

VI. HOUSING

CRITIQUE

The 1964 General Plan seldom mentions housing at all, and then only in terms of physical design and the use of land. At that time the whole matter of housing, considered in its economic and social context, was not generally viewed as a part of the concern of planning and the General Plan. Since that time, because of the increasing cost of shelter and the general broadening of the concerns of government and planning into socio-economic areas, housing has increasingly been recognized as a proper and necessary function of the planning process. The Department of Housing and Urban Development now requires a housing element in all planning assistance applications, including a discussion of housing problems and the planning implementation activities being undertaken for their solution.

With this increasing recognition of the importance of housing as a public responsibility and its close involvement with social and economic problems, additional policies are needed in addition to good urban design (in the architectural sense), and the elimination of slums and blight (viewed as the removal of deteriorated buildings). Evidence of the recognition of this need can be found in policies adopted in recent area master plans, as well as statements in master plans not yet adopted. Thus, the Clarkeburg Master Plan calls for a variety of housing types suitable for "all stages of the human life cycle at all income levels". The same plan, as well as a number of others both adopted and proposed, stress the need for housing suitable for all economic levels.

But at the policy level, recognition is needed of the role played by housing in the total environmental, social, and economic structure of the County. Of particular importance is the relationship between place of residence, location of employment, ready access to shopping and other community facilities, and transportation. This is perhaps more a question of land use planning than of housing. However, the problem has a serious impact not only upon the comfort and convenience of the County resident but also upon the ability of workers to obtain employment with a reasonably possible travel distance and of employers to find workers at all salary levels. This last relationship is the more serious in the case of the lower paid workers.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Four basic critical issues focus on the housing needs which in turn influence housing policy in Montgomery County. These basic issues are: 1) the need for greater variety and choice in housing, 2) the need for housing choices that are related to employment opportunities, geographically and economically, 3) the need for adequate housing for low-and moderate-income households, and 4) the need for halting the spread of blighted neighborhoods and substandard housing.

In approaching the need for greater variety and choice in housing, emphasis should be placed on: household needs; housing for all ages and life-styles; adequate recreation facilities as part of the immediate environment; a variety of ownership provisions (such as cooperatives and condominiums); the use of new and innovative housing systems; and more efficiency in government procedures for facilitating development.

To integrate housing with employment opportunities, housing should be located convenient to job-producing centers, and the availability and economic feasibility of providing housing for all wage levels should be promoted.

Insuring an adequate supply of housing for all households is necessary if housing opportunities are to be available for all wage levels. Specific needs such as low-and moderate-income housing should be included as part of new development. Housing assistance for low-and moderate-income households would facilitate better utilization of resources.

In preventing the spread of blighted neighborhoods and substandard housing, there is a need for fuller community support and funding in neighborhood improvement, for discouraging rental negligence, and for employing where relevant, further positive programs in achieving community improvement.

The County should take advantage of this opportunity to establish a housing policy, something it has not had in the past. This policy should be based on social and economic goals, and future performance in the field of housing can be evaluated on the basis of its conformity to those social and economic criteria. For example, by using policy statements, it will be possible to judge the effectiveness of local ordinances and agency procedures concerned with housing.