

LAND USE PLAN

GOAL: Fulfill the vision of Damascus as a community with a mixed-use center, connected with its residential neighborhoods, and surrounded by rural open space.

INTRODUCTION

Land use in Damascus is characterized by a core of greatest density in the commercial center surrounded by progressively lower density residential areas and rural land beyond. The physical focus of Damascus is its elevated location at the headwaters of four major watersheds. This geographic reality has strongly influenced the development patterns for this community.

Land Use Concept

The recommendations in this Plan maintain and strengthen existing land use patterns, enhancing their ability to evolve within the framework of the town vision as an attractive small town with an identifiable core and livable neighborhoods, surrounded by agricultural and rural open space. As noted in the 1993 Refinement to the Montgomery County General Plan:

It is essential that the small-town appearance and feel of the rural centers be maintained. Reinforcing historic elements of rural centers, confining growth in the centers, and exercising opportunities to cluster development, when appropriate, are initiatives that will help further define the Agricultural Wedge.

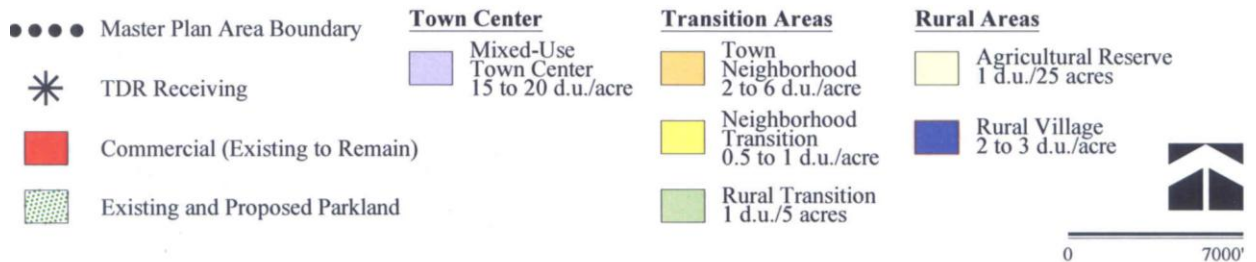
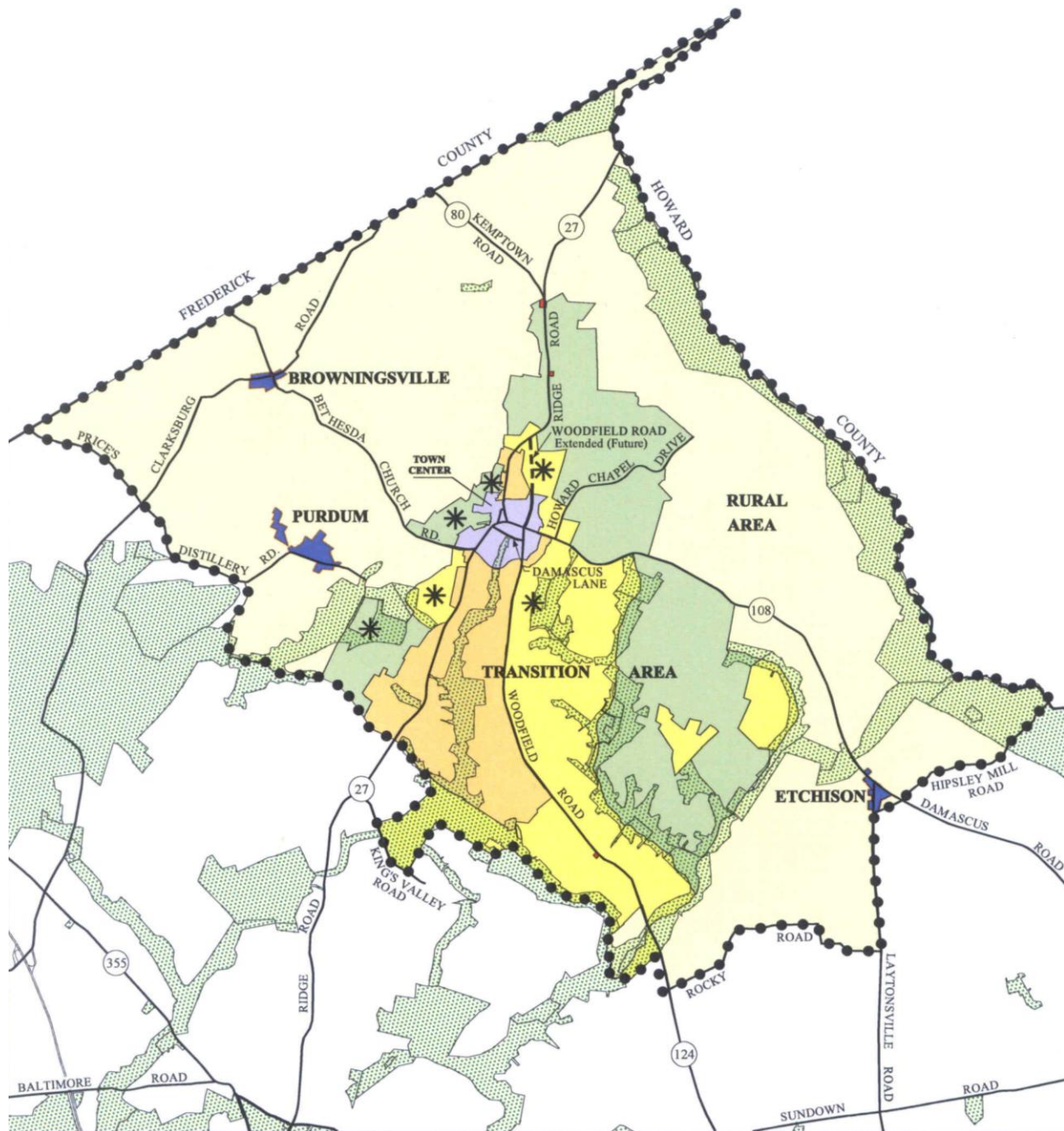
Other major land use issues include connectivity, expanding local retail and residential opportunities within and near the Town Center, enabling limited growth beyond the Town Center, and protecting the surrounding rural areas. Major goals of the Plan include:

- **Town Center** – Provide opportunities for mixed-use development that enhances the ability to support more locally based retail and to provide a greater variety of housing opportunities.
- **Transition Areas** – Encourage the use of clustering, provide a moderate increase in housing through the use of transfer of development rights, and protect the Patuxent River watershed beyond the vicinity of the Town Center. Topography and other environmental constraints, the long distance to jobs, and the limited transit opportunities make Damascus inappropriate for extensive additional development.
- **Rural Areas** – Protect existing rural crossroad villages, provide guidance for subdivision design in the Rural Density Transfer Zone, provide guideline for special exceptions that could impact rural vistas, and support the evolution toward sustainable agricultural practices.

Special Exception Guideline for Rural Vista Protection

To ensure careful consideration of the long rural vistas that are a unique aspect of this community, this Plan strongly encourages the protection of the rural vistas that are intrinsic to the character of the Damascus vicinity. This is a town set on a hill, and the long vistas outside the Town Center provide the most distinctive visual element for the community. Land uses that impede those vistas should be discouraged. Because of the uniqueness of the rural areas surrounding Damascus that are at the highest elevations in the County, this Plan recommends language in the Implementation Chapter to guide review of special exception uses proposed in the Transition and Rural Areas.

Proposed Land Use and Density



TOWN CENTER

The Damascus Town Center reflects the town patterns and design elements of traditional Maryland small towns. The “center of town” contains a variety of uses that primarily serve the residents of the community. While land uses in the center are predominantly commercial, a balanced mix of uses will create a more sustainable heart for the community.

Community Vision

The vision for the Damascus Town Center reflects a desire to strengthen the town’s sense of place as a true town core, not allowing further diffused suburban patterns. It reflects a desire for a sustainable future of compact development patterns and protection of the surrounding rural environment. It calls for renewing the town’s former retail vitality, and addressing quality of life issues for current and future residents. The community vision for the Town Center follows:

The community vision for the Damascus Town Center is a viable, walkable, human-scaled town easily identifiable as the heart of the surrounding community. The Town Center should reflect the compact urban forms of traditional Maryland rural towns and provide a vibrant quality of life for its residents. The Town Center should respect the legacy of the past and its agrarian context, while maintaining a framework for the market needs of future generations and anchoring the northern borders of Montgomery County.

Framework

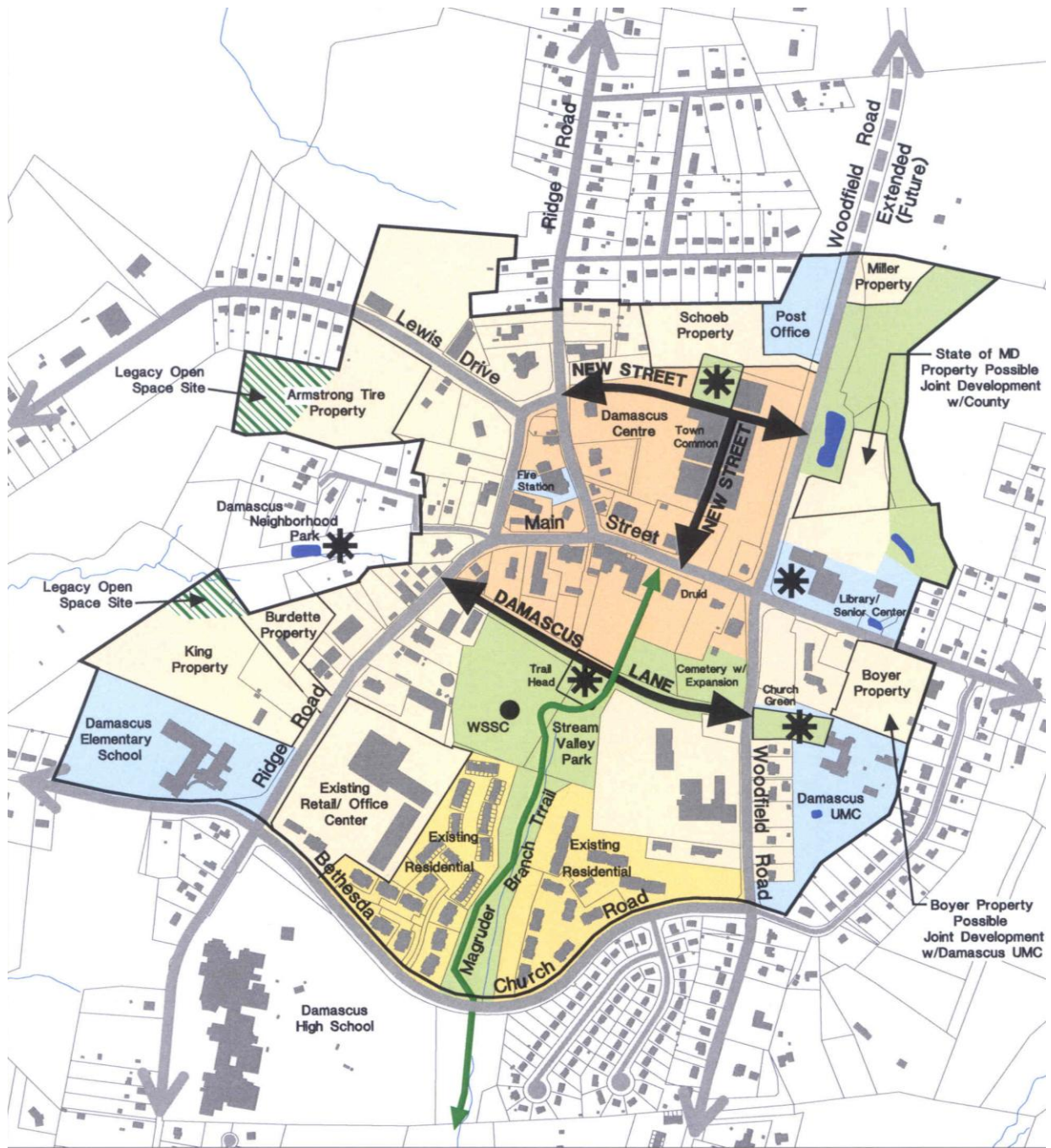
This Plan recommends concentrated densities within the Town Center, improved mobility, mixed-use development, and additional green space. These tools allow the town to evolve and adjust to changing market realities, while retaining and enhancing its rural town character. Commercial uses are concentrated within the historic core and near Main Street, while allowing a broad range of appropriate commercial, office, residential and light industrial uses. The Plan also creates additional opportunities for residential development that will support increased retail and service businesses in the core.

This framework brings the community closer to its legacy and history, as healthy small towns have always had mixed-use centers. The development regulations proposed in this Plan focus on appropriate standards for scale, intensity, and design rather than separation of uses. The proposed density of development in the core and the immediate transition areas reflect the moderate intensity and scale of traditional towns in Maryland. Appropriately compact density in a town core will create vitality. Pedestrian activity is enhanced by the design of the streets, buildings and public spaces. The town-scale envisioned for Damascus will increase opportunities for human interaction at community gathering places.

Another major element of the framework for the Damascus Town Center is to increase the interconnectivity of vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle access. This Plan recommends changes that will result in a town that is more easily and safely accessed by all, and a street network that allows more opportunities for residents to access retail areas. This Plan also recommends creating new public parks and privately maintained open spaces within the Town Center that will serve as community gathering places and as thresholds for access to the surrounding neighborhoods, parks, and rural areas.

The land use recommendations for the Town Center create a mixed-use core supporting residential densities of 15 to 20 dwelling units per acre and commercial densities with a floor area ratio of 0.5 to 1.0.

Town Center Framework



- Mixed- Use (Non- Residential Emphasis)
- Mixed- Use (Residential Emphasis)
- Existing Residential
- Civic/ Institutional
- Park Land or Other Open Space
- Formal Open Space

- Potential Legacy Open Space
- Street Network
- Proposed Framework Streets
- Proposed Hiker/ Biker Trail
- Existing Buildings

0 700'

Land Use Recommendations

This Plan embraces core concepts for land use in the Town Center that emphasize its centrality and includes enhancing the identity of the Town Center and the Damascus Main Street, expanding and enhancing community mobility and connectivity, providing open spaces, and establishing guidelines for development or redevelopment in the Town Center. The recommendations include:

Enhance Town Center Identity

The Damascus Town Center will contain places that reflect common identity and shared experiences. Storefronts and retail spaces provide a framework for establishing the primacy of the Town Center. Distinct focal points within the center such as the steeple on the Damascus United Methodist Church and the water tower are highly visible community icons that identify the Town Center from a distance. Local retail institutions such as the former Druid Theater and Jimmie Cone also provide a sense of place because they reflect its history and shared town traditions.

This Plan proposes additional “placemaking” tools that create opportunities to strengthen the sense of place, including compact town-scale intensity. Concepts to achieve this goal include:

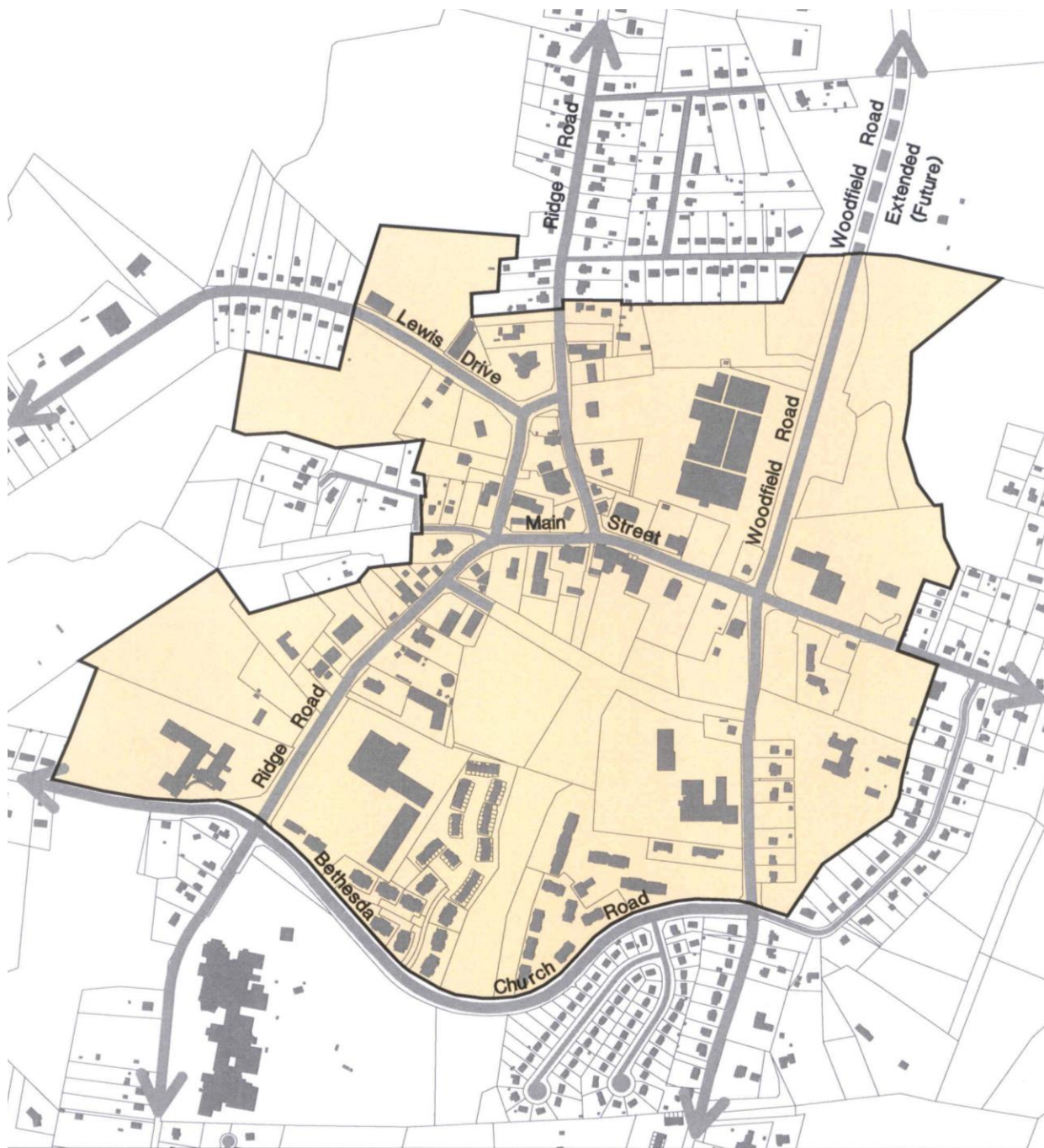
- **Transition Experience** – Enhance the experience of transition at Town Center entrances from rural to neighborhood to town character on approaches to the Town Center.
- **Town Identification Features** – Provide attractive and distinctive gateway features (such as freestanding monuments or signs) to mark the thresholds of entry to the Town Center and define its boundaries for residents and visitors.
- **Vistas and Views** – Protect and enhance views of town focal points and public spaces by preserving selected views toward and away from the surrounding countryside. This will enhance the experience of living and working in a town that is surrounded by the rural vistas of the Agricultural Reserve. Views of important focal points (such as the Damascus United Methodist Church steeple) must be maintained from various vantage points throughout the town core and from major street approaches. New streets should terminate with a view to an important building, or architectural feature.
- **Encourage Evening Activities** – Provide wide, well-lit sidewalks, seating, and gathering spaces to create a physical environment that will support and encourage evening activities. Such activities create vitality in the Town Center. Evening activities could include performances, eating at restaurants, strolling between community open spaces, and going to a well-lighted park or other center for recreation.




Enhance Main Street Identity

The Main Street of Damascus is a powerful symbol of the community’s shared experience and should be easily recognizable as the focus of the Town Center. This Plan augments the identity of Main Street by design standards and enhancements to the pedestrian realm as follows:

- **Building Orientation** – Orient buildings toward streets to enhance spatial definition.
- **On-Street Parking** – Provide continuous on-street parking where possible to add to the viability of the local businesses, and provide a buffer between vehicular travel lanes and pedestrians on sidewalks. Some on-street parking exists along Main Street, and this Plan encourages adding more on-street parking.

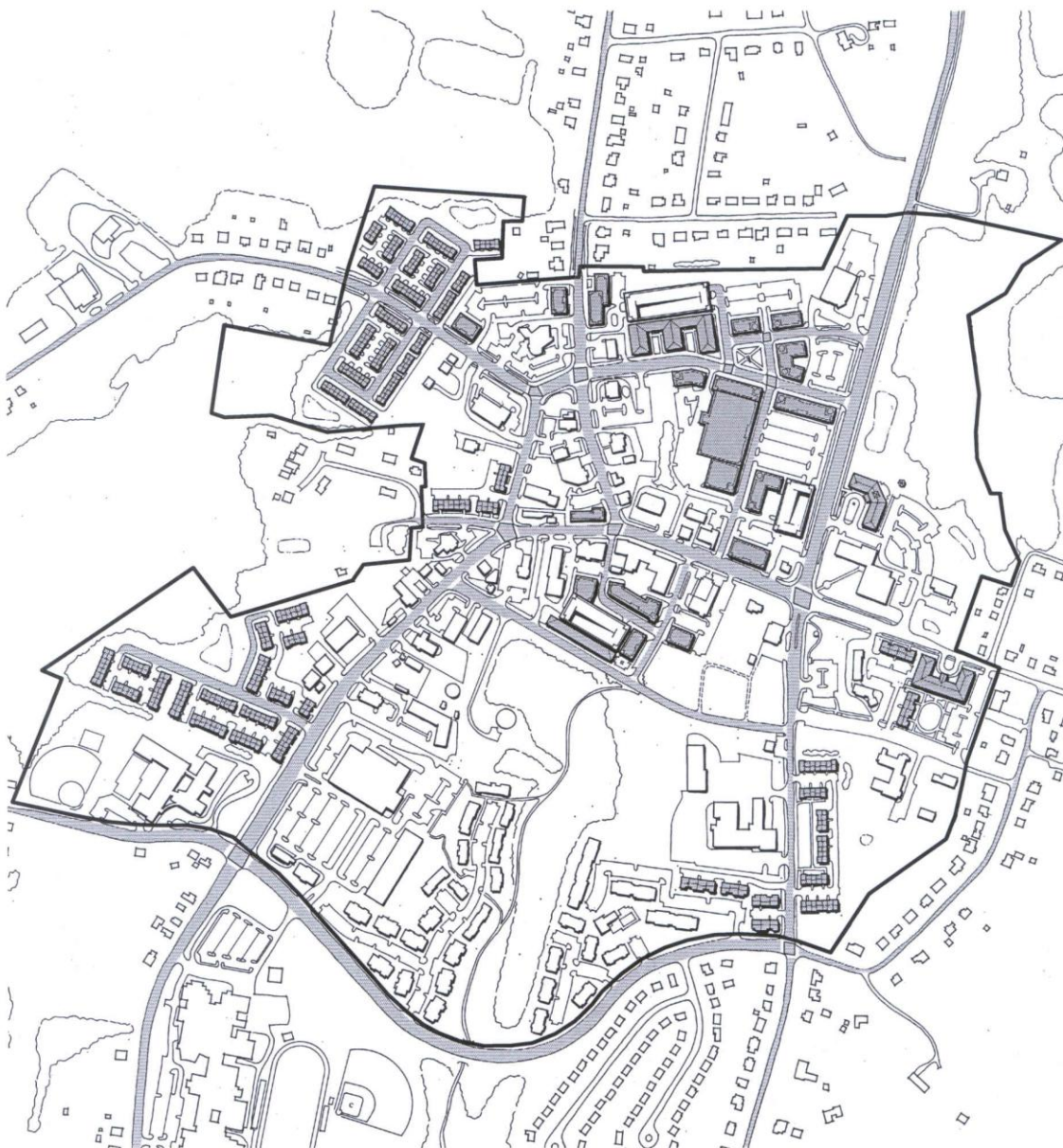
Town Center Boundary





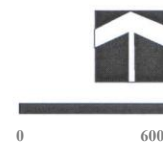
-  Limits of the Town Center
-  Street Network
-  Existing Buildings



Town Center Illustrative



- Limits of the Town Center
-  Existing Building
-  Potential New Buildings



- **Main Street Redesign Potential** – Through traffic that uses Main Street to get from Ridge Road to Woodfield Road is anticipated to significantly decrease after Woodfield Road Extended (A-12) is completed. Decreased traffic congestion should result in a more pedestrian friendly environment along the segment of Main Street from Ridge Road to Woodfield Road. Main Street can be greatly enhanced through redesign if through traffic is reduced as anticipated. If redesign is considered, desirable features include more on-street parking, streetscape treatments, and a dedicated center turning lane. The best combination of features should be determined through a project planning study or in a redevelopment review process.
- **Streetscape Treatment** – Enhance the streets in the Town Center with street trees, uniform lighting treatment and special paving. A continued commitment to the implementation of the Damascus streetscape treatment should be extended to all streets within the Town Center. New treatments should be explored as new street types and street amenities are created and implemented.

Expand and Enhance Mobility and Connectivity

Pedestrian and bicycle connectivity are critical for Damascus. Although adequate sidewalks exist within the core and all destinations in the Town Center area are within a ten-minute walking distance (a half mile), pedestrian activity is minimal. One reason is the limited sidewalk connections to the surrounding neighborhoods and schools adjacent to the Town Center. The primary street framework lacks a secondary street network to serve local businesses and patrons. Because of the limited sidewalks and bicycle lanes, vehicular travel on major roadways serves as the primary means of mobility within the Town Center.

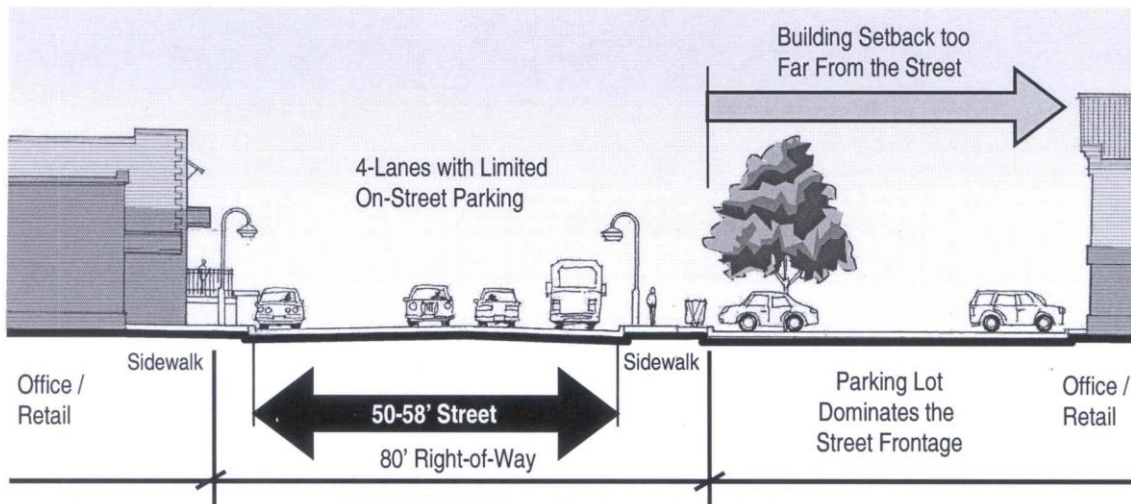
This Plan recommends modifications to create new access points and to provide a more grid-like street pattern. Interconnected streets that provide intuitive circulation alternatives for pedestrians and motorists are needed. Recommendations to achieve these goals include:

- **New Streets** – Add new streets parallel to Main Street from Ridge Road to Woodfield Road. A road connection through the Damascus Centre site on the north will provide additional access to that site and the Post Office, enhancing retail potential and improving mobility options for residents.

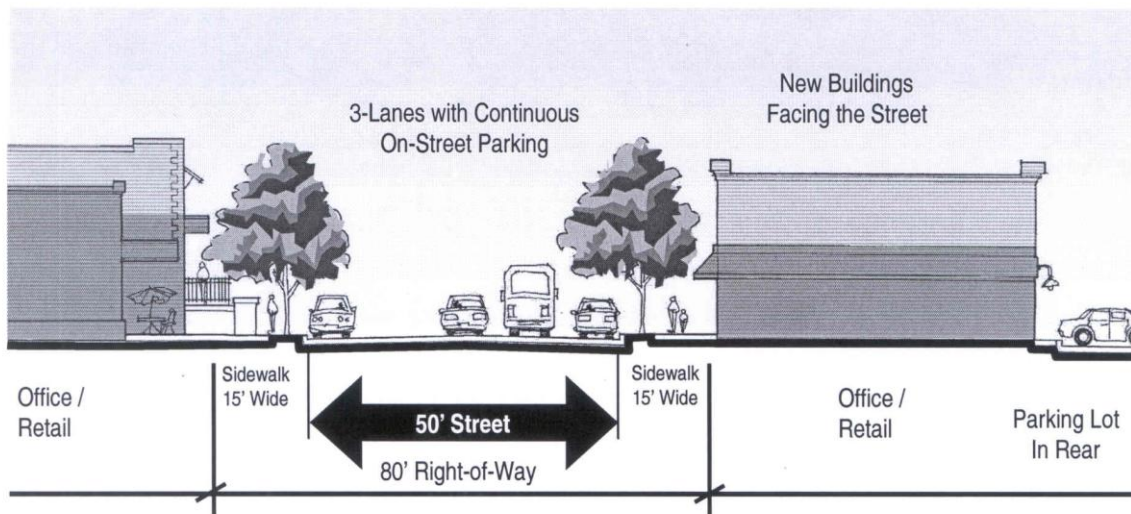
Completing the stub street behind the buildings on the south side of Main Street (Damascus Lane) will provide access to these under-utilized areas. The street is envisioned as a small local road or “lane”, and will also provide access to a “trailhead” for the Magruder Branch Stream Valley Park. The street (discussed further in the Transportation Chapter and the Parkland section of the Community Facilities Chapter) should integrate a bikeway and sidewalks, and be designed as a narrow local street due to environmental and topographic constraints (see Damascus Lane illustration).

- **Sidewalk Widths** – The optimum sidewalk width for major business streets in the Town Center with street facing buildings is 15 feet. This will give pedestrians an environment that is safe, pleasant and interesting.
- **Pedestrian Crosswalks** – Provide clearly marked and distinctively designed crosswalks at all intersections for pedestrian safety.
- **Sidewalk Connections** – Provide an extended sidewalk system to encourage more pedestrians from adjacent neighborhoods to walk into the Town Center.
- **Magruder Branch Stream Valley Park Trail** – Complete the trail into the Town Center and provide a trailhead. This extension will allow safe access to the Town Center.

Town Center Main Street Concept



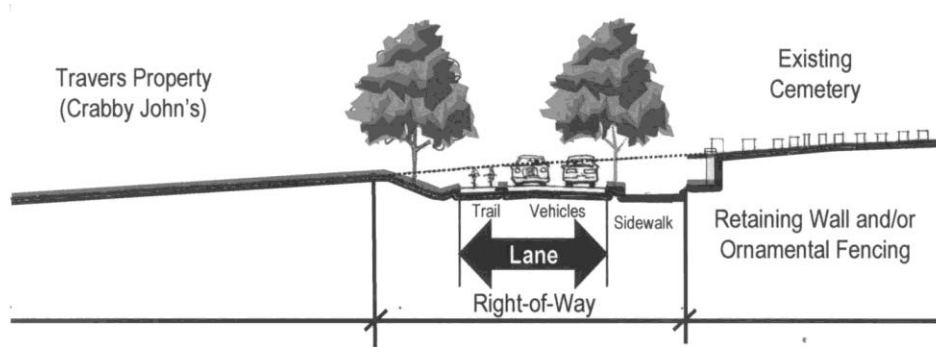
Existing Condition



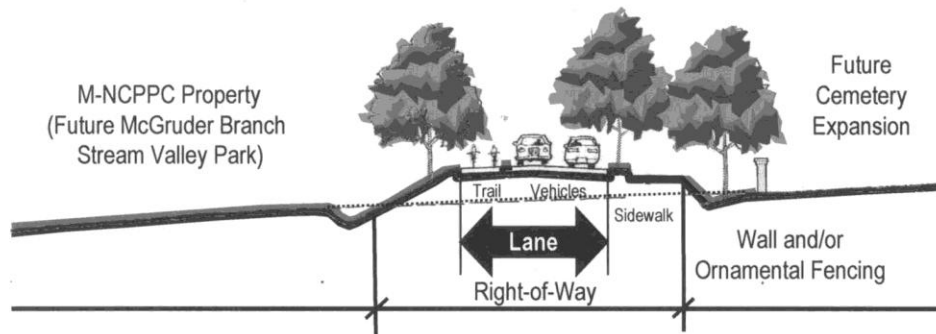
Proposed Condition

Not to Scale

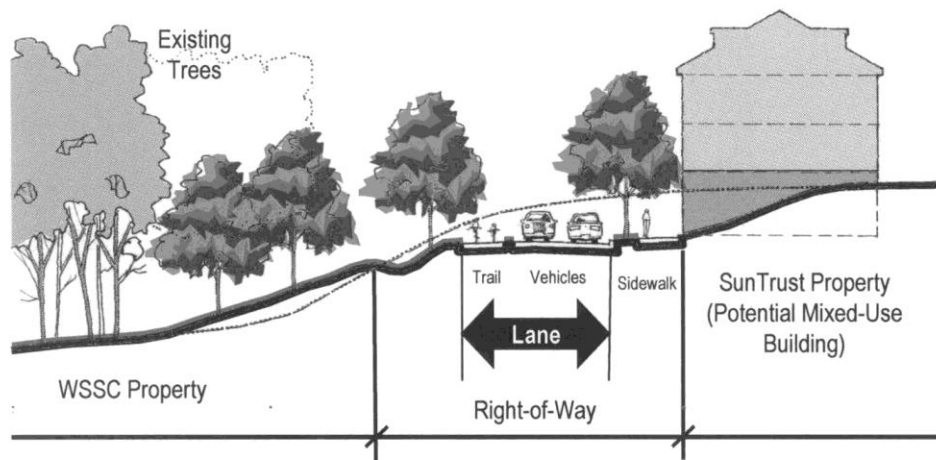
Damascus Lane Concept



Section at the Travers Property



Section at the M-NCPPC Property



Section at the SunTrust Property

Not to Scale

- **Traffic Management** – Implement appropriate traffic calming and context-based design measures, particularly at the gateway points. Context-based street design and traffic-calming tools encourage slower speeds and add awareness of the presence of pedestrians. This Plan recommends tools that provide visual cues at the gateways into the Town Center such as narrower vehicle travel lanes, reconfigured travel lanes, and street trees.

Expand and Enhance Community Open Space

This Plan encourages a compact town-scale intensity of uses within the Town Center. Modifications are proposed that will decrease imperviousness in the Town Center, and provide more community gathering places, including:

- **Town Commons** – Create a significant public green space or town commons to provide a place for people to gather, and provide a green focal point for the Town Center. The commons should be appropriately scaled and contained by a combination of building edges and street frontage. The space should be designed for a diversity of functions and must be clearly perceived as public. The Damascus Centre is the preferred location.
- **Trailhead for the Magruder Branch Stream Valley Park** – Provide an appropriate location along the proposed new street south of Main Street (Damascus Lane) for the trailhead for the Magruder Branch Stream Valley Park to encourage more pedestrian activity in the Town Center.
- **Damascus Neighborhood Park** – Enhance and enlarge this existing park adjoining the Town Center on Locust Drive to provide a pleasant oasis in proximity to the central business area.
- **Open Spaces** – Create additional formal open spaces in the Town Center, such as small urban public parks or privately maintained open spaces. Even small seating areas and pedestrian walkways add character and places for human interaction. The spaces should be safe, comfortable, accessible, and highly visible.

Guidelines for Development and Redevelopment

Future development and redevelopment will provide an environment that reinforces the entire range of activities and uses for a desirable Town Center. Recommendations for future development include:

- **Housing Types** – Provide a range of housing types in the Town Center that will accommodate varied lifestyle choices. The heart of the community should offer opportunities for multifamily housing, including affordable housing options. Flexibility to permit varied housing types will accommodate future housing within a town-scale framework. Additionally, residential opportunities in the Town Center will add vitality and a stronger market for locally oriented commercial activity.
- **Senior Housing** – Two parcels of land located near the Damascus Library and Senior Center are prime locations for age-restricted housing. Residents at either of these sites would be within walking distance to the stores and services located on Main Street as well as transit, and the amenities in the Senior Center. The property located adjacent and north of the Library is currently owned by the State and might provide the opportunity for joint development. The Boyer property, a vacant site located on the south side of Main Street at the eastern gateway to the Town Center, would also be appropriate for senior housing. The Boyer property is adjacent to the Damascus United Methodist Church property immediately to the south. Joint development of the Boyer property and the church may be mutually beneficial.

- **Damascus Centre Shopping Center** – This Plan recommends redevelopment of the Damascus Centre using a “main street” approach in the redesign of the center. The 15-acre site is the largest commercial parcel under single ownership within the Town Center, but it has long suffered from poor visibility and dated design. The property has excellent potential to redevelop into an attractive retail center with a mixed-use potential incorporating a significant green space as well as housing.
- **Miller Property** – This Plan recommends that the portion of this property located west of the Town Spring Tributary stream buffer (approximately eight acres) be included in the Town Center boundary. Although approximately eighty percent (80%) of this property is restricted by stream buffers, a small area near the Post Office is potentially developable.
- **Commercial Uses** – This Plan recommends zoning that will concentrate and focus commercial uses along Main Street and at major arterial intersections. This will allow a greater chance of success for these businesses. The commercial property owners between these optimal locations can redevelop as mixed-use, residential, and commercial uses.
- **Residential Uses** – This Plan recommends that careful attention be given at the time of subdivision or site plan to proposed new residential development that directly adjoins existing single-family residential development, ensuring compatibility of scale, height, and proportion. Such review may limit development potential below that allowed in the zone.
- **Parking Concepts** – This Plan supports concepts for parking in the Town Center as follows:
 - **Shared Parking Within the Town Center** – Shared parking would help achieve the vision for the Town Center. Businesses with different peak demands for parking can mutually benefit by shared parking agreements.
 - **Parking Lots Located Behind Buildings** – Parking lots should be located behind buildings and in limited situations, on the side of buildings in a safe and convenient way.
 - **Green Islands** – Providing “green islands” in parking lots that are adequately sized for shade trees that offset urban heat effects.
- **Building Orientation** – As also noted in the recommendations for increasing Main Street identity, buildings within the Town Center should be street-oriented. Storefronts should be oriented to make the uses inside visible from the sidewalk. Residential buildings should have entrances facing the street in order for visitors to instinctively know where to enter, to encourage social interaction, and to promote natural surveillance and safety.
- **Mixed-Use Buildings** – Mixed-use (residential and commercial) buildings promote a compact town form and encourage walking and less dependency on motor vehicles. Damascus already has a variety of mixed-use buildings within the Town Center. The Plan encourages their development in the future.

TRANSITION AREAS

The Plan establishes three Transition Areas that reflect decreasing residential density – the *Town Neighborhood*, the *Neighborhood Transition*, and the *Rural Transition* Areas. These Transition Areas serve as a bridge between the higher density development in the Town Center and the surrounding Rural Areas. Density is moderately increased through the use of TDR receiving sites, and clustered in small-lot, single-family neighborhoods that ring the Town Center.

Vision

The major land use recommendations for the Transition Areas balance countywide housing needs with the need to protect the headwaters of streams that define the geography of Damascus. The Plan recommendations for the Transition Areas are designed to reduce imperviousness of the eventual build-out, protect scenic vistas, allow greater connectivity to activity centers, and provide “small town” design patterns. Agricultural preservation goals are also enhanced through the creation of new TDR receiving sites where appropriate increases in density permit.

Framework

The primary means to achieve these goals within the Transition Areas is the extensive use of small-lot cluster zoning. The recommendations will allow a few additional moderate density neighborhoods, located near the Town Center, with an emphasis on internal and external connectivity including pedestrian and bicycle connections to the Town Center, schools, and recreational opportunities. They will also provide connections to the Countywide Trail system by paved pathways and trails into the stream valley park systems in the Plan area. This will create neighborhoods accessible to the services of the Town Center that open visually into preserved rural vistas and protected stream valleys. The result will be a town with a more clearly defined edge between the town and the surrounding rural area.

Town Neighborhood Area

This area includes neighborhoods within the upper watershed of *Magruder Branch* (see Proposed Land Use and Density map), and for many years was the primary growth area in Damascus. Growth between Ridge Road and Woodfield Road south of town reflects historic settlement patterns, Master Plan guidance, and the availability of public sewer. Few developable properties of significant size remain, and this Plan recommends modifying the zoning on these properties to conform to existing lot sizes.

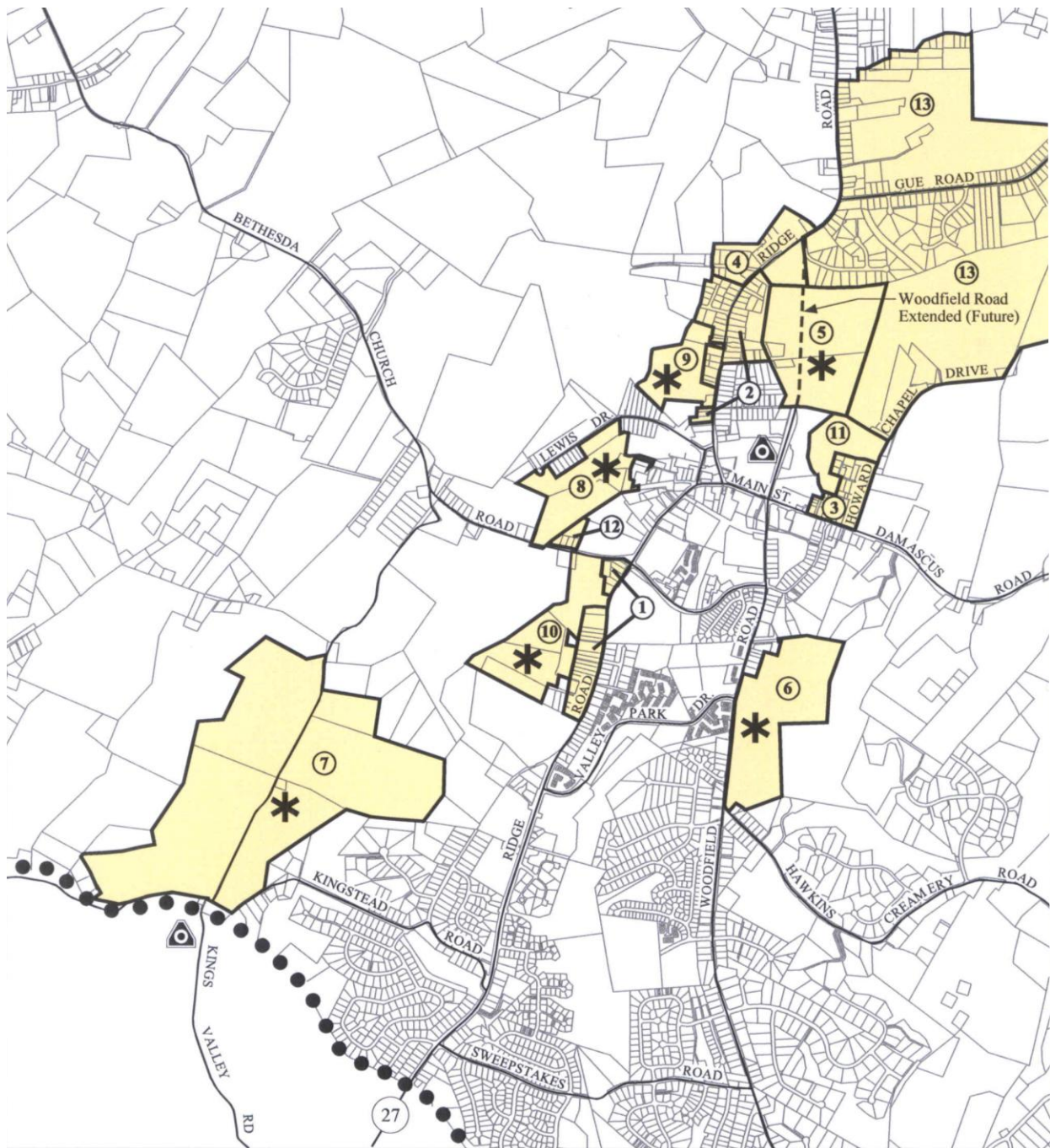
Neighborhood Transition Area

This area includes the upper watersheds of the *Town Spring Tributary*, *Upper Great Seneca Creek*, *Bennett Creek*, and *Little Bennett Creek* (see Proposed Land Use and Density map). It reflects a mixture of residential development near the Town Center and along Ridge Road and Woodfield Road, and open rural areas beyond. Topography and other sensitive environmental features in this area results in restricted access to existing public sewer and affords limited opportunity to significantly increase development potential without negative environmental consequences to the forested stream valleys in these headwater areas. Under the RNC Zone, the provision of sewer service and increased development potential, which confers the private benefit of community sewer service on the property owner, requires provision of increased open space in return. Evaluation of developable properties in these areas reflect this concern.

Rural Transition Area

This area contains agricultural uses interspersed with older subdivisions, and the Plan recommendations encourage a mix of low-density residential and agricultural uses. Most of this area allows five-acre density although there are some areas of two-acre density (usually reflecting older subdivisions). Properties beyond the immediate proximity to the Town Center in the Patuxent River Watershed face limited development potential due to a combination of County water and sewer policy, soil types, and environmental considerations, and the Plan proposes additional protection through lower density zoning. Because of the high threshold for protection of lands draining to the Patuxent River drinking water reservoirs, limited development with limited imperviousness is encouraged.

Transition Areas – Developable Sites



- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| ● ● ● Master Plan Area Boundary | ⑦ Kingstead/ Leishear | ⬮ Existing Sewage Pump Stations |
| * TDR Receiving | ⑧ Casey/ Lewis | ▣ Pump station may be needed to serve cluster development |
| ① Ridge Road South Neighborhood | ⑨ Stanley/ Leishear - Day ▣ | |
| ② Ridge Road North Town Neighborhood | ⑩ Smart/ Miner/ Rice/ Conway ▣ | |
| ③ Town Spring Neighborhood | ⑪ Miller | |
| ④ Ridge Road North Neighborhood Transition | ⑫ Souder and Vicinity | |
| ⑤ Burdette ▣ (Relocate/ reduce existing pump station on Damascus Center) | ⑬ Patuxent River Watershed Properties | |
| ⑥ Warfield | | |



The bulk of the southeast portion of the Master Plan is in the upper watershed of *Great Seneca Creek* (see Proposed Land Use and Density map), an area of two or five acre development. Much of this area has already been developed, as this area experienced the most extensive residential growth in the Damascus area in the 1990's. Recommended densities reflect the continuing environmental concerns. This Plan recommends no land use changes to this area.

Development Guidance for Transition Area Cluster Development

Wherever clustered development is recommended in this Plan, the following development guidance is to be considered:

- Minimize impervious surfaces through environmentally sensitive site design techniques (for example, the use of shared driveways, pervious pavement, and narrow roads that still meet safety requirements).
- Provide stormwater management controls utilizing environmentally sensitive design techniques that avoid concentrating stormwater runoff into high quantity flows, with a preference for on-lot quantity and quality treatment options (or alternatives that provide similar environmental benefits) and disconnected imperviousness design techniques, infiltration of runoff, and open section roadways.
- Design to allow views of protected open space and vistas of surrounding rural areas.
- Protect sensitive environmental features, minimizing development impact.
- Protect important historic or archeological sites and their settings.
- Create a defined "edge" clearly separating the developed neighborhood from the rural open space that is preserved.
- Provide internal and external connections for easy non-vehicular access using trails, sidewalks, and bicycle paths.
- Replicate the scale, design and pattern of historic small town residential neighborhoods.
- Locate a minimum of three-fourths of the lots in the clustered small lot portion of the development unless the Planning Board finds that fewer clustered lots would better implement the goals of the Master Plan.

Land Use and Zoning Recommendations

The modifications in the Transition Areas reinforce the Plan's vision of strengthening the Town Center, and limiting growth on the perimeters.

Town Neighborhood Area

The Plan recommends rezoning four older neighborhoods from RE-2C to R-200 or RE-1 to better reflect the existing lot sizes in these neighborhoods. In these areas immediately adjoining the Town Center, few developable parcels remain. The lot sizes reflect the half-acre to one-acre zoning in effect when these neighborhoods were developed. Little additional development potential is anticipated for any of these neighborhoods, as few parcels have subdivision potential. They include:

- **Ridge Road South Neighborhood** – The R-200 Zone is proposed in this neighborhood located along the west side of Ridge Road between Bethesda Church Road and Oak Drive. Although few properties without homes remain, some lots are large enough that some re-development might occur.

- **Ridge Road North Town Neighborhood** – The R-200 Zone is proposed in this neighborhood located immediately north of the Town Center. Making the zoning consistent with the existing lot pattern will make it more logical to extend sewer to this area as needed to replace failing septic systems on existing lots.
- **Town Spring Neighborhood** – The RE-1 Zone is proposed in this neighborhood north of MD 108 and west of Howard Chapel Drive, a small neighborhood of older homes.
- **Ridge Road North Transition Neighborhood** – The RE-1 Zone is proposed in this neighborhood located north of the Ridge Road North Town Neighborhood, forming the northern edge of the town’s developed area.
- **Other Properties in the Town Neighborhood Area** – The existing zoning is retained on all other properties in the Town Neighborhood Area.

Neighborhood Transition Area

The Plan recommends a moderate increase in density – primarily adjoining the Town Center and primarily through the creation of six transferable development rights (TDR) receiving areas. The Plan also recommends limited additional density on certain properties near the Town Center.

The Master Plan proposes creating TDR receiving ability for the RNC Zone for six property groups at locations that have, or can be easily served by, sewer. While there is conformity of zoning, actual development potential may be curtailed by other elements of this Plan, especially environmental criteria. Small lot, cluster development will be permitted to address environmental and vista protection goals, neighborhood design goals, and enhanced connectivity goals. In order to address agricultural protection goals, additional density yields are achieved through the use of a new Transferable Development Rights (TDR) zone.

- **Burdette Property**

Allow the following range of densities if the specified conditions are met:

Standard Method	RNC 0.2
Optional Method	RNC 0.4 (community sewer service) if TDRs are not used
	RNC 1.0 (community sewer service) with TDRs used to secure the additional density

Potential for 16 to 100 dwelling units (including MPDU bonus and 65 TDRs).

The 82-acre Burdette property is located north of the Damascus Town Center and is bisected by the planned route of Woodfield Road Extended (A-12). Because the property is located immediately adjacent to the Town Center within walking distance of shopping, services, and institutional uses, an increased density is appropriate. The RNC Zone will provide protection of the Patuxent River Watershed by requiring small building lots near the Town Center and along the route of Woodfield Road Extended, reducing the extent of roads and sidewalks needed. Actual development potential will be limited due to environmental considerations. This property is currently in agricultural use with 22 acres of contiguous forest. It contains streams with large associated wetlands, seeps and springs that contribute to the high quality water in the Upper Patuxent River watershed. Lots clustered away from the Patuxent Primary Management Area on this property will protect existing streams and forest cover, preserve rural vistas, and create a stronger urban edge with a sense of proximity to the rural heritage in Damascus. Smaller lots with a large area of protected open space are more protective of the Upper Patuxent River Watershed. Lots clustered away from the headwater tributaries in the eastern portion of the property (with shorter streets) would result in lower overall imperviousness.

Development Guidance:

- Comply with the guidance for development in the Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River Watershed and to the guidelines for cluster development in this chapter.
- Preserve forested stream valleys with wetlands, seeps and springs that contribute to the high quality water in the Upper Patuxent watershed. All contiguous existing forest should be maintained and development must be clustered away from the Primary Management Area.
- Building lots for two new homes may be allowed within the rural open space area of this property for members of the Burdette/Walker families.
- Limit cluster development to areas that can be served by grinder systems and gravity sewer lines that minimize stream or stream buffer impacts. Any new pump station intended to replace the existing pump station on the Damascus Centre property should be located to avoid stream crossings, and minimize impacts to environmental buffers. A relocated pump station may modify or expand the areas on the Burdette property that can be served by public sewer, and may also provide service to nearby areas with failing septic systems.

▪ **Warfield Property**

Allow the following range of densities if the specified conditions are met:

Standard Method	RNC 0.2
Optional Method	RNC 0.4 (community sewer service) if TDRs are not used
	RNC 0.75 (community sewer service) with TDRs used to secure the additional density

Potential for 15 to 71 dwelling units (including MPDU bonus and 42 TDRs).

The modification in density is appropriate because the property is in immediate proximity to the Town Center and within walking distance of shopping, services, and institutional uses. This 78-acre property is a former dairy farm located east of Woodfield Road, just south of the Town Center area. It is the most visually significant developable property in close proximity to the Town Center. It is largely open, with forest primarily lining the headwaters of two tributary streams that feed into Great Seneca Creek. The property contains historic structures and presents one of the more important remaining vistas along the approach to Damascus on Woodfield Road. West of Woodfield Road there are small lot, clustered neighborhoods, and to the east the property descends into the valleys and woodlands of the Great Seneca Creek headwaters. Actual development potential may be limited due to environmental considerations. Because of its proximity to the Town Center, a cluster design will enable better environmental protection and preserve rural vistas. The smaller lots permitted in the RNC Zone allow more design flexibility to protect the historic farm site and existing forest, and to replicate the small town lot patterns across Woodfield Road. The clustering will include a trail system that will implement the recommendations for connectivity of the Countywide Park Trails Plan.

Development Guidance:

- Comply with the guidance for cluster development in this chapter.
- Enhance the headwaters of two tributary streams. Along the northern primary stream there is a spring or seep covered with concrete. Any development must restore wetlands, remove the concrete, and protect other wetland and stream buffer areas as a part of the required rural open space.

- Dedicate seven acres of very high quality forest area located along the northeastern edge of the property, connected to a much larger forest stand on adjacent parkland.
- Protect and reforest stream valleys just beyond this forest. All contiguous forest must be protected as a part of any development proposal, and all unforested tributary streams must be reforested.
- Protect historic structures.

▪ **Kingstead/Leishear Properties**

Allow the following range of densities if the specified conditions are met:

Standard Method	RNC 0.2
Optional Method	RNC 0.2 (community sewer service), if TDRs are not used
	RNC 0.5 (community sewer service) with TDRs used to secure the additional density

Potential for 27 to 84 dwelling units (including MPDUs and 41 TDRs).

The largest developable area in this Plan includes the Kingstead Farm and the adjoining Leishear property. The Plan evaluated the 138-acre site on the east side of Kings Valley Road, which consisted of three properties in the Rural Cluster and RE-2C Zones. The residual portion of the Kingstead Farm is 159 acres in the Rural Density Transfer (RDT) Zone along the west side of Kings Valley Road. The 13-acre Leishear property was evaluated for joint development with the Kingstead Farm. Actual development potential is likely to be limited due to other Master Plan elements, especially environmental considerations.

The Kingstead/Leishear properties occupy a uniquely sensitive headwater area of the Little Bennett watershed, containing numerous springs, seeps, and wetlands that are critical to maintaining downstream water quality. The quality of these resources can be quickly and permanently degraded by the addition of impervious surfaces that alter surface and subsurface flows, and the construction of sewer lines that disturb stream valleys. Therefore impervious surfaces should be minimized and mitigated where possible. The small headwater streams in the area are very susceptible to damage from even small changes in runoff volume and can be degraded by the location and concentrated flows from storm drain outfalls.

Development must be carefully managed to minimize disturbances to the high quality wetlands. Additional density is recommended to take advantage of existing gravity sewer potential, to provide for a modest number of TDRs, and to obtain historic preservation benefits, park and trail connections, and affordable housing benefits. Due to the environmental sensitivity of this site, higher densities are recommended for only the southern section of the property, in order to limit impervious surfaces and stormwater impacts, and avoid the need for sanitary sewer access to the entire property.

The Kingstead Farm was a major dairy farm for many years, and the family still operates a dairy cow breeding operation. The property contains open pastures, large areas of extensive forest and forested stream valleys. The RDT Zone property includes a headwater tributary of Little Bennett Creek. It is located south of Oak Ridge Conservation Park spanning both sides of Kings Valley Road. The Leishear property similarly contains both field and forest.

The Kingstead properties were considered as a TDR receiving site during the 1982 Master Plan and the 1993 Damascus Master Plan Amendment. No change was ultimately recommended in either Plan due to undeveloped intervening properties along Kingstead Road. Those properties are now developed and this Plan recommends a TDR receiving site on the properties. Use of a moderate density cluster development is recommended to achieve the following:

- **Environmental** – Protect extensive natural resources including an upland forest and the Little Bennett Creek Stream Valley Park tributary stream system – an area deemed vital for natural resource protection in the Legacy Open Space program.
- **Historic Preservation** – Offer the best opportunity to protect the historic Kingstead Farm core area in its environmental setting.
- **Trails** – Allow the extension of a planned trail through Little Bennett Creek Stream Valley Park serving this portion of Damascus and connecting it through the development to the recreational resources along Oak Drive and through to Magruder Branch Stream Valley Park Trail.
- **Connectivity** – Allow a neighborhood design dense enough to provide community amenities such as interior sidewalks connecting to the trail.
- **Agricultural Preservation** – Provide the opportunity for the property owner to either transfer TDRs on the RDT Zone portion of the Kingstead Farm or purchase TDRs from other properties.
- **Sewer** – Much of the property is within the drainage area of the nearby Spring Meadows pumping station allowing a gravity sewer access for most of the developable portion of site.
- **Housing** – Provide additional housing potential in close proximity to schools, trails, and the recreation center.
- **Transportation** – Will not have a detrimental impact on the transportation grid, as these residents are more likely to use Kings Valley Road as their primary access rather than Ridge Road, and development will require improving the offset intersection of Kings Valley Road (classified as a Primary Road at this location in the Master Plan) and Kingstead Road.

Despite these advantages, there are significant environmental concerns that constrain development. These include:

- **Water Resources** – Little Bennett Creek, as a Use III stream, already has strong protective measures including stream buffers and wetland buffers that must be applied during the development process. Extension of sewer within the environmental buffers of Little Bennett Creek and its tributaries to achieve full density potential would conflict with longstanding policies that protect the stream headwaters. There is an outstanding 45-acre forested wetland with 14 springs on the property designated for parkland acquisition. In addition, an important tributary with forested wetlands crosses the property from the east to join the main stem of Little Bennett Creek. This system is a critical element in maintaining the high water quality in the downstream portions of Little Bennett Creek. Full density potential may not be achieved due to these environmental constraints.

- **Forest Resources** – The properties contain 120 acres of forest, including approximately 80 acres associated with the large wetland and other riparian areas. Forests on steep slopes and in stream buffers have a high priority for preservation and enhancement. There are 40 acres of upland forest, primarily on the eastern part of the Rural Cluster portion of the property that are high quality forest preservation areas. Development must be clustered in the open areas and preserve the forest stand between the Little Bennett Creek tributary in the eastern portion of the property and Oak Ridge Conservation Park to provide an undisturbed tree canopy.

Development Guidance:

- **Design** – Comply with the guidance for cluster development in this chapter, and avoid vistas of backyards from Kings Valley Road, Kingstead Road or adjacent streets.
- **Environmental Concerns** – Residential development east of Kings Valley Road must use cluster development to protect the steep slopes, erodible soils, forest cover, and high quality streams on the property. Resources can be protected through parkland dedication (see Community Facilities Chapter) and the rural open space requirement of the zone. Homes should be clustered on smaller lots in less sensitive areas to reduce negative environmental impacts, preserve existing forest and the environmental buffers.

Existing water quality and aquatic habitat of Little Bennett Creek must be maintained. Limited imperviousness and stormwater management measures will also be needed to minimize negative water quality impacts.

Homes should be clustered on lots that are small enough to achieve the goals of neighborhood cluster design, yet with sufficient frontage and setbacks so that as much area as possible can be accessed by open section roadways to minimize the concentration of stormwater runoff. Development areas must be located in the least sensitive areas to reduce negative environmental impacts, preserve existing forest, and the environmental buffers.

Maintain and protect existing hydrology by limiting activities that will alter groundwater flow, springs and seeps, wetlands, and streams.

Forests, particularly those on steep slopes and in environmental buffers (approximately 40 percent of the site), should remain undisturbed. Development must preserve the forest between the Little Bennett tributary in the eastern portion of the property and Oak Ridge Conservation Park to provide an undisturbed tree canopy.

- **Parkland** – Dedicate and/or acquire, as appropriate, the designated portions of the land along the headwaters of Little Bennett Creek (discussed in the Parkland and Open Space portions of the Community Facilities Chapter) traversing the property to the M-NCPPC as parkland. Determine the extent and importance of the archeological features on the site. If appropriate, the site containing archeological features should be added to the adjacent area to be dedicated/acquired as parkland.
- **Transportation** – Provide a comprehensive pedestrian and bicycle circulation system linking internal areas and linking to the Countywide Trails system; and reconfigure the intersection of Kings Valley Road and Kingstead Road to eliminate the offset alignment.

- **Sewer Service** – Development on this property should uphold the years of policy that have protected the Little Bennett Creek headwaters. If the cluster option is used, most of the density should be concentrated in the southern area, and community sewer service provided only to those areas that can be served by gravity outside environmental buffers to existing community sewer systems. The northern area is limited to the use of individual septic systems. This will avoid a stream crossing and the need to fragment the existing forest and wetland. This will also avoid future requests for community sewer access further north in the watershed. Development must not disturb the Little Bennett Stream Valley for sewer or stormwater conveyance.

- **Smart/Miner/Rice/Conway Properties**

Allow the following range of densities if the specified conditions are met:

Standard Method	RNC 0.2
Optional Method	RNC 0.4 (community sewer service), if TDRs are not used
	RNC 1.0 (community sewer service) with TDRs used to secure the additional density

Potential for 10 to 61 dwelling units (including MPDU bonus and 40 TDRs).

The modification in density is appropriate because the properties are in close proximity to the Town Center, schools, shopping, and institutional uses. Residents will be able to walk to these community uses. The modification would allow smaller lot clustering (with community water and sewer) on this approximately 50-acre site. The site has frontage west of Ridge Road on Bethesda Church Road, directly across from the Damascus Elementary School and along Ridge Road to the south. The property contains a headwater tributary of Little Bennett Creek. Its proximity to the Town Center, and the ability to access sewer in Ridge Road make this area a suitable location for clustered development, with measures to protect environmental features and the headwaters of Little Bennett Creek.

The Smart/Miner properties were proposed for the RNC Zone in the Public Hearing Draft Plan. The Rice/Conway properties were proposed for additional density during Work Sessions No. 3 and 4. Assembly of these properties is now anticipated. The Smart/Miner properties would also be designed in conjunction with the Kings Valley property. The proposed development plan would create a pleasant neighborhood with three primary development areas, very close to the Town Center, within easy walking distance to schools, shopping, recreation, and services. A new sewer pump station may be needed to serve optional method development especially in the range of higher densities with TDRs. The pump station should be located to avoid stream crossings and minimize impacts to environmental buffers.

These properties are the northern-most extreme of Little Bennett Creek, and they include 14 acres of stream valley, 7 acres of wetlands, and 8 acres of forest. An important feature of these properties is the headwater spring that forms the beginning of Little Bennett Creek. This forested wetland area should be left undisturbed. Development on these properties should use open areas rather than disturbing forest, wetland, and environmental buffers.

Increasing development on all sides of this forested stream valley also increases the potential for impacting the headwaters through forested lots, connector roads, sewer easements and safe conveyance of stormwater to the stream. Optional method development should not be approved on this property unless all the environmental recommendations are addressed by the proposed development. Meeting all the recommendations may result in less than the full density on any or all of these properties.

Development Guidance

- Extend the Little Bennett Stream Valley conservation park to include its headwater spring.
- Community sewer is subject to approval of new pressure systems or pump station by WSSC and in accordance with their policies at time of development.
- Efforts should be made to restore the existing easternmost headwater wetland to the size and condition that existed prior to disturbance and clearing for farming activities. This will not decrease the developable area of this site shown elsewhere in this Plan.
- Consolidate development areas to avoid the stream valley and avoid stream crossings.
- Limit most development to open areas.
- Protect all critical natural resources through park dedication or conservation easements.
- Minimize and mitigate the effects of the existing powerline located in the stream valley buffer by examining alternatives at the time of development, including the following:
 - Work with the electric power utility to relocate the existing powerline outside of the stream valley buffer where there is significantly less encroachment into the stream buffer, and to replant/reforest the area. The landowner is only expected to provide easements for the new alignment.
 - If relocation is not deemed feasible or cost-effective, develop a more environmentally sensitive landscaping plan for the utility area, including selective clearing to control invasive plants and large trees, while retaining low growing shrubs and ground cover consistent with the goals of a stream valley buffer.
- Comply with the guidance for cluster development in this chapter.
- Design development to avoid disturbance to the Little Bennett Creek headwaters area on the property, which contains multiple springs and seasonal wetlands. Maintain and protect existing hydrology by limiting activities that will alter groundwater flow, springs, and seeps.
- Configure lots of sufficient size and appropriate shape to apply the use of open-section road standards, on-lot infiltration of storm water on the majority of the developed area, and narrow roads that still meet safety requirements.
- Maintain stream buffers and existing forest areas and allow sufficient area outside stream buffers for stormwater management.

■ **Casey/Lewis Properties**

Allow the following range of densities if the specified conditions are met:

Standard Method	RNC 0.2
Optional Method	RNC 0.4 (community sewer service) if TDRs are not used
	RNC 0.5 (community sewer service) with TDRs used to secure the additional density

Potential for 9 to 27 dwelling units (including MPDU bonus and 13 TDRs).

This approximately 45-acre site consists of six properties and contains two relatively flat areas, one fronting on Lewis Drive and one on Bethesda Church Road. Beyond these more easily developed areas, the properties drop steeply into a stream valley that is a headwater tributary of Bennett Creek, a Use I stream with good water quality and stream habitat conditions. Preserving the large forested areas that buffer the streams in the upper part of this watershed is essential to protecting existing stream quality. This site is appropriate for limited additional density because of its location in immediate proximity to the Town Center, offering easy access to shopping, services, and institutional uses. Density must remain limited due to the extensive environmental restrictions on the site that leave only small developable areas that meet the county's environmental regulations.

Most of this site is not appropriate for development due to the slopes that are associated with the wide stream valley. While these properties are close to the Town Center, steep topography historically limits development potential. Development should not disturb the stream valley or disturb slopes that exceed 15 percent. The development area should be clustered within the level areas along Bethesda Church Road and Lewis Drive. The forested stream valley and associated springs, wetlands, and steep slopes 15 percent and greater should be protected within a contiguous open space area. This would require that no more than 60 percent of the dwelling units be located either along Bethesda Church Road or on the larger Lewis Drive site. Development potential will be limited due to other Master Plan elements, especially environmental considerations.

There are 33 acres of significant forest, including five acres of interior forest, and 14 acres of sensitive areas within the stream valley including seeps, springs, wetlands, and extremely steep slopes that extend beyond the sensitive areas protected by the Environmental Guidelines. There are also 1,300 feet of power lines located on or adjacent to the western edge of the property.

The Bennett Creek headwater stream that bisects the property is Use I, with good water quality and habitat conditions. The Legacy Open Space program has identified this property as part of the Bennett Creek Headwaters, unique because practically the entire headwater stream valley is forested and relatively undisturbed by development. (See the Open Space portion of the Community Facilities Chapter.)

Development Guidance:

- Comply with the guidance for cluster development in this chapter. Design of development on these properties should reflect the surrounding development pattern, and be compatible with these residential neighborhoods.
- Limit development to the less topographically challenged areas along the ridgelines of Bethesda Church Road and Lewis Drive.
- Limit community sewer service to only those areas that can be served by grinder systems, pressure sewers, or gravity connections to the existing public sewer.
- Limit the disturbance of the slopes in the Bennett Creek stream valley that exceed 15 percent, and avoid disturbance of the Bennett Creek stream valley with stormwater and sewer conveyance systems.
- Locate no more than 60 percent of allowable development along Bethesda Church Road or at the Lewis Drive site.
- Evaluate potential for Legacy Open Space easement for identified portions of the properties (see Community Facilities Chapter), as most of the headwater stream valley is forested and relatively undisturbed by development.

▪ **Stanley/Leishear-Day Properties**

Allow the following range of densities if the specified conditions are met:

Standard Method	RNC 0.2
Optional Method	RNC 0.4 (community sewer service) if TDRs are not used
	RNC 1.0 (community sewer service) with TDRs used to secure the additional density

Potential for 5 to 32 dwelling units (including MPDU bonus and 21 TDRs).

This 27-acre site consists of three properties and is directly adjacent to the north side of the Town Center.

This group of properties contains a headwater area of the Bennett Creek watershed, a Use I stream with good water quality and habitat conditions. There are approximately 16 acres of forest on the site with two stream valleys. The stream valleys, wetlands and adjacent steep slopes total over 12 acres of environmental buffers on site. The Legacy Open Space program has identified the forested stream valleys of these properties as part of the Bennett Creek Headwaters, unique because the headwater stream valley is forested and relatively undisturbed by development. Actual development potential may be limited due to other Master Plan elements, especially environmental considerations.

The modification in density is appropriate because of the location of the properties in immediate proximity to the Town Center. Residents will have walkable access to shopping, services, and institutional uses. The recommended land use will allow protection of the stream valley and Legacy area by clustering the development on small lots on the high, open land, close to Ridge Road. This will maximize the open space and preserve sensitive natural areas.

Development Guidance:

- Comply with the guidance for cluster development in this chapter and the recommendations for community water and sewer service in the Implementation Chapter.
- Address environmental constraints and topographic limitations. Environmental constraints and other Master Plan elements, including land use recommendations for avoiding stream valley disturbance to provide sewer, may limit the actual development potential of this area.
- Single-family housing should be the primary development type used, with some use of attached housing that is built to resemble large single-family housing. Development types, such as rows of townhouses, should be avoided.
- Avoid disturbance to slopes that exceed 15 percent. Development must be planned to maximize the open space and preserve sensitive natural areas.
- Establish and designate open space area to include in the Legacy Open Space program, either through conservation easements or dedication, as part of the subdivision of these properties.
- Locate a pump station to provide sewer service for cluster development on this property and to potentially serve an area of failing septic systems to the north. The location of a potential pump station should minimize impacts to environmental buffers. The pump station should be located to avoid stream crossings.

- **Miller Property
(RE-1 Zone with Potential for 21 to 25 dwelling units)**

The site consists of approximately 21 acres located between Howard Chapel Drive and the “Town Spring” stream tributary, a Use III tributary to the Upper Patuxent River and the drinking water reservoirs. The residual portion of the property, located west of the Town Spring Tributary, is included in the Town Center. Although smaller lot clustering would be helpful in addressing some environmental goals, sewer is needed for a viable cluster development and community sewer is not recommended due to potential for impact on the Town Spring tributary headwaters. Actual development potential may be limited.

The modification is appropriate because this property is close to the Town Center (approximately one-half mile), and because of its regulatory history. This recommendation aligns development on the Miller property with properties in the Town Spring Neighborhood to the south, and reflects the recommendations in the Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River Watershed.

Development Guidance:

- Protect natural resources. Development should be limited to those areas currently unforested, and forest planting in the unforested portions of the stream valley should be a part of development plans.
- Protect extensive forested wetlands on this property. Development potential will be limited by septic system requirements. The development guidelines in the Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River Watershed are essential for water quality and wildlife habitat, which must be protected. These constraints will also limit development potential.
- Use of Best Management Practices.
- Extend community water service.

- **Souder/Adjoining Properties
(R-90 Zone with Potential for up to 14 dwelling units)**

If all or a portion of this property is jointly subdivided and site planned comprehensively with the adjacent King/Souder property, every effort should be made to facilitate joint development. This small property group (approximately 3.7 acres) is located just west of the Damascus Elementary School along Bethesda Church Road. It consists of four developed lots and one vacant property. Because of the location at the edge of the Town Center, this Plan recommends some additional density, but assembly would be required. Although this assembly is not likely to happen soon, during the life of the Master Plan this level of additional density and clustering would be appropriate at this location.

Development Guidance:

- Development must avoid disturbance on slopes exceeding 15 percent.
- Ensure at time of subdivision that the design of development on these properties is compatible with the existing development pattern.

- **Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer**

The Church is located north of the Damascus Town Center, immediately southwest of the intersection of Ridge Road and Faith Lane, and immediately southwest of the future intersection of Woodfield Road Extended (A-12). An unnamed tributary to the Patuxent River runs through the southern portion of the Church’s property. Woodfield Road Extended will cross this tributary

on land that currently belongs to the Church and will run directly adjacent to the Church's existing stormwater management pond before intersecting with Faith Lane and Ridge Road.

Because the Church faces particularly difficult expansion problems due to its location within the Primary Management Area for the Patuxent River watershed, and along the path of the extension of Woodfield Road; this Plan provides the following guidance regarding their proposed building and parking lot expansion plans:

- Initially, this Plan recommends that the Church be permitted to utilize a proposed Park and Ride lot that:
 - Would be located on the west side of Ridge Road, directly across from the Church;
 - Would be designated and constructed to accommodate at least 200 vehicles; and;
 - The Church and the County enter into a long-term shared parking agreement that addresses their mutual needs for parking at this location and provides the Church with the use of the Park and Ride Lot for as long as this Church is located on this site.
- To facilitate this arrangement, this Plan recommends:
 - A feasibility study begin immediately following the Plan adoption; and
 - Significant progress be made so that within Fiscal Year 2009 the necessary construction funding for the Park and Ride Lot be included in the County's Capital Improvements Program budget and that the construction of the Park and Ride Lot be completed by the summer of 2011 or soon after.
 - To foster a close working relationship and better understanding between the parties, that the County and the Church maintain a regular dialogue on the progress of construction of Woodfield Road Extended (A-12) and the Park and Ride Lot.
- This Plan further recommends that if the dates and requirements noted above are not met:
 - The Plan supports the Church's proposal to construct a 145-space parking facility in the area currently occupied by its stormwater management pond and a portion of the stream valley buffer immediately south and to pursue either an off-site or on-site stormwater management plan.
 - If final engineering determines there is adequate storage capacity and the necessary approvals can be obtained, stormwater management could be provided in a surface pond to be located on property south, and by expanding that pond to the north, and jointly used to provide stormwater management for Woodfield Road Extended, proposed development on the Burdette/Walker property, and the Church. The cost of expanding the pond beyond the capacity needed for the Woodfield Road Extended project would be shared proportionately (as measured by a percentage of the contributing runoff volume) by the Church and the developer of the Burdette/Walker property if they need the capacity. If this solution is determined to be infeasible, stormwater management could be located on-site in an underground facility.
 - Within this option, the Church would provide mitigation for any resulting clearing in the Patuxent watershed as mitigation is similarly provided by the County for any clearing resulting from the construction of Woodfield Road Extended.

▪ **Other Properties in the Neighborhood Transition Area**

The existing zoning is retained on all other properties in the Neighborhood Transition Area.

Rural Transition Area

▪ **Patuxent Neighborhood Properties Recommendation**

Rural Cluster Zone for 260 properties on approximately 560 acres

This area is located northeast of Ridge Road (MD 27) and west of Howard Chapel Drive within the Patuxent River watershed. Putting these properties in this agricultural zone will also increase their potential eligibility for conservation easements. The recommendation reflects the environmental considerations of the Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River Watershed. Because several older subdivisions in the area face failing wells or septic systems, this area is also recommended for extension of public water.

▪ **Other Properties in the Rural Transition Area**

The existing zoning is retained on all other properties in the Rural Transition Area.

RURAL AREAS

Damascus continues to be a community surrounded by agriculture and rural open space, and many active farms operate in the Master Plan area. Damascus links and provides continuity for the western and eastern agriculturally oriented areas of the County. This area includes the Rural Density Transfer Area and Rural Village Communities.

Vision

This Plan recommends continued support for the goals of the Agricultural Reserve. The Damascus Rural Area should be an area of agricultural uses, with some low density housing. Existing rural hamlets should be protected and enhanced.

Framework

Much of the land area within the Damascus Master Plan boundary is within the Agricultural Reserve, primarily within the Rural Density Transfer (RDT) Zone, the focus of the County's farmland preservation policies. Approximately 1,050 acres within the Damascus Master Plan area are protected for agricultural and rural open space uses by use of the RDT Zone. Farms and rural landscapes are interspersed with older subdivisions and historic crossroads communities that include residential and some commercial uses.

Lands within the Agricultural Reserve are given special protections from urban and suburban development pressures. Non-agriculturally related commercial, industrial, or institutional uses are discouraged. Farming and agriculturally related activities are encouraged.

Preserving farmland in Montgomery County is a means to achieve quality of life, and economic and environmental goals. Agricultural land preservation in Damascus is important for maintaining the County's agricultural base, and in strengthening the role of Damascus as the rural market focus in this part of the County.

This Plan recommends focusing residential development around the center of Damascus to strengthen the Town Center and to preserve the surrounding farmland and rural landscapes. Other County programs are working on the important issues related to enhancing and protecting farming as an important business for the County. This Plan reinforces those programs by recommendations to keep this prime farmland and forest open and available for agriculture.

Land Use and Zoning Recommendations

The Plan reaffirms the rural protections of the RDT Zone in the Damascus Master Plan area and recommends three rural village areas for increased protection. Recommendations include the following:

- Retain the existing boundaries of the RDT Zone, except as noted, and support agriculture and agriculturally related business.
- Endorse and support criteria for evaluation of agriculturally related special exceptions.
- When evaluating compatibility with surrounding land uses, the impact of agriculturally related special exceptions in agricultural zones do not necessarily need to be controlled as stringently as the impact of a similar special exception in a residential zone.
- Establish guidelines for development in the Rural Density Transfer Area.
- Establish Special Exception guidelines for rural vista protection in the Rural Areas of Damascus.
- Apply a zoning category that protects existing rural villages.
- Endorse emerging agricultural methods and practices, and agriculturally related businesses as the best – most efficient, effective, and economical – means to maintain a viable agricultural economy and protect the Agricultural Reserve. This Plan particularly supports environmentally responsible sustainable agricultural practices.
- Reinforce protection of environmentally sensitive areas and upland forest habitat.

Rural Density Transfer Area

This Master Plan confirms and retains the existing boundaries of the Rural Density Transfer (RDT) Zone in Damascus with minor modifications in Browningsville, Etchison and Purdum. This Plan supports agriculture and agriculturally related businesses. Agriculture is evolving in Montgomery County, and this Plan supports programs that encourage emerging and evolving types of agriculture. As stated in the 1993 Refinement to the General Plan:

Agriculture is a dynamic industry whose success depends upon the ability to adapt to market forces. In addition to continued traditional farming, some transition to non-traditional farming practices is expected. Some fields that once grew corn and wheat may well be planted with fruits, berries, and vegetables to serve the regional market place. Greenhouses, hydroponic farms, and other intensive farming techniques may be more prevalent in the future as the industry responds to changing market needs, preferences, and policies.

This Plan supports programs, practices and regulatory changes necessary to ensure the continued evolution of sustainable agriculture and agriculturally related uses. To further that goal, this Plan supports additional guidance for residential development in the RDT Zone, an issue of concern from agricultural preservation and rural character perspectives. Creative land use will foster the preservation of both farmland and rural character. These standards reflect goals for residential uses in the Agricultural Reserve that protect the potential for agriculture—the primary intent of the zone.

Putting a greater priority on the preservation of open, contiguous farmland is a primary goal of any reform of subdivision in the RDT Zone. In preserving “rural” character and open vistas of farmland and open spaces, lot size is usually less of a determinant than placement of home building sites. With appropriate tools and incentives in place, arable land and vistas may be more easily preserved by the creative use of easements or by creating non-buildable “out-lots” than through either clustering or large lot development.

This Plan recommends a land conservation approach for residential development in the RDT Zone properties in Damascus. The guidelines encourage either small lot clusters, non-buildable out-lots, or creative homesite placement with overlay easements to preserve contiguous fields, important vistas, or environmentally sensitive features. The guidelines encourage creative development patterns that preserve both open contiguous fields and forests, and the preservation of rural character. Large contiguous areas of prime and productive farm fields have the greatest potential for continuing agricultural production. The guidelines are primarily intended for subdivisions creating five or more lots and on properties of 100 or more acres.

Development Guidance - Agricultural Conservation Standards for Residential Development in the RDT Zone:

- The use of cluster, out-lot, or easement methods is encouraged to preserve contiguous fields and forest, while providing increased flexibility in lot layout and allowing the density permitted in the zone. Large lots should be avoided unless conservation or other protective easements are used to designate and protect farm fields, environmental resources, or other open space.
- If common open space is identified for conservation, the preliminary plan must include a description of the intended use and a plan for maintenance of the common open space. Areas reserved for conservation should be recorded on the plan of development as either a separate parcel, non-buildable outlot, or easement on the residential lot or lots. The designated area must be clearly delineated and the easement noted on the record plat in the land records of Montgomery County.
- The location of building sites and roads should further the preservation of prime and productive farm fields, environmentally sensitive areas, scenic vistas, and rural character to the extent allowed by the need to accommodate waste treatment.
- Residential development should be designed to reduce the potential for conflict between the residential and the agricultural uses within the development and in relation to existing uses on adjoining tracts. Substantial setbacks can provide buffers between designated agricultural areas and any existing residential buildings on adjoining property, and between designated or existing offsite agricultural areas and planned housing sites.
- Development design should first identify important resources and related buffer areas that need to be preserved, including location of prime and productive soils. When determining the location of building sites, the identified resources should be avoided to the greatest possible extent.
- The design of the road network should consider the following:
 - Limit physical impact on the natural and historic environment, and avoid extensive cutting through wooded areas.
 - Respect the contours of the land and avoid cross slope routes.
 - Protect rural vistas by preserving existing woodland buffers to the extent safety considerations allow.
- Placement of building sites should consider the preservation of rural vistas and the preservation of contiguous open fields.

Special Exception Guideline for Rural Vista Protection

To ensure careful consideration of the long rural vistas that are a unique aspect of this community, this Plan strongly encourages the protection of the rural vistas that are intrinsic to the character of the Damascus vicinity. Damascus is a town set on a hill, and the long vistas outside the Town Center provide the most distinctive visual element for the community. Land uses that impede those vistas should be discouraged. Because of the uniqueness of the rural areas surrounding Damascus, that are at the highest elevations in the County, this Plan recommends language in the Implementation Chapter to guide review of special exception uses proposed in the Rural Areas.

Rural Village Communities

Montgomery County has a number of small crossroad rural communities, each possessing unique social and physical characteristics. Residents often have historical ties to their communities. These communities feature local institutions like post offices, retail stores, or churches. Some of these villages also provide limited commercial services to area residents.

This Plan supports the continuation of limited convenience retail, agriculturally related commercial activity, and tourism related commercial activity in these rural settlements. This Plan does not support all of the inherent commercial uses that are permitted in the commercial zones that are used in these villages. The existing scale of development should be maintained and enhanced, but not expanded. And new development should be consistent with the historical character and community lifestyle of rural settlements.

This Plan recommends using a modified version of the Rural Village Center Overlay Zone to provide a mixed-use zone approach appropriate for rural communities to protect villages that may become subject to potential development pressures. The Rural Village Center Overlay Zone is designed to create attractive, cohesive, and pedestrian-friendly rural village centers and prohibits land uses otherwise allowed in the underlying zone that would be inappropriate in rural villages. Amendments to this zone are proposed to prohibit additional uses that would be inappropriate in these villages, allow certain uses only by special exception, and allow the Montgomery County Planning Board to modify setback and green area requirements if necessary to better replicate existing development patterns. The purpose of this zoning is to maintain the existing scale of development. New development should be consistent with the historical character and community lifestyles.

This Master Plan proposes the Rural Village Center Overlay Zone to fulfill this vision for the rural villages of Browningsville, Etchison, and Purdum. The village of Lewisdale is only partially in this Master Plan area and is not recommended for this zone.

- **Browningsville** – The community was named for the Browning family. The village is a crossroads of Clarksburg Road and Bethesda Church Road, an area seeing increasing traffic from emerging suburbs in Frederick County.
- **Etchison** – This crossroads community served the surrounding farming families. The village store and historic Mount Tabor United Methodist Church are centers of community life. The location at the intersection of Laytonsville Road (MD 108) and Damascus Road (MD 650) faces rapidly increasing traffic loads from commuters.
- **Purdum** – The village of Purdum on Mountain View Road is a community of a dozen houses and two farmsteads that includes two late-19th century churches. Although the village is located away from commuter roads and less subject to development pressures, protection is recommended.

Guidance for Development in the Rural Village Center Overlay Zone - To support the intent of the Rural Village Center Overlay Zone, any proposed new development must consider the following guidance.

- Village character should be maintained and enhanced through buildings of compatible scale, massing, siting, and setbacks for new or expanded uses.
- Pedestrian and bicycle circulation should be emphasized through street design, including streetscape and traffic calming, sidewalks, and access to trail networks.
- Development that provides varied uses to serve the needs of the local community should be encouraged.
- Opportunities for appropriately scaled new and existing businesses are supported in compact and pedestrian-friendly commercial areas.
- Any development should consider the rural character of surrounding areas, providing vistas beyond the village through streetscape design and building placement.
- Setbacks for new development should replicate the existing setback pattern in the village to the greatest possible extent, rather than the setbacks in the current zone.
- Green area for development may be reduced if the Planning Board determines that reduced green space would better reflect the existing character of the village.