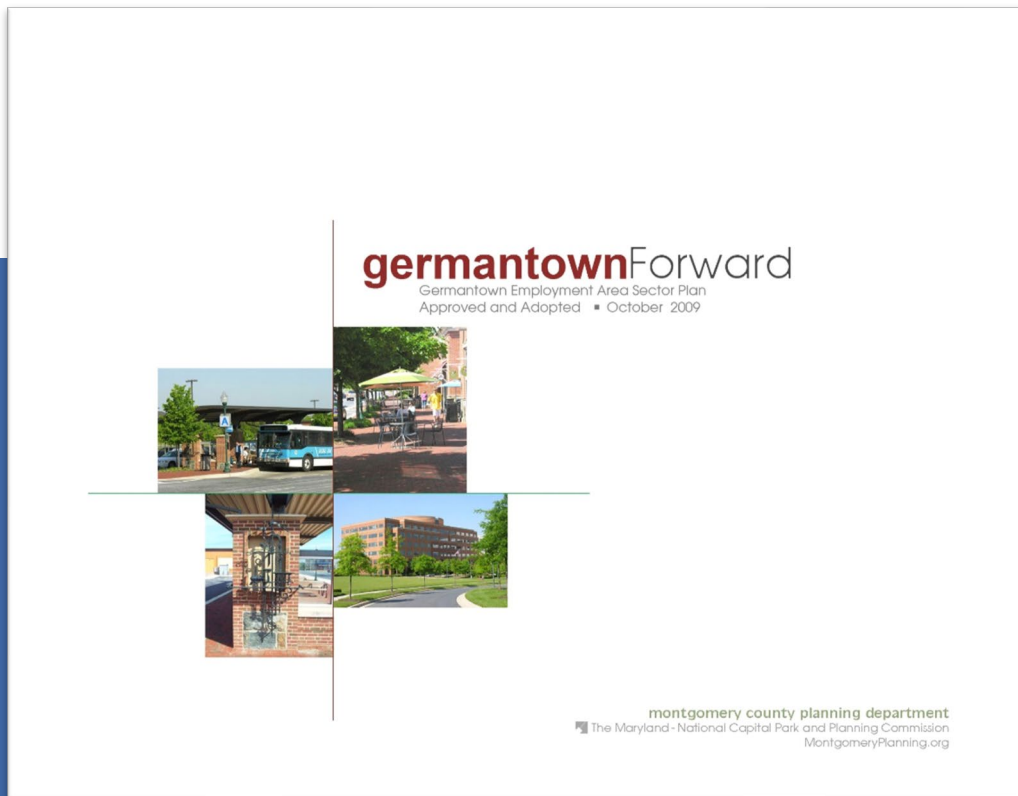


# GERMANTOWN EMPLOYMENT AREA SECTOR PLAN STUDY

## SCOPE OF WORK



### Description:

Planning staff will present a proposed scope of work for a study of the 2009 *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan* that will assess the state of the Sector Plan area relative to the recommendations of the 2009 Sector Plan, particularly regarding success in attracting employment and housing opportunities, and determine what, if any, interventions may be needed to support the Plan in the future.

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Montgomery Planning Board  
2425 Reedie Drive, Floor 14  
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### MASTER PLAN

Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan

### LEAD PLANNER

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### DIVISION

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### Summary:

- The *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan Study* will assess the state of the plan area relative to the recommendations of the 2009 Sector Plan and other policies, particularly regarding the ability to attract new employment and housing opportunities, planned roadway improvements, urban design, planned transit service changes, and achievement of public benefits under the Optional Method of Development.
- The study will include community outreach and engagement, an employment and economic analysis, and scenario modeling of potential alternative futures for the Germantown activity centers along I-270.
- Study findings will seek to address what, if any, interventions may be needed to support the Plan in the years to come, including the potential for a future amendment to the *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan*.

## BACKGROUND

The *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan*, approved and adopted in 2009 (Attachment A), established a vision to transform Germantown's central employment core into a vibrant town center with mixed-use districts established along the I-270 corridor (Figure 1). To accomplish this vision, the Sector Plan recommended investing in the town center core envisioned in the 1964 General Plan, attracting employers, organizing communities around transit, enhancing connections to Germantown's greenbelt and stream valley parks, pursuing design quality and sustainability in the public and private realm, and building on existing cultural, historic, and civic facilities.

In this study, staff will evaluate the land use and zoning recommendations of the Sector Plan to determine what, if any, interventions may be needed to support the Plan in the years to come. These recommendations include the residential and non-residential build-out envisioned by the plan, transportation and right-of-way improvements, and the Transferable Development Rights and Building Lot Termination recommendations specific to the plan area.

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### GERMANTOWN TODAY

The plan area covered by the *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan* contains a mix of multi-unit, attached, and detached residential neighborhoods, suburban-scale retail centers and office parks, and large institutional uses. Portions of the Sector Plan area have realized the plan's vision, while others have yet to develop under the plan's recommendations or have seen densities, occupancies, or public improvements fall short of the plan's vision. In general, commercial areas with low-rise buildings and large areas of surface parking have been slow to transition into the compact, walkable places envisioned by the Plan, especially in the Town Center Core, Cloverleaf, and North End districts (Figure 1).

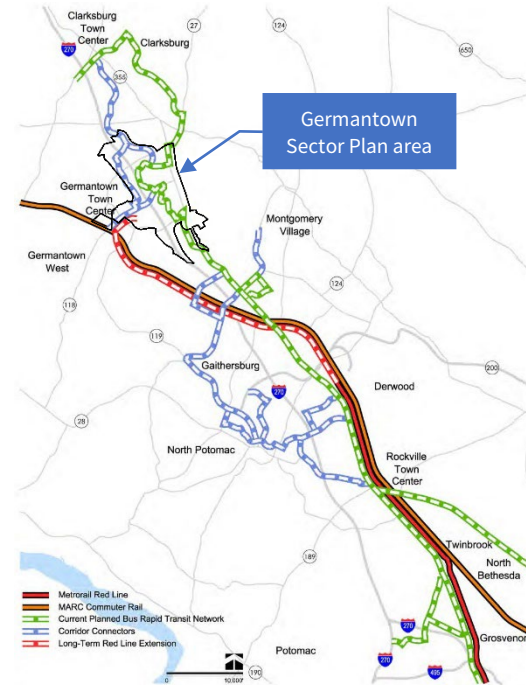
The primary employment industries in Montgomery County are in office buildings. Since the Sector Plan was adopted, the office market in the county and in the nation overall has changed significantly, with more efficient use of existing office spaces and reduced demand for new office spaces. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified this change by dramatically increasing teleworking and further shifting office utilization trends. Other trends in the Sector Plan area include a continued demand for life science development, alteration of the alignment and character of the Corridor Cities Transitway due to the recently approved *Corridor Forward: I-270 Transit Plan*, and the adoption of *Thrive Montgomery, 2050*. As a result, a check-in of this important corridor plan is needed.

A major setback to the potential of the 2009 Sector Plan is the delay and ultimate downgrade of the planned Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT). Once envisioned as a high-frequency rail corridor extending transit service north from a terminus of the WMATA Metrorail Red Line at Shady Grove Station, through communities along I-270 as far north as Clarksburg, the CCT was briefly modified to a Bus Rapid Transit line, then reimagined through the Corridor Forward planning effort as a network of connector bus lines. A long-term plan for a Metrorail Red Line extension from Shady Grove Metro Station to Germantown Town Center remains a possibility, though its funding and timing are uncertain.

Figure 1: Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan



Figure 2: Corridor Forward Transit Network



Due in part to the Sector Plan’s land use and transportation visions not being fully realized, the Sector Plan’s anticipated residential and employment growth has not kept pace with projections. While the number of dwelling units in the Sector Plan area grew only slightly from 2009 to 2023, a more concerning trend was the meager growth in jobs in the Sector Plan area between 2010 and 2021 (Table 1). Nearly 69,000 jobs were planned by the 2009 Sector Plan at full build-out of its land use recommendations, yet a 2021 quarterly estimate of employment from the Maryland Department of Labor found only about 14,600 jobs in the Sector Plan area.

Table 1: Development Conditions and Projections Over Time

	Projected by 1989 Master Plan <sup>2</sup>	As of 2009 <sup>2</sup> /2010 <sup>3</sup>	Projected by 2009 Sector Plan <sup>2,4</sup>	As of 2023 <sup>5</sup> /2021 <sup>6</sup>
Dwelling Units <sup>1</sup>	6,379	6,214 <sup>2</sup>	16,418	8,204 <sup>5</sup>
Commercial Area (sf)	18,552,310	8,077,085 <sup>2</sup>	24,104,248	10,631,046 <sup>5</sup>
Jobs	53,000	13,961 <sup>3</sup>	68,870	14,664 <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Not including bonus dwelling units that may be applicable under the Optional Development Method

<sup>2</sup> Published in the *2009 Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan*

<sup>3</sup> Source: Maryland Department of Labor Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Microdata, 2nd quarter 2010

<sup>4</sup> Assumes 650 dwelling units and 3,339,000 s.f. of non-residential space would be demolished and redeveloped

<sup>5</sup> Source: Montgomery Planning GIS property data, 2023

<sup>6</sup> Source: Maryland Department of Labor Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Microdata, 2nd quarter 2021

## STUDY APPROACH

The purpose of the *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan* Study is to review Sector Plan recommendations to understand how and whether they have been realized and to determine what, if any, interventions may be needed to support the Plan in the years to come. Possible interventions may include a future Sector Plan amendment, re-prioritizing planned capital improvements, identifying targeted community and business support, and establishing an urban service and/or parking district to support clean and safe economic development and placemaking activities.

The challenges of constructing and occupying new office and retail space in a post-pandemic era, especially considering the Sector Plan area's distance from high-frequency transit and urban amenities, explains part of the shortfall in planned employment growth. Yet this study aims to assess more deeply why employment-oriented development has not occurred as planned since the plan's adoption and what factors may be needed to support such development in the future. Potential alternative futures for the Sector Plan area will be explored, as well.

This study will also assess the specified priority for a minimum level of Building Lot Termination (BLT) credits by projects located within the Germantown Transit Mixed Use (GTMU) overlay zone that are zoned Commercial-Residential and seek development approval under the Optional Method of Development. The GTMU overlay zone requires such projects to provide public benefits in accordance with Zoning Ordinance Section 4.7.3.F.1.a with the stipulation that an applicant must purchase BLT easements or make payments to the Agricultural Land Preservation Fund in an amount equal to 50% of the incentive density floor area. This requirement has been little exercised in the overlay zone since it was enacted and may be a factor in limiting interest or ability in property development or realizing greater densities or employment opportunities.

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## STUDY ELEMENTS

Elements of the study will include the following:

1. A review of past planning policies and initiatives in the plan area, including a land use development timeline, and how they have influenced current conditions.
2. A detailed profile of existing conditions in plan area (demographics, employment, real estate market, transportation network, significant natural features, etc.).
3. An exploration of major issues, challenges, and opportunities in the Sector Plan area that might be further studied in a potential future Sector Plan amendment or other initiatives. Specific tasks will include the following and may be expanded as the study progresses:
  - Conduct an analysis of the office and employment sector in the Sector Plan area and an exploration of whether employment opportunities can be better facilitated or adjusted, or whether land use alternatives should be pursued.

- Complete a scenario planning exercise to test potential development concepts and their possible impacts and benefits.
- Explore how to accomplish urban design improvements envisioned by the Sector Plan that are intended to support more compact, walkable forms of development.
- Assess existing roadway and transit facilities, current master plan policy, and any necessary changes to the roadway, transit, bike, and pedestrian network to inform potential future master plan amendments.
- Determine what, if any, zoning or regulatory barriers may be hindering planned development in the Sector Plan area, such as purchase of Building Lot Termination credits as a part of Optional Method of Development projects within the Germantown Transit Mixed Use Overlay Zone.
- Explore the potential to implement an urban district, business improvement district, and/or a parking district, as recommended by the 2009 Sector Plan, to support enhanced public services, such as street sweeping, enhanced safety, additional public amenities, promotion of residential and commercial interests, and cultural and community activities.
- Consider holding a placemaking festival within the study area to bring attention to the potential for infill development, public space improvements, and streetscape activations to improve the community's experience and enjoyment.

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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

Germantown is the most ethnically diverse among the nation's small city communities, according to a 2023 study by WalletHub<sup>1</sup>. Throughout the study, Planning staff will meet with residents, community groups, property owners, commercial tenants, and other stakeholders to provide updates and receive feedback from this diverse community and to find how the Sector Plan can better serve them. Staff will also provide updates on a project website and a subscription e-newsletter to inform stakeholders about the study's progress.

### COMMUNICATIONS GOALS

#### Public Outreach

The study's public outreach efforts will be considered a success when:

- Communications about the study reach a broad and diverse audience through a range of media, including the project webpage, a subscriber e-newsletter, printed and electronic fliers, social media, and Department press releases;
- Participants are informed and understand that this study is not a full Sector Plan update, thanks in part to Planning staff's participation in outreach events and activities to inform the

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<sup>1</sup> WalletHub. "Most and Least Ethnically Diverse Cities in the U.S." <https://wallethub.com/edu/cities-with-the-most-and-least-ethno-racial-and-linguistic-diversity/10264>. February 22, 2023.

community about the study’s purpose and progress, such as presenting at community and neighborhood meetings, tabling at community events, and organizing Montgomery Planning “pop-ups”; and

- Planning staff prepares and distributes informational materials as the study progresses, including the Scope of Work, existing conditions analysis, presentation of issues and challenges, and proposed findings and recommendations.

### Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement with community stakeholders and community groups will be considered successful when the following goals are met:

- Representatives of commercial tenants, property owners, residential neighborhoods, and public institutions throughout the plan area are engaged and contribute to the study’s assessment and findings;
- Study participants include community members who have been historically underrepresented in planning processes and minority populations are engaged and active in the study;
- Attendance by community stakeholders at meetings organized throughout the study process is consistent and engaging;
- Community stakeholders engage in positive and/or constructively critical conversations with project staff at meetings and other touch points in the study such that community participants feel that their voice is heard;
- Online surveys or questionnaires garners and meaningful level of participation;
- Subscribers to the project e-letter make the effort to open and click-through sent messages and visitors to the study website gradually increase or remain consistent once the study has begun; and
- Community stakeholders are engaged in the study such that they feel their voices and perspectives are heard.

## SCHEDULE

Staff anticipates the study will follow the general schedule presented below:

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| • February 2024         | Present Scope of Work to the Planning Board for Approval |
| • February – March 2024 | Initial public outreach and stakeholder meetings         |
| • February – May 2024   | Conduct study  |
| • April – May 2024      | Community Listening Sessions                             |
| • June – August 2024    | Prepare Study Report                                     |
| • October 2024          | Present study findings to the Planning Board             |
| • November 2024         | Present study findings to the County Council             |

## LINKS

### **Approved and Adopted 2009 Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan**

[www.montgomeryplanning.org/community/germantown/documents/GermantownMasterPlanApprovedandAdopted\\_web.pdf](http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/community/germantown/documents/GermantownMasterPlanApprovedandAdopted_web.pdf)