



Scope of Work for the Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan



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Description

The Scope of Work defines the Plan's boundaries and area to be studied. It discusses the Plan's purpose, issues to be addressed, community involvement, and project schedule.

Staff Recommendation

Approve the proposed Scope of Work.

Introduction

Bethesda is a thriving urban center located in southern Montgomery County, just outside the District of Columbia. What began as a crossroads village in 1871 now boasts over 30,000 residents, and is home to the two largest employers in the county. With numerous restaurants, shops, art galleries, and entertainment choices, including live theatre, live music, and movies, Bethesda is a county arts and entertainment destination and a center of the nightlife economy.

The development of Bethesda has been guided by a series of Master and Sector Plans. These plans, each created through a public process, identify general goals, intents, and priorities for development throughout the defined Plan Area, and include specific recommendations for individual properties within the Plan Area, for land use and zoning, urban design, transportation, open space, the environment, and historic preservation.

Prepared by the Planning Department and the Planning Board and approved by the County Council, these Plans inform the Planning Department, community, and Planning Board in their review of proposed development projects, to make sure that development is consistent with the Plan goals, intents, and recommendations.

This Scope of Work will define the context, purpose, and Plan Area for the Bethesda Downtown Plan, and highlight the process and timeline that Planning Department staff will use in arriving at the Plan recommendations.

Context

Bethesda is located along Wisconsin Avenue between Friendship Heights and the Capital Beltway, centered around the intersection of Wisconsin Avenue, Old Georgetown Road, and East-West Highway. These major thoroughfares connect Bethesda to Silver Spring, Rockville, Potomac, and Washington, DC.

Downtown Bethesda is home to about 31,400 people, about 3 percent of the total County population. The age distribution is generally comparable to the County, though with a larger proportion of residents over 65 (15 percent compared with 12.4 percent County-wide). The contingent of residents between 20-34 is about 20 percent, slightly higher than the County average. The population is predominantly non-Hispanic white (79.5 percent), is highly educated (83.4 percent have bachelor's or graduate degrees, compared to about 57 percent for the County), and has an average household income of \$206,766 (60% higher than the County average). Just over half (57 percent) of residents use their cars to get to work, compared with almost 76 percent County-wide. Downtown Bethesda includes almost 15,000 housing units about 4 percent of the County's housing stock, with a roughly 57/43 split between owners and renters. Of these housing units, about 48 percent are single-family detached houses and about 40 percent are multi-family buildings with 20 or more units.

The January 2014 Development Pipeline of 26 projects approved within Downtown Bethesda includes over 3,000 dwelling units and 2.9 million square feet of office and retail uses. Of this total, about 2,850 dwelling units and 1.9 million square feet of office and retail uses remain unbuilt or under construction.

Planning Framework

Over the last 50 years, a number of approved and adopted plans have addressed development in Bethesda, starting with the "urban ring" of the 1964 *General Plan (On Wedges and Corridors)*. The 1970 *Master Plan for Bethesda-Chevy Chase Planning Area* and the 1976 *Bethesda Central Business District (CBD) Sector Plan* envisioned higher-intensity development concentrated at the planned Bethesda Metro Station, scaling down in transition to the surrounding single-family neighborhoods. Ten years after the opening of the Bethesda



- Bethesda CBD Plan Boundary
- Bethesda Purple Line Station Plan Boundary
- Capital Crescent Trail
- - - Purple Line
- Parkland
- T Planned Purple Line Station
- M Metro Station
- M Proposed Metro Station
- Historic Properties



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Metro Station, the 1994 *Bethesda CBD Sector Plan* expanded on the vision, introducing the “garden” and “cultural district” themes for Bethesda, and providing design guidelines for new development.

More recently, smaller area plans have addressed more specific concerns. The 2006 *Woodmont Triangle Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Bethesda CBD* looked at ways to encourage residential redevelopment in the Woodmont Triangle area while retaining “the qualities and ambience of the small-scale retail that distinguishes” the area from the rest of the CBD. In December 2013, the Planning Board approved the *Planning Board Draft Bethesda Purple Line Station Minor Master Plan Amendment* to incentivize redevelopment of the block around the planned Purple Line Station and south Bethesda Metro entrance at Wisconsin Avenue and Elm Street, to allow for construction of both an improved station design and a new tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue for the Capital Crescent Trail. The County Council is currently reviewing the Draft Plan Amendment.

The Plan

Plan Area Boundary

The *Bethesda Downtown Plan* retains the Plan Area boundary of the 1994 *Bethesda CBD Sector Plan*, including the areas covered by both the 2006 *Woodmont Triangle Amendment* and the December 2013 *Planning Board Draft Bethesda Purple Line Station Minor Master Plan Amendment*. The area covers approximately 451 acres and is bound by the National Institutes of Health campus on the north, Tilbury Street, Sleaford Road, Cheltenham Road, the Capital Crescent Trail, 46th Street, and West Avenue on the east, Norwood Park and Nottingham Drive on the south, and Clarendon Road, Arlington Road, and Old Georgetown Road on the west.

The Purpose of the Plan: Sustaining Bethesda

Over the last 25 years, portions of downtown Bethesda have become internationally recognized examples of successful placemaking. As a community, Bethesda is synonymous with a high standard of living, with schools, parks, supermarkets, transit, arts and entertainment venues, shops and restaurants, and more all within a ten-minute walk of most residents.

The Bethesda Downtown Plan will explore ways to sustain these qualities over the next 25 years, and explore how Bethesda can remain competitive as a center of employment, entrepreneurship, and innovation, while retaining – and enhancing – its community character, leveraging existing amenities, partnerships, and infrastructure.

The Plan will explore the three core themes of sustainable development: economic sustainability; social sustainability; and environmental sustainability. These themes are interdependent, working together to create a great place to live, work, and play.

Economic sustainability

- Promote flexibility to allow future development to better adapt to market conditions.
- Incentivize expanded affordability for housing.
- Foster the enrichment of social capital by encouraging public and private gathering places.
- Re-imagine under-performing public spaces to revitalize them as community assets.
- Identify new partners and projects (e.g., in the fields of art, entertainment, education, science) that will catalyze economic development in the Downtown.
- Enhance specific aspects of the public realm that support retail and office development.
- Take best advantage of existing and planned transit, including Metro, Purple Line, BRT, and bus.

Social Sustainability

- Continue to prioritize compatibility as a central element of new development.
- Enhance recreational opportunities and explore other ways to encourage a healthy community.
- Encourage lighter/quicker/cheaper approaches to implementing public amenities (open space/streetscape/lighting/recreation).
- Address the impacts of development on community roads, schools, neighborhoods.
- Support the development of new and existing districts to provide local centers of activity in the Downtown.
- Locate new parks and open space to better serve the needs of the Bethesda Downtown community.

Environmental Sustainability

- Help achieve the County's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2050.
- Reward the use of alternative energy sources and greater building energy efficiency.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle safety in an expanded network of sidewalks and bike facilities to encourage walking and cycling for daily needs.
- Extend green space further into the Downtown for both recreational and environmental benefits.
- Integrate more fully environmental functions (e.g., stormwater, shade, air quality) into Downtown streets.

The Plan Process

Outreach

Community outreach is essential to developing a Plan that reflects the vision and goals of the people who live, work, and play in Downtown Bethesda. Done well, it provides opportunities for inclusive participation in the process and gives on-going feedback in a public discourse to better understand each other and inform the plan, building broad support for its recommendations.

The Bethesda Downtown Plan will not begin with a Community Advisory Committee (CAC). In order to function, a CAC generally involves a limited number of people and therefore must exclude others. In lieu of a formal advisory group, the project team has implemented a more inclusive outreach plan, combining extensive on-going electronic outreach via social media and the Plan website with a series of regular public meetings which will provide opportunities for interaction in small groups in a discussion or workshop format.

To broaden the range of participants, the outreach plan offers a variety of additional choices of how to get involved and stay informed on the Plan:

- BethesdaDowntownPlan .org website;
- Twitter: @BethesdaPlanner, #bethesdadowntownplan;
- Constant Contact e-mail newsletter;
- Planning Department Facebook page;
- Participate in Bethesda community, civic, and business group meetings, like the Sacks Neighborhood and the Greater Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce;
- Regular attendance at meetings of standing committees in Bethesda, including the Woodmont Triangle Action Group, the Arts and Entertainment Board, the Bethesda Urban Partnership Board, among others;
- Piggy-back onto the extensive electronic mailing lists of the Bethesda Chevy Chase-Regional Services Center, Bethesda Urban Partnership and County Government;
- "Pop-Up" outreach at popular locations to target specific groups.

- Organize small group meetings and interviews for focused discussion, with online alternatives;
- Post short explanatory videos by the project team on the website.

In particular, the project team is working to reach out to the following groups:

- Residents at various stages of life, from high-school students to young professionals to empty nesters, and all in between;
- Neighborhood and homeowner associations, including single-family neighborhoods and multi-family condominium and renter groups;
- Bethesda business owners, from local businesses like Bethesda Bagels, Tout de Sweet, Fresh Baguette Bakery, and the Bethesda Jazz and Supper Club to larger enterprises like Honest Tea and Safeway;
- Owners of large and small properties;
- Advisory groups, such as the Woodmont Triangle Action Group and the Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board;
- Entrepreneurs, start-ups, and business incubators, like Bethesda Green;
- Interest groups such as faith communities and non-profits like Bethesda Cares;
- Arts and entertainment community, including Imagination Stage, the Writers Center, and Joy of Motion;
- Public Private Partnerships such as the Bethesda Urban Partnership, its board and staff and its Arts and Entertainment District Board;
- Major employers like the National Institutes of Health and Walter Reed Navy Medical Center;
- Students and parents at the Bethesda public and private schools: Bethesda Elementary, Sidwell Friends Lower School, and Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School.

The team held a Kick-Off meeting on November 4, 2013, that was attended by about 150 people. It was followed by two drop-in meetings, Imagination Stage and the Writers Center. The purpose was to share information on the plan update and to hear from people about their likes, dislikes and issues of concern related to Downtown Bethesda. The issues raised included, among others and in no particular order:

- mobility and circulation, including traffic, service access, and pedestrian and bike access and safety;
- lack of quality public space, particularly green space;
- connectivity between “new and old” Bethesda;
- loss of small businesses, particularly high rents and adequate parking;
- affordable housing;
- impacts of new development on existing communities;
- attracting younger residents.

In addition, the team has begun its technical outreach to county and state agencies and the Town of Chevy Chase. These work groups will address transportation, environmental, and other issues and provide on-going guidance as the plan develops.

Consultants

The project team is investigating opportunities to hire consultants to provide insight and expertise to supplement and extend those available within the department. Specifically, the team is interested in assistance with innovative outreach for the spring visioning meetings and for preparation of a retail and office planning study to inform the alternative development scenarios. Other consultant opportunities may include upgrading the department traffic model, mapping of rooftop solar energy potential, and detailed 3-D modeling of existing conditions in Bethesda.

Project Timeline

Initiated in July 2013, the *Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan* is scheduled to be transmitted to the County Council and the County Executive in April 2015. The work schedule and products are outlined below. During the first few months of the project timeline, staff was also developing recommendations for the *Bethesda Purple Line Station Minor Master Plan Amendment*.

Project Scope (July 2013 - April 2015)

Online Outreach and Updates

Ongoing

Provide information about the plan and plan process, including updates about recent meetings and milestones, via the plan website and social media. Provide opportunities to submit comments and questions electronically.

Background Research

September 2013 - January 2014

Complete an existing conditions inventory and mapping. Assemble data on land use, zoning, demographics, transportation, environment, community facilities, and parks and recreation facilities. Create an inventory of existing commercial and residential uses. Collect data on development since the 1994 Sector Plan. Conduct kick-off outreach meetings and begin meeting with property owners, community groups, and other interested parties.

Scope of Work

January 2014

Discuss and finalize the needed analysis and resources, and establish a methodology and approach. Prepare a Scope of Work that describes the Plan area and issues including tasks, staff assignments, a community outreach plan, and timeline.

Analysis and Draft Plan (November 2013 - September 2014)

Analysis

November 2013 - June 2014

Conduct a community visioning workshop; analyze development scenarios for amount and type of development; analyze transportation and environmental impacts; conduct urban design studies; develop schematic concepts for sustainability, parks and open spaces and community facilities; and identify potential zoning designations.

Draft Recommendations

April - May 2014

Develop preliminary recommendations for an appropriate level of growth, identify infrastructure needs of the planned level of growth; and prepare a zoning and design framework that will implement the plan recommendations. Present to community and Planning Board for comment.

Staff Draft Report

June - September 2014

Prepare a Staff Draft Sector Plan for Planning Board review and approval of a Public Hearing Draft. Set a public hearing date and publish the Public Hearing Draft of the Sector Plan.

Planning Board Review (October 2014 - April 2015)

Planning Board Public Hearing

October 2014

Conduct the Planning Board's public hearing to receive public testimony.

Planning Board Worksessions and Planning Board Draft

October 2014 - April 2015

Planning Board worksessions to review testimony and discuss issues raised in the public hearing. Prepare the Planning Board Draft for transmittal to the County Council and the Executive in April 2015.

County Executive Review (April - May 2015)

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

County Council Review, including Public Hearing and PHED Committee and County Council Worksessions

(June - November 2015)

The County Council tour of the Plan area and public hearing on the Planning Board Draft followed by the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) committee work sessions. The PHED committee will make recommendations to the full Council on the Planning Board Draft. County Council worksessions to review the PHED Committee's recommendations, amend the Planning Board draft as needed, and approve the Plan through a Council Resolution, delineating changes to the Planning Board Draft Plan.

Implementation (December 2015 – March 2016)

Full Commission Adoption of the Planning Board Approved Plan

December 2015

Sectional Map Amendment

January – March 2016

Prepare and file the Sectional Map Amendment to implement the Plan's zoning recommendations and obtain County Council's approval after public hearing and review by the Planning Board and the County Council.

Bethesda Downtown Plan proposed schedule

