



February 2023



Wheaton

DOWNTOWN STUDY



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CHAPTER 1

Executive Summary

Introduction

The 2012 *Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan* envisions Wheaton as a major mixed-use center for the Georgia Avenue corridor and eastern Montgomery County, with regional shopping, culturally diverse retail and entertainment, business and government services, and transit-oriented uses. Elements of this vision have advanced over the last decade, further enhancing Wheaton’s strengths. However, the Sector Plan’s overall vision remains unfulfilled, hindered by long-standing challenges, including Wheaton’s auto-oriented character, lack of safe connections for people walking, biking, and rolling, and limited availability of publicly accessible open space.

Since the adoption of the 2012 Plan, subsequent plans, policies, and initiatives have recommended improvements to address these challenges. The following Study presents findings and strategies that build on these efforts and on stakeholder feedback to create steps to advance the physical development of Wheaton, which is essential to further implementation of needed improvements.

Study Purpose

The Wheaton Downtown Study seeks to advance implementation of the 2012 *Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan*. The Study explores how to further Wheaton’s economic diversity by strategically leveraging new investment and economic benefits created by large scale redevelopment, while fostering the successful and entrepreneurial nature of the existing small property owners and businesses interested in evolving and adapting. The Study establishes an urban design framework with near-, mid-, and long-term strategies to create a cohesive downtown that integrates recent development with Wheaton’s small-scale character while meeting the needs and aspirations of small businesses, property owners, and residents of the Wheaton Central Business District.



Study Goals

The Wheaton Downtown Study focuses on the following goals:

- **Evaluate development progress:** Evaluate downtown Wheaton’s development progress to date and identify challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned in furthering the 2012 Sector Plan vision.
- **Promote complete communities:** Explore the adaptive reuse and expansion of existing structures to promote small businesses and job retention and creation, provide services and amenities, and introduce additional residential uses.
- **Improve multimodal safety:** Update the 2002 Wheaton Central Business District Streetscape Standards and establish goals compatible with actual redevelopment opportunities and with Wheaton’s unique character to further Montgomery County’s Vision Zero policy.
- **Establish a fine-grained urban design vision for Wheaton:** Create an urban design development framework that builds on the relationship between redeveloped and adaptively reused properties and focuses on how small-scale redevelopment can help retain Wheaton’s unique character.



Mural Detail, 11301 Georgia Avenue, completed September 2022- Eric B. Ricks, Artist

Study Process

The Wheaton Downtown Study is a product of staff-led research and analysis, community input, and consultant expertise. Staff researched and documented development implemented in the last decade, catalogued recent and anticipated public infrastructure investments, and examined individual properties to identify ownership patterns and opportunities. Staff also engaged property owners, agency partners, community members, and other stakeholders to evaluate the potential for furthering the Sector Plan vision. Consultants for economic analysis (Partners for Economic Solutions) and architectural development (Hord Coplan Macht Architects) were also engaged to work with property owners to evaluate redevelopment potential at jointly owned properties of various sizes.

The economic analysis concluded that while there is sufficient development capacity in the area and the market might evolve to support transformative development in the future, incentives will be needed to spur near- and mid-term redevelopment. The analysis also concluded that in the near-term, strategies to support business retention and improve the public realm would be beneficial to make the area more attractive to future development; case studies are included in their report as examples of how other locations similar to Wheaton have approached this.

Strategies

Based on the staff-led research and analysis, community input, and consultant expertise, the Wheaton Downtown Study includes near-, mid-, and long-term strategies aimed at progressively enhancing the area to support existing businesses and improve the public realm to attract future investment. Strategies are provided for each district described in the 2012 Sector Plan and are prioritized under the following categories:

- **Strengthen Wheaton's Character and Support Revitalization**
- **Enhance Existing and Create New Public Use Space**
- **Improve Connectivity**
- **Incentivize Potential Development**



Background

Wheaton is a specialized urban center, serving local and regional retail demand. Its small, post-World War II housing makes it a draw for newcomers to the community. It is a transit hub and crossroads, in a compact geographic area. Its diverse group of businesses offer a concentration of retail options widely supported by adjacent, socio-economically diverse communities. Together with wide availability of arts and entertainment opportunities, Wheaton's character has significant appeal to the area's residents.



Downtown Wheaton, circa 1961

Planning History

Downtown Wheaton became a small-retail centered area through a series of land subdivisions recorded as far back as 1928, but that occurred mostly in the 1940s and 1950s. Except for the Wheaton Mall, these subdivisions shaped the area into clusters of small auto-centric commercial properties, many of which remain active and individually owned today. The area came to be known as the Wheaton Marketplace, and over the years county policies supported retention of its small businesses through public improvements that enhanced pedestrian areas and expanded access to public parking.

The opening of the Wheaton Metrorail Station in 1990 introduced a shift in the vision of how downtown Wheaton could develop. While small business preservation remained a goal, the 2012 *Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan* rezoned commercial properties comprehensively, using the recently created Commercial Residential Zones, to promote mixed-use development that would deliver public domain improvements with public open space as a priority. The Sector Plan envisioned Wheaton as a major mixed-use center for the Georgia Avenue corridor built on the area's strengths that would include investment to further downtown Wheaton as a complete community. The Plan recommended:

- Capitalizing on the area's **diversity** by zoning for mixed-use to promote redevelopment that will attract customers supportive of the existing retail base.
- Improving **connectivity** within and beyond the Sector Plan area.
- Promoting great **design** to create active and safe public places, including streets.
- Improving the natural and built **environment** by promoting reduced energy consumption and the restoration and protection of existing natural resources.

The 2012 Sector Plan organized the Plan area by distinct districts, with boundaries primarily established by the three major roadways that cross the central business district: Georgia Avenue, Veirs Mill Road, and University Boulevard West (for districts map, see Figure 01). The character of each district is defined by a combination of properties with development potential, adjacent established residential areas, and in certain cases, proximity to public facilities. The 2012 Sector Plan sought to maintain the district's character as rezoned properties redeveloped and public benefits and other enhancements to the public domain are implemented. The Wheaton Downtown Study retains the district boundaries established in the 2012 Sector Plan.

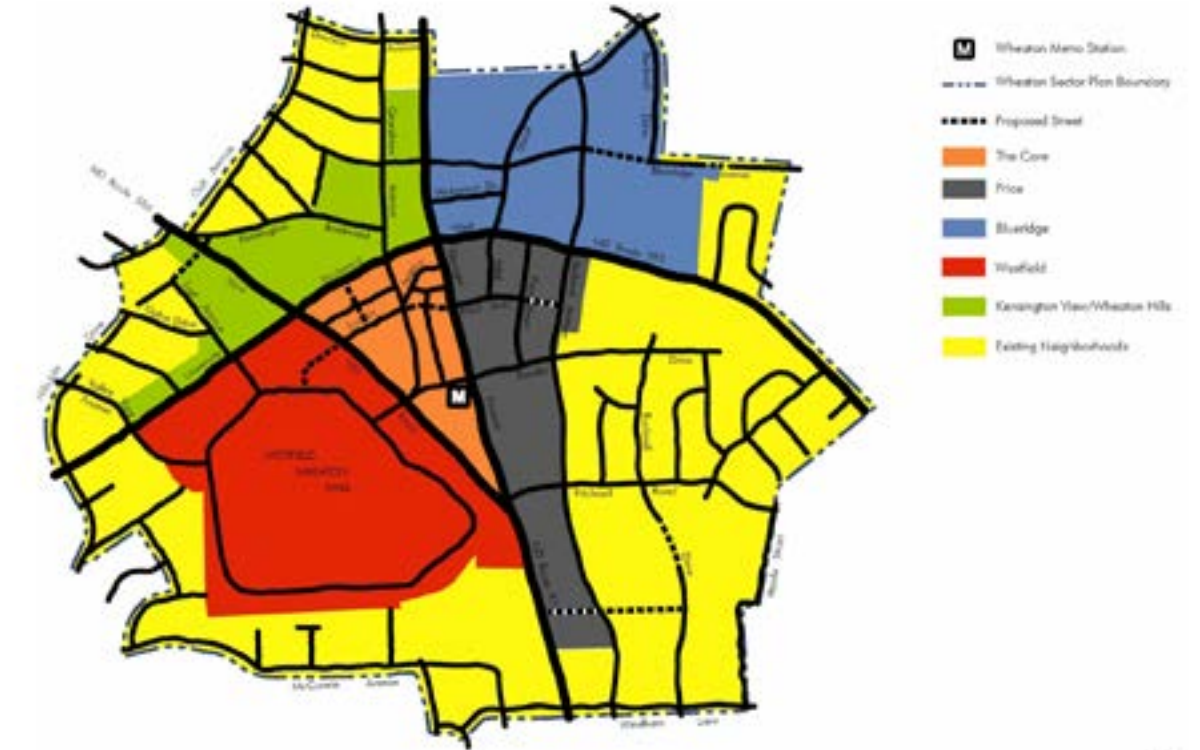


Figure 01: Wheaton Districts (from 2012 Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan)

Wheaton Today

Over the last decade, a few properties have redeveloped consistent with the 2012 Plan vision, with additional development anticipated in the coming years. This development, paired with recently completed and planned public sector investment suggests further progress toward achieving the Plan vision is possible in the coming decades. The Wheaton Downtown Study seeks to document recent and planned investment and identify strategic priorities to catalyze additional improvements and further fulfillment of the Plan vision.





Relevant Plans, Policies, and Initiatives

The Wheaton Downtown Study builds on the 2012 *Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan* and integrates guidance from plans, policies, and initiatives with effects on downtown development quality. The following plans, policies, and initiatives are important resources for the Wheaton Downtown Study:

- **2013 Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan:** Recommends changes and additions to the transportation network that are needed to serve the county's most densely developed areas, areas planned for redevelopment, and areas planned for new dense development.
- **2018 Bicycle Master Plan:** Sets a vision for Montgomery County as a world-class bicycling community, where people in all areas of the county have access to a comfortable, safe, and connected bicycle network.
- **Vision Zero Action Plan:** Establishes activities and projects to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries on our roads by 2030.
- **Complete Streets Design Guide:** A one-stop guide for designing new streets and reconstructing or retrofitting existing streets following safety, sustainability, and vitality principles.
- **Pedestrian Master Plan:** Vision Zero approach to prioritize improvements to countywide pedestrian infrastructure.
- **Thrive Montgomery 2050:** Montgomery County's General Plan, a framework for future planning and development that defines the basic land-use policies and context for all public and private development in the county.
- **Climate Action Plan:** Montgomery County's strategic plan to cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 80 percent by 2027 and 100 percent by 2035.
- **2021 Retail in Diverse Communities Study:** Identified tools and policies to help preserve and strengthen the county's diverse retail clusters.

- **Context Driven – Access & Mobility for All Users:** Maryland State Highway Administration's planning and design resource "centered on establishing safe and effective multimodal transportation systems."

In addition, the Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee (WUDAC) organized in 2018 the 2018 forum *What's Next for Wheaton*, which gathered input from the community to prioritize the recommendations in the 2012 Sector Plan. This initiative was also an important initial resource for the Wheaton Downtown Study.





Development Progress and Public Infrastructure Investment

Sector Plan Vision

The Sector Plan envisions Wheaton as a high-density, high-quality growth area that blends new development with existing small and family-owned businesses. To implement this vision, the Plan rezoned most of the central business district to Commercial-Residential zones, adding significant development capacity and height.

The density and height allocated in the Sector Plan were intended to encourage small property assembly and stimulate transformative development that could deliver public benefits, including consolidated public use space, streetscape improvements, pedestrian connections, and public art.

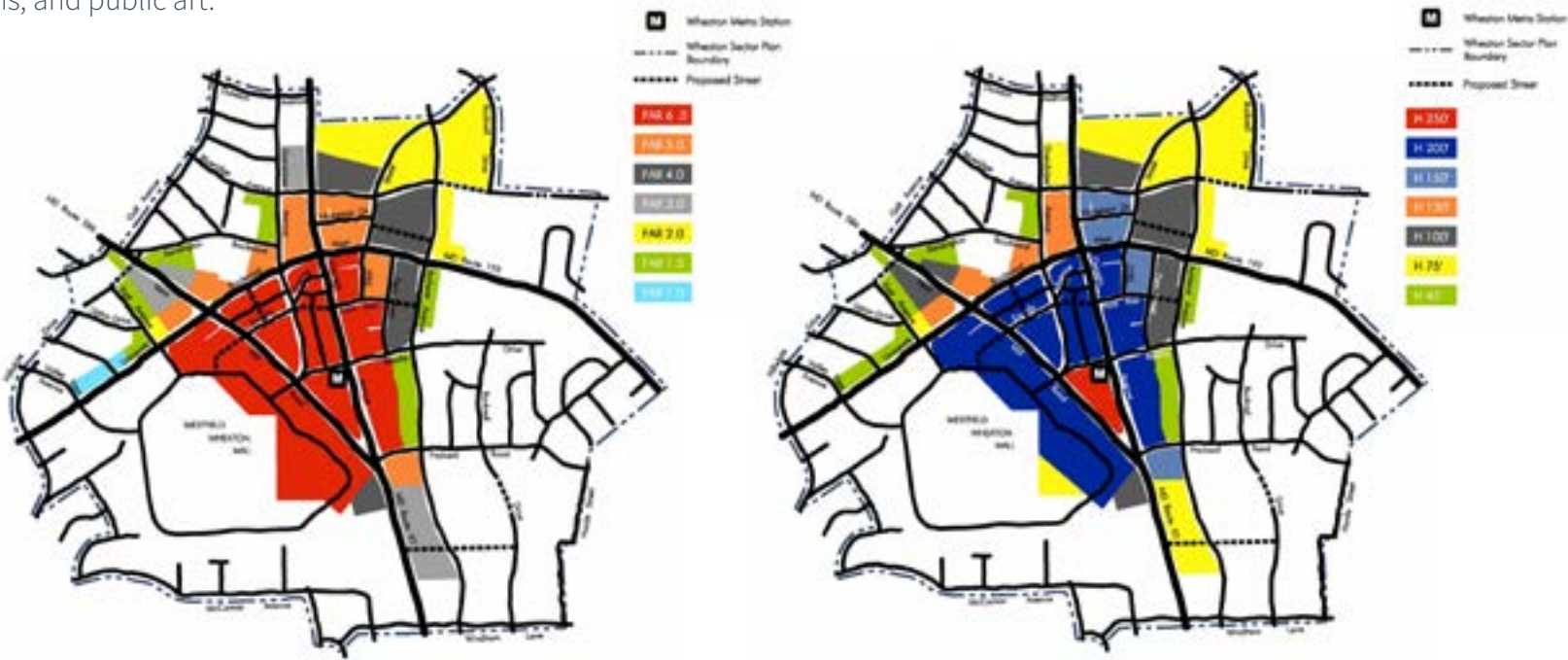


Figure 02: Zoning Density and Height Maps (from 2012 Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan)



Development Progress to Date

In the 10 years since Sector Plan approval, multifamily residential developments have been completed on several properties, including Arrive Wheaton, Solaire Wheaton, AVA Wheaton, and The George Apartments. The M-NCPPC Wheaton Headquarters (formerly known as the Wheaton Revitalization Project) was completed in 2020 and delivered over 300,000 square feet of office and ground floor retail in the center of Wheaton.

In addition to these redeveloped properties, two other properties have initiated development review processes:

- **Wheaton Gateway:** At the corner of Veirs Mill Road and University Boulevard. The Planning Board approved Sketch Plan No. 320210060 on May 26, 2022. The approved Sketch Plan includes 895,222 square feet of mixed-use development organized around a private street and public open space.

- **Montgomery Housing Partnership (MHP):** Extending from Georgia Avenue to Elkin Street and Amherst Avenue, north of Blueridge Avenue. The proposed development will deliver affordable units within a mixed-use development between Georgia Avenue and Elkin Street, and an urban park located between Elkin Street and Amherst Avenue. Montgomery Parks currently owns a lot with frontage on Georgia Avenue, adjacent to the property owned by MHP with frontage on Elkin Street. MHP also owns the property between Elkin Street and Amherst Avenue. The proposal will exchange the lot fronting on Georgia Avenue for the lot between Elkin Street and Amherst Avenue, with the latter becoming an urban park. This land exchange concept was approved by the Planning Board on July 18, 2019. The timeline for this development has not been established and no plans have been submitted.



Clockwise from top left: Solaire Wheaton, Arrive Wheaton, The George, M-NCPPC HQ, AVA Wheaton

Table 01: Multifamily Development in Downtown Wheaton - Last 20 Years

Multifamily Development in Downtown Wheaton				
Project	Approval Date	MF Units	SF units	Non-Res
The Flats / Brownstones at Wheaton Metro	2001	250	75	-
Grandview Townhomes	2002	NA	42	-
Metro Pointe	2005	180	-	2,000 sf
Arrive Wheaton	2010	486	-	59,500 sf
Solaire Wheaton	2011	245	-	-
AVA Wheaton	2014	324	-	-
The George Apartments	2015	194	-	840 sf
TOTAL		1,679	117	62,340

Proposals on other properties with potential to deliver transformative development consistent with the Sector Plan vision have yet to come forward. These include properties that the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and Westfield Wheaton own. The Sector Plan rezoned the Wheaton Station bus loop, WMATA parking garage, and the Veirs Mill Road frontage of Westfield Wheaton to the Commercial-Residential zones, with maximum densities of 6.0 floor area ratio (FAR) and maximum heights ranging from 200 to 250 feet.

- **WMATA Properties:** WMATA recently released a *10 Year Strategic Plan for Joint Development* to prioritize Metro planning and investments. The Wheaton Metro Station was listed as needing further planning and coordination before a solicitation is issued. As part of their jurisdictional coordination process, WMATA shared with Planning Staff a more detailed feasibility study for the bus loop and the parking garage properties that evaluated their redevelopment potential. The study considered estimated infrastructure costs, real estate revenues, and ridership gains to determine if redevelopment of the two sites could achieve a net positive fiscal impact for the county. The study concluded that the cost to reconfigure existing transit facilities exceeded the value currently possible with private development. The study further noted the construction of a podium over the bus loop and achievement of required parking ratios significantly added to the infrastructure costs.

- **Westfield Wheaton (the shopping mall):** Westfield Wheaton continues to explore development concepts along its Veirs Mill Road frontage but does not have immediate plans for development.

Legend

1. Redeveloped Properties
2. Near-Term Development (Under Review)
3. Significant Potential (WMATA)
4. Significant Potential (Westfield)
5. Near-Term Potential (County Owned)
6. Long-Term Potential

As shown in Figure 03, the areas of Wheaton that have redeveloped or have the potential for transformative development are located at the edges of Wheaton's center. Fragmented ownership patterns and market limitations have prevented further development from occurring, particularly in the center of Wheaton. However, these clusters of smaller properties are home to both long established and recently created small businesses operating in affordably leased spaces that define Wheaton's unique character.

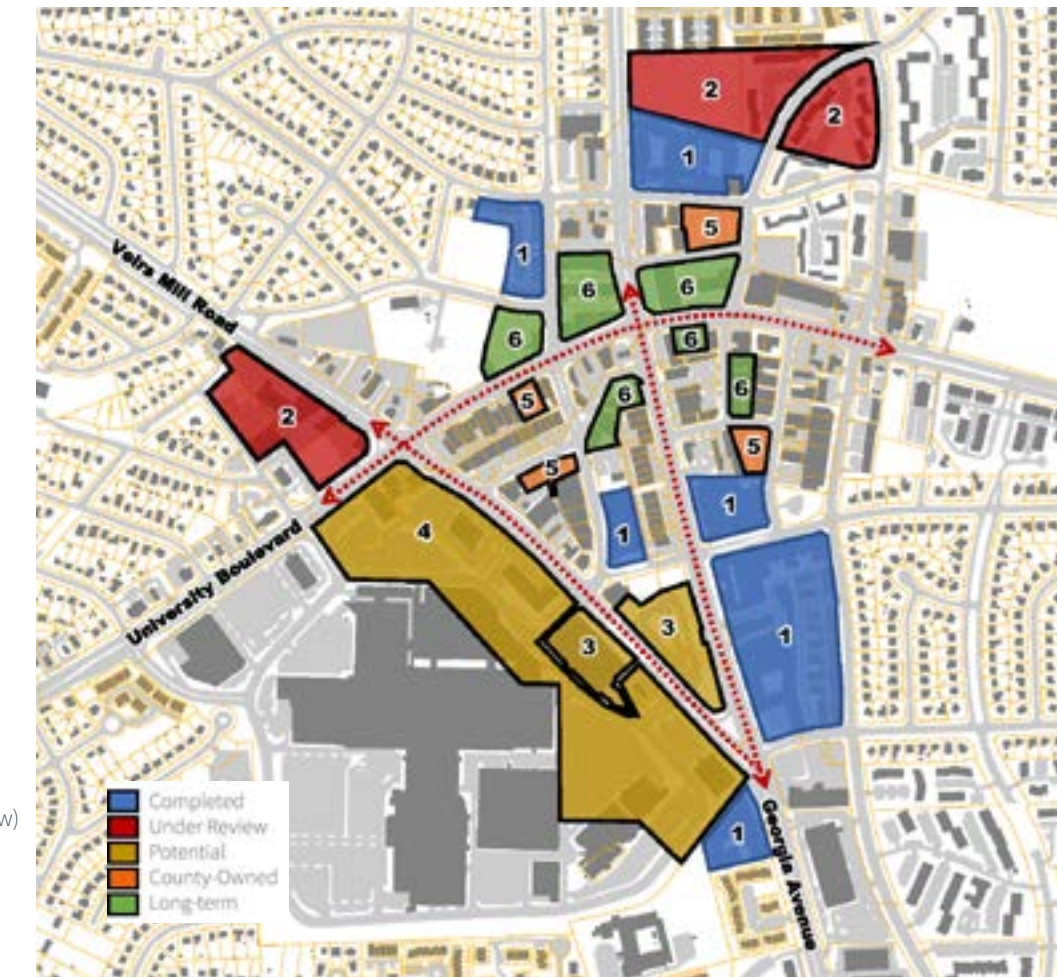


Figure 03: Downtown Wheaton - Potential Redevelopment Sites

Market Feasibility

Transformative development in the center of Wheaton, as the 2012 Sector Plan envisioned, will remain a challenge. These clusters of smaller properties have the potential to redevelop in the long-term but given small property sizes and fragmented ownership patterns, they are anticipated to remain in place for the next several years. Given this, the Wheaton Downtown Study explored the feasibility of smaller-scale redevelopment within these locations, to identify potential incentives that may be necessary to achieve such development in the near-to-mid-term.

Montgomery Planning engaged Partners for Economic Solutions (PES) in support of the Wheaton Downtown Study to identify underutilized properties, shown as opportunity sites, and evaluate the financial feasibility of small-scale redevelopment on these properties. PES also identified case study examples from successful community improvement efforts in similar markets. In coordination, Montgomery Planning also engaged Hord Coplan Macht (HCM) Architects to prepare site evaluations and illustrations for potential development scenarios on the identified opportunity sites.

Underutilized opportunity sites (see Figure 04) were selected based on properties where the value of improvements was less than the value of the land, with a ratio of 50 percent or more being considered underutilized. Other factors considered were contiguous properties under common ownership, vacancies of existing properties, and construction year of improvements. After consulting with property owners, PES evaluated the financial feasibility of development alternatives on these opportunity sites and considered different development programs, parking, mixture of uses, and funding alternatives. The opportunity sites and scenarios evaluated by PES and HCM are documented in PES's Wheaton Market Overview & Financial Feasibility Report.

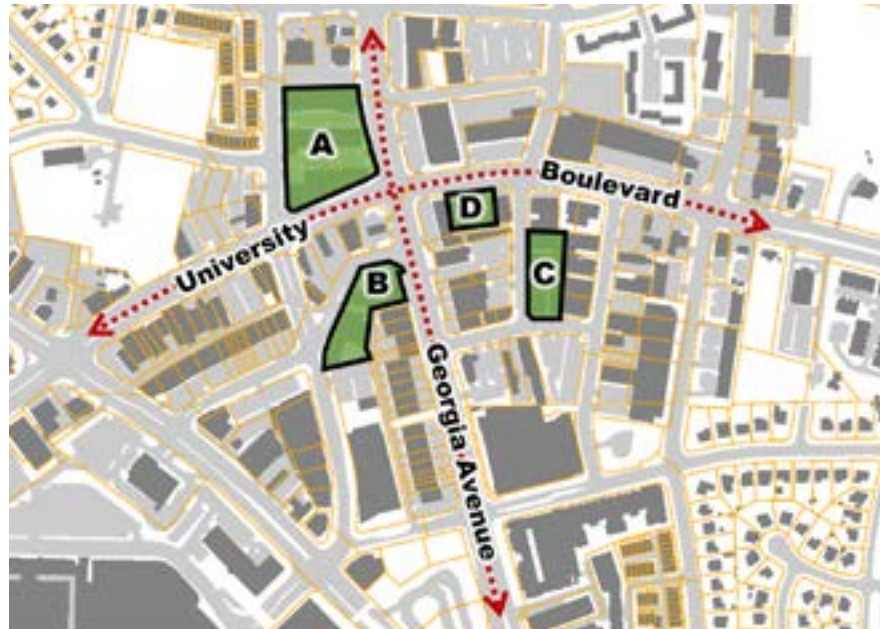
PES's analysis indicates higher rents and prices would be needed to attract private developer interest and investment to warrant the costs and risks in downtown Wheaton redevelopment projects. While low-cost financing or interventions by the public and non-profit sectors may in some cases improve feasibility, the analysis stipulated that these interventions may not currently be sufficient for private development to achieve a return on investment. PES's work also highlighted the following:

- Additional height and density are not needed, as these would exacerbate the development's financial gap which at present is significant. Building products of limited height that use frame construction are more likely to provide the flexibility needed for smaller redevelopment efforts to move forward.
- Ground floor retail rents will likely not be sufficient to support the construction of dedicated parking for their customers. The Wheaton Parking Lot District periodically conducts Parking Demand Studies of its facilities and their usage to ensure the district's needs are met. Their next study should explore whether tools to facilitate redevelopment efforts via shared agreements to shift parking requirements offsite can be developed.
- A focus on enhancing conditions for existing businesses in the near-term, as described by the case study lessons included in PES's report, would be beneficial to increase the area's attractiveness and potentially generate future development interest at feasible locations.

Given the progress of transformative development to date and the feasibility of small-scale development in Wheaton, and consistent with the conclusions in PES's report, this Study identifies specific strategies to stimulate further improvements that can position Wheaton to attract new investment as regional and national economic conditions evolve in the coming years.



Development Scenario Example - Elkin Street Properties (HCM Architects)



Legend

- A. Anchor Inn Properties
- B. Ennalls Avenue Properties
- C. Elkin Street Properties
- D. University Boulevard (South Side) Properties

Figure 04: Case Study Opportunity Sites



Public Infrastructure and Investment

The county has initiated several improvements in recent years that are anticipated to attract additional private investment in the coming years. These improvements described in greater detail below range from community amenities to active transportation projects.

Wheaton Library and Community Recreation Center

The Wheaton Library and Recreation Center, located next to the Wheaton Central Business District at the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Arcola Avenue, was completed in 2019. The new facility provides both a library and a community recreation center within a combined facility at the edge of downtown Wheaton.

Marian Fryer Town Plaza

The Marian Fryer Town Plaza was completed in 2020 with the M-NCPPC Wheaton Headquarters, fulfilling an important goal of the 2012 Sector Plan. The Plan recommended the creation of a major civic space for community-wide events on the site formerly occupied by county uses, including surface parking. The Town Plaza is approximately 35,000 square feet and provides space for community gatherings, social interaction, performances, public markets, and other activities. The Town Plaza includes a performance stage, seating areas, public art, and streetscape improvements.

Façade Improvement Program

The Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) initiated a countywide Façade Easement Program in July 2022, with an initial focus on five commercial areas, including the Wheaton Central Business District. The program seeks to revitalize older commercial properties, support small businesses, and encourage private investment. DHCA is partnering with commercial property owners on improvement projects such as façade renovations, gateway signage, pedestrian lighting, streetscape elements, plant material installation, and other exterior amenities. The program provides funding for up to 50 percent of design and construction costs and requires participants to maintain their properties for a negotiated term.

Wheaton Arts and Cultural Facility

Maryland designated Wheaton an Arts and Entertainment District in 2006 and re-designated in 2016. This designation provides tax-related benefits and incentives to encourage artists and arts organizations to locate in the district to promote community involvement, tourism, and neighborhood revitalization. In advance of the re-designation in 2016, the Wheaton Urban District developed a strategic plan for the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District, in consultation with residents, business owners, and the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County. The Strategic Plan for the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District 2016-2021 evaluated the challenges and opportunities in placemaking, arts, economic development, and marketing of the district, and identified several goals to preserve, strengthen and promote the arts in Wheaton.

To further the goals of the Strategic Plan, Montgomery County is pursuing a public-private partnership for a new arts facility in Wheaton to provide access to a variety of arts spaces, classrooms, teaching and creative studios, and performance space. The FY23 Capital Budget includes funding for planning and site feasibility activities, and the Department of General Services is considering specific sites in the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District.

Sustainable Innovation Zone Initiative

The Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC), in collaboration with local and international non-profit organizations (Bethesda Green, One Montgomery Green, and Global Urban Development, respectively), is pursuing federal funding to create a Sustainable Innovation Zone in Wheaton. According to MCEDC, these zones seek to develop “new businesses, technologies, and globally scalable products and services that conserve, reuse, and renew resources much more efficiently” to advance sustainability and resource efficiency to achieve inclusive job creation.

Active Transportation

Wheaton is one of many Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Areas (BiPPA) in Montgomery County, established to enhance safe bicycle and pedestrian access, improve connectivity, and replace aging infrastructure. The BiPPA program funds the design and construction of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, including new sidewalks, bikeways, streetscape improvements, lighting, signal and accessibility upgrades, intersection safety improvements, bicycle parking, wayfinding, and similar improvements. Several improvements are underway in Wheaton, including bikeways and improved transit connections.

Design is currently underway for bikeways on Amherst Avenue, Grandview Avenue, and Upton Drive. The Amherst Avenue Bikeway, a two-way separated bikeway extending from Windham Lane to Arcola Avenue, will connect the downtown to residential communities and facilities to the north and east of Georgia Avenue, including the Wheaton Library and Recreation Center. The Grandview Avenue Bikeway is anticipated to extend from Ennalls Avenue to Blueridge Avenue and connect the downtown to the residential communities to the north and west of Georgia Avenue. Together, the Amherst and Grandview Avenue Bikeways will provide safe bicycle connections on both the eastern and western sides of Georgia Avenue, and significantly improve connectivity from the surrounding residential neighborhoods to the businesses, services, and amenities within downtown Wheaton. Similarly, a neighborhood greenway on Upton Drive will extend from East Avenue to the Crossway Montessori School and connect the Kensington View neighborhood to Westfield Wheaton.

Veirs Mill Road is identified as a future bus rapid transit (BRT) corridor in the 2013 *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan*. Over the last several years, the Maryland Department of Transportation and the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) have advanced planning and design of the Veirs Mill Road BRT to connect the Wheaton Metrorail Station and Montgomery College in Rockville. The Veirs Mill Road BRT, currently in preliminary engineering, is anticipated to include queue jumps at congested

intersections, transit signal priority, new BRT stations, and associated pedestrian and bicycle improvements. Construction is anticipated to start in fiscal year (FY) 2025, with construction complete in FY 2027.

In addition to planning and design for the Veirs Mill Road BRT, MCDOT is simultaneously seeking to improve bus performance in the short-term by planning, designing, and constructing improvements such as bus-only lanes, queue jumps, passenger boarding and alighting improvements, transit signal priority, and enhanced bus stops; this is an effort to improve bus service and reliability and advance the county’s goals for economic health, environmental resilience, and community equity. MCDOT is currently planning these short-term improvements along Veirs Mill Road, from the Wheaton Metrorail Station to the intersection with University Boulevard.



Marian Fryer Town Plaza





Parking

Montgomery County Parking Lot District Program

Montgomery County established Parking Lot Districts in Bethesda, Silver Spring, and Wheaton between 1947 and 1951 to support the development of these central business districts, promote their economic growth, and provide enough parking spaces to accommodate public demand. These Parking Lot Districts (PLD) remain in effect today but have evolved over the last several decades with the extension of Metrorail's Red Line, the expansion of local and regional bus services, and the evolution of the county's multimodal transportation system. PLDs seek to promote and complement the multimodal transportation system to encourage use of the most efficient and economical transportation modes available, as well as implement parking management strategies that maximize use of the public parking supply to enhance economic development potential.

In each of the PLDs, minimum parking requirements for each property are not required to be met on-site. Property owners can elect to provide fewer than the required number of spaces and pay a property-value (Ad Valorem) tax to the PLD program to provide shared, public parking. Property owners that provide the minimum number of required parking spaces can apply for a tax exemption.

At the program's inception, the Ad Valorem tax provided revenue for the construction and management of public parking. However, the exemption incentivized property owners to meet the minimum parking requirements on-site and limited the ability to reduce or eliminate minimum parking requirements in the county's mixed-use, transit-oriented urban districts. For this reason, the Ad Valorem tax was restructured and set at zero percent in 2016.

Each PLD has its own enterprise fund, a fund which is separate from the county's general fund. The enterprise fund receives all public parking revenue collected within the PLD boundaries and is used to acquire, build, restore, or improve the off-street parking facilities in the individual PLD. Revenue from parking fees may also be used to fund the Urban District and other programs that provide and promote transit services and alternative modes of transportation.

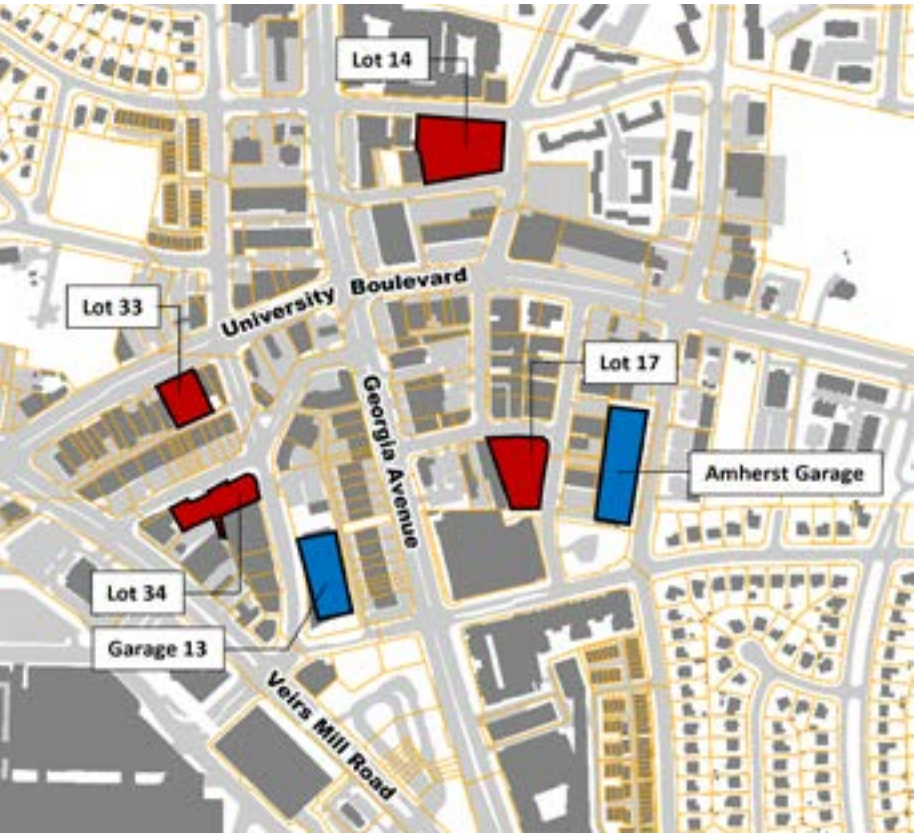


Figure 05: Parking Lot Districts Facilities Map (Does not include on-street parking locations)



Location, Type, and Quantity of Parking

Wheaton’s Parking Lot District includes 1,554 off-street and on-street spaces, including 917 spaces in two parking garages, 320 spaces in five surface parking lots, and 317 metered on- street spaces. The number of parking spaces in each of the garages and surface parking lots is included in the table below.

Table 02: Downtown Wheaton - Wheaton Parking Lot District Facilities

Wheaton Parking Lot District Facilities		
Parking Facility	Location	Spaces
Garage 13: Wheaton Market Place Garage	11219 Grandview Avenue	286
Garage 45: Amherst Garage	11304 Amherst Avenue	631
Lot 13: Wheaton Market Place Lot	11219 Grandview Avenue	54
Lot 14: Blueridge - Hickerson Lot	2425 Hickerson Drive	107
Lot 17: Price - Fern Lot	2320 Price Avenue	66
Lot 33: University Lot	2622 University Boulevard W.	53
Lot 34: Ennalls Lot	2510 Ennalls Avenue	40
Total Spaces in Parking Facilities		1,237
Total Metered Spaces on Street		317
Total in Parking Facilities and On-Street		1,554 spaces

Parking Utilization

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation Division of Parking Management regularly monitors parking utilization in each of the county’s PLDs and typically commissions a study every five years to assess parking supply and demand. The most recent study for the Wheaton Parking Lot District was completed in 2015, prior to the

completion of the M-NCPPC Wheaton Headquarters. While an assessment of parking utilization was anticipated in 2020, following the completion and occupancy of the M-NCPPC Wheaton Headquarters, the assessment was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and most individuals were teleworking at the time.

The 2015 Wheaton Parking Lot District Parking Demand Study, completed by Desman Design Management, provided an assessment of existing conditions and anticipated future parking demand for county-owned on-street and off-street parking spaces within the Parking Lot District. The study analyzed parking occupancy on a typical weekday, Friday evening, and typical weekend, and found that overall peak utilization occurred on a Friday at 8:00 p.m. when 45 percent of the district’s 1,554 parking spaces were occupied. The analysis showed there was adequate capacity within the district to support demand but also that specific parking lots neared the practical capacity (85 to 90 percent of capacity) in the peak periods.

In addition to studies completed every five years for each of the county’s PLDs, the Division of Parking Management also completed parking studies in 2011 and 2016 to review the county’s Parking Lot District Program and identify opportunities to update, improve, and expand the benefits of the program. Acknowledging that conditions have changed in Wheaton since 2016, particularly with the completion of the M-NCPPC Wheaton Headquarters, **the Parking Lot District Study Update completed by Nelson Nygaard in June 2016 suggested that parking occupancy in Wheaton declined from 51 percent to 45 percent between 2011 and 2016.** The 2016 study acknowledged that during the same time, demand increased for housing, commercial space, and public amenities, particularly in urban, transit-oriented centers.

Balancing Parking Capacity with Redevelopment

The available parking capacity in Wheaton, coupled with the demand for redevelopment in the county’s central business districts and the need for affordable housing, recently led Montgomery County to offer 18 county-owned properties for the development of affordable housing, including four of the surface parking lots in the Wheaton Parking Lot District. These include Lots 14 (Bluebridge – Hickerson Lot), 17 (Price – Fern Lot), 33 (University Lot), and 34 (Ennalls Lot).

However, as noted in the Montgomery County Parking Policy Study, completed by Nelson Nygaard in 2011, the shared parking resource offered by the PLDs provides an opportunity for small-scale infill development to occur, without the potentially cost-prohibitive requirement to provide on-site parking. “By providing a shared resource, the small-lot and infill development projects characteristic of these areas can thrive. And by sharing parking resources, collective parking needs can be met with fewer spaces overall, allowing these centers to continue to provide dense, walkable, multi-modal alternatives to typical, parking-oriented suburban centers.”

Redevelopment on key larger publicly owned properties could also benefit from this shared resource. Exploring how this could help offset parking requirements could improve development feasibility on properties such as the WMATA bus loop property at the Wheaton Triangle.



Garage 13 Entrance



CHAPTER 4

Strengths and Opportunities

Strengths

Many qualities of today's Wheaton can be leveraged to achieve the Sector Plan's vision of a major mixed-use transit-oriented center characterized by culturally diverse retail and entertainment, and home to socioeconomically diverse people.

Regional Accessibility

Wheaton is served by high-quality transit, including the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) Metrorail Red Line and Metrobus and Ride On. Additional high-quality transit is also planned for Wheaton, with future bus rapid transit planned on each of the three major roadways within Wheaton: Georgia Avenue, Veirs Mill Road, and University Boulevard. These major roadways also connect Wheaton to other important centers within Montgomery County, as well as the District of Columbia, City of Rockville, and Prince George's County.

Unique Character

Downtown Wheaton was originally developed as clusters of small retail structures that over time became affordable places for a diverse group of business owners. This small retail base, combined with a strong restaurant presence and the addition of regional shopping with Westfield Wheaton made the area a significant retail destination, particularly supported by the growing diverse population in the communities surrounding the downtown area.

Development Potential

The core of Wheaton's urban fabric consists of small commercial properties that provide affordable entry level space for many diverse small businesses. Several larger properties in the vicinity where large-scale mixed-use redevelopment is possible have already developed, in keeping with the Sector Plan's vision for substantial redevelopment.



But other larger properties within the core such as Westfield Wheaton and WMATA's Metro properties still have significant capacity for transformative redevelopment, particularly along their Veirs Mill Road frontages.

County Interest

Supportive of resident's needs, public investment in the area has delivered public facilities and infrastructure improvements as part of the county's interest in promoting development in the central business district. Publicly funded projects completed to date include:

- Wheaton Volunteer Rescue Squad
- Wheaton Library and Community Recreation Center
- M-NCPPC Headquarters

The county is also exploring the construction of the Wheaton Cultural Arts Center, to be collocated with private development within the downtown area.

Infrastructure Improvements and Streetscape

In addition to the recently completed public facilities in Wheaton, several improvements to the transportation network are also underway. These include bikeways on Amherst Avenue, Grandview Avenue, and Upton Drive, and transit improvements on Veirs Mill Road. Furthermore, Montgomery County is coordinating with the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MCDOT SHA) for the installation of a protected crossing at Price Avenue and Georgia Avenue to reduce the distance between safe crossings within the center of Wheaton.

The county has over the years retrofitted sidewalks at locations where redevelopment was not expected in the near term, consistent with the 2002 *Wheaton Central Business District Streetscape Standards*. While redevelopment has improved several other areas, significant gaps remain that create safety challenges for pedestrians. Although these sidewalk gaps are a significant challenge in Wheaton, the Wheaton Downtown Study includes an update to the 2002 Standards, with recommendations that integrate various streetscape types currently in use. The updated Streetscape Standards are forthcoming, following the review of the Wheaton Downtown Study.

Challenges

While Wheaton has many strengths and opportunities, it also has some challenges that present obstacles to fulfilling the vision of the 2012 Plan.

Major Roadways

While Georgia Avenue, Veirs Mill Road, and University Boulevard provide the benefit of regional auto accessibility, they also create significant challenges for people walking, biking, and rolling within downtown Wheaton and among the surrounding residential communities. These major roadways function as barriers that preclude the ability for people to access services, amenities, and resources safely and conveniently by a means other than driving, particularly those at the center of Wheaton.

MDOT SHA designed and constructed these roadways under a historical paradigm that allocated space and resources to prioritize regional automobility; however, MDOT SHA's 2020 Context Driven Guide identifies the Wheaton Triangle as an "Urban Core" context and provides clear, updated priority guidance: "In the densest urban areas with the highest concentration of trip origins and destinations, accessibility is the primary consideration. . . . this land-use pattern generates a high proportion of non-motorized trips, including walking, transit, and bicycling. While the need for mobility through these areas does exist, it is far exceeded by the need for internal circulation within the context."

Lack of Safe, Convenient, and Comfortable Pedestrian Connections

While the Sector Plan included a recommendation for improving connectivity within and beyond the Sector Plan area, the lack of safe, convenient, and comfortable pedestrian connections throughout Wheaton remains a significant issue. Pedestrian access within downtown Wheaton as well as between adjacent communities and the retail center of Wheaton are limited and unsafe, a situation further compounded by the barriers created by the three major roadways that cross the downtown area.

Public Open Space

As noted in the 2012 Sector Plan, Wheaton is mostly built out; today there are few public parks and public use spaces within the downtown area. Completion of the Marian Fryer Town Plaza along with the new M-NCPPC Headquarters delivered a significant public-use space for social gatherings, festivals, and events in the center of Wheaton. However, until further redevelopment opportunities become feasible, creating additional public-use spaces in other portions of downtown will remain difficult.

Ownership Patterns and Market

Fragmented patterns of property ownership remain the most significant challenge to transformative redevelopment in downtown Wheaton. Various combinations of single and multiple ownership of small commercial structures exist through the area, complicating the Sector Plan's vision of property assembly. A few properties of significant size to entertain redevelopment have done so, mostly away from the center of Wheaton, but redevelopment opportunities within smaller property clusters are limited. Real estate market conditions intensify the challenge of fragmented property ownership, rendering the transformative development envisioned in the 2012 Plan infeasible in the near and mid term.

Storefronts

Reinvestment in storefront improvement can result in significant enhancements to the quality of the public domain. County-supported efforts in the past have focused on block unifying strategies that visually maintain the notion of Wheaton as a collection of auto-centric strip centers. But many storefronts within the downtown area lack the continued maintenance required to support active pedestrian environments. Storefront improvements highlighting Wheaton's business diversity and individuality should be prioritized to stimulate pedestrian activity.



CHAPTER 5

Strategies to Advance the Sector Plan

Revitalize and Redevelop

The Wheaton Downtown Study does not modify the 2012 Sector Plan's overall vision or specific recommendations; it provides strategies to guide future public-realm investments and inform potential private development. The strategies improve connectivity, enhance existing public spaces, and create new public spaces.

Strategies are organized by the districts established in the 2012 Sector Plan and includes specific actions grouped in the following categories. These are organized in order of priority to deliver incremental enhancements to improve the area's appeal, which will potentially increase redevelopment interest in the future. Categories include:

- **Strengthen Wheaton's Character and Support Revitalization:** These strategies seek to identify interventions at key locations to strengthen and promote Wheaton's unique character, and to provide guidance to support revitalization of existing properties.
- **Enhance Existing and Create New Public-Use Space:** These strategies seek to enhance existing public use spaces and identify locations for additional public use space within the downtown area.
- **Improve Connectivity:** These strategies seek to improve the quality of the public realm and enhance mobility and connectivity between districts.
- **Incentivize Potential Development:** These strategies provide guidance to identify incentives to support redevelopment at key locations.

Strategic Priorities

The strategies described under the following districts are prioritized in the context of the 25-year lifespan of the 2012 Sector Plan, following the categories described above. The following priorities describe general areas of focus; specific improvements and areas are listed under the individual districts discussion to follow.



Figure 06: Wheaton Districts and Improvement Focus Areas



Priorities

Near-term (0 to 5 Years)

Strengthen Wheaton's Character and Support Revitalization

1. Continue to support the Wheaton Urban District and Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District's efforts to activate publicly owned property and rights-of-way through public art, programming, and pop-up amenities. Identify a dedicated annual funding stream and staffing to support, market, and implement these efforts.
2. Coordinate with the Mid-County Regional Services Center and the Wheaton Urban District to initiate and complete a Public Life Study for the Wheaton Central Business District to observe and document pedestrian patterns and use of public spaces in Wheaton to guide future capital investments and to enhance public life.
3. Pursue a Cultural Mapping exercise that builds on recent work focused on Wheaton's Asian and Latino communities, to identify and support legacy businesses within Wheaton's multicultural communities. Build on the outcome of this exercise to define a local designation (e.g., Multicultural Main Street) that highlights the various ethnic groups in the area, to attract funding for improvements and programs.
4. Improve locations where connectivity, safety, and usability would be immediately enhanced by publicly funded improvements to the public realm. Explore:
 - a. Improving pedestrian comfort and safety by providing wide buffered sidewalks where missing and adding short pedestrian crossings to major roadways.
 - b. Coordinate an enhanced pathways program, to improve designated linkages throughout the CBD with pavement treatments, wayfinding, and landscaping to connect Wheaton communities with the downtown area, existing community facilities, and other areas of interest.
5. Pursue placemaking initiatives through Montgomery Planning's Placemaking Program. A placemaking initiative provides an opportunity to engage the Wheaton community to implement improved connections between existing and potential community amenities, promote safe pedestrian movement between districts, reimagine underutilized areas of the public realm, and build on the success of the Streeterly. Partners in this effort would include the Mid-County Regional Services Center, Wheaton Urban District, business owners, and community members. Implement at least one of the following:
 - a. Improved pedestrian connection between the Westfield District and the Price District.
 - b. Improvements along the west side of Georgia Avenue between Reddie Drive and Price Avenue.
 - c. Outdoor dining area on Triangle Lane.
 - d. Artist-painted crosswalks.
6. Promote near-term improvements to existing commercial structures in areas with long-term redevelopment potential.
7. Coordinate with the Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs to promote individual business expression through their ongoing Façade Improvement Program, to develop a livelier frontage environment in keeping with the multicultural presence in the downtown area.



*Near-term goals:
Continued support
of district's events to
activate existing spaces,
improve pedestrian areas
with creative wayfinding,
and improve existing
storefronts including
expanding outdoor
seating.*



Mid-term (5 to 10 Years)

Enhance Existing and Create New Open Space

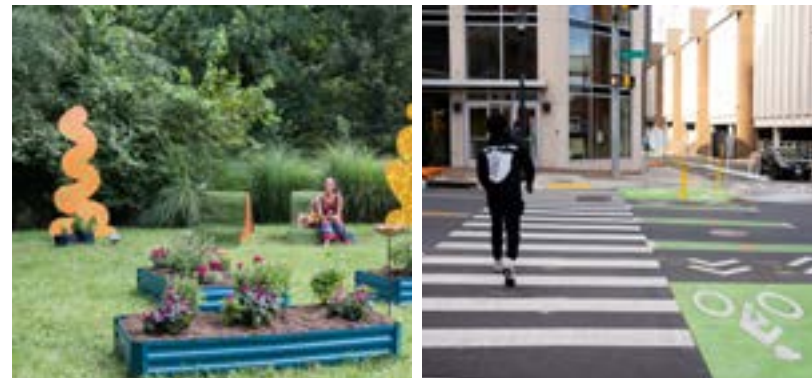
1. Enhance and expand access to public-use space in downtown Wheaton. Explore:
 - a. Enhancing existing public open spaces;
 - b. Identifying interim public open space location areas within the CBD;
 - c. Promoting the creation of usable public use space in connection with redevelopment opportunities.

Improve Connectivity

1. Review/revisit current PLD revenue sources to provide a consistent revenue source appropriate to support Wheaton Urban District operations.
2. Pursue local, state, and federal funding resources including operating and capital budgets, capital improvements programs, grants, and public / private partnerships. Prioritize low-cost, high-impact improvements.
3. Coordinate with local, state, and regional stakeholders to pursue funding through grants such as Safe Streets and Roads for All, Transportation Alternatives Program, Reconnecting Communities, and Bloomberg Philanthropies.
4. Coordinate with the Maryland State Highway Administration and the Montgomery County Department of Transportation to:
 - a. Improve pedestrian connectivity throughout the Wheaton Central Business District by establishing neighborhood greenways consistent with the Bicycle Master Plan/ shared streets within each district, introducing additional protected crossings, and improving crossings of major highways where the shared streets intersect. Consider increasing visibility of pedestrians and crosswalks by incorporating public art in

crosswalks, like the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Asphalt Art Initiative.

- b. Transform Georgia Avenue and University Boulevard within the existing rights-of-way to slow down traffic, improve safety, enhance sidewalks and walkability, and create opportunities for public activities. Pursue funding to advance incremental implementation of this transformation in the near-term.
- c. In future master, sector, or functional plan updates, revise the master planned right-of-way to accommodate planned transportation facilities while reducing crossing distances to improve pedestrian safety.
- d. Implement bikeway branding, consistent with Montgomery Planning's Bikeway Branding Plan on the Amherst Avenue Bikeway and the Grandview Avenue Bikeway. This would provide a cohesive identity for these parallel bikeways and provide wayfinding to direct bicyclists to important destinations in and around Wheaton, including but not limited to Wheaton Regional Park, Wheaton Library and Recreation Center, neighborhood parks and plazas and amenities, Metrorail, Westfield Wheaton, and arts and entertainment venues.

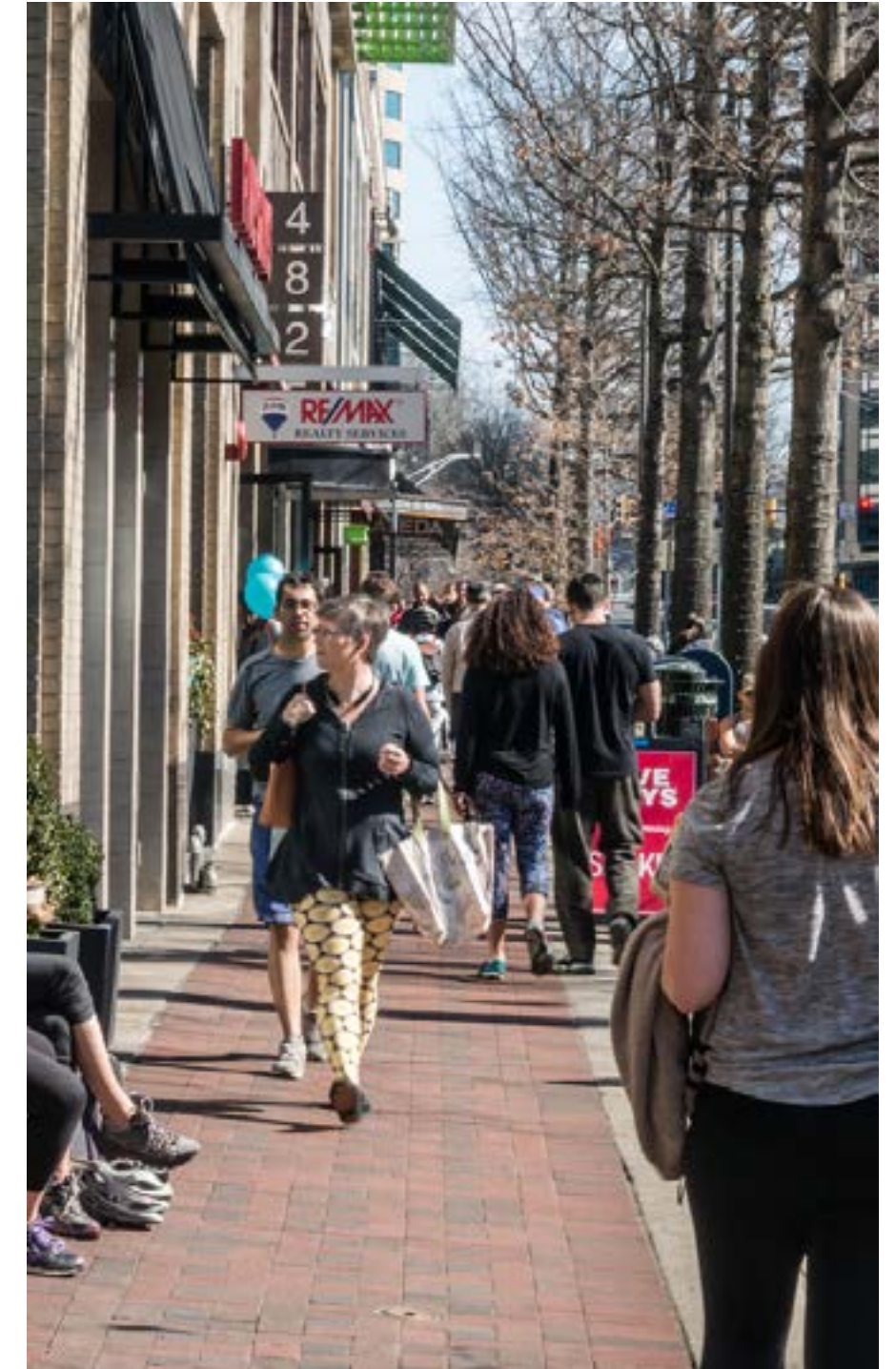


Mid-term goals: Expand access to public open space and improve safe connectivity

Long-term (10+ Years)

Incentivize Potential Development

1. Incentivize mid and large-scale redevelopment in the CBD. Explore:
 - a. Strategies to incentivize and facilitate large- and small-scale development, based on the findings and recommendations of the case studies within this Study and the accompanying Wheaton Market Overview & Financial Feasibility Report, to include small business support, revitalization of public amenities to improve the area's attractiveness, and collective parking solutions to maintain small business rent affordability through redevelopment.



Long-term goals: Promote redevelopment that improves the public realm for all users



District-Specific Strategies

The Core and Westfield Districts

The 2012 Sector Plan identifies the Plan area being bound by Georgia Avenue, Veirs Mill Road and University Boulevard West as the Core District, and the area west of Veirs Mill Road as the Westfield District. The Sector Plan characterizes the Core District as an area with significant redevelopment potential, including new street connections and a major public open space. The Plan envisions transit-oriented, pedestrian-friendly development including a mixture of uses, public open space, and new street connections along the Veirs Mill Road frontage in the Westfield District.

Strategies to advance the Sector Plan include:

Strengthen Wheaton's Character and Support Revitalization

1. Establish a branded pathway between the existing Ennalls Avenue terminus at Veirs Mill Road and Georgia Avenue. Explore:
 - a. Establishing routes that improve connectivity and pedestrian flow between districts;
 - b. Improving visibility and expanding access to existing businesses in secluded locations;
 - c. Enhancing existing businesses' presence along the branded path.
2. Improve Triangle Lane to create a lively gathering place supportive of the nighttime economy goals described in the Sector Plan. Consider:
 - a. Coordinating with the Montgomery County Department of General Services to balance commercial offerings along Triangle Lane by attracting businesses able to activate the area all day and into the evenings to fill new ground floor spaces at the M-NCPPC Headquarters;

- b. Collaborating with the Arts and Entertainment District and the Wheaton Urban District to organize events focused on Triangle Lane that highlight existing commercial offerings and attract foot traffic to local businesses;
 - c. Promoting the utilization of Triangle Lane for public events and gatherings.
3. Prioritize existing retail frontages in the Core District for inclusion in the upcoming façade improvement program by the county's Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA), including the following specific locations (listed in order of priority):
 - a. West side of Georgia Avenue between Reedie Drive and Ennalls Avenue
 - b. East Side of Georgia Avenue north of Price Avenue
 - c. East side of Triangle Lane north of Reedie Drive
 - d. Ennalls Avenue between Veirs Mill Road and Grandview Avenue
 - e. University Boulevard between Veirs Mill Road and Grandview Avenue.



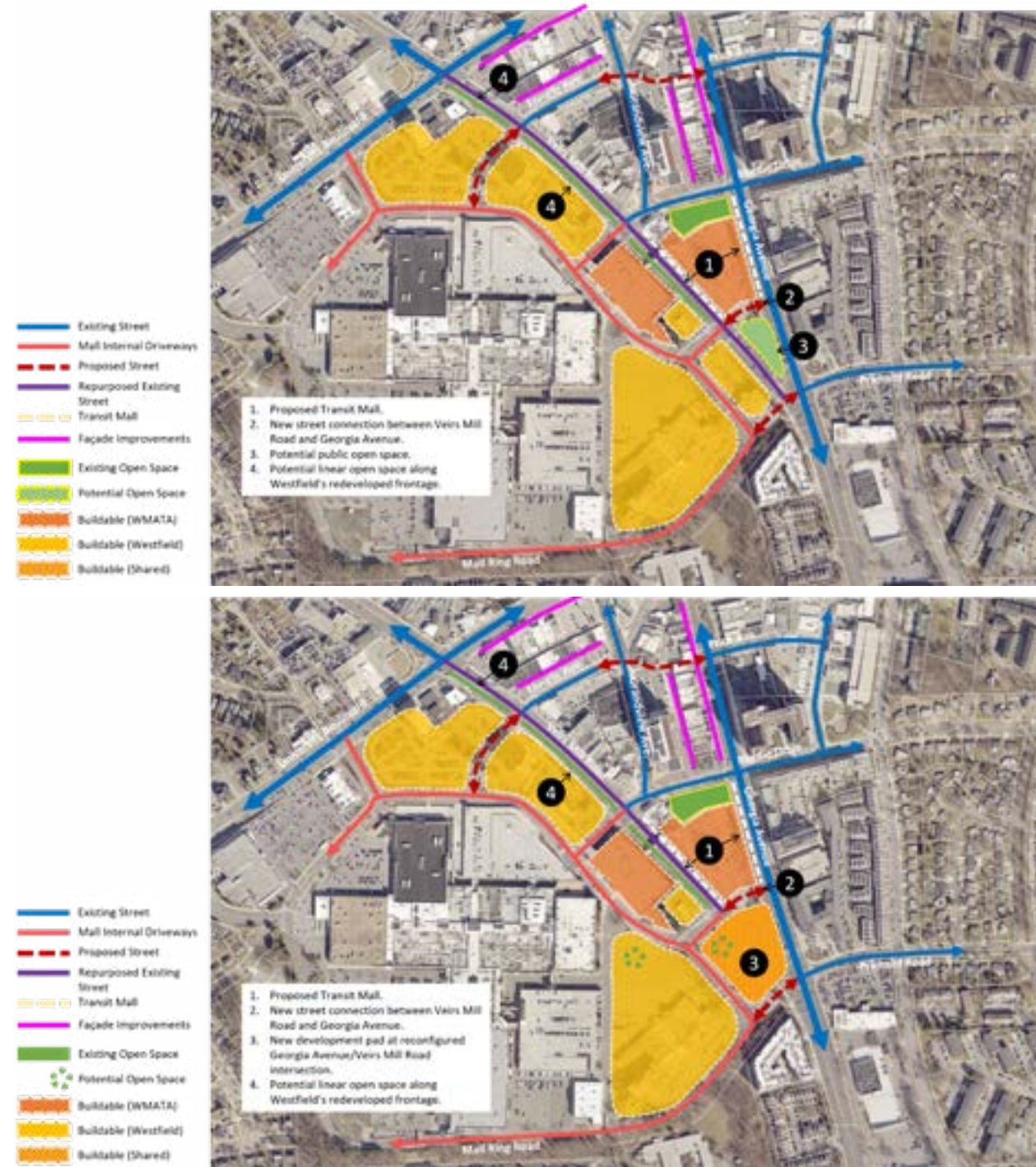
Examples of creatively improved storefronts and programmed activation events



The Core and Westfield Districts (cont'd.)

Improve Connectivity

1. Coordinate with the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration and the Montgomery County Department of Transportation to transform Veirs Mill Road between University Boulevard and Georgia Avenue within the existing right-of-way to improve safety, enhance walkability and create opportunities for public activities.
 - a. Explore opportunities to establish a street grid between the Core, Price, and Westfield districts to expand east-west mobility through downtown Wheaton.
 - i. Explore reallocating the existing Veirs Mill Road right-of-way to include dedicated transit lanes, and reduced capacity for travel by car (see Figure 07).
 - ii. Consider terminating Veirs Mill Road at the southernmost existing entrance to Westfield Wheaton, to establish new street connections between Westfield Wheaton and Georgia Avenue through the WMATA bus loop property; and connecting Prichard Road with the Mall Ring Road (see Figure 08).
 - iii. Include a comprehensive traffic study to analyze existing traffic – including volumes, origin and destination, any mode shifts anticipated with the completion of additional multimodal and active transportation projects, and any redistribution of vehicular traffic associated with the establishment of a street grid.
2. Implement the Sector Plan recommendation to extend Ennalls Avenue between Veirs Mill Road and Westfield Wheaton's Ring Road. Also, explore alternatives to implement the Sector Plan recommended extension of Ennalls Avenue to connect with Price Avenue at Georgia Avenue.
3. Improve pedestrian areas along the western side of Georgia Avenue between Reddie Drive and Ennalls Avenue (extended) to establish safe and attractive pedestrian zones and remove conflicts with existing vehicular uses. Improvements shall include:
 - a. New sidewalks with planted areas along the curb, consistent with the recommendations of the updated Wheaton Streetscape Standards. Coordinate with future facility recommendations for Georgia Avenue to ensure near-term improvements will not hinder the future implementation of transit or bikeway facilities as recommended.
 - b. Establishing safe pedestrian crossing zones between the new sidewalks and existing retail frontages, in coordination with business and property owners.
 - c. Near-term options to underground existing overhead utilities to facilitate implementation of the above recommendations.
4. Coordinate with Westfield Wheaton owners in the near-term to formalize frequently used pedestrian paths through mall property that connect to adjacent residential communities and existing pedestrian access points, such as pedestrian connections from Torrance Drive and the Stephen Knolls School to the south. Consider illumination, landscaping, wayfinding, pedestrian safety elements, and public art treatments.



Figures 07 (top) and 08 (bottom): Westfield and Core District - Expanded Street Grid Examples



Ballston Metro
Curbside Bus Bays



Examples of curbside bus operations in a
downtown setting



The Core and Westfield Districts (cont'd.)

Enhance Existing and Create New Public-Use Space

1. Development on the WMATA property in the Core District should expand Marian Fryer Town Plaza or create additional public open space. Alternatively, other areas within the Core District could be improved for outdoor public use by considering payment-in-lieu of providing new onsite public open space when this property develops. Payments should be collected via the Midcounty Park Benefits Payments (approved in September 2020) and used to expand existing or acquire new parkland or develop park facilities on existing or newly acquired parkland.
2. Development on WMATA property within the Westfield District should provide public open space in coordination with other locations identified by Westfield Wheaton ownership as part of future development on Westfield property.
3. Establish location(s) for public open space(s) within the Westfield Wheaton property in collaboration with the property owner. Explore:
 - a. Location(s) positioned to anchor existing uses and/or future development and of sufficient size to accommodate gatherings and events.
 - b. Pedestrian-accessible locations from existing and future transit stops.
 - c. Locations where improvements could be implemented in the near-term to be activated by existing uses and expanded further with future development.

Incentivize Redevelopment

1. Montgomery Planning should initiate a detailed study, in consultation with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Montgomery County Department of Transportation and Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration, to advance the redevelopment of the WMATA bus loop and parking garage sites. The detailed study should:

- a. Consider alternative locations for existing and future bus operations:
 - i. Consider dedicated bus lanes and bus bays on streets surrounding the Metrorail station entrance, like the improvements recently completed at the Ballston-MU Metrorail Station.
 - ii. Maintain ease of transfer and access between buses, future BRT, and Metrorail. The safety, time, distance, and comfort to transfer between buses and rail should be maintained or improved over existing conditions.
 1. Explore accommodating direct pedestrian access through the proposed development, either external to or within the future building.
 2. Explore a new elevator connection to the Metrorail platform from within the proposed development.
 3. Include considerations for strategically locating the proposed bicycle storage facility recommended in the 2019 *Bicycle Master Plan*.
- b. Significantly reduce or eliminate the requirement to replace the parking within the existing Park & Ride garage. Further, explore significantly reducing parking requirements for any proposed development on the bus loop and parking garage sites.
 - i. Include a comprehensive parking study that evaluates parking supply, demand, and anticipated need in relation to existing and planned transportation infrastructure in downtown Wheaton, including Metrorail, buses, BRT, and bikeways on Amherst Avenue, and Grandview Avenue.
 - ii. The comprehensive parking study should evaluate opportunities for shared parking strategies to facilitate large- and mid-scale redevelopment within downtown Wheaton.
2. Advance mixed-use development on Public Parking Lot 13 through Montgomery County's Request for Developments Proposals process.



Legend

- Existing Street
- - - Proposed Street
- - - Pedestrian Connection

- Facade Improvements
- Existing Open Space
- Potential Open Space
- Buildable (County)
- Buildable (Long-term)



Price District

The 2012 Sector Plan identifies the area bound by Georgia Avenue, University Boulevard, Amherst Avenue, and just north of Windham Lane as the Price District. Recommendations of the Sector Plan envision the following for the Price District: high density housing and some office uses along Georgia Avenue, including expanded neighborhood-serving businesses, clustered around public open space in the vicinity of Parking Lot 17, with the interior of the district anticipated to remain lower scale development.

Strategies to advance the Sector Plan include:

Strengthen Wheaton's Character and Support Revitalization

1. Develop alternatives to formalize the existing streetery into a shared street. Consider:
 - a. Interim solutions such as paint treatments to delineate outdoor areas for patrons.
 - b. Interim solutions to extend sidewalk depth by elevating portions of the streets adjacent to curbs with wood decking or other materials.
 - c. Exploring long-term alternatives to replace existing pavement with an elevated, textured and/or colored street installation to create a curbless environment like the flush treatment at Reddie Drive between Grandview Avenue and Triangle Lane.
 - d. Coordinate with business and building owners to ensure deliveries are accommodated, and that sufficient on street parking is retained and incorporated into the shared street design.

2. Initiate improvements to Wheaton Veteran's Urban Park. Consider:

- a. Improving the existing stair leading from Amherst Avenue up to the park with public art to create a branded path through the park that leads up to the streetery and the recommended public open space on a redeveloped Parking Lot 17.
 - b. Integrating alternatives for the passive use of the space such as additional seating, tables or play features like swing sets or climbing areas.
 - c. Exploring opening and/or carving out a portion of the grassy embankment sloping down to Reddie Drive with terracing to create additional seating areas adjacent to the sidewalk.
 - d. Exploring alternatives to improve shading and access to existing seating areas and gathering spaces on the grassy areas along the north side of the park.
3. Prioritize the following retail frontages for inclusion in the upcoming façade improvement program by the county's Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA):
 - a. East side of Elkin Street between Price Avenue and University Boulevard West.
 - b. East Side of Georgia Avenue between Price Avenue and University Boulevard West.

Improve Connectivity

1. In coordination with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation, improve the existing connections between the Core District and potential development and associated open space in the Price District's existing Parking Lot 17. Likewise, improve connections between the Price District and the anticipated urban park in the Blueridge District. Include wayfinding, lighting, and landscaping along Price Avenue, and Elkin and Fern streets leading up to Blueridge Avenue.

Enhance Existing and Create New Public-Use Space

1. Coordinate with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) to deliver a permanent public use space as part of any redevelopment on Parking Lot 17 location to be coordinated with the shared street concept discussed below for Elkin Street/Price Avenue.
 - a. All, or a portion of the public-use space should be at the terminus of Elkin Street to complement its transition into a shared street. Open space on Lot 17 must be street facing and publicly accessible, activated by the proposed development and designed to accommodate outdoor activities and events.
2. Coordinate with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation and the Wheaton Urban District to establish a capital improvement project to convert the existing temporary Wheaton streetery into a year-round shared street available for outdoor dining and entertainment. Explore near and long-term alternatives to incrementally transition into a shared street along Elkin Street between Price Avenue and University Boulevard, and along the segment of Price Avenue between Elkin Street and Fern Street, to connect with the recommended public open space on the redeveloped Public Parking Lot 17.
3. Coordinate with the Wheaton Urban District to implement improvements to Wheaton Veteran's Park to expand usability, direct access to the facing streets, public programs, and overall visual and physical access.

Incentivize Development

1. Advance development on Public Parking Lot 17 through Montgomery County's Request for Development Proposals process. Consistent with the recommendations of the 2012 Sector Plan, create a new street-facing public-use space with street and park-activating development.

Figure 09: Price District - Streetery Improvement Area



Blueridge District

The 2012 Sector Plan identifies the Blueridge District as a mixed-use, primarily residential neighborhood with small neighborhood-serving retail and some office uses. Recommendations of the Sector Plan envision the following: higher density street-oriented redevelopment along Georgia Avenue and University Boulevard, including a mix of uses anchored by public open space in the vicinity of Parking Lot 14.

Following are strategies to advance the Sector Plan within this district.



Figure 10: Blueridge District - MHP / Montgomery Parks Improvement Area

Strengthen Wheaton's Character and Support Revitalization

1. Explore strategies to implement “green gateways” along segments of Elkin and Fern streets between University Boulevard and Blueridge Avenue. Green gateways will provide an attractive pedestrian connector between the Price District and the proposed Urban Park north of Blueridge Avenue. Green gateways should include:
 - a. Signature landscape treatments to highlight the presence of the proposed park beyond. Coordinate with design staff from the Montgomery County Parks Department and the requirements of the updated Wheaton Streetscape Standards for landscape selections.
 - b. Coordinating with the Arts and Entertainment District to explore alternatives to enliven blank urban walls along these paths with public art representative of local character.
2. Target the following retail frontages for inclusion in the upcoming façade improvement program by the county’s Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA):
 - a. East side of Georgia Avenue between Hickerson Avenue and Blueridge Avenue.
 - b. South Side of Blueridge Avenue between Georgia Avenue and Elkin Street.

Improve Connectivity

1. In coordination with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation, improve the existing connections along the Blueridge Avenue right-of-way between Amherst Avenue and Channing Drive, to include local street connections, wayfinding, lighting, and landscaping. This off-street trail connection can serve as an extension of the Amherst Avenue Bikeway and provide critical pedestrian and bicycle connections between the Wheaton Central Business District, Arcola Local Park, the Sligo Creek Trail, and Wheaton Regional Park.
2. In coordination with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation, design and construct an off-street trail connection from Arcola Avenue to Henderson Avenue on existing county

property. This off-street trail connection can serve as an extension of the Amherst Avenue Bikeway and provide a critical pedestrian and bicycle connection between the Wheaton Central Business District and Wheaton Regional Park.

3. In coordination with the Wheaton Urban District, improve Elkin Street and Amherst Avenue between University Boulevard West and Blueridge Avenue to become green gateways to the proposed Urban Recreation Park to the north. Include closely spaced large species trees, updated illumination, and sidewalk paving consistent with the updated Wheaton Streetscape Standards and coordinated with the future urban park.
4. Development on public Parking Lot 14 should improve its frontage along Elkin Street consistent with the “green gateway” concept.

Enhance Existing and Create New Public-Use Space

1. Advance the creation of a focused, central active urban park on the district’s northern edge, connected with the development of expanded affordable housing.
 - a. Coordinate with Montgomery Parks to design and implement an accessible and active urban park on the property currently owned by the Montgomery Housing Partnership between Elkin Street and Amherst Avenue, as part of their joint development agreement. This park should be fronted by streets and fully accessible to the public.
2. Future development on public Parking Lot 14 should explore creating activated public open space, along its Elkin Street frontage.

Incentivize Development

1. Advance development of affordable housing by the Montgomery Housing Partnership on the Montgomery Parks-owned lot east of Georgia Avenue and facing onto Elkin Street. This development should create active fronts along Georgia Avenue and Elkin Street and connect to pedestrian connections established by recent development immediately south, and the townhouse community to the north.
2. Advance development on Parking Lot 14 through Montgomery County’s request for Development Proposals process.



Legend

- Existing Street
- - - Proposed Street
- Potential Linear Park
- Potential Open Space
- Buildable (Long-term)
- Buildable (Near-term)



Figure 11: Kensington View / Wheaton Hills District - WSSC improvement Area

Kensington View / Wheaton Hills District

The 2012 Sector Plan envisions that the low-scale residential neighborhoods, with a mix of commercial uses along University Boulevard and Veirs Mill Road remain. The Plan also envisions that new development should be focused along these highways, mostly low-to-moderately scaled mixed use, with higher buildings at the University Boulevard, Veirs Mill Road, Grandview Avenue, and Georgia Avenue intersections to create architectural gateways into the Central Business District.

Strategies to advance the Sector Plan include:

Strengthen Wheaton’s Character and Support Revitalization

1. In coordination with the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, explore alternatives to use the exterior of the existing storage tanks for mural/branding interventions promoting the area’s diversity and arts community.¹
2. Target the following retail frontages for inclusion in the upcoming façade improvement program by the county’s Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA):
Prioritize:
 - a. South side of University Boulevard West between Veirs Mill Road and Grandview Avenue.

¹ The Washington Sanitary Commission informed Montgomery Planning in January 2023 that improvements to the exterior of the existing storage tanks cannot be considered at this time, but Montgomery Planning recommends retaining this strategy for consideration in the future.

Improve Connectivity

1. In coordination with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation, improve the existing connections between the proposed Wheaton Gateway project, adjacent communities, and Georgia Avenue via Kensington Boulevard, to include wayfinding, lighting, and landscaping.
2. Explore opportunities to redesign Kensington Boulevard between Veirs Mill Road and Grandview Avenue to include a linear open space with sidewalks, landscape buffers, street trees, and pedestrian-scale lighting by reallocating space within the existing right-of-way

Incentivize Development

1. Incentivize development at gateway locations identified in the Sector Plan, e.g., University Boulevard West and Georgia Avenue, Grandview Avenue, and Veirs Mill Road.



Examples of potential enhancements to existing green areas along Kensington Boulevard, and public art applied to the exterior of a water reservoir.





Conclusion

The Wheaton Downtown Study seeks to advance fulfillment of the vision for Wheaton established in the 2012 *Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan* – a major mixed-use center for the Georgia Avenue corridor and eastern Montgomery County with regional shopping, culturally diverse retail and entertainment, business and government services, and transit-oriented uses. Recent and anticipated public investments that harness Wheaton’s strengths demonstrate progress toward the vision, but challenges to implementation remain. The Wheaton Downtown Study establishes an Urban Design Framework with specific near-, mid-, and long-term strategies to overcome these challenges as well as guide – and ideally stimulate – future public realm investments and private development.

Implementation of the Study’s strategies requires further coordination, collaboration, advocacy, leadership, and investment between public agencies, community stakeholders, and property owners. Wheaton’s many unique strengths, paired with recent and planned investments, suggest that achieving the 2012 Plan’s vision is within reach over the next decade.





Wheaton

DOWNTOWN STUDY



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