Approved
City of Mount Rainier
Mixed-Use Town Center Zone Development Plan
November 2010
Abstract

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The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC)

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The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
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The mixed-use town center (M-U-TC) zone district was created in 1994 to promote reinvestment and development in the county’s older, more established mixed-use areas. This document updates the July 1994 Mount Rainier Town Center Development Plan and revises the development policies and design standards and guidelines that will support a pedestrian-friendly, vibrant mixed-use town center for the City of Mount Rainier.

This plan was developed by M-NCPPC during an extensive 18-month public participation process that involved the input of many residents and public officials. The plan, which takes into account current market and economic conditions, consists of five sections: the Introduction, which defines the project area and outlines the public participation process; the Existing Conditions Analysis, which includes a historical overview and current economic and marketing considerations; the Plan Vision, which describes the envisioned future for the M-U-TC area; the Design Standards and Guidelines, which promote high-quality urban and architectural design; and the Implementation, which provides information on funding resources to encourage, promote, and facilitate near, medium, and long-term project goals.
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The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission is a bicounty agency, created by the General Assembly of Maryland in 1927. The Commission’s geographic authority extends to the great majority of Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties: the Maryland-Washington Regional District (M-NCPPC planning jurisdiction) comprises 1,001 square miles, while the Metropolitan District (parks) comprises 919 square miles, in the two counties.

The Commission has three major functions:

- The preparation, adoption, and, from time to time, amendment or extension of the General Plan for the physical development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District.

- The acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of a public park system.

- In Prince George’s County only, the operation of the entire county public recreation program.

The Commission operates in each county through a Planning Board appointed by and responsible to the county government. All local plans, recommendations on zoning amendments, administration of subdivision regulations, and general administration of parks are responsibilities of the Planning Boards.

The Prince George’s County Department of Planning (M-NCPPC):

- Our mission is to help preserve, protect, and manage the county’s resources by providing the highest quality planning services and growth management guidance and by facilitating effective intergovernmental and citizen involvement through education and technical assistance.

- Our vision is to be a model planning department of responsive and respected staff who provide superior planning and technical services and work cooperatively with decision-makers, citizens, and other agencies to continuously improve development quality and the environment and act as a catalyst for positive change.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The City of Mount Rainier Mixed-Use Town Center (M-U-TC) Zone Development Plan updates the previously approved 1994 Mount Rainier Town Center Development Plan. The new plan takes into account current economic/market conditions. Its revised development policies and design standards will guide future development within the plan area and ensure a pedestrian-friendly, vibrant mixed-use town center.

The project area encompasses the buildings along the Rhode Island Avenue corridor east of the District of Columbia line at Eastern Avenue to just beyond the traffic circle at 34th Street. It also extends from the building frontages along 34th Street just north of Bunker Hill Road to about an eighth of a block south of Rhode Island Avenue.

Several hundred residents and stakeholders within a half-mile radius of the study area participated in the development plan update through more than 12 public meetings, hands-on work sessions, and stakeholder group meetings held between September 2009 and March 2010.

Existing Conditions Analysis

As a part of the development plan update, a detailed analysis was made of existing conditions in Mount Rainier. This analysis included research and documentation of the following:

- The physical/geographic description of the M-U-TC boundary
- Historic background and development patterns
- Transportation systems
- Market analysis
- Demographics
  - Existing land uses
  - Market demands and development
  - Opportunities

Plan Vision

The plan vision incorporates urban design and illustrative plans, which provide a framework and visualization of the planned town center, as well as recommendations for the three sub-plan areas:

- Upper 34th Street
- Rhode Island Avenue
- Civic Core/City Center

FIGURE 1: An illustrative showing the sub-plan areas.
Executive Summary

Design Standards and Guidelines

The purpose of the design standards and guidelines is to promote high-quality urban and architectural design within the context of the M-U-TC Zone development plan area and to encourage a cohesive and attractive environment consistent with the plan vision and economic revitalization.

The design standards and guidelines define a design review process that ensures predictability for development or redevelopment from concept, through review, to approval and implementation.

First, the design standards and guidelines are based on an understanding of the Mount Rainier Historic District and an overview of its defining characteristics.

The plan area’s three districts are described in detail:

- Upper 34th Street: “Main Street” pedestrian scaled one- to three-story retail.
- Rhode Island Avenue: “Boulevard” three- to five-story larger scale, retail/residential mix.
- Civic Core/City Center: “Civic Center” three- to four-story larger scale, civic/residential mix.

Next, the design standards and guidelines provide graphics and details for the public realm, site design, and architectural elements. Examples of these graphics and details include street sections at 34th Street and Rhode Island Avenue, pedestrian crosswalks, sidewalks, street lighting, building height, setbacks, massing, walls, fences and screening, façades and fenestration, storefronts, material, color, porches and front yards, additions, subtractions, and signage.

Specific recommendations are provided for key buildings within the plan area.

Finally, the design standards and guidelines also address public art, sustainability, parking, and the treatment of historic buildings within the Mount Rainier M-U-TC Zone development plan area.
Implementation

For the effective implementation of the plan vision, it is suggested that a number of key stakeholders form new working relationships and coordinate initiatives. The M-U-TC Zone development plan provides a framework for implementation, paying special attention to priorities, timing, and possible funding strategies. The key elements to the implementation philosophy are:

- A comprehensive framework
- Building on existing resources
- Priority and focus
- Quality over quantity
- Incremental change

The key implementation priorities are:

- To reinforce the role of the M-U-TC Zone development plan as the critical planning tool.
- Creation of a “downtown” action plan to concentrate public investment and energy on key plan areas: Upper 34th Street, Rhode Island Avenue, and the Civic Core/City Center.
- Creation of a “Main Street” program.

The M-U-TC Zone development plan provides implementation charts and action timelines for each of the key plan areas.

Implementation precedents such as Barracks Row in Washington, D.C., and Takoma Park Main Street in Maryland provide specific examples of how the recommended strategies worked in other communities.

The section on implementation tools and programs itemizes current successful economic development programs and transportation implementation tools. Economic revitalization programs are outlined at the Prince George’s County, State of Maryland, and federal levels.

Profiles of property/building clusters provide details on existing conditions and development potential for major development or redevelopment opportunity sites highlighted in the plan vision. Information is included on lot area, land use, building details, historic integrity, and ownership. Details are also provided on implementation factors such as costs, benefits, and phasing.