

# Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan

## Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC)

### Agenda

Friday, September 11, 2020 (Virtual Meeting) Notes to be Taken by Jack Alexander

- I. STREETERIES AND WINTER PLANS (Stephanie Coppola, BUP) (10 minutes)
- II. 4702 CHEVY CHASE DRIVE (Pat Harris, Winthrop Group) (20 minutes)
- III. THRIVE MONTGOMERY 2050/BETHESDA (Khalid Afzal, Carrie McCarthy, Planning Department) (45 minutes)
- IV. NEW BUSINESS (as needed to close of meeting)
- V. NEXT MEETING – Friday, October 2, 2020

## **Meeting Notes and Attendees:**

The meeting was called to order at 8:05 AM.

### **Streeteries and Winter Plans**

Presenter: Stephanie Coppola, BUP

The Bethesda “streeteries,” outside eating areas in the streets, were opened on June 10 at Bethesda Row (on Woodmont Avenue) and in the Woodmont Triangle (on Norfolk and Cordell). The streeteries are generally at capacity on Fridays and Saturdays, and have received positive feedback from residents. There was great attendance at the start, then it dipped slightly in late July and August when people were on vacation. BUP hopes to keep the streeteries open through October (weather will be determinative). BUP would like to have the streeteries open again in the spring in partnership with the county.

At both locations, the streeteries provide a place to eat meals picked up at carry-out. At Woodmont Triangle areas are open to patrons of all restaurants with no wait staff service. At Bethesda Row areas are designated for specific restaurants and some offer wait staff service.

BUP hopes for spring to work on a more permanent streeteries arrangement but that requires funding. As for winter, BUP has had discussions with restaurant owners about outdoor heaters for the colder weather, but expense is an issue.

### **4702 Chevy Chase Drive**

Presenters: Pat Harris (Lerch, Early)  
Winthrop Group – Hans Schmidt, Max Gross  
Lessard Design – Luz Del Mar Rosado, Ricardo Tovar

The property at 4702 Chevy Chase Drive is zoned CR 1.5. No commercial space is proposed here. The proposal goes to the DRC the week of September 14. The project has already gone to the DAP, and there has been outreach to the neighbors on Nottingham and to the owners of condominium units in the building to the west.

The building fronts on Chevy Chase Drive and Nottingham. The basement will house a two-level garage. The building complies with the design guidelines, but massing and articulation continue to be refined. The building will have 70 condominium units, with the main entrance to the building, and the garage entrance, on Chevy Chase Drive. The trash pick-up area will be completely enclosed, and entrance to this, too, will be from Chevy Chase Drive; the trash area

will not be exposed to area pedestrians. An easement on the east side of the building precludes building on that space. The ground-level residences on that side will have outdoor patios, and there will be a through-block connection (between Nottingham and Chevy Chase Drive). There will be some residential entrances and patios on the Nottingham side to give the Nottingham facade a look more in keeping with the street's single-family homes. The loading area will be concealed within the building.

The building will have several levels facing Nottingham, conforming to zoning requirements for a CR structure confronting single-family homes, and a step-back on Chevy Chase Drive. The design is described as simple and elegant, with light and dark contrasts. There will be large windows on the ground floor, and a unique pedestrian entry at the corner with a canopy. Balconies, terraces, and a combination of materials are contemplated. The presenters showed a conceptual elevation of the building and possible landscapes.

Regarding the mid-block connection, Pat Harris explained that the connection was requested by Planning. Although initially Planning contemplated a mid-block connection at the other side of 4720 Chevy Chase Drive, it asked for the connection here because the original site is unlikely to be redeveloped for some time.

IAC Co-Chair (and Chevy Chase West resident) Naomi Spinrad commended the way those involved in the project had worked with neighbors to reach positive resolution of concerns and noted there were some remaining issues to be resolved.

## **Thrive Montgomery 2050**

Presenters: Khalid Afzal (Planning Department)  
Carrie McCarthy (Planning Department)

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is the update to the Montgomery County General Plan. The last major update to the plan was in 1964, with some revisions in 1993. The County now has to adapt to new realities and economic, social, technological, climate, and demographic changes.

The current plan contemplates development along the I-270 corridor. The County now has a web of corridors, not just the one. The County is mostly built out, with 85% constrained and only about 15% vacant land available for development. (The major constraints are residential properties at 36.7%, the Ag Reserve at 23.9%, and parks at 11.3%.) Trends and challenges in the County include sluggish economic growth; increased inequality and segregation; growth in the older adult share of the population; a housing supply that is not meeting demand; a need for regional solutions; and the climate change threat.

Thrive Montgomery seeks three broad outcomes: economic health, community equity, and environmental resilience. Drafters have looked to the Bethesda Downtown Plan and "scaling it up" for other areas. The goal for 2050 is a web of complete communities connected by vibrant

corridors. The key themes are a compact form of development and urbanism; corridors are the place for new growth; planning for people instead of cars; eradicating greenhouse gases; attainable housing for all income levels; evolution of single-family homes near transit (including looking at zoning); racial justice and equity; great design and importance of place; and regional solutions and strategies. Thrive Montgomery is intended to be a guide, not a roadmap, laying out where the County wants to go.

The next steps in the schedule are: delivery of a Working Draft to the Planning Board on September 24; meeting with the Planning Board on October 1; Public Hearing on November 19; Planning Board work sessions in December; and sending to the County Council in April 2021.

Addressing the Covid pandemic, the presenters stated that the pandemic reinforces what they have been thinking, and has accelerated trends already in place. With regard to the negative effect of the pandemic on cities, a look at human history indicates the cities will come back.

When asked how Thrive Montgomery would affect Bethesda, Khalid Afzal responded that the general plan speaks at a “high level policy level” and does not address specific zoning or land use. The plan will generate the need for other studies and plans, and is not designed to “do all the work” on future development. The Red Line, Purple Line, and BRT create corridors for new growth, and near those transit lines planners may decide to explore housing for the “missing middle” to permit building to 5 or 6 stories, and getting away from single-family homes/townhomes. Bethesda is a premier employment center in the County. But Bethesda is not affordable, and it would be a goal to make it more affordable. This could include adding more “missing middle” housing by looking at single-family neighborhoods and adding different building types that might fit into those areas.

In response to a comment that most in the County are not aware of Thrive Montgomery 2050, a question about outreach to residents, and a question about the zoned potential of areas such as White Flint that are not yet built, Khalid Afzal replied that they are finalizing the “Residential Capacity Analysis” and that zoning is not the question. In Bethesda, the zoning is “used up,” but in Wheaton all the CBD density is not used. Development in Wheaton has taken a long time. The zoning capacity in Wheaton is much higher than what the market will support; density is not supported by the rents that can be commanded there. Overall, Montgomery has many places that are currently under-built, now occupied by strip shopping centers and the like, and development is “a complex question.”

Carrie McCarthy discussed community outreach. The outreach effort was launched last summer (summer 2019), with community meetings in the fall announced through digital advertising. In the spring community meetings went all online, with mailers sent out using the County’s community association database; newsletters were also mentioned. Several IAC members commented that although they are board members in their community organizations, they have not been receiving communications related to the plan.

Asked about Bethesda zoning capacity and the number of projects presently on hold, Khalid Afzal responded that they are still looking at that, with information still coming in. He noted, though, that the plan is intended to cover 25 to 30 years, and the drafters do not want to plan based on the expectations of the next 2 to 5 years. They continue to look at the current situation to try to see how it will pan out for the long term. They cannot predict, and are trying to be flexible, using the best knowledge available in planning for the long term.

When asked to confirm that there are no major changes planned for Bethesda, Khalid Afzal responded that the statement is accurate in broad terms. For growth and complete communities, they would not be looking at Bethesda because that was done with the Bethesda Downtown Plan. But in the longer term Planning can be expected to look at making Bethesda more affordable, equity, and corridors, and Bethesda will likely experience more changes over time. He does not know which Master Plans would be affected but cited the example of Silver Spring where Planning is looking at transit-oriented development and expanding the CBD.

IAC members raised the complexity issue, pointing out that the current form of the working draft includes over 200 action items, and the implementation plan has not yet been published, and asking how specific the plan can be expected to be as a guidebook. Khalid Afzal responded that the drafters want to keep the plan at a high level to state a vision, but that if they stay at that very high level they are likely to lose their audience, and noted that it is difficult to plan more specifically even 10 years out. The drafters are trying to strike a balance, giving detail to provide a sense of what comes from the big picture.

Asked the effect of the plan on areas adjacent to the Bethesda CBD, Khalid Afzal responded that the plan will be implemented by amendment to the Master Plan. When asked if the CBD boundaries might be extended to, for example,  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile to  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from the Metro he said he was hesitant to express a view on what the changes might be. He asserted that some changes might be “not significant” in the overall plan, but residents pointed out that changes to the CBD boundary might be very significant to residents. He noted that the plan recommends re-examining zoning within a 15-minute walk to transit, but that any change is left up to subsequent Master Plans. He then expressed that single-family zoning within  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of transit should be examined and that something more intense should be permitted there.

The comment was made that development only around transit is unlikely to get diversity in other neighborhoods, and that the Covid impact may make less dense residential settings more desirable to residents. Infrastructure was also raised, noting that the reliance on transit may not be realistic given the problems of Metro and questions regarding the future of public transit. Khalid Afzal responded that they had talked about these issues internally. The approach of the plan is as a 30-year plan with a goal of complete communities, more amenities and services available nearby so people will travel less, looking at places like Viers Mill, Layhill Road, and New Hampshire Avenue. When it was pointed out that the County has been permitting higher density development such as townhouses in areas that are not readily walkable such as Ashton (limited sidewalks and few or no crosswalks), the presenters agreed that should be looked at because density should be transit oriented. A question was raised

about eastern and upcounty areas, as it appears there is increased interest in living further out (i.e., in less urban areas). Khalid reiterated that the ag reserve is not envisioned for development/redevelopment.

Asked about a return visit once the implementation section was filled out and the working draft public, Khalid suggested coming back in October.

There being no further questions on Thrive Montgomery 2050, the discussion was closed.

## **New Business**

The next meeting will be Friday, October 2, at 8:00 AM.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 AM.

## **Meeting Attendees:**

IAC: Michael Fetchko, Amanda Farber, Joyce Gwadz, Naomi Spinrad (Co-Chair), Susan Wegner, Steve Long

Emily Vaias (Co-Chair), Jad Donohoe, Matt Gordon, Patrick O'Neil, Kristi Smith, Christopher Smith

Bethesda Green: Adam Roberts

4702 Chevy Chase Drive applicant: Ricardo Tovar. Luz Del Mar Rosado, Max Gross, Hans Schmidt, Pat Harris

Chief of Staff, Councilmember Friedson: Cindy Gibson

BUP: Derrick Harrigan

BCC Regional Services: Ken Hartman

Parks and Planning: Stephanie Dickel, Khalid Afzal, Caroline McCarthy, Rachel Newhouse, Hyojung Garland