

COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS

A SUMMARY REPORT

In Spring 2006, the Department of Planning convened two community sessions with local and national experts and community leaders to explore how we can best plan and manage growth in the future. The guidance gleaned from these sessions is helping the Department to develop a planning program responsive to the community and business needs now and in the future.

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INVITEE SURVEY

Before the first Community Discussion, the Department of Planning conducted a small, non-scientific survey of the invitees to explore invitees' preferences and values regarding livability of present and future communities. More than 50% of the invitees responded to the survey.

The following results reflect the respondents' preferences, and vision for their communities:

- Respondents showed strong support for a greater variety of uses in their neighborhood commercial centers and along some commercial corridors.
- Many respondents liked the idea of living in a County that offers well-planned, mixed use, and pedestrian-friendly communities that provide: a variety of housing types, a sense of place, and good connections to amenities, shopping, and jobs.
- Time and convenience of travel to frequent destinations was very important to respondents. High percentages of respondents strongly supported priority public investment for the following: 1) improving pedestrian access and safety, 2) extending transit facilities, and 3) widening key congested intersections, and rebuilding interchanges at the worst ones.
- Respondents rated quality of schools and natural and open spaces as the most important followed by: leisure activity and accessibility to parks and recreation facilities, sense of community, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods well-connected to shopping and recreational activities, time and convenience of travel to frequent destinations, and cultural opportunities, in that order.
- Safety was an important issue among a vast majority of respondents. A high percentage of respondents rated pedestrian, traffic, and personal safety to be important.
- The features respondents like most about their neighborhoods were convenient access and proximity to mass transit, shopping, and jobs; parks and open spaces; and family-oriented, quiet residential areas.
- The features respondents liked least about their neighborhoods included: traffic congestion, unsafe roads, lack of "pedestrian friendliness", poor street lighting, and distance to services and amenities.
- With a few exceptions, respondents agreed that a variety of housing types and prices in their neighborhoods is a good thing.

Creating Thriving and Sustainable Communities Discussions with the Community

I. Community Discussion, May 3, 2006

Topic: Planning for Sustainable Communities that Meet Changing Community Needs

The first Community Discussion explored the physical impacts of demographic trends, changing community needs, evolving lifestyle preferences, and the opportunities they represent. The challenges, choices, and trade-offs associated with accommodating change in our communities through design were discussed from a variety of different perspectives.

A. Recap

Montgomery County is experiencing a new growth dynamic wherein greenfield development is being supplanted by redevelopment and infill while the County's economy continues to boom. In order to achieve the type of growth necessary for the economic well-being of the region, and the quality-of-life in its communities, planners intend to focus more on design, explore new techniques such as Smart Codes in order to promote good growth while protecting existing neighborhoods and the Agricultural Reserve, and more fully engage the community in the planning process. The Montgomery County General Plan, its vision and planning approaches can all be strengthened so that future growth better reflects changing community needs and desires.

The County's planning policies must evolve so that future growth produces more mixed-use communities where County residents and businesses can thrive in the realities of the 21st Century. A variety of ideas were advanced regarding how to manage growth in a way that will fulfill our citizens' aspirations for well-planned, architecturally pleasing communities that reflect all the principles of Smart Growth

Montgomery County planning initiatives will focus on seven areas: agricultural and rural open spaces, Corridor Cities, Metro Station areas, neighborhoods and centers, commercial centers, boulevards, and public spaces. To create great places, Montgomery County needs to align its planning initiatives with a toolbox of some new planning approaches that will guide future growth "smartly" by: a) improving coordination and implementation of Master and Sector Plans, b) revising the Zoning Ordinance and other regulations to foster higher quality design for all types of places, c) adopting road cross-sections that are context-sensitive, d) fostering a balance of uses, and, e) creating more opportunities for meaningful public participation and inter-agency cooperation throughout the planning and implementation of community plans.

The following issues of concern to residents emerged from the Q&A:

- How can citizens get involved and ensure planners really listen?
- Can the county restrict growth?
- Are our expectations for the quality and type of growth reasonable?
- How will we reach the goals in our vision?
- How will we finance needs such as pedestrian space and affordable housing?
- Will our plans be updated to facilitate coordinated comprehensive growth strategies?
- Have we identified the right land uses?
- As we redevelop, will we lose things we like such as cul-de-sacs?

B. Summary of Presentations

Derick Berlage, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board

Montgomery County is approaching a new growth dynamic wherein greenfield development is being replaced by redevelopment and renewal. Some areas, such as the Agricultural Reserve, will be protected, and other areas, such as Metro station areas, will become centers for growth. The County needs to decide how much growth to accept—how fast—and how it will look. The County needs to adopt policies that foster the good attributes of density, but not the bad ones. The County needs to develop expertise in green building. Planners must work with citizens, acquire new knowledge, and monitor local demographics in order to promote good growth. In November 2006, planners will make recommendations to the Planning Board - planning and zoning changes will ensue.

Faroll Hamer, Acting Director, Department of Planning

Montgomery County was once “cutting edge” in terms of its approaches to planning and zoning. Throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the County established innovative floating zones, the award-winning MPDU Ordinance, and the nationally acclaimed Transfer of Development Rights program (TDRs) to protect the Agricultural Reserve. However, as the County matures and shifts its planning emphasis to redevelopment and infill, away from the Agricultural Reserve, new cutting edge approaches must be developed to meet emerging planning challenges.

Many of the County’s more than 100 commercial shopping centers have become community “eyesores” with little public amenity space, no community connectivity, and complete auto-orientation. Determining the future form and function of these commercial centers will present many challenges to the County. Can we use some of these commercial center resources to create great communities that have great architecture? How can we make sure developers pay their fair share?

Future planning will, in part, focus on the form and function of many of these commercial centers, to better serve community needs and desires. Some of these centers might be appropriate for mixed-use development that requires creative design, encourages active street life, and limits center expansion into existing communities. New planning approaches and tools need to be developed to meet the challenge of commercial center redevelopment in the future.

Len Bogorad, Managing Director, Charles Lesser & Company

Montgomery County will continue to grow by an estimated 66,000 people between 2005 and 2010 alone. Between 2005 and 2010, Eisenhowers (born before 1946) will be migrating out. Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Echo Boomers are expected to grow by about the same number. The majority of growth will be in households comprised of married couples without children, followed by singles, and a fair number of female-headed households. Only one in fifteen new households in the region will be traditional families, married with children. The immigrant population will grow.

Housing demand will be affected by these generational shifts, as well as by immigration and socio-economic changes. The youngest Baby Boomers are likely to have kids, and value “family friendly” more urban environments. Middle Boomers/Empty Nesters are looking for locations close to employment, amenities, and services, second home opportunities, typically outside the region, and value nature-focused environmentally sensitive communities. The oldest Boomers are moving into “retirement” or new or part time jobs. The majority will want to stay in Montgomery County, and are looking for amenities, minimal maintenance, and opportunities for living in town areas.

The new population will be ethnically diverse and willing to trade square footage for quality of place and interesting settings. This is good news because the places these groups will want to live are the places where increases in density can be accommodated, in urban and infill locations, at high density along transit lines, and in multifamily buildings. Higher density may be helpful in another sense. 71% of Montgomery County households earn less than \$127,000 a year, and, thus, are unable to afford the average price of \$507,340 for a single-family house in the County. Apartments and condos may provide an affordable alternative to single-family housing.

Karl Moritz, Chief, Research and Technology Center, Department of Park and Planning

In-movers, new County residents within the past five years, are key indicators of demographic change. Many in-movers to Montgomery County are young, foreign born, and likely to rent in the face of high housing costs. They also tend to be well-educated and inclined to use transit. County growth forecasts are not written in stone. As policies change, the forecasts will change to match. 2003 proposed a lower growth rate, 2005 reiterated interest in managing growth. The invitee preference survey revealed that people like safe, pedestrian-friendly,

mixed-use places such as Bethesda, The Kentlands, Old Town Alexandria, Takoma Park, and Reston Town Center. In general, they most value natural areas and open space and good schools, followed by leisure activity/accessibility to parks and recreation, sense of community, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods connected to shopping and recreation, time/convenience of travel to frequent destinations, and cultural opportunities. In general, what they like least about Montgomery County is heavy traffic, unsafe roads, pedestrian unfriendliness, poor street lighting, distance to services and amenities, and an abundance of parking lots.

Ralph Bennett, Session Moderator and President, Bennett, Frank, McCarthy Architects

This presentation featured dozens of photos of exemplary built features throughout the county, some good and others bad. It was stated initially that the audience would not like much of what it saw. There were examples of abruptly ending sidewalks, monotonous tract housing, McMansions out-of-scale with neighboring houses, and high-speed roads disrupting neighborhoods. There were also examples of diverse housing, memorable spaces, and complete streets from King Farm, Bethesda, Chevy Chase, Silver Spring, and Rockville. Based on this qualitative assessment, Montgomery County needs more complete bicycle and pedestrian networks and greater variety of housing stock in both price and design. Montgomery County should also support small-scale retail and mixed-use development. Montgomery County should create memorable places that are quirky and interesting with genuine public space and amenities. “Change is good” should be the rallying cry.

Mike Watkins, Director of Town Planning, Duany, Plater-Zyberk & Company

There was a time when growth was welcome and municipalities competed for it. The model of growth changed throughout the 1940s and 1950s from walkable communities to suburban sprawl. There are still examples of smart growth from the Gulf Coast (as it rebuilds) and elsewhere. Montgomery County has yet to feel the same sense of urgency to develop right. Smart Codes offer an alternative to Montgomery County’s current land development codes. They are based on the Transect, which consists of slices of different human habitat on a rural to urban continuum. The six-zone transect system—natural, rural, suburban, general urban, urban center, urban core—is based on the type of development, not use. For example, a bed and breakfast and large hotel are the same land use, but are different development types that are suited to different transects.

Smart Codes address everything from building type to road cross-sections to light fixtures. They give people the chance to determine density, by selecting the percentage of each zone they would like in their community. The recoding process begins by protecting open and natural space. Places of beauty are created by coordinating buildings and streets, enforcing strict design codes, and teaching the construction trades about how to build quality and character into

new buildings. An example from Florida was used to illustrate how developers taught contractors and their workers to construct architectural details into buildings. On-site demonstrations showed contractors how to build quality into their structures with ease. This effort changed their construction methods for subsequent projects.

John Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning Division, Department of Planning

Our vision for future planning is guided by the development pattern outlined in the General Plan.

The I-270 Corridor is, and will continue to be, the primary area for future development. The Corridor Cities, strung along the I-270 Corridor, must continue to compete for employers by offering quality campus style development and desirable residential communities. Outer tier Metro Station areas, such as Shady Grove and Wheaton CBD, will provide a myriad of housing and redevelopment opportunities. Older neighborhood commercial centers at Kensington, Westbard, and Takoma/Langley still have room for redevelopment. Examples of the mixed-use that can occur at some older commercial centers are found in the newly redeveloped Clarksburg Town Center, and in the reshaped Olney Town Center, Damascus Town Center and the older commercial centers of downtown Silver Spring and Bethesda.

Major streets have ceased to function as places, generally they function only as conduits for traffic and opportunities for traffic-related uses. Boulevards and the commercial centers they connect need to be saved from sprawling commercial development and restored as desirable residential locations. MD 355 is a priority for detailed planning study.

Examples of great public spaces in the County are found in the Kentlands, Shady Grove, Discovery Communications Headquarters, Downtown Bethesda, and Downtown Silver Spring. Other public spaces need to be enhanced, since they are the setting for a community's social and public life. More action needs to be taken to create great public places in the future: master and sector plans need to reinvent the I-270 Corridor; commercial zoning regulations need be rewritten to encourage mixed uses and public amenities; and, the Zoning Ordinance should follow Smart Code principles and allow mixed-use, design-oriented places with public space. The Department of Public Works and Transportation has a large palate of road cross-sections that should be used to better fit road design to land use context.

We need to work together to achieve road design in the future. We need more urban design experts to help the community create beautiful places that meet community needs.

We need public participation tailored to meet the unique needs of the community. We need to focus our energy on follow-through and implementation of plan recommendations and the provision of public facilities at the local level.

Summary Q&A

During the question and answer period, residents voiced some of their concerns.

- There is concern about lack of meaningful citizen involvement. Citizens want a say in restricting growth and retaining development types that they like.
- There is concern that expectations for the quality and type of growth are unreasonable, given that most of the County is already built. Many citizens feel that, historically, growth has outstripped the ability to pay for needs such as pedestrian space and affordable housing.
- There is general concern over coordination of plans. Two questions illustrate this point. One resident asked if plans would be updated to facilitate coordinated comprehensive growth strategies, such as the enhancement of services before additional development is approved. Another audience member asked if receiving zones for TDR would be identified for all farmers interested in selling development rights.
- Other citizen concerns include: how will development be coordinated with schools; why is heavy industry near Metro; is it practical to expect to accommodate growth through redevelopment; why should condo owners subsidize fees for low income residents; how can the county keep urban areas green, avoid other negatives of urbanization; and when will Master and Sector Plans be updated to facilitate long-range comprehensive planning strategies.

II. Community Discussion, May 17, 2006

Topic: Key Elements of Planning for the 21st Century

The second Community Discussion provided an opportunity to explore challenges and choices associated with future growth, change, and community needs. Issues discussed included: What choices can we reasonably make regarding future growth? How will we accommodate, plan, and manage future growth? What has to happen to more fully engage the community in guiding future planning?

Participants examined how emerging demographics, changing community needs, and the economic reality of the private market are being successfully integrated into community planning and project development in Montgomery County and throughout the country.

To set the tone and facilitate the discussion, participants were presented with three key questions dealing with planning priorities in the future

Question 1: Where should future growth be concentrated?

- a. Sections of existing transit served neighborhoods
- b. Existing transit served low-rise commercial areas
- c. Existing low-rise commercial areas not served by transit
- d. Other areas

Question 2: What policies and development controls need to be developed or changed to assure that new development will add to the quality of life in existing communities?

Question 3: What innovative ideas should be incorporated into a planning framework for the future?

A. Recap

The second Community Discussion started where the May 3 discussion ended, with the reality that the era of greenfield development in Montgomery County is coming to an end, and most new development will come in the form of infill development, likely at relatively high densities and close to transit lines.

Growth is inevitable in Montgomery County. The County is projected to be the second fastest growing in the region, a surprise, given the amount of land already developed or under conservation easement. Still, the County can exercise some control over the amount, pace, nature, and location of future growth. In particular, due to demographic and other changes, and increasing demand for dense housing, the County can work towards concentrating growth in urban centers that are transit-served, thereby safeguarding the integrity of existing neighborhoods and the Agricultural Reserve.

Montgomery County is known nationwide as a leader in growth management. It was one of the first to implement floating zones and an Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) that allows more congestion in urban centers. Its Wedges and Corridors Plan was groundbreaking, and has been maintained to a remarkable degree. Its Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program is a model for the rest of the nation; through TDRs and PDRs (purchase of development rights), the County has preserved more farmland and open space on its own than any other county in the United States. Yet, Montgomery County still lacks the full set of tools required to “smartly” manage growth.

The County has almost entirely single use (Euclidean) zoning districts. It could follow the lead of other progressive jurisdictions and make mixed-use districts the rule, single-use the exception. The County has very little in its codes to promote high quality design; it could improve the appearance and walkability of development through more specific design guidelines and form-based codes. Impact fees could be structured to encourage development in designated centers and discourage development in other areas, as with the County’s existing APFO.

The County has no requirements related to street connectivity or block length; it could better accommodate all modes by adopting such requirements, as progressive jurisdictions elsewhere have. The County should explore additional innovative strategies to provide more affordable housing, and greater variety in housing stock. The County has very limited expertise in green building design, and few green buildings within its boundaries; it could develop new staff expertise in this area and incentivize green building.

Montgomery County has made an effort to involve its citizens in planning and zoning. Nonetheless, there seems to be general agreement among staff, citizens, and local officials that the community is not as fully engaged in plan making and implementation processes as they should be. The County needs to better educate the community about the planning and zoning process and urge the broadest spectrum of citizens to get involved. The County needs to develop or hire expertise in the area of conflict resolution. The County needs to master plan smaller areas so individual citizens can have more say, and community needs can be met in a more expedited plan-making process. The County needs to concentrate on identifying shared goals among the public, political leaders, and private investors.

The following issues of concern to residents emerged from the Q&A:

- How can citizens get involved and ensure planners really listen?
- Can the County keep congestion down while density is going up?
- Who will champion affordable housing?
- How will we pay for infrastructure to accommodate growth?
- How can the County regulate development without being overly restrictive?

B. Summary of Presentations

Derick Berlage, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board

The face of growth and development in Montgomery County is shifting toward redevelopment and infill development and the development industry is evolving toward more mixed-use developments, reflecting the market. We are challenged to direct development in what are now mature communities. The way we work with the public is changing. Planners need to direct their expertise in the direction of Smart Growth as we become a mature community.

Faroll Hamer, Acting Director, Department of Planning

The Montgomery County General Plan is clear in some respects but vague in others. While it is clear in its objectives of directing growth to the Urban Ring and I-270 Corridor while preserving agricultural areas, it does not identify specific growth centers, and lacks implementation approaches and tools needed for guiding growth into specific areas and away from others. Specific actions that should be taken in the future to meet the challenge of redevelopment and infill planning include:

- More aggressive outreach to a broader spectrum of citizens
- More focused and expedited master plans
- Adequate zoning to encourage mixed-use
- Stricter requirements for phasing of public facilities
- More requirements on developers to provide affordable housing, parks, and open space.

Karl Moritz, Chief, Research and Technology Center, Department of Park & Planning

The County sets the pattern of growth through its General Plan. The APFO and staging amendments set the pace of growth. Master plans limit the amount of housing, jobs, and therefore growth within subareas. The County forecasts growth itself, and the Council of Governments (COG) Cooperative Forecasting Process helps ensure regional consistency among growth forecasts. A challenge to all of the above is that developers now have the propensity to replace what is existing with something new and more intense, not just build in greenfields.

The current growth forecast is for 94,000 houses, 213,800 people and 170,000 jobs by 2030. Montgomery County is forecast to be second in household growth and third in job growth within the metropolitan region. There are currently 1.4 jobs per household and the forecast is for 1.5 to 1.6 jobs per household by 2030. This suggests the need 16,000 additional households for jobs-housing balance.

A Smart Growth Audit is proposed to evaluate the amount, pace, and location of future growth.

John Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning Division, Department of Planning

In order to achieve the quality communities envisioned in County plans and highlighted in the Invitee Survey, the County needs to understand what makes people want to live in Montgomery County. Perhaps the outer rings of Metro Station areas represent the best opportunity to create communities in the future. Mature commercial centers provide an opportunity for mixed-use development. There is more than enough capacity for growth under current zoning, particularly for nonresidential development. Indeed, an unrealistically high 100 million square feet of nonresidential development could be added through redevelopment and infill.

Montgomery County should take the following actions:

- Design corridors for a variety of transportation modes (car, transit, bicycle, pedestrian).
- Improve sidewalks along avenues and design boulevards with green spaces and public art.
- Improve infrastructure to keep pace with new development.
- Emphasize high quality design.

National Experts

Chris Nelson (Moderator), Professor and Director of the Urban Affairs and Planning Program, Virginia Tech

The long-used planning templates came out of the 1960's and were family-driven, but now single-person households are on the rise and have different needs. In fact, 90% of net population change between the year 2000 and 2030 will be attributable to families without children, and 35% will be attributable just to single-person households. The other major demographic change is that baby boomers are aging and living longer and have changing housing needs. The County is at a watershed in terms of preferred housing and neighborhood types.

Nowadays, people tend to want neighborhoods reflective of an urban environment, e.g., with transit access. They favor higher density attached dwellings and will trade larger yards for urban amenities. An important market signal is that the value of land accelerates up to a lot size of roughly 7,000 square feet then levels off. Demand for apartments, attached and small lot detached housing will increase, and as it does, demand for large lots will decline from 35% to 10% by 2030. The County is already oversupplied with large lots through the year 2030.

A forecast of 126,000 net housing units plus 62,000 replacement units (to compensate for loss of existing home stock) results in 186,000 new units required by the year 2030 to house the projected population. According to the U.S. Census, the average lifespan of a typical home is around 150 years, making housing the most durable land use. On the other hand, the typical retail use, the land use with the shortest life span, changes in a little more than a decade, and turnover is particularly fast for big box retail. Herein lies a prime redevelopment opportunity to turn vacant retail into housing. Single ownership makes it even easier for redevelopment, as do prime locations positioned conveniently to absorb a high share of future growth. Obsolete warehouses are also a prime opportunity for infill development.

Affordable housing has to be at the front and center of planning. The County can work toward meeting affordable housing needs through a combination of the following:

- Continued commitment to inclusionary zoning
- Accessory dwelling units by right
- No minimum house and lot sizes, if building codes are met
- Technological innovations with low cost materials
- Continued property tax abatement on qualifying units

In response, members of the audience expressed the need for:

- Adequate funding for infrastructure and open space
- Greater coordination with bordering jurisdictions
- Expedited updates of master plans
- More affordable housing

Tony Downs, Senior Fellow, Metropolitan Policy, Brookings Institution

The County's Agricultural Reserve represents a contradiction in planning philosophy. The Reserve is not needed for food supply, as there is plenty of food available from elsewhere. Instead, it increases the price of land, contributes to lack of affordable housing, and forces growth to leapfrog to rural areas outside the county. We should be managing growth on a regional scale, not within each county in isolation. Montgomery County needs to work toward providing a full range of housing opportunities as the cost of housing escalates and the number of jobs outpaces the number of housing units. The Agricultural Reserve could become a source of land for new housing.

Planning ought to be metropolitan-wide, but the presence of two states and the District of Columbia makes this difficult. While many localities plan incrementally, Montgomery County has a detailed master plan that can be seen as overly controlling. As a consequence, the price of land and housing has risen faster in Montgomery County than elsewhere in the region, traffic congestion has worsened, and sprawl has been exacerbated.

No feasible strategies exist for reducing existing housing prices from the current average price of over \$600,000. A possible but unrealistic solution would be to flood the market with enough new housing to lower prices, but current homeowners would be strongly opposed to that strategy. Instead, the County ought to take small steps and use inclusionary zoning more intensely. Although inclusionary zoning is fundamentally unfair to developers and builders, it can produce affordable units. Other tactics worth considering are:

- Establish a statewide Housing Trust Fund
- Allow accessory housing
- Set up a donation tax credit, particularly for key developable centers and corridors
- Require businesses to provide employee housing through linkage requirements

Thomas Lavash, Vice President, Economic Research Associates

A key to good growth lies in realizing shared goals. The communities' desire for certain amenities dovetails with developers' drive for a competitive advantage in the marketplace. There seems to be a "consensus vision" of the ideal community as a mixed-use urban center surrounded by green residential neighborhoods with pedestrian connections to the center.

The "consensus vision" of the ideal community presents the following challenges to developers:

- Is more difficult to finance
- Carries greater financial risk and higher cost
- Takes longer to get a return on the investment
- Is subject to code enforcement issues

Montgomery County should explore successful models of mixed-use infill development from both the community and developers point of view:

1. Market Common in Arlington is an urban lifestyle village sitting on a former Sears parking lot. This project received no public subsidy and was 100% pre-leased before it opened. The project has premium rents and exceptional sales performance. It provides a good pedestrian environment and good mix of first-time renters and empty-nesters.
2. Paseo Colorado in Pasadena, California is a New Urbanist open-air village. It is on the site of an enclosed mall that failed. It involved significant public outreach that led to a unanimous approval by government. By reinstating a street grid and a housing mix, the project has created a lively environment for dining and other activities.

Infill will not be as easy in Montgomery County though, and redeveloping 106 existing community centers is going to be very challenging.

Reid Ewing, Research Professor, National Center for Smart Growth, University of Maryland, College Park

Montgomery County is widely recognized as a national leader in growth management. One could only wish that neighboring counties were engaged in this kind of soul searching. While Montgomery County will want to fine-tune its land development regulations, it should largely stay the course. The prior suggestion that the Agricultural Reserve be developed runs counter to principles of Smart Growth, to which we all subscribe, and would actually promote sprawl. Moreover, with only 10,000 acres in the Reserve not already under conservation easement, opening the Reserve to development would meet the County's housing demand for less than five years. It is equivalent to opening the Artic Refuge to oil drilling in order to meet the nation's demand for petroleum, a very short-term solution.

The County needs to recognize that the next twenty years of growth will look almost nothing like the last 20 years. Green developments driven by energy and environmental concerns are coming. There is a demand for more walkable places. Simply put, walkability can be a central organizing principle for future development. Properly designed, communities will generate 20% or more walking trips. This has already been accomplished in Downtown Bethesda and highlighted communities outside the region by means of a fine-grained mix of land uses, high densities, street connectivity, and pedestrian-friendly design. Counting transit trips, the potential exists for almost half of all trips to be non-auto. Our aging Baby Boom population should not have to drive everywhere, but instead, should have the option of aging in place in walkable communities.

The County can work toward the goal of walkability (plus sustainability and transit friendliness) by:

- Raising allowable densities
- Replacing single-use with mixed-use zoning

- Waiving the level of service standard (LOS) for roads in centers where growth is desired
- Adopting impact fees tied to vehicle miles traveled (VMT)
- Adopting street connectivity and block length standards
- Adopting context-sensitive street design standards

C. Local Leaders Response

Dan Wilhelm, President, Montgomery County Civic Association

The participants' feedback indicates that we need to focus our attention on walkability, transit, and intersection/interchange improvements and not on widening roadways.

Bryant Foulger, Principal and Vice President, Foulger Pratt

We should change our attitude and approach away from “managing the problem” of growth, and think about how we can take advantage of inevitable growth to improve our communities. It is time for less conversation and more action.

Frankie Blackburn, Executive Director, Impact Silver Spring

Let us not forget about affordable housing. In our daily lives, we all depend on individuals who need affordable housing. We have tools in the private sector but we need help from public and non-profit groups as well. We need preservation of existing housing, increased density along corridors, and a fully-funded public housing initiative fund.

Pamela Lindstrom, Civic Activist & Smart Growth Advocate

Based on the Invitee Survey, our ideal shared vision is for vital mixed-use urban centers with diverse buildings and pedestrian orientation, surrounded by green residential neighborhoods with easy access on foot to these centers. We want our urban centers to look green, even if only via street trees, parks, and stream valleys.

Richard Parsons, President, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce

The development community and civic associations must set aside old differences from earlier land use debates, build a consensus behind a vision for the County, and all contribute towards achieving that vision. The vision needs to include stability and vibrancy in the local economy. At the same time we need to bear in mind the reality that the jobs/housing provision is regional, and traffic congestion is not going to go away when density and transit usage increase.

Paul Mahon, Executive Vice President, United Therapeutics

Companies that want to grow in place are an important resource for shaping future growth. When these companies pursue infill development, they face the challenge of dealing with policy and planning mandates presented by a myriad of government agencies. Planning, regulatory, and permitting processes should be

sensitive to the needs of companies choosing to remain in Montgomery County and grow “in place.”

D. Concluding Remarks

Roger Lewis, Architect, Planner, Educator, Washington Post Columnist

Perhaps the focus of this Community Discussion has been shortsighted --- we are being too timid and incremental in our planning, given the current rate of growth. The County needs to break out of the General Plan nomenclature, and talk about a new approach to planning for sustainable and livable communities and neighborhoods in the future. Zoning is a crude tool; form-based design codes are better at producing quality development. Political leaders are short-term thinkers by nature - that is where the problem lies.

A recurring theme is the notion that Montgomery County is not isolated; it is part of the Capitol Region and part of our planet Earth. The County may have little control over development by the year 2050 or 2060 because of larger issues. Increased CO₂ emissions may result in our walking and biking by necessity. While the County need not be self-sustaining, the Agricultural Reserve serves a greater purpose as a large contiguous open space for numerous species, for CO₂ absorption and, if we eventually do have to rely on our own farmland, for food. A final thought: “Make no small plans,” to quote Daniel Burnham.

Summary Q&A

Some of the most thought-provoking questions asked in the Q&A were:

- Can we get some cars off the main roads in exchange for the density?
- Who will champion affordable housing?
- In places where infrastructure is already behind and infill development will be taking place, how are we going to catch up and pay for infrastructure?
- How do we get more green space down county?
- What is the appropriate level of regulation necessary to get the development desired?

Major feedback and suggestions included:

- The county could allow developers to develop county-owned land.
- The annual growth policy needs improvement.
- The quality of transit service, more than simply its existence, determines whether it attracts people.
- Planning efforts ought to focus on places where regulatory incentives or disincentives are needed.