A Once & Future County:
How planning politics shaped Montgomery County
100 years of development
In 5 easy doses

Nov. 12: Planners, politicians and how we got this way

Dec. 10: Retrofitting the suburbs: Friendship Heights to White Flint

Jan. 14: Trials & Errors of Corridor City Planning

Feb. 11: Creating and Sustaining the Agricultural Reserve

Mar. 11: Hunting the Snark: Growth Policy & the Public Interest
Planners and Politicians and How We Got This Way
Everything has to happen somewhere

That makes planning useful

Nothing happens by itself

That makes politics necessary
Planning politics combines 2 ways of thinking:

- Planners’ Logic of Consequentiality (Rational Method)
- Politicians’ Logic of Appropriateness (Garbage Can)

and competing values & interests of 2 virtual republics:

- Commercial Republic
- Miniature Republic
Governing Regimes
shape the character of planning politics
and the county’s development pattern

4 regimes have governed Montgomery County
The Lee Regime – 1918-1958 – and the Commercial Republic

The automobile made suburban living feasible. Sewers made it possible. E. Brooke Lee made it happen.

Basis of the regime: Unity of Public & Private Sectors
Democratic Party Organization
Bi-County Commissions
Diffused Government; Centralized Power

Accomplishments:
Suburban Growth: 35,000-341,000
East-West Highway
Stream valley parks
Federal Agencies

The Charter Movement: from consumers to citizens

Civic Federation and League of Women Voters

Loses fight to control planning
Builders & Bar Regime—1950-1970

Basis of the regime:

Merchant Builders & Land Use Bar

Commercial Republic’s 2nd growth machine

The CAP Council’s zoning binge

Floating Zones

The 1964 General Plan
Bartholomew Draft of the General Plan

Freeways

Corridor Cities

Year 2000 Plan
On Wedges and Corridors: The 1964 General Plan

Wedges, per Elston’s Thumb

Corridor Cities

Freeways
The Progressive Vanguard

The Scull Coalition: 1967-68

Scull & 3 Democrats

Achievements

Updated General Plan

Zoning Hearing Examiner

Metro alignment & stations
Council-approved General Plan 1969

- Clarksburg
- Satellite Communities
  - Damascus
  - Olney
- No Cor. City
The Progressive Regime 1970-1986

Regime Base:

County Council/Planning Board
Liberal Precincts/Miniature Republics

Managed Growth: consequentiality = appropriate

Sector Plans for Metro, CBDs
Area Master Plans + SMAs
Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance
Moderate Priced Dwelling Units Law
Agricultural Reserve
Historic Preservation
Growth Policy
The Pure Political Regime –1986-

No stable governing coalition
- Independent political actors
- No stable components
- Shifts from Commercial to Miniature republics

Achievements
- Road Wars—from ICC to BRT
- Silver Spring Revitalization
- Legacy Open Space
- Clarksburg
- White Flint
- Zoning Code Revision
Planners and Politicians play distinct roles

Structure matters

Autonomy, Authority, & Accountability

The Board’s role:

Policy initiative using the Logic of Consequentiality

The Council’s Role:

Policy adaptation, using the Logic of Appropriateness
Reconcile Interests, values of Commercial & Miniature Republics
The Rules of Engagement in Planning Politics

Welcome to Montgomery County, where process is our most important product

1. Everyone gets into the act
2. Participants are due a lot of process
3. The price of consent is advice by committee
4. Land use decisions are public and openly made
5. Every decision requires expert analysis
6. Master Plans are sacred
7. Litigation is planning by other means
Lessons

Logics & Roles of Politicians and Planners were complementary

Autonomy of planning was critical to policy initiation & success

Balancing the two republics was the essence of planning politics

Participation in planning built civic capital

Legitimacy required extensive process