

# *Planning Board Draft*

*Limited Amendment to the  
Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central  
Business District and Vicinity*



Montgomery County Planning Board  
June 2008

## **Planning Board Draft**

# **Limited Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity**

An Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity, 1990, as amended; being also an amendment to the General Plan for the Physical Development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District, as amended.

### **Prepared by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission**

8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760

### **Approved by the Montgomery County Council**

Date

### **Adopted by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission**

Date

# **PLANNING BOARD DRAFT OF THE LIMITED AMENDMENT TO THE SECTOR PLAN FOR THE WHEATON CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT AND VICINITY**

## **ABSTRACT**

This plan contains land use and zoning recommendations for a portion of the Wheaton Sector Plan Area. It is a limited amendment to the approved and adopted 1990 Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity. It also amends *On Wedges and Corridors*, the *General Plan for the Maryland-Washington Regional District in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties*, as amended. The Plan makes recommendations for land use, urban design, environment, and transportation that are intended to guide development and to be implemented through zoning.

## **SOURCE OF COPIES**

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission  
8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3760

## **THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION**

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission is a bi-county agency created by the General Assembly of Maryland in 1927. The Commission's geographic authority extends to the great majority of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties; the Maryland-Washington Regional District (M-NCPPC planning jurisdiction) comprises 1,001 square miles, while the Metropolitan District (parks) comprises 919 square miles, in the two counties.

The Commission is charged with preparing, adopting, and amending or extending *On Wedges and Corridors*, the general plan for the physical development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District.

The Commission operates in each county through Planning Boards appointed by the county government. The Boards are responsible for all local plans, zoning amendments, subdivision regulations, and administration of parks.

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A plan provides comprehensive recommendations for the use of publicly and privately owned land. Each plan reflects a vision of the future that responds to the unique character of the local community within the context of a countywide perspective.

Together with relevant policies, plans should be referred to by public officials and private individuals when making land use decisions.

### **The Plan Process**

The PUBLIC HEARING DRAFT PLAN is the formal proposal to amend an adopted master plan or sector plan. Its recommendations are not necessarily those of the Planning Board; it is prepared for the purpose of receiving public testimony. The Planning Board holds a public hearing and receives testimony, after which it holds public worksessions to review the testimony and revise the Public Hearing Draft Plan as appropriate. When the Planning Board's changes are made, the document becomes the Planning Board Draft Plan.

The PLANNING BOARD DRAFT PLAN is the Board's recommended Plan and reflects their revisions to the Public Hearing Draft Plan. The Regional District Act requires the Planning Board to transmit a sector plan to the County Council with copies to the County Executive who must, within sixty days, prepare and transmit a fiscal impact analysis of the Planning Board Draft Plan to the County Council. The County Executive may also forward to the County Council other comments and recommendations.

After receiving the Executive's fiscal impact analysis and comments, the County Council holds a public hearing to receive public testimony. After the hearing record is closed, the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee holds public worksessions to review the testimony and makes recommendations to the County Council. The Council holds its own worksessions, then adopts a resolution approving the Planning Board Draft Plan, as revised.

After Council approval the plan is forwarded to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission for adoption. Once adopted by the Commission, the plan officially amends the master plans, functional plans, and sector plans cited in the Commission's adoption resolution.

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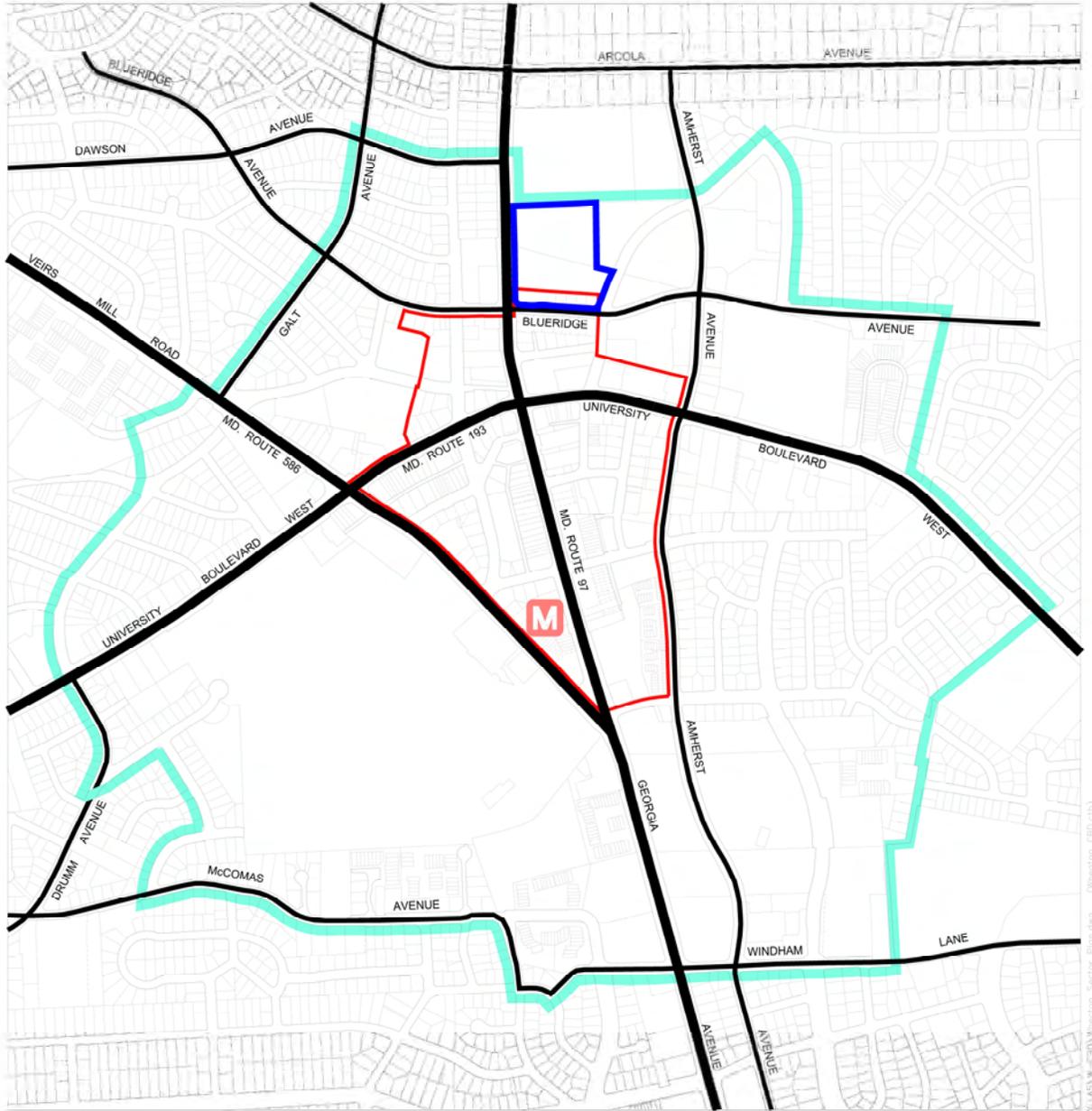
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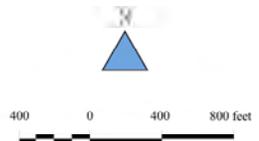


# VICINITY MAP

FIGURE 1



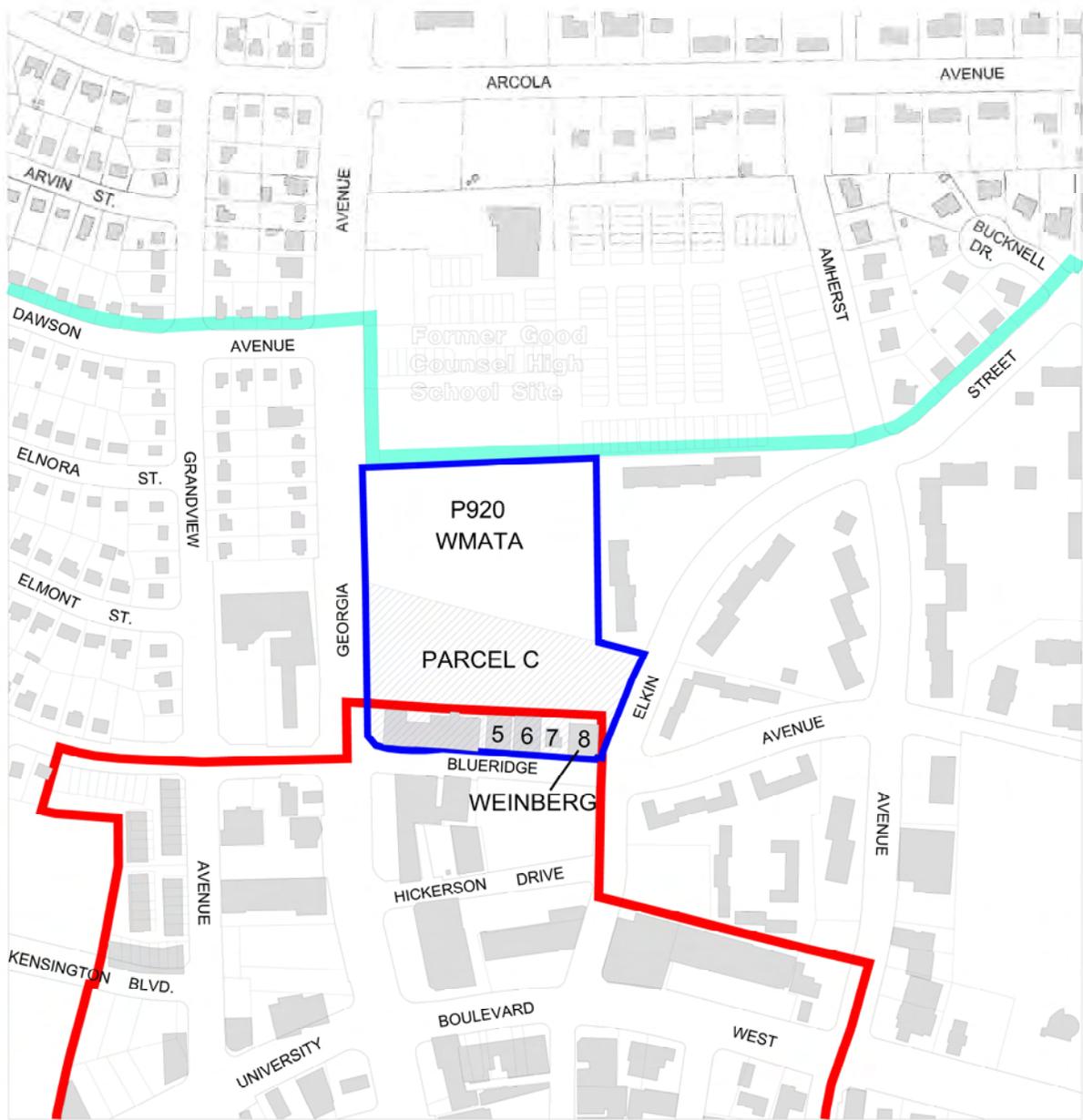
- WHEATON METRO STATION
- STUDY AREA BOUNDARY
- SECTOR PLAN BOUNDARY
- CURRENT CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT BOUNDARY



Limited Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity

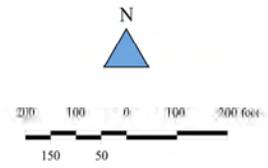
# STUDY AREA

FIGURE 2



X:\AS\W-CBD\STUDY AREA 1.dwg (Wheaton CBD.sib)

- 5 LOT NUMBER (See Text)
- AVALON BAY
- SECTOR PLAN BOUNDARY
- CURRENT CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT BOUNDARY
- STUDY AREA BOUNDARY



Limited Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity

## Introduction

This Limited Amendment to the 1990 *Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity* evaluates and makes land use and zoning recommendations for a portion of the Sector Plan area. It also recommends adjustments to the boundaries for the Central Business District (CBD) to accommodate its zoning recommendations.

## The Study Area

The study area for this Amendment is located at the northern edge of the Wheaton Central Business District Sector Plan area. It consists of three sets of properties: Lots 5, 6, and 7 and Parcel C of the Villa Verde subdivision, all of which are owned by Avalon Bay Communities; Lot 8 of Villa Verde, owned by the Weinberg family; and Parcel 920, an unsubdivided and largely vacant property owned by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority that is immediately to the north of Parcel C. The three sets of properties total approximately 7.6 acres (see Figure 1 for an overall vicinity map and Figure 2 for the study area).

The Avalon Bay and Weinberg properties comprise the entire frontage of Blueridge Avenue between Georgia Avenue and Elkin Street. Parcel 920 fronts on Georgia Avenue. The block currently includes four office buildings, from one to seven stories in height, and one unoccupied single-family house. The office buildings occupy part of Parcel C, as well as Lots 5, 6, and 8. The unoccupied house is on Lot 7. Parcel 920 is vacant, with an access point for Metro operations in the southwest corner of the property.

Property	Size	Existing Zone
Lots 5, 6, 7 and Parcel C	3.65 acres	C-O/Overlay (Lots 5, 6, 7 and part of Parcel C are in the Overlay Zone)
Lot 8	0.13 acres	C-O/Overlay
Parcel 920	3.8 acres	R-90/TDR

Lots 5, 6, 7 and 8, as well as a portion of Parcel C, are now classified in the Wheaton Retail Preservation Overlay Zone with an underlying C-O (Commercial Office) Zone. The remainder of Parcel C is in the C-O Zone but is not in the Overlay Zone. Parcel 920 is in the R-90/TDR Zone, with a Sector Plan recommendation of nine units to the acre. The CBD boundary divides Parcel C, with the buildings along Blueridge Avenue located inside the Central Business District, and the parking lot associated with the buildings outside the CBD. Lots 5, 6, 7 and 8 are inside the CBD.

The defining physical feature of the study area is the pronounced west to east slope along Blueridge Avenue. Blueridge Avenue's intersection with Elkin Street is about 33 feet lower than its intersection with Georgia Avenue. The easternmost part of the study area, along the eastern property lines of Parcel 920 and Parcel C, is wooded. A stormwater management facility that serves Parcel C's parking lot is located in this area.



## Analysis

The 1990 *Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity* recommends the four lots on Blueridge Avenue and Parcel C for office use and also recommends that future office development in the area abutting residential neighborhoods should be limited to building heights of 30 to 40 feet. “These offices,” the Sector Plan states, “should serve as a transition between the residential areas to the north and the Central Business District south of Blueridge Avenue.” (p. 33)

In the years since the Sector Plan’s approval, mixed-use development has become an increasingly attractive and efficient way to redevelop relatively urban commercial areas. The CBD zones enable this mixing of uses. The C-O Zone, in contrast, does not generally allow commercial retail uses and limits the ability to include residential uses.

Mixed-use development in the study area would provide housing within a reasonable half-mile walk of Wheaton’s Metro station, and could increase the stock of housing in Wheaton that is attractive to residents of varying ages and incomes. The addition of residential and commercial retail uses would enliven Blueridge Avenue and provide neighborhood shopping destinations for residents of the multifamily communities along Elkin Street east of the study area.

Mixed-use development also would accomplish the Sector Plan’s overriding objective of providing a transition between the more intense uses in the CBD and the lower density residential uses to the north. Building heights, for example, would step down from as much as 143 feet in the CBD-2 Zone south of Blueridge Avenue to 60 feet or 90 feet along Blueridge Avenue and to 35 feet in the proposed townhouse community on the former Good Counsel High School site south of Arcola Avenue.

## Land Use and Zoning Recommendations

### Blueridge Avenue Properties

This Amendment recommends reclassifying Lots 5, 6, and 7 and Parcel C to the CBD-1 Zone, and expanding the Central Business District boundary to include all of Parcel C. With most of this block in single ownership, and likely to be the subject of a single development proposal, the small business protection afforded by the Wheaton Retail Preservation Overlay Zone is less critical in this area. The Amendment therefore recommends that the Retail Preservation Overlay Zone be removed from the north side of Blueridge Avenue between Georgia Avenue and Elkin Street. The Amendment strongly encourages an Optional Method Development for the CBD-1 properties. An Optional Method Development would allow a denser development with more on- or off-site public use space, more Moderately Priced Dwelling Units and firmer regulatory controls through the site plan process than a Standard Method Development.

This Amendment does not recommend mixed-use development for the Weinberg property on Lot 8; it recommends instead that the C-O Zone remain in place. The current office use continues to meet the transition objectives of the Sector Plan. Although the building's floor area ratio exceeds the maximum FAR now allowed in the C-O Zone, it is conforming under the standards of the Zoning Ordinance and can be structurally altered, repaired, or reconstructed as long as the original dimensions are retained. This Amendment recommends guidelines aimed at maximizing compatibility between the Weinberg property and any new development that occurs on adjoining properties in the CBD-1 Zone.

### Parcel 920

This Amendment recommends that Parcel 920 be reclassified to the CBD-0.5 Zone and that the Central Business District boundary be expanded to include this parcel. This property is located between properties that appear poised for development. To the south are Avalon Bay's properties on Blueridge Avenue, recommended in this Amendment for mixed-use development. To the north is the former Good Counsel High School site, which is now zoned for townhouse development at 15 dwelling units to the acre. Recommended residential densities for those properties and the existing multifamily community to the east are higher than the nine units to the acre recommended for the property by the 1990 *Sector Plan*. Increased densities on Parcel 920 will increase the availability of housing and can contribute to the inventory of housing of varying types and affordability. They will not compromise the Sector Plan's objective of a smooth transition from the Central Business District to the one-family neighborhoods outside the Sector Plan area. The Amendment strongly encourages an Optional Method Development for this property as well. An Optional Method Development would allow a denser development with more on- or off-site public use space, more Moderately Priced Dwelling Units and firmer regulatory controls through the site plan process than a Standard Method Development.

In summary, staff makes the following recommendations for the study area.

- Expand the boundary of the Wheaton Central Business District to include all of Parcel C, Villa Verde, and Parcel 920.
- Reclassify Parcel C, as well as Lots 5, 6 and 7 from the C-O Zone to the CBD-1 Zone.
- Reclassify Parcel 920 to the CBD-0.5 Zone.
- Remove the Wheaton Retail Preservation Overlay Zone from properties on the north side of the block of Blueridge Avenue between Georgia Avenue and Elkin Street.
- Retain the C-O Zone on Lot 8.
- Allow a reduction of required public use space on site to 10 percent, should an Optional Method Development occur on CBD-1 properties, if the developer opts to adhere to standards in the Zoning Ordinance that allow off-site provision of some or all of the required 20 percent public use space.
- Encourage off-site provision of public use space when Parcel 920 develops.

Figure 3 shows proposed land uses for the study area, Figure 4 shows existing zoning, and Figure 5 depicts proposed zoning.

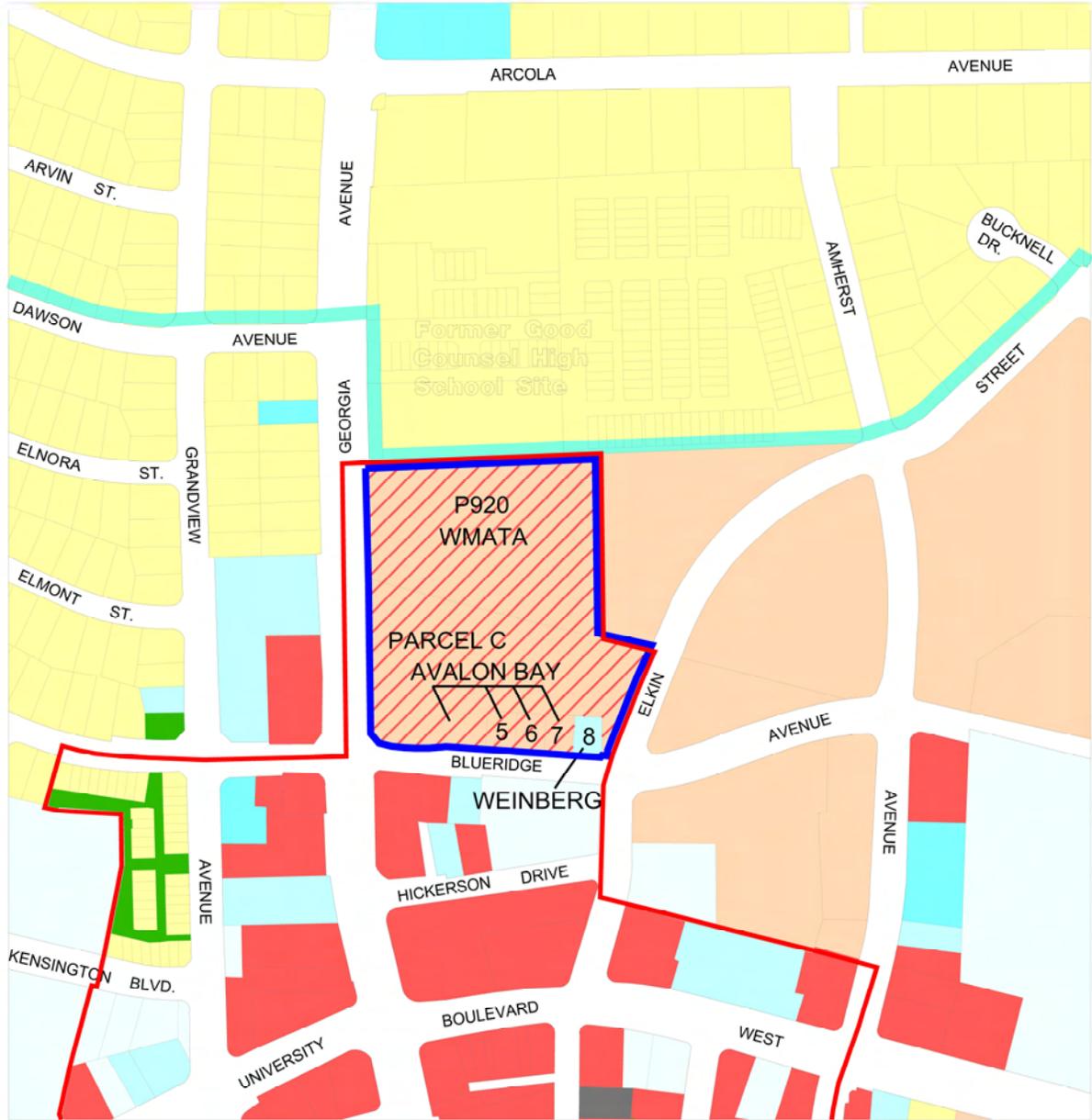
## **Urban Design**

Successful urban streets provide an atmosphere that is attractive to and comfortable for pedestrians walking along them. These streets use elements of design—varied building massing, differing façades, landscaping, and sidewalk treatments—to create a lively streetscape for workers and residents. This Amendment offers design guidelines whose aim is to insure that new development in the CBD-0.5 and CBD-1 zones along Blueridge and Georgia Avenues achieves design excellence and contributes to a smooth transition from more intensive CBD uses to less intensive residential uses. They also guide the location of public spaces and contribute to a gradual stepping down of potential building heights from the CBD core to the residential communities outside the CBD. The guidelines strongly encourage future development projects to:

- Employ design techniques that reinforce the general principles of crime prevention through environmental design: maximizing visibility, careful placement of access points and clear delineation of activity areas
- Orient all buildings to streets
- Use building setbacks or façade articulations at appropriate heights to vary the building mass and enhance compatibility with existing buildings
- Insure that building heights follow the sloping topography and step down from Georgia Avenue east towards the existing multifamily neighborhood along Elkin Street
- Locate and design vehicle and delivery entrances and other service elements so that they have minimal impact on pedestrian activities
- Provide neighborhood retail and service activities in ground floor space along Blueridge Avenue and use design features—varying façades, building setbacks, and landscaping, for example—in this area that encourage and enhance the walking experience

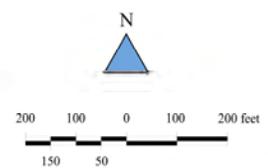
# PROPOSED LAND USES

FIGURE 3



X:\AS\W-CBD\STUDY AREA PROPOSED LANDUSE.dwg (Wheaton CBD Prelim.cbd)

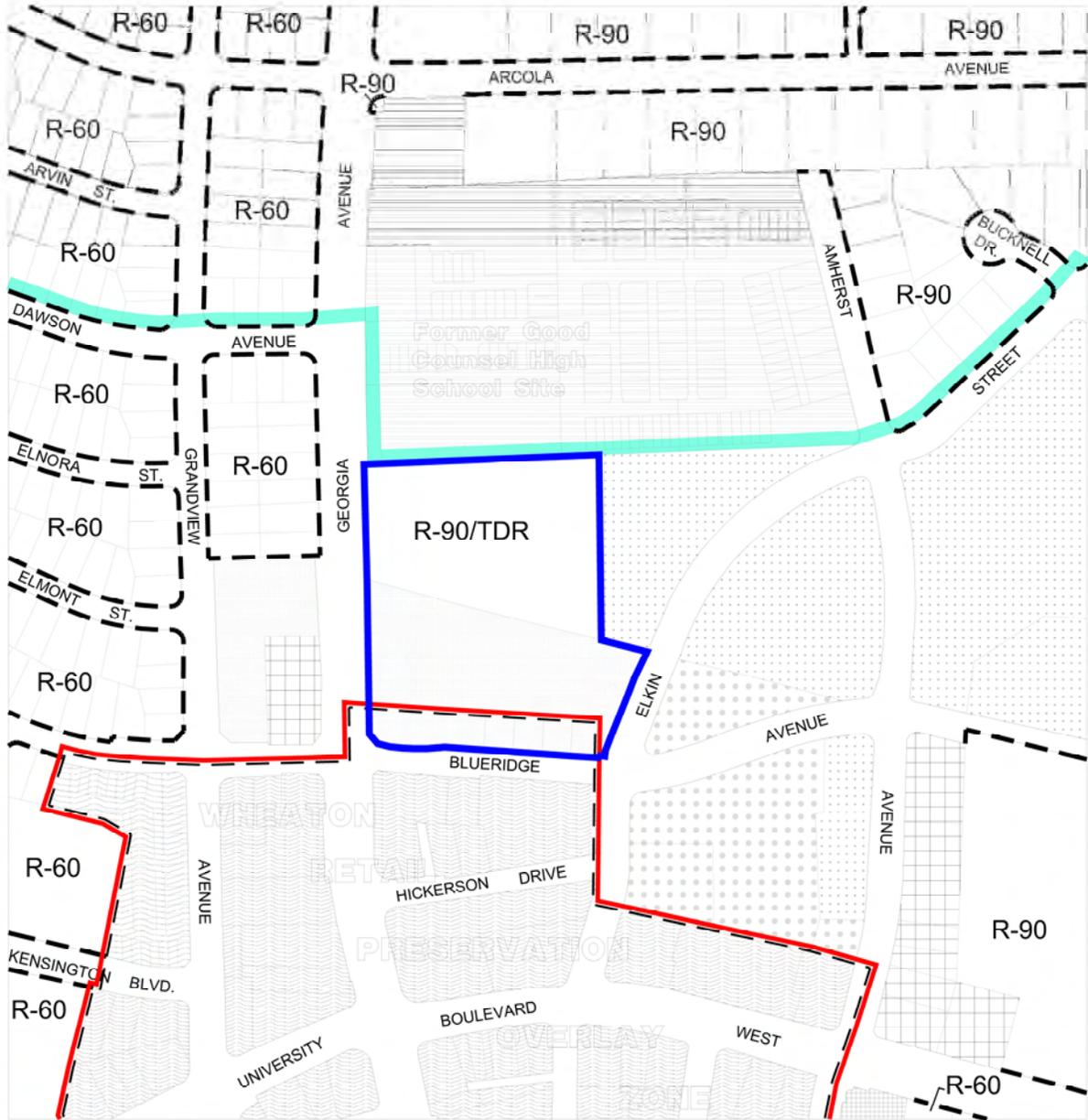
- |   |   |
|---|---|
|  STUDY AREA BOUNDARY                         |  COMMERCIAL - RETAIL       |
|  SECTOR PLAN BOUNDARY                        |  COMMERCIAL - OFFICE       |
|  PROPOSED CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT BOUNDARY |  INSTITUTIONAL             |
|  SINGLE-FAMILY                               |  RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE |
|  APARTMENTS, CONDOMINIUMS                    |  MIXED USE                 |
|  INDUSTRIAL AND WAREHOUSE                    |  LOT NUMBER (See Text)     |
|  TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATION, UTILITIES    |   |



Limited Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity

# EXISTING ZONING

FIGURE 4

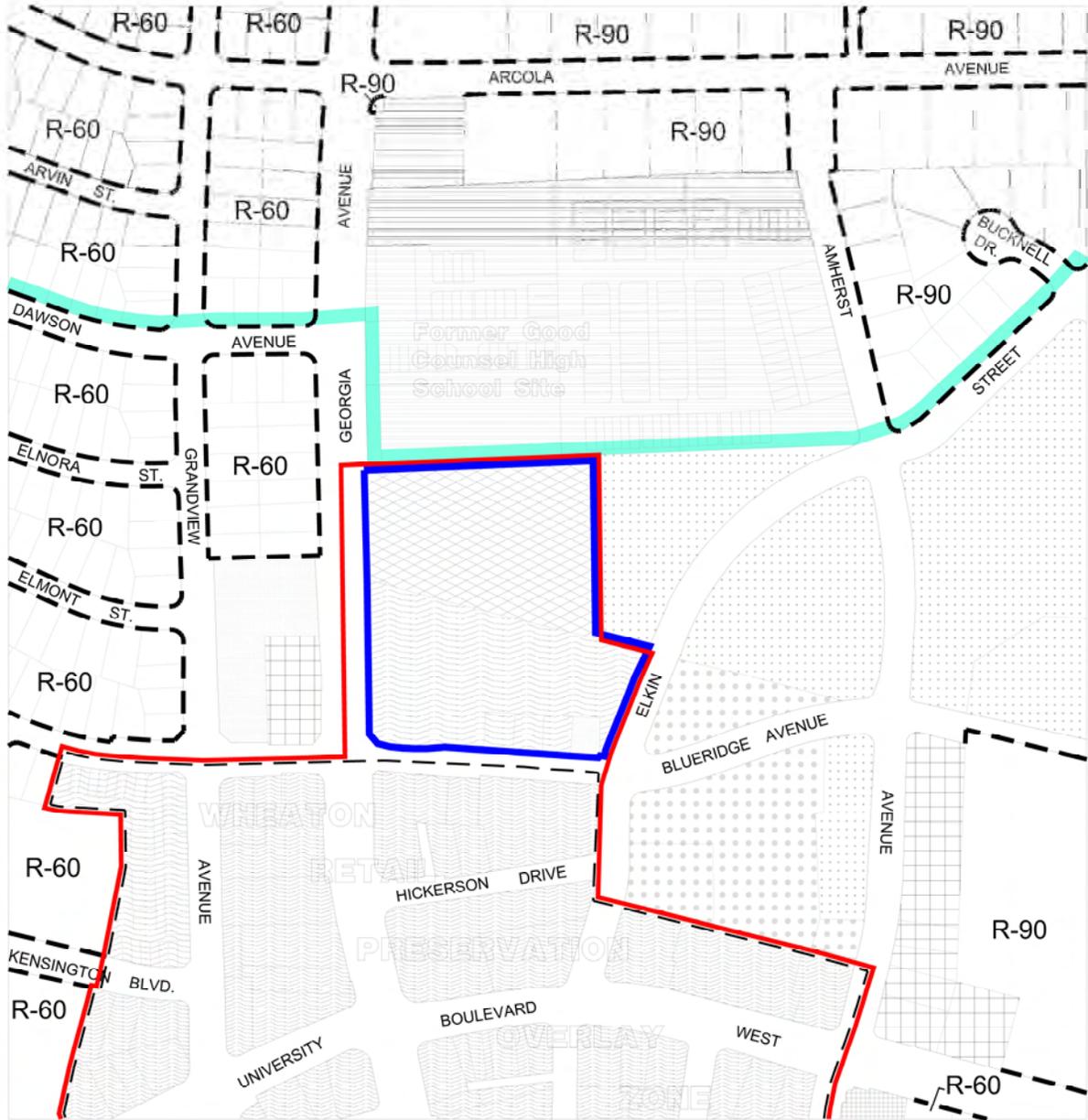


X:\AS\W-CBD\STUDY AREA EXISTING ZONING.dwg (ZONESMA.dwg)

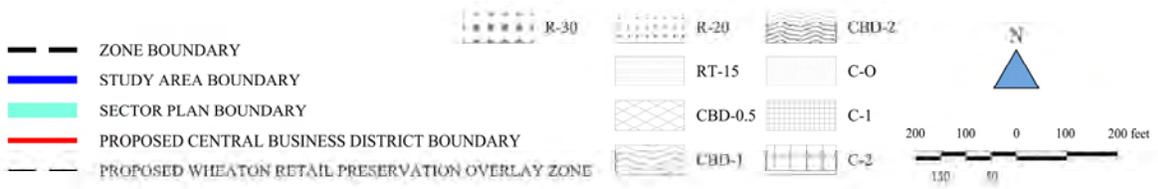
Limited Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity

# PROPOSED ZONING

FIGURE 5



X:\AS\W-CBD\STUDY AREA PROPOSED ZONING.dwg (Wheaton cbd pro zone, etc)



Limited Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity

Use design techniques such as façade articulation, durable materials, building entrance and storefront design, awnings and other building features to create attractive building form

- Provide a substantial mid-block public use space on Blueridge Avenue that is adjacent to building and store entrances
- Provide building transparency along Blueridge Avenue for a minimum of 50 percent of the distance between Georgia Avenue and the mid-block public use space
- Create open space at the eastern portion of the area in the CBD-1 Zone and along Elkin Street, incorporate it into public use space for the benefit of neighborhood workers and residents, and design it so that new development does not “surround” the existing building on Lot 8
- For new development in the CBD-1 Zone, provide a portion of the public use space in the form of significantly widened sidewalks located in part on private property along Georgia and Blueridge Avenues, and use materials that adhere to the county’s *Wheaton Commercial Area Streetscape Standards*
- For new development in the CBD-1 Zone, provide a minimum building setback of 25 feet from Georgia Avenue, a planting strip along Georgia Avenue that is a minimum of five feet wide, and a sidewalk on Georgia Avenue that has a minimum clear width of 10 feet, all of which will help enliven the public pedestrian realm along this busy avenue
- Provide building entrances, windows, stoops, and landscaping on Georgia Avenue to create an active streetscape
- Locate retail or other street activating non-residential uses at the corner of Georgia and Blueridge Avenues and provide a minimum of 25 feet from the curb at the corner of Georgia and Blueridge Avenues to the building by truncating the first floor corner or setting the entire building back
- Provide a pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular connection from Blueridge Avenue through Parcel C and Parcel 920 to the Leesborough development to the north
- Use varied building massing and building setbacks in the northern and eastern portions of Parcel 920 to insure compatibility with adjacent development
- Provide a 100-foot green buffer on Parcel 920 between the existing multifamily neighborhood along Elkin Street and new development in the eastern part of the property.

## **Transportation**

This Amendment proposes no changes to existing street and highway classifications. The impact of possible land uses along Blueridge Avenue on the existing roadway network has been evaluated for this Amendment. The analysis considered mixed-use development at various proportions of office, retail, and residential as well as the impact of development in the existing C-O Zone. The analysis concluded that mixed-use development with a significant residential component produces fewer peak hour vehicle trips—with a smaller resulting impact on the roadway network—than mixing non-residential uses such as office and retail or a development consisting solely of office uses.

## Environment

New sector plans in urbanizing areas of the county, such as Twinbrook and White Flint, recognize the need for greater efforts in avoiding carbon emissions, increasing energy efficiency, and conserving water. There are a variety of techniques available to meet these goals. Because services needed for living and working are in close proximity, mixed-use developments enable residents to reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled, thus reducing the amount of carbon emitted. Carbon emissions can be reduced more if the development is built with energy systems that draw from renewable sources such as photovoltaic cells or geothermal heat pumps. Living spaces should be outfitted with Energy Star appliances and lighting. Conserving water can be achieved through measures such as extensive green roofs, bioinfiltration cells or rain gardens, graywater reuse systems, and low flow water fixtures. An open space system with adequate pervious area provides ground area for trees to grow and areas for rain to infiltrate into the groundwater. Development proposed by this Amendment should provide required public use space within in the Central Business District if it cannot be fully achieved on site. This Amendment recommends that new development:

- Provide high performance measures in new buildings that prioritize water conservation, energy efficiency, and reducing carbon emissions
- Provide pervious open space except where necessary for walkways and bikeways
- Incorporate ways to deconstruct existing buildings and make every reasonable effort to recycle or reuse materials in the existing building.

## Implementation

This section outlines those steps necessary to implement the land use and zoning recommendations of this Amendment.

### Proposed Zoning

The following table summarizes the zones proposed in this Limited Amendment:

Property and Size	Existing Zone	Proposed Zone
Lots 5, 6, 7 and Parcel C (3.65 acres)	C-O	CBD-1
Lot 8 (0.13 acres)	C-O	C-O
Parcel 920 (3.8 acres)	R-90/TDR	CBD-0.5

### Other Steps

Implementing the recommendations of this Limited Amendment requires revisions to Wheaton's Central Business District boundary. This Amendment recommends a Zoning Text Amendment to incorporate the necessary revisions to the metes and bounds description that delineates the Central Business District.

This Amendment recognizes that mixed-use development recommended for the CBD-1 and CBD-0.5 zones may require revisions to the boundaries of Wheaton's Urban District and its Parking District. Neither revision is required to implement this Amendment's recommendations, but these revisions would allow property owners to contribute to the maintenance of these districts.

### Water Supply and Sewerage Systems

The Study Area lies within the Washington Suburban Sanitary District and receives public (community) water and sewer service from systems owned and operated by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC). Consistent with the service policies in the County's *Ten-Year Comprehensive Water Supply and Sewerage Systems Plan (2003)*, all properties in the area studied by this Limited Amendment have approval for and access to WSSC's public sanitary systems.