

M-NCPPC



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING**

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL  
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

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September 23, 2005

The Hon. Thomas E. Perez  
President, Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20910

The Hon. Douglas M. Duncan  
Montgomery County Executive  
101 Monroe Street  
Rockville, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Perez and Mr. Duncan:

On August 1, 2005, the Montgomery County Planning Board transmitted to you the Final Draft 2005-2007 Growth Policy for Montgomery County. In the cover letter, the Planning Board noted that it would hold a third and final worksession on growth policy issues in September on the following topics:

- A review of the first year under the new growth policy approved by the County Council in 2003 but which went into effect in July 2004;
- A review of statistics indicating that development pressure on the agricultural reserve is increasing; and
- A proposal by the Garrett Park Estates – White Flint North Citizens' Association to change the boundary of the Grosvenor Policy Area.

The Planning Board held the worksession on September 22, 2005 and I am pleased to transmit to you the Planning Board's comments on these issues.

*New Growth Policy*

In 2003, the Planning Board recommended that the County identify an overall pace of growth that the County could successfully absorb without further strain on public facilities. The Board suggested that approvals be limited to 1 percent of existing development – 5,800 jobs and 3,625 housing units. The Board further recommended that the permitted number of approvals be allocated to various areas of the County in concert with the County's planning policies and the availability of public facilities.

In FY05, the first year under the new growth policy, approvals for new non-residential development totaled 14,644 jobs, two-and-a-half times the 5,800-job approval rate recommended by the Planning Board. In FY05, residential approvals totaled 4,388 housing units, about one-fifth higher than the Board recommended. Actual development approved is not only higher Countywide than the Board recommended but is also higher

in areas that are not as well served by transit, such as Fairland/White Oak, Montgomery Village/Airpark, Germantown, and Clarksburg. The attached tables illustrate the difference between actual development approved and the Board's recommendations.

The Planning Board's 2003 recommendations reflected a strong belief that the County needs to manage the pace of growth on a Countywide basis, a belief the Planning Board continues to hold. Policy Area Transportation Review, admittedly flawed, needed to be replaced with a better approach, not discarded entirely.

As the Planning Board noted in 2003, weakening the growth policy as a staging tool increases the County's reliance on master plans to stage development, which can make master plans more complicated and master planning more contentious. The County's 30-year forecast of growth – 90,000 housing units and 170,000 jobs – justifies a comprehensive approach to staging development.

The Planning Board stands by its 2003 growth policy recommendations and urges the County Council to consider strengthening the growth policy's ability to regulate the pace of development in Montgomery County.

#### *Development Pressure in the Agricultural Reserve*

The Montgomery County Planning Board views with concern the evidence of increasing development pressure on Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve. Since the beginning of the decade, single-family home approvals on RDT-zoned land have increased from an average of 13 per year to over 40. In rural planning areas (which includes but is not limited to RDT-zoned land), approvals increased 48 percent in the past year.

Over the next 30 years, the County is forecast to add 5,000 housing units in the rural part of the County, about 1,800 of which will be on RDT-zoned land.

In the next Biannual Report to the County Council, the Planning Board will highlight the challenges to continued success of the Agricultural Reserve and the status of initiatives to address those challenges. In addition, the Planning Board is moving forward to provide the County Council with a comprehensive set of regulatory and policy recommendations in such critical subject areas as the TDR program, permitted land use in agricultural zones, and septic systems. To do this, the Planning Board has directed Park and Planning staff to conduct an outreach effort to farmers, landowners, and other stakeholders this fall to assure that the voices of the agricultural community are clearly heard. Following this outreach effort, Planning staff will return quickly to the Board with a set of proposals, on which the Planning Board will again invite public comment, before sending the recommendations to the County Executive and County Council. It is our objective to send recommendations before the end of the year.

The Planning Board understands that the County Executive and County Council are currently at work on issues affecting the Agricultural Reserve. The Board looks at this

effort as a mean to further support and to accelerate the County's progress on these important issues at a most critical time.

*Grosvenor Policy Area*

After careful review, the Planning Board does not support the Garrett Park Estates – White Flint North Citizen's Association proposal to change the boundary of the Grosvenor Policy Area. Although the Board has not yet reviewed the affected subdivision proposal, preliminary review by staff indicated that the boundary change would not alter the outcome of the transportation test, a finding that the Garrett Park Estates – White Flint North Civic Association does not dispute.

*Biennial Preparation of the Highway Mobility Report*

In the Planning Board's transmittal of the *Final Draft 2005-2007 Growth Policy for Montgomery County*, one of the Planning Board's recommendations was inadvertently omitted. This recommendation concerns the preparation of an assessment of approved development and traffic congestion in the County. In the *Final Draft 2005-2007 Growth Policy*, the report is included as Chapter 3: Highway Mobility.

Currently, the growth policy requires that this report be prepared annually. However, because the report is to be used to inform capital programming and growth policy issues, and because those activities are conducted biennially, the Planning Board recommends that the Highway Mobility report be prepared biennially as part of the growth policy.

I look forward to presenting the Planning Board's growth policy recommendations to the County Council at the public hearing on Tuesday, September 27 and hearing the testimony from fellow citizens on growth issues facing the County. As always, the Board and staff are ready to support your review of the issues this fall.

Sincerely,

[original signed]

Derick P. Berlage  
Chairman

DPB:KWM