



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB
Item #
10/29/09

October 16, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: John A. Carter, Chief *JAC*
Urban Design and Preservation Division

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Urban Design and Preservation Division

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Urban Design and Preservation Division

SUBJECT: Draft Urban Design Guidelines for the
Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Approval to publish the Draft Urban Design Guidelines for the Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan, and set the hearing date on December 3, 2009.

URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES: A New Implementation Tool

The development of the Urban Design Guidelines represents a creative effort by the Planning Department to assist in implementing the recommendations in master plans. The guidelines are intended to accomplish the following:

- **Foster Design Excellence** - Building communities in accordance with the vision in an approved master plan or sector plan
- **Clarify Design Expectations** - Streets, open spaces and buildings
- **Provide Flexibility and Promote Creativity** - Provide guidance that recognizes the need for flexibility and creative solutions in community building

The graphics and text included in the guidelines are also intended to assist in the visualization of the recommendations in master plans and to assist the Planning Board, staff, property owners, County Council, and others during the review and approval of a master plan or sector plan. The combination of a comprehensive master plan with Urban Design Guidelines will provide a unique planning tool for Montgomery County. This new planning tool is needed as density increases, the mix of land uses becomes more complex, and compatible transitions to existing neighborhoods need to be provided.

The Urban Design Guidelines for the Germantown area will be followed by guidelines for the Gaithersburg West and White Flint areas. A similar format will be used for each of these documents.

Scope of Urban Design Guidelines

The document provides design guidance for the basic building blocks of a community as follows:

- **Streets** Using the framework established in the Sector Plan, the Design Guidelines establish the character for the street network in accordance with the Road Code. The guidelines for streets will create an attractive, tree lined character for Germantown's streets, reinforce the sense of identity for each district, and promote walking and biking. A separate Streetscape Plan will follow creating a coherent and unified streetscape treatment specifying street trees, paving, street lights and other furnishings.
- **Open Spaces** Based on the Sector Plan's open space concept, the Design Guidelines establish goals and guidelines for each category of open space (public parks, urban open spaces, and natural open spaces). The guidelines will ensure a variety of open spaces within each district. The guidelines address safety, accessibility, visibility, amenities and maintenance.
- **Buildings** The Design Guidelines expand the guidance in the Sector Plan for building form and heights. The intent is to ensure a form of development that is attractive, sustainable and compatible with adjacent residential communities. The guidelines also identify retail priority streets.

How to Use the Urban Design Guidelines

The design guidelines set the Planning Board's expectations for development and provide general design guidance. Elements such as streets and open spaces recommended in the approved and adopted Sector Plan will be required. Elements not specified in the Sector Plan such as building form and locations, "floating" open spaces and local streets are considered illustrations of design principles and are not mandated. Applicants and public agencies are encouraged to be creative and work closely with staff in early conceptual stages to achieve outstanding public and private development.

PREPARATION OF URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

The draft guidelines were prepared in tandem with the Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan to help visualize and implement the Plan's vision for an urban community. The guidelines took shape with the review by the Planning Board of earlier drafts in February and April 2009. The draft guidelines were transmitted to the County Council in July 2009 as background information assisting in their review of the proposed Sector Plan. After the County Council's unanimous approval of the Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan on September 22, 2009, the draft guidelines were updated with the County Council's Sector Plan revisions. They are ready for the public comment, and final review and adoption by the Planning Board.

Outreach and Coordination

In preparation of the October draft, staff coordinated with the following groups:

- Members of the Germantown CAC. Individual meetings with key stakeholders have been held to receive comments.
- MCDOT. Initial comments in April 2009 were incorporated into the draft and subsequent comments will be received prior to the public hearing.

Continued coordination with property owners, developers and other County agencies is ongoing and the Planning Board will hear their comments at the hearing in December 2009.

MCDOT as the lead agency for street infrastructure and design in the public right-of-way wants to avoid conflicts between the proposed guidelines and the standards in the Road Code. The MCDOT initial comments in April 2009 were as follows:

- Clearly state the County Executive's responsibility to approve design standards and guidelines for rights-of-ways
- Concerned with narrow streets, turning radii at intersections, and access to buildings
- Concerned with the Sector Plan's recommended public right-of-ways that are not included or do not comply with the Road Code such as the transitway or greenway.

Staff has revised the Street Standards and Guidelines Table included in the April 2009 Draft to graphically illustrate the street typology and to clarify which elements are approved by the Executive agencies including DPS and the MCDOT. The staff has revised the guidelines for corner turn radii and other elements to be in conformance with the Road Code. Guidelines that address streetscape characteristics such as sidewalk pavement cut-outs for trees, existing tree preservation in the medians, and street lighting are not found in the Road Code. The forthcoming Germantown Streetscape Plan that specifies tree species, paving details, street lights and other details also will require close coordination and approval by MCDOT.

NEXT STEPS

- Publish the Draft Urban Design Guidelines for Germantown
- Hold a hearing to receive comments of the Draft Urban Design Guidelines
- Hold worksessions, and revise the guidelines as directed by the Planning Board
- Adopt the Germantown Urban Design Guidelines by the Planning Board

The final products will include a printed document and a design resource to be located on the M-NCPPC web site.

KKM:ha: M:\Kumm\ Germantown Urban Design Guidelines\Final Germ UD G staff report 10.13.09

Attachment:

Draft Urban Design Guidelines for the Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan, October 2009