

# Commercial Centers - Character and Vitality

*This Plan recommends improvements to the access, appearance, and the overall economic health of commercial centers to ensure their long-term viability.*

## Introduction

North and West Silver Spring residents value local businesses in their community and many of their daily convenience retail needs can be met in the immediate neighborhood. Recommendations to improve access, appearance, compatibility with residential communities, and the overall economic health of commercial and industrial uses are a focus of this Plan.

Commercial and industrial businesses in North and West Silver Spring are concentrated in several centers that provide a wide variety of convenience goods and services. This chapter contains recommendations for the Rock Creek Center along Grubb Road; the Brookville Road Industrial area; the Walter Reed Army Medical Center; the National Park Seminary Historic District; and office uses on Cameron Street. These areas are shown in Map 14. This chapter also provides general guidance for non-residential land uses and special exceptions. Montgomery Hills, the largest commercial center in the Master Plan area, is addressed in the following chapter (page 49).

This Plan recognizes that the existing commercial and industrial development are generally appropriate, with limited modifications as recommended by this Plan.

## Recommendations

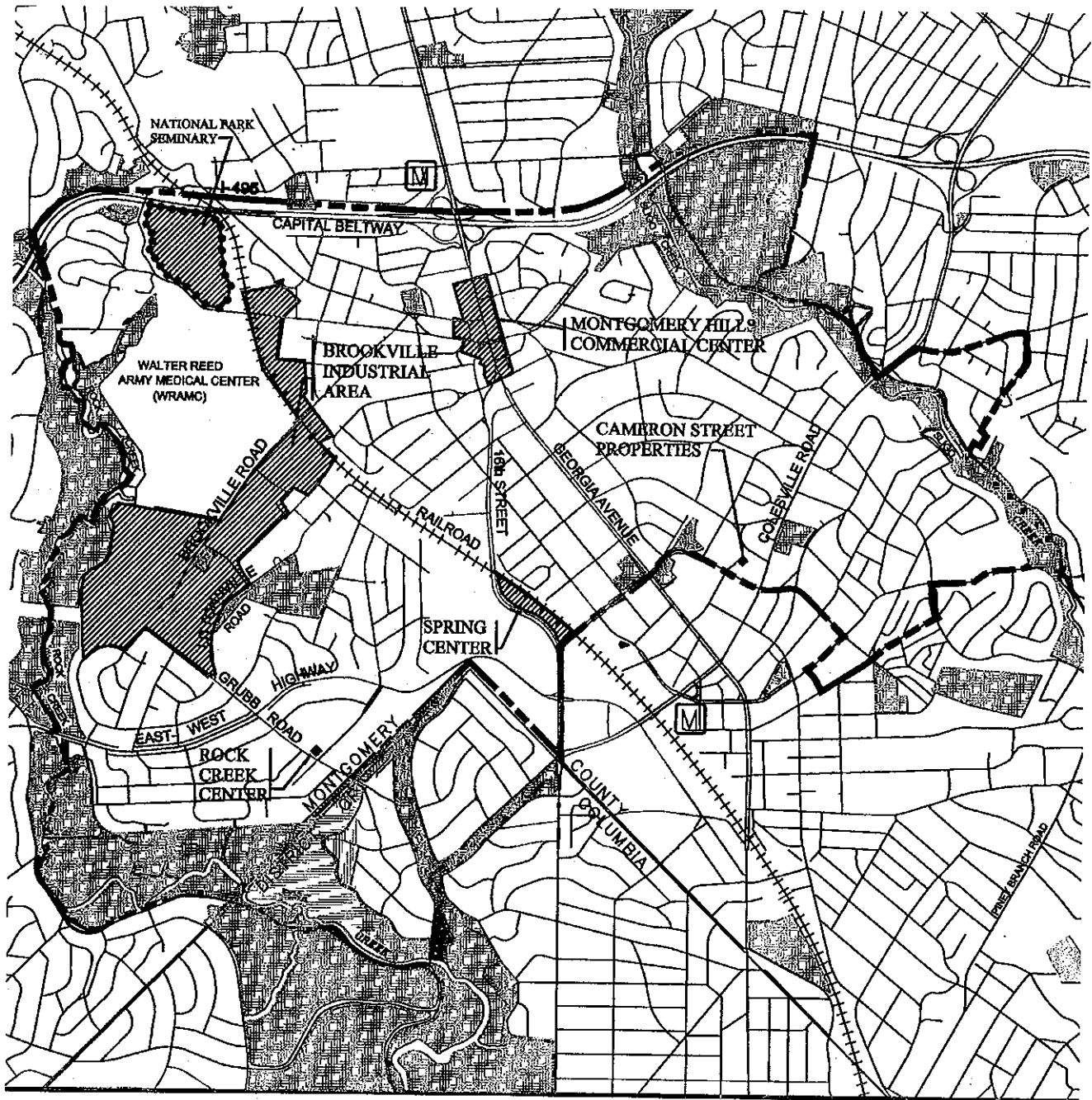
- **Limit the extent of commercial and industrial development to the areas shown on the proposed land use and proposed zoning maps (see Maps 9, 10, and 12).**





Intensive commercial development is most appropriate in the Silver Spring Central Business District. However, the commercial and industrial activities in North and West Silver Spring serve important roles in the local and subregional marketplace. There are limited areas around the Silver Spring CBD and along major roads where low intensity office uses are present or recommended as a transition in use, density, and building heights.

- **Recognize the Silver Spring Central Business District (CBD) as a community-oriented downtown for the surrounding residential neighborhoods, including North and West Silver Spring.**

# Selected Commercial and Industrial Areas

Map 14



-  Master Plan Boundary
-  Parkland
-  Metro Station
-  Commercial and Industrial Areas

0 575 1150 2300 Feet



## Cameron Street Properties

### Recommendations

- Consider lots 17 and 18 on Cameron Street for the Commercial Transition (C-T) Zone (see Map 15).

Lots 17 and 18 on Cameron Street are zoned R-60, but have no street access or frontage on a residential street. Access and site orientation for these two lots is from Cameron and Spring streets, which are oriented toward the CBD. Other uses on Cameron Street are commercial, with C-O and C-T zoning.

The Plan recommends that the C-T Zone be applied by local map amendment with a schematic development plan to ensure compliance with the guidelines of this Plan. Buildings constructed under the C-T zone should be compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood in terms of height, bulk, and building materials and should be screened from the residences on Noyes Drive using landscaping or other forms of buffering.

To ensure compatibility with adjacent residential uses, development guidelines for these two properties include:

- Thirty-foot minimum setback from the northern lot line of lot 19.
- Fifteen-foot minimum setback from the rear yard setback on both lots.
- Rezone a portion of lot Pt. 13 on Cameron Street from R-60 to the Commercial Office (C-O) Zone to correct a mistake in the zoning map (see Map 15).

This property was rezoned C-O by local map amendment application C-804 in 1962, but

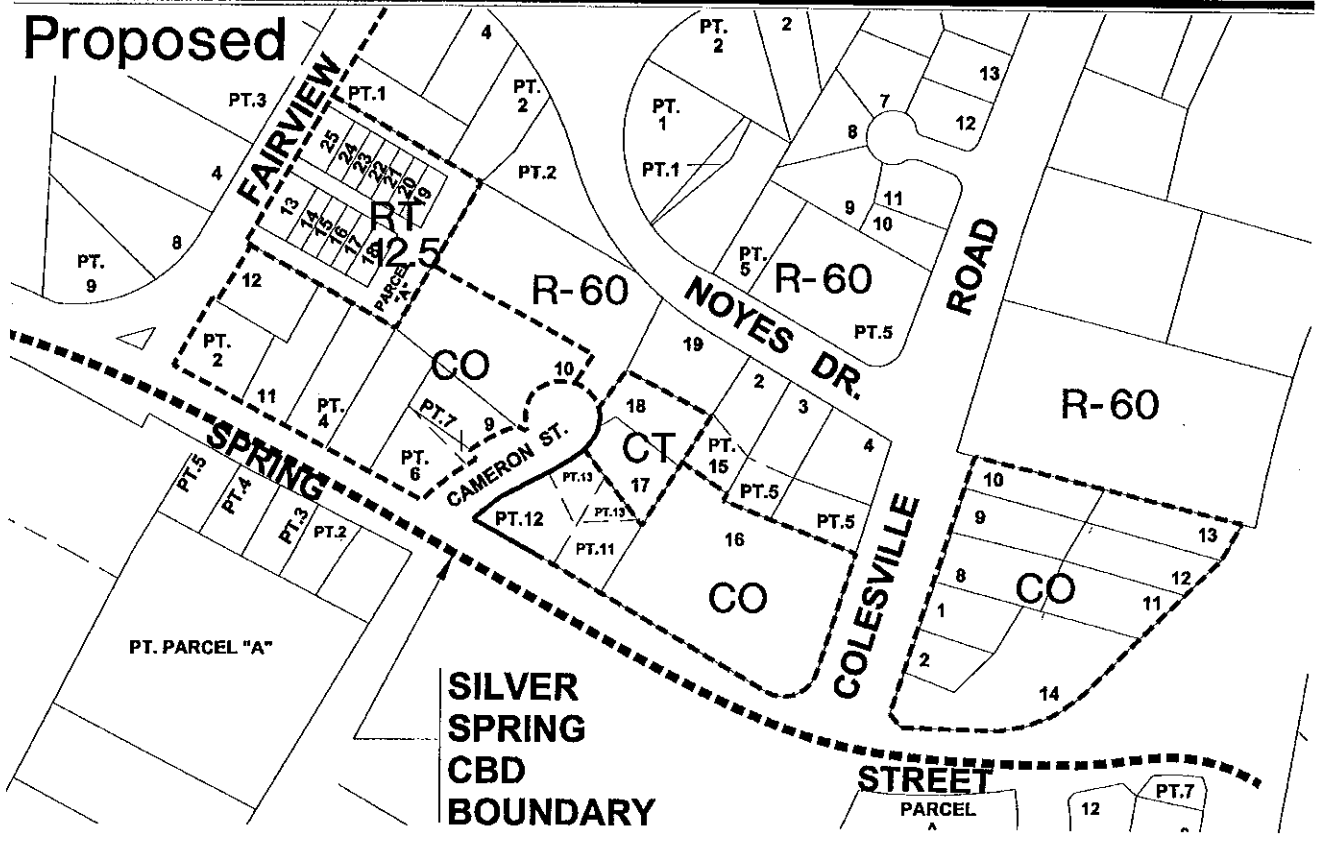
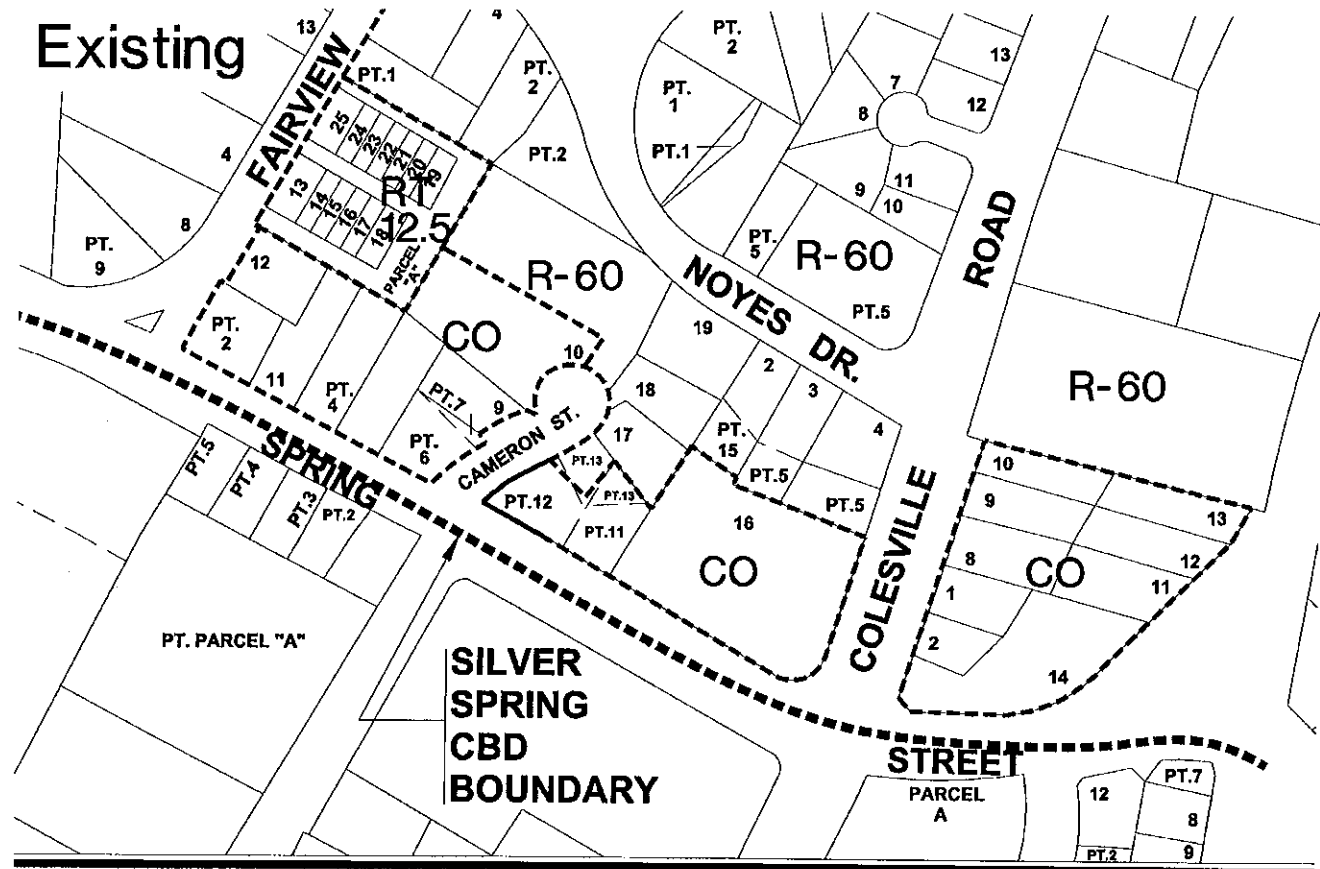
subsequent zoning maps mistakenly showed the R-60 Zone.

## Rock Creek Center

The Rock Creek Center, a small neighborhood commercial area located on Grubb Road, provides convenience shopping within walking distance for local residents. It has the feel of a traditional small town shopping center due to its locally-oriented stores, the two-lane roads that surround the property, and its location within a residential neighborhood. The Rock Creek Center is the type of small-scale, neighborhood retail desired by many County residents. The center currently includes a restaurant/deli, a bakery, and a dry cleaners. Previous uses included a food market, a gas station, and a drug store with a post office retail service. Several tenant spaces are currently empty and the community is concerned about the vacancies at this center. Probable soil contamination at the former gas station site has prevented its timely reuse.

The challenge for the center is to maintain tenants and fill vacancies when they occur with neighborhood-oriented retail. The smaller tenant spaces of this older center and the lack of visibility along a major highway make it difficult to attract a large assortment of tenants. A major advantage for the Rock Creek Center, however, is that there is ample parking, particularly at the rear of the property.

If this center redevelops, its function as a community focal point—a gathering place for neighborhood eating and shopping—should be enhanced. The front of the center should continue to be oriented toward Grubb Road and Washington Avenue. The center should continue to have a relationship to these streets and not turn inward toward the rear parking lot, which would place the back of the stores along public streets.



## Recommendations

- Support the use of the Rock Creek Center on Grubb Road as a neighborhood-oriented retail facility.
- Reconfirm the existing commercial zoning (C-1, Convenience Commercial) at the Rock Creek Center.
- Encourage the owners of the Rock Creek Center to resolve the environmental issues regarding the vacant gas station site at the corner of the center.
- Encourage the owners and tenants at the Rock Creek Center to explore the assistance programs available through the County Department of Economic Development.

## Brookville Road Industrial Area

The Brookville Road Industrial area is a strong, competitive market for light industrial and commercial service uses (see Map 16). The area is well-occupied and quite active with businesses that serve a wide geographical area. Many Brookville businesses are well-established, both in terms of the age of the business and the length of time in the area.

Light industrial uses generally involve small- to medium-scale industrial activities including, but not limited to, research and development, warehousing and storage activities, light manufacturing and assembly of products, and other similar uses. Light industrial uses usually generate less heavy truck traffic and have fewer adverse environmental effects on surrounding areas compared to heavy industrial uses. There are no heavy industrial uses in the Brookville area. Brookville is an intensively developed area of over 100 acres and almost 1.4 million square feet of industrial floor space in 50 buildings. It benefits from the limited inventory of warehouse space in this part of Montgomery County and the high rent such spaces command throughout the County.

*From the Telephone Survey of Silver Spring and Takoma Park Residents:*

*The most frequent complaint about the Brookville area by those who use it is that it is "unattractive," according to the Silver Spring/Takoma Park telephone survey.*

It is estimated that the number of workers in the Brookville Industrial area is as high as 3,000. This estimate does not include the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Forest Glen Annex, which is adjacent to Brookville but is not considered part of the industrial area. It is unlikely that the estimated 3,000 employees are ever in Brookville at the same time. Numerous firms specialize in custom construction trades and automotive and other repair services. Many service firms work primarily off-site, including construction, cleaning and maintenance firms, building and repair services, air conditioning, heating, and plumbing contractors, caterers, decorators, and other specialty contractors.

Most existing land uses are expected to remain and substantial redevelopment is not anticipated. Brookville will continue to provide locations for light industrial land uses and commercial services that are necessary and valuable resources for Silver Spring. Several large public facilities, including the Brookville Road Service Park (home of a Ride-On Bus Depot and a County road maintenance facility) and a Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) facility, will remain as well.

The Brookville Road Industrial area is a viable competitive market, even though its deficiencies include crowding, lack of sufficient parking, road congestion, and some deteriorated buildings.

The following recommendations are directed at improving the visual character and functional operation of the Brookville Road area. Implementing these recommendations will improve the overall attractiveness of the area as a business location and will also improve the pedestrian environment. Transportation-related

recommendations for the Brookville Road area are contained in the next chapter.

The Capital Crescent Trail/Georgetown Branch traverses the Brookville Industrial area. In order to encourage use of the Capital Crescent Trail/Georgetown Branch, it is important to have convenient, direct, and safe bicycle and pedestrian access from the neighborhoods to the trail system. Recommendations for trail access are also contained in the next chapter.

## **Recommendations**

- **Retain the existing I-1 (light industrial) zoning in the Brookville Road Industrial Area.**
- **Protect Rock Creek Park, including preservation of trees, wetlands, the stream valley, and the management of stormwater run-off.**

Improvements are planned at the Brookville Road Service Park, the location for two major County facilities, the Ride-On Bus Depot and road maintenance facility. Careful planning, including review of schematic concept designs by the Department of Park and Planning, should be undertaken to avoid negative impacts to Rock Creek Park.

- **Improve landscape buffers between the industrial uses and the residential neighborhoods.**
- **Request that DPWT consider parking time limitations on streets in the industrial area to prevent long-term parking and improve the supply of on-street parking for businesses in this area.**
- **Encourage facilities and services that support the local employees of the Brookville Road Industrial area and the Walter Reed Army Medical Center complex.**

## **Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Forest Glen Annex**

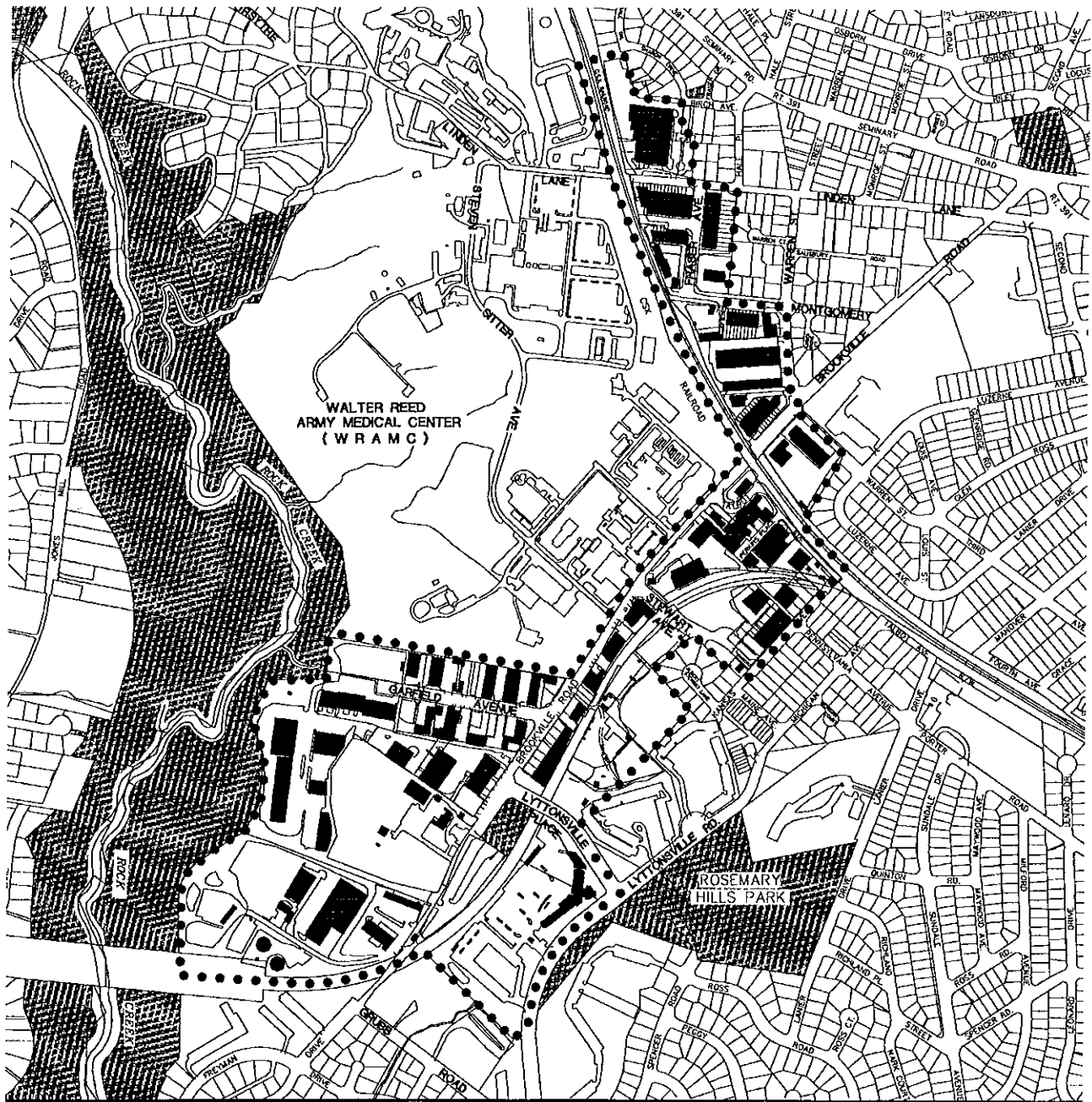
The Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC), Forest Glen Annex, contains 174 acres bordered by the Capital Beltway, CSX Railroad, Brookville Road, the industrial area along Garfield Avenue, Rock Creek Park and the Forest Glen Park neighborhood (see Map 17). Linden Lane separates the National Park Seminary District from most of the base. The function of the base is to provide Army and Navy research facilities for military medicine, with other functions that support the main campus of Walter Reed, located in Washington, D.C. on 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Georgia Avenue.

The Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR), a 474,000 square foot building, has been completed off Brookville Road and Steven Sitter Avenue. In 1992, as part of the Planning Board's mandatory referral review of WRAIR, the Army signed a Memorandum of Understanding to limit traffic impact. During construction, the Army has met with representatives from the surrounding neighborhoods, Save Our Seminary, and Montgomery County staff to address traffic and historic preservation issues. A revision to the Army's 1992 Master Plan for the Base is underway.

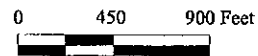
## **Recommendations**

- **Ensure that the Army complies with and fully implements the 1992 Memorandum of Understanding agreement for the Forest Glen Annex made among the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the Montgomery County Planning Board, and the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) for the Forest Glen Annex.**

The Memorandum of Understanding specifically addresses traffic impact from the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR), however, the intent of the agreement is that it applies to all traffic generated by the entire Forest Glen Annex. It must be implemented



- Industrial Area Boundary
- Non-Residential Buildings
- ▨ Parkland



with community participation. Additional issues that the Army should address with the surrounding community include the disposition of the National Park Seminary District, the Army Base Master Plan update, future development plans, and hazardous material incident notification procedures.

- **Use Brookville Road as the main entry to the WRAMC.**

Brookville Road is classified as an arterial highway, while Linden Lane is a secondary residential road. Brookville Road is an appropriate main entrance to the base.

- **Minimize traffic impact on surrounding neighborhoods and roadways through on-site measures to control the number of vehicles, direction of vehicles, and timing of arrival/departure.**
- **Comply with the reduced parking levels (one space per two employees) recommended for federal installations in the National Capital Planning Commission's (NCPC) *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.**
- **Maximize the use of public transportation, interoffice shuttles, shuttles to the Metrorail system, and high-occupancy vehicles as recommended in the NCPC *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.**

## National Park Seminary Historic District

National Park Seminary, located in the vicinity of Linden Lane and Woodstock Avenue, was the first historic district in the County to be designated on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* in 1979. (See Map 17.) A former resort known as The

Forest Inn (1887) became the centerpiece for the National Park Seminary (1894), a successful finishing school for young women. Some 20 fanciful buildings constructed during the school's heyday continue to delight and amaze passersby.

The property was purchased by the War Department in 1942 and was used as convalescent facilities for the WRAMC. The National Park Seminary is discussed in this chapter since it is part of the WRAMC. Additional historical information on the site is on page 28.

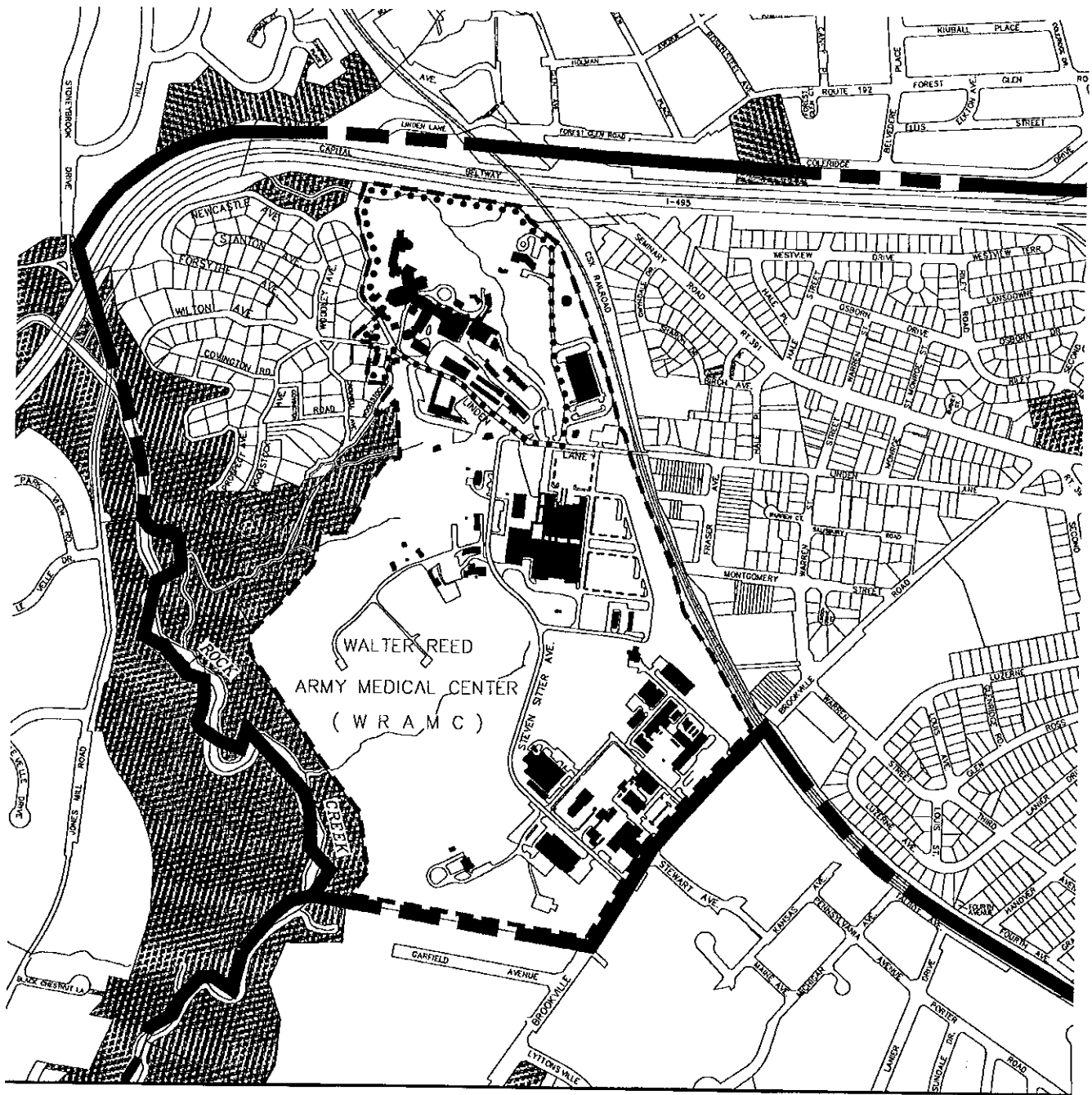
Deterioration of the district under the Army's ownership has been an ongoing concern. The Department of the Army and the General Services Administration are actively working to transfer ownership from the Army to another government agency or into private ownership. Because this process is ongoing, and the potential reuse of the district will have many issues to balance, this Plan recommends the following guidance for evaluating a reuse proposal.

### *Recommendations*

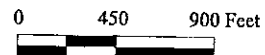
- **Prepare a minor master plan amendment if the proposed reuse cannot be accommodated by the existing R-90 (residential, one-family) zoning.**

The minor master plan amendment process allows for a limited modification to a previously adopted plan in order to respond to changing community conditions or for occasional clarification of recommendations. A minor master plan amendment should be initiated for this Master Plan if the proposed reuse of the National Park Seminary property cannot be accommodated by the existing R-90 zoning. The following guidelines should serve as the basis for the minor master plan amendment or for development, should it proceed without an amendment.





- ■ ■ ■ ■ Master Plan Boundary
- - - - - WRAMC Boundary
- ..... National Park Seminary Historic District
- ▨ Parkland



- **Maintain and restore the district’s historic integrity, including the buildings, relationships between the buildings, and the character of the open space.**

If the property is subdivided into private lots, those lots should be situated to accommodate planned uses and supporting activities (parking, loading, and access) while meeting other development guidelines.

- **Limit impacts on environmentally sensitive areas and provide for private conservation easements or public ownership.**
- **Consider, where compatible with the proposed use(s), the ability to allow access (either public or for-fee) to buildings with public or quasi-public uses such as the Ballroom, the Chapel, and the Pagoda.**
- **Minimize traffic impact on surrounding neighborhoods and roadways primarily through low-traffic-generating land uses.**
- **Minimize noise, light, and other environmental impacts on the surrounding residential neighborhoods.**
- **Provide trail connections as recommended in this Plan.**

## Special Exceptions

The Zoning Ordinance identifies certain land uses in each zone that require a special exception. These special exception uses must meet specific standards and requirements, as well as the general conditions contained in the Zoning Ordinance. The Board of Appeals has primary responsibility for reviewing and approving special exception petitions.

A special exception application must be approved unless the Board of Appeals finds the proposed use does not satisfy the special exception criteria or the Zoning Ordinance’s general conditions. Approval requires a finding that there is not an

increase in the number, intensity, or scope of special exception uses sufficient to affect the area adversely or alter its predominantly residential nature and that the use is consistent with Master Plan recommendations. Master Plan recommendations for specific properties were developed based on existing conditions and proposed development plans.

This Plan identifies the following issues to be considered in the preparation and review of special exception applications.

## Recommendations

- **Limit impacts of existing special exceptions in established residential neighborhoods.**

The Woodside Center Nursing Home is located within an established residential neighborhood and its potential expansion is a source of concern to the neighborhood in terms of compatibility. If any significant modification or expansion to the facility is requested, the Board of Appeals should take into account the impacts on the neighborhood, particularly with regard to noise, traffic, and the number and scheduling of deliveries. Given the possibility that a modification could change the effect of the special exception on the immediate neighborhood, the Board should hold a public hearing to adequately address these issues. The Board should also seek to ensure that any such modification or expansion is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood in terms of its scale and design.

- **Apply increased scrutiny to the review of special exception applications for highly visible sites, such as properties located at corners of residential streets with major arterial highways, and residentially zoned properties adjacent to non-residential zones.**

In addition, properties situated in other prominent locations, such as on hills, at the end of a road, or aligned with curves, also are highly visible. These highly visible sites have a

large role in influencing the character of the neighborhood. The visibility of parking areas, size of signs, and lighting should be minimized. The use of a residential style of architecture for modifications is also desirable.

- **Maintain a residential appearance where feasible.**
- **Evaluate special exception uses in residentially zoned areas and along major highways to minimize:**
  - non-residential appearance
  - size and number of signs
  - visibility and amount of parking
  - traffic generation
  - intrusive lighting

Residentially zoned areas adjacent to commercial zoning and at the entrances to neighborhoods are of particular concern given the Plan's guidance to limit the expansion of commercial zoning into surrounding residential areas. In addition to the visual character, the impacts of parking and commercial appearance, and increased vehicular turning movements may also be problematic along major highways.

- **Consider the impact on surrounding residences of size and placement of signs, intensity of lighting, amount of parking, landscaping, and other physical features.**
- **Avoid the placement of parking, loading, and other service areas in the front yard to maintain the residential appearance of the property.**
- **Encourage submission of landscape plans for all special exception uses. Landscaping enhances the integration of a special exception use into a community.**

## ***Non-Resident Professional Office Special Exceptions***

The 1978 *North Silver Spring Sector Plan* recommended that certain properties were suitable to apply for a special exception that allows a non-resident professional office in the R-60 Zone. According to the 1978 *North Silver Spring Sector Plan*, the purpose of this recommendation was to provide a transition (by use, not by structure type) from properties at the edge of the neighborhoods to those in the interior.

Each of the designated properties, along with other locations requested by property owners, were evaluated as part of this Plan to determine which, if any, are still suitable to apply for a non-resident professional office special exception. Factors reviewed included the assumptions made in the 1978 *North Silver Spring Sector Plan*, existing uses (on-site and adjacent), building setbacks, access, and ability to provide parking, as well as the preferences of the property owners and surrounding civic associations.

### ***Recommendation***

- **Retain the designation that 8808 and 8810 Colesville Road are suitable to apply for the non-resident professional office special exception.**

These two properties are adjacent to the Silver Spring Central Business District and a high-rise residential building. Both structures have been approved for use as professional offices by non-residents.

- **Retain the non-resident professional office special exception designation for Georgia Avenue properties that have an approved special exception. Remove the designation of Georgia Avenue properties as suitable to apply for a non-resident professional office special exception for all properties that do not currently have an approved special exception. (See Table 1 and Map 18 for specific addresses and locations.)**

- Retain the designation that properties on Cedar Street between Ellsworth Drive and Pershing Drive are suitable to apply for the non-resident professional office special exception. (See Table 1 and Map 18 for specific addresses and locations.)

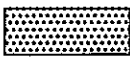
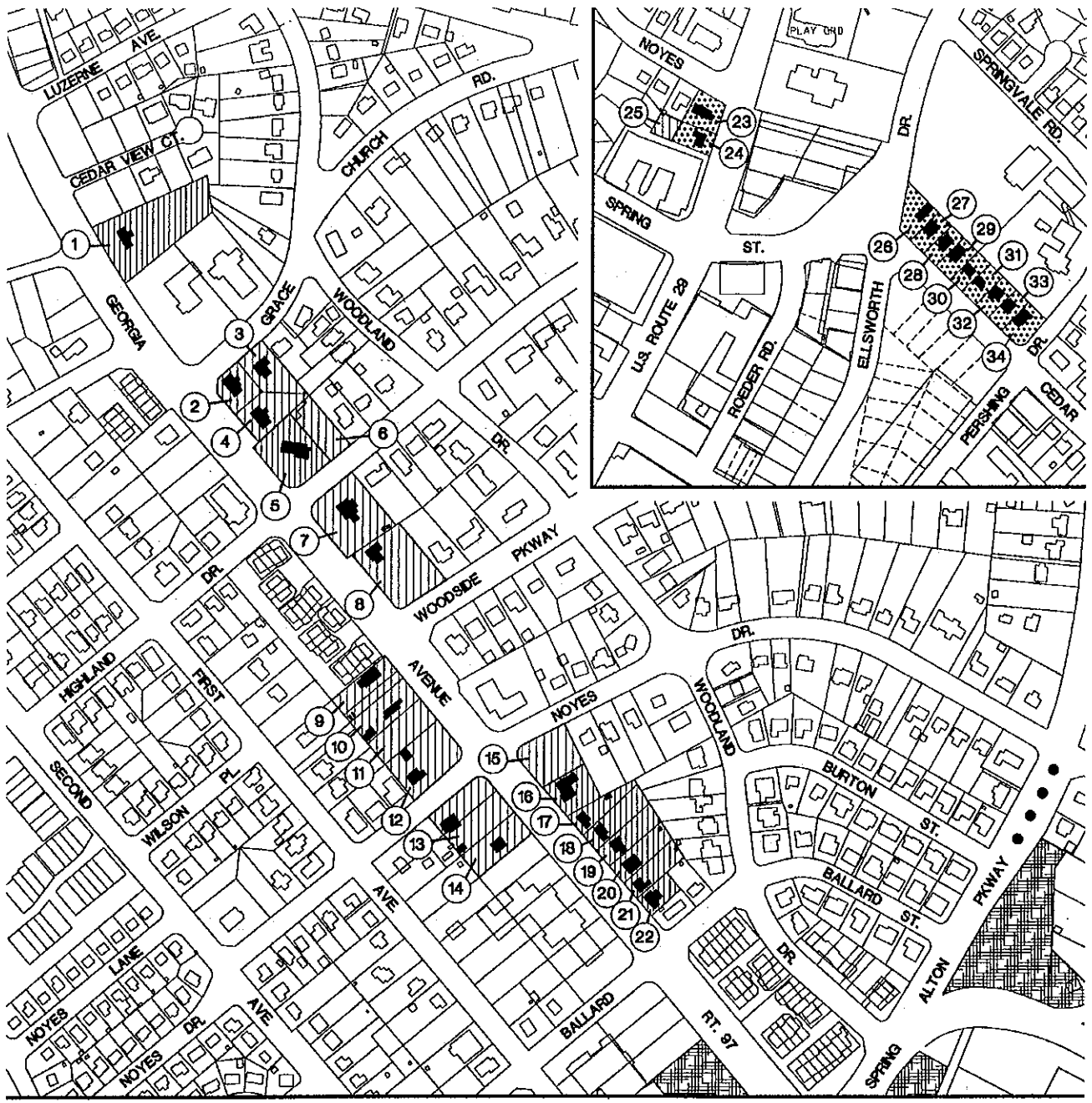
These homes are suitable for continued residential use or permitted special exceptions, including application for use as a professional office by a non-resident. These properties are located on the border between North Silver Spring and the Silver Spring Central Business District. They are somewhat isolated from the other single-family homes in the neighborhood by the Chelsea School, a private school located to the rear of these homes. Other surrounding uses include a public parking lot across the street in the CBD that has been approved for a 160-unit residential development with two levels of parking and an existing high-rise residential building to the west.

This Plan strongly recommends that the existing residential structures be retained but that continued designation as suitable for non-resident professional offices is appropriate given the surrounding uses. Paving of front yards for parking is inconsistent with this Plan's overall goal of maintaining residential character and sustaining stable neighborhoods. The parking required for any approved special exception use should be met through the Parking Lot District to minimize the number of spaces on the property and help retain a residential appearance along Cedar Street.

#### Summary of General Conditions for Special Exceptions from the Zoning Ordinance

A special exception may be granted when the Board of Appeals finds on the basis of the evidence on record that the proposed use:

- Is a permissible special exception in the zone.
- Satisfies the specific standards for the special exception.
- Is consistent with the relevant master plan.
- Is in harmony with the character of the neighborhood considering population, design, intensity, character, traffic, and number of similar uses.
- Will not be detrimental to the use, value, and enjoyment of other properties.
- Will not adversely affect traffic, cause objectionable noise, vibrations, odors, and glare.
- Will not overburden existing public services or facilities.



Maintain 1978  
Plan Designation as Suitable to Apply for  
Non-Resident Professional Office Special Exception.



Remove 1978  
Plan Designation as Suitable to Apply for  
Non-Resident Professional Office Special Exception



Property Number  
(See Text)

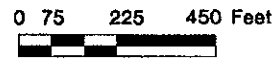


Table 1

NON-RESIDENT PROFESSIONAL OFFICE SPECIAL EXCEPTION PROPERTIES

Retain Non-Resident Professional Office Special Exception Designation		
Map Key	Address	Notes
23	8810 Colesville Road	Existing CPA and Attorney's office. Located in Parking District; corner lot with access on Colesville Road and Noyes Drive.
24	8808 Colesville Road	Approved for CPA office. Access to Colesville Road, adjacent to apartment building, located in Parking District.
26	8617 Cedar Street	Located in Parking District. Encouraged to use Parking District to meet requirements due to limited front and rear yards and topography.
27	8615 Cedar Street	Located in Parking District. Encouraged to use Parking District to meet requirements due to limited front and rear yards and topography.
28	8613 Cedar Street	Existing Law Office. Located in Parking District. Encouraged to use Parking District to meet requirements due to limited front and rear yards and topography.
29	8611 Cedar Street	Located in Parking District. Encouraged to use Parking District to meet requirements due to limited front and rear yards and topography.
30	8609 Cedar Street	Located in Parking District. Encouraged to use Parking District to meet requirements due to limited front and rear yards and topography.
31	8607 Cedar Street	Located in Parking District. Encouraged to use Parking District to meet requirements due to limited front and rear yards and topography.
32	8605 Cedar Street	Located in Parking District. Encouraged to use Parking District to meet requirements due to limited front and rear yards and topography.
33	8603 Cedar Street	Located in Parking District. Encouraged to use Parking District to meet requirements due to limited front and rear yards and topography.
34	717 Pershing Drive	Existing Doctor's Office. Located in Parking District. Encouraged to use Parking District to meet requirements due to limited front and rear yards and topography.

Table 1 (Continued)

NON-RESIDENT PROFESSIONAL OFFICE SPECIAL EXCEPTION PROPERTIES

Remove Non-Resident Professional Office (NRPO) Special Exception Designation		
Map Key	Address	Notes
1	9127 Georgia Avenue	Owned by Grace Episcopal Church. Rear yard used for parking lot for Church.
2	9111 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed.
3	1610 Grace Church Road	No NRPO applications filed.
4	1612 Grace Church Road	No NRPO applications filed. House faces Georgia Avenue. Access is from Grace Church Road.
5, 6	1515 Highland Drive	NRPO application filed and denied in 1982. Existing doctor's office (Dr. Anderschat). Corner lot; access to Georgia Avenue and Highland Drive.
7	9033 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed. Large corner lot.
8	9027 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed. Large corner lot.
9	9012 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed.
10	9008 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed.
11	9006 Georgia Avenue	Vacant lot.
12	1403 Noyes Drive	No NRPO applications filed. Large corner lot. Frontage and access on Noyes Drive.
13	8922 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed. Large corner lot (2 lots) with access from Noyes Drive.
14	8918 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed.
15	8917 Georgia Avenue	Vacant lot at the corner of Noyes Drive (same owner as 8915).
16	8915 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed. Large lot with adjacent vacant lot on corner of Noyes Drive. Side yard parking with screening. Former home health practitioner's office on lower level.
17	8913 Georgia Avenue	Applied for NRPO in 1998 (included 8911 Georgia Avenue). Application denied by Board of Appeals. (Same owner as 8911.)
18	8911 Georgia Avenue	See above (8913 Georgia Avenue).
19	8909 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed. Large tree in front yard.
20	8907 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed. Front yard paved for parking.
21	8905 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed. Portion of front yard paved for parking.
22	8903 Georgia Avenue	No NRPO applications filed. Front yard paved for parking.
25	1004 Noyes Drive	Rear lot was previously part of 8808 Colesville Road; it is now part of 1004 Noyes Drive.