

# WHEATON CBD AND VICINITY SECTOR PLAN

Community Meeting – May 19, 2010

## Preliminary Recommendations

### Wheaton's Future

This Plan is about finding the right balance of land uses within the diversity unique to Wheaton.

Wheaton has:

- a combination of varied local and specialty retail uses
- proximity to Metro
- broad housing choices.

This Plan's task is to capitalize on these strengths and encourage investment while maintaining Wheaton's special character. Wheaton will emerge as an affordable mixed-use Central Business District (CBD) with new development that blends with existing small and family-owned businesses.

### Wheaton's Role in the County

When Wheaton develops more fully it will provide, in conjunction with Silver Spring, a full set of services, employment, and housing opportunities for the eastern half of the county.

By creating a more diverse local economy and expanding the connections between the CBD and its surroundings, Wheaton is positioned to become a future growth area for the County. This Plan makes recommendations based on four overarching principles.

- Wheaton has a great deal of **diversity** that contributes to its unique character. It is important to maintain and enhance this aspect of Wheaton (e.g., through new housing options and office uses). The proposed zoning should contribute to diversity, for example by encouraging space for small businesses. More mixed-use development will provide a larger base to support the retail and service sector, the current mainstay of Wheaton's economy.
- **Connecting** people to places within and beyond the Plan area needs significant improvement (e.g., new street grid, bikeway network, and public use spaces) for Wheaton to maximize its potential as a downtown. This Plan proposes a network of flexible "activity-generating-people-places" that can create connectivity in the short term on publicly owned land and in the longer term through the development process.
- **Design** is critical to create active and safe public spaces, including streets, to enhance Wheaton's sense of place while adding value to the surrounding neighborhoods.

- The natural and built **environment** can be made more hospitable through reduced energy consumption, better stormwater management, greater tree canopy, and walkable streets.

	Existing	Existing plus Pipeline	1990 Plan Total	Proposed	Total with Proposed
Residential Units	2, 400	2,588	3,165	4,012	6,600
Jobs	10,200	10,210	13,490	3,090	13,300
J-H Ratio	4.25:1	3.95:1	4.26:1	NA	2.8:1

### **Revitalization Strategy**

Through redevelopment and public/private partnerships, portions of public parking lots should ultimately be redeveloped with structured parking and permanent public use space. In the meantime, there are inexpensive improvements that could enliven these surface parking lots with public gathering and other uses immediately.

#### **Short Term**

##### **Public Use Space as Catalyst**

- Jump start public use of these spaces by painting and placing planters, bollards, and street furniture to create temporary spaces for festivals, art exhibitions, outdoor movie theaters, temporary outdoor cafes and eating areas, dances, and musical performance space.

#### **Long Term**

##### **County Redevelopment Program and Private Investment**

- The design, construction, and financing of transit-oriented development for properties owned by Montgomery County, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The sites total 11.70 acres and all lie within a 1,200-foot radius of the Metro station.

##### **Encouraging Street Level Activity**

- Initiate a retail action plan, in concert with property and business owners, which provides strategies and recommendations for retail attraction and retention.
- Launch an advertizing campaign developed jointly by the County, small business, and Westfield Mall.
- Form a Wheaton merchants, small business, and property owners association to implement the retail action plan.
- Work with landlords to create a revitalization program that includes guidelines and restrictions for the upkeep and appearance of retail storefronts and restaurants.
- Expand the streetscape program through the Development Review Process and the County's Capital Improvements Program.
- Consider a community development corporation to help implement the revitalization strategies, including a small retail business incubator, such as a covered food market.

### **Developing a Nighttime Economy**

- Coordinate music and entertainment to:
  - improve communication and cooperation between musicians, venues, residents, and the County
  - promote efficiency of regulatory, licensing, and permitting procedures; public safety and policing; and public services
  - enhance promotion for performances and culturally-themed events
  - locate funding sources for local, independent, non-profit organizations and other groups that support music interests
  - develop a “good neighbor agreement” that establishes standards and expectations for late-night establishments to maintain a high quality of life for nearby residents and businesses
  - mediate conflicts between the operators of establishments and those affected by them
  - support marketing efforts that bring residents and visitors to the Wheaton CBD for culture and food establishments.
- Evaluate and amend County codes and regulations to ensure that eating and drinking establishments can serve in the public rights-of-way.
- Use the Wheaton Urban District to provide maintenance and other services.
- Support community policing to maintain public safety.

### **Establishing Permanent Public Use Spaces**

When redevelopment occurs as a part of a public private partnership consider:

- a major civic space for community-wide events in the vicinity of Parking Lot 13.
  - The Parks Department should own and operate this space as an urban park. It should be acquired as a capital improvement project or dedicated through a turn-key arrangement as part of a public private partnership.
  - Consider relocating Veterans Park as part of a redevelopment proposal.
- locating a central public use space in the vicinity of Parking Lot 14 in the Blueridge District.
- locating a central public use space in the vicinity of Parking Lot 17 in the Price District. If Veterans Park is relocated, a permanent replacement public park should be located within the Plan area.

## **Proposed Land Use and Zoning**

### ***Density and Building Height***

The density and height of buildings shape the built environment and define the skyline. The CR Zones place the greatest densities and building heights at and near the Metro station in the core of the downtown, along Georgia Avenue and Veirs Mill Road. The heights and densities decrease as development moves toward the single-family residential communities surrounding Wheaton's commercial areas. The tallest development is recommended on the WMATA triangle site at the convergence of Veirs Mill Road and Georgia Avenue to encourage the development of an iconic building at the southern gateway to Wheaton. Taller buildings are also allowed at the two other important nodes in Wheaton: the intersection of University Boulevard and Georgia Avenue, and University Boulevard and Veirs Mill Road which serve as the northeast and northwest gateways to the downtown.

### ***The Districts***

The Plan area is organized into five districts, each with its own distinct character. The Core, centered in the CBD, should contain a defined civic presence and new office uses. The Westfield Mall District has the potential to evolve into a mixed-use district by adding offices and a new residential component. The three other districts, Price, Blueridge, and Kensington View/Wheaton Hills have existing residential neighborhoods with potential to add residential units and small-scale, non-residential uses. The rest of the Plan area is composed of stable residential neighborhoods where few properties are available for infill development and where mixed-uses are not appropriate.

### **The Core**

A landmark building should be located at the confluence of Veirs Mill Road and Georgia Avenue and signature buildings should be located at Georgia Avenue's intersections with University Boulevard and Veirs Mill Road. The Core should have the tallest buildings in the Plan area intermixed with existing low-scale structures. Small retail establishments should be included on the ground floor of new buildings to encourage street level activity.

### **Price Square District**

The Price Square District contains housing, neighborhood restaurants, and entertainment venues clustered around a surface parking lot with the potential for a public use space through public/private redevelopment. There will be dense housing and some office along Georgia Avenue. Redevelopment with expanded neighborhood-serving businesses will serve those who live in the new mid- and high-rise housing and in the surrounding neighborhoods. The district will be anchored by a major grocery store at a Metro station entrance. Pedestrian connections will link the Price Square District to the rest of the Plan area. The interior of the block will likely remain low-scale development.

### **Blueridge District**

The Blueridge District is the northern gateway to downtown Wheaton and within walking distance of the Core, Wheaton Regional Park, and nearby neighborhoods. It is evolving into more of a residential neighborhood with small neighborhood-serving retail on the ground floor

with some office uses. Future development should include street oriented businesses along Georgia Avenue and University Boulevard, along with housing, professional offices, and neighborhood retail centered on a central public use gathering space.

#### **Westfield Mall District**

A new transit-oriented Westfield community of mid-rise office, low-scale housing, and neighborhood serving retail should be integrated into the southern and western portions of Westfield's property and public use space should provide recreation facilities.

#### **Kensington View/Wheaton Hills District**

The district will continue to be primarily residential with office and retail located nearest the intersections of the boulevards. The Plan envisions two new low to moderately scaled mixed-use developments along Veirs Mill Road, flanking the western entrance to the CBD. Pedestrian connections will link these areas to the Core and to existing neighborhoods.

#### **Residential Areas Surrounding the Districts**

Wheaton has a substantial and varied residential base outside of its commercial areas, including townhouses and garden apartments. Most of the single-family neighborhoods are small, post-war houses, placing them among the older and smaller stock in the County. Some infill townhouses have been added over the last 20 years (856 units). The 1990 Plan recommended PD and RT zones, and most of the properties have developed accordingly, with the exception of the Douglas Knolls School Site. Redevelopment in these neighborhoods should blend with existing conditions and should not introduce mixed-use zoning.

### **Mobility**

#### ***The Street Network***

- Redesign Georgia Avenue, University Boulevard, and Veirs Mill Road as urban boulevards with enhanced medians and crosswalks, street trees, and street-oriented retail where appropriate.
- Designate Georgia Avenue, University Boulevard, and Veirs Mill Road west of Amherst Avenue as a 120-foot right-of-way with six lanes. Parking should be accommodated in the off-peak hours in wide outside lanes where feasible. Bus Rapid Transit would operate on Veirs Mill Road via wide outside lanes reserved for buses, bicycles, and right turning vehicles.
- Designate University Boulevard east of Amherst Avenue as a 150-foot right-of-way to accommodate the master planned dual bikeway (DB-5).
- Provide on-street parking on as many streets as possible to serve adjacent land uses, separate pedestrians from traffic, and contribute to slower target speeds.
- Reduce target speeds to 30 miles per hour on the major highways and 25 miles per hour for all other Plan roadways.
- Consider roundabouts to control traffic and serve as entry features on residential streets such as along Amherst Avenue at Prichard Road and Blueridge Avenue.
- Complete missing links in the existing grid of Business and Primary Residential Streets.

- Implement non-master planned local street connections consistent with the subdivision regulations and urban design guidelines. These streets would be either public or private and include service access and local vehicular circulation.

### ***Pedestrian Circulation***

- Provide through-block pedestrian connections where feasible.
- Certain local streets in the CBD are identified for improved connectivity and access but also for place-making potential. These streets would include features that communicate slower vehicle speeds including special paving, plantings, and flush curbs with bollards. Innovative storm water management features should also be included in their design. The width of adjacent sidewalks should accommodate outdoor dining and retail activity. Their design should allow these streets to be closed to vehicular traffic on the weekends and holidays to accommodate open air markets, outdoor dining, and/or event space for special occasions or festivals without significantly affecting circulation and traffic flow in the immediate area. These streets include:
  - Hickerson Drive between Georgia Avenue and Elkin Street
  - Elkin Street between Price Avenue and University Boulevard.
- The disconnected street segments that serve as bicycle and pedestrian links should be enhanced to minimum eight-foot pavement widths and clearly marked.

### ***Bikeway Network***

- Improve connectivity from the Plan area to Wheaton Regional Park, Rock Creek Park, and Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park and Trail including enhanced signage on streets that lead to trail connectors as well as on the trails themselves. Key connections include:
  - Windham Lane from Amherst Avenue to Sligo Creek Trail
  - Blueridge Drive from Amherst Avenue to Sligo Creek Trail and Wheaton Regional Park
  - Upton and East Avenues to park facilities in eastern Wheaton.
- Designate the Plan area as a Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Area. This State designation will facilitate the allocation of funds for bicycle and pedestrian improvements on State roads.
- To improve circulation and accommodate long-distance connections include bicycle lanes along Amherst Avenue and the portion of University Boulevard to the east in the *Countywide Functional Bikeways Master Plan*.
- Facilitate on-road bicycle travel for short trips using slower target speeds and bicycle compatible designs per the County's Road Code.
- Develop a bicycle station with secure bicycle parking and related amenities at the Wheaton Metro Station.

### ***Transit***

- High quality (frequent, limited stop, low-floor) Bus Rapid Transit on Veirs Mill Road should be developed as part of a larger BRT network to better connect Wheaton with Rockville. Improved transit connections to Takoma/Langley Crossroads via University Boulevard are also envisioned beyond the Plan's eastern boundary. This initiative will improve bus travel times between major activity centers to provide greater mobility for transit users and reduce the growth of trips by single-occupant automobiles.

- Provide convenient and safe intermodal connections by ensuring that bus bays, enhanced bus stop amenities, crosswalks, and other supporting facilities are well located and sufficient in number (minimum of 14 bays) both as stand-alone facilities or as part of redevelopment initiatives. This Plan does not envision new bus transfer facilities outside the existing Metrorail station, but recognizes that the County and the WMATA will need to coordinate as redevelopment proposals are considered.
- Project planning should recognize the Metrorail Station as the focus of Wheaton’s transportation infrastructure. Providing easy and safe multi-modal access to and from the station, and incorporating features that reinforce the station area as a transit place are an important part of the Plan vision.

***Travel Demand Management***

- Establish a 30 percent non-auto driver mode share goal for employees in the Plan area based on the area’s transit service and connectivity opportunities.

***Parking Management***

- Encourage short term on-street parking within the CBD.
- Retain some convenient parking for the Metro station but devote primary efforts to increasing the percentage of Metrorail passengers walking, using the bus, or riding bicycles to and from the station.

**Environment**

***Natural Systems***

- Connect the built and natural environments by:
  - reinforcing relationships to local natural resources through visual and functional connections
  - creating green links through plantings and signage along Windham Lane to Sligo Creek Park and along Blueridge Avenue to Wheaton Regional Park
  - using native plants and creating habitat for appropriate urban wildlife in parks and open spaces.
- Increase tree canopy cover by:
  - identifying unused right-of-way and publicly owned land for increased plantings by the County government
  - using advanced planting techniques such as constructed soil and interconnected tree pits to increase the soil area for tree roots along new streets and sidewalks
  - incorporating trees into stormwater management and roof and terrace plantings
  - establishing a minimum 30 percent tree canopy cover for new surface parking in the CR Zones.
- Minimize and mitigate impervious surfaces by:
  - using Environmental Site Design to reduce runoff from all impervious surfaces, including roofs, terraces, and paving

- building new streets and retrofitting existing roads as “green streets” with urban stormwater management facilities in the right-of-way
  - encouraging small properties to redevelop together to facilitate shared use
  - protecting existing remnant streams.
- Raise awareness of water flow through increased visibility by:
    - referencing the streams that historically flowed through Wheaton in public art and water features
    - creating visible, interactive, and educational stormwater management facilities.

### ***Health***

- Provide opportunities for active and passive recreation.
- Integrate the natural environment into the built environment.
- Promote walking and cycling on safe and complete streets.
- Support healthy eating by providing a variety of choices for fresh, local food.
- Support convenient access to healthcare for both preventive and acute care.
- Improve pedestrian access to shopping areas, transit, recreation, and community facilities.
- Apply the Road Code’s context sensitive designs to improve pedestrian mobility and enhance street connectivity.
- Identify potential community garden and urban farm sites in new development, existing parks, public easements and right-of-ways, and schoolyards.
- Encourage all new building construction to incorporate environmental features such as green roofs, green walls, and innovative urban stormwater management. Encourage retrofits of existing development to maximize environmental features.
- Support community clinics and expanded local health care facilities.
- Develop adequate bicycling and trail amenities with connections to employment and retail centers, community facilities, and open space.
- Support the Safe Routes to School program to encourage walking and biking to school.

### ***Energy***

- Reduce energy consumption through site and building design techniques that:



- meet the minimum energy efficiency standards 17.5 percent less than the calculated baseline performance or meet the appropriate ASHRAE advanced energy design guidelines for new buildings
  - allow renovated buildings to meet energy efficiency standards 10.5 percent less than the calculated baseline performance or meet the appropriate ASHRAE advanced energy design guidelines.
- Reduce energy use by:
    - channeling sunlight for daytime lighting through building orientation, light shelves, baffles, clerestories and skylights.
    - integrating geothermal systems and passive solar to reduce energy consumption.
  - Maximize energy production by allowing and encouraging solar and wind energy conversion systems and large district energy systems.

***Water and Sewer***

- Require development proposals that generate over 100,000 gallons per day of wastewater (base sanitary flow approximately 700 units or 3,500 employees) to undergo testing. Applicants would be required to work with WSSC to plan improvements to the conveyance system if the modeling results exceed WSSC’s adopted policy.
- Require applicants to construct local sewer system capacity improvements to satisfy capacity issues identified with private development proposals. Other larger improvements to the system would be done through the CIP.

**Community Facilities**

***Public Park Facilities***

- Provide an interconnected system of parks, trails, and public open spaces where people can gather, enjoy the outdoors, and conduct business. Wheaton’s public use space system should be designed to create connections, both physical and visual, to the parks and trails, as well as to other destinations. Spaces serving the entire planning area and beyond should be owned and operated by the Department of Parks.
- If Veterans Memorial Park is not redeveloped per the Request For Qualifications (RFQ), renovate it to be more visible and inviting from the surrounding streets. If redeveloped, the function of memorializing war veterans should be moved to a more central open space. Any redevelopment of the Veterans Memorial should be closely coordinated with veterans groups.
- Provide a civic urban park in the Core District, close to the Metro station, for public events and

The County has issued an RFQ seeking a public/private partnership that would leverage the ownership of publicly-owned land in Wheaton.

Veterans Park is a block east of the Metro station and has the potential for redevelopment with transit-oriented uses. The RFQ recognizes that the park and memorial function must be replaced, “at equal value or use,” and any redevelopment proposal must include a replacement location within the Plan area that “enhances its impact on the public realm,” and through its design, pay homage to veterans.

community-wide activities. This space should be located in the vicinity of Parking Lot 13 and eventually become a permanent public use space.

- Provide opportunities for urban recreation in the downtown. Because developable land is at a premium, a typical suburban 15-acre local park is not feasible in downtown Wheaton. Staff will explore opportunities for large parks outside, but near the Plan area, to meet the standards established in the *Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan*. Active recreation facilities within the Plan area will likely need to be dispersed throughout the downtown in a series of smaller public open spaces. Most of these recreational facilities will be provided by the private sector in public use spaces, and will be implemented through zoning and regulatory review.
- Improve connectivity to regional parks and trails near the CBD. Improve signage on streets that lead to trail connectors as well as on the trails to Wheaton Regional Park and Sligo Creek Stream Valley Parks.
- Improve access to Wheaton Regional Park. Provide entry features where roadways lead to the park and wayfinding kiosks at central locations such as the Metro station and public parking facilities.

#### ***Public Schools***

- Reuse the County-owned former elementary school building and site used by the Crossways Community, a non-profit provider of social services. The site is adjacent to the Wheaton Plan boundary.

#### ***Libraries***

The County is planning to upgrade the library to address these future needs. New development recommended in this Plan can be accommodated by existing and planned library services.

#### ***County Recreation Facilities***

Just outside the Plan area is the Rafferty Center, a gymnasium from the former Good Counsel High School site that has an approved plan for renovation as a public use facility. This proposal is currently being reconsidered.

There is community interest in another outdoor pool and the County Recreation Department should evaluate this.

#### ***Public Safety***

No new public safety facilities would be needed for the Plan's projected growth.

#### ***Regional Services Center***

- Rebuild the center in the Core District as part of a public/private partnership project to redevelop the WMATA block and Parking Lot 13.

### ***Fire, Rescue, and Emergency Medical Services***

- An Emergency Medical Services unit will be needed at Station 18 to serve additional growth.

### ***Historic Resources***

- Any redevelopment of the WTOP site must conform to the requirements established in its historic designation, including preserving the 1.4-acre historic setting.

## **Implementation**

### ***Zoning***

CBDs are organic; build out takes time. This Plan will be implemented incrementally through infill development, adaptive reuse, and the actions of many stakeholders.

Implementing the Plan's vision is best accomplished with a mixed-use zone. Only one property has taken advantage of the optional method since the CBD zones were applied in 1978, even after the Overlay Zone was amended to allow the optional method. The CR Zones are easier for small properties (less than 10,000 square feet or 10 units) to use because there is no minimum lot size required for the optional method. For this reason, the Plan recommends removing the Overlay Zone and rezoning all the CBD Zones to CR Zones. The Plan also recommends rezoning to CR non-residentially zoned properties and some sites with multifamily zoning.

The CR Zones allow a broad range of uses similar to the CBD Zones and other commercial zones. The CR Zones require the designation of four elements: a total allowed floor area ratio (FAR), a maximum nonresidential (C) FAR, a maximum residential (R) FAR, and a maximum building height (H). The CR Zones are applied through a sectional map amendment consistent with the recommendations of a sector or master plan.

There are two development methods: standard and optional. The standard method requires compliance with a specific set of standards and the optional method allows for greater density and height when supported by additional public benefits, facilities, and amenities. The additional density may be achieved through a series of incentive bonuses that can be bundled to earn the maximum allowable density. The provision of the public benefits will create the urban quality of life envisioned in this Plan.

Properties within the Plan area will have the benefit of incentives based on proximity to transit as well as incentives for providing a range of housing types, additional affordable housing, incorporating community facilities into mixed-use developments, environmental sustainability features, and innovative design.

Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs) are required in all residential development with more than 20 units. Workforce Housing is required for residential development with more than 40 dwelling units per acre within a Metro Station Policy Area. Residential development within the Metro Station Policy Area must comply with the County's Workforce Housing requirements.

### **Public Use Space Requirements**

The CR Zones require public open space for all development under both the standard and optional methods, based on the lot size and frontage. Public open space may be privately owned, but must be publicly accessible. In Wheaton, many of the lots are too small to generate public open space. It would be preferable in these cases to have payment in lieu of an on-site provision.

### **Priority Projects Eligible for Amenity Fund Support**

The CR Zones allow contributions for off-site amenities that contribute to building the public realm. These projects must be identified in a sector or master plan and appear in the CIP to enable contributions. Appropriate public use spaces in Wheaton are in the Core, and the Blueridge and Price Districts.

### **Public Benefits in the CR Zones**

The following public benefits should be given priority in meeting the incentive density provisions in the CR Zones:

- advanced right-of way dedication
- through-block connections
- child daycare center
- dwelling unit mix
- on-site space for small businesses
- structured parking
- public art
- bike station on the WMATA block.

### ***Capital Improvements Program***

The public sector must also coordinate the private sector's contributions, as well as invest in capital improvement projects necessary to implement the Plan's recommendations, such as roads, schools, and bike paths that cannot be provided through redevelopment. These projects are:

- public use spaces on Parking Lots 13, 14, and 17
- realigning and creating new streets
- Bus Rapid Transit along Veirs Mill Road
- a new elementary school
- streetscape improvements
- indoor and outdoor active recreation facilities
- sewer system improvements by WSSC.