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PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

Approved General Plan



October 2002



The Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission
www.mncppc.org

Abstract

- Title:** Prince George's County Approved General Plan
- Author:** The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
- Subject:** An approved general plan for the Prince George's County portion of the Maryland-Washington Regional District.
- Date:** October 2002
- Source of Copies:** The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive
Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20772
- Series Number:** 82202152405
- Number of Pages:** 120
- Abstract:** The General Plan makes comprehensive recommendations for guiding future development within Prince George's County, Maryland. The plan designates more than two dozen Centers, which are focal points for increased efforts to concentrate development that can take advantage of existing or future investments in high-capacity mass transit services. The plan also designates seven Corridors where more intensive development should be encouraged. It proposes three development tiers within the county (the Developed, Developing and Rural Tiers) and proposes policies to guide development within each tier. The plan recommends goals, objectives, policies, and strategies for the following plan elements: Environmental Infrastructure, Transportation Systems, Public Facilities, Economic Development, Housing, Revitalization, Urban Design, and Historic Preservation. Plan implementation through future intergovernmental coordination, public participation, planning, regulatory measures, and plan monitoring is described.



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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; and
- 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 comprised 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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The County Council has three main responsibilities in the planning process: (1) setting policy, (2) plan approval, and (3) plan implementation. Applicable policies are incorporated into area plans, functional plans, and the general plan. The Council, after holding a hearing on the plan adopted by the Planning Board, may approve the plan as adopted, approve the plan with amendments based on the public record, or disapprove the plan and return it to the Planning Board for revision. Implementation is primarily through adoption of the annual Capital Improvement Program, the annual budget, the water and sewer plan, and adoption of zoning map amendments.

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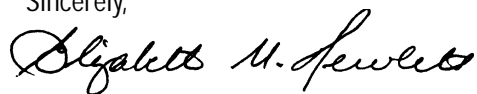
Welcome to the 2002 Prince George's County Approved General Plan! This document is the product of many months of intense study and hard work by hundreds of residents, property owners, the business community, and public officials and will guide land use and development policies in our community for years to come. This very important planning framework emphasizes mixed use, economic development around 26 designated Centers in the county, most of which are located at existing or planned transit stations. The plan recognizes three development tiers: Developed, Developing and Rural, and establishes different goals and policies for different parts of the county. Guidance for transportation, environmental protection, economic development, revitalization, urban design, and historic preservation is also provided.

The approved General Plan builds on recommendations of the Biennial Growth Policy Plan adopted by the Prince George's County Council in November 2000 and prepared with the assistance of Commission 2000, a 53-member, broad-based community advisory committee. The preliminary General Plan was released in February 2002, adopted by the Planning Board in May 2002, and approved by the Prince George's County Council, sitting as the District Council, in October 2002.

The Prince George's County Planning Board and the Prince George's County Planning Department of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission are pleased to have played a lead role in the development of the General Plan; however, this major planning project could not have been accomplished without the extensive and invaluable assistance of our elected officials and the Prince George's County community at large. Sincere thanks to the countless community members who took the time to attend and discuss General Plan issues and recommendations at our public and regional forums and town meetings, to participate in a series of focus groups, and to fill out surveys and submit comments. Thank you also to those who attended and/or submitted comments for the public hearings held by the Planning Board and County Council. The feedback received from the public was considerable and truly invaluable.

The 2002 Prince George's County Approved General Plan reflects countless hours of deliberations, guidance and involvement from all facets of the community and is a well thought-out framework for quality growth management policies that will benefit the county's citizens and residents for years to come. The Commission is delighted to present this General Plan document to the community we proudly serve.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth M. Hewlett, Chairman
Prince George's County Planning Board

Approved General Plan

Executive Summary



Executive Summary

In recent years, the Prince George's County Council has undertaken a number of initiatives to better guide growth, improve the quality of housing, and fund much-needed infrastructure, particularly schools. These efforts are based on the recognition that the county faces significant limitations on its available fiscal and natural resources and its ability to fund needed facilities and services.

The purpose of the General Plan is to provide broad strategies to guide the future growth and development of the county. This General Plan represents the results of an evolving definition of growth policies for the county. It is the culmination of the current phase of an ongoing process to define Prince George's County's future. It builds on the recommendations of the adopted 2000 *Biennial Growth Policy Plan* by adding to and refining its recommendations. The plan provides policies for the future development of the county and describes implementation strategies.

To a great extent, this General Plan represents a departure from earlier county plans. The implementation strategies of the plan are guided by countywide goals, guiding principles, and priorities. The countywide goals describe what is important to strive to create, preserve and protect in planning for the county's future.

The goals are:

- Encourage quality economic development.
- Make efficient use of existing and proposed county infrastructure and investment.
- Enhance quality and character of communities and neighborhoods.
- Preserve rural, agricultural and scenic areas.
- Protect environmentally sensitive lands.

The guiding principles provide an underlying basis for interpreting the policies of this and future plans. The following guiding principles are established:

- Public health, safety and welfare
- Sustainability
- Quality
- Meaningful public participation

The purpose of the General Plan is to provide broad strategies to guide the future growth and development of the county.

The General Plan lays the foundation for all future planning and development activities in the county.

Priorities describe how objectives should be balanced to make decisions more predictable to the public and private interests.

The *Biennial Growth Policy Plan* established the following county priorities:

- High-quality schools
- Quality economic development
- Infill and revitalization
- Existing neighborhood integrity
- Adequate public facilities
- Environmental protection
- Transit support
- Socio-economic diversity
- Farmland preservation
- High-quality housing

The plan recognizes the county's need to concentrate its efforts and make important choices so that it can best realize its goals. In order to define the policies needed to accomplish its goals and where those policies should be applied, the General Plan utilizes a system of designated Centers, Corridors and growth Tiers to guide future land use and development in Prince George's County. For each of these areas, the General Plan provides guidance for future development, environmental protection, transportation and public facilities that takes into account these areas' needs and opportunities.

The General Plan lays the foundation for all future planning and development activities in the county. It is a tool to better manage growth by linking growth policies, capital improvement, economic development, and environmental protection. This plan establishes goals, policies and measurable objectives that will allow a biennial examination of the success of this General Plan.

Development Pattern Element

The Development Pattern Element establishes the three policy areas: Developed, Developing and Rural Tiers. Within the Tiers, an overlay designation of Centers and Corridors is established. The combination of these policy areas designates areas of significant economic development, residential development, and preservation. The growth objective of the plan is that 33 percent of the county's residential growth over the next 25 years is to be located in the Developed Tier, 66 percent in the Developing Tier, and one percent in the Rural Tier.

Developed Tier

The Developed Tier is an 86-square-mile area located along the border of the District of Columbia and more or less within or just outside the Capital Beltway. This area contains more than half the county's households and nearly half the employment in a wide variety of communities. The Developed Tier's policies emphasize: medium to high density, quality infill and redevelopment; restoration, as well as preservation and

enhancement of the environment; providing transit and pedestrian facilities; and maintaining and providing needed public facilities to serve existing and future residents. To achieve the goals in the Developed Tier, financial incentives and streamlined review policies that encourage a higher quality of infill and redevelopment will have to be established. This area will have the highest priority for the expenditure of public funds.

Developing Tier

The Developing Tier encompasses the middle section of the county, approximately 237 square miles, which has been most subject to suburban expansion. Containing almost half the county's households and half the employment, it is still an evolving pattern of farms, residential subdivisions, employment parks, and auto-oriented commercial areas. Growth policies in the Developing Tier encourage compact residential neighborhood design and limit commercial uses to designated Centers. The policies encourage: low- to moderate-density, transit- and pedestrian-oriented development; the preservation and enhancement of environmental features; the provision of as many multimodal options as possible for new development; and the planning and provision of public facilities to support the planned development pattern. The primary challenge in this Tier is to balance the pace of development for new communities and businesses with the demands for adequate roads and public facilities. This plan anticipates that the private sector will have to pay a greater share of the public facilities needed to serve their development. The Developing Tier is an area of low- to moderate-density suburban residential communities, distinct commercial centers, and employment areas that are transit serviceable.

Rural Tier

The Rural Tier is comprised of the eastern and southern portions of the county in the Patuxent River, Potomac River, and Mattawoman Creek watersheds. The Rural Tier is the most scenic part of the county and is characterized by fine landscapes, most of the county's remaining farms, extensive woodlands, numerous streams, and diverse wildlife habitat. Development activity includes mining and widely dispersed, large-lot residential home sites. The preservation of the remaining environmentally sensitive features in this Tier is a priority for any future development. Transportation system policies seek to ensure the operational integrity of the road network for a development pattern that is envisioned as remaining essentially as it is today. The hiker and biker trails system in this Tier is principally recreational in purpose and design.

The vision for the Rural Tier is protection of large amounts of land for woodland, wildlife habitat, recreation and agricultural pursuits, and preservation of the rural character and vistas that now exist. Land use, environmental, transportation, and public facilities policies recommended for the Rural Tier are intended to balance the ever-increasing pressure for residential development and landowners' equity with the desire to maintain rural environments and character. The policies address: retaining or enhancing environmentally sensitive features and agricultural resources; designing future development to retain and enhance the rural character; providing for a transportation system that helps protect open space, rural character, and environmental features and resources; and assigning minimal priority to public sector capital improvements.

The General Plan specifically targets growth to a limited number of designated Centers and Corridors.

Centers and Corridors

The General Plan specifically targets growth to a limited number of designated Centers and Corridors. Development and redevelopment here can capitalize on existing infrastructure by locating homes, jobs and shopping closer to transit services. These are areas where the benefits to the county for future development can far outweigh the costs to the county. The Centers and Corridors designated in this plan represent a unique opportunity for attracting economic development; capitalizing on investments in mass transit facilities; and providing opportunities for mixed-use, transit-oriented and transit-supporting development. Many of the more than two dozen designated Centers are located at Metrorail or MARC stations or at significant bus service hubs. Other Centers, located beyond the Beltway, are focal points for major planned developments of a size that can support significant development and become transit supporting. These locations offer significant opportunities for economic development: office, retail, and entertainment uses. These are also areas where uses can be effectively mixed to limit automobile trips and make efficient use of existing and future transit.

The scope of these Centers varies both in scale and in timing depending on market forces and the individual characteristics.

- **Metropolitan Centers** have a high concentration of land uses and economic activities that attract employers, workers and customers from other parts of the metropolitan Washington area, such as large government service or major employment centers, major educational complexes, or high-intensity commercial uses. High-density residential development may also be located in or very near Metropolitan Centers. Metropolitan Centers can effectively be served by mass transit.
- **Regional Centers** are locations for regionally marketed commercial and retail centers, office and employment areas, some higher educational facilities, and possibly professional sports and recreation complexes primarily serving Prince George's County. High-density residential development may be an option at these Centers if the needed public facilities and services, particularly schools and transit, can be provided. Regional Centers should be served by rail or bus mass transit systems.
- **Community Centers** are concentrations of activities, services and land uses that serve the immediate community near these Centers. These typically include a variety of public facilities and services; integrated commercial, office and some residential development; and can include mixed-use and higher-intensity redevelopment in some communities. Community Centers should also be served by mass transit.

Seven Corridors where more intensive development and redevelopment should be encouraged are designated by the General Plan. The purpose of the Corridors is to provide for more intensive uses at appropriate locations within one-quarter mile of these key transportation routes in the county. Accordingly, it is anticipated that policies will differ for Corridors within each Tier.

- Developed Tier Corridors generally contain a higher intensity of residential and nonresidential land uses, and a greater mix of uses that are regional in scope, than the Developing Tier Corridors. This development should occur at selected Corridor nodes and be planned as transit-oriented development.
- Developing Tier Corridors generally contain less intense residential and nonresidential land uses, than the Developed Tier Corridors and with a mix of uses that are more community-oriented in scope. This development should occur at designated Corridor nodes and be planned as transit-oriented development.

Infrastructure Elements

Environmental Infrastructure

The Environmental Infrastructure Element emphasizes the need to protect important environmental assets and make wise use of the county’s resources. The plan proposes the identification and protection of a green infrastructure. Green infrastructure is defined as a network for large, undisturbed land areas (hubs) connected by designated pathways for the movement of wildlife and humans (green corridors). In addition to the identification of the green infrastructure elements, this plan includes policies that are important to sustainable, liveable communities. Preserving ecological functions, providing for energy conservation, reducing light pollution, and encouraging construction that uses green building techniques are essential elements of sustainable communities in the twenty-first century and are addressed in this plan.

Transportation Systems

Transportation systems policy in Prince George’s County is a hierarchy that begins with the broad goals and policies for integrating countywide transportation with land use. The complementary networks of roads, rail and bus transit, and trail facilities for pedestrians, bikers and equestrians that make up the county’s transportation system interact differently. The Developed Tier has all but one of the county’s 15 Metrorail stations, three MARC commuter rail stations, and most of the bus service in the county. Also, a considerable part of the county trails network originates in this Tier. In the Developing Tier and Rural Tier, the transportation system consists almost entirely of a road network. Bicycle and trail proposals build on county Smart Growth and revitalization initiatives by promoting walkable and bikeable nonmotorized connections to mass transit, residential and regional activities, and by making revitalization projects more bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly.

Since the last *Master Plan of Transportation* and *General Plan* were approved almost two decades ago, a number of important operational improvements have occurred:

- Completion of the Metrorail system
- Initiation of the first Metrorail expansion, the Blue Line extension to Largo Town Center
- Initiation of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge replacement project
- Initiation of the Ritchie-Marlboro and Arena Drive interchanges on the Capital Beltway (I-95/I-495)

These changes and the significantly different preferred development pattern envisioned in this General Plan require an updated *Master Plan of Transportation*.

An integrated multimodal transportation system is essential to attracting the quality development that the county envisions during the duration of this General Plan. It is, therefore, important that these transportation system reevaluations should ensure both the system's consistency with the preferred development pattern envisioned in this General Plan and the operational integrity of the county pedestrian trails, transit and highway networks.

Public Facilities

This General Plan addresses the provision of county public facilities (fire and rescue, police, schools, parks, water and sewer, and libraries) that will be needed to serve existing and future county residents and businesses. The plan's policies address efficiently providing public facilities in locations needed to serve existing and future residents and businesses, and utilizing the provision of public facilities to strengthen county economic development.

Economic Development, Housing, and Community Character Elements

Economic Development

The General Plan reinforces the county's *Economic Development Strategy*. With the exception of the provision of high-quality schools, quality economic development is the highest countywide priority. The benefits of quality economic development to the county's future development pattern include:

- Providing upper income, high value-added jobs for county residents.
- Shifting tax burden (used to provide needed county facilities and services) away from county residents.
- Providing desired amenities for county residents, such as quality retail stores and restaurants.

The development pattern recommendations help set the framework for future economic development. For instance, the Centers and Corridors should be cornerstones for attracting new employment and commercial development. Further, the plan's public facilities and transportation recommendations help support future economic development, as well as create and maintain strong communities. A strategic component of the economic development goal is the retention and maintenance of existing businesses.

Housing

The housing recommendations of the General Plan are guided by the need to provide for a greater balance of housing types and values throughout the county while creating and maintaining strong neighborhoods.

The plan encourages high-end valued housing and a balance of housing choices throughout the county. High-value housing contributes to the county's tax base by generating more in tax revenues than is demanded in county services and also provides "move-up" opportunities for county residents. In addition to families and individuals wishing to live in single-family homes on suburban lots, those desiring easy access to

transit should be able to find housing close to the county's Metro stations. Seniors should be able to continue to live within the county without the burden of maintaining single-family homes. Low- and moderate-income families should be able to find safe, affordable housing. To meet these needs and desires, this General Plan provides policies that seek to strengthen existing housing stock and provide a variety of new housing choices.

Revitalization

There are neighborhoods within Prince George's County with substandard housing or underutilized/deteriorating commercial and industrial areas. Parts of the Developed Tier consist of older communities that have stable residential areas that are adversely affected by deteriorated commercial strips and/or blighted industrial areas. In other areas, residential structures are in need of revitalization or redevelopment. These areas are experiencing disinvestment and obstacles to investment, and thus are showing evidence of decline. Revitalization means a revival of the physical, social, and economic vitality of a community. It improves the quality of life for citizens and businesses. Revitalization of blighted and deteriorated areas is a primary concern of citizens and is a key to strengthening the economy of and maintaining healthy communities in Prince George's County.

Urban Design

Urban design is an important component of the area/sector planning and development review processes, and is where a community can articulate a vision and standards for the design of the physical environment. Design plays a major role in establishing a sense of place and community identity. Design elements include: architecture (facade and massing); layout; views; circulation and parking; public spaces and other amenities; pedestrian orientation; safety; landscaping; lighting; and signage.

Historic Preservation

Historic districts, buildings, structures, and sites can provide the architectural and cultural context for new development and for the preservation of a sense of place. Their protection provides a link to the county's past while recognizing their role in the county's present and future. Individual historic sites provide focal points for new and existing development. Protection of historic sites and their settings can help protect the character of their surrounding neighborhoods. The plan's policies address integrating historic sites and districts into the county's development pattern, protecting historic resources through appropriate regulation and enforcement measures, and encouraging stewardship and adaptive use of historic sites and districts.

Implementation

The *General Plan* will only be effective to the extent that its goals and policies are implemented. Plan implementation will involve making choices concerning future development patterns, while taking into consideration the cost of providing needed infrastructure and protecting the environment. The fundamental challenge in making these critical choices for the county's future lies in deciding how to improve our county responsibly without being wasteful. This General Plan, which applies Smart Growth principles countywide, offers a range of policy choices for controlling sprawl and ensuring cost-effective use of public resources to maintain a high and sustainable quality of life. Implementation of this plan should be guided by the need to achieve

the county's top growth priorities. To do this, the county will need to regularly review, and where necessary, reorient, the way it implements and refines this General Plan, through the Biennial Growth Policy updates, master and functional planning, and by regulatory revision. The four essential components of implementation include:

- Intergovernmental cooperation and public participation
- Future planning activity
- Regulatory revisions
- Biennial Growth Policy Updates