

# INTRODUCTION

This Master Plan amends the General Plan...on Wedges and Corridors. This Master Plan addresses the need to:

- Assess the impact of construction since the 1982 Damascus Master Plan was completed.
- Provide recommendations to revitalize the Town Center as a compact mixed-use center of locally oriented commercial activity and additional housing opportunities.
- Build a strong transportation network by layering pedestrian access, bicycle connections, and regional trails.
- Add moderate additional residential opportunities on the perimeter of the Town Center, primarily through the creation of additional TDR receiving sites.
- Reflect environmental protections in the Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River Watershed and protect other environmentally sensitive areas.

## COMMUNITY VISION

Damascus is a small town surrounded by the agricultural and rural open spaces of the County's Agricultural Reserve. It is a town that offers community oriented commercial uses, a variety of housing types, a mix of uses in the Town Center, and a Town Center surrounded by single-family residential neighborhoods. The protected area of agricultural and rural open spaces buffers Damascus from the more intense growth patterns in adjoining master plan areas and adjoining counties. The Plan provides a moderate amount of planned growth in the area, oriented primarily in and adjoining the Town Center. The Master Plan establishes the following goals for the Damascus community:

- Establish a Town Center identifiable as the community's heart by creating a moderate intensity mix of uses in the Town Center, emphasizing design and scale over separation of uses, and increasing housing opportunities.
- Fulfill the vision of Damascus as a community with a mixed-use center, connected with its residential neighborhoods, and surrounded by rural open space.
- Create livable neighborhoods clustered near the Town Center, cluster development to provide a stronger community edge, use transferable development rights (TDRs) to provide additional growth potential, and provide a range of housing types and lot sizes within neighborhoods.
- Provide a variety of housing options including affordable housing and housing opportunities for seniors suitable to the small town character of Damascus.

- Provide greater connectivity within, to, and around the town by increasing pedestrian and bicycling connections to the Town Center and pedestrian and bicycling opportunities along all major roadways and at other appropriate locations, emphasizing multi-use aspects of all roadways in planning for safety and access, and evaluating the necessity for alternate routing for through commuter traffic.
- Improve the efficiency of the roadway network, provide road improvements, expand the pedestrian and bicycle path networks, and improve the potential for intercepting commuters through expanded transit options.
- Protect and enhance the local and surrounding environment by clustering new development to achieve greater overall environmental protection, protecting stream valleys, steep slopes and forest resources, and reducing land use density in the Patuxent Watershed beyond immediate proximity to the Town Center to meet the goals of the Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River Watershed.
- Support agriculture and rural open space, continue the use of the Rural Density Transfer Zone, create zoning appropriate for rural crossroad communities, and support agricultural uses on rural land.
- Maintain the quality and integrity of the outstanding natural systems within the Damascus Master Plan area, enhance water quality in the Patuxent River Watershed, and mitigate the impacts of future development.
- Provide a network of local and countywide parks that offer recreational activities, support an interconnected trail system, protect important natural features, and create attractive settings for cultural and historic resources. Provide sufficient public facilities to support the neighborhoods of Damascus, and linkages to access local facilities and institutions safely and efficiently.
- Protect the important historic and archeological resources in the area.

## PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

A primary goal of this Master Plan is to enhance the identity of central Damascus as the heart of the community. Major recommendations of this Plan include:

### Land Use and Zoning

This Plan supports a moderate level of residential growth, strengthening the potential for multifamily residential and mixed-use development in the Town Center. Mixed-use and residential developments are encouraged in the Town Center, and cluster development is preferred in the Transition Areas immediately beyond the Town Center. In addition, this Plan supports the continuing viability of major institutional uses, such as churches and schools that are an intrinsic part of the character of Damascus.



- **Town Center** – Mixed-use zoning is recommended. The zoning will emphasize proportion, design, and an architectural context of structures rather than separation of uses. Commercial uses concentrated along Main Street and at major downtown intersections will create opportunities for residential development that will support retail and service businesses in the core. Added residential densities are achieved mainly through the use of transferable development rights. Guidelines for future development and redevelopment are designed to create an identity for Main Street that will improve mobility and connectivity, and will enhance Community Open Space.



- **Transition Areas** – Cluster designs are encouraged on properties immediately accessible to the Town Center. These properties are suitable for additional growth and will establish a strong edge between the town and rural areas beyond. Most growth potential is tied to receiving areas for transferable development rights. The Plan recommends including the potential to transfer development from the rural area to the Rural Neighborhood Cluster (RNC) Zone.



- **Rural Area** – The Plan supports the existing extent of the Rural Density Transfer (RDT) Zone with adjustments for rural village centers. Emerging agricultural methods and practices, and agriculturally related businesses are endorsed as the most efficient, effective, and economical means to maintain a viable agricultural economy and protect the Agricultural Reserve. The Plan recommends the Rural Village Center Overlay Zone for three rural villages. This zone is designed to protect and maintain their existing scale of development through appropriate types of uses and limited levels of intensity. Guidelines are provided for development in the RDT Zone for protection of rural vistas and to guide subdivision design.

## **Public Sewer Service**

For community design and environmental protection goals, this Plan recommends community sewer service for designated properties, including all of the RNC/TDR Zone properties if they are developed using the cluster method. A comprehensive study of designated neighborhoods for alternative ways to address failing septic systems is also recommended.

## **Housing**

To support a range of housing options, this Plan recommends providing moderate-density development within the Town Center, including senior housing opportunities. Beyond the Town Center, the small town character of Damascus will be maintained through limited additional density, and the use of small-lot clustered development that will create a distinct edge between urban and rural areas.

## **Transportation**

To improve pedestrian and bicycle access, as well as vehicle movement, this Plan recommends establishing a multi-functional transportation network through methods that include: use of context-based street design techniques, retaining the existing two-lane road network outside the Town Center, creating a trigger to evaluate the need for a bypass after the completion of Woodfield Road Extended, augmenting pedestrian and bikeway access, and increasing transit options.



## **Environment**

To support goals for protection of environmental resources, this Plan recommends protecting existing forest corridors by encouraging reforestation of stream valleys and protecting high priority forest stands. Additional goals support and encourage development techniques that will minimize forest fragmentation, connect existing forest stands, and promote the use of forest banking.



## **Parks, Trails and Open Space**

The Park system within this Planning Area will be augmented by developing or improving existing facilities at: Seneca Springs Local Park, Woodfield Local Park, Damascus Recreational Park, and completing the Magruder Branch Stream Valley Park Trail to a terminus in the Town Center. Park acquisition is recommended for properties within the Little Bennett Creek Watershed Headwaters and the stream valley of the Western Tributary of Seneca Creek. The Countywide Park Trails Plan will be amended to add an east-west natural surface trail corridor to link the Seneca Trail to the west to the Little Bennett Trail system, along Valley Park Drive with access to Magruder Branch Trail, and special treatment at the Ridge Road intersection to ensure safety. Additionally, specific properties are recommended for Legacy Open Space protection as natural resource sites through parkland acquisition (in the Little Bennett watershed) or easements (in the Bennett Creek Headwaters and Upper Patuxent River Forest Area).

## DESCRIPTION OF MASTER PLAN AREA

### Changes to the Planning Area Boundaries

The boundaries of the Damascus Master Plan differ from the Plan boundaries of the 1982 Master Plan and the 1993 Amendment. Certain areas west of Woodfield Road have been deleted from the Master Plan area, and certain areas east of Woodfield Road have been added to the Master Plan area. The Master Plan boundaries now duplicate the boundaries of traffic zones. Portions of Planning Areas #10 and #14 were removed from the Master Plan area. These locations are primarily in the Rural Density Transfer Zone, and will remain subject to the recommendations of the 1982 Damascus Master Plan.

### Regional, County, and Planning Area Context

Damascus anchors the northwest tip of Montgomery County. It is surrounded by agricultural and rural open space. The town is situated on high ground that divides four watersheds. Major roads are built on the ridgelines.

Within Montgomery County, Damascus adjoins the Clarksburg, Olney, and the Agricultural and Rural Open Space Master Plan areas. Damascus has much lower development potential than Clarksburg or Olney due to limited sewer access and its location in the heart of the Agricultural Reserve removed from major job centers and transit opportunities. Beyond Montgomery County, the Master Plan area abuts Frederick, Howard, and Carroll counties. Damascus serves as a market hub for this rural area, providing service and specialty retail for its residents that complement and supplement the larger commercial areas in Clarksburg to the south and Mt. Airy to the north.

Damascus provides a unique contrast to the extensive development in nearby Clarksburg and adjoining counties. Maintaining this unique difference is a paramount goal of this Master Plan. Extensive suburban growth in the Mt. Airy area and job growth along the I-270 Corridor contribute extensively to commuter traffic congestion in Damascus. Additional growth beyond Montgomery County is anticipated, and will increase through traffic in Damascus, a primary conduit for commuters to jobs in Montgomery County and the District of Columbia.

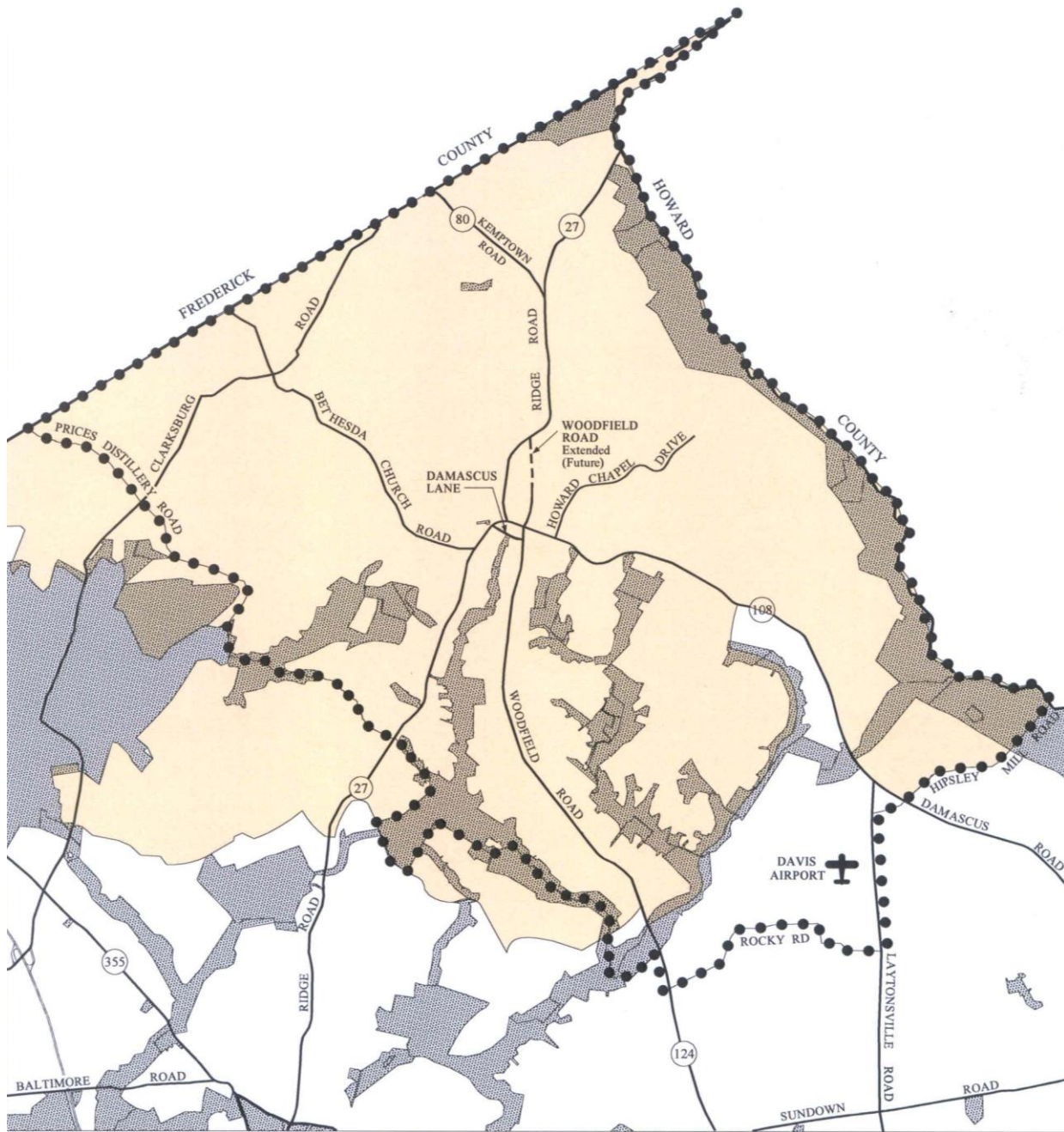
### Planning in Adjoining Counties

Because the Damascus Master Plan area is directly impacted by growth in three adjoining counties, this Plan explored current master plans in those counties.

- **Frederick County** – The Urbana Region of Frederick County abuts the western County line and the Master Plan boundary. The population in this area is expected to significantly increase by 2010. In 2002, Frederick County began a new master plan process for the region. The draft plan recommends generally rural neighborhoods, conservation areas, and agricultural areas adjacent to the Damascus Master Plan area.
- **Howard County** – The portion of Howard County that lies northeast of the Master Plan area is planned for low-density residential development.
- **Carroll County** – The northern tip of the Damascus Master Plan area adjoins the Carroll County border. This area is designated as a Community Planning Area in the Carroll County Master Plan - one of five where the majority of residential, commercial and industrial development should be concentrated. A significant amount of new residential growth is anticipated. Mt. Airy provides substantial commercial opportunities in this area.



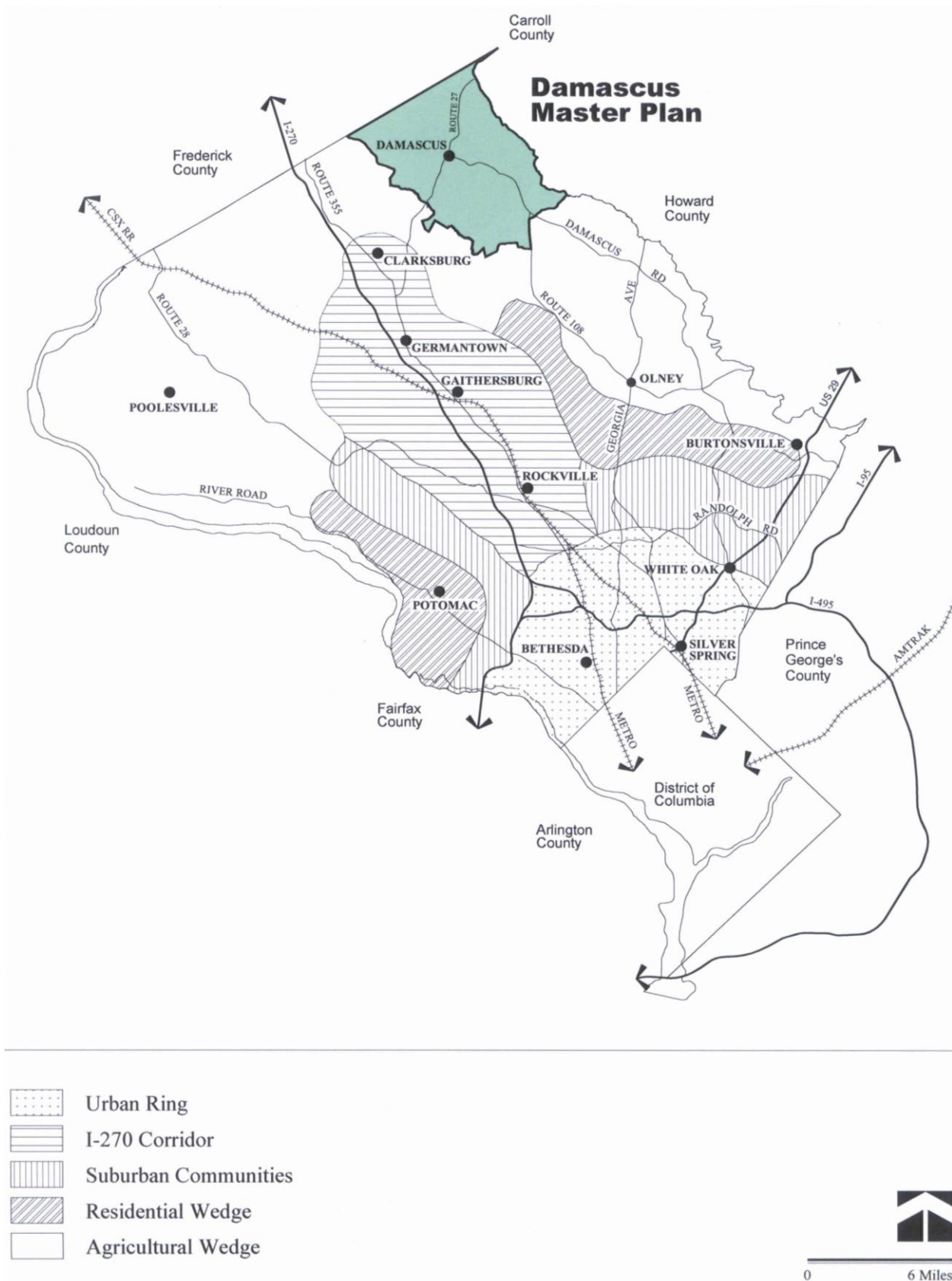
## Previous and Current Master Plan Boundaries



- Current Master Plan Area Boundary
- Previous Master Plan Area Boundary
- Existing and Proposed Parkland



## Wedges and Corridors



## MASTER PLAN FRAMEWORK

### Existing Land Use

- **Town Center** - The Town Center of Damascus contains commercial and light industrial uses along Main Street and in two small shopping centers along main entry roads and along Main Street. Some multifamily housing is also located in the Town Center.
- **Transition Areas** - Adjoining the Town Center land use is primarily residential and institutional along the major highway corridors (Ridge Road and Woodfield Road), and within the Magruder Branch Valley. This pattern reflects historic development patterns and the availability of public water and sewer. Beyond the core, development becomes less intense and older residential areas at one and two-acre densities are interspersed with open land and some agricultural uses.
- **Rural Areas** - Open space and agricultural uses predominate in the Rural areas, interspersed with some older subdivisions on smaller lots and a few older villages including Lewisdale, Browningsville, Purdum, and Etchison.

### Demographic Characteristics Summary

While the County census tracts do not fully match the Damascus Master Plan area, an evaluation of the generally proximate tracts provides a portrait of the Damascus area. The 2000 Census indicated that approximately 16,639 persons reside in the Damascus Master Plan area. Population growth was modest between 1990-2000, increasing approximately four percent compared to the County growth of 15.4 percent.

Damascus is more stable than the County in that 43.1 percent of its residents have lived at their current address for more than 10 years, compared to 34.5 percent for the County residents overall. The predominant housing type is single-family detached, and the number of persons per household (3.04) is larger than the County overall (2.66). This reflects the larger number of children in Damascus households.

Damascus residents are younger than the County overall, with a median age of 35.1, compared to 36.8 countywide. Residents younger than 19 years old comprise over one-third of the population, and the area has a relatively small 6.3 percent of seniors 65 years or older, compared to 11.2 percent countywide. Ethnically, Damascus is more homogenous than the County. Few residents are foreign born; most residents (90.7 percent) identify themselves as European-American, compared to 64.8 percent Countywide. Less than 10 percent of Damascus residents identify themselves as members of a racial minority, compared to over one-third of the County (35.2 percent).

Income levels in Damascus are somewhat lower than the County - a median household income of \$60,812 for Damascus and \$71,551 for the County. Overall, there is a stronger percentage of middle-income ranges, and lower percentages of very high and very low-incomes. The area gained 666 persons and 223 dwellings since the 1990 Census, with the more rural areas showing small losses in population and dwellings, and the central areas showing the largest gains. The areas with the largest growth include the central Magruder Branch Valley and the areas along Hawkins Creamery Road where there has been significant residential development over the decade.



### **Plans and Policies Affecting the Master Plan Area**

The County and State plans and policies that influenced the recommendations of this Plan include:

- 1982 – The *Damascus Master Plan* confirmed the vision of Damascus as a town of low to moderate density residential neighborhoods surrounded by the Agricultural Reserve.
- 1992 – The *Maryland Planning Act* confirmed the need to limit housing growth in rural areas and reinforce the rural town centers.
- 1993 – The *Montgomery County General Plan Refinement* confirmed the rural community vision for Damascus. The General Plan...on Wedges and Corridors supports rural zoning to provide greenbelts that visually separate rural towns from the corridor cities.
- 1993 – The *Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River Watershed* increased environmental protection for the tributaries of the Patuxent River.
- 1993 – The *Damascus Master Plan Amendment* considered alternative through-traffic access around central Damascus.
- 1997 – *The Maryland Smart Growth Act* endorsed limiting housing growth in rural areas.
- 2002 – The Montgomery County *Transportation Policy Report* recommended locating the majority of new development in the County near transit stations or the I-270 Corridor, reducing future development in rural areas of the County.
- 2003 – The Montgomery County Council *Action Plan for Affordable Housing* encouraged using a range of housing types to meet the diverse needs for housing in the County.