

# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE OF THE AMENDMENT

In October 2003, the Montgomery County Council requested that the M-NCPPC examine the potential for a limited amendment to the existing Sector Plan for the Bethesda Central Business District, dated July 1994. The primary purpose of this amendment was to increase opportunities for housing to serve a variety of income levels, and to improve the opportunities for retail in the Woodmont Triangle area.

## SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH

A unique outreach program was developed to address the issues in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area. The M-NCPPC with the Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County held five, public workshops and several focus group meetings. The public workshops and meetings included representatives from the East Montgomery Civic Association, Edgemoor Civic Association, the Bethesda Chamber of Commerce, property owners, retail business owners, developers and architects from the Bethesda area. Individuals from the original Citizens Advisory Committee were also included in the workshops to provide continuity and familiarity with the issues from the Approved Sector Plan for the Bethesda Central Business District. The Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County helped facilitate the workshops. The workshops were open to all interested individuals. The workshops included the following topics:

- **Workshop No. 1: Community Interests** – This open workshop was intended to identify the interests and issues of the business owners and developers of the area without identifying solutions.
- **Workshop No. 2: Community Interests** – This open workshop was intended to identify the interests and issues of the residents of the Woodmont Triangle and adjacent communities without identifying solutions.
- **Workshop No. 3: Vision, Challenges and Actions** – This highly participatory workshop provided the opportunity for all individuals to identify the Vision, Challenges and Actions necessary to address the interests and issues identified in the previous two workshops. The individuals were divided into five groups to prepare recommendations.
- **Workshop No. 4: Resolution of Issues** – This workshop was intended to provide an open forum for the participants to resolve issues identified in Workshop No. 3.

- **Workshop No. 5: Staff Recommendation** – The final workshop was intended to resolve remaining issues and present the staff recommendations prior to preparation of the Staff Draft Amendment.

Separate meetings with individuals, government agencies and civic associations were also held to augment the discussions in the workshops. The use of electronic media, phone messages and written announcements were used to notify individuals of the date and location of the workshops.

## **RELATIONSHIP TO THE 1994 SECTOR PLAN**

This limited amendment to the Sector Plan for the Bethesda Central Business District is intended to retain the vision of the existing Sector Plan. This amendment is intended to provide additional opportunities to help realize the “housing and neighborhoods” objective (pages 28–31) of the existing Sector Plan. The amendment is not intended as a significant departure from the recommendations in the existing Sector Plan. This limited amendment focuses on the Woodmont Triangle District including a complete revision to pages 94–102. Minor amendments to the Battery Lane District, the Wisconsin Avenue North Corridor and the Old Georgetown Road Corridor are also recommended.

## **WOODMONT TRIANGLE STUDY AREA BOUNDARY**

The boundary of the Woodmont Triangle Study Area is shown on the adjacent map. The study area is bound on the north by the National Institutes of Health, on the east by Wisconsin Avenue, on the south by Woodmont Avenue, and on the west by Old Georgetown Road. The study area includes portions of the Battery Lane District, the Wisconsin Avenue North Corridor, the Old Georgetown Road Corridor, and the entire Woodmont Triangle District of the existing Sector Plan. The multi-family housing located along Battery Lane and adjacent to the National Institutes of Health is included in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area. Portions of the properties along the west side of Wisconsin Avenue and the properties along the east side of Old Georgetown Road are also included as part of the mixed-use environment of the study area.

# SUMMARY OF THE AMENDMENT

This section of the amendment provides a summary of the Vision, Challenges and Actions necessary to implement the objectives of this amendment.

## VISION

The Woodmont Triangle will be a vibrant and urban, mixed-use neighborhood emphasizing residential, small-scale retail, and the arts.

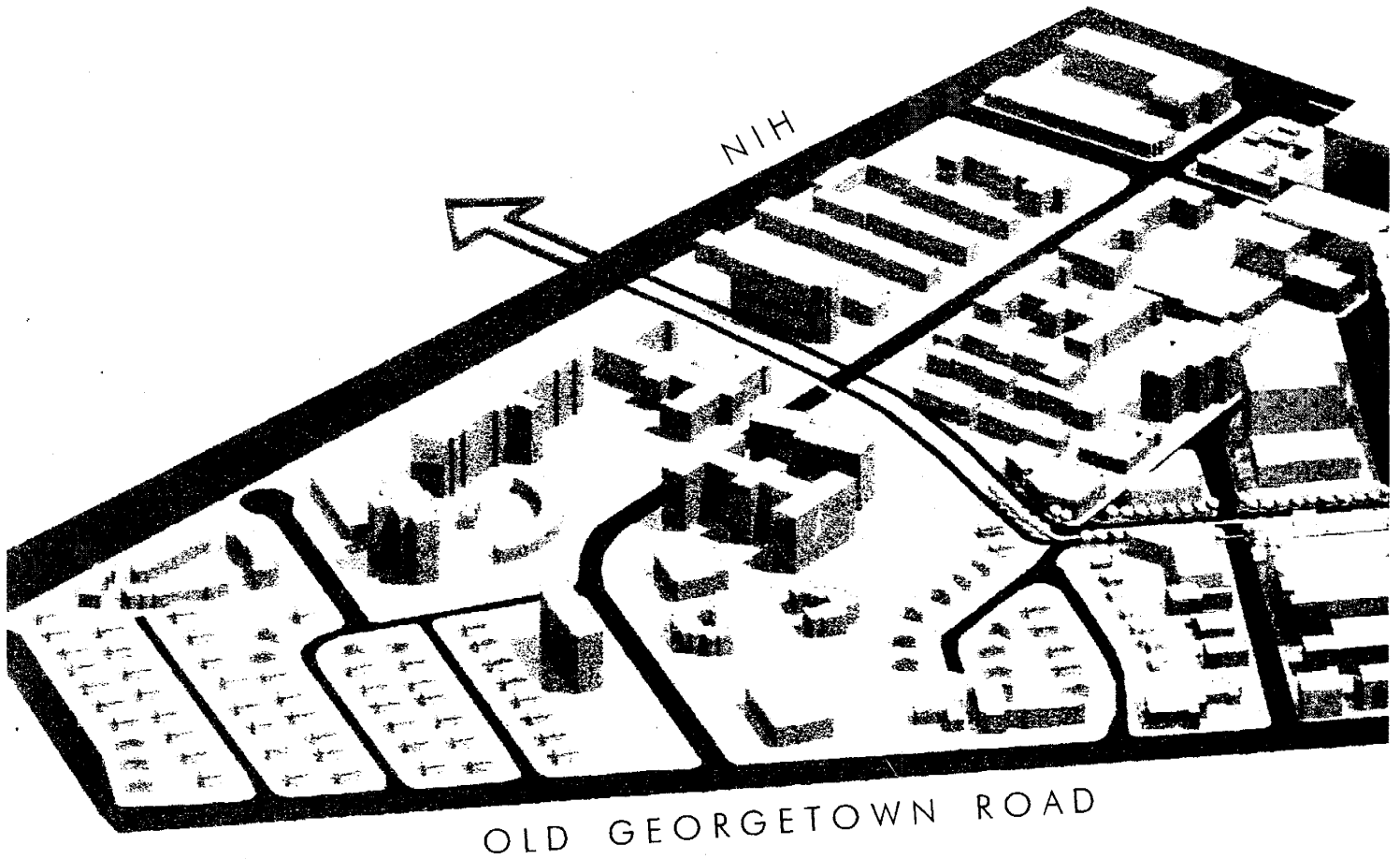
## CHALLENGES

The challenges to be met in order to meet the vision include:

- **Encourage Housing** – Provide opportunities to increase the supply of housing to serve a variety of income levels.
- **Small-Scale Retail** – Provide opportunities to retain existing businesses and expand opportunities for new businesses.
- **Enhance the Arts and Entertainment District** – Enhance the existing public arts program in the Bethesda CBD including opportunities for both the visual and performing arts.
- **Create Great Streets** – Focus on improving the safety and character of the existing streets. Establish Norfolk Avenue as the primary street in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area.
- **Provide Public Amenities** – Increase the flexibility to provide the required public open space in the Optional Method of Development.

## CONCEPT DIAGRAM

The following concept diagram shows Norfolk Avenue as a linear, urban open space with wide sidewalks to be enhanced by closely spaced street trees, new street lights, street furniture, activating retail uses, and public art. Veterans Park and an enhanced Battery Lane Urban Park are shown as the primary outdoor public open spaces. A bikeway along Norfolk Avenue connects the Capital Crescent Trail and the North Bethesda Trolley Trail. Some examples of new buildings (see buildings with color) indicate the increased building heights and densities proposed in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area.



WISCONSIN AVENUE



## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

To meet the challenges and implement the vision, the following actions are recommended in this limited amendment to the existing Sector Plan.

- Density Limitations – Increase the densities allowed to encourage housing for a variety of income levels
- Encourage Moderately Priced Dwelling Units to be located on-site
- Encourage the location of first floor retail along Norfolk Avenue and provide incentives to retain existing retail shops and restaurants
- Building Heights – Revise the guidelines for building heights in the existing Sector Plan and allow the applicable zones to determine the building height to promote housing and retail revitalization
- Promote space for the arts
- Encourage the location of a hotel along Wisconsin Avenue to provide an active use for the Woodmont Triangle Study Area
- Improve Norfolk Avenue as the “main street” for the Woodmont Triangle Study Area with the Bethesda streetscape, underground utilities, and a bikeway by supporting the existing Capital Improvements Program and increasing opportunities for private development and funding
- Improve the connection between the Woodmont Triangle and the NIH by improving the existing Battery Lane Urban Park
- Change the zoning for properties south of St. Elmo Avenue and west of Woodmont Avenue from CBD-1 to CBD-R2
- Design buildings to step down to Norfolk Avenue, preserving solar access during hours of high public use. Create text amendments to the CBD Zones in order to augment and enhance opportunities for housing, retail, public art, improved streetscapes, and public amenities

# **GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

This section of the amendment describes the limited changes to the general provisions in the existing Sector Plan for the Bethesda Central Business District.

## **HOUSING**

This amendment proposes to encourage the retention of existing housing and the construction of new housing to serve a variety of income levels in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area. This amendment supports the Land Use and Urban Design Objectives of the existing Sector Plan. In the ten years since the Sector Plan was approved, the cost of housing in the Bethesda CBD has increased significantly. Although many new dwelling units are becoming available, the diversity and supply of housing are not sufficient to serve a variety of income levels.

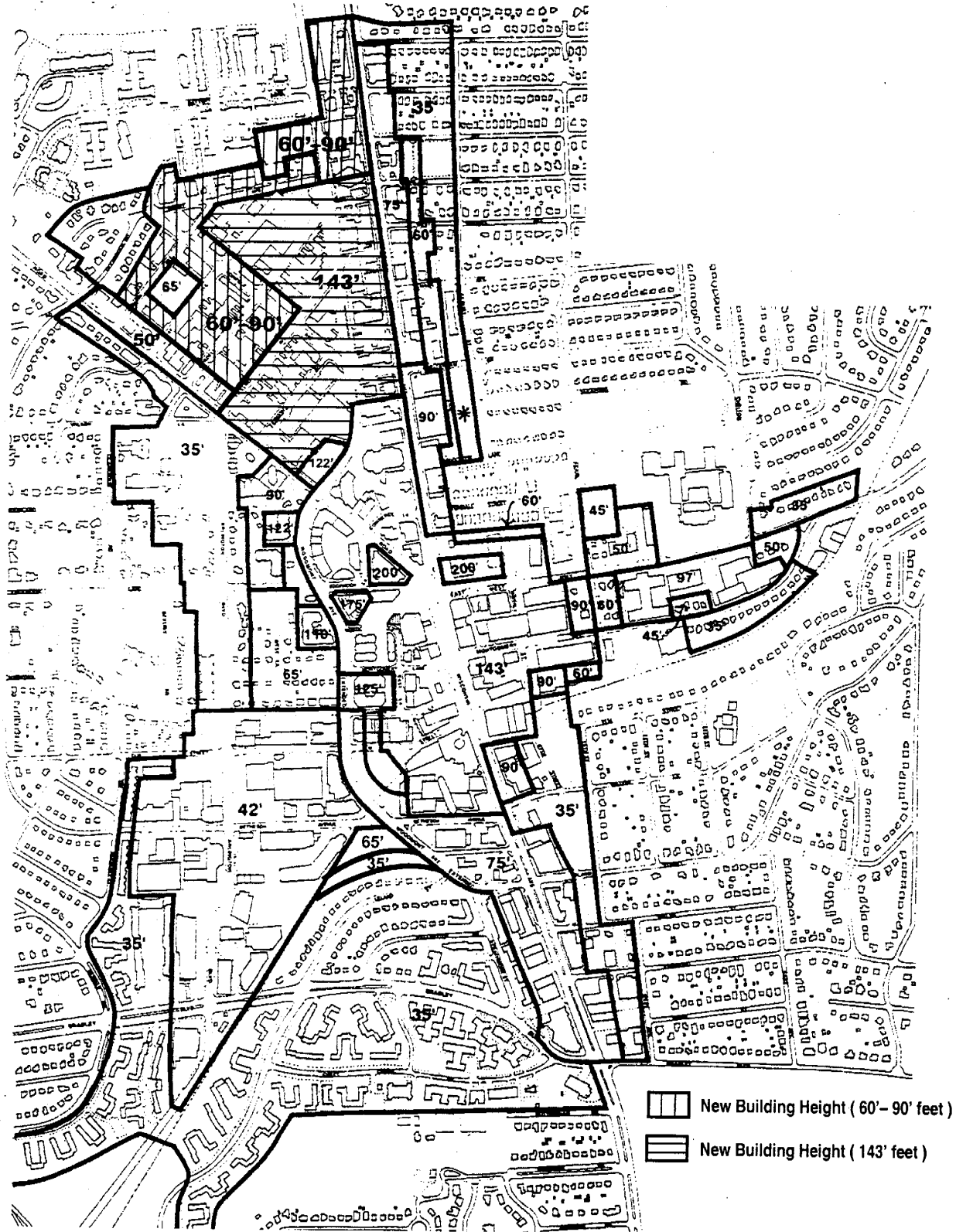
## **TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT**

This amendment will capitalize on the development and revitalization potential of the study area as a transit-oriented urban neighborhood. The Woodmont Triangle Study Area has the potential to become an ideal urban neighborhood. Most of the area is within 2,500 feet of the Metro station, a basic guideline for a transit-oriented development (TOD), and it has the mix of uses that meet TOD criteria. Residents of the Battery Lane District shop in the Woodmont Triangle and take advantage of their location between two Metro stations. In addition, the Woodmont Triangle hosts many public events as part of the Bethesda CBD Arts and Entertainment District program.

## **REVITALIZATION THROUGH IMPROVEMENTS TO PUBLIC STREETS AND SPACES**

This amendment recommends public and private improvements to the streets of the Woodmont Triangle. The recommended improvements would enhance pedestrian safety and access to transit. Improving the pedestrian and bicycle connections between the NIH, the Battery Lane District, the adjacent neighborhoods and the Woodmont Triangle Study Area would be a primary objective. Both on-site and off-site improvements would be a priority of the Optional Method of Development. This amendment also supports the existing Capital Improvements Program to improve Norfolk Avenue.

# PROPOSED BUILDING HEIGHTS





## **ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT**

The amendment proposes the continued use of the Optional Method of Development to support public art. The Woodmont Triangle is an essential part of the Bethesda Arts and Entertainment District. The Woodmont Triangle Study Area includes the Bethesda Academy of Performing Arts Theater, dance schools, studio space, and art galleries. Veterans Park provides outdoor space for public events. The Round House Theater and the Whitney Building provide additional indoor performance spaces immediately adjacent to the study area. The support of the Arts and Entertainment District could include the construction and improvement of existing outdoor performance spaces, the provision of interior public art spaces, and the provision of live/work spaces for artists. A funding mechanism could be created as part of the development process.

## **BUILDING HEIGHT LIMITS**

This amendment proposes to modify the Building Height Limits shown on page 39 of the existing Sector Plan. Instead, the development standards in the underlying zones will determine the maximum building height limits within the Woodmont Triangle Study Area, except along Old Georgetown Road. The recommended building heights are shown on the adjacent map.

The purpose of the guidelines for building heights in the existing Sector Plan is to protect the neighborhoods on the edge of the CBD and to concentrate building height near the Metro station. This limited amendment continues to support the “step down” of building heights from the Metro station area to the edges of the Central Business District.

The modifications to the existing guidelines for building heights include the following:

- Parcels in the CBD-1 Zone will be permitted to develop to a maximum of 60-90 feet with approval by the Planning Board.
- Residential projects in the CBD-R2 Zone will be permitted to development to a maximum of 143 feet. The building height limit of 200 feet permitted in the CBD-R2 Zone at the discretion of the Planning Board is not recommended within the study area.
- Two blocks in the Wisconsin Avenue North Corridor, (existing Sector Plan pages 102-107), are limited to 122 feet. One large property is zoned CBD-R2. The recommended height limit is changed from 122 to 143 feet, stepping down to a maximum of 90 feet at Battery Lane.
- The building height limit is removed from several properties in the Battery Lane District (see existing Sector Plan pages 90–94). These properties are zoned PD-75 and R10/TDR. The older, existing buildings range in height from 3 to 10 stories.

# INDIVIDUAL DISTRICT RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the amendment describes the recommended changes to specific districts identified in the existing Sector Plan. In contrast to the general recommendations, the recommendations in this section apply to the specific, individual districts as follows:

- Minor modifications to the Battery Lane District, the Wisconsin Avenue North Corridor, and the Old Georgetown Road Corridor
- Complete replacement of the text and recommendations for the Woodmont Triangle District

## THE BATTERY LANE DISTRICT

Three changes are proposed in the Battery Lane District:

- This amendment recognizes the importance of improvements to the Battery Lane Urban Park to create an active public open space, and provide a pedestrian and bicycle link between the NIH, the Woodmont Triangle and the Metro station.
- The restriction on building height is deleted for a portion of the Battery Lane District nearest to Woodmont Avenue (see map of Building Heights).
- The Trunnell property and the adjacent multi-family development could develop either separately or together under the PD-75 Zone.

## THE WISCONSIN AVENUE NORTH CORRIDOR

Revise the building height limit on the west side of Wisconsin Avenue, up to Battery Lane to allow the properties in the CBD-R2 Zone to develop to a maximum of 143 feet (see Building Height Limits Map). The height in this area was limited to 122 feet by the existing Sector Plan. A hotel may also be allowed in the CBD-R2 Zone along Wisconsin Avenue to provide an activating use for the Woodmont Triangle Study Area.

## OLD GEORGETOWN ROAD CORRIDOR

Properties in the CBD-1 Zone, south of St. Elmo Avenue, and along Old Georgetown Road, will be allowed to develop to between 60 and 90 feet with special Planning Board approval. If any of these properties are rezoned to CBD-R2, they may develop to 143 feet under the Optional Method of Development. North of St. Elmo Avenue, the existing height limitation of 50 feet will remain to provide compatibility with the nearby residential neighborhood.

## THE WOODMONT TRIANGLE DISTRICT

This limited amendment replaces the entire section of the Woodmont Triangle District described in the existing Sector Plan. The Woodmont Triangle District has the potential to be a complete “transit-oriented neighborhood” (TOD). Improvements to the public streets and spaces are needed to provide the vibrant environment necessary to create a safe and attractive urban environment. This amendment supports mixed-use development, but retains the unique qualities of the existing Woodmont Triangle District. The following items summarize the changes:

- Allow properties in the CBD-1 Zone and the CBD-R2 Zone in the Woodmont Triangle to develop according to the development standards of their zones. This recommendation revises the building height and density limits imposed on the Woodmont Triangle District. This recommendation is intended to provide housing for a variety of income levels.
- The amendment also revises the recommendations for the improvements to Norfolk Avenue. Instead of a median, this plan recommends improving the sidewalk area to provide additional space for pedestrians, and incorporating a major bikeway to increase the vitality of this district.

The following text and illustrations replace pages 94 through 102 in the Approved Sector Plan for the Bethesda Central Business District dated July 1994.

### A. DESCRIPTION

The Woodmont Triangle District is located between Old Georgetown Road and Wisconsin Avenue, south of the Battery Lane District. The Old Georgetown Road Corridor and the Metro Core District are directly to the south.

The Woodmont Triangle District has been a retail, restaurant and office center for many years. Office uses continue to occupy both low-scale and a few high-rise buildings in the Triangle. Restaurants and arts-related uses also contribute to its increasingly urban, mixed-use environment. Until recently, the housing consisted of a few older, high-rise buildings and a small community of single-family homes on Rugby Avenue and Glenbrook Parkway.

The Triangle has a predominance of older, low-rise buildings on small parcels, creating a strong visual contrast with the height and density of the Metro Core District to the south. A “step-down” in height from the Metro Core to the edges of the CBD is a fundamental principle necessary to protect the residential neighborhoods on the edge of the CBD. The overall skyline within the Woodmont Triangle District is very irregular with abrupt changes in height. The value of commercial and residential real estate is high in Bethesda as a whole, but the difficulty of assembling small parcels in order to develop a project under the Optional Method of Development has been a restraint to revitalization. Older, often non-conforming office and retail space, inadequately lit streets, and narrow

sidewalks have come to characterize parts of the Woodmont Triangle. Recently, an increase in retail and office vacancies has coincided with the success of the Bethesda Row area to the south. While new multi-family residential projects, such as the Palisades, the Whitney and the Residences of Rosedale have been completed within and near the Triangle, their impact on the prosperity of the area has not yet been realized. Improvements to the safety and character of the public streets and spaces of the Woodmont Triangle are necessary to spur revitalization and renovation.

The vision for the Triangle is for a vibrant, urban neighborhood, emphasizing a variety of residential, retail and arts uses. This amendment provides opportunities for additional housing to serve a variety of income levels.

## **B. OBJECTIVES**

1. Encourage mixed-use projects to provide Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs) on site to achieve Bethesda CBD Sector Plan housing goals.
2. Support a diverse urban neighborhood environment including restaurants, space for the arts and convenient parking facilities.
3. Create a safe and attractive pedestrian environment through improvements to public streets and open spaces using the existing guidelines for the Bethesda streetscape.
4. Require improvements to the public sidewalks, public spaces and streets through the public use space requirement in the Optional Method of Development in the following order:
  - a. Norfolk Avenue, the "main street" of the Triangle
  - b. Other streets in the Woodmont Triangle
  - c. Battery Lane Urban Park
  - d. Public visual art near the public right-of-way
  - e. Space for performances
5. Establish a Woodmont Triangle Task Force to discuss and monitor neighborhood concerns including mechanisms for retaining existing and encouraging new retail shops and supporting the arts.

## **C. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The amendment recommends the development of mixed-use projects including affordable housing, retail and arts uses.
2. Change the density and building heights for the Triangle District.

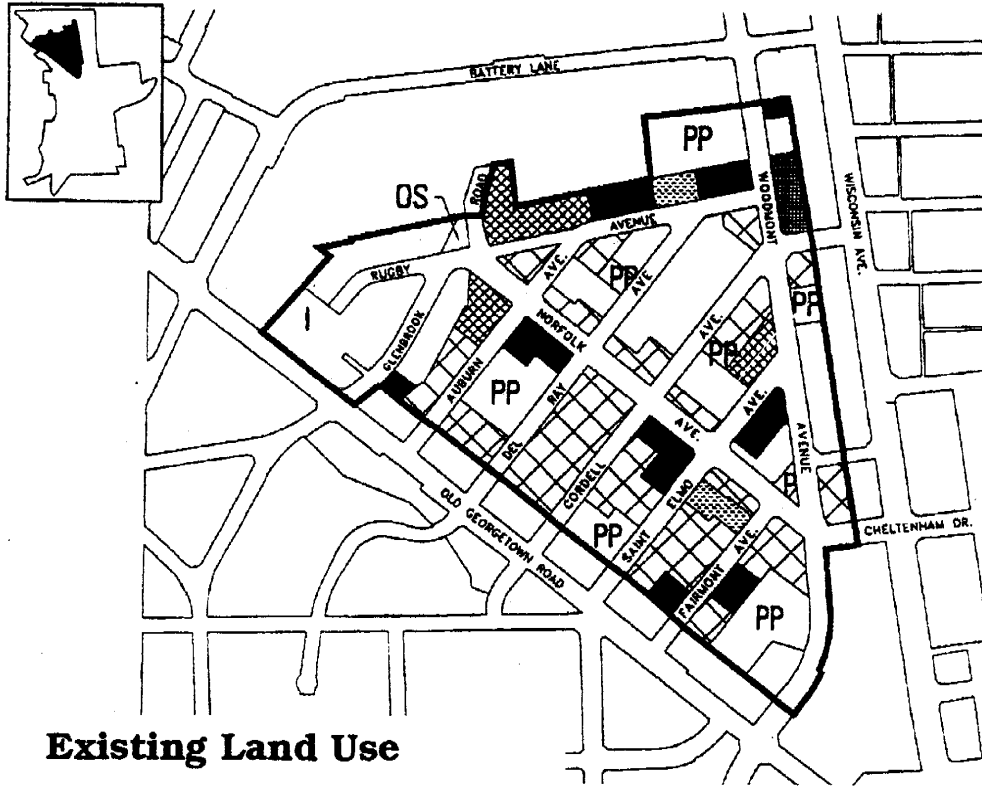
3. Encourage the Standard Method of Development for smaller projects to provide retail use on the first floor and housing on the upper floors.
4. Promote an arts theme in the review of all projects, emphasizing the Woodmont Triangle's importance to the Bethesda Arts and Entertainment District.
5. Designate the Woodmont Triangle District as a housing resource area.

#### **D. URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES**

In addition to the general objectives and recommendations, the following guidelines apply in the Woodmont Triangle District:

1. Design new buildings so that public streets and spaces retain adequate sunlight, particularly along Norfolk Avenue.
2. Provide sufficient building setbacks to adequately accommodate pedestrians and streetscape improvements. Where outdoor restaurants are proposed, additional building setbacks may be required to accommodate pedestrian space and outdoor seating areas.
3. Review new projects for compatibility with existing uses and to ensure animation of the first floor space through use of retail, restaurant or other activating uses.
4. Improve pedestrian and bicycle access across the intersection of Rugby and Norfolk Avenues by redesigning the intersection, potentially adding acreage to Battery Lane Urban Park. Consider adding a landscaped open space in the intersection to improve access and visibility to the Battery Lane Urban Park

# EXISTING AND PROPOSED LAND USE



**Existing Land Use**

## EMPLOYMENT

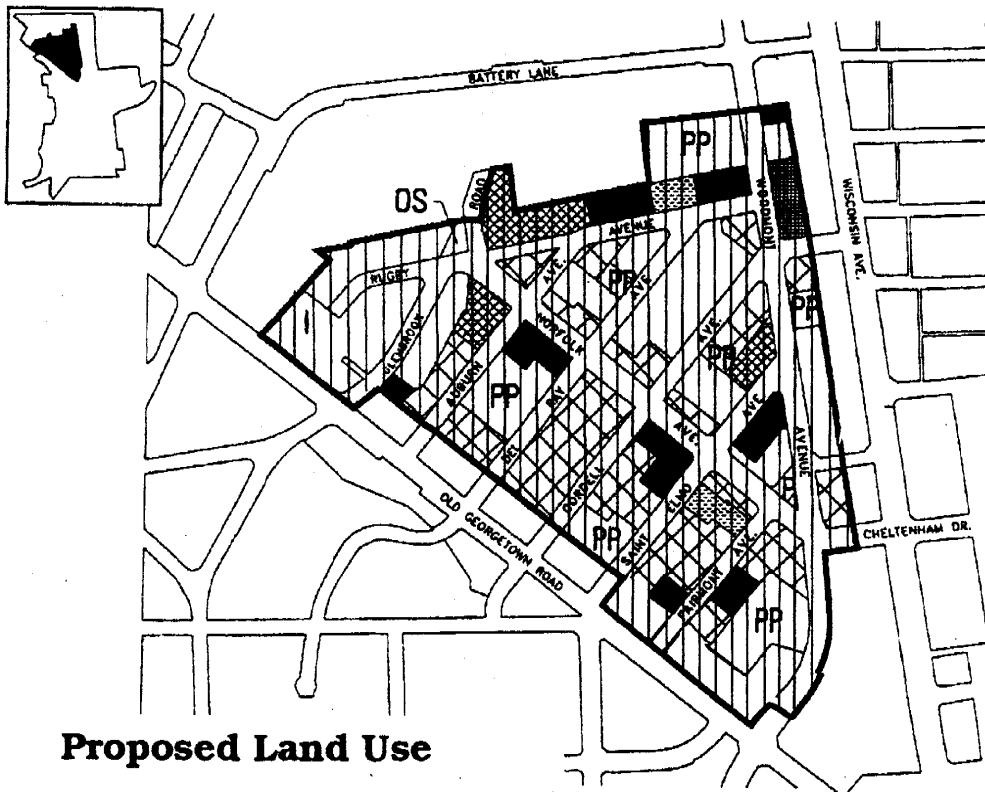
- Office: Medium to High Density
- Office: Low Density
- Retail & Service
- Hotel
- Mixed Use

## RESIDENTIAL

- High-Rise or Garden Apartment
- Single-Family Detached

## OTHER

- P Park
- OS Open Space
- PP Public or Special Exception Parking
- I Institutional



**Proposed Land Use**

- Housing Resource Area

# IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation section of this limited amendment concentrates on proposed zoning, guidelines for the Optional Method of Development, potential changes to the central business district zones, and recommendations for the public and private funding.

## PROPOSED ZONING

Zoning changes, from the mixed-use CBD-1 Zone to the housing oriented CBD-R2 Zone, are recommended for a limited number of parcels. This change in zoning is intended to encourage the development of housing. These properties are located closest to the Metro station and away from the existing residential neighborhoods located on the periphery of the CBD (see the map of Existing and Proposed Zoning).

The zoning for the other portions of the Woodmont Triangle Study Area will remain although the guidelines for the Optional Method of Development will increase the opportunity for parcels to develop to the maximum density.

## GUIDELINES FOR THE OPTIONAL METHOD OF DEVELOPMENT

The Optional Method of Development is a tool to encourage housing, to require street-oriented retail, and to provide public facilities and amenities. The following guidelines for the Optional Method of Development are recommended:

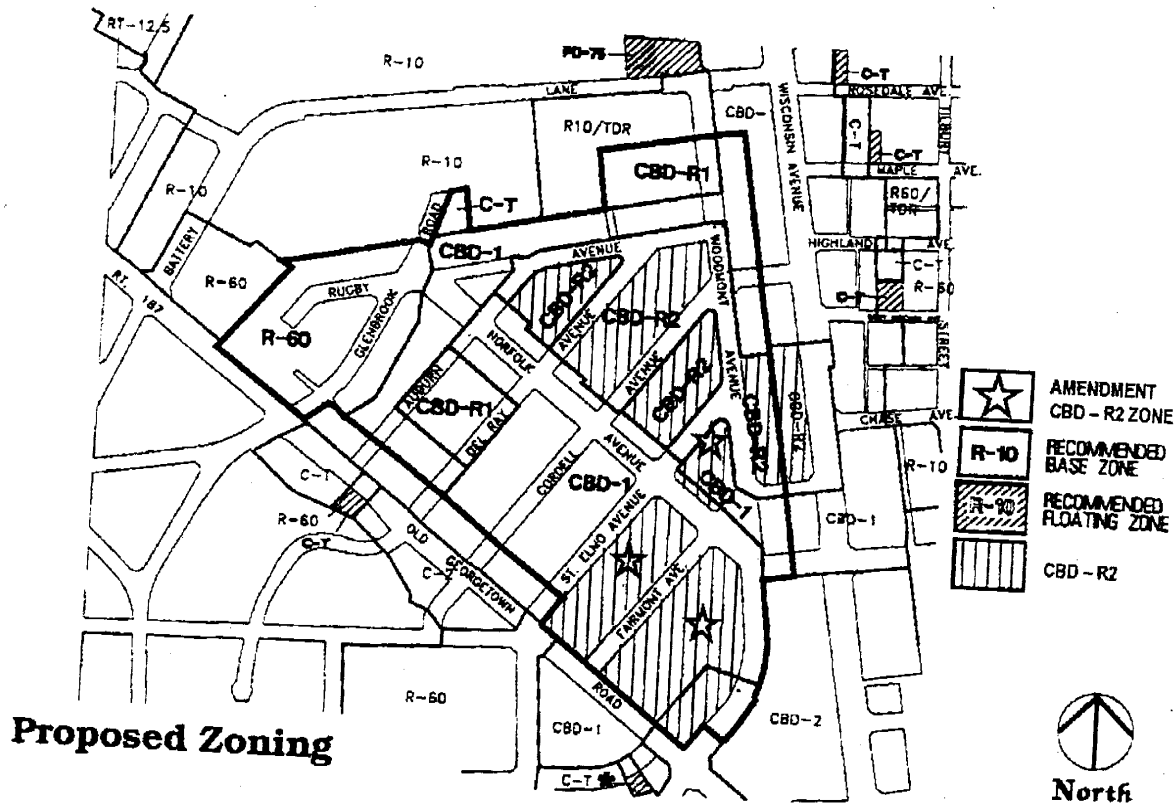
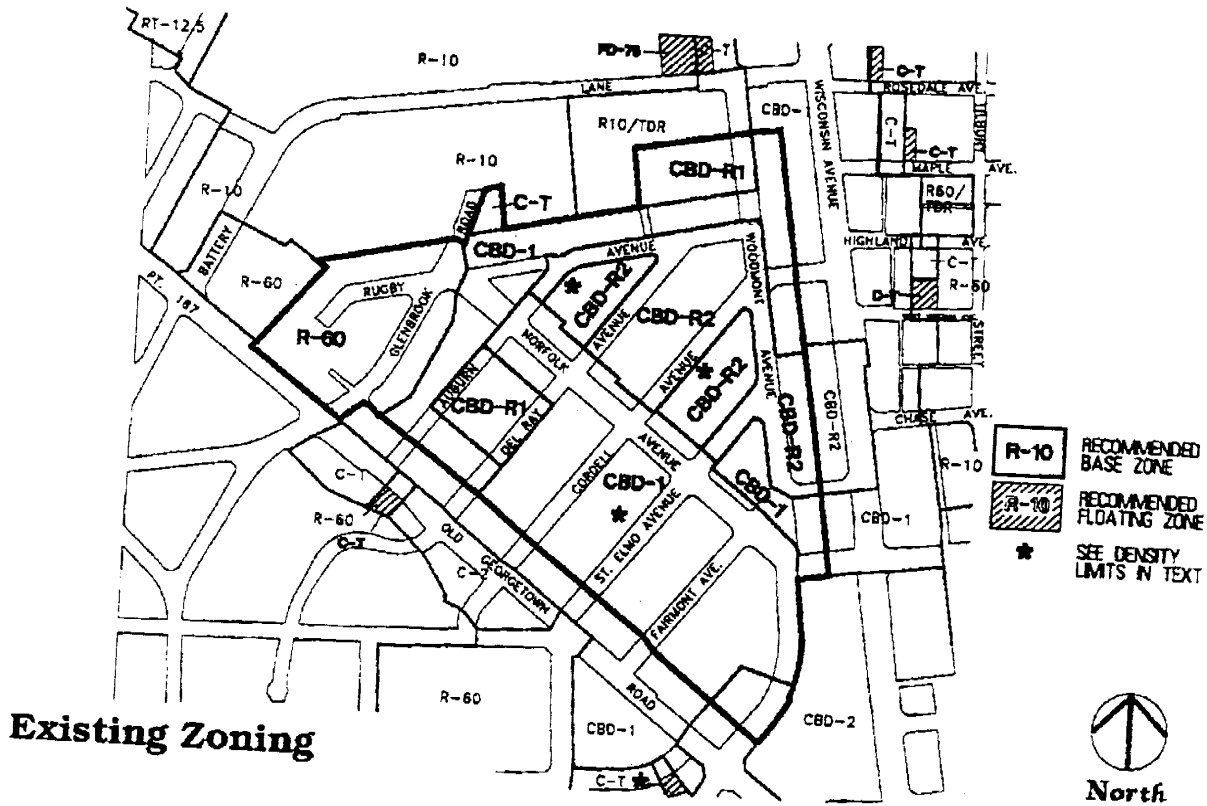
- **Density** – The properties in the Woodmont Triangle will be provided the opportunity to develop to the density specified in the CBD-1 and CBD-R2 Zones. With this amendment, mixed-use properties in the CBD-1 Zone can achieve a floor area ratio of three, and those in the CBD-R2 Zone can achieve a floor area ratio of five. The existing Sector Plan limited the density in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area.
- **Building Height** – The building heights along Old Georgetown Road will remain as specified, except for the area located south of St. Elmo Avenue. The maximum building heights in the remaining areas will be the building heights specified in the appropriate zones (see map of Proposed Building Heights).
- **Residential Uses** – In return for this increase in building height and density, all parcels in the CBD Zones in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area will be limited to a floor ratio of one for non-residential development. Any increase in density up to the maximum allowed must be residential. Providing on-site Moderately Priced

Dwelling Units is a priority for all projects that use the Optional Method of Development.

- **Street-Oriented Retail** – All projects that use the Optional Method of Development are also encouraged to provide street level retail or space for artists on the ground level. Retail along Norfolk Avenue is the first priority.
- **Streetscape** – Improving the safety and character of all streets in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area is a priority. All projects are encouraged to provide streetscape in accordance with the Bethesda streetscape guidelines. Providing enhanced streetscape along Norfolk Avenue is the first priority.
- **Public Use Space** – The existing provisions of the Optional Method of Development require a minimum of 20 percent of the net lot area of each parcel to be devoted to public use space. Existing projects in the Bethesda CBD that double the density of the Standard Method of Development (as permitted in the Optional Method of Development) already provide a combination of on-site and off-site public use space equal to a minimum of 40 to 60 percent of the net lot area. Off-site areas include streetscape in the public right-of-way. For projects in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area, the on-site public use space should be minimized. Off-site improvements to the streetscape, and improvements to the existing Battery Lane Urban Park are the first priority to meet the guideline of combined on-site and off-site public use space equal to a minimum of 40 to 60 percent of the net lot area.
- **Combined Public Space** – Developers are encouraged to combine properties to provide more significant and useful public use space than could be provided individually.
- **Funding for Public Use Space** – Developers are encouraged to provide funding for public use space including extensive streetscape and public space for artists.



# EXISTING AND PROPOSED ZONING



## POTENTIAL AMENDMENTS TO THE ZONING ORDINANCE

This limited amendment to the existing Sector Plan supports modifications to the CBD Zones to increase the opportunities for housing and improve the character of the Woodmont Triangle Study Area. These modifications should be part of a comprehensive review of the CBD Zones instead of included in this limited amendment to the existing Sector Plan. These amendments are not necessary to implement the recommendations in this limited Sector Plan. The modifications could include the following:

- **Public Use Space** – Increase the flexibility in providing off-site public use space to meet the requirements in the CBD Zones. The requirement for public use space could be met on-site or off-site including streetscape improvements in the public rights-of-way, and park enhancements in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area. The public use space should provide an environment capable of supporting and enhancing housing development. The transfer of public use space to off-site areas provides the opportunity to create meaningful public spaces including indoor community centers.
- **Minimum Lot Size** – The minimum lot size of 22,000 square feet could be reduced for use of the Optional Method of Development to encourage additional housing development.
- **Transfer of Density** – The transfer of density is presently permitted throughout the overlay zones in the Silver Spring Central Business District. The transfer of density could be expanded to the CBD Zones. This provision would provide more flexibility to preserve existing retail businesses by transferring density to nearby parcels.

In addition, the minimum coverage requirement could be decreased in the multi-family zones to create a more appropriate and urban development pattern. This decrease in coverage is intended to encourage the retention of existing housing and the construction of additional multi-family housing in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area to serve a variety of income levels.

## PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDING

The Plan recommends that Norfolk Avenue be designed as the “main street” of the Woodmont Triangle Study Area. Funds to create a major bikeway, and enhance the streetscape along Norfolk Avenue are needed to improve Norfolk Avenue. Improving pedestrian safety and the character of the remaining streets in the Woodmont Triangle should also be provided. In addition, funds to improve Battery Lane Urban Park are needed. The source of funds for these improvements include the following:

- **Capital Improvements Program** – The present Capital Improvements Program provides limited funds for the construction of streetscape improvements and a bikeway along Norfolk Avenue. Norfolk Avenue will be a linear urban space with restaurants, public art, and significant streetscape. The bikeway will provide an important link between the existing Capital Crescent Trail and the Bethesda Trolley Trail. Additional funding is needed.
- **Private Funding** – Through a combination of the Optional Method of Development and the Capital Improvements Program, the streetscape in the Woodmont Triangle could be improved in accordance with the Bethesda streetscape guidelines. Placing utilities underground will also be included. The Battery Lane Urban Park could also be substantially improved by the private sector. Projects developing under the Optional Method of Development will be encouraged to include public art along Norfolk Avenue as part of the required amenities, to support the Bethesda Arts and Entertainment District, and to strengthen the links between existing arts venues in the Woodmont Triangle and the rest of the CBD. Projects should be encouraged to provide parking during the evenings and weekends to support retail and restaurants in the Woodmont Triangle.

Donations to an amenity fund will also be encouraged both as part of the Optional Method of Development if approved by the Planning Board or as private donations to the Bethesda Urban Partnership. These funds could be used for such improvements as supplementing the streetscape.

## NORFOLK AVENUE CONCEPT

Woodmont Triangle will become a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood as indicated on the following three-dimensional computer model of Norfolk Avenue in the Woodmont Triangle Study Area. The concept would emphasize public spaces including the existing Veterans Park and the renovation of Battery Lane Urban Park, streetscape including street trees and street lights, street level store fronts and restaurants, and new residential buildings.

