

## Historic Research – Montgomery County General Plans

### 1964 General Plan

All policies and plans within Montgomery County are guided by the foundations laid in the General Plan. As the General Plan is updated, plans for communities, resources, and facilities become more refined in order to reflect the growing county. From the perspective of Design, Arts, and Culture, a review of previous versions of the General Plan can provide a basis for framing thoughts for Thrive Montgomery 2050. Through gaining an understanding of the original policies and the resulting impacts, it becomes possible to make an informed assessment on where the county stands regarding cultural spaces. In the 1964 plan and its updates, cultural facilities were regarded in terms of open space and public facilities. Planning focused on the arrangement of these facilities within developments. Specifically, cluster development and Greenbelts were cited.

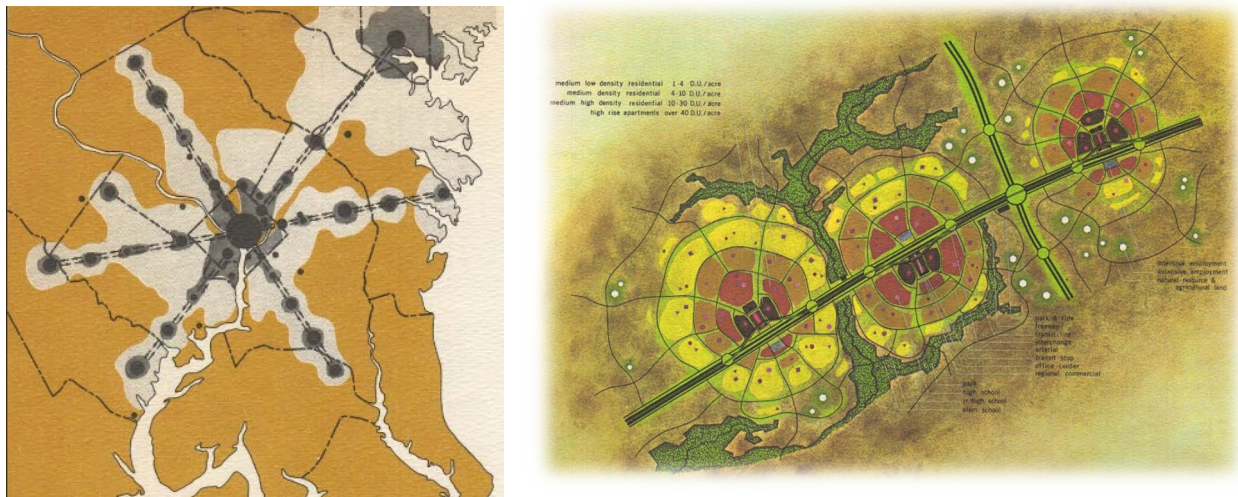
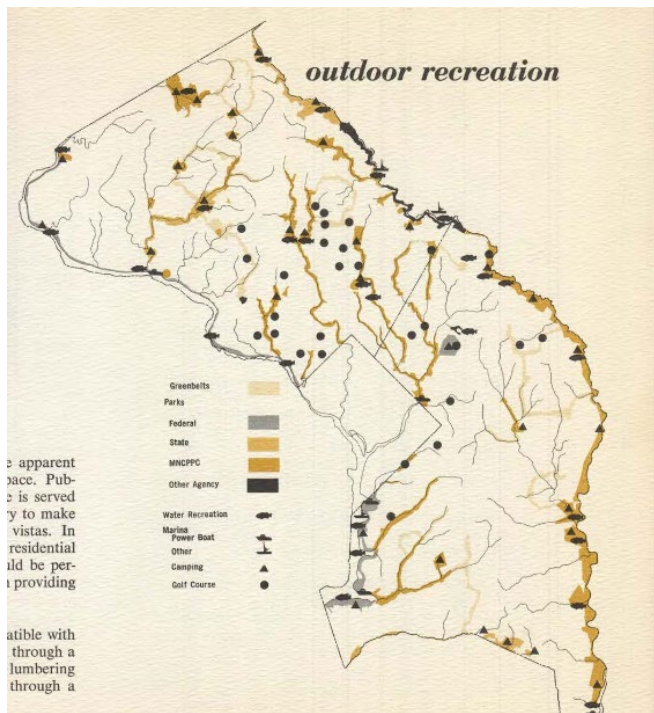


Figure 1: (left) Figure 2 (right) – Depict regional and local scale growth patterns as shown in the 1964 General Plan.

Cluster developments were posited as the foundation of community organization. Home to varied building types with retail, job centers, and “cultural facilities”, the radiating cluster development model was envisioned to provide an area of centralized growth with larger areas on the outer rings.

Beyond this, Greenbelts were mentioned within the 1964 plan to separate uses. Through discrete areas established as “new towns” and developments, the plan proposed the inclusion of elements such as zoos, botanic gardens, and museums as “cultural elements [that serve] as identity drivers”. These cultural facilities, which were not described as either public or privately funded, would be framed within new areas of development by tree rows and parklike, natural land, according to the plan.

Within this General Plan, specific strategies were also identified in order to promote the development of suburbs. The plan recommended maintaining large open space areas in and near urban areas, establishing outdoor recreation within public and private lands, and providing local and regional parks in order to fill in any gaps. These efforts were aided by guidelines which aimed to “give priority consideration to unique natural areas”. These areas included scenic vistas, agricultural land to be preserved, and “cultural and historic sites”. Additionally, the plan included a deliberate goal to integrate parks and recreational facilities with schools and other cultural activities. This was said to “ensure optimum cultural, social, education, and recreational opportunities.”



## 1993 General Plan Refinement

The 1993 plan stated:

*Community Identity and Design was not an explicit goal in the 1964 and 1969 General Plans, although both concepts were implicit throughout the Plans.*

Although identity was not a specific goal in the past, the 1993 plan contained some strategies built on these precedents from the 1964 plan while also establishing new concepts, including goals specific to identity and culture.

For example, the 1993 plan included provisions to preserve cultural landmarks and use local place names for public spaces and buildings such as post offices and schools in an effort to reinforce



community awareness of historic elements. This movement, specifically laid out in the general plan, helped to further establish a cultural base in the county.

Strathmore Hall Community Arts Center.



Great Falls Tavern.



Further, the 1993 plan also included a provision to “Promote art and cultural opportunities at appropriate public and private locations.” This marks a change from cultural efforts being largely historic or recreational, to the inclusion of art and programs as well.

The 1993 plan also took stock of where we tended to gather and interact. It identified government centers, schools, libraries, religious buildings, rec centers, and shopping centers as common meeting points. It was also noted that while shopping centers bring many people together, little interaction occurs there. In 1986, the county established Urban Districts (including Bethesda, Silver Spring, and Wheaton) to enhance public amenities, program activities, and promote commercial and residential interest.

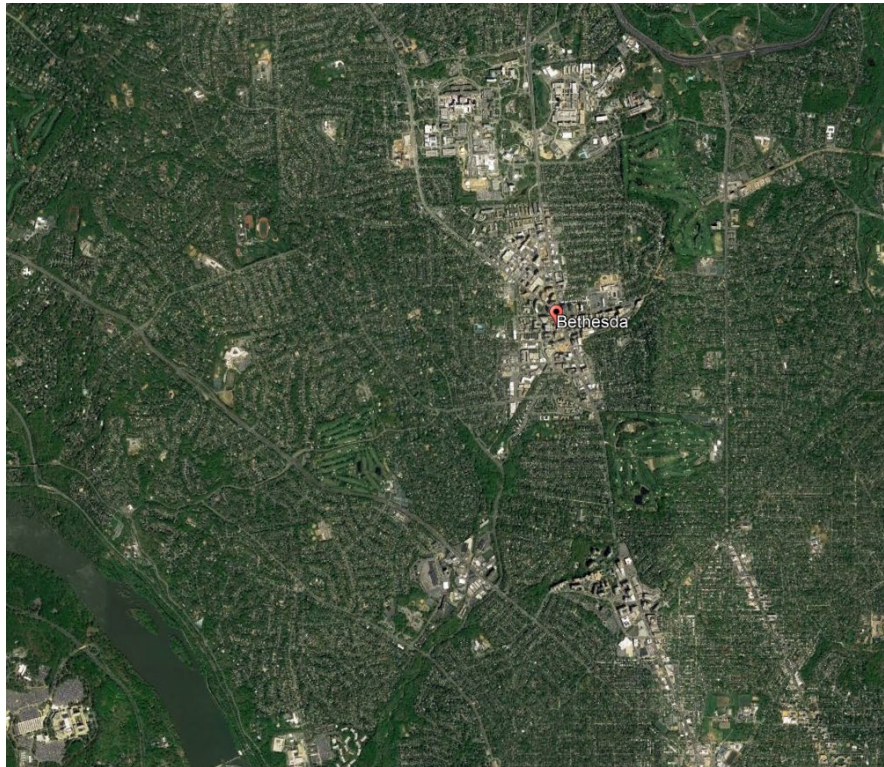
In non-urban areas, the plan established small parks, and community events to offset the lack of focal points. In addition to focal points, the plan also called for preservation within corridors through the consideration of scenic vistas as well as natural/agricultural land.

Through methods of historic preservation and promotion of art in public spaces, General Plans of the past aimed to build or enhance neighborhood identity. The overall idea here seemed to be keying in on the historic identity of place or establishing one through appropriate facilities be it open space or public facilities such as community centers. Following this review of what was envisioned and planned, it is also important to look at what resulted in order to guide the direction of the 2021 General Plan.

## Historic Research – Montgomery County General Plans

### ***Evaluation - How successfully have we met the visions of previous General Plans?***

The plan proposed a vision of the future that accounted for its growing population with an array of public facilities to encourage a sense of community and identity within each community. In reviewing the results of the cited guidelines, we can better understand how the county has been shaped by its previous plans.



- Cluster Development in Montgomery County (Bethesda)





- Preserved open space and historic sites



- Integrated parks and rec facilities with schools and other cultural activities





- Communities and centers that are functional, attractive, safe, and highly accessible.



- Promote art and cultural opportunities at appropriate public and private locations.

## Looking Forward

There are examples throughout the county of how planning goals have been brought to life over the past 50+ years. Guidelines from the previous iterations of the General Plan have resulted in many of the guiding principles coming to fruition, as shown above. Although we have seen growth in the prescribed areas (parks, historic and agricultural lands, urban districts), in looking to the future it will also be helpful to explore where Design Arts and Culture have expressed themselves in unexpected ways.

An overview of the unconventional developments and how it has been embraced by residents illustrates the need for flexibility within future plans. When able to respond to and aid in public excitement, Montgomery County has enabled many unique experiences to become emblematic representations of all that it has to offer. From innovative usage of historic and agricultural lands to street closures for parades and pedestrian exploration, the ways in which planning efforts can aid in the organic growth of cultural experiences is evident in its residents and visitors.



- Design, Arts, and Culture - In underused private spaces (Arts on the Block)





- Design, Arts, and Culture - Streets as extensions to town centers (Ellsworth Drive, Silver Spring. Middle Lane, Rockville.)





- Design, Ars, and Culture - Within the Ag Reserve (Rocklands Farm & Winery)



- Design, Ars, and Culture – Within Preserved Historic Places (Glen Echo)