

## IV. LAND USE AND ZONING

The challenge for this land use plan is to preserve Four Corners' "livability" -- those qualities of stability, cohesiveness, and scale that make it an attractive place to live -- while planning for change that is harmonious and beneficial to the community. There are three issues facing the community: integrating Blair High School, the fourth "corner" into the community; maintaining the character of residential neighborhoods; and improving the image of the commercial district, which is literally and figuratively the heart of Four Corners.

While the County Council decision to construct Blair High School in Four Corners finally determines the use of this fourth corner, guidelines are needed that help ensure that the school buildings and grounds are built at a scale in keeping with the community.

Four Corners is an established community with a very small amount of developable land. (See Figure 9, page 21.) This Plan must guide development of remaining vacant properties in residential neighborhoods and provide means to monitor the special exception process so that such uses do not encroach on residential character.

The commercial district is dominated by two major thoroughfares with multiple lanes and high traffic volumes that push the community apart at precisely the place where it should come together. The physical appearance of the commercial district is incongruent with the stability of the surrounding residential neighborhoods. This Plan encourages actions that improve the physical appearance and image of the Four Corners commercial district.

Public development projects will play an important role in addressing these issues. The design and construction of Blair High School by the County, and the streetscape, pedestrian, and road improvements planned by the State Highway Administration at Colesville Road and University Boulevard represent significant changes that must be carefully planned and implemented in order to maximize this major investment of public funds. Revitalization of the commercial district may best be achieved as a partnership between the public and private sectors. Public investment in Four Corners represents a substantial opportunity for changes that enhance the image, function, and viability of the center of this community of neighborhoods. The Four Corners land use goal is stated below, followed by specific objectives and recommendations.

### *Land Use Goal*

***Recognize, sustain, and enhance the valuable attributes that have made Four Corners a place of lasting character and value. As the heart of this community of neighborhoods, the commercial district must receive particular care and attention so that this front door to the community better reflects the neighborhoods that surround it. Design and construct Blair High School and the State road improvements so that these major public projects contribute to an enhanced commercial district in Four Corners.***

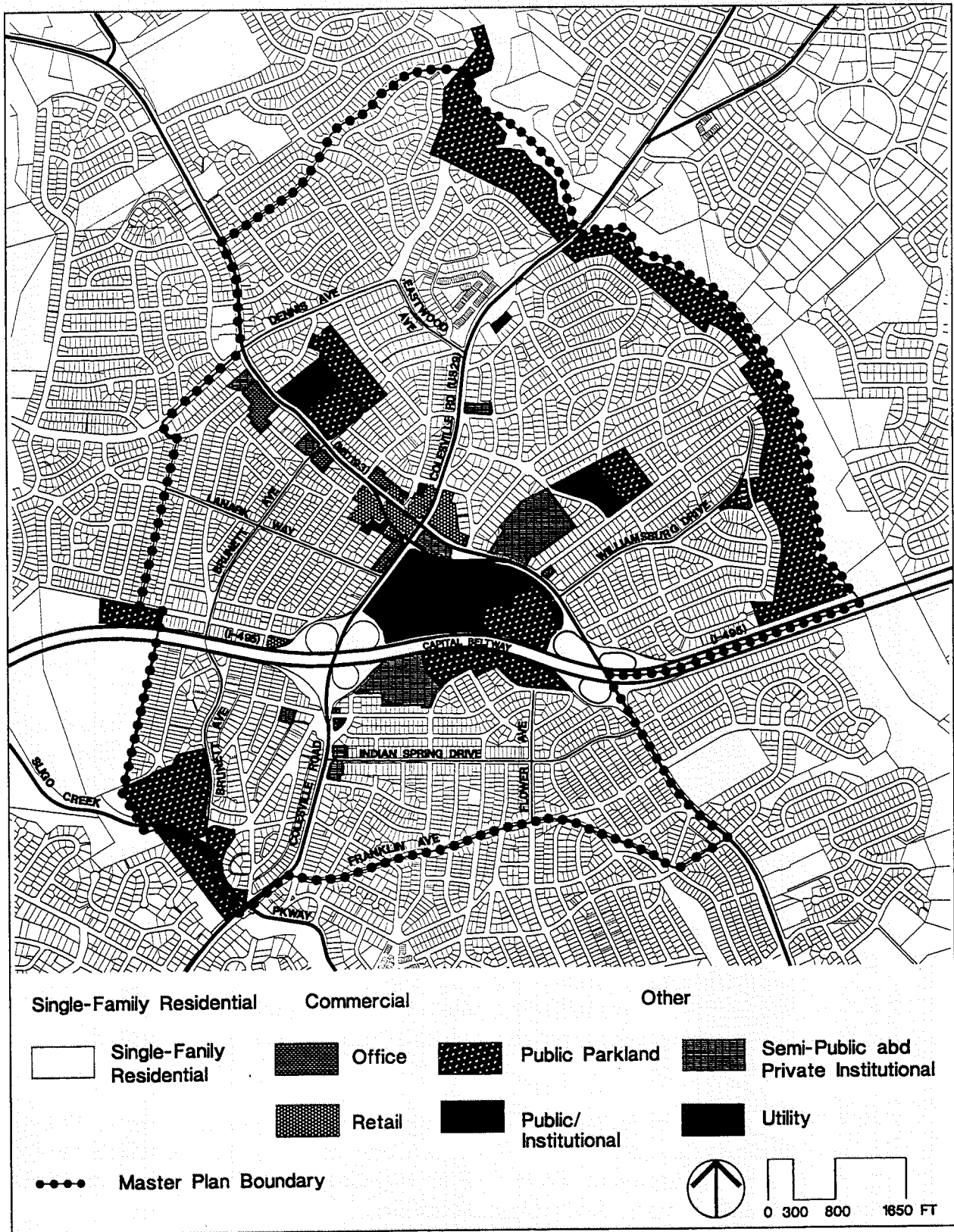
## **Blair High School**

The Montgomery County Council has approved construction of a new Blair High School on the Kay tract, a 42-acre parcel located between the Capital Beltway, Colesville Road, and University Boulevard. (See Figure 10, page 23.) Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) plans to open the school in the fall of 1998. Blair High School will occupy a prominent location at the fourth corner; therefore it is important that the school and its facilities be well-designed and integrated into the existing Four Corners community. Both the program needs of the high school and the integration of this facility into the heart of Four Corners can be achieved without compromising either of these important objectives. This Plan provides guidelines that address the school's connection to the Four Corners community, pedestrian access, vehicular access and impacts, and on-site community use space.

Providing safe pedestrian access to the new Blair High School is a critical public safety issue. Multi-lane highways with heavy volumes of traffic, often traveling at high speed, surround the site. Beltway on-off ramps on Colesville Road and University Boulevard are an additional obstacle for pedestrians. MCPS estimates that one-quarter to one-third of Blair students could walk to the new school, and half of those would come from south of the Beltway. A task force comprising MCPS, Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT), M-NCPPC, and community representatives was convened to review options to provide safe pedestrian access to the site. Alternatives are being considered that address pedestrian access across the Beltway ramps, at Lexington Drive, and at Williamsburg Drive.

Vehicular access to the site will be located along Colesville Road and University Boulevard. (See Figure 10.) The Colesville Road parking lot and drop-off will be limited to right turns in and out; therefore, access will be from northbound Colesville Road only. Since the Colesville Road parking lot is limited to right-out only, drivers who want to go southbound on Colesville Road or westbound on the Beltway must use the jughandle turn at the Colesville/University intersection. On University Boulevard, the main entrance will be at Williamsburg Drive, where most buses will enter and exit, and will be the only access point that provides for full-turning movements. Most buses are expected to arrive from the south or east--in the opposite direction from the heaviest weekday morning peak-hour traffic--and can enter the site at Williamsburg Drive without passing through the Colesville/University intersection. Residents and business owners are concerned about increased cut-through traffic and school-related overflow parking on residential streets or in lots in the commercial district.

With limited County financial resources and scarce available land, a new public school project presents an opportunity for cooperative arrangements that allow for multi-purpose use of facilities. Montgomery County Parks has acquired a portion of the high school site for community recreational facilities, including space that could be used for a recreation center and possibly an athletic field for public use. Montgomery County Parks and MCPS have agreed to permit public access to outdoor resources such as the track, tennis courts, and athletic fields when they are not in use by the school. Additional cooperative arrangements should be considered by the appropriate agencies that would allow community use of indoor resources, such as the media center (library), auditorium, and gymnasium. This Plan provides the following objective and guidelines for Blair High School.



## *Objective*

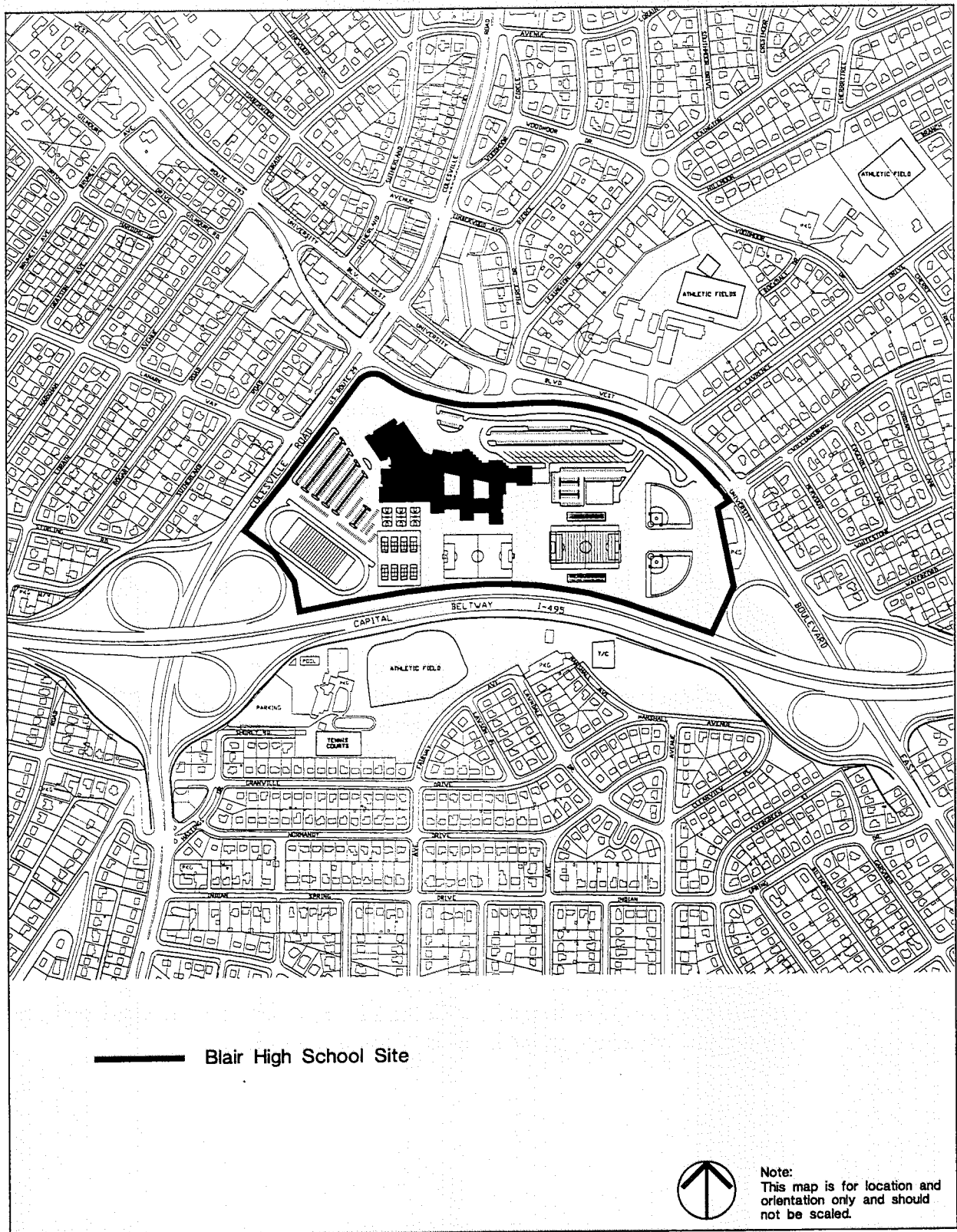
- Encourage design and construction of Blair High School that is consistent with the Plan goal of improving and enhancing the Four Corners community. Foster continued cooperative efforts among public agencies and residents to make Blair High School a strong contributor to neighborhood character.

## *Guidelines*

- Blair High School should continue to be designed and constructed to physically integrate and connect the school with the existing community through building architecture and site layout that is compatible with and appropriate to the Four Corners commercial district and surrounding residential areas. A preliminary site plan is shown on Figure 10.
- A public gathering place or urban plaza should be created on the school site at the corner of Colesville Road and University Boulevard that provides adequate pavement area for congregating and circulating students and pedestrians.
- Pedestrian access to the school site -- a critical public safety issue -- must be solved before the school opens. Improvements to the Beltway ramps should be considered for pedestrians from the south. A pedestrian crossing at Lexington Drive, in addition to the Williamsburg Drive access, should be considered for pedestrians from the north. A pedestrian crossing at Lanark Way should be considered for pedestrians from the west. The SHA project planned for the intersection of Colesville Road and University Boulevard will include some pedestrian improvements. (See Table 2, page 49.)
- To improve safety and emphasize the pedestrian domain, SHA/DPWT should consider prohibiting right turns on the red signal at the Colesville/University intersection, and marking all crosswalks leading to the site with distinct color, material, and texture to differentiate the pedestrian crossings from the asphalt road.
- In any option to ensure safe pedestrian access to Blair High School, medians sufficient for pedestrian refuge on both Colesville Road and University Boulevard should be retained. A median will help maintain the character of Colesville Road as a boulevard through Four Corners and will enhance the future stability of both the immediately adjacent residential properties and the adjacent neighborhoods. SHA/DPWT should review the posted speed limits on Colesville Road and University Boulevard contiguous to Blair High School to ensure they are appropriate for a school zone.
- The school site perimeter should include a generous pedestrian pathway. Where feasible, there should be a double row of trees planted along Colesville Road and University Boulevard next to the Blair High School site. The parking lots should be planted to provide shading and screening.

# BLAIR HIGH SCHOOL SITE PLAN

FIGURE 10



- On-site school parking for faculty, students, and visitors should be provided to minimize overflow parking on residential streets and in the commercial district and to preserve the neighborhood character in adjacent areas of Four Corners.
- Measures to reduce the adverse traffic impacts of Blair High School on the Four Corners community should be considered, including residential permit parking restrictions and traffic management. MCPS and DPWT should work with the business community to address parking and other school-related issues.
- The design of the University Boulevard and Williamsburg Drive intersection should be evaluated to better balance the Woodmoor community's need to discourage cut-through commuter traffic against the need for access by school buses, school traffic, fire station vehicles (the Silver Spring Volunteer Fire Department will remain at this location), and local neighborhood traffic, as well as to determine if (and how) through movements should be prohibited between Williamsburg Drive and the Blair High School access road.
- In addition to community use of outdoor school recreational facilities, the appropriate public agencies should consider arrangements that allow public access to resources such as the media center, auditorium, and gymnasium as part of its contribution to the greater community and to encourage multi-purpose use of school facilities.
- Public community-use space that is easily and safely accessible should be provided on the site with appropriate parking.
- Stormwater management will be accommodated on the school site and water gradually released through an existing storm drainage system under the Beltway and in Indian Spring. Careful planning of stormwater management is recommended to avoid creating an unintended wetland on the property south of the Beltway.
- Noise attenuation is recommended along the Beltway edge of the site. A noise wall is being planned. Attention should be given to landscaping and materials that will discourage graffiti.
- Reforestation of the Blair High School site is required in accordance with the County Forest Conservation Law. Consideration should be given to off-site reforestation locations in the Four Corners Master Plan area and the Sligo Creek watershed, including parkland, medians, and Beltway loops.

## Residential Land Uses

This Master Plan recognizes the established compact residential character of Four Corners and the desire of residents to preserve and maintain the integrity of the neighborhoods as the foundation of the entire community. (See Figure 11, page 27.) To meet this challenge, this Plan addresses the following issues: the six-acre property at 315 University Boulevard; potential infill development on scattered vacant properties and oversized single-family lots; cut-through traffic on residential streets, which affects the character, integrity, and safety of Four Corners neighborhoods; safe pedestrian access to the commercial district; and the effect of special exception uses on community character.

### *Objective*

- Preserve and maintain the character and integrity of the existing, well-established Four Corners residential neighborhoods as the foundation of the community by assuring that new development, infill development, and special exception uses are compatible with the existing residential character.

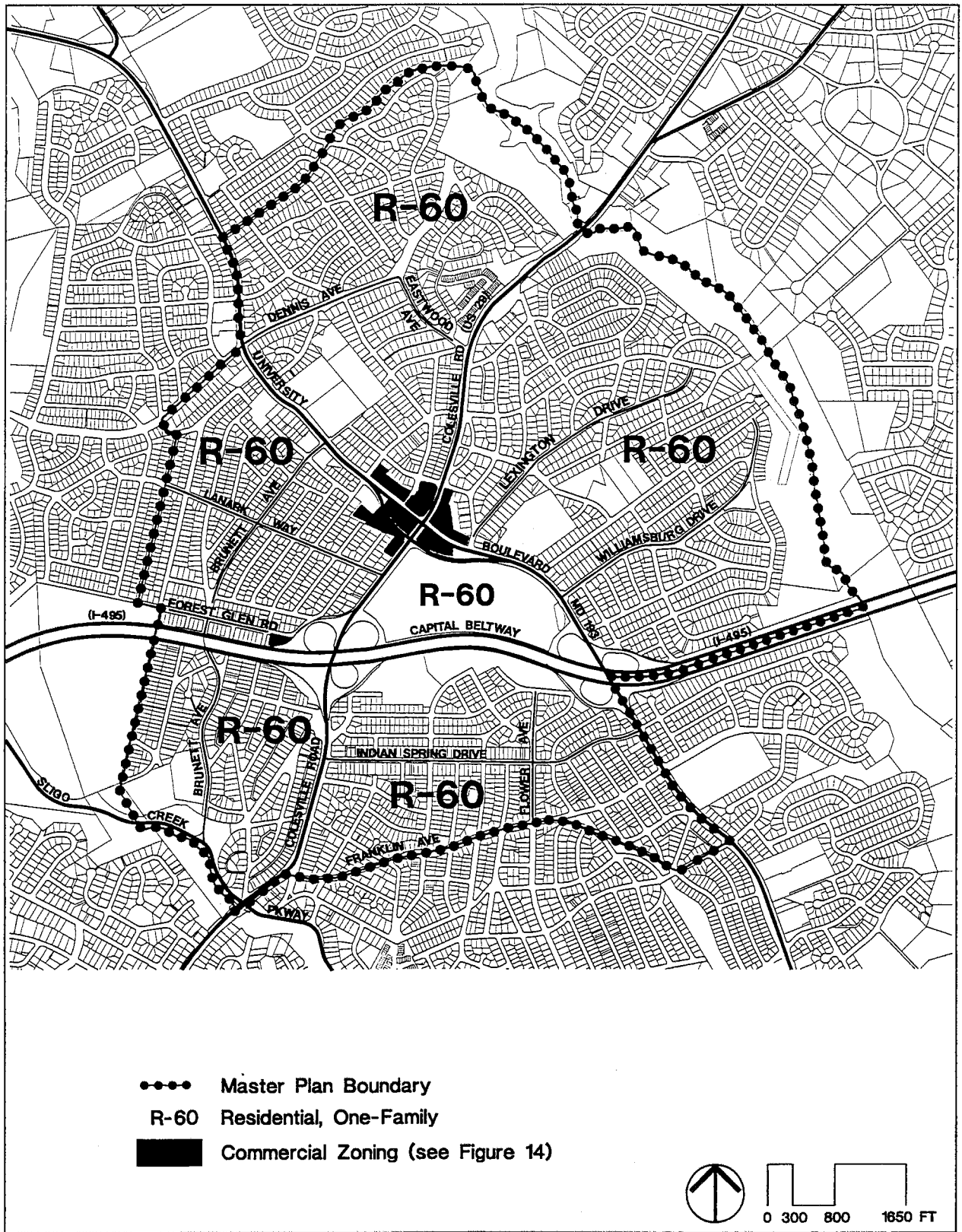
### *Recommendations*

- This Plan reconfirms the existing R-60 (residential, one-family) zoning for the residential neighborhoods in the Four Corners Master Plan area. (See Figure 12, page 28.)
- There is a six-acre property at 315 University Boulevard that was formerly occupied by a private school and is currently vacant. The property owner may rebuild a school on this site, which is an appropriate use for this site. If the property owner decides not to build a school and intends to pursue other options, then this site is appropriate for parkland. Increased parkland in this portion of Four Corners will provide needed recreational facilities and will replace open space that was lost when the former Four Corners Elementary School, which occupied the adjacent site, was converted to elderly housing. If Park and Planning does not decide to use Advanced Land Acquisition or Capital Improvement Program (CIP) funds for purchase within six months after the property owner indicates in writing to Park and Planning that a school will not be built on this site, then the site may be developed for residential purposes. The site has a base zoning of R-60 and is suitable for development as PD-7.
- This Plan recommends that DPWT implement a Residential Traffic Management Program to minimize non-local traffic on residential streets. The program allows residents to participate in the design of traffic “calming” measures to reduce or slow traffic, contributing to safer streets and preserving the residential character in neighborhoods.

- This Plan recommends improving pedestrian access, circulation, and safety by constructing sidewalks on residential streets where there are bus stops, non-local traffic, or that lead into the commercial district or otherwise complete the pedestrian network (see Sidewalks, page 47).
- This Plan acknowledges that the Board of Appeals has primary responsibility for reviewing and approving special exception petitions. Nevertheless, the Plan recommends the following guidelines that enable neighborhoods to absorb special exception uses without diminishing residential character.
  - This Plan discourages special exceptions in residential areas immediately adjacent to the commercial district. Residential neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the Four Corners commercial district are particularly vulnerable to encroachment of non-residential uses, as are single-family homes along the major highways. Several single-family homes along the west side of Colesville Road between the Beltway and University Boulevard have been converted to office use by special exception. This location is suitable for special exception office use; however, residences or other special exception uses are not precluded. Special exception reviews should continue to pay particular attention to the number, type, and intensity of existing special exceptions as currently provided in the Zoning Ordinance.
  - The Plan recommends reuse of existing structures for special exception uses, where feasible. If a use requires a new building, the Plan encourages designs that are residential in character and scale.
  - This Plan encourages the continued requirement for landscape plans for all special exception uses except accessory apartments. Landscape plans enhance the integration of a special exception use into a community by retaining grassed and landscaped front, side, and rear yards.







## **Commercial Land Uses**

The commercial district is Four Corners' "front door." Motorists passing through on University Boulevard or Colesville Road form a lasting impression of the community through its appearance. Today, the commercial district meets essential neighborhood shopping needs, from groceries and dry cleaners to banks and florists. But its strengths have been diminished by the age and physical deterioration of its buildings and by traffic congestion in parking areas and on adjacent streets.

Residents are concerned that the community's front door no longer reflects the stable surrounding residential neighborhoods and that further deterioration of the community's center could have a detrimental effect on the entire area. Part of the problem is that the commercial area developed incrementally over the years, meeting individual needs for parking, access, and business signs. This development pattern has resulted in continuous paving with no landscaping, inadequate access and parking, poor pedestrian connections, and a disjointed collection of commercial buildings, some of which are converted single-family houses.

Four Corners residents want the appearance of their shopping district to better reflect the attractive and stable neighborhoods that surround it. Some people also feel that the range of uses is not adequate. Improving the appearance of the commercial district requires cooperation between public and private sectors. While some important circulation and streetscape improvements will be made as part of the State project at the Colesville Road and University Boulevard intersection, other initiatives will need joint participation of landowners, merchants, residents, and local government.

### **Woodmoor Shopping Center**

The Woodmoor Shopping Center, located at the northeast corner of University Boulevard and Colesville Road, is the largest commercial use in the Four Corners business area. Most of the Woodmoor Shopping Center is in the C-2 (general commercial) Zone, with a small portion of C-T (commercial transitional) zoning. The rear parking lot operates as a special exception in the R-60 (residential, one-family) Zone. (See Figure 13.) Within this one center, many of the community's retail service needs can be met by the local serving nature of the stores. The shopping center is now 50 years old. The long-term economic viability of the shopping center contributes to the health of the entire commercial district.

Four Corners residents are concerned that the Woodmoor Shopping Center will deteriorate further and potentially jeopardize the stability of both the remaining commercial district as well as the residential neighborhoods. The center's appearance, access, and parking need improvement, but most residents feel that such improvements should not come at the expense of the adjacent residential neighborhood.

The owners of the Woodmoor Shopping Center are interested in adding retail space and parking at the center. They want to expand into an area where six single-family houses are located on Pierce Drive. The owners propose demolishing the houses, all of which they now own, to construct additional parking that would support the proposed retail expansion. Parking would be

located on a portion of the existing rear lot and on the adjacent residentially zoned land on Pierce Drive. Upgrading the existing shopping center is also anticipated. The owners would like commercial zoning on the entire site, including the lots on Pierce Drive.

Demolition of the houses on Pierce Drive represents commercial encroachment into the residential neighborhood and would alter the character of Pierce Drive. Historically, residents have opposed this idea. Security and visibility of the parking areas, vehicular access to the center, and increased traffic congestion, including cut-through, on residential streets are also concerns. A working group of residents, the owners, and their representatives held discussions regarding the issues and concerns surrounding the site. This Plan recognizes the need for improvements to the Woodmoor Shopping Center. However, upgrading the shopping center does not necessarily require expansion and does not justify demolishing the Pierce Drive houses.

Two independent automotive businesses are located in front of the Woodmoor Shopping Center on the northeast corner of Colesville Road and University Boulevard. One business is a gas station and the other is an automotive repair service, but it appears that they are one business. The State Highway Administration has indicated that it plans to acquire the gas station as part of the intersection improvement because the gas pumps and underground tanks will be too close to the widened intersection. This Plan recommends acquisition of both the gas station and the automotive repair business by the State Highway Administration. Automotive uses at this location, with their associated curb cuts, exacerbate traffic circulation and access problems at the corner. These uses also reduce visibility from the roadway of businesses in the shopping center. If the State does not acquire these businesses, this Plan recommends that in any redevelopment of the Woodmoor Shopping Center, these automotive uses be removed and replaced with landscaping and perhaps a limited amount of additional parking. This Plan recommends relocation of the automotive repair service within the Four Corners commercial district if an appropriate location can be found.

This Plan supports a limited expansion of the Woodmoor Shopping Center that does not involve the houses on Pierce Drive, which should remain in the R-60 Zone. The Plan recommends the C-4 Zone (limited commercial) for the existing Woodmoor Shopping Center, including the rear parking lot and the C-T parcel. (See Figure 14.) The C-4 Zone is more in keeping with Woodmoor's function as a low-density neighborhood shopping center. Limiting the possible commercial expansion of the center to its existing site preserves Pierce Drive as a neighborhood street and maintains the edge between the commercial and residential areas.

Following are objectives and recommendations for the entire Four Corners commercial district.

### *Objectives*

- Improve and enhance the visual and physical appearance of the entire commercial district, providing a more suitable "front door" for the residential neighborhoods.
- Maintain appropriate transitions, provide improved pedestrian connections, and strengthen the distinction between commercial and residential land uses.

## *Recommendations*

- This Plan reconfirms the existing commercial zoning in the Four Corners Master Plan area, except for the Woodmoor Shopping Center site. (See Figures 13 and 14.)
- This Plan recommends that the Woodmoor Shopping Center site, including the rear parking lot, be rezoned C-4 (limited commercial). (See Figure 14.) This Plan recommends that the State Highway Administration acquire the automotive businesses on the northeast corner of Colesville Road and University Boulevard in front of the Woodmoor Shopping Center as part of the intersection improvement project.
- This Plan recommends that Montgomery County provide funding for a commercial revitalization project that would establish a public-private partnership in Four Corners. Following are guidelines for the project.
  - Design and provide canopies, awnings, and signs that will unify and enhance the appearance of the commercial district.
  - Provide landscape treatments that create additional screened or shaded areas and that mark transitions between commercial and residential districts.
  - Encourage discussion of parking issues in the commercial revitalization project.
  - Design special gateway features, including landscaping and signs, at the four corners to strengthen community identity and enhance the visual appearance of the commercial district.
- Due to a lack of available vacant land and a desire to not displace commercial uses, creation of a public parking lot on the northwest side of Colesville Road is recommended if land becomes available. If commercially zoned land becomes available in the future, this Plan recommends that the County consider acquisition, and pursue alternate sources of funding that may be available, to create a public parking lot in the northwest portion of the Four Corners commercial district where parking is limited.
- In the Four Corners commercial district, several single-family detached homes in commercial zones have been converted to non-residential uses. If redevelopment of these single-family homes occurs, adequate on-site parking should be provided as well as landscaping and screening to improve transitions between commercial and residential uses.

- When redevelopment or new development occurs, landscape screening should be provided within the required setbacks for commercial properties that abut residential uses and within the parking lots of commercial areas as required by the Zoning Ordinance. Landscaping should be used in conjunction with fences or walls and low, non-glare lighting fixtures to ensure compatibility with abutting residential areas.

# EXISTING COMMERCIAL ZONING

FIGURE 13

