



# OPEN SPACE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES PLAN

## **A. GOALS**

- Provide for the active and passive recreational needs of residents and employees of the Sector Plan area.
- Protect and enhance environmental resources in the area.

## **B. PARKS AND OPEN SPACES**

In a built-up area like Friendship Heights, parks and open spaces serve many functions: they provide visual relief from the concrete and glass of surrounding buildings, usable space for recreational pursuits, buffers between commercial and residential areas, and protection of environmental resources. The scale of each space is determined by its use: a small urban park can provide a haven for the lunch hour visitor to eat, read, and socialize; a larger paved public space encourages strolling and people-watching; a connected stretch of woods and stream valley supports animal habitat.

### **EXISTING SPACES**

Parks and open spaces within the Sector Plan area today are: Hubert Humphrey Park, an urban park in front of the Friendship Heights Village Center; Page Park, a small neighborhood park, also maintained by the Village of Friendship Heights; and Brookdale Park, a three-acre neighborhood park leased by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) from GEICO.

Just to the west of the Sector Plan area is the five-acre Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park, which is part of the Little Falls watershed. The Town of Somerset owns the wooded watershed area to the northeast, and the Town has recreational facilities adjacent to Warwick Place. Farther north (just south of the Bethesda CBD), Norwood Local Park connects with Little Falls Branch Park, which in turn has links to the Capital Crescent Trail. On the east side of Wisconsin Avenue, Chevy Chase Village has several small open spaces and the private Chevy Chase Country Club golf course provides an oasis of green.

There are also recreation facilities and programs for residents of the Sector Plan area. In addition to Hubert Humphrey Park, the Friendship Heights Village Center contains a library and meeting rooms of various sizes and provides a variety of programs open to the public. Each of the high-rise



**Table 6  
Existing Apartment & Condominium Recreational Facilities**

| Building Name   | # of Units | Swim Pools | Tennis Courts                  | Exercise Room/Gym   | Meeting/Party Room  | Other Facilities        |
|---|------------|------------|--------------------------------|---|---------------------|-------------------------|
| The Irene<br>4701 Willard Avenue                            | 525        | 2          | 2                              | yes   | 75 x 120 s.f.       | no                      |
| North Park Avenue<br>4615 North Park Avenue                 | 310        | 1          | no                             | yes   | no                  | no                      |
| Highland House<br>5480 Wisconsin Avenue                     | 391        | 1          | no                             | no  | no                  | no                      |
| Highland House West<br>4450 South Park Avenue               | 308        | 1          | no                             | no  | no                  | no                      |
| The Willoughby<br>4515 Willard Avenue                       | 815        | 2          | no                             | yes   | 99 person capacity  | 1 sundeck<br>2 saunas   |
| The Carleton<br>4550 North Park Avenue                      | 149        | 1          | no                             | yes   | 49 person capacity  | 2 saunas<br>1 card room |
| The Elizabeth<br>4601 North Park Avenue                     | 353        | 1          | no                             | yes   | 49 person capacity  | 2 saunas<br>1 library   |
| 4620 North Park Avenue                                      | 293        | 1          | no                             | yes   | 100 person capacity | 1 library<br>2 saunas   |
| Somerset House<br>I and II Complex<br>5555 Wisconsin Avenue | 307        | 2          | 3<br>+2 racquet<br>ball courts | Separate Recreation Center with several meeting/<br>party rooms totaling 150 person capacity; aerobics<br>room; billiard room; plus hobby and tv rooms.<br>Each condo building also has a party room. |                     |                         |

Source: Montgomery County Planning Department

apartment buildings in the Village of Friendship Heights and the Somerset House complex has interior recreation facilities for the use of its residents. (See Table 6.) Though the two Somerset House towers, built within the last decade, are surrounded by open space, the older apartment buildings in the Village are for the most part built to the lot line and provide few visible exterior amenities.

## **FUTURE NEED**

County standards provide a preliminary guide for determining the need for additional parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities in the Sector Plan area. One set of standards is the Guidelines for Recreational Amenities in Residential Developments. The existing high-rise apartments, taken as a whole, appear to meet the standards, based on the recreational facilities they include for use of their residents. But because the facilities are interior to the buildings, they do not add to the ambience of the area. A site plan review today for a project comparable to any of these apartment buildings would require more exterior open space. The Plan identifies opportunities to provide additional open space within the Village of Friendship Heights.

The Guidelines for Recreational Amenities will apply to the proposed residential development on the GEICO site. The Plan designates the general location for some of these amenities, to be detailed later at site plan review.

The *Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan* sets standards for facilities County-wide. There is a greater need for local park ballfields than for any other recreation facility. Bethesda-Chevy Chase currently has the highest need for ballfields in the County, and the need will continue to be high through the year 2010. According to the 1997 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan, in 1995 there was a need for 9 ballfields; in 2000 the need will be 14, and in 2010 it will be 16. It is difficult to extrapolate guidance on providing ballfields in a small compact area of higher density like the sector plan areas. Given the need and the available space, it does not appear that a significant portion of the need for ballfields can be met in the Friendship Heights sector of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Planning area.

State and County environmental policies also recommend creation of a system of greenways. Greenways are linear open spaces set aside for recreation and conservation uses. Greenways link people, communities, and the natural environment. The greenway concept is not a discrete regulatory or land acquisition program. It is a unifying approach to use existing park acquisition, regulatory, and voluntary programs to create a network of green spaces that will protect wildlife habitats and provide links for human or animal movement throughout the state. Greenways can be on public or private lands; private land in greenways may be protected through a conservation easement.

Wherever possible, trails and bikeways are planned to provide connections between neighborhoods, commercial areas, and workplaces as well as between other parts of the County and the region. Often, publicly owned land in greenways provides vital links in an interconnected transportation network that encourages alternative modes of transportation and knits communities together.



## OBJECTIVES:

Provide parks and open spaces at a variety of scales to meet the recreational needs of residents, create community gathering spaces, and protect environmental resources.

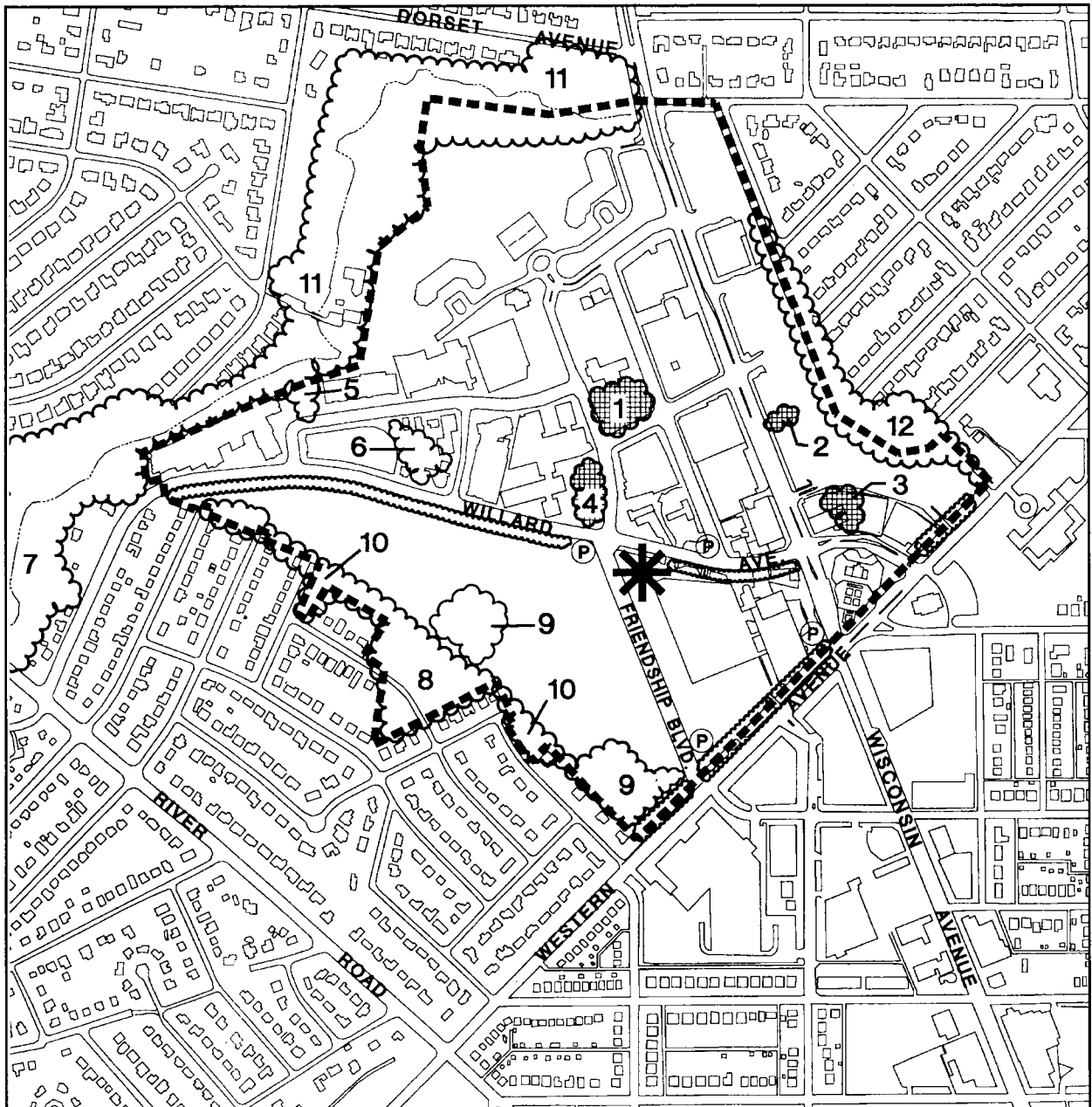
Develop a local system of greenways that connects to a regional system for recreation, linkage, and buffering between residential and commercial uses, water quality, and habitat protection.






## RECOMMENDATIONS: (See Figure 44.)


- **Create a major public park, a “Commons” or “Green” on the Hecht’s site near the Willard Avenue/Friendship Boulevard intersection.**

This park, approximately one acre in size, should be provided as part of redevelopment of the Hecht’s site. It will offer residents and employees a green refuge from concrete and asphalt. The park should include an open grass area and shade trees, as well as seating areas, paths, special paving, lighting, and other features such as fountains and art work. This major gathering place for the community should accommodate a range of activities from concerts and festivals to outdoor dining, strolling, and people watching. Adjacent land uses such as restaurants, cafes, and a residential building will draw people to the park. Space should be provided for a community center either in a free-standing building within the park or in a building next to the park. If the Hecht’s site is not developed as one parcel, a public use space that achieves Plan objectives in a different location from that of the park described above could be considered at the time of the project plan. (See Figure 45.)

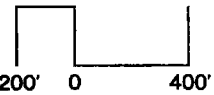
- **Create new urban parks or plazas in the following locations:**
  - *The Chevy Chase Land Company site between the new buildings along Wisconsin Avenue and between existing and new sections of the Chevy Chase Center.* These parks or plazas will be created as part of redevelopment of this site. They should be lively places incorporating outdoor cafes, retail entrances, seating areas, shade trees, special paving, lighting, and other features such as fountains and art work. (See Figure 46.)
  - *The Barlow property on the northwest corner of the Friendship Boulevard/Willard Avenue intersection.* This space (parcel 14) will be developed by the Barlow Corporation as part of an approved site plan. It is designed to have a passive character, with quiet areas for sitting, paths for strolling, trees and decorative plantings, and public art.



|   |  |   |                           |
|---|--|---|---------------------------|
|    | <b>MAJOR PUBLIC PARK</b>                 |  | <b>NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS</b> |
|    | <b>URBAN PARKS AND PLAZAS</b>            |  | <b>GREENWAYS</b>          |
| 1. Hubert Humphrey (existing)   |  | 5. Page (existing)  |                           |
| 2. Chevy Chase Land   |  | 6. Parcel 6   |                           |
| 3. Chevy Chase Center (See text)  |  | 7. Willard Avenue (existing)  |                           |
| 4. Barlow   |  | 8. Brookdale (existing: leased from GEICO)  |                           |
|   |  | 9. Two New Open Spaces  |                           |
|  P | <b>PROMENADES AND SMALL PARKS/PLAZAS</b> | 10. Brookdale/GEICO   |                           |
|   |  | 11. Little Falls Stream Valley (existing)   |                           |
|   |  | 12. Chevy Chase (expanded)  |                           |



**North**



200' 0 400'

## MAJOR PUBLIC PARK ON THE HECHT'S SITE

FIGURE 45

This concept sketch shows the proposed park with an open lawn, shade trees, benches, cafe, and entrance to a community center.



# URBAN PARK ON THE CHEVY CHASE LAND COMPANY SITE

FIGURE 46

This concept sketch shows the proposed park between three-story retail/office buildings on Wisconsin Avenue.



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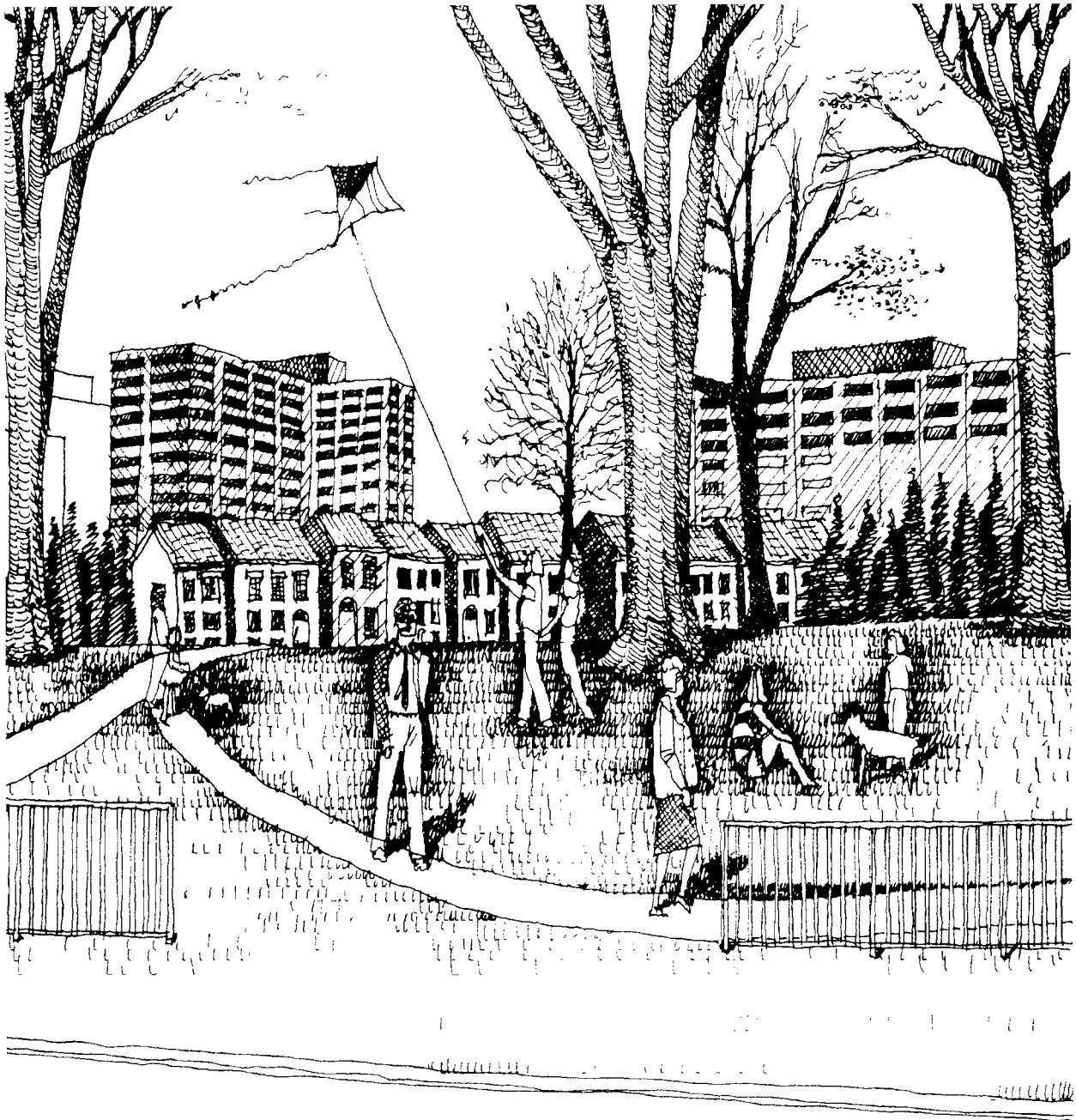
- **Complement the proposed Urban Boulevard on Wisconsin Avenue and Promenades on Willard and Western Avenues with small urban parks, plazas, or green areas provided as part of redevelopment of the Barlow, Hecht's, and GEICO sites in the following locations:**
  - Willard Avenue between The Hills Plaza and Wisconsin Avenue on the Barlow property (parcel 9B).
  - The Wisconsin Avenue/Western Avenue corner of the Hecht's site.
  - The Friendship Boulevard/Western Avenue corner of the Hecht's site.
  - The Friendship Boulevard/Willard Avenue corner of the GEICO site.
  
- **Provide for neighborhood parks in the following locations:**
  - *Parcel 6, within the Village of Friendship Heights.* This park could be created by land exchange, public acquisition, and/or private contribution of some of the lots. Alternatively, the park could be the amenity space of an optional method project on an assembled set of lots. The park should be designed for the quiet enjoyment of adjacent residents and for visual relief from the surrounding high-rise buildings. The design should retain existing trees where appropriate and take advantage of the site's topography.
  
  - *The site of the existing Brookdale Park.* Currently leased from GEICO, this park should be dedicated to M-NCPPC as part of development on the GEICO site. It will be part of the greenway discussed below. (See Figure 47.)
  
  - *Two new open spaces on the GEICO site: one to the north of Brookdale Park and one along Western Avenue.* The uses should be determined by the Planning Board at the time of the development plan for the GEICO site. A ballfield for youths 12 and under, or other active recreational uses, may be appropriate for one or both sites. Until the Planning Board makes a final determination regarding use, adequate space should be reserved at the open space adjacent to Brookdale Park for a Little League-size field and at the Western Avenue site for a junior/practice size field. Once the Planning Board has made a determination regarding the appropriate use(s) for the sites, it should also determine whether one or both sites should be dedicated or privately owned and maintained. It is contemplated that at least one of the sites would be dedicated. (See Figures 33 and 34.)
  
- **Designate greenways, in a variety of ownerships, in the following locations:**
  - *Along the boundary between the proposed residential development on the GEICO property and the existing Brookdale community.* This greenway should include a Class I bikeway, which meanders through the park. It should accommodate the recreational needs of the new residential community on the GEICO site, complementing the Brookdale Neighborhood Park.



# BROOKDALE PARK

FIGURE 47

This sketch shows the neighborhood park with proposed townhouses, office building, and existing apartment buildings.





- *Along the Little Falls stream valley, between the Town of Somerset and the Friendship Heights Sector Plan area, connecting to Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park.*
- *Along the unbuilt right-of-way east of the Chevy Chase Land Company parking lot. This greenway would include enhanced plantings on the Chevy Chase Land Company property east of the existing wall and the planted area in Chevy Chase Village. It should include a Class I bikeway.*

## **C. STORMWATER MANAGEMENT**

Friendship Heights is intensely developed. It was developed at a time before environmental controls were in place and, as a result, the natural environment is seriously impaired in Friendship Heights and in the entire Little Falls watershed. As the area redevelops, the environmental goal is to restore as much of the natural environment as possible, especially in terms of watershed management.

The resilience of natural resources varies, based on environmental characteristics, the degree of disturbance, the effectiveness of mitigation, and other factors. Development patterns in various areas of the County also differ. According to County policy, development is generally concentrated in areas served by public infrastructure and otherwise limited to preserve agriculture, open space, and sensitive areas.

A County-wide Stream Protection Strategy (CSPS) assesses stream quality throughout all the County watersheds, assigning management categories and tools and setting priorities for watershed preservation, protection, and restoration. The CSPS defines watershed management categories based on the existing stream resource condition, existing and planned land uses in the watersheds, and the types of management tools available to protect or restore each watershed. The CSPS provides a consistent process for identifying stream preservation, protection, and restoration needs County-wide. The Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the M-NCPPC cooperated to draft the initial CSPS and will continue to refine the report and the priority rankings as new stream quality data becomes available. This strategy is closely tied to the County's biological monitoring program and will be updated on a regular basis to incorporate new monitoring results.

The CSPS designates the Little Falls upper mainstem (which encompasses all of Friendship Heights) as a Watershed Restoration Area. Much of the Little Falls watershed, developed prior to requirements for environmental controls, now suffers from degradation caused by development throughout the watershed, including intense development in the Sector Plan area. Approximately 31 percent of the major stream segments have been channelized or piped, primarily in the upper part of the watershed. This alteration of the watershed results in increased water runoff velocities and exacerbates downstream erosion and, in some places, stream migration. The in-stream biological community is also extremely impaired, indicating a high level of pollution in the stream.

There are two areas in Friendship Heights where the effects of uncontrolled stormwater runoff are particularly evident. The first is behind The Irene and North Park Avenue apartments. At the narrowest point, only 120 feet separate houses in Somerset on one side of the stream from The Irene on the other. If this area were developed under current environmental guidelines, the minimum distance would be 200 feet. This situation leaves little room for stream migration, a factor that is accelerated and intensified by high stormwater volumes. In this area, the stream is continuing to move toward Friendship Heights. Erosion poses a potential threat to any pathway and to the apartment buildings.

The second location where uncontrolled water runoff is evident is at the confluence of Jenifer Run and Little Falls near the entrance to Willard Avenue Park, next to The Irene Apartments. The force of stormwater at this confluence has resulted in severe bank erosion, undercutting several large trees.

Land use decisions will have a limited effect on water quality within the Little Falls watershed. Redevelopment, however, may present opportunities for additional stormwater management. As new development or redevelopment takes place, regular environmental protection measures will be employed, resulting in improvements in runoff conditions from these areas. At a comprehensive level, the County's efforts will focus on restoration, given the existing conditions. Public funding may be used to supplement required private stormwater management facilities to address impacts from existing development upstream.

The CSPS identifies the Little Falls upper mainstem as a priority watershed. The Department of Environmental Protection is currently in the process of developing an action plan for the Little Falls Watershed, based on a comprehensive assessment of watershed conditions and problems. It is anticipated that this action plan will refine the management strategies indicated in the CSPS, including stream restoration and pollution control. It will also identify stormwater management needs and opportunities to mitigate the impacts of existing development and future redevelopment.

State and local regulations require that on-site stormwater controls be addressed. Types of controls include but are not limited to infiltration, flow and pollutant attenuation, on-site retention, detention through underground storage pipes, and any combination of these methods that is appropriate.

The existing stormwater management regulations currently have provisions that allow waivers of on-site stormwater management controls. These waivers have at times been granted in urbanized areas such as the Friendship Heights CBD because of site constraints, high cost of underground storage facilities, and a storm drain network that conveys runoff to the receiving stream. However, the Department of Permitting Services will consider both on-site and off-site stormwater quality and quantity controls for redeveloping areas.



### **OBJECTIVES:**

Use current environmental requirements to mitigate effects of any new development or redevelopment.

Implement restoration programs through DEP and other agencies, with citizen participation, to address the lack of adequate stormwater management and water quality protection in the upper Little Falls watershed.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **Design redevelopment sites to minimize impervious surface area and maximize landscape plantings.**
- **Require new development and redevelopment to provide on-site water quality and quantity controls, where site conditions permit, and safe conveyance of stormwater runoff to the receiving stream, or direct runoff to suitable off-site facilities.**
- **Ensure strict adherence to the guidelines adopted in *Environmental Management of Development in Montgomery County*.**
- **Support DEP's efforts to locate specific sites for stormwater management retrofits, water quality controls, and stream bank stabilization projects.**

## **D. AIR QUALITY**

Although there are various forms of air pollution, the major health concern in this region is exposure to ground level ozone. Ozone is formed in the atmosphere when exhaust emissions and sunlight react under certain conditions. The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 require regional consideration of air quality. The Washington Metropolitan Statistical Area, which includes Montgomery County, does not meet the federal standards for ozone and is considered a non-attainment area. Carbon monoxide exposure at "hot spots" has been a localized health problem. Carbon monoxide pollution has been substantially reduced as a result of cleaner burning fuels. The major approach to achieving better air quality is now shifting to reducing ozone on a regional level.

The General Plan clearly recognizes the need to address air quality issues by concentrating development in areas served by public infrastructure and transit. The recommended land use pattern of Friendship Heights reflects this policy direction. Other pollution-reduction strategies used throughout the County include promotion of transit, mandatory trip mitigation measures, cluster and mixed-use developments, and high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. Reduction of emissions from single-occupant vehicle travel is a main focus of the County's ozone control efforts

in regard to land use. It is also a transportation objective of this Sector Plan. The approach taken in the Plan is to emphasize the location of new development near transit, to improve access to transit, and to promote cycling and walking through an enhanced bikeway and pedestrian network.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

Reduce ozone pollution in Friendship Heights through participation in regional efforts to reduce emissions of volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides.

Improve air quality by encouraging walking, cycling, and use of transit in existing development and redevelopment.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **Pursue land use policies that locate mixed land uses near transit stops.**
- **Provide strong incentives to encourage the use of alternatives to single-occupant vehicle travel.**
- **Maintain pedestrian and bicycle access to transit stops, community retail centers, and employment areas.**

## **E. NOISE**

In Montgomery County, government agencies have the authority to control two of the most prevalent types of noise, stationary and mobile sources. The Montgomery County Noise Ordinance regulates stationary noise sources such as heating and air-conditioning units, construction activity, and neighborhood noise annoyances. The Montgomery County Planning Board, through master plan and regulatory review of plans, addresses the need to protect residential properties from mobile source noise such as from automobiles.

The Planning Board noise guidelines identify several measures to alleviate traffic noise problems, including:

- Noise-compatible land use
- Distancing the receiver from the source
- Blocking the path from source to receiver
- Sensitive site design
- Acoustical treatment of buildings.

These are typically applied at the time of subdivision. At the development stage, noise attenuation measures, site design standards, or acoustical treatment of the affected structures would be implemented to meet the goals within the guidelines.



**OBJECTIVE:**

Minimize noise impacts on existing development and redevelopment.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- **Support noise-compatible site design for new development and redevelopment within the noise impact areas along major roads (Wisconsin Avenue and Western Avenue.)**