

HOUSING

GOAL: Provide a variety of housing options including affordably priced housing and housing opportunities for seniors, suitable to the small town character of Damascus.

INTRODUCTION

The community of Damascus offers one of the most balanced housing markets in the County, offering excellent diversity of housing types and prices. Affordably priced housing in a small town setting, convenient access to employment centers, and the beauty of the surrounding agricultural and rural open space have attracted and maintained a growing number of young families in recent years.

Cluster housing is preferred on major developable parcels over standard low-density designs; mixed-use mid-rise buildings are preferred in the Town Center over single use, single story buildings; and additional residential opportunities are encouraged in the Town Center to build a customer base for additional locally oriented retail opportunities. While environmental goals are important in this community, building a viable town with balanced housing opportunities is equally important. This Plan reflects the need to balance the occasionally competing goals and policies of housing, the environment, transportation, and town building.

The one area of significant need is senior housing. As the community's population continues to age, the demand for senior housing has become more pronounced. Currently, there are very few housing options within the Damascus planning area that can accommodate the diverse needs of the expanding senior population. This Plan identifies alternative senior housing options that support Countywide policies.

The most significant additional housing proposed is in the Town Center, which will contribute to the viability of local businesses and create a livelier center for the Damascus community. Outside the Town Center, this Plan supports limited additional single-family housing. This is due to the location of Damascus in the rural north of the County, limited access to public sewer, environmental constraints, and limited transit options. This Plan's recommendations will protect environmental features and the agricultural economy of the area while providing sufficient additional housing opportunities and meeting community building goals. This Plan recommends the following major goals for housing in Damascus:

- **Support moderate-density development within the Town Center.**
Multi-family, single-family attached, and live-work units within the Town Center will accommodate a significant portion of the need for moderately priced residential development in this community. Increased densities will also accommodate moderately priced dwelling units (MPDUs) and contribute to the economic base for local retail and service businesses.
- **Support increased senior housing for residents of the Damascus area.**
The anticipated demand for senior housing will support approximately 150 units. Senior housing would be most appropriately and conveniently located within the Town Center. Two potential sites appropriate for joint development are discussed.

- **Use cluster development where feasible to maintain the small town character of Damascus.**
Developable sites within the Transition Areas are recommended for single-family cluster development where public sewer is available.
- **Support use of TDR receiving areas where appropriate.**
Where infrastructure is available and environmental regulations permit, TDR receiving sites create additional housing opportunities that also contribute to agricultural preservation goals. Two TDR receiving sites are recommended in the Plan, both in Transition Areas.
- **Support single-family cluster development at existing densities except as recommended for TDR receiving sites.**
A moderate amount of development potential remains in the RE-2C and Rural Cluster Zone in the eastern portion of the Master Plan. This Plan supports the eventual development of those properties using the cluster option for development.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Town Center

Creating senior housing opportunities and additional moderate density housing are the primary housing goals for the Town Center.

- **Moderate Density Residential Development** – As indicated in the Land Use Chapter the Town Center will accommodate a variety of housing types. Currently, less than 8 percent of the existing housing stock within Damascus is multi-family housing and most of that is within the Town Center. This Plan encourages further moderate density residential development to enhance the vitality and character of the Town Center. The types of moderate density development that are contemplated include live-work units, townhouse and multifamily units.

As noted in the Table below, existing densities in the Town Center have the potential to allow somewhat more than 2,300 additional dwelling units, based on the maximum development potential of the existing ten zones in the Town Center (illustrated in the Existing Zoning map in the Land Use Chapter). This theoretical maximum exceeds the realistic potential market for development in Damascus, and as much of this land is already in stable commercial, industrial, and residential uses.

Similarly, based on the proposed land use in the Town Center, the anticipated residential density generates a maximum theoretical total of slightly more than 2,000 dwelling units within the Town Center. While this equally overstates realistic development potential, the proposed land use regulations will provide more flexibility for the property owners, and more design and scale certainty for area residents. Residential potential is not increased, but it will be easier to proposed residential or mixed-use developments in the Town Center.

Maximum Yield from Existing Zones in Town Center

Zone	Acres	GFA	GSA	YPA	# Units	Notes
C-2	64.35	472,523	2,803,249	21.50	*1,384	-
C-T	1.00	5,000	43,560	-	-	1
O-M	21.50	14,200	277,913	21.50	137	2
PD-7	24.68	307,958	1,075,174	8.54	163	3
I-1	15.77	18,891	686,855	21.50	339	2
RE-2C	38.23	87,697	1,665,354	.40	15	-
R-200	20.99	22,193	914,364	2.44	51	4
R-60	4.76	-	207,474	6.10	29	4
RT-8.0	6.03	-	262,474	9.76	59	-
R-30	11.81	91,392	514,476	17.69	184	4
Maximum Potential Residential Yield Town Center					2,361	

GFA – Gross Floor Area GSA – Gross Site Area YPA–Residential Yield Per Acre (Theoretical Maximum)

*Permitted or Special Exception use depending on Master Plan

1. Dwellings no longer allowed in C-T Zone
2. Highest yield through Productivity Housing
3. Zone can yield 8.5/acre if MPDUs are used
4. Includes 22% MPDUs.

The Table below outlines these theoretical maximums and their comparison to the proposed Town Center Zones for realistically developable properties in the Town Center. While the potential yield is slightly reduced, the allowed density remains significantly higher than historic development trends in the community. This “cushion” reflects the reality that not all sites will develop or redevelop, not all sites that develop will develop at full density, and not all sites will develop as fully residential or commercial.

Proposed Town Center Zones Yields

Zone	Acres	GFA (sf)	GSA (sf)	Proposed YPA	# Units
TCZ-1	69.42	1,512,005	3,024,010	20	1736
TCZ-2	21.44	1,167,559	934,047	15	322
Maximum Potential Residential Yield of Developable Properties					2058

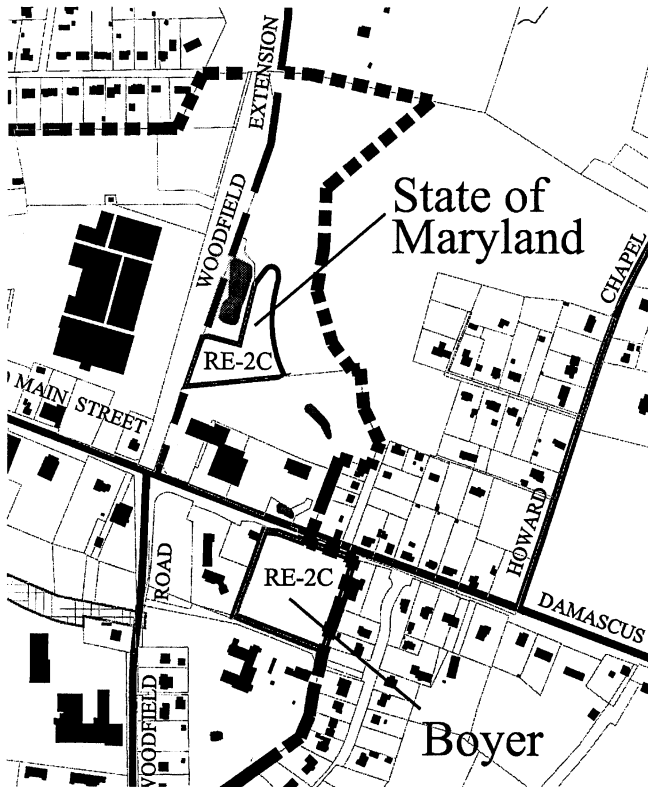
GFA – NR Gross Floor Area GSA – Gross Site Area YPA – Residential Yield Per Acre

- **Senior Housing** - Existing options for seniors (active, assisted, and care facilities) are very limited in the Damascus area. Specialized housing for elderly residents in Damascus consists of two group homes that can accommodate a total of 15 residents. There are only three additional group homes in the rural up-county area: one each in Poolesville, Clarksburg, and Barnesville. Together, these facilities can accommodate a total of 20 residents. There are no nursing homes or age segregated apartments in the area.

Based on the 2000 Census data, current population trends in the Damascus area indicate that while there are many young families, approximately 43 percent of residents have lived in Damascus for more than ten years. This suggests that Damascus offers great potential for providing a stable community for residents who wish to “age in place”. The “aging in place” concept provides the type of housing that will allow residents to remain in their homes despite the limitation that occur with aging. Successful aging-in-place communities provide a variety of services that accommodate the physical, mental, and psychological changes that accompany aging.

This Plan supports residences for active seniors and some assisted living. The anticipated demand for senior housing in Damascus will support a moderate increase of approximately 150

units. Two sites within the Town Center are particularly appropriate for this use due to their proximity to services and retail uses. If both were developed at the maximum proposed density, they could provide the anticipated needed senior housing units. These sites are:



- **State of Maryland Property** - This site is located adjacent and north of the Damascus Library. A joint development venture with the private sector could provide some senior housing options at this optimal location. As noted in the Land Use Chapter, this 3.1-acre property has environmental limitations that would limit its development potential. The proposed density would permit approximately 75 units.
- **Boyer Property** - This 3.3 acre property is located on MD 108 across from the Senior Center and Library. It is adjacent to the Damascus United Methodist Church and also within the Town Center. Although this site is not ideal for pedestrian access, it presents potential opportunities for a joint development venture with the Church. Under the proposed density, approximately 82 dwelling units could be developed on this site.

Town Neighborhood Areas

Existing densities in the neighborhoods within and adjoining the Magruder Branch watershed generally range from 2-8 houses per acre and primarily consist of small lot single-family homes and townhomes with a moderate number of multifamily developments. Few developable parcels remain in this corridor, and no changes are proposed to housing policy. This corridor is the cornerstone of Damascus' strength as a community offering a wide range of moderately priced single-family housing. These neighborhoods are convenient to schools, recreation facilities, shopping, and commuter routes. As these neighborhoods mature, it will continue to be important to improve their non-vehicle access opportunities through trails and improved sidewalks.

Neighborhood Transition Areas

Beyond the immediate vicinity of the linear corridor development along Ridge, Woodfield, and Damascus Roads, residential development is characterized by development ranging from 1-3 houses per acre. This type of development serves as a transition between higher density residential development within the Town Center and Magruder Branch, and the Rural Transition and Agricultural Reserve areas. Some developable properties still remain in these areas, and they can be expected to provide additional low-density single-family detached housing opportunities for the Damascus area.

Limited change is proposed for these areas. Some developable parcels located along major roadways near the Town Center are recommended for smaller lot cluster, but little additional density is proposed.

Several of those properties will also provide moderately priced dwelling units dwellings, contributing to additional affordable housing within the Plan area. The Warfield Farm, located along Woodfield Road, is proposed to be a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) receiving area, contributing to housing and agricultural preservation goals.

Rural Transition Areas

The Rural Transition Areas are primarily zoned for large lot (five acre cluster option) development. Development within these areas has been particularly significant in the past decade in the eastern portion of the Master Plan area, particularly along Hawkins Creamery Road. This zoning was recommended as a means to protect stream valleys and woodlands. The consequence of this recommendation has been to add a significant number of much larger new homes to the mix of housing in Damascus, an element missing heretofore. These areas are surrounded by areas of two-acre cluster to the west and 25-acre RDT zoning to the east. Developable parcels remain in this area, and they can be anticipated to provide some additional luxury housing opportunities for the Master Plan area.

Rural Transition Areas along Howard Chapel Drive and Ridge Road (the northeastern segment of the Master Plan area) are recommended for a change from two-acre to five-acre density (for environmental reasons), but this change will have limited housing impact. The entire area is beyond the potential sewer envelope and the soil types in this area are difficult for placing septic fields, making the five-acre density closer to the realistic development potential.

Additional housing at somewhat higher density is proposed in the southwest segment of the Master Plan area on the Kingstead/Leishear properties. These properties are also recommended to provide Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) capacity, contributing to housing and agricultural preservation goals.

Rural Areas

Due to density limitation and restrictive land use policies, little housing growth is anticipated in the rural areas of this Plan. Most of the rural areas are in the Rural Density Transfer Zone, which limits housing to one for every twenty-five acres. Some additional housing may be anticipated in the area of existing rural communities, but wastewater treatment limitations curtail development potential.

Public Sites

There are no vacant publicly owned sites in the Plan area, other than the already discussed potential senior housing site in the Town Center, that can be considered for additional housing opportunities. Two vacant school sites are in the Plan area, and one more is just outside the Plan area; but the Board of Education has no plans to surplus these sites. Even if they were to be considered for surplus, infrastructure limitations would make them of limited usefulness for additional housing. They would be better considered for park and recreation resources as discussed in the Parkland section of the Community Facilities Chapter.

HOUSING ANALYSIS

Housing Types

The 2000 Census data for the Damascus area indicates that of the 5,559 households within the area, more than 92 percent of the housing is comprised of single-family detached units and townhomes. Of the total households in this planning area, 7.3 percent are multifamily units, located within the Neighborhood Transition or Town Center areas.

Housing Prices

New single-family detached houses have been the most expensive category in Damascus in recent years, and the only one to exceed Countywide prices. Although resale housing accounts for almost all of Damascus housing sales, the number of new single-family detached dwellings have increased in the past couple of years. Most of these have been in low-density developments within the Rural Transition portion of the eastern side of the Plan area. Although these homes are significantly higher in price compared to Countywide averages, Damascus generally has more affordable housing options than most other areas of the County.

Recently, Countwide housing recommendations have been revised and reflect a commitment to increase the supply of affordable housing. Although the term affordability is relative, the County specifically defines the term as households with incomes between 60 percent and 120 percent of the median household income or households with incomes between \$43,000 and \$86,000. Housing in Damascus complements the County's needs by offering a variety of reasonably priced housing. As stated previously, most of the affordable housing in Damascus comes in the form of market-rate, detached and attached single-family housing. Additional multi-family and townhome developments in a mixed-use setting are proposed to be located within the Town Center.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Population Trends

While the County census tracts do not immediately match the Damascus Master Plan area, an evaluation of the generally proximate tracts provides a reasonably accurate portrait of the Damascus area.

The 2000 Census indicated that approximately 16,639 persons reside in the Damascus Master Plan area. Population growth was slow between 1990-2000, increasing approximately 4 percent compared to the County growth of 15.4 percent. This reflects the limited developable land with access to water and sewer that can serve higher densities in the Plan area.

One of the trends in the data reveals that Damascus residents tend to be younger (a median age of 35.1) compared to the County average age (36.8). Almost one-fourth of the area's population is school age, compared to about 18 percent of the entire County. Further, over half (56.9 percent) moved to their current address during the 1990's, and 43.1 percent of Damascus households have been at their current address for more than 10 years, compared to 34.5 percent of all County households. These statistics reflect a large proportion of young families and the relative affordability of housing in the community and suggests that many residents value the small town character of Damascus and want to raise their families here.

This Plan recommends land use changes that encourage additional affordable housing while protecting environmental resources. The Town Center will provide opportunities for moderate density development, while adjoining areas are encouraged to cluster housing near primary roads, and preserve stream valleys and forest resources.

The 2000 Census also indicates that the "Baby Boomer" population (35-54 years of age in 2000) makes up approximately one-third of the population in Damascus. As this population ages in coming years, the need for senior housing will become more pronounced. Active seniors will need housing facilities that can support lifestyle changes such as single floor, higher-density living in close proximity to convenience retail, restaurants, cultural activities, and entertainment. This Master Plan supports the development of active senior housing and a limited level of assisted senior housing within the context of

the town's current character. Higher levels of assisted senior housing or nursing level of care would be more appropriate in areas that are nearer a hospital than in Damascus.

Development Trends

The land use recommendations proposed in this Plan will increase housing potential in the Town Center areas (through moderate density mixed-use, multi-family, and attached housing), but only slightly increase the existing emphasis on single-family detached housing in the Neighborhood Transition Areas. Limited additional housing potential is proposed outside the Town Center.

The most dramatic change to the character of Damascus in recent years has been the number of new large homes on large lots on the periphery of the Plan area. The prices of these estate homes have not been typical of the area, and along with the widespread price pressure in the County, they have led to generally higher housing costs.

Overall, Damascus offers a reasonable supply of new and resale affordable housing, both subsidized and market rate; and a more recent availability of luxury homes. This Plan proposes land use policies to continue to offer housing diversity and balance.

