



# Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) Meeting Minutes

Friday, November 1st, 2024 @ 8 AM

Notes Taken By: Amanda Farber

Hybrid Meeting (Microsoft Teams and in-person)

B-CC Regional Services Center, 4805 Edgemoor Lane, East Room B

## **IAC MEMBERS AND OTHER PARTICIPANTS PRESENT:**

IAC Members: Jack Alexander, Amanda Farber, Andy O'Hare, Dedun Ingram, Dave Yampolsky, Andrew Saul, Naomi Spinrad, Chris Smith, Jad Donohoe, Joyce Gwadz, Michael Fetchko, Stacey Band

Other Participants: Henry Coppola, Christine Ciabotti, Elza HizeL-McCoy, Cindy Gibson, David Anspacher, Irene Lane, Jeff Burton, Brandon Stuckey

### **1) Bethesda Downtown Minor Master Plan Update and Discussion**

- Timing – Public Hearing Draft Planning Board Hearing scheduled for Monday December 2<sup>nd</sup> (instead of at the typical Thursday meeting of the Planning Board) because that is when the Board is available
- IAC members shared thoughts, concerns, and questions about Draft Minor Master Plan Amendment
- General resident member feedback and questions - Need for more data; draft presented a rosy picture – need a realistic synthesis of Plan aspirations and goals; disappointing draft in that feels like back to where we started (remove the cap and barely change anything else); question of how much revenue being generated by development versus how little of that is actually going towards

projects and services in Bethesda versus elsewhere in the county; projected potentially very large increase in downtown Bethesda population with no density cap; PIP not enough to cover park needs – where is the other dedicated money that is discussed in the sector; if cap raised, it should be done so incrementally with check-ins to ensure infrastructure actually being delivered (and not just exist on paper); inconsistencies and silos of information – for example - using outputs to 2045 but Plan (with Amendment) was supposed to be a 20 year Plan (so only 13 years left); report appeared to show new residential occupancy to be 84% which is high; concerns about traffic on Wisconsin Ave especially and bad data leading to overcrowded (and underutilized schools) because residents have experienced this repeatedly; even if a school is technically underutilized it can have overcrowded classes

- General developer /Commercial member feedback and questions – Ok removing the cap; potentially open to recommending future check-in but need to be clear on purpose; not easy to develop in Montgomery County (Cheltenham Drive project, for example) because of interest rates and cost of construction; more costs are dumped on developers – should reduce / eliminate transportation impact taxes because no new roads in Bethesda (resident asked about the huge cost of area transit projects that need funding); there should be a transparent accounting of how much money is coming back into downtown Bethesda and additional funding sources for parks.
- Questions/comments about data and underlying assumptions of the models and draft amendment – how are employment numbers being generated; why are employees at NIH being counted when not in the Plan area; it seems like the number of jobs is being exaggerated (Planning Staff noted the projections go out to 2045 and higher levels of employment generate more trips; started with 3 scenarios (11M, 16M, 21M additional square feet) but Planning staff decided to recommend elimination of the cap instead; Planning Board has been approving ~1M square feet of density per year; question about accuracy of residential versus commercial density, and size of dwelling units (Planning assumes 1,000 sq foot average; other reports use 900 sq foot)
- Question/comments about where taxes/fees go – inside and outside of Bethesda – Elza indicated that PLD not collecting fees, school impact taxes go to MCPS, transportation impact taxes go to DOT, BLTs (building lot terminations) for farmland preservation; planning staff stated that only going to get benefits and amenities in Bethesda such as frontage improvements and dedication of parkland by allowing more private development; said there is a “check-in” with every project
- David Anspacher – models are always being updated but there can still be a lag; question as to whether the recent rent cap was factored into the models – no; the factors are land use and transportation recommendations

- Need to be honest and transparent about CIP recommendations in the Plan (pages 159 and 160) versus what is in the actual CIP and funded
- Cindy Gibson noted that recreation center will require finding a site; Silver Spring had a unique opportunity for their recreation center. Also stated that won't get a cap replaced without a convincing argument; why Bethesda and not other places; be clear about what want to accomplish with a check-in; Bethesda has more monitoring than other places (it also has more development); are we getting the things that the Plan recommends (no guarantee in any Plan; a lot has happened in 7 years, more to be done); how to prioritize amenities; need more advocacy for CIP
- What do we as an IAC need to do to push for Parks and Recreation Center and other CIP projects to be delivered to serve current and future residents? Discussion about whether the IAC wants to support removal of the cap and what check-in or alternatives can be recommended; there is no mechanism to ensure CIP projects and recommended amenities are actually delivered in the Plan timeline
- IAC can all agree that more of the money generated by downtown Bethesda needs to go towards projects in downtown Bethesda
- IAC members agreed that the IAC should send a letter to the Planning Board regarding the MMPA recommendations. Two points of agreement: 1) point out that PIP funds were never intended to cover the costs for new parks and that alternative fund sources need to be pursued and 2) Parks should be open to obtaining new park land wherever the opportunity arises even if the site was not specified in the Plan. Members will send points to be included in the letter to Dedun and Jack by Nov. 8. We'll get consensus on a letter via email.

## 2) New Business

- Elza noted that no members are terming out of the IAC this year; some members eligible for reappointment; Annual Monitoring Report will be on the website with abbreviated sections on schools, parks, transportation
- question raised about need for continued staff/tech support for IAC meetings and how that will be provided
- Cindy Gibson offered to have Councilmember Friedson come talk about the CIP and suggested the IAC also invite someone from the County Executive's office. This year will be off-year amendments.