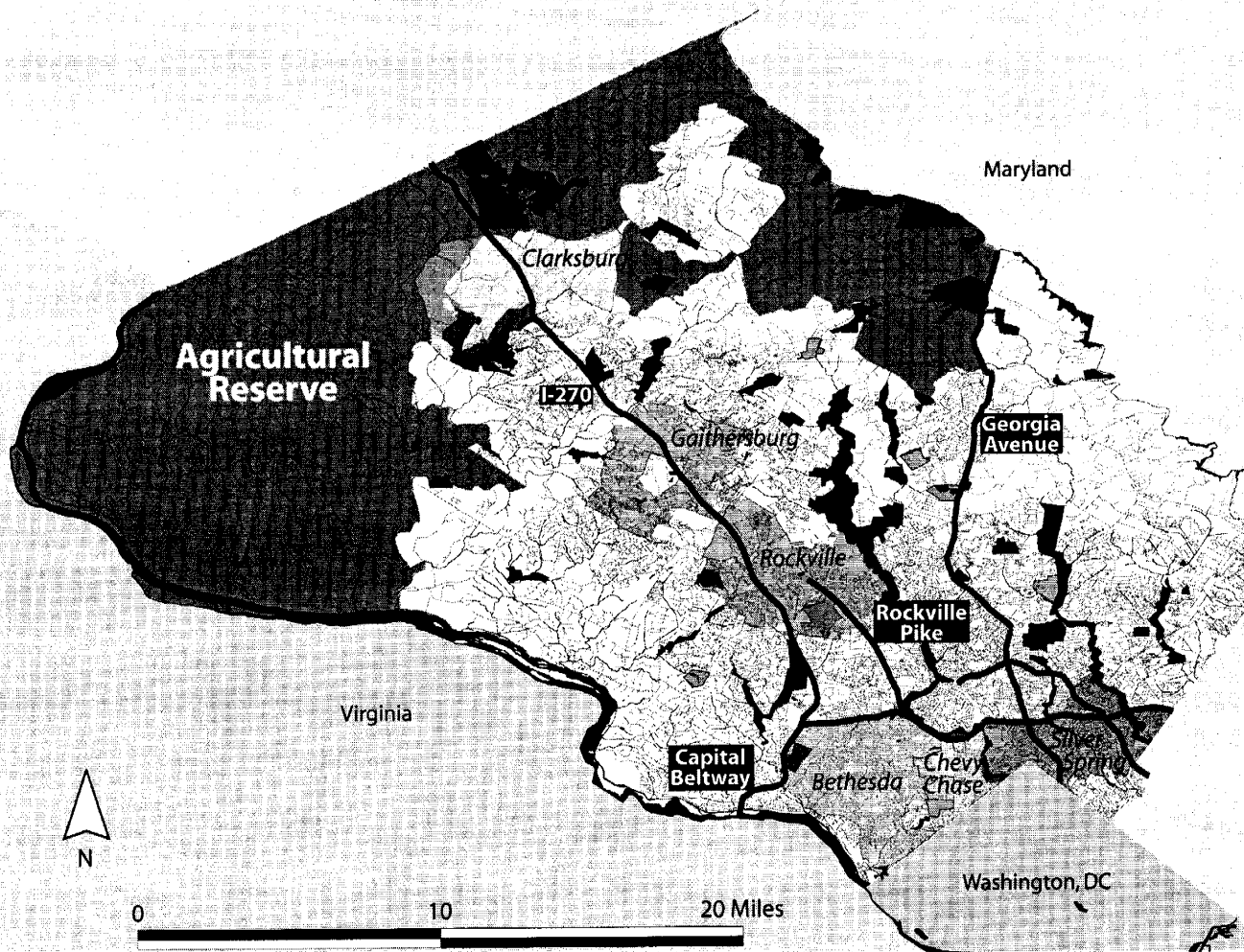


- provide an efficient transportation system, including rapid transit
- preserve our natural and cultural resources
- cultivate livable communities and affection for places

Effective center management maximizes the value of our past and future public investments in expensive infrastructure such as, schools, firehouses, and transit. By attracting people to them, centers make everyday destinations closer, increasing accessibility, while steering development away from our natural and cultural resources. Finally, successful, “human-scale” centers enhance livability and quality of life for people of all income ranges.

Montgomery County’s communities are already naturally organized into centers, strung along major transportation corridors like pearls on a necklace. They need to be constantly managed and periodically reinvented to support the growth of a lively mix of uses for communities nearby and farther away. It is in these centers where:

- Infill development can be built on empty lots between existing buildings.
- Obsolete or abandoned land uses can be redeveloped into more up-to-date residential, commercial, or mixed-use buildings.
- A mix of land uses can support each other and create a lively neighborhood at all hours of the day, achieving a healthy job/housing/amenities balance.
- Multi-family housing, including affordable housing, can be developed to foster 24-hour vitality, support amenities, share parking with commercial activity, and take advantage of transportation access.
- Renewed attention to the delivery of high-quality design can preserve and enhance the distinct character of the neighborhood, reinforce residents’ sense of place, improve livability, and enhance compatibility with surrounding communities.
- Streets, avenues, and boulevards can be shared to accommodate drivers as well as transit-users, pedestrians and bicyclists, encouraging a balance of modes within and between centers.
- Local stakeholders can feel invested and build a sense of community and shared ownership of their neighborhood.



*At least a quarter of the County's existing commercial centers are ripe for redevelopment, and owners of parcels within commercial centers are already coming forward with redevelopment plans. The key will be to make sure that zoning regulations and other incentives encourage the land uses, quality design and effective public space management that will make centers thrive. A critical issue in the County, right now, is the fact that current zoning and parking space requirements encourage redevelopment that does not require public amenities and that is mostly commercial and car-dependent in nature, while mixed-use development that benefits centers is not encouraged.*

The re-design and re-engineering of commercial centers to become great destinations will not be easy. People are attracted to new places, new destinations, and new things to do. This does not allow for manual-driven designs, minimum FAR ratios, and other formulaic solutions to creating great centers. The experts on what "makes a good place" are the people who live in that place. They know the activities and uses they enjoy as well as the "look and feel" that define their favorite commercial town centers and main streets. A place-based, community-driven planning process is a critical element of any successful commercial center redevelopment initiative.

## B. Creating Boulevards that Link us Together

People will walk and bike more often if provided pleasant and safe places to do so in proximity to attractive and interesting destinations. Yet in many places, driving is the only option for even the most routine daily activities.

Wide car lanes and narrow sidewalks, lots of driveways but few crosswalks, blank building façades, poor transit service, and a disconnected street network are all factors that, together, make walking and bicycling inconvenient or even dangerous. Montgomery County's transportation network largely fits that description: arterials such as Rockville Pike, Georgia Avenue, and University Boulevard are designed solely for cars. This problem is magnified by disconnected local street networks that force local traffic to spill out onto these larger arterial roads, further endangering pedestrians and bicyclists using these routes to get around.

As Montgomery County makes the transition from auto-oriented suburbs to pedestrian-oriented, transit-friendly more-urbanized areas, the transportation network will be redesigned to better balance car use with softer modes of travel such as walking, biking, and using transit.

Within centers, this means:

- **Encouraging mixed-use, mid-density development** so that everyday destinations within centers are closer together, and so that ridership between centers is high enough to improve transit service between them.
- **Creating a connected street network** that is oriented toward the center, encouraging people to walk or bike to their destination, or to transit.
- **Providing the necessary pedestrian and bicycle amenities**, including lighting and landscaping.
- **Ensuring that new development is designed at a pedestrian scale**, with interesting façades coming up to the lot line – streetscapes should be attractive and interesting, even at the average walking pace of three miles an hour.
- **Encouraging transit-oriented development** around Metro stations.
- **Implementing traffic calming measures** to slow down cars and make the streets safer for all users.
- **Limiting parking** and encouraging shared parking.
- **Creating lively, attractive, comfortable places** that people enjoy visiting and relaxing in at all times of the day.

Between centers, this means:

- **Redesigning car-only arterials into multi-modal boulevards**, with dedicated bus lanes, bicycles lanes, and wider sidewalks.
- **Designing and developing bus stops as places.**
- **Implementing traffic calming measures** to slow down cars at critical points, making the boulevards safer for all users.
- **Connecting the street grid** to encourage local traffic to stay off of regional arterials and by redeveloping arterials with tree-lined frontage roads.
- **Emphasizing the importance of good urban design**, such as connecting buildings to the street, accommodating parking lanes in front and parking spaces in back, improving the aesthetic qualities of boulevards, etc.
- **Coordinating transportation and land use planning** among County agencies, between the County and municipal governments in the county, and with adjacent counties, to ensure proper continuation of engineering, design and management elements between jurisdictions.
- **Gradually consolidating strip developments** into commercial centers through effective access management.

*A key distinction between boulevards and traditional arterials is the concept of boulevards as shared public space.*

Traffic lanes can become on-street parking and bus pullouts. Clear crosswalks, signalization, medians, and bumpouts<sup>1</sup> can make it easier for pedestrians to cross the road. Sidewalks can be wide, well lit, stylish, and accommodating with benches, outdoor cafes, and public art. Amenities, such as lighting, seating, wayfinding, and trees can be improved. Parking lots can become public markets on weekends, with produce and dairy sales by farmers from the Agricultural Reserve. Metro stations can be made more accessible to more people through transit-oriented development. Even major arterials like Rockville Pike and Georgia Avenue can be retrofitted to provide for dedicated bus lanes, well-designed bus stops that serve as gathering places, and multi-modal facilities for bus rapid transit or other forms of travel.

*"If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you get people and places."*  
-- Fred Kent, PPS

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<sup>1</sup> Bumpouts, also known as "bulbouts," are extensions of sidewalks at intersections that reduce the crossing length, thus improving pedestrian safety and accommodating seniors and disabled citizens who take longer to negotiate street crossings.

*Implicit in this notion of moving from accommodating large arterials monopolized by motor vehicle traffic to shared-use boulevards is the imperative of much closer and more collaborative planning between transportation and land use agencies, including planning, environment, housing, and economic development agencies.*

Grand boulevards require close collaboration on both the inside and outside of the right-of-way through *context sensitive solutions (CSS)*,<sup>2</sup> integrated transportation and land use planning, joint corridor management, and a focus on roads and streets as shared public space. In general, these planning techniques focus on how to manage these boulevards for a broad array of public uses, rather than focusing solely on use of the right-of-way by motor vehicles.

### **C. Great Places for the Community**

Montgomery County already has great public spaces, like Silver Spring, Bethesda Row, Old Town Gaithersburg, and Glen Echo Park. They make living in more urbanized areas more attractive to everyone, including families. Great public spaces engender a cycle of virtue: A great place is inviting to people, who in turn make it even more appealing for businesses and visitors.

*Increasingly, it is affection for place that becomes the deciding factor in where people choose to live, relocate, or open a business. In today's economy, attention to place is a competitive advantage.*

The factors that make one center simply a crossroads and another a favored place include:

- Access to the County's *open spaces*, which gives character and contrast to developed areas, creates linkages, protects sensitive environmental and cultural areas, and provides recreation. These important open spaces are the result of strong public support and numerous public and private actions taken over the years. Coordinated efforts by all County agencies, municipalities, and the private sector will be needed to safeguard and enhance Montgomery County open space resources in the future
- High-quality design of more densely developed neighborhoods that preserve and enhance the distinct character of centers, reinforce residents' sense of place, improve livability, and enhance compatibility with surrounding communities.
- An ongoing and iterative management and planning process that involves stakeholders in each community to meaningfully participate in the development of

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<sup>2</sup> Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) are transportation designs where the context of the place, not the optimum travel speed of vehicles, dictates geometric design and even choice of transportation solution. Flexible designs, lower design speeds, and traffic-calming features (such as speed bumps) characterize CSS strategies, which are often negotiated between transportation professionals and affected communities.

programs, activities, and design recommendations that can enhance the environment, livability and enjoyability of a place.

Open spaces, civic squares, parks and plazas and other public gathering places promote social activities that build community. Montgomery County will continue to supply it citizens with the great public spaces that define great communities.

## **V. The Agricultural Reserve: A unique resource**

Although Montgomery County is best known for its attractive, livable towns and cities, its Agricultural Reserve is key to the County's overall quality of life, our local economy, environment and cultural heritage. The Agricultural Reserve serves as a model for farmland preservation that has informed and inspired communities across the country.

*"Land is too valuable an asset to be heedlessly wasted by allowing it to be developed aimlessly in a scattered pattern."  
– 1964 General Plan*

The Reserve provides us with productive rural communities that not only employ more than 10,000 people in agricultural and agriculturally related businesses, but also contribute \$252 million to Montgomery County's annual economy. In addition it provides access to forests, cultural landscapes, fresh farm produce, and dozens of recreational opportunities. Families from across the region visit the Reserve for fresh berries and peaches in summer, hay rides through the pumpkin patch in October, and freshly cut trees at Christmas-time. Within the 93,000 acres of the Agricultural Reserve, visitors can also go horseback riding, cycling, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and hunting; while enjoying spectacular views of Sugarloaf Mountain, the vistas of productive farmland, or the resources of the County's major parks.

Encouraging the production of fresh produce from the Reserve's farmland for sale to residents throughout the region at farm stands, farmers markets, grocery stores and restaurants is becoming increasingly desirable. This stable local food supply helps to expand access to fresh produce for all County residents. The Reserve and its fresh-food markets directly support and build community food systems and food security throughout the County, which is especially important during this time of increasing energy costs.

The Agricultural Reserve also benefits our environment, providing critical habitats for plants, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies and other wildlife. Its forests help cleanse the air. Its farmland and open space help reduce the risk of flooding in the area, filter our drinking water supply, and protect the threatened Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Finally, the Agricultural Reserve helps us to preserve Montgomery County's rich cultural legacy. Our agricultural and cultural heritage is reflected in the Reserve's landscape, its traditional homes, barns, schools, and its historic monuments.

Despite the existing level of protection of the Agricultural Reserve, pressure to encroach upon it will continue to grow. New strategies are needed to ensure its continued protection and the economic viability of agricultural business, among them:

- Methods to encourage more small food producing farms that use sustainable production methods. The County should consider how to bring new farmers, enhancing their sales and distribution opportunities;
- Maximizing the potential for economic return for food producing farms in the Reserve by enhancing fresh farm markets in public spaces throughout the region. Local farmers should be able to sell grass/pasture raised dairy and meat products directly to the public. Public health concerns can be addressed without curtailing this important and emerging niche in agricultural production; and
- Maximizing the potential for greater *food security* in the region to better assure food safety and supply, particularly in this environment of increasing energy costs.
- Strengthening our commitment to finding new housing opportunities near transit and job centers; or more community scale development directly adjoining the perimeters of developed areas; taking pressure for residential growth off the Reserve.

*The Agricultural Reserve is an integral part of Montgomery County: it reflects where we come from and the values we stand for. We will maintain the commitment of previous generations to protect and strengthen the Agricultural Reserve as it evolves to meet the economic challenges of the 21st Century.*

During Fall 2005, the Department will work with Agricultural Reserve stakeholders to explore and address a broad spectrum of issues related to land use and transferable development rights. A report will be prepared for presentation to the Planning Board in November 2005.

## **VI. Planning for a More Livable County**

*Planning at the finer grain, the smaller scale, will require the active participation of community stakeholders, government agencies, and public leaders in terms of planning, designing, implementing and managing their common community assets. Community participation will be crucial to the success of this effort. Agencies will be resources to community-driven processes that create the places of affection of the future.*

As the Department begins to refocus its planning agenda on redevelopment and reinvestment, the way we do business will change as well- new ways to cooperate

across agencies to support a common community vision will need to be developed. Creating great places requires close integration of several agency functions, most specifically planning, environment, transportation, community, and economic development and housing. Importantly, common processes to conduct outreach to our communities, across agency boundaries, will be needed.

This, in turn, will require new “in-reach” techniques where agencies train each other to work together across disciplines. New linkages with State agency processes will be needed, as well as new ways to collaborate with our incorporated areas to achieve common objectives.

The classic master plan approach is not necessarily suited for the next 25 years. Much of the County is already developed and does not need to be intensively planned. Instead, attention now can be focused on redevelopment opportunities throughout the County, on maintaining the quality of life in areas that are not planned for growth, and on maintaining the vitality and integrity of our Agricultural Reserve. These efforts will also help the County to address the current jobs/housing imbalance in the County’s major sub-areas. (See Attachment #2: Addressing the Jobs/Housing Imbalance)

Change and growth is not only about square feet, it is also about important qualitative details that affect quality of life, such as vibrant public spaces, the provision of desired community amenities, and the availability of transportation options. The “people” aspect of growth and change is critical to planning in the future to make sure that Montgomery County remains a place where people want to live, work, and play.

The true “experts” in defining and protecting the quality of life in the County are not planners, engineers, or other professionals—they are the people who live in, and love Montgomery County. Cultivating affection for Montgomery County’s public spaces will be most effectively pursued by encouraging local residents, employers, workers, and other stakeholders to participate in the creation, programming, and management of those places.

Each place, whether it is a County park or a Main Street, has a unique blend of attributes and a unique potential for revitalization, transformation, or upgrade. As people’s needs and wants change, the places they frequent change. However, there is a basic set of building blocks for every great place, and they are:

- *uses and activities*: every great place is founded on a rich array of things to do
- *comfort and image*: places should be attractive, and feel safe and inviting
- *access and linkages*: places should be easy to get to by a variety of means, visible, and easy to navigate
- *sociability*: places should be friendly, open environments, where people can meet, mix, and recreate together.



*These building blocks of great places are not easily designed into either public or private investments. They emerge organically from an intense, community-based planning process, as well as from the use of public engagement techniques where community members evaluate specific places and how they could be improved. A collaborative process where developers, public agencies and communities negotiate the “terms of engagement” for place development within the context of a small area plan is most likely to achieve both commercial and community success.*

Montgomery County's centers and other places can be developed along these guidelines, with the strongest collection of each community's assets identified and celebrated to make them as successful as possible. For Montgomery County's emerging commercial centers to thrive in the context of a rapidly developing metropolitan area, they must be unique places, and that means they must be planned by and for the people who live in them.

## **VII. Taking the Next Step, an Implementation Strategy**

Montgomery County has within its reach the tools and opportunities to support this new planning focus. Chief among these tools is the General Plan itself, which is still our foundation and guide for future growth. The Agricultural Reserve is another tool that has withstood the test of 25 years of managing growth within the County. The County's Smart Growth Policies, including its commitment to the preservation of its parks, recreation and natural areas, is a third tool and guide to future growth.

Building on this strong policy foundation, the Department recognizes the vital importance of engaging the community to help develop and implement this new planning approach. The Department will create active opportunity for community dialogue as this new approach evolves and community visions, aspirations, and needs are further clarified.

*Planning at the finer grain, the smaller scale, will require the active participation of community stakeholders, government agencies, and public leaders in terms of planning, designing, implementing and managing their common community assets. Community participation will be crucial to the success of this effort. Agencies will be resources to community-driven processes that create the places of affection of the future.*

As the Department begins to refocus its planning agenda on redevelopment and reinvestment, the way we do business will change as well- new ways to cooperate across agencies to support a common community vision will need to be developed. Creating great places requires close integration of several agency functions, most specifically planning, environment, transportation, community, and economic development and housing. Importantly, common processes to conduct outreach to our communities, across agency boundaries, will be needed.

This, in turn, will require new “in-reach” techniques where agencies train each other to work together across disciplines. New linkages with State agency processes will be needed, as well as new ways to collaborate with our incorporated areas to achieve common objectives.

## **Conclusion**

This Framework Report reflects the factual and philosophical pursuit of planning in a county nearing residential build-out. This Report provides the planning rationale and government response to the future planning of our centers, boulevards, and public spaces.

The current Master Plan Program will continue on schedule and run coincidentally with and benefit from these efforts. Planning for mature commercial centers and major transportation and transit routes connecting those centers is already underway, such as Olney Town Center, Long Branch/University Boulevard, MD 355, and Wheaton CBD.

However, the Department believes that the scope and scale of the planning program will substantially change to emphasize small scale planning.

Since a substantial portion of Montgomery County’s future growth will be located within the development envelope in the form of infill and redevelopment, more intensive community participation, smaller-scale planning, and collaborative implementation approaches will be required.

Planning approaches that focus on small-area planning must be designed to better assure that that private and public space functions well and contributes to overall neighborhood livability.

Planning at the finer grain will change the way we do business- a) new ways to cooperate and make decisions across agency lines to support and implement community vision and plan recommendations will be needed, b) unified processes to seamlessly conduct community outreach will be required, c) more effective ways to listen and respond to community needs and preferences must evolve, and d) expedited plan implementation processes must be developed including the use of streamlined master plan amendment processes and floating zones.

A planning framework that puts emphasis on planning at a smaller scale will obligate the County to reinvigorate how we regulate the pace of growth and assure residents and workers that roads, schools and other public facilities will be adequate at the local level.

Additional information on this planning initiative will be posted on:  
[http://www.mc-mncppc.org/strategic\\_planning/index.shtm](http://www.mc-mncppc.org/strategic_planning/index.shtm)