







Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan, Work Session #3

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Completed: 10.01.15

Description

Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan: Work Session #3

Summary

Work session #3 will be a continuation from work session #2 with a detailed discussion of the zoning and building height recommendations as outlined in the Public Hearing Draft, along with the zoning and building height changes requested by property owners. The discussion will be on a district-by-district basis beginning with the Pearl District and followed by the Wisconsin Ave Corridor. The remaining districts may be discussed as time permits.

DISCUSSION

Vision and Goals

Over the past 20 years, the focus of Downtown Bethesda changed from a single center of activity focused around the Metrorail station to a series of activity centers with multiple downtowns. Each of the nine districts as identified by the community is distinct with its own unique character. One of the

primary goals of updating the 1994 Sector Plan is to recognize this shift and build on the successes and lessons learned from the previous plan and to ensure that the distinct character of these districts remains. The Concept Framework Plan was developed through a collaborative effort among the community, County agencies and staff. The Concept Framework Plan identifies the basic components of the present-day urban fabric in Downtown Bethesda with respect to the following:

- Existing commercial activity centers.
- Emerging commercial activity centers over the next 20 years.
- Residential neighborhoods.
- Primary pedestrian corridors connecting activity centers and residential neighborhoods.
- Parks and open space network that complements the pedestrian corridors and anchors the community.

The Concept Framework Plan provides the basic elements and organization of Downtown Bethesda. All other Sector Plan details are built upon this structure to form a cohesive urban fabric that will evolve over the next 20 years.

District Character

Pearl District

As the eastern gateway to the Sector Plan area, the Pearl District is an emerging center of activity with potential for concentrated retail growth along Pearl Street between East-West Highway and Montgomery Avenue. Current buildings range from small-scale commercial uses in single-family homes to high-rise commercial and residential buildings with poor street presence.

The proposed concept for this district is to promote open space and street activity through a mixed-use environment with improved pedestrian connectivity and new public space opportunities.

The Plan envisions the Pearl District as a gateway to Downtown with recreation space and a street enlivened by new retail.

Wisconsin Avenue

The Wisconsin Avenue Corridor is the main artery through the center of Downtown Bethesda. With the existing Bethesda Metrorail Station, future Purple Line and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) options, Wisconsin Avenue is a critical focus area for improved access, mobility and pedestrian safety. The corridor is envisioned as a symbolic downtown center that reflects the character of adjacent neighborhoods and overall identity of Bethesda through innovative building designs and active public spaces.

The Plan envisions Wisconsin Avenue as the center and spine of Downtown Bethesda connecting surrounding districts.

Arlington South District

Arlington South is an emerging center of activity with potential for commercial and residential redevelopment. As an automobile-oriented retail district, convenience and abundance of parking will be critical for this district as redevelopment occurs. By urbanizing the development pattern, building to the sidewalk with parking in the rear or underneath the buildings, the site can support the depth required

for junior anchors while balancing the Sector Plan goals for creating a pedestrian-friendly streetscape environment.

Arlington North District

The Arlington North district is a transitional zone between the urban core and single-family neighborhoods to the west of the Sector Plan area. Houses used as offices are located along both Montgomery Lane and Arlington Road. The district is located between Woodmont Avenue and Arlington Road and extends from Hampden Lane to Moorland Lane. The form of new development has been mid- to high-rise apartments.

There are opportunities for both open space and connectivity improvements to enhance this area for residents. West of Arlington Road, the institutional buildings and park spaces provide a buffer to the single-family homes. East of Arlington Road, heights should continue to step up as the buildings approach Woodmont Avenue.

The Plan envisions the Arlington North District to retain its mainly residential focus with a mix of low, mid, and high-rise residential development and to continue as a transitional zone between the more commercial urban core and residential neighborhoods west of Arlington Road.

Battery Lane District

The Battery Lane District consists primarily of garden and mid-rise apartments on either side of Battery Lane between Woodmont Avenue and Old Georgetown Road, directly south of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) campus. The Battery Lane district has the well-used Battery Lane Urban Park and North Bethesda Trail at its center, and a range of housing types, including single family homes and low- to high-rise buildings. Planted setbacks provide an inviting green streetscape along Battery Lane.

The Plan envisions the Battery Lane District to retain its residential character with a mix of low, mid, and high-rise residential development, to have improved access and connectivity for pedestrians to enhance neighborhood livability and to expand and enhance the existing Battery Lane Urban Park.

South Bethesda District

South Bethesda is an established residential neighborhood situated north of Norwood Local Park, a major area amenity. The district has a garden character with tree-lined streetscapes and planted setbacks, and offers several opportunities to create better connections for pedestrians and bikes within the district and to surrounding destinations.

The Plan envisions the South Bethesda District to retain much of its residential character with a mix of low to mid-rise residential development, to have improved access and connectivity for pedestrians to enhance neighborhood livability and to provide opportunities for small neighborhood-oriented open spaces.

Property Owner Zoning Requests and Staff Recommendations

As outlined above, this work session will discuss in detail the zoning and building heights as outlined in the Public Hearing Draft, along with the zoning and building height changes requested by property owners. The discussion will be on a district-by-district basis beginning with the Pearl District and followed by the Wisconsin Ave Corridor. The remaining districts may be discussed as time permits.

Property owner zoning requests from written testimony during the Public Hearing process have been documented in the attached spreadsheet and organized by District. In addition, the spreadsheet includes the current zone for the property, the Public Hearing Sector Plan recommended zoning and staff's recommendations based on the property owner's requests. Staff's recommendations weighed the impacts of the requests from property owners to the planning methodology used to achieve the concept framework plan and public benefit initiatives. A map corresponding to the properties and owner's requests will be provided during the hearing.

CONCLUSION

Following the October 5, 2015 work session, staff will summarize the zoning and building heights approved by the Planning Board on the September 17th and the October 5th work sessions. A spreadsheet with the Planning Board's decisions will be posted prior to the next work session on October 22, 2015. Depending on the outcome of work session #3, the October 22nd work session will focus on Parks and Open Space, the High Performance Area and Density Averaging.

Attachments

- Staff Recommendations for Property Owner Zoning Change Requests Spreadsheet
- September 17th work session – Planning Board approved zoning and building heights for Bethesda Row and Woodmont Triangle and revised building heights map

