

MCPB
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Rock Spring Master Plan Scope of Work

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Completed: 10-01-15

Description

Rock Spring Master Plan: Scope of Work

Staff Recommendation

Approval of the proposed Scope of Work

Summary

The Rock Spring Master Plan comprises approximately 535 acres located in North Bethesda. This Scope of Work includes the following sections:

- *Introduction* describes the proposed boundary for the Rock Spring Master Plan.
- *Planning Framework* provides an overview of the previous Sector Plan's guidance.
- *Background and Context* highlights existing uses in the area.
- *Development Activity* outlines new projects that are under construction or have been approved.
- *Purpose of the Plan* highlights the issue of office vacancies.
- *Issues to be addressed* summarizes what the Plan will cover.
- *Community Outreach* describes how stakeholders will be engaged.
- *Plan Schedule* outlines the timeline.

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Figure 3: Existing Zoning

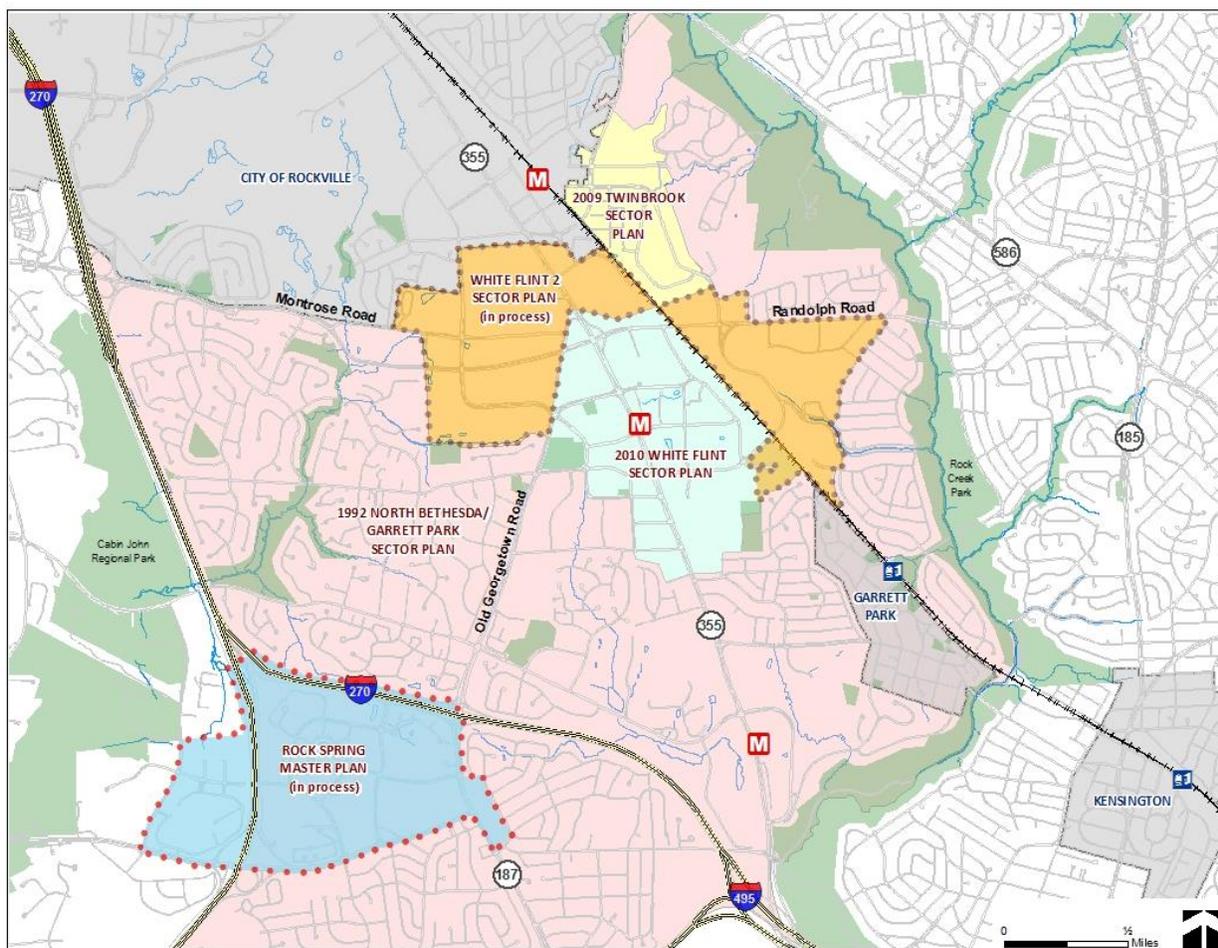
Figure 4: Aerial View of Rock Spring Master Plan

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The majority of the proposed Rock Spring Master Plan area was included in the 1992 *North Bethesda/Garrett Park Sector Plan*. The 1992 Sector Plan covered a large geography and focused on the areas around the Twinbrook, White Flint and Grosvenor-Strathmore Metrorail stations, as well as the office park at Rock Spring. Communities that were previously part of the 1992 Sector Plan are now the subject of separate, smaller area plans, including the 2009 *Twinbrook Sector Plan*, the 2010 *White Flint Sector Plan*, and the plans currently underway for Rock Spring and White Flint 2 (see Figure 2). The portion of the Rock Spring Master Plan area that includes Westfield Montgomery Mall was part of the 2002 *Potomac Subregion Master Plan*.

The 1992 Sector Plan describes Rock Spring Park as “one of the East Coast’s premier office parks” with a campus-style setting, green lawns, and lush landscaping that attracts tenants who wish to “enhance their corporate image.” At the same time, the Sector Plan notes that the office park consists of somewhat homogeneous, unrelated sets of buildings centered on sites with no particular relationship with each other and no unifying urban design features other

Figure 2: 1992 North Bethesda/Garrett Park Sector Plan; 2009 Twinbrook Sector Plan; 2010 White Flint Sector Plan; White Flint 2 Sector Plan; Rock Spring Master Plan



than generous landscaping. Describing Rock Spring, the Sector Plan states:

It provides a gateway to the I-270 technology corridor and proximity to Baltimore, Washington and suburban Virginia. It also has easy access to three high volume airports. The Park's visibility, unique access to major transportation networks, and proximity to other commercial/industrial centers, to the nation's capital and to stable residential neighborhoods make it the most convenient corporate office location in the County. Business demand for the type of space offered at Rock Spring Park is typically very high. Vacancies in the park average 8 to 12 percent, which is 30 to 50 percent less than elsewhere in the County. The asking price for space at Rock Spring Park is near the top of Montgomery County's office rents, surpassed only by Bethesda-Chevy Chase business districts. (Page 94)

The 1992 Plan retained the office park's zoning, which was largely office-oriented. On the undeveloped Davis-Camalier site, in the northeast quadrant of the area, the 1992 Plan retained the high-rise housing zone, but recommended a mixed-use floating zone. The Plan includes extensive development guidelines for the 54-acre Davis property, which is envisioned as "the urban village center for this area of North Bethesda, creating a more pedestrian friendly, transit serviceable environment with the housing and retail on the Davis parcel linked to the offices in the remainder of the Park." (Page 102) In 2011, the Planning Board approved a site plan application for the Davis parcel (see Development Activity section below).

The 1992 Sector Plan recommended the North Bethesda Transitway to link the Metrorail Red Line with Montgomery Mall via Old Georgetown Road and Rock Spring Drive. The 1992 Plan defined Transitway as "a path for transit, separated from other vehicles. It could be theoretically for heavy rail (unlikely here), light rail, buses, or even other technologies. An interim use might be for buses and ridesharing." (Page 185)

The Transitway was originally conceived as a link between the Grosvenor Metrorail Station to the east, through Rock Spring, to a planned transit center at Montgomery Mall. It is included in the approved 2013 *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan (CTCFMP)*, which provides alternative routes to either the Grosvenor or White Flint Metrorail stations. Much of the right-of-way along Rock Spring Drive, Fernwood Road, and Tuckerman Lane is currently available through easements and dedications that have been provided through the development process. The CTCFMP lists four possible stations within Rock Spring for the Transitway: the Montgomery Mall Transit Center, Rock Spring Drive and Fernwood Road, Rockledge Drive and Rock Spring Drive, and Rock Spring Drive and Old Georgetown Road.

Several objectives from the 1992 *North Bethesda/Garrett Park Sector Plan* continue to be relevant today, including:

- Add residential and retail uses.
- Preserve publicly accessible open space.
- Provide pedestrian and bicycle paths linking the open space with other areas in the office park, with public facilities and with adjacent residential neighborhoods.
- Integrate transitway stations and right-of-way into future development (page 94 of the Plan).

The 1993 *General Plan Refinement* included the Rock Spring area within the Urban Ring, the relatively intensively developed area of the County nearest Washington, D.C. The Rock Spring Plan will amend, and be guided by relevant goals from the General Plan Refinement, including:

- Accommodating selective additional development and redevelopment.
- Emphasizing development, including housing, in appropriate transit station areas.
- Expanding transportation options, while accommodating pedestrian needs.
- Enhancing park and recreation linkages (page 25 of the General Plan).

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The central portion of the Rock Spring Master Plan is a conventional suburban, auto-oriented office park, which is bounded by I-270 on the west, the I-270 spur on the north, Rockledge Drive on the east, and Democracy Boulevard on the south. The majority of office buildings in Rock Spring were built in the 1980s and 1990s. The office park has a large percentage of Class A space (87 percent, compared to 50 percent Countywide) and much of it has been consistently renovated and upgraded. Office buildings in Rock Spring are substantially larger than other areas; on average, they are twice the size of office buildings elsewhere in the County.

The Rock Spring office park contains 30 buildings with 5.3 million square feet of space. Major tenants include Marriott International, Lockheed Martin Corporation, IBM, Host Hotels and Resorts, and the National Institutes of Health. Several buildings contain mostly medical offices, such as the Camalier, Champlain, and Suburban Outpatient Medical Center. Other tenants in



Office Buildings on Rockledge Drive overlooking a landscaped pond

the area's office buildings include insurance, real estate, and financial companies. Rock Spring Park is part of the North Bethesda/Potomac office submarket. It accounts for 48 percent of the office inventory in North Bethesda and 7 percent of office space Countywide. The current office vacancy rate in Rock Spring is 23.7 percent, much higher than the Countywide vacancy rate of 15 percent. Rock Spring's office vacancy rate has remained above 19 percent since 2009.

Marriott International, which occupies about 800,000 square feet at their headquarters in Rock Spring, intends to relocate to a more urban location with good access to transit; the planned relocation would boost the office park's vacancy rate to 39 percent, if there are no other changes. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) vacated approximately 160,000 square feet of leased office space in Rock Spring for a new headquarters in Twinbrook. IBM has reduced its Rock Spring footprint from 168,000 square feet to 59,000 square feet. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) currently leases over 700,000 square feet in several locations in Rock Spring. Lockheed Martin has 275,000 square feet of space in a secured and gated site on Rockledge Drive.



Marriott International Headquarters on Fernwood Road

Retail uses are located west and east of the office park. Westfield Montgomery Mall, a large regional shopping mall, is located west of I-270, north of Democracy Boulevard, east of Westlake Drive, and south of Westlake Terrace. A small shopping center is located adjacent to the regional mall on the southeast corner of Westlake Drive and Westlake Terrace. Across from Montgomery Mall, on the north side of Westlake Terrace, there is a Home Depot, as well as automobile sales and service uses, including Jim Coleman Toyota, Jim Coleman Infinity, Jim Coleman Cadillac, and Ourisman Ford Bethesda. This retail area is linked to Rock Spring's office park by Westlake Terrace, which bridges I-270.

On the east side, the Master Plan area includes the Wildwood Shopping Center and Georgetown Square. Georgetown Square is located on the northwest corner of Old Georgetown Road and Democracy Boulevard and includes Giant, a DSW shoe store, a restaurant, and ancillary retailers. Wildwood Shopping Center is located east of Old Georgetown Road, north of Cheshire Drive, and west of Berkshire Drive. It includes a specialty grocer, Balducci's, a CVS, and a variety of small retailers in a strip-style center. Adjacent to the Wildwood Shopping Center to the north are a gas station, a bank, and a medical office building.

The first residential units within the Rock Spring area were completed in 2004. The Berkshires at Rock Spring is a 386-unit multi-family development located adjacent to the I-270 spur between Rockledge Drive and Old Georgetown Road.

Walter Johnson High School is also located in the Rock Spring Master Plan area, with primary access from Rock Spring Drive. The high school, which opened in 1956, is on nearly 31 acres and the building was revitalized in 2009. According to Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), current enrollment at Walter Johnson High School is 2,295 and the school's capacity is 2,335. MCPS is currently conducting a feasibility study to analyze the potential for adding classrooms to the high school.



Walter Johnson High School

With its location adjacent to I-270 and near I-495, Rock Spring is well served by roads, but not currently by transit; the closest Metrorail station is Grosvenor, 2 miles away. Two major infrastructure projects greatly improved vehicular access to and around Rock Spring: the interchange at the I-270 spur and Rockledge Boulevard and the Westlake Terrace bridge over I-270. Multiple existing bus routes and shuttles run throughout the area. As mentioned above, the 2013 *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan* included the North Bethesda

Transitway and four proposed stations within the Rock Spring Master Plan area. A critical issue for the Rock Spring Plan will be identifying additional mobility options to improve circulation in and around this area.

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

Several properties in the proposed Rock Spring Master Plan area have been developed or have been approved for development since the 1992 *North Bethesda/Garrett Park Master Plan*. The Berkshires of Rock Spring, a 386-unit multi-family residential building (formally known as Avalon Bay) was completed in 2004 on the northern portion of the Davis-Camaliere property along the I-270 spur. The Berkshires is part of a larger project for the entire Davis tract that was originally approved by the Planning Board in 1999. The proposed, multi-phase project for the Davis parcel, the only vacant site in the Plan area, has been amended several times and the approved development includes nearly 1 million square feet of offices, retail, a hotel, as well as high-rise and mid-rise residential buildings.

In the heart of the Rock Spring office park, residential builder EYA is currently constructing a 168-unit townhouse development on the northwest corner of Fernwood Road and Rock Spring Drive, across from the Marriott's headquarters. A 340-unit multi-family high-rise residential building has been approved on a parcel on the north side of Westlake Terrace across from Westfield Montgomery Mall at the site currently occupied by Ourisman Ford.

Westfield Montgomery Mall has undergone significant renovations, including a new food court, movie theatres, and the Cheesecake Factory (relocated from White Flint Mall). A new transit center at Montgomery Mall is funded and construction is underway. The transit center will be relocated from the mall's entrance on Westlake Terrace to a site just to the east before the bridge over I-270. This project is scheduled to be completed in approximately two years. Additional redevelopment may be contemplated by the mall's owners in the future. A Montgomery Mall Citizens Advisory Panel has been formed to keep the surrounding community informed about activities and issues at the regional shopping center.



New movie theatre and mall entrance at Westfield Montgomery Mall

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Across the County, region, and many areas of the country, the office market has been experiencing a significant downturn. Montgomery County's challenges are exemplified by a 15 percent office vacancy rate, which represents nearly 11 million square feet of vacant space. An Office Market Assessment Report, prepared for the Planning Department by Partners for Economic Solutions (PES) and released in June 2015, states (on page 1): "The Washington, DC metro region is currently experiencing unprecedented challenges in its office market...Montgomery County is suffering along with the rest of the region, performing better than other jurisdictions on some indicators and worse on others. The region and county have experienced recession-driven office market downturns for decades. What is different this time is a major realignment as tenants reduce their office space even as they expand their workforce. That trend will impact local and regional office markets for many years into the future."

The trends impacting the County's office market include:

- Lasting impacts from the recession and slow recovery in those sectors of the economy that use office space.
- Federal budget cuts, sequestration, and overall uncertainty have reduced government contractors' employment and ability to commit to long-term leases.
- The Federal government's "freeze the footprint" initiative, which mandates reducing the square footage of employee workstations as well as reducing the amount of space the government leases from the private sector.
- Competition in the region, particularly with the District of Columbia and Tysons in Fairfax County, which is served by the Silver Line, a new extension of the Metrorail system.
- Changes in preferences as prospective tenants seek transit-served locations near retail, restaurants, entertainment, and housing in buildings that offer open layouts, high ceilings, and natural light.
- Changes in office technology have reduced needs for filing and storage space.

Once considered a premier office location, Rock Spring has been particularly hard hit by these current trends. Single-use business parks without access to transit, like Rock Spring, are struggling with the highest office vacancies. In the context of changing preferences among employers and their workforce for transit-served locations with a dynamic mix of uses, this planning effort will explore ways to reimagine Rock Spring. With the current construction of townhouses on a site previously planned for another office building, the market is already responding by introducing residential use into a heretofore single-use office park. Staff will assess the feasibility of adaptive reuse of vacant office buildings into residential uses and/or community uses, such as schools. As noted on page 66 of the PES report: "Property owners and developers are beginning to rethink and redesign conventional office parks to accommodate a mix of uses."

The Master Plan will examine opportunities for additional streets to improve the network; public use spaces and amenities; residential and non-residential uses; sustainable

environmental measures; infrastructure needs for the area; linkages to the proposed transitway; and opportunities to improve connectivity to the surrounding communities.

Baseline land use and traffic conditions will be evaluated to understand existing opportunities and constraints. Redevelopment and infill opportunities for residential and nonresidential development will be explored and consideration will be given to allowing mixed-use development in areas where mixed-use development is currently limited by the existing zoning. The Rock Spring planning process will allow for a more detailed and nuanced assessment of the zoning conversions made effective through the Countywide comprehensive rezoning on October 30, 2014 (see Figure 3). Staff will evaluate different levels and types of development and prepare scenarios to be tested by traffic modeling. Staff will also work with Montgomery County Public Schools to estimate the potential number of new students that may result from any proposed increase in residential uses in the Master Plan area and identify potential ways to address school capacity issues. Urban design guidelines will be prepared and opportunities to improve mobility will be identified, as will the provision of public spaces and community facilities, including schools.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

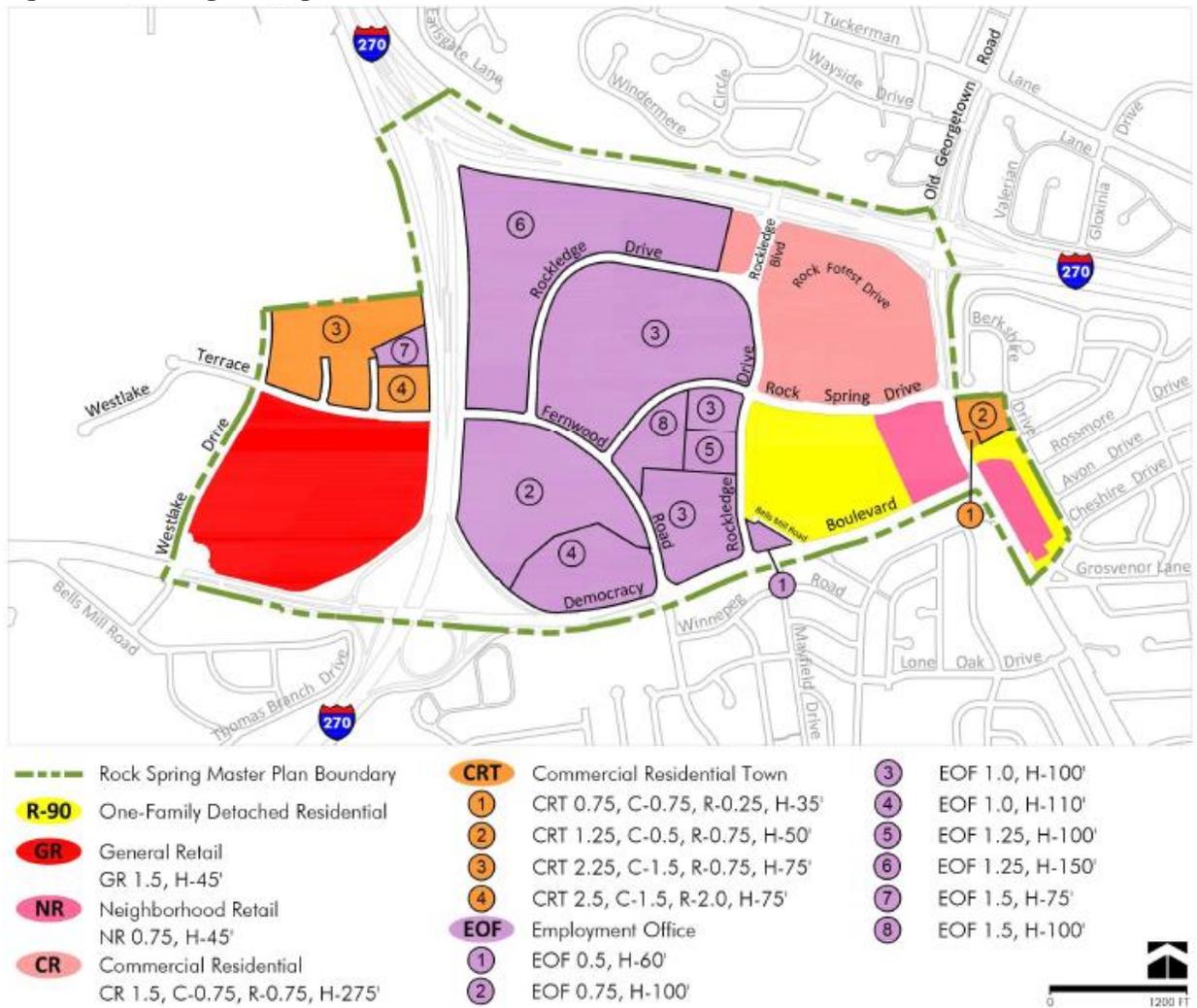
Land Uses and Urban Design

Many of the uses in the Plan area are low- to medium- density single-use developments. The Plan will evaluate the appropriateness of the single-use properties and explore land use patterns that promote mixed-use development at suitable locations. Two of the more predominant single-use land use types in Rock Spring are office and retail. The Plan will explore the role of an office park in a changing office market, as well as how the existing land use pattern could be modified and transformed. On a more micro-level, urban design guidelines will be prepared to address physical planning issues such as building heights, scale, the relationships between new and existing development, as well as ways to improve community identity.

Transportation and Connectivity

The Rock Spring Master Plan will address the need for transportation infrastructure to improve mobility within the Plan area and connectivity beyond it. The North Bethesda Transitway, the proposed BRT route through the Plan area, will connect the area to the Metrorail Red Line stations at Grosvenor and White Flint. Other ideas will be explored to enhance the multi-modal transportation options.

Figure 3: Existing Zoning



Community Facilities

Land use recommendations in the Rock Spring Master Plan must consider school capacity in the Walter Johnson School Cluster in North Bethesda. The Subdivision Staging Policy indicates that the Walter Johnson Cluster is close to a moratorium for all school levels. Additional residential development will impact the Walter Johnson cluster, as well as the adjacent Downcounty Consortium secondary schools. New or re-opened school facilities may be necessary.

The need for additional park and open spaces will also be analyzed as a component of this Plan. The Rock Spring Master Plan will assess the impact of proposed development in the Rock Spring area and determine whether additional facilities are needed.

Figure 4: Aerial View of Rock Spring Master Plan



Environmental Sustainability

Much of the development in this area occurred at a time before stormwater management regulations were in place. Redevelopment provides an opportunity to improve environmental conditions and create a healthier community. The Plan will promote environmental sustainability, including environmental site design techniques and increased tree canopy coverage. The addition of new parks and open spaces will be considered. Opportunities to improve air quality by reducing reliance on single-occupant vehicles will also be explored.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

A community kick-off meeting was held on September 1, 2015 at Walter Johnson High School to launch the planning and public engagement process. Approximately 150 people were in attendance, representing residents, developers, business owners, neighborhood associations and community groups. Attendees engaged in a robust dialogue with staff and identified their priority issues, including overcrowded schools; connectivity, safety and access throughout the area; the need for added amenities such as public parks and open space; and infrastructure needs.



September 1, 2015 Master Plan Kick-off Meeting at Walter Johnson High School



Citizens participating at Rock Spring Master Plan Kick-off Meeting

The dominant concern expressed by a majority of the attendees at the kick-off meeting was about school capacity at all school levels within the Walter Johnson cluster. As a result of this concern (which was also expressed at the June 25, 2015 kick-off meeting for the White Flint 2 Sector Plan), staff held a meeting on September 17 that focused exclusively on school issues. Over 100 people attend the September 17 meeting, where the Montgomery County Public Schools' long range planner made a presentation regarding the methodology for forecasts as well as the approved plans to address capacity issues in the cluster. The Planning Department presented general information about the Rock Spring Master Plan and White Flint 2 Sector Plan. Planning staff also presented information on the annual school test and impact fees that are assessed as part of the adequate public facilities analysis, as required by the Subdivision Staging Policy. In addition to these meetings, staff met with the cluster coordinators for the Ashburton and Luxmanor elementary school PTAs.

Over the summer, staff attended the Rock Spring office park's farmers market and food truck events and spoke with employees. In the fall and winter, staff will hold a series of community workshops to solicit ideas from and engage residents, surrounding neighborhood associations, business owners, and community organizations. Additional public meetings will address specific topics such as transportation, land use, zoning, and public facilities, including schools. Staff will meet with individual property owners, business owners, civic representatives, public agencies and other interested parties throughout the process.

A Communications Plan has been prepared for the project that outlines resources and tools for effectively communicating with the community about the issues of this Plan. Social media, electronic newsletters, and other communication tools will be utilized. All public meetings, events and staff reports will be posted on the project website. A variety of opportunities for interactive engagement, in addition to public and small group meetings and workshops, are discussed below.

Consistent, easy-to-understand messaging: Planning concepts related to transportation, zoning and infill opportunities will be explained simply and clearly across all media platforms.

Overview PowerPoint: The Plan's main PowerPoint will be used to summarize the history and challenges of the area. The PowerPoint will provide background to help planners communicate issues to interested stakeholders, including the context, planning history and current topics to be addressed by the Plan. Along with other relevant materials, the Plan's PowerPoint will be available online and will be updated throughout the process.

This tool will be designed to help stakeholders learn about existing conditions -- past as well as the present -- as they engage with planners about the future of the area. A voice-over of planners narrating the PowerPoint (as in a live presentation) will accompany it on the webpage for the Plan. And, if possible, the staff team will enable viewers of the on-line PowerPoint to pose comments and questions about its content.

Websites: Efforts will be made to have well-coordinated messaging on the Plan from the Planning Department project team. A project webpage has been established at montgomeryplanning.org/community/rockspring.

E-newsletter and social media: Updates and clear messaging will be conveyed through regular postings on Facebook and Twitter (@ReimagineRockSpring) about various aspects of the Plan.

Videos: Staff interviews and segments devoted to specific topics (transportation, zoning, public facilities, etc.) could be posted on the Planning Department website.

PLAN SCHEDULE

The Rock Spring Master Plan was initiated on July 1, 2015. The Planning Board is scheduled to review the Working Draft Plan during summer 2016 and transmit the Planning Board Draft Plan to the County Executive and County Council by February 2017. The County Council review of the Plan is scheduled to begin in April 2017. Upon completion of the Council's review and

action, a Sectional Map Amendment (SMA) will be initiated to implement the Plan's zoning recommendations. It is anticipated that the SMA will be approved by February 2018.

Project Scope of Work

Background research

July 2015 – October 2015

Complete an inventory of existing conditions, including assembling data on land uses, zoning, demographics, transportation, environment, community facilities and parks and recreation facilities.

September 1, 2015 Community Kick-off Meeting

October 8, 2015 Approval of Scope of Work by the Planning Board

Delineate the Plan area and issues to be addressed, including community outreach and timeline.

Analysis and Community Meetings

October 2015 – April 2016

The community kick-off meeting will be followed by a series of workshops in fall 2015. Staff will prepare development scenarios; analyze transportation, school, and environmental impacts; conduct urban design studies and infrastructure needs assessment; develop concepts for the environment, parks and open spaces, and community facilities; identify potential zoning designations; and discuss alternatives with stakeholders.

Draft Recommendations

May – June 2016

Develop preliminary recommendations for discussion with the Planning Board, including identifying infrastructure needs of the proposed development scenario, and land use and zoning options, and urban design recommendations that will implement the Plan recommendations.

Working Draft Plan

Summer 2016

Present a Working Draft Master 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 Master Plan.

Planning Board Review

Public Hearing Draft

Fall 2016

Conduct the Planning Board's tour of the area and the public hearing to receive public testimony.

Planning Board Worksessions and Planning Board Draft

October 2016 - January 2017

Planning Board worksessions will be held to review testimony and discuss issues presented in the public hearing. The Planning Board Draft will be prepared for transmittal to the County Council and the County Executive.

County Executive Review

February - March 2017

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

County Council Review

April 2017 - October 2017

County Council public hearing and PHED Committee Worksessions.

The County Council will tour the Plan area and conduct a public hearing on the Planning Board Draft Plan. Worksessions will then be held by the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee. The PHED Committee will make recommendations to the full Council on the Planning Board Draft.

County Council Worksessions

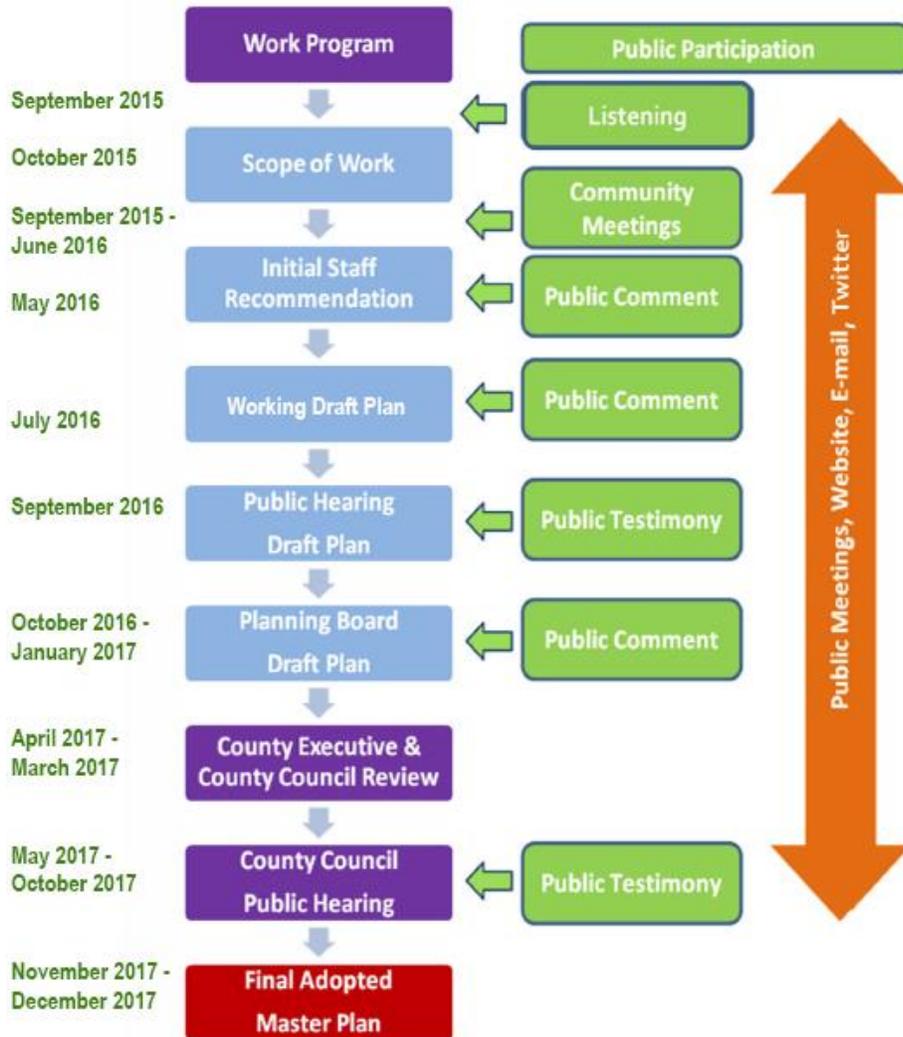
County Council worksessions will review the PHED Committee's recommendations and approve the Rock Spring Master Plan with a Council Resolution.

Commission Adoption and Sectional Map Amendment

November 2017 – February 2018

The full Commission of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission will adopt the approved Master Plan. The Planning Department will prepare and file the Sectional Map Amendment (SMA) to implement the Plan's zoning recommendations.

Master Plan Process



STAY CONNECTED

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Project Webpage

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