

HOUSING

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

INTRODUCTION

The community of Damascus offers one of the most balanced housing markets in the County, offering a diversity of housing types and prices. Affordably priced housing in a small town setting, convenient access to employment centers, and the surrounding agricultural and rural open space have attracted and retained an increasing number of young families in recent years.

Cluster housing is preferred on major developable parcels over standard designs. Mixed-use buildings are preferred in the Town Center over single use, single story buildings. Additional residential opportunities are encouraged in the Town Center to increase the customer base for locally oriented retail. This Plan reflects the need to balance the occasionally competing goals of housing, the environment, transportation, and town building.

The one area of significant need is senior housing. The community has many long time residents who wish to remain in the community as they age, so the demand for senior housing has become more pronounced. Currently, there are very few housing options within the Damascus planning area for the expanding senior population. This Plan also identifies alternative senior housing options. This Plan recommends land use changes that encourage additional affordable housing while protecting environmental resources. The Town Center will provide opportunities for moderate density development, while adjoining areas are encouraged to cluster housing near primary roads, and preserve stream valleys and forest resources.

The most significant additional housing is proposed in the Town Center, which will contribute to the viability of local businesses and create a livelier center for the Damascus community. Outside the Town Center, this Plan supports limited additional single-family housing. This is due to the location of Damascus in the rural north of the County, with limited access to public sewer, environmental constraints, and limited transit options. This Plan recommends:

- **Support moderate-density development within the Town Center**
Multi-family, single-family attached, and live-work units within the Town Center will accommodate a significant portion of the need for moderately priced residential development in this community. Increased densities will also accommodate moderately priced dwelling units (MPDUs) and contribute to the economic base for local retail and service businesses.
- **Support increased senior housing for residents of the Damascus area**
Senior housing would be most appropriately and conveniently located within the Town Center. Two potential sites are discussed.

- **Encourage cluster development to maintain the small town character of Damascus**
Developable sites within the Transition Areas are recommended for small lot, single-family cluster development where public sewer is available. A moderate amount of development potential remains in the RE-2C and Rural Cluster Zone in the eastern portion of the Master Plan. This Plan supports the eventual development of those properties using the cluster option for development.
- **Support use of TDR receiving areas where appropriate**
Where infrastructure is available and environmental regulations permit, TDR receiving sites create additional housing opportunities that also contribute to agricultural preservation goals.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Town Center

Creating senior housing opportunities and additional moderate density housing are the primary housing goals for the Town Center.

- **Moderate Density Residential Development** – As indicated in the Land Use Chapter the Town Center will accommodate a variety of housing types. Currently, less than 8 percent of the existing housing stock within Damascus is multi-family housing and most of that is within the Town Center. This Plan encourages further moderate density residential development to enhance the vitality and character of the Town Center. The types of moderate density development that are contemplated include live-work units, townhouse and multi-family units.

Existing densities in the Town Center have the potential to allow approximately 500 dwelling units, based on the maximum development potential of the existing ten zones in the Town Center (illustrated in the Existing Zoning map in the Land Use Chapter).

The proposed land use in the Town Center will generate a maximum theoretical total of slightly more than 1300 dwelling units within the Town Center. The proposed land use recommendations will provide more flexibility for the property owners, and more design and scale certainty for area residents.

Maximum Yield from Existing Zones in the Town Center

Zone	Land Area (sf)	Land Area (ac)	Residential Units (du)	Residential Density (du/ac)	Non-Residential GFA (sf)	Non-Residential FAR
C-2	2,803,249	64.4	0*	-	4,204,874	1.50
C-T	43,560	1.0	0*	-	21,780	.50
O-M	277,913	6.4	0*	-	416,870	1.50
PD-7	1,075,174	24.7	163	6.6	3,258	0.00
I-1	686,855	15.8	0*	-	N/A**	N/A**
RE-2C	1,665,354	38.2	15	0.4	-	-
R-200	914,364	21.0	51	2.4	-	-
R-60	207,346	4.8	29	6.1	-	-
RT-8.0	262,474	6.0	59	9.8	-	-
R-30	514,476	11.8	184	17.7	-	-
TOTAL	8,450,765	194.0	501	2.6	4,646,781	0.55

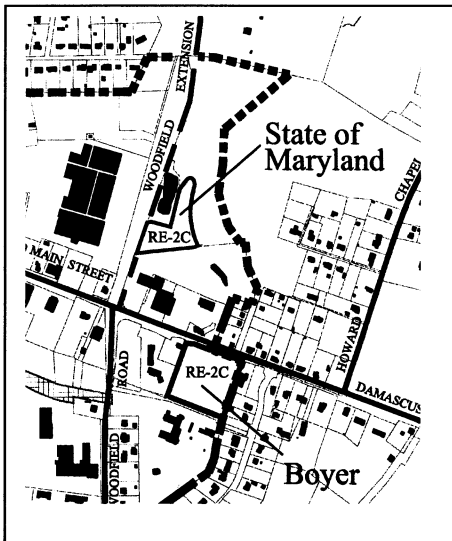
* Residential density is highly unlikely in the C-2, C-T, O-M and I-1 zones

** No maximum density limits in the I-1 zone.

- **Senior Housing** – Existing options for seniors (independent and assisted housing) are limited in the Damascus area. Specialized housing for elderly residents in Damascus currently consists of two group homes that can accommodate a total of 15 residents. There are only three additional group homes in the rural up-county area: one each in Poolesville, Clarksburg, and Barnesville. Together, these facilities can accommodate a total of 20 residents. There are no nursing homes or age restricted apartments in the area.

Based on the 2000 Census data, current population trends in the Damascus area indicate that while there are many young families, approximately 43 percent of residents have lived in Damascus for more than ten years. Damascus offers great potential for providing a stable community for residents who wish to “age in place.” This concept provides the type of housing that will allow residents to remain in their homes despite the limitations that occur with aging. Successful aging-in-place communities provide a variety of services that accommodate the physical, mental, and psychological changes that accompany aging.

This Plan supports residences for active seniors and 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 are particularly appropriate for this use due to their proximity to services and retail uses. If both were developed at the maximum proposed density, they could provide the anticipated needed senior housing units. These sites are:



- **State of Maryland Property** – This site is located adjacent and north of the Damascus Library. A joint development venture with the private sector could provide some senior housing options at this optimal location. As noted in the Land Use Chapter, this 3.1-acre property has environmental limitations that would limit its development potential. The proposed density would permit approximately 75 units.
- **Boyer Property** – This 3.3 acre property is located on MD 108 across from the Senior Center and Library. It is adjacent to the Damascus United Methodist Church and also within the Town Center. Although this site is not ideal for pedestrian access, it presents potential opportunities for a joint development venture with the Church. Under the proposed density, approximately 82 dwelling units could be developed on this site.

Transition Areas

Housing in the Transition Areas of Damascus, located between the Town Center boundary and the Rural Areas is characterized by a range of residential development providing the bulk of the current housing stock in the community. The proposed land use for properties in the Transition Areas will generate over 4,900 dwelling units, including new TDR receiving sites.

- **Town Neighborhood Area** – The areas immediately north and south of the Town Center provide a mix of small lot single-family homes, townhomes, and multi-family development. In this *Town Neighborhood Area* few developable parcels remain, and no changes are proposed to housing recommendations. These neighborhoods are the cornerstone of Damascus’ strength as a community offering a wide range of moderately priced, single-family housing with convenient access to schools, shopping, and recreation facilities. The Plan recommends improvements to non-vehicle access to these areas, and zoning to reflect existing lot sizes.

- **Neighborhood Transition Area** – A *Neighborhood Transition Area*, located further away from the Town Center, provides somewhat lower density existing housing; and contains developable sites that are addressed in this Master Plan. These sites are recommended for some clustered low-density single-family housing opportunities, including TDR receiving sites that have the potential to provide moderately priced dwelling units, contributing additional affordable housing within the Plan area.
- **Rural Transition Area** – The lowest density residential potential is in a *Rural Transition Area* that is primarily zoned for large lot (five acre cluster option) development. The pace of this very low-density development was particularly significant in the late 1990's in the eastern portion of the Master Plan area. This zoning is recommended as a means to protect stream valleys and woodlands. The consequence of the zoning has been development of a significant number of large new homes, adding a housing type generally not previously available in the Damascus area. Some developable parcels remain, and they will provide some additional luxury housing opportunities. An area north and east of the Town Center (west of Howard Chapel Drive and east of Ridge Road) is recommended for a change from two-acre to five-acre density, reflecting environmental goals. This change will have limited housing impact as the entire area is beyond the potential sewer envelope and the soil types in this area are difficult for placing septic fields, making the five-acre density closer to the realistic development potential.

Rural Areas

Little housing growth is anticipated in the rural areas of this Plan. Most of the rural areas are in the Rural Density Transfer Zone, which limits housing to one for every twenty-five acres. Some additional housing is anticipated in the area of existing rural communities, but wastewater treatment limitations curtail development potential. The proposed land use for Rural Area properties will yield slightly over 1,100 dwelling units.

Public Sites

There are no vacant publicly owned sites in the Plan area, other than the already discussed potential senior housing site in the Town Center, that can be considered for additional housing opportunities. Two vacant school sites are in the Plan area, and one more is just outside the Plan area. The Board of Education has no plans to surplus these sites. Even if they were to be considered for surplus, infrastructure limitations would make them of limited usefulness for additional housing. They would be better considered for park and recreation resources as discussed in the Parkland section of the Community Facilities Chapter.

HOUSING ANALYSIS

Housing Types

The 2000 Census data for the Damascus area indicates that of the 5,559 existing households within the area, more than 92 percent of the housing is comprised of single-family detached units and townhomes. Of the total households in this planning area, 7.3 percent are multifamily units, located within the Neighborhood Transition or Town Center areas.

Housing Prices

New single-family detached houses have been the most expensive category in Damascus in recent years, and the only one to exceed Countywide prices. Although resale housing accounts for almost all of housing sales, the number of new single-family detached dwellings have increased in the past couple of years. Most of these have been in low-density developments within the Rural Transition portion of the eastern side of the Plan area. Although these homes are significantly higher in price compared to Countywide averages, Damascus generally has more affordable housing options than most other areas of the County.

County housing policies reflect a commitment to increase the supply of moderate and affordable workforce housing. Housing affordability concerns arise when households earning the area median income find that they cannot afford the median priced housing (purchase or rental) available in the area. Housing in Damascus complements the County's needs by offering a variety of existing reasonably priced housing, and this Plan provides a variety of opportunities for additional multi-family, attached, and small-lot single-family housing. Most of the existing affordable housing in Damascus is market-rate detached and attached single-family housing.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Population Trends

One of the trends in the 2000 Census data reveals that Damascus residents tend to be younger (a median age of 35.1) compared to the County average age (36.8). Almost 25 percent of the area's population is school age, compared to about 18 percent of the entire County. Over half (56.9 percent) moved to their current address during the 1990's, and 43.1 percent of Damascus households have been at their current address for more than 10 years, compared to 34.5 percent of all County households. These statistics reflect a large proportion of young families and the relative affordability of housing in the community and suggests that many residents value the small town character of Damascus and want to raise their families here.

The 2000 Census also indicates that the "Baby Boomer" population (35-54 years of age in 2000) makes up approximately one-third of the population in Damascus. As this population ages in coming years, the need for senior housing will become more pronounced. Active seniors will need housing facilities that can support lifestyle changes such as single floor, higher-density living in proximity to convenience retail, restaurants, cultural activities, and entertainment. This Plan supports the development of active senior housing and a limited level of assisted senior housing within the context of the town's current character. Higher levels of assisted senior housing or nursing level of care would be more appropriate in areas that are nearer a hospital than in Damascus.

Development Trends

The land use recommendations proposed in this Plan will significantly increase housing potential in the Town Center areas (through moderate density mixed-use, multi-family, and attached housing), and moderately increase single-family detached housing in the Transition Areas.

The most dramatic change to the character of Damascus in recent years has been the number of new large homes on large lots on the eastern periphery of the Plan area. The prices of these estate homes have not been typical of the area, and along with the widespread price pressure in the County, they have led to generally higher housing costs.

Overall, Damascus offers a reasonable supply of new and resale affordable housing, both subsidized and market rate; and a more recent availability of luxury homes. This Plan proposes land use policies to continue to offer housing diversity and balance, adding to the supply of multi-family and small lot single-family housing.

Proposed Transferable Development Rights Receiving Sites

To meet the agricultural preservation goals of the County, this Plan uses TDRs as the primary means to create any new density potential. The Table below indicates approximate development yield of the receiving sites for Transferable Development Rights (TDRs) proposed in this Plan. They will yield up to 263 TDRs through the use of a new RNC/TDR Zone to be used on all the sites.

Property Group	Zone	Acres	Base DU	Full Yield	TDR Potential
Burdette	RNC .4/TDR 1.0	82	32	100	50
Warfield	RNC .4/TDR 1.0	78	31	95	47
Kingstead/Leishear	RNC .4/TDR 1.0	138	55	168	83
Smart/Miner/Rice/Conway	RNC .4/TDR 1.0	60	24	69	36
Casey/Lewis	RNC .4/TDR 1.0	50	20	61	30
Stanley/Leishear	RNC .4/TDR 1.0	27	10	32	17
Total		435	172	525*	263

*Includes Bonus with MPDU units.