

## USDA/BARC OFFICE COMPLEX and OTHER FEDERAL PROPERTIES

### Employment Center and Open Space

#### CONCEPT

The concept envisions retention of the current land uses in this subarea. Improved vehicular and pedestrian circulation is provided to link the USDA/BARC facilities and the Greenbelt Metrorail/MARC station. The Metro Service & Inspection Yard is screened from public view.

#### OBJECTIVES

This sector plan recognizes the USDA/BARC facilities under Federal jurisdiction and seeks to fulfill the following objectives:

- Encourage the preservation of existing open spaces.
- Explore access improvements and pedestrian/bicycle linkages to other key areas of the sector area and beyond.
- Encourage buffering of incompatible land uses.

#### EXISTING SITUATION AND ISSUES

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)/Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) office complex, the Metro Service & Inspection Yard and a large wooded open space comprise the fifth subarea in the sector plan. Because these three land areas reside under Federal jurisdiction, the County laws governing land use planning do not apply. However, this plan will be making recommendations for this subarea to resolve the following issues:

**USDA Office Complex**—The Beltsville Agriculture Research Center, originally referred to as Government Farm, is owned by the USDA and has existed in the Beltsville area since 1910. This agriculture facility is comprised of five farming areas and has been noted for many scientific advances in the animal and plant industries. However, only a portion of

one farm, historically referred to as the Linkage Farm, is located within the Sector Plan Area boundary. In the far northwestern corner, an open space area exists; in 1997, the remaining land to the east was developed as an office complex with four buildings. Presently, this 365,000 square feet office complex employs approximately 1,300 people who access the site from Sunnyside Avenue. Since the completion of the office complex, vehicular traffic has substantially increased along Sunnyside Avenue and Kenilworth/Edmonston Avenue, resulting in regularly congested roadways. Additionally, Beltway commuters must exit at US 1 north or Kenilworth Avenue Edmonston Road north and then proceed along Sunnyside Avenue to access the site. Alternatives are presently under review to consider, prioritize, plan and design vehicular access directly from the Beltway to this site, by



*Main entrance to the USDA/BARC office complex.*

completing the partial interchange at the Greenbelt station. This substantial employment center is a benefit for the Greenbelt Metro area, and the population can contribute to an increase in transit ridership at the Greenbelt station. Unfortunately however, direct and convenient pedestrian and bicycle connections to the Metro Station do not currently exist. The office buildings are approximately 3,500 linear feet, or 2/3-mile, from the Metro platform. While this is not the ideal 10-minute (1/4-mile) walking distance for transit, this facility is still in close proximity to the Greenbelt station and will attract transit riders if safe, well-lit paths are provided.

The open space area in the northwestern corner of the site borders Sunnyside Avenue and Rhode Island Avenue. This parcel is also bordered to the south by a low-density single-family detached residential neighborhood. This land was previously used for plant research and today provides a buffer for the residents from nearby industrial and commercial development along Sunnyside Avenue.

**Metro Service & Inspection Yard**—Constructed in the early 1990s, this WMATA-owned facility terminates the Green Line and provides a turn-around station and maintenance facility for Metro transit cars. This facility is directly north of the Capital Beltway from the Greenbelt station and is juxtaposed between the USDA/BARC office complex and a large wooded open space area, also USDA-owned. Several structures, CSX/MARC Commuter rail/Metrorail tracks and parking lots exist on this site. Unfortunately, screening methods were not installed when this facility was constructed, and due to the low-lying site, the yard can be easily seen from the Capital Beltway and the adjacent USDA/BARC office buildings.



*Metro Service & Inspection Yard.*

**Large Wooded Open Space**—A large wooded open space exists north of the Beltway and east of the Metrorail yard. This property is bordered to the east by Kenilworth/Edmonston Avenue and is also part of the BARC

property. This area is a remnant of the 1930s Federal land acquisitions for the expansion of Government Farm and the construction of the planned town of Greenbelt. Once referred to as the “Hollywood Swamp,” this land is located at the convergence of the Beaverdam Creek and Indian Creek, and has environmentally sensitive natural resources, such as forested wetlands and floodplain. The 1996 *BARC Master Plan* designated this land area to remain as open space with preservation of the wetlands and floodplain. Also, forest fragmentation has occurred in this vicinity over time and measures to maintain this forested area of the Watershed should be considered.

## DESIGN POLICIES

- Retain the two open space areas in their natural state; the farm land in the northwest corner of the USDA/BARC office complex area and the wooded floodplain east of the Metrorail yard. The latter is an important link in the regional greenway system and should continue to provide infiltration zones for stormwater runoff within the Indian Creek Watershed and uninterrupted habitat and forest canopy.
- Explore options for direct access improvements from the Capital Beltway to the USDA/BARC office complex as part of the broader Beltway interchange access improvement study to serve the proposed Core Area development.
- Provide pedestrian and bicycle access ways to link the USDA/BARC office complex with the Greenbelt station. This pedestrian/bike connection will also provide a necessary connection over/under the Beltway to link the Indian Creek Stream Valley Trail to the Little Paint Branch Trail.
- Evaluate roadway improvements to Sunnyside Avenue to ease the vehicular, pedestrian and bike conflicts and improve circulation movements.
- Undertake a traffic demand management program to provide and encourage alternative transportation modes for USDA/BARC employees. The program could include carpooling, shuttle bus service, flexible work schedules/hours and pedestrian and bicycle pathways to the transit station.
- Screen the Metrorail yard from: (1) the USDA/BARC office complex; and (2) the Capital Beltway, subject to Beltway access improvement alignments, with a combination of evergreen and deciduous plant materials. This screening should be undertaken by WMATA.