

SEPTEMBER 2008



WHEATON CBD AND VICINITY SECTOR PLAN  
PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT  
The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission



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The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission  
8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910  
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## INTRODUCTION

Montgomery County, Maryland



Central Business District



The Plan's boundaries will be the same as those of the 1990 Plan.

This report is a scope of work for a comprehensive amendment to the 1990 *Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity Sector Plan*. It briefly describes the setting and states the issues that will be addressed in the amendment; describes the methodology, tasks and resources to be used in this effort; and addresses how the community will be involved in the process.

### CONTEXT

Wheaton is located north of Silver Spring on the eastern leg of the Metro Red Line along Georgia Avenue where it intersects with Veirs Mill Road and University Boulevard. It is one of the four Central Business Districts (CBDs) in the County. Existing development in Wheaton reflects a traditional small downtown with mostly low-rise development. Despite an older building stock, the area has the lowest retail vacancy rate in the County, four percent. There are more than 400 businesses in Wheaton serving the surrounding community, many of them known for their ethnic character. Westfield Wheaton Mall, with 2.4 million square feet of commercial space, is the largest shopping center in the County.

### PURPOSE

Putting the planning framework in place now will enable us to:

- bring the Wheaton Sector Plan up to date with the latest thinking and best practices in land use planning
- position Wheaton to take advantage of future redevelopment opportunities and help the downtown revitalization efforts by the County and other interested parties
- address the timing of development and its impacts on the community
- address the quality of life issues (community facilities, environment, design of the public realm) that must be addressed to create a livable, sustainable community.

## DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY SINCE 1990

The first ten years after the adoption of the 1990 Sector Plan saw very little new building or renovation in Wheaton. Development activity picked up after 2000 with a major renovation of the Wheaton Mall by its new owner, the Westfield Group, which added a new anchor, a new floor of stores, and additional parking. Also, more than 18 new small businesses have opened in Wheaton including the two-story Triangle Park retail building on Reddie Drive.

The most significant development activity was the creation of approximately 723 housing units between 2004 and 2008 where none existed in downtown Wheaton before. Outside the CBD core but within the Sector Plan boundary, the Montgomery Housing Partnership renovated some 133 multifamily units at Pembridge Square Apartments in the northeast section of the Plan.

Currently, Westfield is preparing a long-term plan for their Wheaton Mall site to create a more compact urban development pattern. Washington Properties is planning a 211-unit apartment complex at the intersection of Veirs Mill Road and Georgia Avenue. Avalon Bay is proposing a 316-unit rental housing project at the intersection of Georgia and Blueridge Avenues, which will also include a Safeway grocery store. This project will allow redevelopment of the current Safeway site at Reddie Drive. The Bozutto Company intends to build a mixed-use project on the Metro station property between Veirs Mill Road, Georgia Avenue, and Reddie Drive.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Wheaton Sector Plan amendment will have three goals:

- To meet County policy of focusing density at Metro stations to encourage transit use and make best use of that significant public investment.
- To reinvigorate the Wheaton CBD and create a walkable community with a distinct identity.
- To create a center of jobs and housing on the eastern leg of the Metro Red Line.



- |    |  |
|----|--|
|    | Wheaton Metro Station                    |
|    | Sector Plan Boundary                     |
|    | Central Business District                |
|    | Recently Built                           |
|    | Proposed and Potential                   |
|    | Under Construction                       |
| 1  | 1st Wheaton Baptist Church - Residential |
| 2  | The Montgomery - Residential             |
| 3  | Metro Triangle - Mixed-Use               |
| 4  | Triangle Park - Retail                   |
| 5  | MetroPointe - Residential                |
| 6  | Safeway Site - Mixed-Use                 |
| 7  | Georgia Crossing - Retail                |
| 8  | Grandview - Residential                  |
| 9  | Avalon Bay - Mixed-Use                   |
| 10 | Leesborough - Residential                |



Proposed Avalon Bay Mixed-Use Project

## WHEATON SECTOR PLAN OBJECTIVES

### SPUR REVITALIZATION

New development is needed to enhance the mix of uses and encourage public and private development to create a quality public realm that will turn the CBD into a more attractive place.

### INTEGRATE WHEATON MALL INTO THE COMMUNITY

Wheaton Mall is built in the old regional shopping center layout with a covered mall, pad sites at the edges, surrounded by parking lots and garages. Westfield plans to renovate, recognizing the economic benefits of creating an urban-style shopping center. The Sector Plan will develop a framework that will integrate the mall into the overall fabric of downtown Wheaton making it an integral part of the CBD rather than a separate, disconnected entity.

### PRESERVE WHEATON'S SMALL BUSINESSES AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Many of the small businesses and ethnic restaurants that give Wheaton its identity are attracted by the CBD's lower land values and rents. Revitalization will increase land values and rents and may force out marginal businesses. Retaining and encouraging small businesses and ethnic diversity in a redeveloped mixed-use environment will be the largest challenge in Wheaton's revitalization and a major objective of this plan.



Low-rise buildings accommodate a variety of small businesses

### BUILD A QUALITY PUBLIC REALM

The public realm is an important factor in establishing community character. Wheaton's deteriorating buildings and sidewalks, extensive surface parking, and lack of green space and trees has served neither residents nor businesses. The highways that bisect Wheaton are not pedestrian-friendly and act as barriers.

Wheaton lacks a central open space or town common that can be a focal point for community gatherings and special events. The Plan will identify and set priorities for providing facilities and amenities, including the potential for a public open space and improved pedestrian connections within the CBD and to surrounding facilities. It will emphasize design excellence in all aspects of redevelopment to create a quality public realm.



### CREATE WHEATON AS A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

The Wheaton CBD has some characteristics of a sustainable community—a centrally located Metro station and an extensive network of bus routes—but lacks the dense mix of uses, pedestrian connections, and

environmental features that make a sustainable urban environment. Natural conditions are degraded to the point of non-existence. The Plan will seek opportunities to increase pervious surfaces and the tree canopy within the CBD, recommend urban environmental solutions, and encourage green building choices.

#### MITIGATE THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF REDEVELOPMENT ON THE COMMUNITY

Wheaton has a Metro station, three major roads, and a street network that provides alternative travel routes and can be the basis for a walkable community. But it is not walkable. Even though new development will be transit-oriented, road congestion within the study boundaries and neighboring communities will be a major concern. The Sector Plan may need to address the phasing of development with regard to facilities such as roads, schools, recreation, and open spaces. The County's Annual Growth Policy will be used to coordinate the infrastructure needed to serve the future redevelopment in Wheaton.

#### CREATE NEW HOUSING OPTIONS

Although the residential communities surrounding the CBD provide significant single-family and garden apartment housing for the area, there is a need to locate more and varied housing within the CBD. Housing is a key element in revitalization because residents activate the downtown and support local businesses. Housing near jobs and transit also provides opportunities for people to drive less and live near work. The Plan will address the housing needs of the County and Wheaton's role in addressing the affordable and workforce needs of the area.

#### PROVIDE ECONOMICALLY FEASIBLE OPTIONS

Along with new housing, downtown Wheaton needs new office development to support its current base of small businesses. An economic analysis of the Plan's recommendations will ensure that the vision for Wheaton is one that can be achieved within the funding and implementation tools currently available to County agencies, developers, and property owners.




#### APPLY NEW PLANNING TOOLS

The land use and planning environment has changed since the 1990 Sector Plan was approved. Today's issues of sustainability, design excellence, and housing needs require new zoning and regulatory tools. The Plan will assess current regulatory controls and recommend new tools for implementing the Plan's recommendations as appropriate (e.g., overlay zones, form-based codes, and design guidelines).



# WHEATON SECTOR PLAN



-  Sector Plan Boundary
-  Central Business District
-  Open Space
-  Important Pedestrian Nodes
-  Gateway to the CBD
-  Major Highways
-  Integrate Wheaton Mall into the CBD
-  Increase connectivity to surrounding areas, community facilities and the park system
-  Protect surrounding residential communities by transitioning uses and compatible building heights
-  Metro Station



## ISSUES

The proposed amendment will address the following issues:

- What level of growth is appropriate in Wheaton given that it has a Metro station but is divided by heavily traveled regional roads?
- What kind of growth will result in a mix of uses that supports revitalization and maintains the community's character?
- How can Wheaton's mall be connected to the CBD and the surrounding residential communities and be an integral part of an attractive, walkable downtown?
- What kind of transition is appropriate between the commercial core and the surrounding single-family neighborhoods?
- What are the best tools and mechanisms for transforming Wheaton into an economically robust and environmentally sustainable downtown?
- Where are the opportunities and needs for public spaces? What should be the character of the public realm and streets?
- How can the CBD as a whole be more pedestrian-friendly and interconnected?
- How can the ethnic diversity and small businesses that give Wheaton its character be maintained in the face of potential revitalization?

## APPROACH

Starting with the assessment of existing conditions and an estimate of development by 2030 under the current Sector Plan and zoning, staff will establish baseline conditions that will be used to analyze scenarios for the new Plan. This baseline scenario will help us understand the opportunities and constraints of the current infrastructure and what kind of infrastructure would be needed to achieve the Plan's goals and objectives.

Staff will prepare and evaluate up to three development scenarios with different intensities, massing, and mix of uses for the CBD and the Westfield Wheaton

Proposed Avalon Bay Mixed-Use Project



Mall site. These scenarios will consider the size and location of buildings, existing uses, surrounding development patterns, building heights, massing and setbacks, and the circulation network, including a hierarchy of streets, bikeways, sidewalks, and open spaces.

The scenarios will be used to test the benefits and impacts of growth and a development pattern for the core based primarily on transit over the next 15 to 20 years. The emphasis will be on exploring Wheaton's potential as a vibrant, walkable transit-oriented place. Analysis will focus on opportunities rather than the constraints of existing conditions.



## OUTREACH

The Plan will be developed with full participation of the community and other stakeholders using resources including three-dimensional modeling and illustrative concept plans to convey the technical information in an easily understandable way for all participants.

In lieu of a master plan advisory group, the project team will use the experience and expertise of the two existing advisory committees associated with the Mid-County Regional Services Center—the Wheaton Urban District Advisory committee (WUDAC) and the Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee (WRAC).

WUDAC and WRAC have formed a joint work group that includes representatives from the Wheaton Citizens Coalition (WCC) and community members who are committed to monthly attendance as non-voting members. The work group's recommendations will be presented to the full membership of WUDAC and WRAC for deliberation and recommendations. All of their meetings are open to the public.

In addition to these committees, staff will host community meetings, post information on the agency's website, and contact the community via email, the Mid-County Service Center, the Wheaton Regional Library, and community locations such as grocery stores and area businesses. Staff will also meet with individual property owners, businesspeople, developers, and umbrella organizations. Staff will work with the Business Redevelopment Manager at the Mid-County Services Center to build on existing small business programs and to establish relationships with Wheaton's diverse small business community.

In addition to the joint work group, outreach will include working with the:

- Kensington/Wheaton Chamber of Commerce
- Leading Economic Development in the Community
- Westfield Wheaton Mall
- development community and business owners
- neighborhood associations, non-profit groups, and individuals
- government agencies
- community institutions

Throughout the planning process regional, State, and County officials will be asked to join internal Wheaton team meetings and external community meetings to address issues that span agency jurisdictions. Foreign language translation will be provided at large community meetings as needed. Advertisements of meetings and summary plan documents will be provided in Spanish.

#### COMMUNITY MEETINGS

- At a kick-off meeting on April 30, 2008, staff discussed why the plan is being done, development since 1990, major issues, the existing planning framework, a plan's role in the development process, and the project schedule.
- On June 4, 2008 staff briefed County agencies about the master plan work program, including an overview of Wheaton's planning issues, schedule, and how staff will work with the agencies throughout the planning process.
- Through summer 2008, staff continued to meet with WUDAC, WRAC, WCC, and the joint work group to discuss ongoing work and planning concepts such as sustainability, market data, and land use practices.
- Soon after the Planning Board approves the Scope of Work in September 2008, staff will commence a visioning exercise with the community.
- In December 2008, staff will get community input for a preferred development scenario that will be refined into preliminary recommendations.
- In February 2009, staff will seek community input on preliminary recommendations.

## PHASING

### PROJECT SCHEDULE

Starting in September 2008, the proposed planning process will take 24 months. Staff responsibility for meeting the schedule is focused in Phases I and II described below and in the chart on page 15.

After the County Council approval and adoption by the Commission, a Sectional Map Amendment is needed to implement the zoning recommendations of the approved Plan. The SMA could require another three months to complete. The SMA is scheduled to be completed by October 31, 2010, before the next Council election.

### PHASE I: PRE-PLAN

#### TASK 1: SCOPE PROJECT

Prepare a need statement that briefly describes issues and establishes the plan boundaries. Identify a project manager.

Product: Budget program element that describes and maps the project

### PHASE II: DEVELOP DRAFT PLAN (9 MONTHS)

#### TASK 2: ESTABLISH WORK PROGRAM (1 MONTH)

Discuss and finalize the needed analysis and resources, and establish a methodology and approach.

Prepare a detailed Scope of Work that describes the plan area, issues, and goals, and that lists tasks, staff assignments, a community outreach plan, and a timeline. Staff will establish a liaison with County agencies and identify redevelopment scenarios.

Product: Scope of Work

#### TASK 3: BACKGROUND RESEARCH (1 MONTH)

Complete an existing conditions inventory, analysis, and mapping that includes data on land use, zoning, demographics, transportation, environment, community facilities, and parks and recreation facilities.

Establish the current Sector Plan's development potential in 2030 as a baseline for traffic modeling of scenarios. Initiate an economic analysis of office, retail, and housing to determine growth opportunities that respond to County policies and emerging markets.

Product: Existing conditions maps and data, community contact and distribution list, demographic profile, 3-D model base, level of analysis needed for future tasks



Redevelopment is beginning to transform Wheaton

#### TASK 4: ANALYSIS (4 MONTHS)

A community visioning exercise, followed by analyses of various scenarios and impacts, will define an appropriate level of growth, the infrastructure needs of redevelopment, and the planning and zoning framework that will implement the plan. Staff will have two roundtable discussions with the Planning Board to report on the Plan's progress.

Product: Development scenarios analyzed for amount and type of development, economic viability, transportation and environmental impacts; urban design studies; sustainable community concepts; park and open space scheme; community facilities; and zoning implementation analysis

#### TASK 5: DEVELOP DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS (1 MONTH)

Preliminary recommendations will include illustrations of urban design concepts and draft zoning amendments. Staff will present the preliminary recommendations to the Planning Board in a roundtable discussion. After Board input, staff will finalize the recommendations.

Product: Draft recommendations, zoning, and design guidelines

#### TASK 6: PREPARE DRAFT PLAN (2 MONTHS)

Staff will prepare the draft Sector Plan for Planning Board approval to proceed with a public hearing.

Product: Public Hearing Draft

### PHASE III: PLANNING BOARD REVIEW (6 MONTHS)

#### TASK 7: CONDUCT PLANNING BOARD PUBLIC HEARING (2 MONTHS)

Staff will schedule and advertise the public hearing, and distribute the Plan.

Product: Public hearing transcript and summary notes

#### TASK 8: PLANNING BOARD WORKSESSIONS AND PLANNING BOARD DRAFT (4 MONTHS)

Staff will prepare the issues for the Planning Board worksessions. Following the worksessions, staff will prepare the Planning Board draft document and seek Board approval to transmit the Plan to the County Council and Executive.

Product: Planning Board Draft and design guidelines

### PHASE IV: COUNTY EXECUTIVE REVIEW (60 DAYS)

#### TASK 9: COUNTY EXECUTIVE REVIEW

The Executive will review the Plan's recommendations, conduct a fiscal analysis, and transmit comments to the County Council.

Product: Executive's comments on the Planning Board Draft



#### PHASE V: COUNTY COUNCIL REVIEW (6 MONTHS)

##### TASK 10: COUNTY COUNCIL HEARING AND PHED COMMITTEE WORKSESSIONS

The County Council will tour the planning area and hold a public hearing on the Planning Board Draft, followed by the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee worksessions.

Product: PHED Committee's recommendations to the full Council on the Planning Board Draft

##### TASK 11: COUNTY COUNCIL WORKSESSIONS

The full Council worksessions address the PHED Committee's recommendations. After full discussion, the Council will approve the Plan through a Council Resolution, delineating all the changes made to the Draft Plan.

Product: Council Resolution of approval

#### PHASE VI: IMPLEMENTATION

##### TASK 12: PLANNING BOARD AND FULL COMMISSION ADOPTION OF THE APPROVED PLAN

Product: Approved and Adopted Sector Plan

##### TASK 13: SECTIONAL MAP AMENDMENT

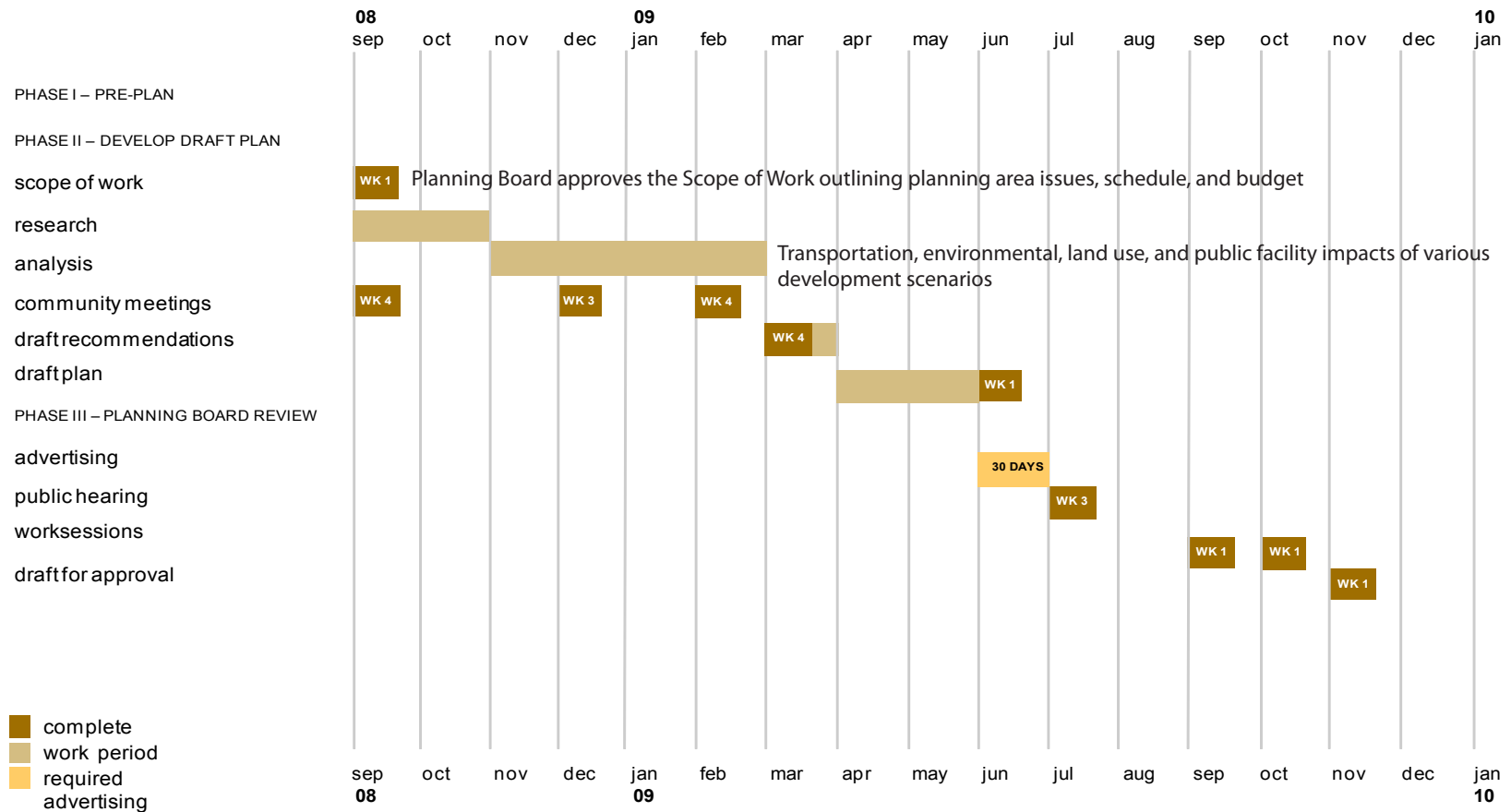
Staff prepares the Sectional Map Amendment to implement the Plan's zoning recommendations.

Product: Updated zoning maps

#### RESOURCES

The Planning Department's approved FY09 budget allocates 4.6 work years to the Wheaton Sector Plan, including the Research and Technology Center's residential market analysis. The Parks Department's approved FY09 budget also allocates time to this project.

# WHEATON SECTOR PLAN PROPOSED SCHEDULE



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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