



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

February 5, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: John A. Carter, Chief *JAC*
Community-Based Planning Division

FROM: Judy Daniel, Team Leader *JD*
Rural Area Planning Team (301/495-4559)

SUBJECT: Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report for the Damascus Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION: Approval for Staff Use

DISCUSSION

The enclosed Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report completes the initial planning effort for the Damascus Master Plan. After review by the Planning Board, the Rural Area Team will distribute the Report to interested persons. The Report includes the following:

1. Identification of the Purpose and a Summary of the Issues – After meeting with the Damascus Alliance, individual property owners, and the Up-County Advisory Board, the issues for the Damascus Master Plan were identified and included in this Report.
2. Delineation of the Planning Area Boundaries - The boundaries established in the previous master plan have been modified to match the traffic zones in response to requests from the Planning Board.
3. Recommendation for the Community Outreach Process – The outreach process includes a broad range of input from civic groups, residents, property owners, public agencies, and business owners. This outreach continues the process established in the Shady Grove Sector Plan. A Master Plan Review Committee and a series of Task Forces will be used in this process.

The Report also provides background on the Master Plan and development history of Damascus, and a summary of recent planning activities and ongoing studies.

JD:JAC:ha: g:/carter/Damascus Purpose.doc

Attachment

PURPOSE AND OUTREACH STRATEGY REPORT

Damascus Master Plan

January 30, 2003

**The Maryland-National Capital
Park and Planning Commission**

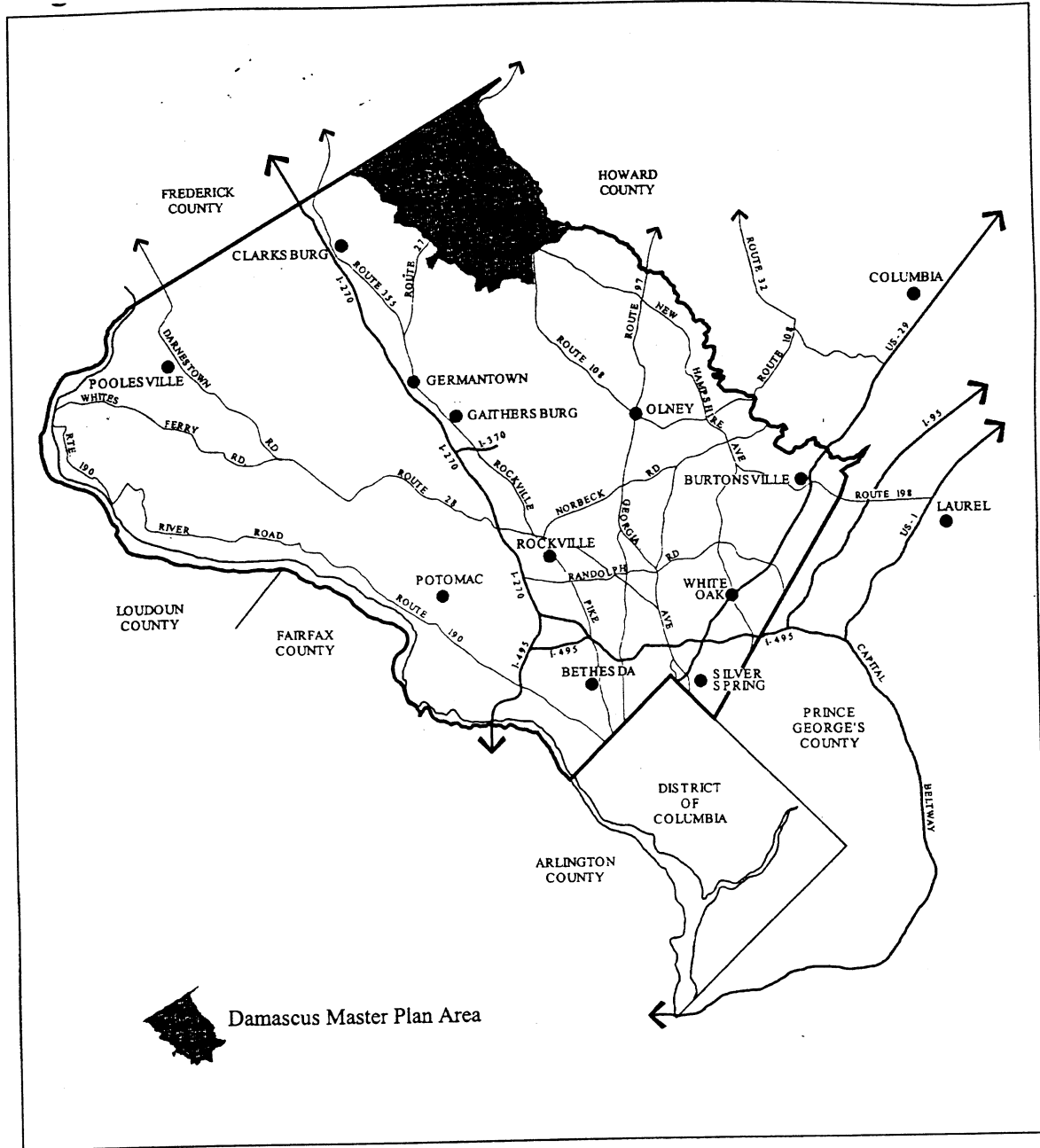
DAMASCUS MASTER PLAN
DRAFT PURPOSE AND OUTREACH STRATEGY REPORT
TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
PART I: INTRODUCTION	3
Purpose of the Master Plan.....	3
Proposed Master Plan Boundaries.....	5
Summary of Recommendations and Implementation from the 1982 Master Plan, and 1985 and 1993 Amendments	7
Damascus Master Plan Area Today	10
1. Land Use Characteristics	10
2. Demographic and Housing Profile	10
3. Transportation.....	10
4. Environment	11
5. Parks and Recreation	11
PART II: PLANNING ISSUES	13
Land Use and Zoning	13
Housing.....	13
Transportation and Pedestrian Access	13
Environment and Watershed Protection.....	15
Parks, Trails, Recreation, and Legacy Open Space.....	16
Community Facilities.....	16
Historic Preservation.....	16
Other Issues.....	16
PART III: PROPOSED MASTER PLAN PROCESS	17
Proposed Community Outreach Strategy	17
Tentative Master Plan Schedule	18
PART IV: APPENDICES	19
Master Plan Implementation Report.....	19
Summary Discussion of Damascus November 12 and 19, 2002 Public Meetings.....	21

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Page</i>
Figure 1: Location Map	2
Figure 2: Existing Planning Areas and Traffic Zones	4
Figure 3: Proposed Damascus Master Plan Boundaries	6
Figure 4: Existing Damascus Land Uses.....	12

REGIONAL LOCATION



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PART I: INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE MASTER PLAN

Damascus has always been a rural commercial center and residential community anchoring the northeast corner of Montgomery County. The General Plan designated Damascus a rural community planned to remain a "small and simple" town, and subsequent master plans have continued that vision. Through the thirty-seven years that have elapsed since the first master plan for Damascus was approved and adopted in 1966, the subsequent master plans and their amendments continue to share the underlying vision of a low to moderate density primarily residential community, with a compact "town center" core. The current Damascus Master Plan was approved and adopted in 1982 and has been amended twice.

Master Plan Proposal - In May 2002, the County Council asked The Department of Park and Planning to amend the Damascus Master Plan beginning in July 2002. This was at the request of Damascus residents who believe that the recent changes in the area justified reconsideration of a plan that is now 20 years old. The staff supported this request as the master plan will provide an opportunity to review and incorporate the recommendations of other plans and policies that have been adopted since the 1982 Master Plan and its 1993 Amendment were completed. A number of new policies, plans, and initiatives have been put in place countywide since 1982 that particularly impact the central part of this master plan area.

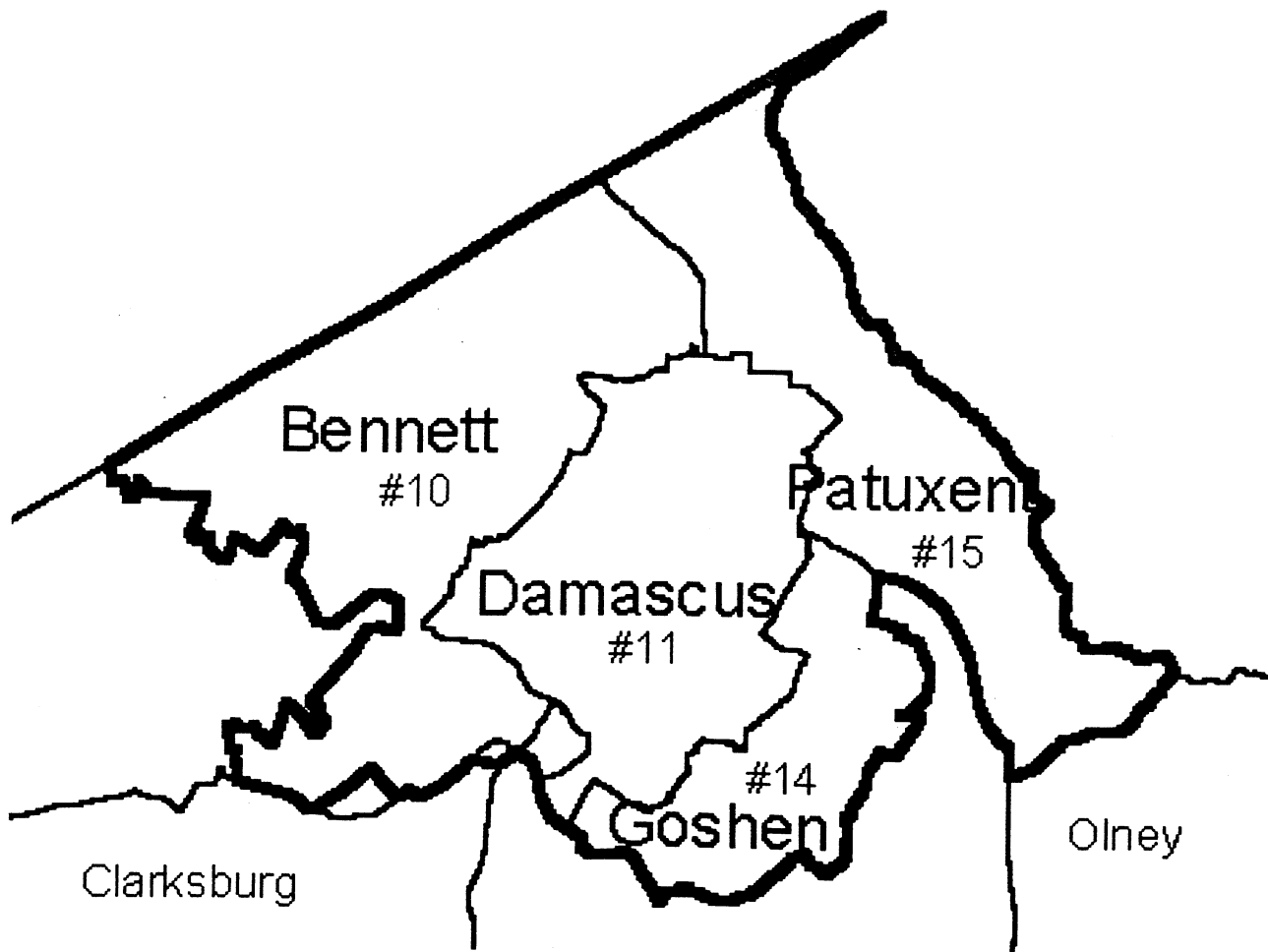
Issues proposed for consideration in this Master Plan process are drawn from Damascus residents (most strongly represented by the Damascus Alliance), and the M-NCPPC and Montgomery County staff. Most of the issues raised by the community are confined to the Damascus planning area (#11), so the greatest effort on the plan will be confined to that portion. Past recommendations will be refined to form a planning template for a center that serves the surrounding community more effectively. Regarding land use beyond the town center, this master plan will augment the planning assumptions made in previous master plans and incorporate any new policies, plans or initiatives that have occurred since 1982.

Major Themes - The purpose of this Master Plan is to address the following, which will be discussed in greater detail in Part II of this report:

1. Land Use and Zoning
Town Center Land Use
Land Use Along Woodfield Road Extended
Guidelines to enhance a "sense of place" for the Community
Guidelines to protect the community identity and character
Appropriate Zoning for Rural Villages
2. Housing
Determining Sufficiency of Affordable Housing
Guidelines for Encouraging Housing for the Elderly
3. Transportation Issues and Pedestrian Access
Pedestrian Access – especially in the town center
Through traffic along MD 27 and MD 124
Status of Master Planned Roads Facing Environmental Constraints

4. Environment and Watershed Protection
Environmental aspects of roadway connections and zoning issues
Compliance with Policies Governing Watershed and Stream Valley Protection
5. Parks, Trails, Recreation, and Legacy Open Space
Expanding Network of Recreational Trails and Bikeways
Expanding Potential for Trail Connectivity
6. Community Facilities
Evaluating sufficiency of existing and proposed community facilities to adequately serve the community.

EXISTING PLANNING AREAS AND TRAFFIC ZONES



PROPOSED MASTER PLAN BOUNDARIES

The current Damascus planning area covers approximately 50 square miles of northern Montgomery County. It is bounded by the Frederick, Carroll and Howard County lines to the west, north and east; and the Clarksburg, Agricultural and Rural Open Space, and Olney Master Plan areas to the south. It encompasses all or part of four planning areas, and all or part of seven traffic zones:

Damascus #11 (Traffic Zones [TZ] #279 and #280)

Patuxent Watershed Conservation Area #15 (TZ #281)

Part of Bennett/Little Bennett Watershed #10 (TZ #278 and part of TZ #277)

Part of Goshen, Woodfield, Cedar Grove #14 (parts of TZ #247 and TZ #245)

The Master Plan boundaries will be adjusted in order to avoid split traffic zones. The revised Damascus Master Plan boundaries will encompass all or part of four planning areas and all of five traffic zones:

Damascus #11 (Traffic Zones #279 and 280)

Patuxent #15 (Traffic Zone #281)

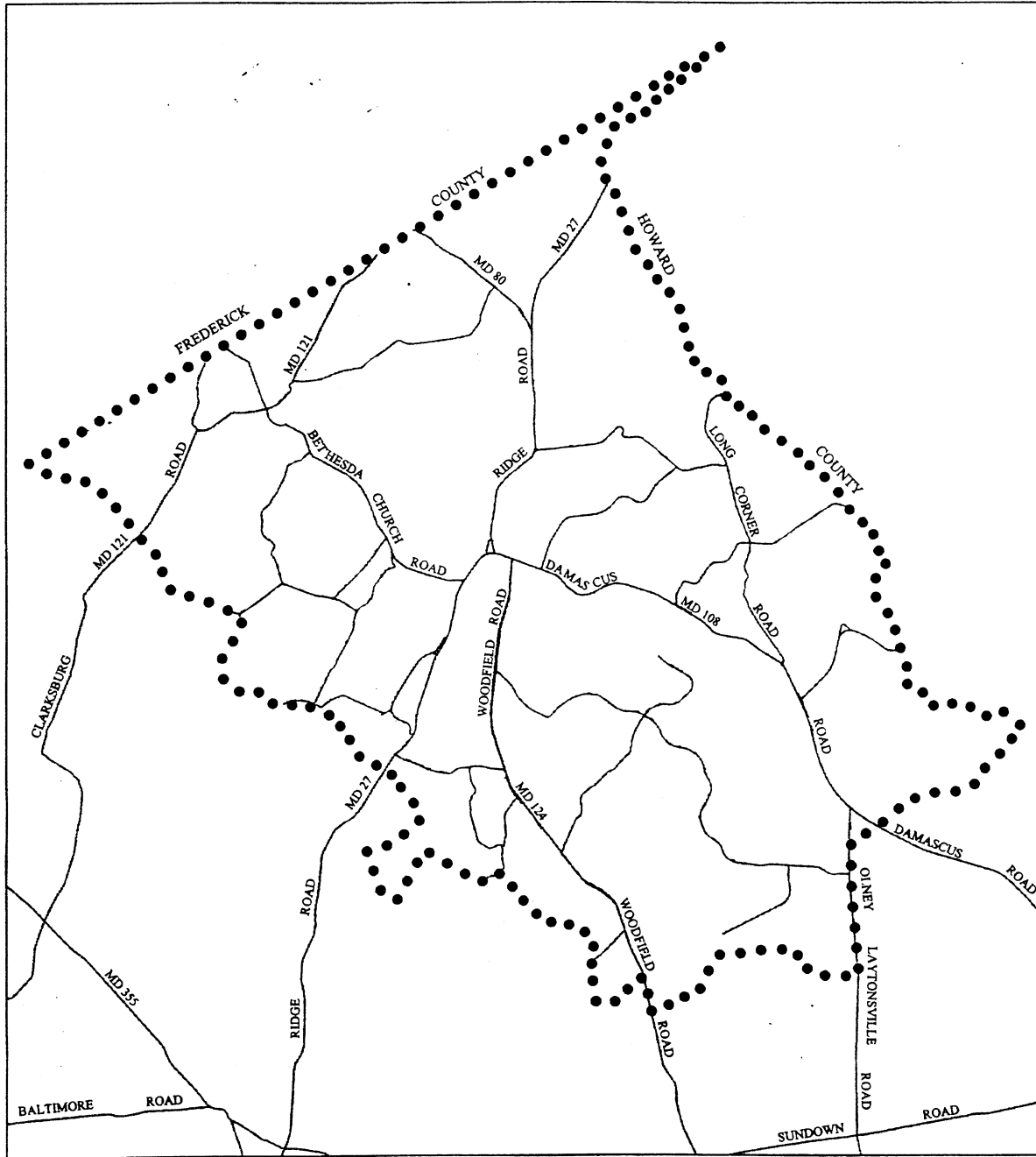
Part of Bennett and Little Bennett #10 (Within Traffic Zone #278); and

Part the Goshen, Woodfield, Cedar Grove #14, (Within Traffic Zone #245)

The Plan will no longer address the portions of Traffic Zone #277 in the Bennett and Little Bennett planning area #10, or the portions of the Goshen planning area #14 that are within traffic zone #247. The boundary change also consolidates the remainder of the eastern portion of the Goshen planning area (#14) contiguous to Damascus that are within traffic zone #245. It will be moved from the Agricultural and Rural Open Space Master Plan into the Damascus Master Plan.

Most of the areas being deleted in planning areas #10 and #14 are sparsely populated. A small area along MD 27 near Kings Valley Road is fully developed and unlikely to see further development potential. The areas removed will remain under the guidance of the General Plan amended by the 1982 Damascus Master Plan. In addition, a small portion of this area off MD 27 was incorporated into the Clarksburg Master Plan when it was adopted in 1994.

PROPOSED DAMASCUS MASTER PLAN BOUNDARIES



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●●●● Master Plan Area Boundary



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION FROM THE 1982 MASTER PLAN, AND 1985 AND 1993 AMENDMENTS

The Damascus Master Plan of 1982 and its amendments in 1985 and 1993 built upon each other and previous plans to implement the vision for the community contained in the 1964 General Plan of a rural residential community and commercial center in Damascus.

1982 Damascus Master Plan and 1985 Amendment

The vision statement of the 1982 Damascus Master Plan (and continued in its 1985 and 1993 amendments) designates Damascus as a rural community planned to be retained as a "small and simple" town; surrounded by low-density and rural zoning to separate it from higher density suburban development in Germantown and Clarksburg. That Plan focused its attention on central Damascus (planning area 11), but also reviewed appropriate planning land use for planning areas 10, 14, and 15. The primary land use in these outlying areas was agriculture but including these areas provided an opportunity to comprehensively review the transportation system in upper Montgomery County.

1. *Business/Town Center Area* - The 1982 Plan recognized the generalized design concept for retail and office development in the 1966 Plan providing an identifiable, well-integrated commercial center for Damascus. The Plan made three changes to the 1966 zoning and land use recommendations for the business area concept plan:

First, the 1966 Plan had located 15 acres of commercial development in the headwaters of the Magruder Stream Valley. By 1982, environmental regulations designed to avoid harm to the steep slopes and erodible soils associated with fragile headwater areas led to severe limits on commercial development potential in this area. The Plan recommended medium density residential housing at this location instead.

Second, the 1966 Plan had recommended 100 acres for low-density employment centers via an industrial or office park development. The 1982 Plan recommended that this concept be eliminated due to the proximity of large employment areas subsequently designated in the I-270 corridor. This area was instead recommended as rural open space (one house per five acres with a cluster option) and agricultural reserve as a TDR sending area.

Third, the Plan designated a future shopping area east of Ridge Road, subsequently built under the recommended Planned Development Zone.

2. *Agriculture and Open Space* - The 1982 Plan reinforced the goals of the 1980 Master Plan for the Preservation of Agricultural and Rural Open Space by adding three TDR receiving areas, all subsequently developed using the TDR option. Further, residential densities along Great Seneca Creek were reduced from two acres to five acre zoning.
3. *Transportation* - The 1982 Master Plan eliminated a bypass of the business area that had been in the 1966 Master Plan in recognition of funding, land use and environmental constraints. It instead recommended a series of road improvements in the business area including a northern extension of Woodfield Road (A-12) to intersect MD 27. The Plan stated that if the extension of Woodfield Road was found to be insufficient to adequately handle the traffic need, then the bypass alternative should be reconsidered.

This Plan also proposed a series of road improvements, subsequently implemented, to relieve congestion at the intersection of MD 27 and Main Street. The Plan recommended the elimination of Damascus Boulevard because it would cross the headwaters of the Magruder Branch and would require substantial fill and grading. No new roads were proposed outside the business district area, but previously existing master plan roads were confirmed, and alternate possible routes for existing master plan roads were evaluated.

4. *Environment* – The goals of the 1982 Master Plan included a range of environmental policies that have since become institutionalized through the County's Stream Protection Strategy and the adoption of the 1993 Patuxent Watershed Master Plan. These include protecting sensitive headwaters that drain away from the town center/business area, conservation easements along stream channels, the use of stormwater management facilities in the Magruder and Little Bennett watersheds, and the use of cluster and planned development to encourage protection of slopes and other environmental features.

Further, housing densities of 12 to 14 units per acre on some properties in the upper Magruder Valley recommended in 1966 were considered too high when compared to the existing residential character of the surrounding area and the environmental constraints. This area was instead recommended for moderate densities of six to eight houses per acre.

5. *Community Facilities* - Most major goals of this Plan have been all or partially achieved including the development of the Magruder Valley trail, the construction of a new library, and approval of a new community recreation center.

The 1985 Amendment served three technical purposes. It deleted alternate road A-11-A in the Magruder Valley from the Highway Plan Map (and Valley Park Drive became the designated arterial), clarified certain zoning boundaries in the business area, and clarified the Plan language concerning a conservation buffer at the rear of Damascus Motors.

1993 Amendment to the Damascus Master Plan

This was a limited amendment to the 1982 Damascus Master Plan. The Amendment addressed -again - whether or not there should be a bypass of MD 27 in Damascus and, if one were needed, where the alignment should be located. Also, five specific properties were reviewed: Heritage Builders, Watkins Amalgamation Joint Venture, the King Farm, Cramer, and Burdette (located in the Damascus Business Area). In summary, this Amendment recommended the following:

1. *Transportation*

Bypass – The Amendment recommended that no bypass of MD 27 be built, and in order to protect the “linear residential development pattern” of Damascus, and that MD 27 should remain a two-lane road. This followed an extensive study and evaluation, conducted for the County by Rummel, Klepper & Kahl that began in January of 1990. That study represented the first detailed look at alternate alignments for a potential bypass. The Planning staff held a series of meetings with the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Master Plan, and organized two public workshops to describe and discuss the alternates. The Planning Board selected three alternates for further study by the consultant.

The consultant's ultimate conclusion was based in large measure on its evaluation of environmental issues, particularly compliance with federal and state environmental regulations, and on the probability that the alignments under study could receive permits for construction in sensitive areas. The Amendment concluded

that all of the alternatives faced significantly difficult constraints, and that no bypass should be considered until the relief from the completion of Woodfield Road Extended could be evaluated. This recommendation was incorporated into the Master Plan.

Woodfield Road Extended (A-12) - The Amendment evaluated several alignments for the intersection of MD 27 and Woodfield Road Extended (A-12). Due to unanticipated difficulties the alignment recommended for this intersection was later rejected in favor of one of the other alternatives during the subsequent final planning.

Damascus Boulevard – Due primarily to environmental concerns, this road had been deleted in the 1982 Master Plan. The Amendment recommended that it be reinstated as a “rural” business street with a 40-foot right-of-way, a narrower road than originally contemplated.

2. *Land Use*

Of the specific properties evaluated, the Amendment recommended rezoning the Cramer property on Lewis Drive to I-1; including the Heritage Builders site (near Woodfield Road at Watkins Road) in the sewer service envelope; not authorizing a TDR receiving designation for the King Farm (along Kings Valley Road between Mountain View Road and Kingstead Road) due to its distance from existing sewer service; and a Corrective Sectional Map Amendment to rectify zoning map errors for the residual properties studied.

Master Plan Implementation Report

Since 1998, the M-NCPPC staff has compiled the Master Plan Status Report, a biennial review of progress in implementing the land use recommendations of the various county area master plans. In addition to reviewing land use and policy recommendations, the report outlines the projects recommended in the Plan, and their status in the Capital Improvements Program. Many of the recommendations in the 1982 Damascus Master Plan and its subsequent amendments have been implemented. A summary of the achievements in implementing the recommendations of the Damascus Master Plan is contained in the Appendix on 8. Major remaining issues to be addressed that have been incorporated into the proposed issues for this Master Plan include:

1. *Land Use*

The long-term use for the older shopping center at MD 108 and Woodfield Road Extended. Construction of the new post office and the completion of the Woodfield Road extension should provide impetus for improvements to this center. Given these pending changes, the appropriate zoning for this area and its context in the town center will be a topic of review in the master plan amendment process.

2. *Parks and Recreation*

Completion of planning and development for the Magruder Valley Stream Park, the Oak Ridge Conservation Park, and the Little Bennett Stream Valley Park.

3. *Transportation*

Unresolved recommendations to be discussed during the master plan review process relate to the downtown area, roads traversing the Magruder Valley, the upper Patuxent watershed, rural area connector roads, and bikeways.

DAMASCUS MASTER PLAN AREA TODAY

The Damascus community today is much as envisioned in its master plans, a low-key, pleasant, primarily residential community with a range of service commercial uses, offering its residents a variety of housing types in a setting surrounded by the beauty of the County's Agricultural Reserve. The issues of greatest concern to its residents revolve around the quantity of "pass-through" commuter traffic and issues related to inadequate facilities – in terms of schools and recreation – for the children in the area. Both of these issues affect the quality of life for all residents of Damascus. The following is an overview of the general characteristics of Damascus today.

1. Land Use Characteristics

Land uses are generally as envisioned in the Master Plan, with moderate density choices in and immediately adjacent to the Magruder Valley (where there is sewer service) and lower density (one to five dwelling units per acre) in the surrounding periphery, all bounded by the very low density (one dwelling unit per 25 acres) of the Rural Density Transfer Zone. The commercial heart of Damascus offers retail and service choices at two shopping centers, free-standing stores, a few office buildings, and some light industrial uses.

2. Demographic and Housing Profile

Damascus offers reasonably priced housing in a small town environment, surrounded by Montgomery County's rural wedge. The housing is primarily single-family; there are few apartments. Housing for the elderly is limited to two, small group homes. Subsidized housing comprises a relatively generous 4.2 percent of the housing stock, compared to 3.5 percent County-wide, and market rate housing tends to be more affordable than in most areas of the County. Townhouses are more plentiful than in most small towns, but contribute to the affordability of the area. Population growth is modest, four percent between 1990 and 2000 compared to the County's 15.4 percent.

Overall, the mix of housing types and prices is appropriate for a small town. Damascus, in its current configuration, is an excellent housing resource for the County and a pleasant place to live for its residents. Attractive housing prices combined with a small town location contribute to its appeal. Unfortunately, County-wide and regional development pressures and a strong County housing market are already evident in higher prices in the area, especially for new housing, whether this trend is desired or not. The one area of potential housing need, within the context of the town's current character, is senior housing.

3. Transportation

In recent years the major transportation-related initiatives in the Damascus area have been the final planning for the construction of Woodfield Road Extended (A-12), and the current construction of the Park and Ride lot in the town center area. The four interim rustic roads within the Master Plan area are currently under review for final designation in an amendment to the Rustic Roads Functional Master Plan.

4. *Environment*

The Damascus town center is located at the headwaters of four major stream systems. The Patuxent River and Little Bennett Creek are designated as Use III-P, the highest water use classification in the State. Many of these headwater streams are characterized by steeply sloping stream valleys with severely erodible soils. The rural nature of the area outside the town center has protected some key natural resources that are potentially threatened as land use changes are considered. In addition, the portion of the Upper Patuxent River that falls within the planning area drains to two water supply reservoirs (located downstream of the planning area) - the Triadelphia Reservoir east of Georgia Avenue and the Rocky Gorge Reservoir near the Prince George's County line. As a result, land use decisions through the planning area and in the Damascus town center will continue to have important impacts on environmental resources in general, and on water quality and supply in particular.

5. *Parks and Recreation*

The Damascus Recreation Center is to begin construction soon. This was an important achievement for the community. Final planning is also underway for a Disc Golf Course at the Damascus Recreational Park. The Magruder Trail is one of the most heavily used recreational facilities in the Damascus area. Completion of the trail with a trailhead in the Damascus town center area is a primary goal for the community. For the future, increased attention is warranted to the concept of connectivity. This would allow existing trails to gradually be connected into the County's vision of a "network of green" and allow Damascus residents to connect to Little Bennett and other area park and trail systems in the County.

EXISTING DAMASCUS LAND USES



LEGEND

GENERAL PLAN GEOGRAPHIC COMPONENTS		
URBAN RING	20+ Housing Units/Acre	CBD
	10-20 Housing Units/Acre	Commercial
I-270 CORRIDOR	4-9 Housing Units/Acre	Office Park/Industrial
	3-4 Housing Units/Acre	Conservation
SUBURBAN COMMUNITIES	2-3 Housing Units/Acre	Parkland
	2-2 Housing Units/Acre	Golf Courses
RESIDENTIAL WEDGE	2-2 Housing Units/Acre	Water
AGRICULTURAL WEDGE	Agro/Aural Reserve, Rural Open Space and Large Rural Estates	



PART II: PLANNING ISSUES

This Master Plan will face a range of choices for the future of Damascus. While patterns of density are generally constrained by the realities of sewer limitations, other elements of prior Master Plans need updating and/or reconsideration in the light of current realities. The following is an overview of the major proposed issues to be considered in the context of this Master Plan review:

LAND USE AND ZONING

An overriding concern in considering appropriate land uses in Damascus is the need to preserve and enhance the community's "sense of place" – its unique identity and character as a rural community of low to moderate density residential uses surrounding a town scale commercial center. In the context of that vision, the following land use issues will be evaluated in this Master Plan:

1. Town Center Mix and Land Use Types – including appropriate zoning for the older shopping center site, appropriate land use and zoning of properties along A-12 route, and relationship of existing zoning to future desired commercial uses.
2. Land Use Outside the Town Center – to include an evaluation of the potential need for a rural "village" overlay zone for several existing historic communities.
3. Sewer Issues - remaining capacity of the sewer plant serving Damascus.

HOUSING

While an adequate supply of affordable housing is not as critical a need in Damascus as in other communities in the County, it is important for all master plans to fully evaluate housing needs in all communities. Additional housing for low to moderate income individuals and families is currently under construction or consideration. Further evaluation of this housing element will be a part of the planning process.

There is a lack of housing opportunities specifically designed for seniors. Consideration of how best to address this need will be a part of the master plan review process.

TRANSPORTATION AND PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

1. Status of Master Planned Roads

Several planned roads within the Damascus Master Plan need to be reconsidered for alternate alignments or removal.

P-2 (a rerouting of Howard Chapel Drive northeast of the town center), and *P-5* (a connector between Hawkins Creamery Road and Woodfield Road) currently face practically insurmountable environmental constraints.

P-8 (a street off of Woodfield Road) appears to be unnecessary.

Woodfield Road Extended – modify to reflect the final alignment chosen by the County.

Woodfield Road – modify to better specify locations for two-lane to five-lane treatment and review proposed right-of-way sufficiency.

Damascus Boulevard – a classification category needs to be created in the County Road Code for the designated “rural business street.”

MD 27 (Ridge Road) - north and south of Damascus, evaluate width given the continuing growth of commuter traffic through the Damascus community. This road was to remain a designated two-lane road until the next Master Plan. The Maryland State Highway Administration already thinks the road should be wider, and turning lanes should be considered at several roads.

Annapolis Rock Road - Evaluate status as a State road in Howard County, but a non-classified road in Montgomery County.

2. Possible New Roads for Better Connectivity

The Master Plan should also contemplate several potential new roads in the Damascus area. These include:

Bethesda Church Road – Consider potential extension from Woodfield Road to MD 108 east of Damascus, providing an alternate route for through east/west traffic.

Lewis Drive - Evaluate potential extension to connect to Bethesda Church Road.

Kings Valley Road - Evaluate potential reclassification to arterial status to allow it to handle a larger volume of traffic, and an alternate route to Bethesda Church Road, allowing some commuter traffic to avoid central Damascus.

Consider potential connector road between MD 27 and Woodfield Road Extended just north of the shopping center.

3. Commuter Through Traffic – While this Master Plan update should respect the recommendations of 1982 and 1993 Master Plans regarding the Damascus Bypass, the potential need for an eventual bypass or other type of roadway to route through traffic around Damascus cannot be ignored. The bypass issue has been thoroughly studied in previous Master Plans, most recently examined in-depth in the 1993 Amendment to the Damascus Master Plan.

That document stated that a bypass should be contemplated again only if it is determined that the extension of Woodfield Road (A-12) does not adequately handle through traffic when it is completed. Yet no mechanism for guaranteeing that evaluation is included. Thus, this Master Plan update should contain two elements to ensure that the issue of through traffic will be evaluated in a timely manner:

- The Master Plan should recommend that within one to two years after the completion of Woodfield Road Extended (A-12), the M-NCPPC staff will commence a work program task to evaluate current traffic conditions at that time and work with the community to determine whether a Master Plan Amendment process is warranted to evaluate the need for a bypass.

- To ensure a timely process for the above evaluation, the Master Plan should recommend that the County Council authorize and direct the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation to conduct, within two years - in conjunction with the M-NCPPC, State of Maryland, Howard County, Frederick County, and Carroll County - a study of the long-term traffic load implications of growth patterns in these adjoining counties that are the major contributing factors in the continuing rise in through traffic in Damascus.

This study would be available as a resource for the evaluation of Damascus through traffic to be conducted after the completion of Woodfield Road Extended, as noted above.

These elements will guarantee future action on this issue for the residents of Damascus.

In addition to these measures, the Master Plan should evaluate the current level of commuter traffic and determine if other alternate measures, such as improvements to MD 27, are warranted in the near future.

4. Pedestrian Issues - Safety and Facilities

Issues of "walkability" including the safety and aesthetics of the "pedestrian experience" will be reviewed in the business area. This will include a review of existing sidewalks, crossing signals, road markings and pedestrian circulation to focus on pedestrian access and safety.

ENVIRONMENT AND WATERSHED PROTECTION

The main focus in this Master Plan review will be on the environmental aspects of roadway connections and zoning issues in the Damascus town area and any other key natural resource and water supply protection issues elsewhere. An Environmental Resources Inventory is underway, and will be available by the time of the Staff Draft. Some of the environmental issues in the Master Plan include:

1. Improved protection of the County drinking water supply, especially in the Patuxent watershed, including the proper relationship between this Master Plan and the 1993 Functional Master Plan for the Patuxent River.
2. Limiting potential impact of development in selected areas on sensitive streams, wetlands, and erodible slopes, including methodologies to protect sensitive streams and stream headwaters.
3. Consideration of natural resources for protection as parkland.
4. Options for reducing the impacts of road construction and improvements.

PARKS, TRAILS, RECREATION, AND LEGACY OPEN SPACE

While much has been accomplished in the timeframe of the current Master Plan, a number of issues relating to park and recreation facilities will be evaluated. This need primarily reflects the growth in housing serving young families with children in the area. Park and Trail needs analysis in the Damascus area will focus on five major issues:

1. Providing adequate recreation opportunities.
2. Considering locations for greenway trail corridors to provide trail connections between the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers; including opportunities to hook east-west connectors into the north-south stream valley trail systems.
3. Consideration of properties for protection as important natural resource areas.
4. Identifying historical and cultural sites that should be preserved as park features.
5. Consideration of properties for protection under Legacy Open Space in the natural resource, water supply protection, and rural open space categories.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

In recent years there has been progress in providing adequate community facilities in the Damascus area. A new library and adjacent senior center were completed and work is to begin in the spring of 2003 for a new community center on Oak Drive. This Master Plan will evaluate whether additional facilities are necessary and whether existing facilities are adequate for the community.

Overcrowding in schools remains an issue of major concern to Damascus residents. Some school building projects, such as the new Clarksburg High School (which will relieve the overcrowding at Damascus High School) have been delayed due to budget constraints. The community is aware of these problems, and they will continue to work with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to resolve the overcrowding issues.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Potential historic resources are too numerous to be evaluated within the time frame of this Master Plan. There are currently 122 individual sites and six historic districts on the Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites in Montgomery County, Maryland that need to be fully evaluated to determine if they should be included in the Master Plan of Historic Preservation. The Historic Preservation staff is working concurrently to evaluate these sites. Over the years, 18 individual sites and two historic districts were designated in the Master Plan.

OTHER ISSUES

The staff has met with representatives of three properties or property groups in the Damascus community. At their request, these properties will be specifically considered within the master plan process. These include properties north of the town center along the route of Woodfield Road Extended, and properties adjacent to the west side of the town center area. Discussion of these properties will be a part of the work of the Land Use Issues Task Force.

PART III: PROPOSED MASTER PLAN PROCESS

PROPOSED COMMUNITY OUTREACH STRATEGY

1. General Public Meetings

General public meetings will be held throughout the master plan process. Two general public meetings were held in November to listen to the concerns of the community and to introduce the community to the proposed master plan process and issues as discussed in this report. The issues that are proposed reflect concerns heard from members of the community and from the M-NCPPC and Montgomery County staff. The staff is especially appreciative of the Damascus Alliance, a local civic group that has been working over the past two years with the community and the staff to raise awareness of issues of particular concern in the community. All of the concerns they have brought to the attention of the staff have been included as issues to be addressed as a part of this Master Plan. Also, a composite of the questions raised at the November public meetings is included in the Appendix to this report.

The initial general public meetings introduced the community to the master plan process and the proposed issues for consideration. Further general public meetings will be held as required to introduce proposals determined from the work of issue-oriented task forces, as discussed below, and the Staff Draft of the Master Plan. At least one general public meeting will include a presentation of the concerns and questions of individual property owners.

2. Master Plan Review Committee with Task Force Methodology

The proposed outreach method will provide for participation and input from as broad a spectrum of the community as possible. The proposed process is being used currently in several master plan areas because of its more inclusive approach. This process combines an open participation process with topic oriented "Task Forces" to address specific issues of the Damascus Master Plan. It allows broader participation from those with limited time available or strong interest in only one or two topics, instead of limiting participation to those with the time to devote to all elements of the master plan process (an ongoing concern with the more limited Master Plan Advisory Groups or Citizens Advisory Committees).

Any Damascus area resident or landowner interested in participating in the master plan process will be included in an overall Master Plan Review Committee (MPRC). Those choosing to participate will attend an orientation meeting on the processes to be followed and the interrelationship of their individual work. Those on the Committee will join one or more Task Force to be a part of studying those issues of interest to them. Those with the interest and time available may choose to participate in all Task Forces, but those with limited time can be a part of those issues of primary interest to them. Six Task Forces, related to the major topics of this Master Plan, are proposed:

- Land Use and Zoning in the Town Center - with Design Charrette
- Land Use and Zoning Outside the Town Center and Historic Preservation
- Housing - Affordability and Senior Needs
- Transportation Capacity and Network
- Preservation of the Patuxent River and Other Environmental Issues
- Rural Open Space, Parkland, Recreation, and Community Facility Needs

These Task Forces will meet, as necessary, over a period of approximately six months with the M-NCPPC and County staff to discuss the topics and issues outlined for Master Plan review. Some will meet more than others, depending on the complexity of the issues they are addressing. Each Task Force will conclude with recommendations for addressing issues.

The Task Force members and the M-NCPPC staff will present their recommendations to the full membership of the Master Plan Review Committee at a series of meetings following the completion of the work of the Task Forces. After these meetings and adjustments that arise from those meetings, the Task Force reports will be incorporated into the staff draft of the Master Plan. After the staff draft has been prepared, its major conclusions and recommendations will be presented at a general community meeting for review and comment before being presented to the Planning Board.

3. Communication Techniques

The staff will maintain communication with the community and interested parties through a variety of methods including electronic media (e-mail and a website), a mailing list, and notices in the Damascus Gazette.

TENTATIVE MASTER PLAN SCHEDULE

The scheduled timeframe for the active phases of this master plan process are noted below:

July 2002 through January 2003

- Preparation of Community Issues Report
- Community Information Gathering Meetings
- Preparation of Draft Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report

February 2003

- Presentation of Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report to the Planning Board

February to July 2003

- Task Force Meetings
- Identification of Alternative Actions and Recommendations

July through September 2003

- Finalizing the Staff Draft Plan
- Presentation of Staff Draft Plan to the Community
- Adjustments to Staff Draft if Needed

October 2003 – February 2004

- Planning Board Public Hearing and Worksessions

March to November 2004

- County Executive Review
- County Council Review
- Public Hearing
- Worksessions
- Approval

PART IV: APPENDICES

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

According to the 2000 Master Plan Status Report, Damascus residential growth in recent years has been strong, although traffic congestion continues to be a major local issue. Key achievements in implementing the recommendations of the 1982 Damascus Master Plan include:

Land Use – Most of the recommendations from the 1982 Master Plan have been implemented including:

1. 860 acres removed from the Agricultural Reserve and designated for residential development - and an additional 1,050 acres elsewhere added to the Agricultural Reserve.
2. 100 acres of employment and industrial land uses along MD 108 rezoned for residential use.
3. Zoning Ordinance change to permit cluster development with septic systems and public water when recommended by a Master Plan.
4. Zoning Ordinance change to extend service, non-retail commercial uses along Lewis Drive and accommodate local light industrial needs.
5. Completion of road improvements to address congestion at the intersection of MD 27 and Main Street.
6. Most new residential development channeled to the Magruder Valley, with limited low-density residential along major ridge roads, and a low-density buffer provided along portions of MD 124 and MD 27 - reflecting environmental constraints.
7. A new shopping area built east of Ridge Road, on the south side of town in the designated PD Zone.

The remaining issue is the status of the older shopping center that will be a focus of the master plan amendment process. The long-term best use for the older shopping center needs to be considered, as it currently has un-leased or under-leased space.

Environmental - All environmental recommendations of the 1982 Master Plan, primarily related to critical watershed and stream valley protection policies and regulations have been completed.

Transportation - This is the area with the most remaining unresolved issues. There are nine remaining unresolved recommendations to be discussed during the master plan review process related to the downtown area, roads traversing the Magruder Valley, the upper Patuxent watershed, rural area connector roads, and bikeways.

Though traffic issues continue to plague Damascus during rush periods, and relief must be provided. The Master Plan designates the construction of the extension of Woodfield Road north to Ridge Road (A-12 on the Master Plan) as the next step in this process. At this time the Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) is at work on final design plans for this road. In addition, traffic issues related to the safety of MD 27 north of the Woodfield Road extension intersection are being evaluated and are under consideration at Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT).

Successes in this area include the "Park and Ride" lot (currently under construction), the approval of construction of "P-6" to eliminate a difficult curve in Hawkins Creamery Road, the completion of Bethesda Church Road from Ridge Road to Woodfield Road, and improvements to Sweepstakes Road.

Parks - Two recommendations have been completed and the three that remain relate to the Magruder Valley Stream Park, the Oak Ridge Conservation Park, and the Little Bennett Stream Valley Park. Evaluation of these recommendations will be a part of the Master Plan amendment process. Recreation issues such as completion of stream valley trails connecting area parks will need to be considered by the M-NCPPC staff in conjunction with the community. A new park located just east of Damascus on MD 108 is being planned at this time.

Schools - Woodfield and Cedar Grove Elementary Schools have been modernized, Baker Middle School is being enlarged, and Rocky Hill Middle School is to be replaced. Other school issues – primarily related to overcrowding remain, but are outside the purview of this master plan process. The community is very aware of these problems, and will continue to work with Montgomery County Public Schools to resolve the overcrowding issues that plague the Damascus schools.

Other Public Facilities - The new library has been built, and sidewalks have been installed in the business area. Also, the new recreation center should commence construction by spring of 2003.

SUMMARY DISCUSSION OF DAMASCUS NOVEMBER 12 AND 19, 2002 PUBLIC MEETINGS

Master Plan Process Related Issues

Land Use

1. Will a potential for transitional zoning be addressed?

The staff will be open to discussing any types of zoning that area residents believe potentially appropriate for the community.

2. Need to develop a vision statement for Damascus to help guide planned development.

The Master Plan should contain, and should be, an expression of the vision for growth and development in the community.

3. Grave concerns about HOC/low income housing projects—if planned, will it change the character of Damascus?

Damascus, as with all sections of the County, will need to consider whether there is a need for additional affordable housing in their community. However, HOC withdrew from an approved project in Damascus due to a lack of sufficient need for lower income housing in the Damascus area.

4. Need further explanation about the sewer capacity for Damascus. How does this relate to planned and future development?

Little additional development at densities requiring public sewer can be approved in the Damascus planning area due to lack of sewer capacity, and the inability of the sewer plan serving Damascus to expand its capacity. This is not a significant problem, as Damascus is not intended for any significant additional growth.

5. Damascus needs to be established as a rural community.

The vision expressed for Damascus in all its master plans, and in the County's General Plan is for a rural residential community, and rural commercial center for the upper County.

Transportation

1. Need the Bypass around Damascus to get through traffic out of Damascus.

The Master Plan will set up a process to ensure that a review of the need for a Bypass is set in motion after completion of Woodfield Road Extended (A-12).

2. How are we going to work on transportation issues, including County roads, State roads, road alignments, and traffic lights? There are significant safety issues on MD 27 that the Master Plan should address. The Master Plan should address the need for shoulders, bike paths, and sidewalks.

The Master Plan process is to include a study of any significant transportation issues. Residents of the community interested in these issues may join the Transportation Task Force and work with the M-NCPPC staff and the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation on these issues. In addition, the need for sidewalks and bicycle access will be specifically included.

3. Consider a tunnel onto Oak Drive for bicycle riders and pedestrians across Ridge Road versus a stoplight.

The issue of safety at this intersection will be a part of the Master Plan discussions.

4. Current and future development around Gue Road needs to be addressed—concerned about getting 'boxed in'. Gue Road needs to be designated as a Rural Rustic Road.

The Land Use Task Force will discuss whether changes should be made to existing zoning in areas of Damascus along major highways. Residents may propose additional roads for Rustic Road designation, although certain criteria related to volume, accidents, and existing character are a part of that evaluation. In addition, the Rustic Road designation does not affect the development potential of property.

5. Concerned about the connection between Hawkins Creamery Road and Woodfield Road.

This discussion will be a part of the Transportation Task Force evaluations.

6. Howard Chapel Road should not be upgraded to a primary road.

This discussion will be a part of the Transportation Task Force evaluation.

Rural Open Space/Environment

1. Scenic viewshed guidelines need to be established.

This issue can be a part of the Land Use Task Force discussions.

2. Need new devices for preserving additional open space.

This issue can be a part of the Land Use Task Force discussions.

Master Plan Process

Concern that there will be no Master Plan Advisory Group (MPAG). Are the issues in the Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report the same as the issues that would have been raised if an MPAG existed?

For the reasons discussed previously in this report, the Task Force oriented process is proposed. The issues in the Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report fully reflect all the concerns that the staff has heard from Damascus residents – individually and from the collective concerns expressed by the Damascus Alliance leadership. Additionally, any other concerns raised by community residents in the context of individual Task Force discussions will be included for evaluation. The intent in using an alternate to the MPAG model is to allow increased participation from a broad cross-section of the community – especially those who have specific areas of interest and concern, but who do not have the time or interest required for MPAG participation. The Task Force model also address the longstanding concern that MPAGs too often come to represent the dynamics of group chosen rather than the community as a whole.

Regulatory Process Issues Not Related to the Master Plan Process

1. Concerned about the future capacity of schools in the Damascus School System.

This is an issue of understandable great concern for residents in Damascus. While school overcrowding is not directly related to the Master Plan process, the MCPS may determine that a moratorium is necessary for additional housing construction if they determine that schools in an area are too crowded.

2. How can the community play a more active role in the Special Exception process?

Whenever a resident sees a Board of Appeals special exception notice sign, they should contact the Board of Appeals to determine what is being proposed. They should also call the M-NCPPC to determine if the Planning Board will be making a recommendation on the case. Any interested person or group may testify at Planning Board, Hearing Examiner, or Board of Appeals hearings (as appropriate) on a special exception application. The applicable Planning Board staff member assigned to write the report can discuss the information available or can meet with interested persons before the report is written.

3. Is there any recourse if the community disagrees with the Board of Appeals decisions on a special exception?

The appeals procedures are available through the Board of Appeals offices.

4. What is a Special Exception and how does it affect the County's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO)?

These are two different entities. The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance generally applies to new subdivision activity, not special exceptions. Most special exceptions do not relate to housing. Those that do generally relate to housing for elderly or handicapped persons, and may not be subject to APFO restrictions.

5. Is it true that an 88,000 square foot commercial building is going up in the middle of the town?

A parcel along Lewis Drive, zoned for light industrial uses, has recently received subdivision approval for a commercial building. Because this is a permitted use in the zone, no additional approvals were required.

6. Broadcast towers will decimate the views and vistas of Damascus.

The staff is aware that a special exception application is likely to be submitted for AM Radio Towers on the west side of Damascus. However, no application has yet been made. However, the visual impact of any tower application will be a part of the review criteria.

7. Worried about decisions being made that will preclude this Master Plan such as the rezoning on the Miller property, baseball fields and their traffic problems, and the Ride-On bus lot. The residents have little input and are unsure that the master plan process will be valid.

The issues listed do not invalidate the vision and direction of the Damascus Master Plan. They include a rezoning recommended in the 1982 Master Plan (not yet approved), a special exception application (not yet approved), and a long planned (a recommendation of the 1982 Master Plan) County mass-transit project for those in the Damascus area who ride buses. Master Plans do not prevent property owners from pursuing used allowed by their zoning and in the zoning ordinance. A part of every Master Plan process is to increase the awareness of the land use regulatory process, so that misunderstandings about the intent and limitations of master plans can be clarified.

8. Need further information about the Miller Farm property development.

This is a property recommended for a Planned Development Zone in the 1982 Master Plan. It is currently in the process of pursuing this rezoning. Although the situation surrounding this property has changed significantly since 1982, the applicant is entitled to request a rezoning.

Other Comments – Not Master Plan Process Related

1. Concerned that communication between staff is not working as represented by the staff coordination on the former HOC housing site.

The development history of this site along Ridge Road (near the north intersection with Oak Drive) led to a development plan that required a significant amount of forest clearing very close to the Magruder Branch Trail. The point of intersect is to be very near an important stormwater retention pond, and the creation of that facility requires a significant amount of earth moving. This clearing will be stabilized and replanted, but has resulted in a bare and ugly site for the near term. The situation cited is somewhat related to development timing, but also related to a common difficulty in accepting the necessity of significant earthmoving as a part of subdivision development.

2. Need a list of staff names that can answer specific questions—special exceptions, future development, etc.

Appropriate M-NCPPC and Montgomery County staff will be listed on the Damascus Master Plan Website, or can be obtained from the Rural Area Community-Based Planning Team.

3. Planning Board needs to meet with the Damascus community to address its concerns.

The Planning Board welcomes any resident of Damascus at any public meeting, but due to technological difficulties it is difficult for the Planning Board to change its meeting location.