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Chapter 1:  
**Introduction**

# 1.1 How to Use the Guidelines

## **Purpose**

One of the main goals of the Rock Spring and White Flint 2 Sector Plans (plans) is to promote the transformation of auto-oriented, single-use areas into vibrant, mixed-use places served by a variety of transportation alternatives. Design guidelines illustrate appropriate relationships between buildings and the pedestrian realm, and ensure that walking, biking and transit are incorporated into the design of streets. They also show ways of minimizing any adverse impacts of redevelopment on surrounding lower-scale residential neighborhoods.

New development in the plan areas should enhance the quality of life for existing and future residents and workers in the area. These guidelines help to achieve that goal by providing clarity and certainty for stakeholders in illustrating how key properties within the two plan areas may develop over time.

## **Applicability**

This document should be used in conjunction with recommendations in the Rock Spring and White Flint 2 Sector Plans to guide development projects and improvements to the public domain within the two plan areas. Standard Method and Optional Method projects under Site Plan review should substantially conform with the goals and recommendations of the sector plans and design guidelines.

## **Guidelines Flexibility**

Design guidelines provide a range of strategies to appropriately meet the intent of recommendations of both plans. They are not rigid requirements, but offer predictability for applicants about what will be expected during development review and provide Montgomery Planning staff and the Planning Board with a framework to guide the review process. Design proposals and alternative solutions will be evaluated during the development review process based on the surrounding context, site conditions, programmatic considerations of a particular use and ways in which the projects address applicable plan goals and the intent of the design guidelines.

## **Design Excellence**

Montgomery Planning's Design Excellence program was established in 2015 to encourage the creation of attractive, safe and sustainable places in the county to live, work and play. The Rock Spring and White Flint 2 plan areas are experiencing considerable growth and complex projects with architectural significance are being developed within their boundaries. Developers working within the two plan areas are strongly encouraged to go through the Concept Plan process and have an early meeting with Planning staff to ensure the best outcomes for their proposals.

In 2017, the Montgomery County Planning Department created a Design Advisory Panel (DAP) to review and provide direction to the Planning Director and staff on Bethesda development applications submitted to the Planning Department. The goals of the DAP are to ensure the highest quality design for the planned and built environments. This panel helps to resolve issues that arise during the regulatory process, particularly when urban design principles conflict with other county regulations, by providing review and discussion early in the process. In addition, the

DAP prioritizes public benefit points in Commercial Residential (CR) zones based on the CR Guidelines and the applicable plan.

Given the large scale of development projects within the Rock Spring and White Flint 2 plan areas, it may be beneficial for those responsible for the projects to request a courtesy review from the DAP. While this process is not a prerequisite for regulatory review, it is being offered by the Planning Department as a way for developers to receive objective feedback from industry professionals, potentially streamlining resolution of design issues and making subsequent regulatory reviews more efficient. This review will also ensure a focus on design excellence. These guidelines, therefore, state that any project developer working within the two plan areas may request a courtesy review from the DAP. The DAP will be guided by the applicable plan, accompanying design guidelines and the CR zone criteria in its reviews.

## Structure of the document

The urban design guidelines are organized into five chapters as follows:

### Introduction:

Describes the purpose of the document and how to use these guidelines.

### Vision:

Provides an overall context for the two plan areas, summarizes the vision set forth by the two plans and outlines general recommendations that apply to both plan areas.

### Guidelines for Rock Spring:

Outlines recommendations for the three districts within the Rock Spring Sector Plan area and provides more detailed guidance for the design of buildings, open spaces and streets within key properties. Cross sections are provided for all streets within the plan area to illustrate the expected design of the right-of-way.

### Guidelines for White Flint 2:

Outlines recommendations for the four districts within the White Flint 2 Sector Plan area and provides more detailed guidance for the design of buildings, open spaces and streets within key properties. Cross sections are provided for all streets within the plan area to illustrate the expected design of right-of-way.

### Community Led Placemaking:

Contains detailed information and resources for pursuing community-led placemaking projects within the two plan areas and beyond their borders.

## For development projects:

### 1. General Guidance

Consult Chapter 1 for urban design principles guiding the overall layout of streets, buildings and open spaces.



### 2. Site and Building Guidelines

Consult chapter 2 or 3 for the applicable master or sector plan that provides guidance for:

- Streetscape dimensions for all streets.
- Urban design guidance for districts within each plan area.
- Guidance for key properties that outline recommended circulation, open space design and building form.



### 3. Community Led Placemaking

Consult Chapter 5 to explore potential for Community Led Placemaking opportunities on the particular site.



### 4. Regulatory Review

Submit application for review by the Design Advisory Panel and the applicable regulatory processes.