





Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan, Work Session #10

-  Leslye Howerton, Planner Coordinator, Area 1, leslye.howerton@montgomeryplanning.org, 301.495.4551
-  Robert Kronenberg, Chief, Area 1, robert.kronenberg@montgomeryplanning.org, 301.495.2187
- Laura Shipman, Senior Planner, Urban Design, Area 1, 301.495.4558
- Matt Folden, Planner Coordinator, Transportation, Area 1, 301.495.4539
- Tina Schneider, Senior Planner, Environment, Area 1, 301.495.4506
- Brooke Farquhar, Master Planner/Supervisor, Parks Department, 301.650.4388
- Rachel Newhouse, Park Planner, Parks Department, 301.650.4368
- Susanne Paul, Senior Planner, Parks Department, 301.650.4392
- Rick Liu, Senior Planner, Research Department, 301.495.5641
- David Anspacher, Planner Coordinator, Transportation, Functional Planning & Policy, 301.495.2191
- Scott Whipple, Supervisor, Historic Preservation, 301.563.3402
- Lisa Tate, Senior Planner, Research Department, 301.650.5623
- Parker Smith, Planning Tech, Area 1, 301.495.1327

Completed: 03.31.16

Description

Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan: Work Session #10

Summary

Work session #10 will be a continuation of work session #9 beginning with the presentation of the Ecology and the High Performance Area recommendations in Downtown Bethesda followed by Affordable Housing.

Staff will present an overview of the High Performance Area and Environmental goals and recommendations as outlined in the May 2015 Public Hearing Draft. The overview will be followed by a discussion with the Planning Board of specific recommendations presented.

Following the Ecology and High Performance Area recommendations, staff will present an overview of the Affordable Housing goals and recommendations in the Plan for discussion with the Planning Board.

DISCUSSION

Vision

In 2035, Bethesda residents will have a downtown that is a model for sustainability, accessibility, equity and innovation. There will be more affordable choices of housing in close proximity to jobs, shopping and recreation. They will safely walk and bike along shaded streets to stores and offices, past new energy-efficient buildings and familiar landmarks. New parks and open spaces will provide green, tranquil places for the residents, their families and friends to gather, socialize and relax. Nearby Metrorail and new Purple Line stations will be quickly reached via green corridors that line streets and sidewalks to meet the needs of both the residents and visitors to Downtown Bethesda.

This vision stems from the goals and recommendations within this Sector Plan to enhance Downtown Bethesda over the next 20 years. The aim of the Plan is not to radically transform the community but to achieve a truly sustainable downtown through incremental measures addressing its economic, social and environmental future.

Planning Framework

Overarching Goals:

Specifically, the Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan builds on the past successes of Downtown Bethesda to create a truly sustainable downtown by focusing on recommendations to increase:

- **Affordable Housing**
- Parks and Open Space
- **Environmental Innovation**
- Economic Competitiveness

Strengthened Centers of Activity:

Bethesda is distinguished by multiple downtowns within its greater Downtown. Identified in Chapter Three are nine districts, including the established centers of the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor, Bethesda Row and Woodmont Triangle; emerging centers of the Pearl and Arlington South Districts; and residential and edge districts of Battery Lane, Eastern Greenway, South Bethesda and Arlington North. The Plan explores ways to strengthen these centers of activity through the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainability.

Environmental and High Performance Area Recommendations

Staff will be discussing the vision, goals and recommendations for the High Performance Area and specific environmental recommendations related to Energy, Canopy Cover, Green Cover and Stormwater.

Plan Vision

The central theme of this Sector Plan is sustainability, not just environmental sustainability but also

economic and social sustainability. Integrating the latest planning principles for each of these three elements such as affordable housing, alternative modes of transportation, access to parks, high performance buildings, and greener streets will increase urban livability and desirability for Bethesda's residents, support a prosperous economy, and provide a healthy place to live work and recreate.

The Sector Plan establishes goals for each of these elements and then sets forth a system for measuring success toward reaching the goals. Each idea proposed herein can be evaluated in terms of six key performance areas that are important measures of overall sustainability. The targeted performance areas for Downtown Bethesda include:

- Community Identity
- Equity
- **Habitat and Health**
- Access and Mobility
- **Water**
- **Energy and Materials**

Many of these performance areas are already well integrated into the fabric of Bethesda's existing urban landscape. The recommendations within the plan fill in the gaps where improvements can be made to make Bethesda better, forward thinking, progressive, and a destination point.

High Performance Area Goals and Recommendations:

This designation aims to raise the level of sustainability through exceeding the County's minimum requirements for high performing, energy-efficient buildings that save resources, decrease operating and maintenance costs, and incentivize development that will help achieve the County's climate objective. The High Performance Area will be implemented through the public benefits in the Commercial Residential (CR) zone.

Energy-efficient buildings will be accomplished through the optional method of development that allows higher density as an incentive to providing significant public benefits. This Plan prioritizes the benefit points for energy conservation and generation.

Environmental Goals and Recommendations:

The Sector Plan recommends strategies that compensate, mitigate, and minimize lost resources to grow a healthier and greener downtown. These approaches include transit-oriented development to lessen carbon outputs; high performance buildings to lower energy demand and operational costs; stormwater management that mimics nature to improve groundwater recharge and stream quality; and stratified vegetative plantings to improve habitat, purify air and water, and cool the urban landscape. When implemented comprehensively and on a site-by-site basis, these performance-based recommendations can be quantified and measured to improve and sustain a healthier, greener and more prosperous community.

Canopy Cover and Green Cover:

Through the recommendations identified below, this Sector Plan aims to reestablish and link green spaces via streetscape improvements, tree canopy corridors and green roofs.

A. Goals:

- Increase overall tree canopy cover.
- Reduce heat island effect.
- Improve air quality.

B. Recommendations:

The following recommendations are critical to achieving the habitat goals of this Sector Plan:

- Supplement tree planting along streets and public space to achieve a minimum of 50 percent canopy cover.
- On private property, provide a minimum of 35 percent green cover, which may include either singularly or a combination of the following:
 - Intensive green roof (six-inches or deeper).
 - Tree canopy cover

Stormwater:

Improving water quality in the three receiving tributaries (Coquelin Run, Bethesda Mainstem and Willett Branch) is an important goal that will take many years to achieve. With each new development and streetscape design, the construction of integrated stormwater management treatments will begin to reduce the quantity and improve the quality of stormwater runoff and water in the receiving streams.

A. Goals:

- Reduce untreated stormwater runoff to improve stream quality.

B. Recommendations:

- Integrate stormwater management within the right-of-way where feasible.
- Plant intensive green roofs
- Use Low-Impact Development Techniques

Affordable Housing Recommendations

The Sector Plan envisions Downtown Bethesda as a place consisting of a well-rounded community of residents and workers who contribute to the health and vitality of the downtown. However, its attractiveness as a place to live, the ambience of street life, shops, and restaurants, and the proximity to employment and Metro – has resulted in housing costs increasingly out of reach for most residents across Montgomery County.

Over the next 25 years, Downtown Bethesda is anticipated to grow at a faster rate than Montgomery County as a whole, with households projected to increase by 28 percent, population by 24 percent, and employment by 40 percent. As housing demand continues to increase as a result of this growth, Bethesda's high housing costs will become even more cost-prohibitive for most Montgomery County residents to reside there. Monthly homeowner costs in the Bethesda Downtown Plan Area Study area currently average around \$4,660, which is two-thirds higher than the County. The average rent in this area is \$1,916¹, which is about 20 percent more than the average rent for the County. Furthermore, newly built residential apartments typically rent for \$2,750², which is 30 percent more than the Study area and over 40 percent more than the County.

Along with high housing costs, Downtown Bethesda also continues to have a shortage of committed affordable housing. Of the 4,669 multifamily rental apartments in the Bethesda Downtown Study Area, only 826 (17.69 percent) are rent-restricted as defined by MPDU requirements, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, or public subsidies³. There also exists about 1,992 "market-affordable"⁴ rental apartments in Bethesda—apartments whose market rents fall within affordable income levels due to their age or limited amenities – but given Bethesda's high land values and overall desirability, these rents have the potential to increase considerably. Thus, absent special efforts, there will be a continuing shortfall of new units to meet the needs of moderate-to-lower income households that require the services or are employed by retail establishments in Bethesda.

- A. *Goal:* Preserve existing market-rate affordable housing, provide a mix of housing options and increase the provision of Moderately Priced Dwelling Units in exchange for development incentives.

Recommendations:

- Minimum 15% MPDUs for residential development within the High Performance Area in Downtown Bethesda.
- Preserve existing market-rate affordable housing by identifying these sites as Priority Sending Sites for density averaging. Affordable Housing sending sites that choose to transfer their density must enter into a rental agreement to retain 30% of their existing

¹ 2012 Rental Housing Survey, Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs

² Based on rents at comparable new apartments in Bethesda

³ Such units are typically required to be affordable to households with an income below 65 percent of AMI (Area Median Income), or about \$70,000 for a household size of 4.

⁴ Market-Rate rentals are defined as affordable if their rent price plus expected tenant-paid utility costs are no more than 30 percent of household income.

affordable housing units, defined as 65 percent of Area Median Income (AMI) or below, for 20 years.

- Provide off-site moderately-priced dwelling units (MPDUs) within the Sector Plan Boundary

CONCLUSION

Following the April 7, 2016 work session, staff will summarize the ecology and high performance area and affordable housing decisions recommended by the Planning Board and post them to the Downtown Bethesda website.

Attachments

- Recent Correspondence between March 3, 2016 – March 29, 2016