



Update on the Master Plan Reality Check Study

NH	Nick Holdzkom, Planner, Research & Special Projects, Nicholas.Holdzkom@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-650-5612
HB	Hye-Soo Baek, Intern, Research & Special Projects, Hye-Soo.Baek@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-2164
RR	Roberto Ruiz, Manager, Research & Special Projects, Roberto.Ruiz@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-650-5618
CM	Caroline McCarthy, Chief, Research & Special Projects, Caroline.McCarthy@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-4506

Completed: 2/15/17

Description

Staff from the Research & Special Projects Division will provide an update on the Master Plan Reality Check study, with a focus on the analyses of the 1998 Friendship Heights Sector Plan and 1997 Fairland Master Plan. The presentation will provide a recap of the reality check analysis process and criteria used, as well as detailed analysis of the two plans. Finally, the presentation will discuss the project’s next steps.

Overview

The Master Plan Reality Check study was funded in the FY2016 work program to analyze the degree to which select master plans have realized the vision, densities, land uses, infrastructure, and amenities called upon in their respective recommendations. By assessing the difference between a plan’s aspirations and the on-the-ground reality among a broad set of planning criteria, the study aims to shed light on why some plan aspects materialized as envisioned and others didn’t. Since our July presentation on the 1989 Germantown Master Plan, we have analyzed two additional plans: the 1998 Friendship Heights Sector Plan and 1997 Fairland Master Plan. Today, we present detailed findings from our analysis of these plans and some findings and observations. We will come back to the Planning Board in few weeks with a final, synthesized Master Plan Reality Check presentation, where the three plans analyzed will be compared and contrasted to tease out a comprehensive set of findings and lessons learned from all three plans and potential indicators for more regular master plan monitoring.

As with the 1989 Germantown Master Plan analysis, in order to establish a process for a master reality check and evaluate measurable elements that could be applied to subsequent plans, the 1998 Friendship Heights Sector Plan and 1997 Fairland Master Plan were chosen because they had reached their horizon date, or a period of about twenty years where it is reasonable to expect recommended plan elements to come to fruition; there was still staff available with first-hand knowledge of the development of the plans, from beginning to adoption; and it was assessed to have sufficient planning elements which are measurable and for which there is data.

The planning elements, or indicators, which were analyzed fall into six categories:

- Non-residential development
- Residential development
- Community facilities for schools, parks, and the public, broadly
- Urban design
- Transportation
- Environment

For each planning indicators within each category—for example the housing mix indicator in the residential development category— a quantitative analysis was done to compare the plans’ projected goal with the actual figure today. The analysis also includes baseline data from when the plans were created for some indicators when data were available. This assessment of each indicator is included in the Master Plan Reality Check presentations, attached.

Key findings from the analysis of these two plans include the following:

- There is a dramatic difference in FAR utilization between urban and suburban areas. Friendship Heights utilized nearly 90% of its maximum commercial FAR as urban in-fill development while Fairland used roughly one-third of its’ allowable FAR, a ratio of FAR use consistent with Germantown.
- Also similar to results in the Germantown Master Plan, the Fairland Master Plan successfully implemented a change in the housing type mix, in this case from multi-family to single family units, although most of the new development was single-family *attached* units not the prescribed single family *detached* units.
- The Friendship Heights Plan did not consider impacts on schools.
- In Fairland, the plan’s aspiration to create appropriate retail centers but to avoid strip center aesthetic was not fully realized and suggests that the Plan could have benefited from more exacting design guidelines. This finding also applies to the open space and community center elements of the Friendship Heights plan.
- Both master plans had often vague, and sometimes conflicting, articulation of environmental goals.
- The public sector has largely delivered on its proposed investments in open space and transportation.