# Course Syllabus

## Overview

The Montgomery Planning Community Planning Academy is an educational initiative designed to engage 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, environment, transportation, schools, and other key focus areas. Developed by Montgomery Planning in collaboration with the Montgomery County Council, Department of Permitting Services, the Department of Transportation, and Montgomery County Public Schools, 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.

**Course Contact**
Please reach out to Community Planning Academy staff at
**planningacademy@montgomeryplanning.org**

## Course Format

The Community Planning Academy is offered through an intuitive online platform that is designed to deliver a user-friendly and engaging learning experience. The course comprises ten self-paced modules, each between 25 to 40 minutes long, and combines multimedia elements to enhance understanding and keep participants engaged. Participants also have access to a comprehensive digital resource library and downloadable highlights from each module to support ongoing learning.

## Course Access

The online course is accessible through a computer, tablet, or mobile device with an internet connection making it easier for residents to learn in a way that fits their schedule and lifestyle. After visiting the Academy's public dashboard and signing up to create an account, participants receive an email from the learning management platform confirming their login credentials and providing instructions on how to access the course.

## Goals

**By the end of the course, participants can:**

- Gain a deeper, well-rounded understanding of the planning and development process so they may effectively advocate for their communities and share that knowledge with their community.
- Be inspired to lead and engage their community throughout the planning and development process.
- Have stronger connections to the Planning Department staff and work.
- Be more engaged in contributing their voice to the planning process.
- Serve as ambassadors for the Academy encouraging others to participate in the program.

## Course Modules

**Module 1: Introduction to Planning**

- This module breaks down the basics of planning for the natural and built environment in Montgomery County—what it is and why it's so important. Participants will learn how planning helps guide growth, development, and how land and buildings are used to create thriving communities across Montgomery County.

**Module 2: Master Plans**

- This module focuses on Master Plans: what they are, different types of plans, who is involved, how they're created and implemented, and their role in shaping communities across Montgomery County.

**Module 3: Zoning**

- This module covers what zoning is and how it shapes physical development in Montgomery County. Participants will learn about how zoning affects what gets built on each property, how development standards and land uses are defined and applied, and what are different zone types.

**Module 4: Development Review**

- This module covers the Development Review Process, from concept to Planning Board approval. Participants learn how projects move from proposals to approved plans, whether they're allowed by right or a discretionary review by the Planning Borad or the Hearing Examiner, who are the key players, including the applicant team, county and state agencies, and the role of community and special interest groups.

### Module 5: Permitting and Construction

- This module builds on the information provided in Module 4: Development Review and covers what happens after the Planning Board (and in some cases the Planning Director or the Hearing Examiner), approves the development application for a project and it moves to the construction phase. Participants learn about different phases of the permitting and construction process led by Montgomery County's Department of Permitting Services.

### Module 6: Environment and Climate Change

- This module covers how protection of environmental resources, climate change, and resilience are incorporated in the county's planning and development process. Participants learn about key environmental challenges like maintaining air and water quality, minimizing forest loss and how the county incorporates environmental justice at every level of planning, from the General Plan (Thrive Montgomery 2050) to plan reviews and final construction and monitoring.

### Module 7: Participating in the Planning Process

- This module covers how to get involved in various parts of the planning process in Montgomery County. This module shares details around the Equitable Engagement Guide, the Equity Agenda for Planning and other resources community members can use to stay active in community development.

### Module 8: Transportation Planning

- This module is about the relationship between land use and transportation, and how planning for all forms of transportation—private vehicles, trucks, buses, trains, bicycles, wheelchairs and pedestrians—in the county is done, and what tools and mechanisms planners use at different stages of the planning and implementation of the county transportation network.

### Module 9: Planning for Schools

- This module discusses how planning for public schools is done to ensure that schools have the capacity to serve new development, and the role of Montogomery Planning and the Montgomery County Public Schools in providing adequate school facilities to meet the educational needs of the school system.

### Module 10: Putting It All Together

- This module ties it all together with a real-world example of how a site was developed from start to finish, ranging from what the area master plan envisioned for the site, how

the proposal was influenced by the input from the surrounding community, and what finally got built. It will also cover ways for the participants to stay involved in the planning process after they graduate from the Community Planning Academy.

## Learning Checks and Course Evaluation

Each module ends with a short learning check questionnaire designed to help participants review key concepts and reinforce their understanding. These checks are not graded, and there is no pass or fail for the course. The goal is to foster learning in a low-pressure, engaging environment—one where residents feel encouraged to expand their knowledge of planning-related topics. Participants are also asked to complete a brief evaluation about their learning experience at the end of each module.

## Resources for Participants

All necessary materials and supplemental content for the course are provided directly within the online learning platform. Participants do not need to purchase or acquire any external resources.

## Privacy Policies

As a government agency, we are required to comply with the Maryland Public Information Act, which provides that information or documents within our possession must generally be publicly available unless protected by one of the exemptions/exceptions.

The information we gather is either basic information for registration and contact purposes such as name, email address, phone number, or the information we need to track the progress of the Academy and whether we are reaching a diverse audience (for example, address, income, age, race/ethnicity, etc.) as well as to gauge  the  usage patterns and participants' preferences as they navigate the web site, use our services such as e-mail, or read our e-mail newsletters.

If you send us an e-mail, we use it to respond to your inquiry, just as we do with written correspondence. E-mail correspondence, like mailed correspondence, may become a public record. As a public record, your correspondence could be disclosed to other parties upon their request, in accordance with Maryland Public Information Act.

**View Montgomery Planning's** terms of use and privacy policy.

## Accessibility

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) encourages the involvement and participation of all individuals in the community, including those with disabilities, in the planning and review processes. In accordance with the requirements of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), M-NCPPC will not discriminate against individuals with disabilities in its services, programs or activities. M-NCPCC works to make its facilities and materials accessible and to hold public meetings in formats and locations that are, likewise, accessible. M-NCPPC will generally provide, upon request, appropriate aids and services and make reasonable modifications to policies and programs for persons with disabilities (e.g. large print materials, listening devices, sign language interpretation, etc.).

To request accommodation, please contact the M-NCPPC Montgomery County Commissioners Office at (301) 495-4605 or at mcp-chair@mncppc-mc.org. If you are requesting an auxiliary aid or service for a public meeting, please submit your request at least one week prior to the scheduled meeting date. Maryland residents can also use the free Maryland Relay Service for assistance with calls to or from hearing or speech-impaired persons by dialing 7-1-1; for information about the service, go to the MD Relay website or call 800-552-7724. Residents may also contact the Montgomery Planning ADA Coordinator at 301-495-1324.

**View Montgomery Planning's** [accessibility policy](#).

## About Montgomery Planning

The Montgomery County Planning Department aims to improve quality of life by planning to conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for current and future generations. The Planning Department creates great communities by developing master plans, [reviewing applications for development](#) and analyzing various types of information to help public officials plan for Montgomery County's future.

Each community within Montgomery County has a master plan that creates a comprehensive vision of land use and future development. (Some jurisdictions within Montgomery County—such as the cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg and some smaller taxing districts such as Poolesville—have independent planning and zoning authority over land within their boundaries. Contact those jurisdictions directly for information about properties within their borders.) The 140-member Planning Department brings [regulatory cases](#), [master plans](#), [functional plans](#) and many other initiatives to the [Montgomery County Planning Board](#).