relate to the Magruder Valley Stream Park, the Oak Ridge Conservation Park, and the Little Bennett Stream Valley Park. Evaluation of these recommendations will be a part of the Master Plan amendment process. Recreation issues such as completion of stream valley trails connecting area parks will need to be considered by the M-NCPPC staff in conjunction with the community. A new park located just east of Damascus on MD 108 is being planned at this time.

Schools - Woodfield and Cedar Grove Elementary Schools have been modernized, Baker Middle School is being enlarged, and Rocky Hill Middle School is to be replaced. Other school issues – primarily related to overcrowding remain, but are outside the purview of this master plan process. The community is very aware of these problems, and will continue to work with Montgomery County Public Schools to resolve the overcrowding issues that plague the Damascus schools.

Other Public Facilities - The new library has been built, and sidewalks have been installed in the business area. Also, the new recreation center should commence construction by spring of 2003.

SUMMARY DISCUSSION OF DAMASCUS NOVEMBER 12 AND 19, 2002 PUBLIC MEETINGS

Master Plan Process Related Issues

Land Use

1. Will a potential for transitional zoning be addressed?

The staff will be open to discussing any types of zoning that area residents believe potentially appropriate for the community.

2. Need to develop a vision statement for Damascus to help guide planned development.

The Master Plan should contain, and should be, an expression of the vision for growth and development in the community.

3. Grave concerns about HOC/low income housing projects—if planned, will it change the character of Damascus?

Damascus, as with all sections of the County, will need to consider whether there is a need for additional affordable housing in their community. However, HOC withdrew from an approved project in Damascus due to a lack of sufficient need for lower income housing in the Damascus area.

4. Need further explanation about the sewer capacity for Damascus. How does this relate to planned and future development?

Little additional development at densities requiring public sewer can be approved in the Damascus planning area due to lack of sewer capacity, and the inability of the sewer plan serving Damascus to expand its capacity. This is not a significant problem, as Damascus is not intended for any significant additional growth.

5. Damascus needs to be established as a rural community.

The vision expressed for Damascus in all its master plans, and in the County's General Plan is for a rural residential community, and rural commercial center for the upper County.

Transportation

1. Need the Bypass around Damascus to get through traffic out of Damascus.

The Master Plan will set up a process to ensure that a review of the need for a Bypass is set in motion after completion of Woodfield Road Extended (A-12).

2. How are we going to work on transportation issues, including County roads, State roads, road alignments, and traffic lights? There are significant safety issues on MD 27 that the Master Plan should address. The Master Plan should address the need for shoulders, bike paths, and sidewalks.

The Master Plan process is to include a study of any significant transportation issues. Residents of the community interested in these issues may join the Transportation Task Force and work with the M-NCPPC staff and the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation on these issues. In addition, the need for sidewalks and bicycle access will be specifically included.

3. Consider a tunnel onto Oak Drive for bicycle riders and pedestrians across Ridge Road versus a stoplight.

The issue of safety at this intersection will be a part of the Master Plan discussions.

4. Current and future development around Gue Road needs to be addressed—concerned about getting 'boxed in'. Gue Road needs to be designated as a Rural Rustic Road.

The Land Use Task Force will discuss whether changes should be made to existing zoning in areas of Damascus along major highways. Residents may propose additional roads for Rustic Road designation, although certain criteria related to volume, accidents, and existing character are a part of that evaluation. In addition, the Rustic Road designation does not affect the development potential of property.

5. Concerned about the connection between Hawkins Creamery Road and Woodfield Road.

This discussion will be a part of the Transportation Task Force evaluations.

6. Howard Chapel Road should not be upgraded to a primary road.

This discussion will be a part of the Transportation Task Force evaluation.

Rural Open Space/Environment

1. Scenic viewshed guidelines need to be established.

This issue can be a part of the Land Use Task Force discussions.

2. Need new devices for preserving additional open space.

This issue can be a part of the Land Use Task Force discussions.

Master Plan Process

Concern that there will be no Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG). Are the issues in the Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report the same as the issues that would have been raised if an MPAG existed?

For the reasons discussed previously in this report, the Task Force oriented process is proposed. The issues in the Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report fully reflect all the concerns that the staff has heard from Damascus residents – individually and from the collective concerns expressed by the Damascus Alliance leadership. Additionally, any other concerns raised by community residents in the context of individual Task Force discussions will be included for evaluation. The intent in using an alternate to the MPAG model is to allow increased participation from a broad cross-section of the community – especially those who have specific areas of interest and concern, but who do not have the time or interest required for MPAG participation. The Task Force model also address the longstanding concern that MPAGs too often come to represent the dynamics of group chosen rather than the community as a whole.

Regulatory Process Issues Not Related to the Master Plan Process

1. Concerned about the future capacity of schools in the Damascus School System.

This is an issue of understandable great concern for residents in Damascus. While school overcrowding is not directly related to the Master Plan process, the MCPS may determine that a moratorium is necessary for additional housing construction if they determine that schools in an area are too crowded.

2. How can the community play a more active role in the Special Exception process?

Whenever a resident sees a Board of Appeals special exception notice sign, they should contact the Board of Appeals to determine what is being proposed. They should also call the M-NCPPC to determine if the Planning Board will be making a recommendation on the case. Any interested person or group may testify at Planning Board, Hearing Examiner, or Board of Appeals hearings (as appropriate) on a special exception application. The applicable Planning Board staff member assigned to write the report can discuss the information available or can meet with interested persons before the report is written.

3. Is there any recourse if the community disagrees with the Board of Appeals decisions on a special exception?

The appeals procedures are available through the Board of Appeals offices.

4. What is a Special Exception and how does it affect the County's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO)?

These are two different entities. The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance generally applies to new subdivision activity, not special exceptions. Most special exceptions do not relate to housing. Those that do generally relate to housing for elderly or handicapped persons, and may not be subject to APFO restrictions.

5. Is it true that an 88,000 square foot commercial building is going up in the middle of the town?

A parcel along Lewis Drive, zoned for light industrial uses, has recently received subdivision approval for a commercial building. Because this is a permitted use in the zone, no additional approvals were required.

6. Broadcast towers will decimate the views and vistas of Damascus.

The staff is aware that a special exception application is likely to be submitted for AM Radio Towers on the west side of Damascus. However, no application has yet been made. However, the visual impact of any tower application will be a part of the review criteria.

7. Worried about decisions being made that will preclude this Master Plan such as the rezoning on the Miller property, baseball fields and their traffic problems, and the Ride-On bus lot. The residents have little input and are unsure that the master plan process will be valid.

The issues listed do not invalidate the vision and direction of the Damascus Master Plan. They include a rezoning recommended in the 1982 Master Plan (not yet approved), a special exception application (not yet approved), and a long planned (a recommendation of the 1982 Master Plan) County mass-transit project for those in the Damascus area who ride buses. Master Plans do not prevent property owners from pursuing used allowed by their zoning and in the zoning ordinance. A part of every Master Plan process is to increase the awareness of the land use regulatory process, so that misunderstandings about the intent and limitations of master plans can be clarified.

8. Need further information about the Miller Farm property development.

This is a property recommended for a Planned Development Zone in the 1982 Master Plan. It is currently in the process of pursuing this rezoning. Although the situation surrounding this property has changed significantly since 1982, the applicant is entitled to request a rezoning.

Other Comments – Not Master Plan Process Related

1. Concerned that communication between staff is not working as represented by the staff coordination on the former HOC housing site.

The development history of this site along Ridge Road (near the north intersection with Oak Drive) led to a development plan that required a significant amount of forest clearing very close to the Magruder Branch Trail. The point of intersect is to be very near an important stormwater retention pond, and the creation of that facility requires a significant amount of earth moving. This clearing will be stabilized and replanted, but has resulted in a bare and ugly site for the near term. The situation cited is somewhat related to development timing, but also related to a common difficulty in accepting the necessity of significant earthmoving as a part of subdivision development.

2. Need a list of staff names that can answer specific questions—special exceptions, future development, etc.

Appropriate M-NCPPC and Montgomery County staff will be listed on the Damascus Master Plan Website, or can be obtained from the Rural Area Community-Based Planning Team.

3. Planning Board needs to meet with the Damascus community to address its concerns.

The Planning Board welcomes any resident of Damascus at any public meeting, but due to technological difficulties it is difficult for the Planning Board to change its meeting location.