

MEMORANDUM

January 28, 2010

TO: Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee
FROM: Marlene L. Michaelson, ^{MM} Senior Legislative Analyst
SUBJECT: White Flint Sector Plan

This is the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee's sixth worksession on the White Flint Sector Plan. This memorandum addresses various follow-up issues from previous worksessions related to land use, amenities, and sustainability. A separate memorandum addresses the land use transportation balance issues. The final worksession on February 8 is devoted to staging.

Committee Members should bring a copy of the Sector Plan to the meeting for reference.

DESCREPANCIES BETWEEN ZONING AND HEIGHT FIGURES

Staff has previously pointed out that there are a number of places where the height shown in the figures in the Sector Plan are different from the CR zone recommendations. While in some cases it is difficult or impossible to know where to draw a zoning line at this time (e.g., because existing development straddles likely zoning lines or a future road alignment will determine the boundaries), Staff recommended that such lines be added wherever feasible to provide greater clarity regarding height. The Committee has already agreed to add new zoning lines on several properties so that the zoning matches the height (e.g., the Rockwall property in the NoBe District). Staff agreed to review all properties for which the height recommendations are different from the zoning recommendations, to determine whether other additional zoning changes should be made.

The one additional change Staff recommends is for the North Bethesda Center in the Metro East District. Figure 21 on page 32 shows a clear demarcation between the property east and west of Boylston Street with a 250' height limit west of Boylston and 200' east of Boylston, but the entire property is zoned CR-4, C-2.0, R-3.5, H-250. Consistent with the Committee decisions on other properties, Staff recommends changing the zoning east of Boylston to CR-4, C-2.0, R-3.5, H-200. **This is not a substantive change in what the Sector Plan would allow, but conforms the zoning to the Sector Plan recommendations.**

For the properties where it is not possible to draw zoning lines to reflect the Sector Plan's height recommendations, Staff recommends that the following actions be taken:

- Where zoning and height recommendations are inconsistent, the Sector Plan should indicate this in text and briefly explain why an alternative zone was not used. (Otherwise, Staff is concerned that future readers of the Sector Plan will be confused as to why height is limited by the zone for some properties and by the Sector Plan for other properties.)
- The height recommendations in text must be consistent with height limits shown in figures so that the Sector Plan's intent is clear. This is currently not the case for at least one property.

AMENITIES AND OPEN SPACE

The Sector Plan's recommendations related to Public Use Space Requirements and Amenity projects are on page 68 of the Sector Plan. The description of priority projects eligible for Amenity Fund Support should be amended to include the recreation center, the library, and regional services center. The Sector Plan should also indicate that the co-location of two or more public facilities (with ancillary facilities such as seating areas or cafes) can serve as a destination and meeting place for area residents.

ENSURING HOUSING GOALS ARE MET

The Sector Plan states a goal of significantly increasing housing in the Sector Plan area. The Council received testimony questioning whether the Sector Plan will achieve this goal, given the flexibility allowed by the Commercial-Residential (CR) zones. Council staff has received recommended changes in language that will call greater attention to the Council goals without changing the zoning or land use goals of the Plan (see suggested language prepared by Pam Lindstrom on © 1 to 6). Staff supports these changes, but will propose some modifications to the recommended changes in the staging section. Included are suggested changes in the memorandum for the Council's February 8 meeting on staging.

SUSTAINABILITY

Pages 50 to 51 of the Sector Plan address Sustainability. The Council received testimony suggesting that this section of the Plan needed to be stronger; however, Staff does not believe this would have the impact intended by those who testified. Most environmental protections are addressed in County laws and regulations or in the zoning ordinance. The Sector Plan provides information on the current state of the environment and identifies opportunities to improve the environment, but these opportunities need to be implemented through other venues and, therefore, stronger sector plan language would have little, if any, impact. In addition, Staff believes it is inappropriate for master plans to address in any depth issues that are County-wide in nature, rather than specific to a planning area (e.g., strategies to reduce air or water pollution should apply throughout the County). The only changes Staff recommends to this section of the Sector Plan would be to update it for any changes related to the CR zones.

CR ZONES

The Committee's changes to the Commercial-Residential (CR) zones will necessitate changes in Sector Plan text that refer to zone requirements (e.g., language about bonus density related to certain environment measures). Staff will make those changes as part of the resolution process once the Committee and Council have finished their worksessions on the zone and Sector Plan.

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[Problem addressed: There is an existing shortage of transit-proximate housing relative to jobs in the I-270 Corridor. There are housing statements in the Vision section of the plan, though the housing statements should be made more visible in a separate paragraph.]

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This Sector Plan vision establishes policies for transforming an auto-oriented suburban development pattern into an urban center of residences and businesses where people walk to work, shops and transit. Offices and plazas are full of workers during the day. At night and on weekends people attend the theater, visit galleries, and eat out. In the summer, people are out enjoying evening activities. Rockville Pike will be transformed from a traffic barrier dividing the center into a unifying multi-modal boulevard. White Flint will be a place where different lifestyles converge to make urban living interesting and exciting. The proposed cultural and retail destinations in and around the civic core, the open space system, and the walkable street grid unite to energize White Flint. From this energy, White Flint will become a vibrant and sustainable urban center that can adapt and respond to existing and future challenges.

There are few locations remaining in Montgomery County where excellent transit service and redevelopment potential coincide. The MD 355/I-270 Corridor (Figure 1) is a historic travel and trade route that links communities in Montgomery County to those in Frederick County. In the last 30 years the corridor has emerged as a prime location for advanced technology and biotechnology industries with regional shopping and cultural destinations. White Flint fits squarely into Montgomery County's General Plan and long range policies as the place to accommodate a substantial portion of the region's projected growth, especially housing. [insert paragraph break to call attention to housing goal]

This Plan recommends adding more residential capacity near existing transit facilities to balance land uses in the MD 355/I-270 Corridor. A substantial housing resource at White Flint is well situated to support the planned expansion of federal facilities in White Flint (Nuclear Regulatory Commission) and Bethesda (Walter Reed National Military Medical Center) and provide a sufficient supply of housing options to serve County residents throughout their stages of life.

White Flint was first proposed as an urban, mixed-use community at the center of North Bethesda more than 30 years ago with the extension of Metrorail service. Over the decades, the envisioned transformation from a suburban, car-oriented series of strip shopping centers into an urban, transit-oriented, mixed-use area has occurred slowly and in scattered pockets. The White Flint Mall, a regional shopping destination with three floors of shops and ample structured parking, was one of the early attempts to blend urban form with suburban needs. But, the automobile still dominates, especially along Rockville Pike and the pedestrian experience in most of White Flint is barely tolerable. Recent projects (the Conference

Center, The Sterling, and the North Bethesda Center) have created urban block patterns with buildings oriented toward the streets, destination uses and an improved pedestrian experience. More needs to be done to connect these urban pockets, to introduce civic functions and open space, and to reduce conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians.

Given the reality of future energy constraints and the effects of climate change, growth must take advantage of existing infrastructure, especially transit, to create compact new communities where reliance on the automobile is unnecessary. Growth should be directed to those places where a reduction in the carbon footprint is possible, like White Flint, and where the infrastructure can support a sustainable, culturally diverse urban center outside the well-established central business districts.

This vision furthers the 2003 Ten-Year Transportation Policy Report [title?], which supports land use policies that promote new opportunities for living closer to work, especially near Metrorail stations. Furthermore, this vision is consistent with regional planning efforts to improve the jobs-housing ratio. This Plan recommends the approval of 9,800 new units (Table 1), which is a substantial increase in housing resources in the I-270 Corridor. The projected jobs to housing ratio in White Flint will be about three jobs to one dwelling unit, an improvement over existing conditions.

It is very important that this housing be achieved as the master planned development is carried out. Development under the flexible CR zone must be monitored to assure that the planned job/housing balance is achieved.

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Staging Plan

A staging plan addresses timing of new development and public facilities within the lifetime of a sector or master plan. A successful staging plan should be elastic enough to respond to market forces without losing the plan's vision or requiring amendments. It must also make realistic assumptions about the facilities needed to support development while minimizing negative impacts on surrounding development. In White Flint, staging must include increasing transit ridership as a means to reduce traffic congestion.

The White Flint staging plan is guided by the following.

- Ensuring fiscal responsibility. Timing and sequence of development should be matched to capital improvement funding.
- Funding for the capital improvements required by new growth will come from a variety of public and private sources. Private development should provide for those public facilities needed to support the new development and not burden existing facilities.
- Coordinating development with public infrastructure. Public facilities should be provided in conjunction with private land development, including dedication of land for public use in order to reduce the costs to the public.
- Promoting balance. The Plan recommends substantial residential development to create neighborhoods in White Flint. Nonresidential development should not preempt residential development by absorbing available capacity or land.
- Promoting a sense of place. The reconstruction of Rockville Pike as a boulevard and the creation of a civic core area are both fundamental to creating a sense of community and place in White Flint. The sequence in which these projects are developed, especially the construction phases for Rockville Pike, is critical to traffic management and to minimizing disruption to commerce and impacts on surrounding communities.

The proposed zoning envelope contains more potential density than will be used over the life of the Plan. The Mobility chapter outlined the requirements for accommodating new development, such as the desired mode split, the enhanced street network, and more emphasis on multifamily residential development since it generates less traffic than nonresidential development. The Plan recommends a staging plan that meters development approvals to ensure that the transportation infrastructure is in place when needed. It will also meter development to assure that the planned housing is achieved in each stage.

The amount of development that can be accommodated by the proposed infrastructure and transit is approximately 75 percent of the recommended zoning envelope capacity. Of primary importance is managing traffic congestion, which can be accomplished by building the proposed street grid and improving and enhancing access to transit. The realignment of Old Georgetown Road and Executive Boulevard is the critical part of the road network that will provide an alternative for through traffic on Rockville Pike and diffuse traffic through the Plan area.

Second is ensuring that proposed civic uses, intended to create vitality within the urban core, are built and constructed early in the life of the Plan.

Finally, reconstruction of Rockville Pike will require additional right-of-way, which cannot be obtained all at once, since development will occur property by property. The Plan recommends dedication to the 150 foot right-of-way and an additional reservation to 162 feet to accommodate the design of the multi-modal cross section. An interim solution may be necessary, such as locating a drive-aisle in the setback area or setting aside vaults for the undergrounding of utilities outside the limits of the future reconstruction. Regardless of when the reconstruction occurs, there will be disruption to adjacent businesses. Efforts should be made to address that disruption, such as local bus shuttles and an evening construction schedule. Before any additional development can be approved, the following actions must be taken.

- Approval and adoption of the Sector Plan.
- Approval of sectional map amendment.
- Council resolution to expand the Metro Station Policy Area to encompass the entire Sector Plan boundary, which:
 - o requires workforce housing
 - o proposes legislative changes to allow impact fees to be captured in a Metro Station Policy Area
 - o reduces Transportation Impact Tax
 - o allows Critical Lane Volume (CLV) Standard to increase to 1,800.
- Establish the Sector Plan area as a State of Maryland Bicycle Pedestrian Priority Area.
- Create public entities or financing mechanisms necessary to implement the Sector Plan within 12 months of adopting the
 - sectional map amendment. These include, as appropriate, the following:
 - o parking management authority
 - o urban service district
 - o redevelopment office or similar entity
 - o tax increment financing district
 - o special assessment district.
- Develop a transportation approval mechanism and monitoring program within 12 months of adopting the sectional map amendment.
 - o Planning Board must develop biennial monitoring program for the White Flint Sector Plan area. This program will include a periodic assessment on development approvals, traffic issues, public facilities and amenities, the status of new facilities, and the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) and Annual Growth Policy (AGP) as they relate to White Flint. The program should conduct a regular assessment of the staging plan and determine if any modifications are necessary.
 - o The Planning Board must establish an advisory committee of property owners and interested groups that support the redevelopment of the Plan area, to evaluate the assumptions made regarding congestion levels, transit use, and parking. The committee's responsibilities should include monitoring the Plan recommendations, identifying new projects for the Amenity Fund, monitoring the CIP and AGP, and recommending action by the Planning Board and County Council to address issues that may arise.
- Any development approvals that proceed before the public entities are in place are subject to existing regulatory review.

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Phasing

Development may occur anywhere within the Plan area, however, all projects will be required to fund or, at a minimum, defray total transportation infrastructure costs. The phases of the staging plan are set at 30 percent, 30 percent, and 40 percent respectively of the 17.6 million square feet of new development. This Plan recommends that affordable housing units provided under the CR Zone incentives and are in addition to those required by Chapter 25A may be excluded from the staging capacity.

Phase 1: 3,000 dwelling units and 2.0 million square feet nonresidential development

During Phase 1, the Planning Board may approve both residential and nonresidential development until either of the limits above is reached. 80% of housing capacity must be approved for development before moving to phase 2.

Work-around road projects west of Rockville Pike, including the streets for the civic core, should be contracted for construction during Phase 1 and completed before commencement of Phase 2.

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The following prerequisites must be met during Phase 1 before to moving to Phase 2.

Contract for the construction of the realignment of Executive Boulevard and Old Georgetown Road. •

Contract for construction of Market Street (B-10) in the Conference Center block. •

Fund streetscape improvements, sidewalk improvements, and bikeways for all streets within one quarter-mile of the Metro station: Old Georgetown Road, Marinelli Road, and Nicholson Lane.

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Phase 2: 3,000, dwelling units and 2.0 million square feet nonresidential development

Before development beyond the limits set in Phase 1 can be approved, the Planning Board must determine that all the Phase 1 public projects have been completed. The amount of development that could be approved in Phase 2 is set at approximately one third of the planned development. During Phase 2, the Planning Board may approve both residential and nonresidential development until either of the limits above is reached. 80% of housing capacity must be approved for development before moving to phase 2.

The following prerequisites must be completed during Phase 2 before proceeding to Phase 3.

- Construct streetscape improvements, sidewalk improvements, and bikeways for all streets within one quarter-mile of the Metro station: Old Georgetown Road, Marinelli Road, and Nicholson Lane.
- Complete realignment of Executive Boulevard and Old Georgetown Road.
- Construct the portion of Market Street as needed for road capacity.
- Fund the second entrance to the White Flint Metro Station.
- Construct Nebel Street Extended between Nicholson Lane and Rockville Pike as needed for road capacity.
- Conduct a North Bethesda residential areas circulation study.
- Increase non-auto driver mode share to 35 percent.
- Limit long-term parking spaces to capacity established in the Annual Growth Policy.