

GSSC IAC Meeting Minutes

June 06, 2023

AGENDA:

Meeting was held at The Universities at Shady Grove. There was no virtual option.

7:00 P.M.	Review Agenda & Introductions	Phillip Usatine (GSSC IAC Chair)
7:05 P.M.	Announcements	All
7:10 P.M.	Great Seneca Plan: Background, Vision, and Plan Elements	Montgomery Planning Staff
7:25 P.M.	Great Seneca Plan: Land Use and Urban Design Big Ideas	Montgomery Planning Staff
8: 05 P.M.	Great Seneca Plan: Parks, Open Space, and Sustainability Big Ideas	Montgomery Planning Staff
8:45 P.M.	Great Seneca Plan: Next Steps	Montgomery Planning Staff
9:00 P.M.	Adjourn	All

AGENDA REVIEW & INTRODUCTIONS:

- As this is the first time that the committee has come together in person since pre-COVID, we began with introductions.
- This meeting will be the first of two where we will review the Great Seneca Plan (heretofore referred to as The Plan), a refresh of the original Great Seneca Master Plan that was enacted in 2010. The 2nd half of the meeting will be held virtually on 6/13.
- The committee can ask questions and provide feedback during the presentations. Following the 2nd half of the presentation (either at the end of the 6/13 meeting, time permitting, or at a following meeting), the committee will come together on a set of recommendations to the proposed Plan.

Scribe's Note: The presentations included a large number of highly detailed and heavily hyper-linked slides. The intent of these minutes is not attempt to capture the content of the presentations, but to focus on highlights, questions that elicited discussion or were tabled for future discussion, or committee feedback and concerns.

BACKGROUND, VISION, AND ELEMENTS:

Reviewed the overall purpose and scope of The Plan, as well as key elements/inputs that inform the Plan.

Spoke to the need to update the original Great Seneca Master Plan (including the 2021 minor plan adjustment), as changing market conditions and state and county policies, as well as changing community needs and desires, have invalidated at least some of the original master plan.

Types of inputs that will inform the Plan:

- 1) Expert Planner Analysis (Montgomery County Planning)
 - a. Thrive Montgomery 2050 as key guiding principles
 - b. Other Expert Analysis (e.g., Vision Zero, Climate Action Plan, Corridor Forward)
 - c. Many (all?) of these were adopted after the 2010 Master Plan
- 2) Community Input, generally through engagement events
- 3) Outside Expert Consultation: Surveying of residents, traffic/transportation analysis, real estate compatibility study, others

Reminder of Plan area, with recognition that focus will be on Southeast area (Shady Grove Adventist, Universities at Shady Grove, Belward, and surrounding areas).

Spoke to accomplishments of 2010 master plan, but recognition of challenges:

- Comment that although the area is a collection of very successful campuses, there is nothing that creates a “sense of place” or community; how to make the GSSC whole more than a sum of its parts
- Huge footprint dedicated to parking lots

Updated Plan vision, refines (more specific than) 2010 vision.

Question: Has any type of “self-government” been discussed? No, though something like a business development group has been (more on that later in presentation).

Question: Should there be a TIF to support infrastructure and other improvements?

Question: Given the reputation (true or not) of Montgomery County being a difficult place for large businesses, why would a large international company want to be in (work with) Montgomery County as opposed to a more nimble, flexible, accommodating (and smaller) municipality (e.g., Rockville, Gaithersburg)?

Land Use and Urban Design:

Establish Hubs: “Activity” hubs, walkable within and easily connected to each other. Leverage new public transportation (Great Seneca Transit Network).

Building Form: Showed examples of intended design recommendations, focused on developing a desirable mixed-use (residential, retail, life sciences) community.

Housing: Prioritizing moderately priced, different types of housing.

There is a belief that there are state and county-owned facilities that are under-utilized. Current occupants should be encouraged to move so that these areas could be better utilized to support the Plan vision.

Question: More accurately an Issue raised. A significant amount of “development opportunities” have already been assigned to (locked into) developers. How much, and for how long? What is the impact on being able to implement significant portions of the Plan given this?

Question: How do we develop for small-to-medium sized businesses (incubator hubs)? Most existing and planned development is for large companies. This may stifle our ability to position as an innovation center.

Question: If the area is 24/7, with some level of “after-hours” economy, how is that reflected in the plans? Public transportation and walking/biking are less viable, so the plan cannot be “anti-car.”

Parks and Open Space:

Purpose is to create a more social and active environment (walking, interacting) with supporting public amenities and facilities. Mention of LSC Loop Trail (not shown here, will be in 6/13 materials),

Discussed, as an example, repurposing (taking away lanes from) an under-utilized part of Great Seneca Highway between Key West and 28/Darnestown Rd as a “linear park.” With the complimentary (also linear) park being included in the new residential development, the combined area would be a sizable park.

Question: Are there retail opportunities in the linear park?

Question: Are there other opportunities for “linear parks” in the Plan area? Darnestown Promenade?

Sustainability:

Brief overview of Thrive Montgomery 2050 sustainability priorities, followed by a number of very detailed maps and discussion of various related challenges and gaps.

General comment that although WHAT we want to do is well-defined and clear, the HOW we do so is not.

Plan Schedule & Next Steps:

Part 2 of this presentation to be held virtually on June 13.

Discussed key milestones related to the Plan, highlighting that the preliminary Plan (as it then stands) will be presented to the County Planning Board during the summer.

Meeting Adjourned