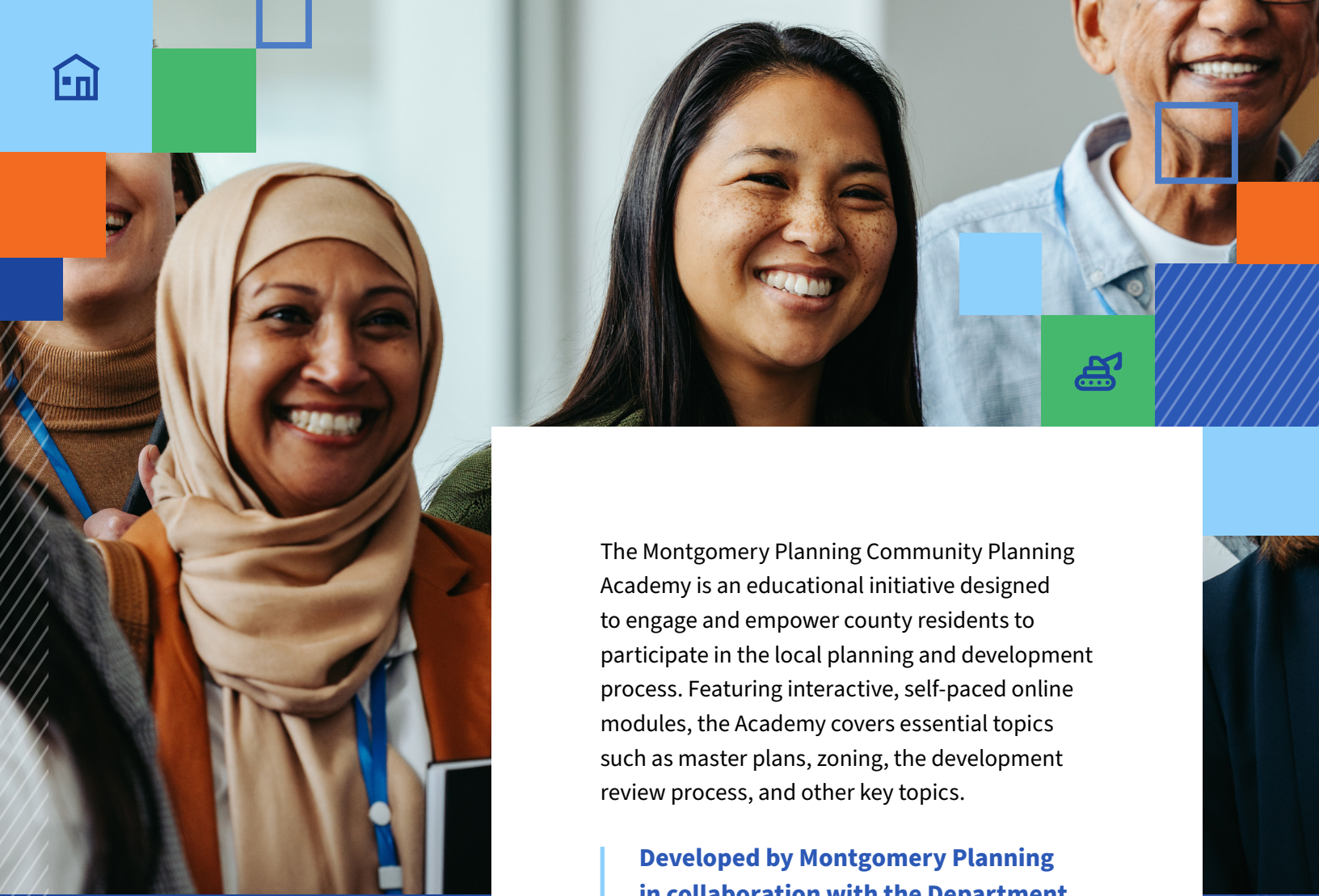




Montgomery Planning

COMMUNITY PLANNING ACADEMY TEXTBOOK





OVERVIEW

The Montgomery Planning Community Planning Academy is an educational initiative designed to engage and empower county residents to participate in the local planning and development process. Featuring interactive, self-paced online modules, the Academy covers essential topics such as master plans, zoning, the development review process, and other key topics.

Developed by Montgomery Planning in collaboration with the Department of Permitting Services, and the Department of Transportation, the Academy aims to make planning more accessible and inclusive for all and provide residents with the knowledge and tools to actively engage in shaping their communities.

This textbook provides a high-level overview and recap of the key topics, terms, and processes covered in each course module. It is designed to support your learning throughout the Planning Academy and serve as an ongoing resource to help you stay engaged in planning-related discussions and decisions during the program and beyond.

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Introduction to Planning

What is Planning?

Planning guides how our cities, towns, and communities grow to meet the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

Planning prepares for future growth by:

- Creating livable spaces
- Preserving history and cultural resources
- Strengthening local infrastructure
- Expanding housing options
- Protecting the environment
- Driving economic growth
- Enhancing public safety
- Promoting health and well-being
- Encouraging community engagement and advancing social equity

Planning Together

Successful planning requires collaboration between state and local agencies and active engagement with the community to develop a shared vision for the future.

THE KEY PLANNING PLAYERS INCLUDE:

- **The County Council:** The legislative branch of the county government with ultimate authority over land use regulations.
- **The Montgomery County Planning Board:** A five-member board that is one half of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) and is responsible for advising the County Council on land use.
- **Montgomery Planning:** The main land use planning agency responsible for defining the long-term vision for the county's growth and setting policies and programs to achieve that vision.

OTHER PLANNING PARTNERS INCLUDE:

- **Montgomery Parks**
- **County Executive Departments and Commissions**
 - Department of Transportation (DOT)
 - Department of Permitting Services (DPS)
 - Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
 - Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA)
 - Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)
- **Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)**
- **State agencies, utility providers and special interest groups**

Planning In Montgomery County

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is the general plan that guides all land use planning in Montgomery County. Thrive's three key outcomes include:

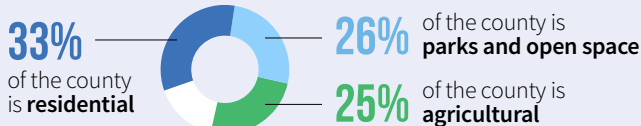
Economic Competitiveness

Racial Equity and Social Justice

Environmental Resilience

1,058,474
residents
live in Montgomery County

Montgomery County covers
506.93
square miles



How To Get Involved

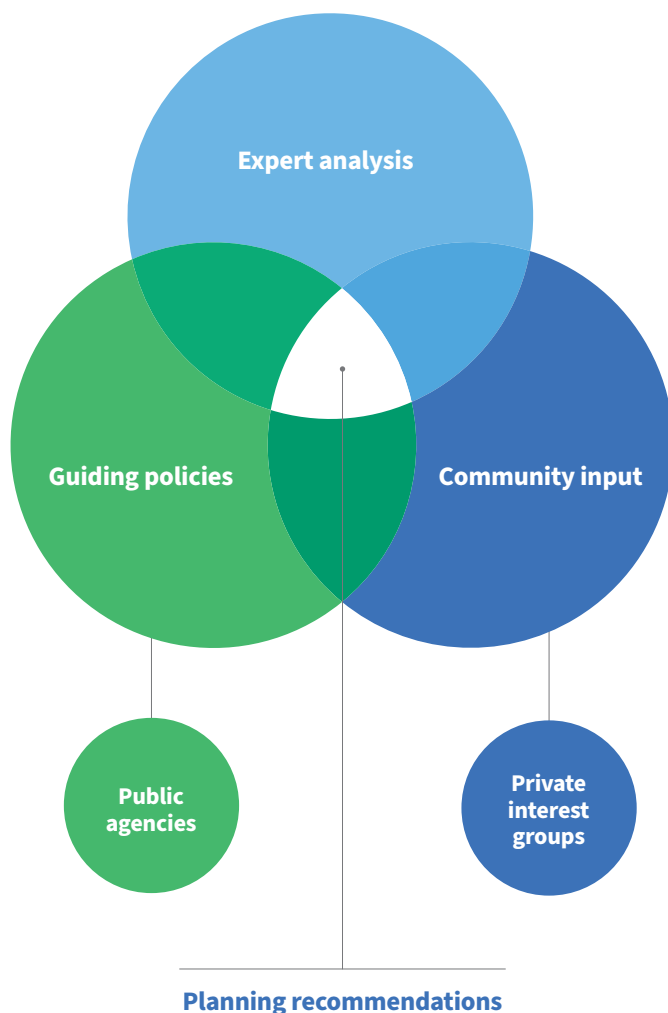
- 1 Attend or testify at a **Planning Board meeting**
- 2 Attend a **Historic Preservation Commission meeting**
- 3 Follow **Development Review Committee meetings**
- 4 Visit **montgomeryplanning.org** to learn about planning efforts around the county

What are Master Plans?

Master plans shape how communities grow and function over the long term, typically spanning 15 to 30 years. They guide decisions on land use, zoning, housing, infrastructure, parks, transportation, and resource preservation, directly influencing where and how people live, work, and travel. As amendments to *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, master plans set a vision for future development and establish the rules for what can be built, where, and how much.

Sources of Input

Given the wide-reaching impact of master plans, planners draw on these five key sources of input and carefully balance them throughout the planning process to shape their recommendations.



Types of Master Plans

Functional (Countywide) Plans:

Address countywide systems like highways, transitways, historic preservation, water resources, and housing.



(Area) Master Plans: Focus on future development of specific neighborhoods or regions, balancing local character with countywide goals. These plans cover land use, housing, transportation, parks, schools, and environmental resources.

OTHER PLANNING PROJECTS

- **Studies:** Examine current conditions and offer recommendations and strategies to foster future stewardship of Montgomery County's natural and built environment.
- **Guidelines and Standards:** Offer site-specific design guidance to support master plans and zoning requirements without changing the General Plan.

How You Can Get Involved

- 1 **Request that your community be included in an upcoming plan** by contacting Montgomery Planning or your Council members.
- 2 **Review and provide feedback on the various plan drafts** by emailing, calling, meeting with the lead planner, submitting comments, or testifying to the Planning Board.
- 3 **Share your experiences, input, and recommendations** by attending virtual and in-person meetings, filling out surveys, or inviting planners to meet with your community.
- 4 **Participate in short-term activities** like placemaking, pilot infrastructure projects, and pop-up events.



The Montgomery County Master Plan Process

Work Program

Agreed-upon master plans are added to Montgomery Planning's work program following budget negotiations with the County Council each spring.

Pre-scope of Work

Every master planning effort begins with several months of detailed data collection, technical analysis, and plan boundary determination. These activities review current conditions and changes over time, allowing planners to understand the evolution of key issues in the area.

Scope of Work

Planning teams present a scope of work for review and approval by the Planning Board. The scope of work examines the changes since the last master plan, outlines the existing conditions, sets the plan's boundary, and explains why a new plan update or amendment is needed. The scope also lays out the key issues or themes for exploration in the new plan.

Visioning + Analysis

Planners continue identifying issues and begin to identify solutions with the community. Community conversations help develop a vision for the plan, discussing how to improve future community conditions, infrastructure, the built environment, amenities, and more. Planners also review best practices and apply in-house and external expertise to explore possibilities for the community.

Preliminary Recommendations

Planners consult with the community to develop alternative actions and recommendations for the master plan, then present these to the Planning Board.

Working Draft Plan

Planners draft the working draft plan, which is first reviewed by the community, then present it to the Planning Board.

Public Hearing Draft Plan

Planners take comments from the Planning Board and official public comments submitted, then present a revised draft at a public hearing, during which anyone may testify. The Planning Board may also hold work sessions to review the testimony and determine whether to make any revisions before publishing the Planning Board (Final) Draft Plan.

Planning Board Draft

Planners incorporate further community comments into the plan and present a revised draft to the Planning Board. The board approves the new draft and transmits it to the County Council and the County Executive for review.

County Executive and County Council Review and Public Hearing

The County Executive drafts and sends a fiscal impact analysis with any comments and recommendations regarding the plan to the County Council.

The County Council holds a public hearing on the plan, then committee work sessions as appropriate. The full County Council then discusses the plan/holds work sessions and approves the plan with whatever changes occurred throughout their process.

Approval + Adoption

Montgomery Planning certifies the plan and submits it to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission for final approval. The plan is then added as an amendment to the General Plan and published.

Master Plan Implementation

While Montgomery Planning provides consultation and research support to the county agencies responsible for making plans come to fruition, we do not implement the plans. Once a plan is adopted, Montgomery County government is responsible for coordinating plan implementation with Montgomery County agencies and partners, along with community members and developers, as appropriate.

NOTE: Outlined here is a model for the master planning process, which will be adhered to in most cases. However, each community is different, and, from time to time, steps may need to be added, deleted, or modified. Those portions of the planning process mandated by law - such as Planning Board hearings, County Executive review periods, and County Council public hearings - are not subject to modification.

What is Zoning?








Zoning is the government's regulation of public and private land use through designated zoning districts, where multiple adjacent properties share the same zoning classification. Each property in the county (except those in municipalities with their own zoning authority) is assigned a zoning designation shown on the official Zoning Map.

Zoning is implemented by Montgomery Planning, the Office of the Hearing Examiner, the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA), the Department of Permitting Services (DPS), and through the Development Review Process.

The Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance

All building activity in the county is controlled by the Zoning Ordinance, a set of zoning regulations contained in **Chapter 59 of the County Code**.

Its purpose is to provide zoning requirements designed to:

-  Promote health, public safety, and general welfare
-  Provide adequate light and air
-  Promote the conservation of natural resources
-  Prevent environment pollution
-  Prevent overcrowding
-  Promote or facilitate adequate transportation, water, sewage, schools, recreation, parks, and other public facilities
-  Control street congestion



Amendments

- **Zoning Text Amendments (ZTAs)** modify the Zoning Ordinance to address evolving land use and development needs.
- **Zoning Map Amendments** change a property's zoning to reflect a master plan or a property owner's request.

There are four types:

- 1 District Map Amendments (for countywide rezoning)
- 2 Sectional Map Amendments (to implement master plans)
- 3 Local Map Amendments (to apply floating zones)
- 4 Corrective Map Amendments (to fix zoning errors)

Zone Types

-  **Euclidean Zones:** These zones separate land uses and are governed by strict standards tailored to each zone's purpose. They are applied to properties through a Sectional Map Amendment (SMA) following master plan approval.
-  **Floating Zones:** These flexible zones support adaptable development aligned with evolving needs and planning goals. They are applied through a separate mapping process called a Local Map Amendment.

AND SEVEN SETS OF ZONES:

- 1 **Agricultural:** Promotes agriculture as the main land use in designated preservation areas.
- 2 **Rural Residential:** Protect farmland and natural areas while allowing low-density rural housing.
- 3 **Residential:** Offer diverse housing types—like single-family homes, townhomes, condos, and apartments—through various residential zones.
- 4 **Commercial Residential (mixed-use zones):** Promote mixed-use areas where people can live, work, and access amenities nearby.
- 5 **Employment:** Primarily allow offices, labs, and non-retail businesses.
- 6 **Industrial:** Designate land for industry and regulate impacts like noise and dust based on nearby zones.
- 7 **Overlay:** Remove, adjust, or add extra requirements to base zones to support specific planning goals in areas of special public interest, where regular zoning may not be sufficient.





How To Get Involved

Submit written comments or provide testimony at the Planning Board's public hearing during the Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) process. Visit the **County Council website** for a list of current ZTAs under consideration, as well as an archive of past ZTAs.

Development Review Process

What is the development review process?

The development review process ensures that proposed development in Montgomery County:

-  Aligns with zoning and master plans
-  Protects natural and community resources
-  Considers existing or necessary new public facilities (e.g., schools, roads, parks)
-  Incorporates community input

Montgomery Planning leads this process in collaboration with state and county agencies, residents, developers, and the public to ensure that new development is equitable, sustainable, and aligned with community goals.

All development falls into two categories:

- 1 By-Right Projects**
Smaller projects (like home additions or EV chargers) that comply with zoning, do not require Planning Board review and approval, and move directly to permitting.
- 2 Full Review Projects**
Larger proposals requiring review and approval by the Planning Board, Planning Director, or Hearing Examiner before permitting.

The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) ensures public infrastructure can support new development. If not, developers may be required to fund or build needed improvements.

Why Development Review Matters

New development drives economic growth and enhances quality of life by:



Increasing housing options and job opportunities

Creating parks, bike lanes, and public spaces



Supporting thriving neighborhoods

Through development review, Montgomery Planning encourages high-quality design, infrastructure improvements, and amenities that reflect community needs.

Key Players in the Process

Montgomery Planning: The county organization responsible for managing the process and coordinating review and collaboration.

Applicant Team: The property owner or submitting organization and their supporting team of developers, architects, engineers, and consultants who submit the development proposal.

Development Review Committee (DRC):
An interagency task force composed of representatives from DPS, DOT, DEP, Montgomery Parks, WSSC, and others who review the project for compliance with applicable requirements and standards.

Montgomery County Planning Board: The final decision makers who vote to approve or deny projects.

Community Members and Special Interest Groups: The residents, homeowner associations, organizations, business owners, and others who share input in meetings and hearings.

Development Review Recap

1 Pre-Submission

NRI/FSD Existing Conditions Filed

Community Notification and Meeting

2 Application Submission

Application Submitted and Accepted

Lead Reviewer Assigned

Plan Distributed to Development
Review Committee (DRC)

3 Review, Revisions, Report

Plan review by DRC, relevant
agencies, and community

DRC Meeting

Revisions and Plan Preparation
for Planning Board Hearing

Planning Staff Report Posted

4 Planning Board Actions

Planning Board Public
Hearing and Decision

Planning Board Adopts Resolution

5 Final Submission & Plats

Final Plan Submitted with
Conditions of Approval Met

Plats Recorded

Montgomery Planning portion ends; Applicant
moves to Permitting and Construction with the
Department of Permitting Services

Application Types Include:

Concept Plan

An optional plan that allows applicants to get early feedback prior to filling a full development application.

Sketch Plan

An early-stage, illustrative overview of site layout and benefits.

Preliminary Plan

Required when creating new lots, blocks, or roads to illustrate subdivision.

Site Plan

A detailed plan showing zoning compliance and design.

Record Plat

A detailed legal map of an approved subdivision.

Forest Conservation Plan

A document that outlines specific strategies for protecting and conserving environmental features on a site.

Mandatory Referral

Required Planning Board review of projects proposed by government agencies.

Administrative Approval

Approval granted by the Montgomery Planning Director for specific smaller or low-impact projects.

How You Can Get Involved

- ✓ **Sign up** for the biweekly Development Review e-letter.
- ✓ **Attend** pre-submission community meetings.
- ✓ **Observe** livestreamed DRC meetings.
- ✓ **Review** staff reports and Planning Board agendas.
- ✓ **Testify** at public hearings or submit written comments.
- ✓ **Contact** the lead reviewer to ask questions or share input.
- ✓ **Visit** montgomeryplanning.org to explore active applications.

Permitting and Construction

Once a proposed project has been approved through the development review process, it moves into the permitting and construction phase, managed by Montgomery County's Department of Permitting Services (DPS).

DPS oversees all phases of building and land development projects, from initial permit applications through construction and final use and occupancy.

DPS's key responsibilities include:

Land Use Permits	Code Compliance
Residential Permits	Licenses
Commercial Permits	Inspections
Electrical & Mechanical Permits	Zoning & Site Plan Compliance
Fire Permits	

REMEMBER, THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS:

- 1 By-right developments that do not require any kind of initial approval and therefore go straight to DPS to apply for a building permit.
- 2 Full development review projects require some kind of discretionary approval from the Planning Board, the Hearing Examiner, or the Montgomery Planning Director before they can move to DPS.

Both types are ultimately subject to the DPS review and permitting process.

The Permitting Process

When a property owner or developer is ready to begin with permitting, they must submit the appropriate plans and applications to DPS.

The specific documents required depend on the type of construction project, the permits needed, and the reviews required for the project.

DPS reviews the plans and applications to ensure they align with:






- ✓ All applicable building codes and related laws
- ✓ Zoning regulations
- ✓ Planning Board or Hearing Examiner conditions of approval, and
- ✓ Any specific site plan requirements

Once all reviews are complete and any required revisions are made, permits are issued and construction can begin. Most projects also require a pre-construction meeting with DPS inspectors to confirm next steps.

Inspections

Once permits are issued, DPS conducts inspections throughout the construction process to ensure compliance with approved plans and building, zoning, and safety codes.

Inspectors review:

-  Installation and maintenance of sediment controls and stormwater management facilities.
-  Improvements in the public right-of-way.
-  Well and septic systems.
-  Excavations, foundations, electrical systems, fire and safety, and building heights.
-  Final inspections to close out the permit and return the posted bond.

If violations occur, DPS may also issue stop work orders, civil citations, or other enforcement actions.

How You Can Get Involved

While there are no formal opportunities for public input during permitting or construction, residents can:

- 1 File an appeal of an approved permit with the County Board of Appeals within 30 days of the action.
- 2 Contact DPS regarding **complaints** about construction safety or code violations.
- 3 Explore DPS's **Construction Activities Map** to learn about projects in your area.
- 4 Check out DPS's **homeowner resources** to learn more about permitting.
- 5 **Schedule a free predesign consultation** with DPS staff.

Protecting the Environment at Every Level of Planning

Planning and urban design are some of the most effective tools for protecting the environment and preparing our communities for the effects of climate change. Environmental planning ensures that future development supports both the community's needs and the protection of natural resources.

Planners focus on:

-  Prioritizing environmental justice and health
-  Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
-  Improving air and water quality
-  Preserving biological diversity and local ecosystems
-  Preventing forest loss and increasing carbon sequestration
-  Promoting resilience by helping communities adapt to climate change
-  Improving new developments' environmental impacts

Planning In Montgomery County

Montgomery Planning integrates these environmental considerations into every level of planning.



Thrive Montgomery 2050 and the Climate Action Plan offer **countywide guidance** on environmental priorities and establish sustainability goals.

Master plans and community climate assessments provide **area-specific recommendations** that focus on a community's unique needs.



The development review process, the Forest Conservation Law, and the Environmental Guidelines translate plan recommendations into **site-specific actions** by applying regulations to individual sites.

How Does Montgomery Planning Help Improve Environmental Challenges?

Each plan and process includes a range of recommendations and actions to address priority environmental challenges.

SOME KEY STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

-  Identifying and supporting underserved communities to ensure equitable access to a healthy environment
-  Creating compact, walkable communities that support biking, walking, and public transit use
-  Protecting streams, watersheds, and environmentally sensitive areas
-  Expanding protected parklands
-  Preserving forests, planting trees, and enhancing soil health to strengthen ecosystems
-  Establishing design guidelines to help communities adapt to flooding, extreme heat, and other climate impacts
-  Promoting energy-efficient buildings, green infrastructure, and clean energy sources

How You Can Get Involved

- 1 **Attend Public Meetings** during the Master Plan or Development Review processes.
- 2 **Join a Local Advocacy Group** or environmental organization to contribute your voice to environmental planning.
- 3 **Volunteer** with Montgomery Parks or other environmental programs.
- 4 **Explore the Reforest Montgomery program** and apply for free trees, join tree planting efforts, or explore incentives for planting on your property.



Participation in the Planning Process

Community members play a critical role in shaping how Montgomery County grows and evolves. Your input helps Montgomery Planning and county leaders understand local needs, set priorities, and create more inclusive, responsive plans that reflect the voices of all who call the county home.

Equitable Engagement in Planning

Montgomery Planning is committed to ensuring all residents feel welcomed, valued, and heard.

Our engagement approach is grounded in our [Equity Agenda for Planning](#) which guides our commitment to including communities who have historically been left out of the planning process.

Our [Equitable Engagement Guide](#) helps staff meet people where they are, build lasting relationships, and create accessible, inclusive opportunities—through translation services, flexible meeting formats, and outreach tailored to each plan and community.

MASTER PLANNING

Public feedback on master plans helps planners understand local perspectives, build shared goals, and shape future recommendations.

You can:

- Request that your community be included in an upcoming plan
- Sign up for updates and share ideas with planners
- Review and comment on the Scope of Work
- Attend virtual and in-person meetings, events, and workshops
- Complete surveys, use feedback maps, or participate in focus groups
- Invite planners to speak with your community or organization
- Review draft recommendations and share feedback
- Testify or submit comments during the Public Hearing Draft and County Council review
- Attend or participate in short-term activities like placemaking projects or pop-up events
- Organize neighbors around shared priorities or advocate for specific ideas
- Join advocacy organizations that share your priorities

PARK PLANNING

Montgomery Parks invites feedback on projects of all sizes and opportunities to get involved vary based on the project's scope and location.

You can:

- [Sign up](#) for the Parks + Plans newsletter
- Take surveys posted on the [Parks Open Town Hall page](#)
- [Visit](#) the Park Projects page to learn about current and upcoming efforts
- Check individual park pages for engagement opportunities tied to specific sites

ZONING

Community members can weigh in on zoning matters, particularly during the [Zoning Text Amendment \(ZTA\) process](#).

You can:

- [Submit written comments or testify](#) at Planning Board hearings
- Follow current and past ZTAs on the [County Council website](#)
- Share feedback on conditional use applications and development proposals requiring site plan approval

DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

Residents can provide input on proposed development projects during various stages of the review process.

You can:

- [Subscribe](#) to the Development Review E-letter
- Attend pre-submission meetings or [watch](#) DRC meetings online
- [Review](#) staff reports and Planning Board agendas
- [Submit written comments or testify](#) at Planning Board hearings
- Contact the lead reviewer with questions or input

Stay Engaged Year-Round

To stay connected with Montgomery Planning, you can:

- Subscribe to plan- or project-specific [e-letters](#)
- Follow Montgomery Planning on social media:
 - X (Twitter): [@montgomeryplans](#)
 - Instagram: [@montgomeryplanning](#)
 - Facebook: [facebook.com/montgomeryplanning](#)
- Explore our [online videos](#) to learn more about planning topics
- [Contact Planning staff](#) or visit our [Information Counter](#) to ask questions or learn more

To stay connected in your community, you can:

- Engage with local civic, tenant, or homeowners associations
- Join a Citizens Advisory Board or advocacy group
- Volunteer with Montgomery Parks or Planning projects
- Encourage friends and neighbors to participate with you

Transportation Planning

Transportation affects how people live, work, and move throughout Montgomery County. Transportation planning anticipates how people will travel now and in the future, taking into account population growth, land use changes, and economic development. The goal is to ensure that everyone can get where they need to go safely, affordably, and reliably—regardless of how they travel.

Modes of Travel

Planning for transportation infrastructure involves the following modes of travel:

- **Driving:** Includes all private vehicles, carpools, taxis, rideshares such as Uber, and commercial trucks for deliveries and transport.
- **Public transit:** Includes Ride On and Metrobuses and the Metro and MARC trains.
- **Rolling:** Includes motorcycles, bicycles, electric bicycles and e-bikes, and both motorized and non-motorized wheelchairs.
- **Walking**

Thrive Montgomery 2050 and Master Plan Guidance

Thrive Montgomery 2050, the county's General Plan, establishes why and how we plan for transportation infrastructure by requiring that all land use plans include complementary transportation plans. Accordingly, these transportation plans must align with Thrive's vision for compact, corridor-focused, sustainable growth and present a multimodal approach that offers multiple ways to travel around the county.



Transportation functional master plans focus on infrastructure supporting one or more modes of transportation. Examples of transportation functional master plans include:

- [The Master Plan of Highways and Transitways](#)
- [The Pedestrian Master Plan](#)
- [The Bicycle Master Plan](#)
- [The Rustic Roads Functional Master Plan](#)





Area master plans focus on the roads, sidewalks, bikeways, trails and transit improvements needed to support the type of development envisioned for each area, with priorities tailored to the community's character and travel needs.

Key Transportation Planning Players

COUNTY ENTITIES

- 
Montgomery Planning
 Develops transportation policies and master plans that guide where roads, bikeways, and transitways go—but does not build or operate infrastructure.
- 
Montgomery County Planning Board
 Approves public and private projects that include roads, sidewalks, trails, bikeways, and transit improvements.
- 
Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT)
 Designs, builds, and maintains county roads and operates the Ride On bus system. Manages major projects like bus rapid transit.
- 
Montgomery Parks
 Plans, builds, and maintains roads and trails within the county's park system.
- 
Montgomery County Police
 Enforces traffic laws and promotes road safety.

STATE & REGIONAL PARTNERS

- 
State Highway Administration (SHA)
 Oversees design, construction, and maintenance of major state roads like MD 97 and US 29.
- 
Maryland Transit Administration (MTA)
 Operates the MARC Brunswick Line and commuter buses.
- 
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)
 Manages Metrobus and the Metrorail Red Line within the county.
- 
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC)
 Approves regionally significant transportation projects through its Transportation Planning Board



How You Can Get Involved

- 1 Attend in-person or virtual meetings to learn about plans and projects
- 2 Take online surveys and use interactive maps to share input
- 3 Join advisory groups to stay involved and connect with neighbors
- 4 Join public meetings or citizen committees during the Facility Planning stage of the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) process
- 5 Provide written or in-person comments or testimony during Planning Board or County Council review and before key funding decisions

Implementation and Monitoring of Improvements

There are two ways that the transportation-related improvements recommended in functional and area master plans are constructed.

- **Privately funded improvements** include new streets, streetlights, sidewalks, bikeways, traffic signals, etc. that are built by developers as part of a private project's review, approval and construction process to ensure that the local transportation network can adequately serve the new development.
- **Publicly funded improvements** account for the majority of the county's spending on transportation improvements and are implemented by the county or state through the state's Consolidated Transportation Program or the county's Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Under the county's CIP process, a typical project goes through facility planning, final design, and construction, with key decision points for Planning Board and County Council.

These projects can include bus rapid transit, sidewalks, bikeways, upgrading the storm drains, bridge replacement, and safety projects. Examples include the Purple Line construction, the extension of Observation Drive, a shared use path on Good Hope Road, and sidewalks on Old Baltimore Road.

Monitoring the performance of the transportation infrastructure is essential and involves collecting information on a regular basis to understand how the county's transportation network meets the goals and metrics defined in Thrive and the various functional plans and area master plans.



Planning for Schools

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is Maryland's largest school district. In the 2024-2025 school year, it served 156,050 students across a network of 137 elementary schools, 40 middle schools, 25 high schools, one career and technical high school, one alternative education center with one satellite center, five special schools, one charter school and two Early Childhood Centers.

Planning for schools is a collaborative effort between Montgomery Planning, MCPS's Department of Planning and Construction, Montgomery Parks, the County Council, the state, and community members that ensures schools meet current and future needs.

How School Planning Happens

School planning is shaped by:

1 Area Master Plans

Guide long-term school needs based on planned land use and potential growth.

2 MCPS Facilities Planning

Manages the capital budget and Capital Improvements Program process for schools, including projecting enrollment, analyzing building conditions, and planning capital or non-capital solutions as necessary.

3 Growth & Infrastructure Policy (GIP)

Guides the Planning Board's review of development applications by setting standards for evaluating public school capacity and the impact that additional growth from development may have on it.

4 Mandatory Referral

Planning Board reviews and approves all new school construction projects to ensure design, access, and environmental factors align with master plans and community needs. Operational decisions such as curriculum, class sizes, and school boundaries are not part of the mandatory referral review; they remain solely with MCPS.

When making decisions about next steps for school plans, MCPS analyzes:

- **Projected Enrollment** – The number of students projected to be registered at a school in future years based on past and current enrollment trends
- **Program Capacity** – The number of students that can be reasonably accommodated at a school, based on the number of classrooms, staffing ratio, and educational programs
- **Utilization** – A measure of how occupied a school's capacity is, calculated by dividing enrollment by program capacity

Boundary Change Process

When nearby schools are overutilized or underutilized, MCPS may adjust school boundaries. The process includes data analysis, community meetings, and public input before final decisions are made by the Board of Education.

Aligning Development and Schools

Enrollment forecasts and capital projects scheduled in MCPS's Capital Improvements Program are used to evaluate school adequacy through the Annual School Test. This helps determine whether or not schools can support the expected number of students that will enroll over the years.

School planning also considers facility utilization, based on how full a school is compared to its capacity. Schools over 100% utilization are considered overutilized, while those under 80% are deemed underutilized. When projected enrollment exceeds the program capacity of a school by certain thresholds, several strategies may be considered to address the overutilization, including student reassignments, classroom additions, or new schools. These trends inform future investments, boundary changes, or new school construction.

If a school is projected to be overutilized above certain thresholds, developers will be required to pay Utilization Premium Payments (UPPs) in addition to the standard School Impact Tax that all new housing projects are required to pay.

Roles and Responsibilities

- MCPS leads school planning and construction
- Montgomery Planning shares housing data and conducts school adequacy tests
- Planning Board reviews public school projects under the Mandatory Referral process
- Montgomery Parks coordinates the maintenance and operation of shared recreational facilities

Get Involved

- ✓ **Attend** [MCPS public hearings](#), boundary studies, and workshops
- ✓ **Use** the [MCPS Boundary Study Web Site](#) to share feedback
- ✓ **Join** [Family Engagement Specialists](#)
- ✓ **Stay** updated through MCPS newsletters and the Community Engagement website

Putting It All Together

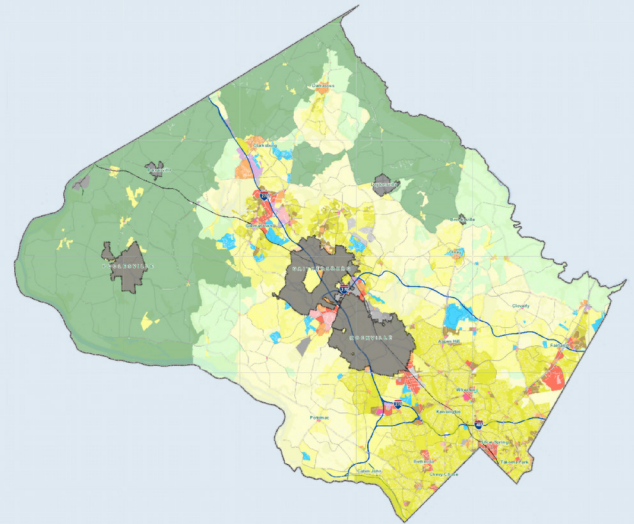
This module weaves together key Planning Academy topics, from community engagement and master plans to zoning and development review, using real-world examples and interactive tools.

THE PEDESTRIAN MASTER PLAN: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

The [Pedestrian Master Plan](#), launched in 2019, aimed to make walking and rolling safer, more comfortable, and more accessible across Montgomery County. It placed special emphasis on inclusive design for residents with vision and mobility challenges, going beyond basic American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.

Community voices and priorities shaped the Plan from the start. Planning's outreach and engagement efforts were designed to meet people where they are and included:

- **#WalkingHere:** A countywide social media campaign encouraging residents to share pedestrian experiences and challenges.
- **Multilingual Signage:** Installed in parks, bus shelters, and transit areas to engage diverse communities.
- **Interactive Tools:** Digital maps for identifying pedestrian shortcuts and a prioritization tool for weighing in on needed improvements.
- **Pedestrian Audit Toolkit:** A resource to support neighborhood-level advocacy.
- **Community Meetings & Pop-Ups:** More than 60 in-person and virtual events to gather feedback.
- **Pedestrian Survey:** Distributed to 60,000 households, providing the first statistically valid pedestrian data for the county.
- **Community Advisory Group:** A diverse group that shaped goals, reviewed drafts, and provided ongoing feedback.



Explore MCATLAS, Montgomery Planning's interactive mapping tool, to find zoning information for any property, neighborhood, or area of interest.

ZONING: CONNECTING PLANS TO PLACES

Zoning brings master plans to life by defining how land can be used and developed. The maps below highlight the different zoning types and where they are located throughout the county.

- 🏡 **Agricultural & Rural Residential Zones:** Protecting farmland, rural communities, and open spaces.
- 🏠 **Residential Zones:** Including single-family homes, townhouses, condos, and apartments across the county.
- 🏢 **Commercial/Residential Zones:** Creating walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods like those in Bethesda, Wheaton, and Silver Spring.
- 🏢 **Employment Zones:** Supporting offices, labs, and retail hubs like the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center.
- 🏢 **Industrial Zones:** Designated for manufacturing, warehousing, and public works.
- 📏 **Overlay Zones:** Adding extra requirements to support area-specific planning goals.

ATWELL ON SPRING - A DEVELOPMENT REVIEW CASE STUDY

The redevelopment of 8787 Georgia Avenue—from a small office building with a large surface parking lot to a multifamily residential building with a grocery store—demonstrates how a wide range of inputs are integrated throughout the development review process to establish a final plan that aligns with the county goals and regulations while reflecting diverse community perspectives.

This project clearly illustrated how:

- **Master plans, county codes, and regulations** form the foundation for all development and guide the review of proposed plans.
- **Community input** directly shapes the plan at every stage of the process.

- **Expert analysis** is used to assess whether public facilities can support the proposed development and to identify any necessary improvements or contributions from the applicant.
- **Montgomery Planning and the Planning Board** work to balance community priorities with the broader needs of a growing population.

Explore Montgomery Planning's Development Activity Information Center (DAIC) featuring interactive tools including a searchable plans list, an interactive map of projects, and development dashboards with data about review times and approvals.





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