

II. BACKGROUND

General Description of the Master Plan Area

Four Corners is located in southeastern Montgomery County, surrounding University Boulevard and Colesville Road. (See Figure 6.) Washington, D.C. is just two miles south, along Colesville Road to Sixteenth Street. The Four Corners Master Plan area covers 1.58 square miles, approximately 1,000 acres (excluding rights-of-way), and is roughly bounded by Sligo Creek Parkway, Franklin Avenue, and the Capital Beltway on the south; Renfrew Road and Dallas Avenue on the west; Eisner Street and Northwest Branch Park on the north; and Northwest Branch Park (north of the Beltway) and University Boulevard (south of the Beltway) on the east. (See Figure 7.)

The Master Plan area includes the neighborhoods of Northwood-Four Corners, Woodmoor-Pinecrest, South Four Corners (north of the Beltway), Indian Spring, and North Hills of Sligo (south of the Beltway). Portions of the Four Corners commercial district, which surrounds the Colesville Road/University Boulevard intersection, are contained in each of the three neighborhoods north of the Beltway. A few neighborhood retail stores are located along Forest Glen Road in South Four Corners. The Four Corners community is divided by three major roadways -- the Capital Beltway (I-495) and University Boulevard (MD 193), both of which run east-west, and Colesville Road (US 29), which runs north-south. The Capital Beltway is a major 8-lane freeway that serves primarily interstate and regional trips. Colesville Road, a 6-lane divided highway, is a major north-south radial extending from Howard County to downtown Silver Spring. University Boulevard, also a 6-lane divided highway, is a major continuous east-west route extending from Connecticut Avenue in Kensington to beyond the University of Maryland campus in Prince George's County.

Conformance with the Maryland Planning Act of 1992 and the General Plan for Montgomery County

The Maryland Economic Development, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992 (the Planning Act) establishes state objectives that must be reflected in local master plans. Following are the seven visions of the Planning Act, as stated in Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland:

1. Development is to be concentrated in suitable areas;
2. Sensitive areas are to be protected;
3. In rural areas growth is to be directed to existing population centers and resource areas are to be protected;
4. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is to be considered a universal ethic;
5. Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption, is to be practiced;
6. To assure the achievement of paragraphs 1 through 5 above, economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are to be streamlined;
7. Funding mechanisms are to be addressed to achieve these objectives.

In addition to these seven visions, the Planning Act requires the implementation of a sensitive areas element designed to protect areas of environmental significance. Sensitive areas are described in the Planning Act as 100-year floodplains, streams and associated buffer areas, habitats of threatened and endangered species, and steep slopes.

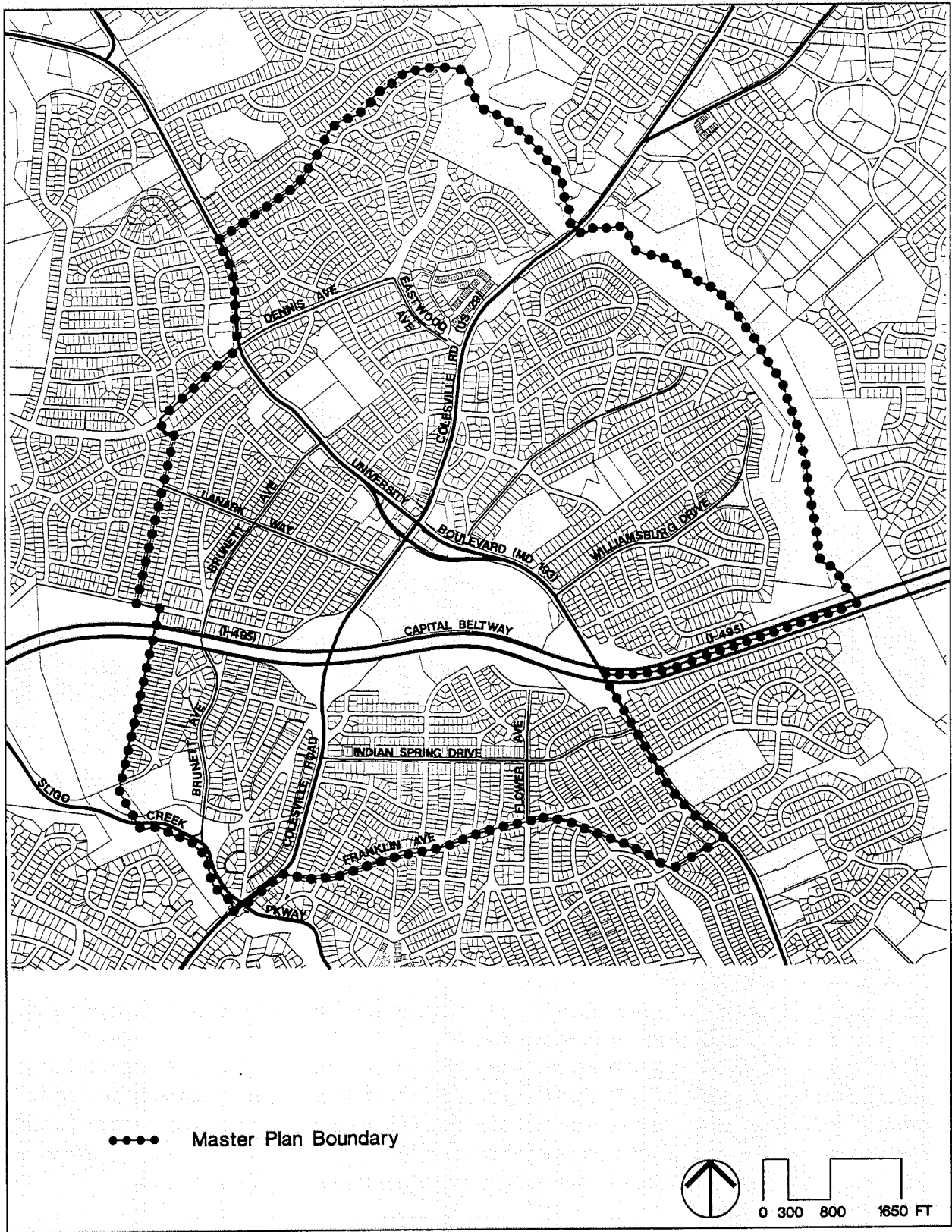
The 1993 *General Plan Refinement of the Goals and Objectives for Montgomery County* amended the 1964 General Plan, commonly called "...on Wedges and Corridors," and the 1969 *Updated General Plan for Montgomery County*. The General Plan Refinement provides the framework for the development of more specific area master plans, functional plans, and sector plans. The General Plan Refinement provides clear guidance on the general pattern of development in Montgomery County, while retaining enough flexibility to respond to unforeseeable circumstances as they arise.

The General Plan Refinement divides Montgomery County into four geographic components: the Urban Ring, the Corridor, the Suburban Communities, and the Wedge. Each component is defined in terms of appropriate land uses, scale, intensity, and function. The geographic components provide a vision for the future while acknowledging the modifications to the Wedges and Corridors concept that have evolved during the past three decades. In particular, two distinct sub-areas of the Wedge are confirmed -- an Agricultural Wedge and a Residential Wedge. The Refinement also recognizes the transitional areas of generally moderate density and suburban character that have evolved between the Wedge, Corridor, and Urban Ring as Suburban Communities. Emphasis remains on intensification of development along the I-270 Corridor, particularly along the main stem.

In addition to defining geographic components, the General Plan Refinement provides seven goals and associated objectives and strategies that guide development within those geographic components. The goals, objectives, and strategies provide a future vision for Montgomery County and establish a frame of reference for decision-making to ensure that the vision becomes a reality. The visions established in the Maryland Planning Act generally coincide with the General Plan Refinement goals for Montgomery County. The Four Corners Master Plan area is within the boundaries of the General Plan Urban Ring. The General Plan vision for the Urban Ring includes well-established, lively centers with job and housing opportunities; strong residential neighborhoods; varied transportation options; relatively dense development; active public and private reinvestment; and commercial revitalization. Following is a discussion of how the Four Corners Master Plan supports the seven goals of the General Plan Refinement as well as the visions of the Planning Act.

Land Use Achieve a variety of land uses and development densities consistent with the Wedges and Corridors pattern.

Four Corners, located within the Urban Ring, is a densely developed residential community with an established character. The Master Plan directly supports the General Plan Refinement objectives of recognizing the importance of identifiable centers of community activity and encouraging revitalization of older commercial structures. The Plan also supports the objective of limiting the size of centers to a scale appropriate to the community, providing suitable transitions between residential neighborhoods and commercial centers, and planning community facilities that enhance and reinforce the sense of community in the immediate neighborhood. The Plan also



conforms with Vision 1 of the Maryland Planning Act -- development is to be concentrated in suitable areas.

Housing Encourage and maintain a wide choice of housing types and neighborhoods at appropriate densities and locations for people of all incomes, ages, lifestyles, and physical capabilities.

Four Corners is primarily a residential community consisting mostly of single-family detached homes constructed over 50 years ago. In addition, there is an elderly housing facility and a townhouse development. Only one site in the Master Plan area may be available for development; the Plan recommends that it be acquired for parkland to provide additional recreational opportunities for this densely developed area.

Economic Activity Promote a healthy economy by supporting a broad range of business, service, and employment opportunities at appropriate locations.

Four Corners is not an employment center and opportunities for substantial economic growth are not planned or recommended. The Plan recommends revitalizing the Four Corners commercial district, which provides neighborhood retail services. Improved streetscape and pedestrian amenities, to be provided through the State Highway Administration road project, will support the commercial district.

Transportation Enhance mobility by providing a safe and efficient transportation system, offering a wide range of transportation alternatives that serve the environmental, economic, social, and land use needs of the County and by providing a framework for development.

The Four Corners Master Plan supports many of the General Plan Refinement transportation principles, including an improved transit system, bikeway system, sidewalk network, and movement of through traffic away from local streets. The Eastern Montgomery County master plans support a long-term solution for significantly improving transit along US 29. This conforms with the General Plan Refinement objective of establishing exclusive travelways for transit serving the Urban Ring and Corridor and with the Planning Act vision of conserving resources.

Environment Conserve and protect natural resources to provide a healthy and beautiful environment for present and future generations. Manage the impacts of human activity on our natural resources in a balanced manner to sustain human, plant, and animal life.

The Four Corners Master Plan supports this goal of the General Plan Refinement through its recommendations to minimize further degradation of stream quality and erosion and to provide retrofit projects that enhance and protect natural resources. The Environmental section of this Plan also identifies sensitive areas and recommends strategies for protecting them.

Community Identity and Design Provide for attractive land uses that encourage opportunity for social interaction and promote community identity.

A strong sense of community pride exists among residents of the Four Corners neighborhoods. This Master Plan seeks to reinforce this important element of community character and value through recommendations that enhance the function and appearance of the commercial district, improve the pedestrian and streetscape environment, and expand the sidewalk and bikeway network to provide connections to destinations throughout the Four Corners area.

Regionalism Promote regional cooperation and solutions of mutual concern to Montgomery County, its neighbors, and internal municipalities.

The Eastern Montgomery County master plans address regional issues, such as the protection of water quality and quantity, Clean Air Act standards, and transportation, which conforms to the General Plan Refinement's strategy to attain and maintain standards for matters of regional significance.

Four Corners Today

The single-family detached homes that were constructed in Four Corners starting in the 1920s and 1930s still dominate the landscape today. The majority of the land area, nearly 70 percent, is devoted to residential use. Commercial uses are concentrated in the area surrounding the University Boulevard and Colesville Road intersection and represent only 1.5 percent of the land area.

The population of the Four Corners Master Plan area is 10,600, based on the 1990 U.S. Census. While there has been a slight decrease in population since the 1980 Census (which reported a population of 10,700), Four Corners has remained a stable community since it was first developed. As the community has aged, many of the original homes have been purchased by young families who are drawn by the same attributes that attracted the first home buyers over a half century ago. The sturdy houses where many baby boomers were raised are now occupied by aging boomers who are raising children of their own. While the early days of Four Corners as a peaceful crossroads are long gone, the community is still viewed as a good place in which to live and raise children. And, it is not unusual to find several generations of the same family living in the area.

Residents seem to be attracted by the convenience and affordability of the Four Corners area. The older charm and, in some cases, custom-built features of many area homes distinguish them from the many uniform, post-war subdivisions. The rolling hills and heavily treed terrain in some areas of the community also offer a more distinctive setting than the flat topography of many subdivisions. Compared to other parts of Montgomery County, Four Corners housing has remained affordable through the years. In 1995, the median resale price of a single-family detached home in Four Corners was \$164,500, 25 percent below the County-wide median of \$220,700.

The convenient location that spawned development at the crossroads originally is a feature that appeals to many of today's residents as well. The area has progressed from rural, agricultural countryside to mature, well-established suburb and is in a significant location within the region. The adjacent Beltway access permits residents who work in the Virginia and Maryland suburbs a relatively convenient commute. Washington, D.C. also is easily accessed from Four Corners, either by car, bus, or by the Metro stations at Forest Glen, Silver Spring, or Wheaton.

The advantages of the Four Corners location are also its drawbacks. An estimated 90,000 vehicles per day currently pass through the Colesville Road and University Boulevard intersection. And most drivers are doing just that, passing through. The development and growth of communities in Prince George's and Howard counties have generated a significant amount of

traffic through Four Corners. Traffic that comes through the University Boulevard and Colesville Road intersection has destinations throughout the metropolitan region: in Washington, along the Capital Beltway, along I-270 in western Montgomery County, or in Columbia, Baltimore, or other adjacent counties.

For those whose destination is Four Corners, it is not always easy to get in and out of the neighborhoods or to and from the commercial district. In addition to the frustrations of the congested intersection, the high volume of traffic has had a negative effect on the overall quality of life due to increased noise and pollution, increased cut-through traffic on residential streets, and decreases in pedestrian safety and access.

Despite these negative traffic impacts, some residents feel that Four Corners has the character of a small town rather than a typical suburban subdivision. Much of that small town feeling comes from the 50-year old Woodmoor Shopping Center, a neighborhood institution that provides convenience shopping for area residents. At night, the word "WOODMOOR" is lit up in bold neon letters on the roof of the shopping center, which sits at an angle to the Colesville Road/University Boulevard intersection. The Woodmoor Pastry Shop, now operated by a fourth generation, was one of the original businesses to rent space in the shopping center in 1946. The shopping center also includes a small grocery store, gift shop, dry cleaners, drugstore, florist, jeweler, barber shop, delicatessen, travel service, watch shop and repair, art supply and framing store, a bank, and the Silver Spring Stage. Another local landmark is Fred & Harry's Seafood Restaurant, located across from the Woodmoor Shopping Center since 1945. Other focal points in the area include Marvin Memorial United Methodist Church, St. Bernadette's Church and School, Pinecrest Elementary School, and the Silver Spring YMCA.

An M-NCPPC document, *Eastern Montgomery County Master Plan Areas Population and Household Profiles*, provided demographic information for Four Corners. The largest concentration of the area's population, 30 percent, is between 30 and 44 years of age. The proportion of the area's population over 65 is 17 percent, compared to 10 percent County-wide. Whether young or old, residents of the Four Corners area are community-focused and take pride in their mature suburban neighborhoods. Based on the profile, which contains information from the 1990 U.S. Census, a composite snapshot of a typical household in the Four Corners area reveals the following characteristics:

- a married couple who both work outside the home
- both adults are employed either in the State of Maryland or the District, and either drive alone to work or take transit
- the couple are college educated and have an annual household income of about \$60,000
- both adults are approximately 38 years old and they have one young child
- the family lives in a 40-year-old single-family detached home that they purchased over five years ago and that is worth about \$171,000