

Executive Summary

Damascus Master Plan Staff Draft

COMMUNITY VISION

Damascus is a small town surrounded by the agricultural uses and rural open space in the county's Agricultural Reserve. It is a town that offers community oriented commercial uses, a variety of housing types, mixed uses in the town center, clustered single-family residential neighborhoods surrounding the Town Center, and a protected rural area that buffer it from more intense growth patterns in adjoining Master Plan areas and adjoining counties. This Plan maintains approximately the current level of anticipated growth in the Master Plan area but reorients it primarily in and around the Town Center in accord with county policy and the community vision.

PLANS AND POLICIES AFFECTING MASTER PLAN AREA

This Master Plan is built upon the foundations of existing plans and policies. Major county and state plans and policies that have influenced the recommendations of this Plan include:

- The *1982 Damascus Master Plan*, that confirmed the vision of Damascus as a rural town of low to moderate density residential neighborhoods surrounded by the Agricultural Reserve.
- The *1992 Maryland Planning Act*, that confirmed the need to limit housing growth in rural areas, and reinforce the rural town centers.
- The *Montgomery County General Plan and 1993 Refinement*, that confirmed the rural community vision for Damascus.
- The *1993 Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River Watershed*, that established improved environmental protection for the tributaries of the Patuxent River.
- The *1993 Damascus Master Plan Amendment*, that established the need to consider the need for alternative through-traffic access around central Damascus when Master Plan Road A-12 is completed.
- The *1997 Maryland Smart Growth Act*, that confirmed again the need to limit housing growth in rural areas.
- The *2002 Montgomery County Planning Board Transportation Policy Report*, that recommends that the majority of new development in the county be located near transit stations or within the I-270 Corridor, and a reduction of future potential development in the rural areas of the County.
- The *2003 Montgomery County Council Action Plan for Affordable Housing*, that encourages using a full range of housing types to meet the diverse needs for housing in the County.

GOALS

General Goals of the Master Plan

A human-scaled town center easily identifiable as the heart of the surrounding community

- Moderate intensity mixed-use in the Town Center
- Increased pedestrian orientation for neighborhoods
- Design and scale emphasized over separation of uses in the Town Center
- Increased housing opportunities within the Town Center

Greater connectivity within and around the town.

- Increased pedestrian and bicycling opportunities along all major roadways
- Multi-use aspect of all roadways emphasized in planning for safety and access.
- Evaluation of alternative routing for through commuter traffic in the future

A Green Environment

- New development clustered to achieve greater overall environmental protection
- Use of green technologies encouraged
- Land use density in the Patuxent Watershed outside the Town Center adjusted to reflect realistic development potential and goals of the Patuxent Master Plan

Preservation of Agricultural and Rural Open Space

- Rural Density Transfer Zone confirmed
- Zoning appropriate for threatened rural village communities created
- Agricultural and agriculturally related uses on rural land supported

Specific Goals of the Master Plan

Land Use - Fulfill the vision of Damascus as a community with a mixed-use center, connected with its residential neighborhoods and surrounded by rural open space.

Housing - Provide a variety of housing options including affordably priced housing and housing opportunities for seniors, suitable to the small town character of Damascus.

Transportation - Improve the efficiency of the roadway network through road improvements, expanding the pedestrian and bicycle path networks, and expanded transit options to improve the potential for intercepting commuters.

Environmental Resources - Maintain the quality and integrity of the outstanding natural systems within the Damascus area, enhance that quality in areas such as the Patuxent River watershed, and mitigate impacts of future development through use of appropriate guidelines.

Community Facilities - Provide a network of local and countywide parks that offer recreational activities, support an interconnected trail system, protect important natural features and create attractive settings for cultural and historical resources. Provide sufficient public facilities to support and protect the residents of Damascus.

Historic Preservation - Protect and preserve the important historic and archeological resources in the Plan area.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS SUMMARY

Population growth has been modest in the Damascus area – 4% between 1990 and 2000, compared to the County’s overall 15.4%. Damascus is more stable than the County in that 43.1% of its residents have lived at their current address for more than 10 years, compared to 34.5% for the County residents overall. The predominant housing type is single-family detached, and the number of persons per household (3.04) is larger than the County overall (2.66). This reflects the larger number of children in households.

Damascus is also younger than the County overall, with a median age of 35.1, 1.7 years younger than the County’s median age of 36.8. Over one-third of the population is children 19 and younger, and the area has a relatively small percentage of seniors. Only 6.3% of Damascus is 65 years or older, compared to 11.2% County-wide.

Ethnically Damascus is more homogenous than the County. Very few residents are foreign born, and most residents (90.7%) are European-American or Hispanic. This compares to 64.8% County-wide. Less than 10% of the residents identify themselves as members of a racial minority, compared to over one-third of the County (35.2%).

Median income levels in Damascus are somewhat lower than the County, indicating a median household income of \$60,812 vs. \$71,551 for the County. Overall there is a stronger percentage of middle income ranges than the County overall, and lower percentages of very high and very low income levels.

The Damascus area gained 666 persons and 223 dwellings since the 1990 Census, with the more rural areas showing small losses in population and dwellings, and the central areas showing the largest gains. Areas with the largest growth include the central Magruder Valley and the areas along Hawkins Creamery Road where there has been significant residential development over the decade. Additional and more detailed demographic characteristics are in the Housing Chapter.

PLAN SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommended actions in this Plan implement the goal of ensuring the identity of central Damascus as the heart of the master plan area. Major issues included connectivity and cohesiveness, strengthening local retail and residential opportunities within and near the Town Center, enabling growth appropriate for the town vision, and protecting the surrounding rural areas. Opportunities for additional residential growth outside the Town Center are limited due to infrastructure concerns and to achieve policy objectives.

Housing

Damascus offers one of the most balanced housing markets in the County, with excellent diversity of housing types and prices. Affordably priced housing in a small town setting, convenient access to employment centers, and the beauty of the surrounding agricultural and rural open space continue to attract young families. The one area of significant need is senior housing. This Plan recommends the following major goals for housing in Damascus:

- Support moderate-density residential development within the Town Center.
- Support increased senior housing for residents of the Damascus area, perhaps through joint development opportunities.
- Maintain small town character of Damascus through use of cluster development.
- Support use of TDR receiving areas where appropriate.
- Limit single-family development to existing densities except where recommended for TDR receiving sites.

Moderate Density Residential Development

Existing zoning in the Town Center would allow somewhat more than 2,300 additional dwelling units, based on the maximum development potential of the existing ten zones in the Town Center. This theoretical maximum exceeds the realistic potential market for development in Damascus, and in fact most of this land is already in stable use – commercial, industrial, and residential.

MAXIMUM YIELD FROM EXISTING ZONES IN TOWN CENTER

Zone	Acres	GFA	GSA	YPA	# Units	Notes
C-2	64.35	472,523	2,803,249	21.5	*1,384	
C-T	1.00	5,000	43,560	0	0	1
O-M	21.50	14,200	277,913	21.5	137	2
PD-7	24.68	307,958	1,075,174	8.54	163	3
I-1	15.77	18,891	686,855	21.5	339	2
RE-2C	38.23	87,697	1,665,354	.4	15	
R-200	20.99	22,193	914,364	2.44	51	4
R-60	4.76	0	207,474	6.1	29	4
RT-8.0	6.03	0	262,474	9.76	59	
R-30	11.81	91,392	514,476	17.69	184	4
Maximum Potential Residential Yield Town Center					2,361	

GFA – Gross Floor Area GSA – Gross Site Area YPA–Residential Yield Per Acre (Theoretical Maximum)

*Permitted or Special Exception use depending on Master Plan

- 1. Dwellings no longer allowed in C-T Zone
- 2. Highest yield through Productivity Housing
- 3. Zone can yield 8.5/acre if MPDUs are used
- 4. Includes 22% MPDUs.

Similarly, based on the proposed capacity for Town Center zones the residential density calculation generates a maximum theoretical total of slightly more than 2,000 dwelling units within the Town Center. While this equally overstates realistic development potential, these zones will provide more flexibility for property owners and more design and scale certainty for area residents. While the potential yield is somewhat reduced, the allowed density remains significantly higher than historic development trends in the community. This “cushion” reflects the reality that not all sites will develop or redevelop, and not all sites that develop will develop at full density.

PROPOSED TOWN CENTER ZONES YIELDS DEVELOPABLE PROPERTIES

Zone	Acres	GFA (sf)	GSA (sf)	Proposed YPA	# Units
TCZ-1	69.42	1,512,005	3,024,010	20	1736
TCZ-2	21.44	1,167,559	934,047	15	322
Maximum Potential Residential Yield of Developable Properties					2058

GFA – NR Gross Floor Area GSA – Gross Site Area YPA – Residential Yield Per Acre

Senior Housing

This Plan supports housing for active seniors and perhaps some assisted living. The anticipated demand for senior housing in Damascus will support a moderate increase of approximately 150 units. Two sites within the Town Center, the State of Maryland Property and the Boyer Property – both near the Senior Center, are particularly appropriate for this use due to their location to immediate services and convenient retail uses. If both were developed at the maximum proposed density within the proposed TCZ-1 Zone, they could provide the anticipated needed senior housing units.

Transportation

The Damascus Master Plan Area lies at the northern tip of Montgomery County. Due to this location, travelers from Frederick County, Howard County, and Carroll County substantially affect transportation conditions. Currently, the area features a network of two-lane roads that serve linear development patterns. The transportation recommendations for the Damascus Plan Area include three primary components: roadway functional classification and improvements, facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, and transit and travel demand management.

- The *roadway recommendations* focus on improving the efficiency of the two-lane roadway network through operational, design, and classification recommendations.
- The recommended *pedestrian system* provides a dense network of sidewalks within the Town Center, with extensions to key civic destinations elsewhere in the Plan Area.
- The *bikeway system* features a network of shared-use pathways oriented toward the Town Center and Magruder Branch Trail, connection to area parks and the county trail systems, and recommendations to improve on-road cyclist accommodations.
- *Transit concerns* are addressed by several recommendations.

Roadway Network - This Plan modifies the 1982 and 1993 Master Plan in several ways, although maintaining the basic policy direction. It removes two unbuilt primary residential roadways, and includes a classification of several previously unclassified roadways as either primary residential streets or country roads, reflecting their current function in the roadway network. Reflecting the concern of Damascus residents, specific design and operational treatments are suggested for further study and implementation including traffic signal warrant analyses, investigation of auxiliary turning lanes at intersections, and context-based design. The recommended context-based street design techniques encourage slower speeds and added awareness of the presence of pedestrians in the Town Center and entry street segments of Ridge Road, Woodfield Road and Damascus Road. On local streets traffic-calming tools slow traffic at strategic locations and make the streets safer for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Specific Recommendations

New Business Street – Add a business street connection (B-2) parallel to and south of Main Street connecting Ridge Road (MD 27) to Woodfield Road (MD 124) to provide access to the underutilized areas behind the buildings on the south side of Main Street.

Town Center Street Design - Develop a road design template for road segments in the Town Center to apply context-based design methodologies that give visual cues to entering motorists that they are entering a town area where slower traffic speeds are both posted and logical.

Reclassification - Change the classification of three roads to meet changed conditions or increased use: Oak Drive, Kingstead Road, and Woodfield School Road to Primary Residential.

Removal – Remove planned roadway segments P-2 (between Howard Chapel Drive and Woodfield Road Extended) and P-5 (between Grenel Road and Johnson Farm Road) in the 1993 Damascus Master Plan that are no longer considered viable.

Two Lane Road Policy - Retain the existing two-lane roadway network outside the Town Center to protect the rural and agricultural character of the Damascus area.

Rustic Roads - Add three Country Roads reflecting their function as traffic-carrying rural roadways connecting Damascus to Howard or Frederick Counties: Howard Chapel Drive and a portion of Gue Road, Annapolis Rock Road, and a portion of Bethesda Church Road.

Operational Improvements – The centrality of traffic management issues to the Damascus community merit notice of certain specific improvements that will almost certainly be warranted within the life of this Plan include support for certain turn lanes at intersections, evaluation of subdivision entry/exit lanes to avoid unsafe conditions for pedestrians or bicyclists, and traffic signal warrant analyses for certain locations with high travel demand.

Safety Modifications - Three roadway modifications are proposed to address safety concerns: A realignment of the northern end of Kings Valley Road at Bethesda Church Road to remove the existing “dogleg” curve; an evaluation of a realignment of the intersection of Ridge Road with Oak Drive and Valley Park Drive to eliminate the planned offset intersection; and a realignment of the offset intersection of Kings Valley Road and Kingstead Road in conjunction with any proposed development of the Kingstead Farm.

Through Commuter Traffic - Community disruption related to heavy commuter traffic from Frederick, Carroll, and Howard Counties continues to be a major concern. This Plan supports the need for a thorough analysis of the potential for a Bypass around Damascus, after the completion of Woodfield Road Extended.

- **Alternate Route Study** - This Master Plan recommends that within one to two years after the completion of Woodfield Road Extended (A-12), a study to evaluate current traffic conditions and work with the community to determine whether a Master Plan Amendment process is warranted to evaluate the need for a bypass type road. A study of the long-term traffic load implications of growth patterns in the adjoining counties is also needed.
- **Operational Improvements To Improve Through Traffic** - This plan also recognizes that operational transportation improvements are needed, including auxiliary turning lanes and pedestrian and bicycling amenities, particularly along the portions of Ridge Road north of Woodfield Road Extended and south of Bethesda Church Road.

Bikeway And Pedestrian Improvements

Bikeway and pedestrian routes provide convenient connections and encouraging walking.

- **Bikeways** - Revise the Montgomery County Road Code to include a roadway classification for Country Road and Country Arterial with and without bikeways and sidewalks.
- **Shared Use Facilities** - Implement sidewalk or shared-use paths to key activity centers.
- **Pedestrian Access** - Implement pedestrian safety and access improvements; and consider a below-grade pedestrian tunnel under Ridge Road at Valley Park Drive.

Transit and Travel Demand Management

Damascus should have a better transit options. This Plan recommends:

- Better pedestrian access to the existing Park and Ride lot, and a new Park and Ride lot north of Damascus near the MD 27/MD 80 intersection.
- Support transit and Travel Demand Management (TDM) services and policies:
- Support Inter-jurisdictional study of transit and para-transit opportunities.
- Support evaluation and outreach efforts for current transit and (TDM) service and policies.
- Expand bus services and transit priority projects that enhance these bus services.
- Support implementation of improved transit facilities and amenities such as concrete pads, shelters, and providing of real-time transit information.

Environmental Resources

Damascus is located at the source of four major watersheds. This location exerts a strong influence on planning for the protection of environmental resources. It includes a major part of the Patuxent drinking water reservoir headwaters in the Patuxent watershed. The existing forest and wetland resources in the Master Plan area are of generally high quality. While many of these resources have been protected through low-density land use policy or acquisition of parkland, there are significant environmental resources that lack adequate protection from potential development - particularly in the Little Bennett and Patuxent River watersheds.

- Recommendations for Protecting Headwater Streams and Wetland Resources
- General Water Quality Recommendations:
- Recommendations for the Protection and Enhancement of Forest Resources

Parkland

The Damascus Master Plan Area includes over 500 acres of parkland including local and neighborhood parks, the 4-mile long hiker-biker path in the Magruder Branch Stream Valley Park, and the Damascus Recreational Park. The Little Bennett Regional Park, containing over 3700 acres, is located immediately west of the Master Plan area, and is to be connected to Damascus via the County's trail system. Additionally, the area has many acres of linear parkland along stream valleys, and the Patuxent River State Park. Future active recreation needs for Damascus can be met as recommended below:

- Develop existing the Seneca Springs and Woodfield undeveloped local parks with amenities such as ballfields, playgrounds, trails and multi-use courts.
- Increase ballfield capacities at Damascus Recreational Park.
- Acquire additional conservation or recreation parkland in designated locations through dedication from properties in cluster zones.
- Improve small urban local parks in or near the Town Center including the Damascus Neighborhood Park on Locust Drive and the planned Magruder Branch Trailhead Park.
- Three undeveloped school sites exist in or near the Damascus Master Plan area. As schools provide significant recreation facilities, if the sites are ever declared surplus, retain as parkland to provide the anticipated recreation and open space opportunities.

Parkland Natural Resource Conservation and Protection - Resource protection within existing and new parkland is a critical issue for the preservation of the important natural resources. A major concern in the Damascus Area is the continued protection of the drinking water supply of the County since it contains the headwaters for several major streams and the Patuxent River. Include designated areas in the Little Bennett Creek Watershed Headwaters and the Western Tributary of Seneca Creek Stream Valley in the recommended park network for Damascus:

Parkland Historic and Cultural Settings - This Plan does not propose adding properties to the park system to protect historic structures, but three potential historic resources are immediately adjacent to parkland or potential parkland: the Elisha Warfield House, the Kingstead Farm, and the Ira Jones Farm. At time of subdivision, strategies will be needed to protect their historic settings which may include incorporating part of the setting into the park system.

Trails

Damascus is included in the Upcounty Trail Corridor where the plan objective is to “provide a hard surface recreational trail to serve the existing and future residents of Germantown, Clarksburg, and Damascus.” The *Magruder Branch Hiker-Biker Trail* is a critical element in this network and the only paved trail in the Damascus Planning Area. This Plan strongly supports the continuation of the trail northward to the Town Center, and creating a trailhead park. Safe road crossings of this trail must be provided for those using the trail at all crossing locations, especially at Sweepstakes Road and Bethesda Church Road when that segment is developed.

In terms of the natural surface trail pattern in Damascus, this Plan recommends that the *Countywide Park Trail Plan* be amended to reflect a new concept for east-west connectivity and other modifications as noted below:

- Reflects the east-west natural surface trail corridor being added to link the Seneca Trail to the west to the Little Bennett Trail system to the east.
- Identifies the importance of a sidewalk or bike path along Valley Park Drive to access this trail connection and, special treatment for the Ridge Road crossing to ensure safety for those using the connection.
- Supports providing indicated trail connections in the Countywide Park Trail Plan and this Master Plan during the subdivision review process at time of development.

Legacy Open Space Program

Two Legacy Open Space sites evaluated in the Damascus Master Plan process were originally listed in the Legacy Master Plan as Class III (Technical Appendix D) sites. Those sites are now recommended for protection. A third site already within both the Water Supply and Farmland Protection categories of the Legacy Open Space Master Plan was further evaluated and found to include enough significant forest that it should be added to the Natural Resources category of the Legacy Plan. Three areas are recommended to be included as Natural Resource sites.

- The Little Bennett Creek Headwaters Area is recommended for protection - primarily through parkland acquisition.
- The Bennett Creek Headwaters Area and the Upper Patuxent River Forest Area are recommended for protection - primarily through easements.

Community Facilities

Damascus Community Recreation Center – Because there are few recreational opportunities within the Damascus Master Plan area, there are already plans to add an outdoor amphitheatre, skateboard park and in-line skate rink at the Center in the future. Further facilities that should be provided include additional athletic fields and a roller hockey court. The skateboard park should be a priority. The Department of Recreation should also study the aquatic recreational needs of this area and possible locations for a facility in the near future. *And for the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists entering the Center, a sidewalk must be constructed from the Oak Drive entrance to the facility, in addition to the sidewalks from Baker Middle School to the Recreation Center entrance. This crucial safety element was not authorized as a part of the facility construction.*

Historic Resources

Only one property in the Damascus Master Plan Area, the Druid Theater, has been designated on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation and this Plan reconfirms that designation. The Historic Preservation Commission is in the process of reviewing the historic resources within the Damascus Master Plan area that are identified in the Historic Locational Atlas. The resources in Planning Area 11 and Planning Area 14 are currently under review, and the resources in Planning Area 10 and Planning Area 15 will be completed as time and staff resources allow.

Land Use and Zoning

Land use in Damascus is characterized by a core of greatest density in the commercial center surrounded by moderate density residential neighborhoods, progressively lower density transitional residential areas accessing the primary roadways, and then rural land surrounding the town, primarily in the Rural Density Transfer Zone. Major issues included connectivity and cohesiveness, strengthening local retail opportunities and residential opportunities within and near the Town Center, and enabling appropriate growth, and protecting surrounding rural areas.

The recommendations in this Plan generally maintain and augment the existing land use patterns and enhance their ability to evolve within the framework of the vision for the town as an attractive small town with an identifiable core and livable neighborhoods surrounded by agricultural uses and rural open space. The major development tiers in this Master Plan reflect decreasing permitted intensity of use. They include the Town Center, Transition Areas, and Rural Areas.

This Plan recommends a significant change for the Town Center bringing true mixed-use potential without increasing the allowed intensity of commercial development. This proposal will enhance its potential to evolve with more locally based retail amenities and a greater variety of housing opportunities. The Plan recommends adjustments to the land use patterns in the transitional residential areas to encourage the use of clustering, decreasing density in some rural transition areas, and greater protection of existing rural villages.

Town Center Area

The vision for the town center was developed by community residents at a visioning charette held near the beginning of the master plan process. The community identified the following:

The community vision for the Damascus Town Center is a viable, walkable, human-scaled town easily identifiable as the heart of the surrounding community. The Town Center should reflect the compact urban forms of traditional Maryland rural towns and provide a vibrant quality of life for its residents. The Town Center should respect the legacy of the past and its agrarian context while maintaining a framework for the market needs of future generations anchoring the northern borders of Montgomery County.

This vision reflects a strong community desire to strengthen the town's sense of place as a true town core, rejecting a diffused suburban pattern that dilutes the strength of Damascus businesses.

Town Center Land Use Guidelines Summary

- Enhance Town Center Identity - This Plan proposes additional "placemaking" tools that build on what is good as well as creating opportunities to strengthen the sense of place.
- Enhance Main Street Identity - This Plan recommends policies and regulations to rebuild Main Street's identity.
- Support Guidelines for Development – Appropriate guidelines will ensure an environment that reinforces the range of activities and uses for a desirable town center.
- Enhance Mobility and Connectivity - The Plan recommends improvements to increase pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.
- Expand and Enhance Community Open Space - The Plan encourages a compact town-scale intensity of uses within the Town Center.

Town Center Zoning Recommendations - The recommendations for zoning in the Damascus Town Center include the following:

- Create mixed-use zoning appropriate for town-scale development
- Prepare development design guidelines or codes for future development

Transition Areas

The Transition Areas comprise the areas between the Town Center and the Agricultural Reserve areas of the Master Plan. The majority of residential development in Damascus is located in these areas. As outlined in the Land Use Vision and Development Area Map, they include the Town Neighborhood, Neighborhood Transition, and Rural Transition areas – defined by declining intensity of use and increasing open space. Little change in intensity of land use is recommended within the Transition Areas of Damascus. Six properties are proposed for a change to a different zone, creating only 77 new dwelling units in the entire Transition Area; and 72 of those are created using transfer of development rights. These modifications reinforce the Plan vision of strengthening the Town Core, and limiting further growth on the perimeters.

Framework - The major land use issues in Damascus include connectivity, access to public sewer, and environmental concerns. These concerns are addressed, where feasible, by the use of smaller lot cluster development on public water and sewer – but little additional density. The recommendations to address these concerns will reduce imperviousness, protect scenic vistas, allow greater connectivity to activity centers, and result in “small town” design patterns rather than larger lot suburban design patterns. The recommended changes will allow a few additional neighborhoods, located in close proximity to the Town Center, with an emphasis on internal connectivity that provide external pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to the Town Center. They will also provide connectivity to the recreational opportunities of the Countywide Trail system via paved sidewalk pathways and trails into the area’s stream valley park systems. This pattern will create neighborhoods that open into preserved rural vistas and protected stream valleys.

Cluster Development Guidelines - This Plan recommends the use of clustered development on most developable sites in the Transition Areas. Wherever clustered development is recommended in this Plan, the following development guidelines are recommended:

- Preservation of views to protected open space areas
- Protection of sensitive environmental features
- Development impact to sensitive environmental features is minimized
- Protect and preserve important historic or archeological sites with an appropriate setting
- A development design that creates a defined “edge” clearly separating the developed neighborhood from the rural open space that is preserved
- Internal and external connections for easy non-vehicular access via a trails, sidewalks, and bicycle paths
- A development design that replicates the scale, design and pattern of historic small town residential neighborhoods
- Including at least three-fourths (3/4) of the lots in the clustered small lot portion of the development unless the Planning Board finds that fewer clustered lots would better protect the goals of the master plan.
- A clear definition of the specific areas of open space (65 – 85%), and the mechanism for protection of the defined open space clearly specified.

Land Use and Zoning Recommendations

Town Neighborhood Area

The largest area of neighborhood growth in Damascus over the past two decades has been the Magruder Branch valley between Ridge Road and Woodfield Road. Few developable parcels now remain. *This Plan does not recommend any changes to the land use policy in these areas, and all existing zoning is confirmed.*

Neighborhood Transition Areas

Few developable properties remain and where change is recommended, a policy of cluster zoning, primarily in the Rural Neighborhood Cluster (RNC) Zone, is recommended. Areas north and east of the Town are impacted by the Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River Watershed that establishes a high threshold for protection of lands in the Patuxent River watershed. In these areas development a zoning change that will reduce potential imperviousness is recommended. With the exception of the properties discussed below, all existing zoning is confirmed by this Plan. Specific recommendations for this transition area include:

Burdette Property - The Rural Neighborhood Cluster Zone at .4-density, with public water and sewer, is recommended. Development must follow cluster guidelines in Land Use Chapter. Very limited additional density, achieved through TDRs may be considered if the pump station serving this property is relocated to a location that expands the area available for service through gravity flow. Any development must meet the 10% impervious cap of the Patuxent Functional Master Plan.

Miller Property - The RE-1 Zone (with public water) is recommended. The development potential will depend on septic limitations. The PD-5 recommendation is removed.

Warfield Property - The Rural Neighborhood Cluster Zone at .75 dwellings per acre, with TDR receiving capacity is recommended, with public water and sewer service. Development must follow cluster guidelines in Land Use Chapter. If TDRs are not used, a density of .4 units per acre, is recommended.

Smart/Miner Property - The Rural Neighborhood Cluster Zone at .4 density with public water and sewer service is recommended. Development must follow cluster guidelines in Land Use Chapter.

Rural Transition Areas - Lands between the Neighborhood Transition areas and the Agricultural and Rural Open Space areas comprise the Rural Transition Areas of this Master Plan. Most of the Rural Transition Areas are not recommended for changes. They provide a buffer between the developed portions of the Master Plan area and the Agricultural Reserve. Modifications to existing zoning are recommended in the Patuxent River watershed, and for two developable properties in the southwest segment of the master plan. There are four primary Rural Transition areas:

Northwest of Damascus is a small area with little transition between the Town Center and the Agricultural Reserve. There is an area of two-acre zoning north of Bethesda Church Road, and an area of two and five-acre density on the north side of town, near the future intersection of Woodfield Extended. *No major land use changes are recommended and all existing zoning is confirmed.*

Northeast of Damascus the recommendations of this Plan reflect the enhanced environmental considerations of the Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River Watershed. *This Plan recommends that most of the two-acre density in the area north and east of Ridge Road (MD 27) beyond Gue Road, and along the west side of Howard Chapel Drive be changed to a five-acre density, with cluster allowed. The existing zoning on all other properties is confirmed.* And because of several older subdivisions with failing wells or septic systems, this area is recommended for an extension of public water in the life of this Master Plan.

Southeast of Damascus is a large transition area recommended for two or five acre development. Much of this area has already been developed. Development patterns in this area reflect environmental constraints and encourage clustering away from Great Seneca Creek. *This Master Plan recommends no land use policy changes to this area and all existing zoning is confirmed.*

Southwest of Damascus the area is predominantly rural and agricultural in character. Two properties are recommended for a land use change. *The existing zoning on all other properties is confirmed.*

Kingstead and Leishear Properties - On the 126 acres of developable property east of Kings Valley Road, this Plan recommends a clustered development in the Rural Neighborhood Cluster (RNC) Zone with a density of up to .56. It will require the use of 28 TDRs from the King RDT property, and acquisition of 17 additional TDRs for full density. This proposal would benefit the County goal of providing desirable TDR receiving sites. If TDRs are not used, a density of .21 dwellings per acre – the equivalent density in the existing RE-2C and Rural Cluster Zones, is recommended.

This Plan only recommends a change to the RNC Zone for the Leishear property if it jointly develops with the King properties. If that does not occur, the Leishear property is recommended to remain in the Rural Cluster Zone with no public water or sewer access.

Summary Transition Areas Proposed Zoning Changes

Name	Total Acres	Zoning Modification	Approximate Existing Yield	Approximate Anticipated Yield
Neighborhood Transition Area				
Burdette	82.67	RE-2C to RNC .4	32	32
Miller	21.01	RE-2C/PD-5 to RE-1	10	15
Warfield	78.52	RE-2C to RNC.4 or RNC .75 with TDRs	31	58
Smart/Miner	15.55	RE-2C to RNC .4	6	6
Rural Transition Area				
King/Leishear	126.93	RC and RE-2C to RNC .21 or RNC .55 with TDRs	26	71
TOTAL LOTS	324.68		105	182

* Recommendation contingent on joint development of King and Leishear properties; and transfer of 28 TDRs from adjoining King Property and 17 additional TDRs

Rural Areas

Preserving farmland in Montgomery County is county policy as a means to both economic and environmental goals. The County is working on the important issues related to enhancing and protecting farming as an important business for the county. This Plan reinforces those policies by recommendations to keep this prime farm and forest open and available for agriculture. *This Plan supports and confirms the existing boundaries of the Rural Density Transfer Zone, with minor modifications to adjust village boundaries.*

Subdivisions in the Rural Density Transfer Zone - Additional guidance is proposed for subdivisions within the RDT Zone, an issue of concern from agricultural preservation and rural character perspectives. With creative land use approaches both farmland and beautiful rural vistas can be preserved. The proposed guidelines give the Planning Board the flexibility and regulatory basis for gaining greater control over the design of residential development in the Agricultural Reserve to achieve both these goals. In preserving “rural” character – open vistas of farmland and open spaces - lot size is usually less of a determinant than placement of home building sites. With appropriate tools and incentives in place, open land may be more easily preserved by the creative use of easements or by creating non-buildable “outlots”, than through either clustering or large lot development. This Plan recommends a set of rural subdivision guidelines for the RDT Zone – using a land conservation approach.

Special Exception Guidelines for Rural Vista Protection - To ensure careful consideration of this unique aspect of this community, this Plan recommends the following language to guide special exceptions proposed in Damascus rural areas:

This master plan strongly encourages the protection of the rural vistas that are intrinsic to the character of Damascus vicinity. Damascus is a town set on a hill, and the long vistas outside the town center provide the most distinctive visual element for the community. Land uses that impede those vistas should be strongly discouraged.

Rural Village Communities - *A new mixed-use zone with appropriate types of uses and levels of intensity, the Rural Hamlet Zone, is recommended for Etchison and Browningsdale.*

This Plan recommends a new zone with a mixed-use zone approach appropriate for selected rural communities in order to protect these villages. The purpose of this zone would be to maintain the existing scale of development. New development is to be consistent with their historical character and community lifestyles. A zone of this type was initially recommended in 1980 Master Plan for the Preservation of Agricultural and Rural Open Space [page 72, “investigate the use of a “Rural Village Zone” to provide for a mix of residential lot sizes and limited commercial uses.”].

It is hoped that this zone will serve as a template for certain other villages scattered in the Agricultural Reserve. Evaluation of the Rural Hamlet Zone for other villages in the county can be proposed within the Planning Board’s workprogram since the recommendation for its creation is already within the Agricultural and Rural Open Space Master Plan.

This Master Plan proposes such a zone to fulfill this vision for the rural villages of Browningsville and Etchison. This zone is not recommended for the Purdum village, which is not located on a highway, and does not face potential development pressure from increasing pass-by traffic. And the zone is not recommended for the Lewisdale area, as that village is only partially within this Master Plan area. Lewisdale can be considered with other villages at a later time.

Community Water and Sewer Service

Community Sewer Service - This Plan proposes to maintain the existing sewer envelope with limited changes. The Plan proposes that existing sewer lines be used to provide service to cluster development in areas already cleared of forest and relatively accessible to existing sewer mains to minimize disturbance to large areas of existing forest along streams. This Plan also recommends an analysis of designated neighborhoods for alternative ways to address failing septic systems including, but not limited to, the provision of community sewer service.

Well Contamination Concerns – Some older subdivisions in the Plan area are reported to have well contamination. If confirmed by the Department of Permitting Services, this Plan recommends providing community service according to the policies of the Water and Sewerage System Plan. Because of the concentration of homes in older subdivisions along Howard Chapel Road near its intersection with Gue Road, this Plan recommends that public water be extended along Gue Road or Howard Chapel Drive if WSSC determines that this is technically feasible.

Public Water and Sewer Category Change Recommendations (at time of development)

Location	Water	Sewer
<i>Water and Sewer Access</i>		
Burdette Property	W3	S3 gravity
Warfield Property	W3	S3
Smart/Miner Property	W3	S3
Kingstead/Leishear Properties	W3	S3 gravity
<i>Water Access Only</i>		
Miller Property – Howard Chapel	W3	S6
Souder Property	W3	S6
Stanley/Leishear Property	W3	S6