

Responses to Questions Received at the Community Meetings on June 9 + 11, 2026

The questions below reflect the most common questions submitted at both community meetings.

1. How were the proposed building heights and density increases determined and how do they reflect community preferences and compatibility with nearby residential areas? Why is the plan increasing density in Friendship Heights and who benefits from this additional development?

The height and zoning recommendations balance the county priority to focus development along major corridors, like Wisconsin Avenue, and the concern of some community members around future development being too tall and/or dense. The Plan largely retains the existing density values (Floor Area Ratio or FAR) for most downtown parcels, while proposing taller heights. Many parcels would need additional density beyond what is proposed to reach the mapped maximum heights, and the Plan allows for that in exchange for delivering public amenities that would benefit the community. The Plan also includes recommendations to appropriately transition from taller structures to single family neighborhoods.

2. Can developers exceed the mapped heights through the proposed incentives?

No. The only way to exceed the mapped height is by providing more Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs) than required. This applies to the whole county and is outlined in the existing zoning ordinance in Section 4.5.2.C.

3. Please explain "POPS" - How can the public plan use of these areas if they are privately owned? How is this enforced?

POPS are "privately owned public spaces." Multifamily or mixed-use development projects of a certain size and site configuration in Commercial-Residential (CR) zones are required to provide public open space as part of a development. The zoning ordinance defines this as "space devoted to public use or enjoyment that attracts public appreciation due to its location and amenities." It will be privately owned, but it must be designed for the public to use it. The Sector Plan provides details on the sizes and characteristics of future public open space for the identified opportunity sites. As with all Sector Plan recommendations, future development applications for properties within the Plan Area will have to demonstrate that they substantially conform to the plan during review of the application.

4. What standards will ensure appropriate transitions in scale between new development and adjacent low-density neighborhoods?

In the Sector Plan Working Draft Chapter 4: Site-Specific Recommendations, there are building massing and height controls described for the sites that are immediately adjacent to low-rise residential neighborhoods. The Working Draft recommends (Chapter 5: Implementation) that these controls be included in the proposed Friendship Heights Overlay Zone which would become part of the zoning ordinance.

5. What traffic studies have been conducted and how will proposed changes affect congestion and safety? How will a recommendation like the changes to River Road be implemented? Have you fully studied the impacts of removing lanes?

The Transportation Appendix presents the master plan transportation adequacy metrics as well as lane repurposing analysis for River Road and Wisconsin Avenue. The Draft Plan recommendations are consistent with Montgomery County's Vision Zero goal to end traffic deaths and serious injuries on our roads. Changes to all roads are implemented by the agency that controls the road, which is either Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) or the Maryland State Highway Administration (MDSHA). As part of implementation these agencies would complete more detailed study and analysis to determine whether/how to implement.

6. I see no public parking, in this highly dense area for residents, their guests and to support the sorely needed retail, restaurants. Is the plan recommending public parking?

Yes. The Plan recommends exploring options for a future public-private partnership that could yield a publicly accessible parking as a Priority Public Benefit via the Friendship Heights Overlay Zone. See Section 3.7 (Transportation) and Chapter 5 (Implementation) of the Working Draft for more details.

7. Is the Plan recommending removing the WMATA bus facility?

No. The WMATA bus facility is crucial for bus operations. The Plan is proposing that in the future Wisconsin Circle could be relocated or redesigned to create a different block structure that would provide an opportunity for the bus facility to be redesigned. WMATA supports this recommendation as the current bus facility is not the ideal size or orientation for the buses that use it today.

8. How much new public green space is proposed and how does it compare to existing conditions?

There are two categories of public open space - the parks owned and operated by M-NCPPC and the public spaces that are privately owned but are used by the public. The Plan is proposing improvements to the M-NCPPC parks within the Plan Area and is proposing several new POPS (see question 3 above) at key sites. The Plan is focused on preserving the open space at 5550 Friendship Boulevard and introducing new open space along Wisconsin Avenue where there is not any today.

9. What is the interface between the Sector Plan recommendations for Brookdale Park and the development plans from EYA, specifically regarding Brookdale Park and the linear park buffer?

The development review process is separate from the ongoing Sector Plan update. The Sector Plan is carrying forward the recommendation from the 1998 *Friendship Heights Sector Plan* for a linear park that can serve as a green connector and a buffer between the Brookdale neighborhood and the future development on the former GEICO site. The Plan includes a few recommendations about the design and experience of the linear park as the Plan will last for the next 20-30 years, regardless of what happens with current development applications.

10. What environmental studies have been conducted and how will environmental impacts be mitigated? What are the expected impacts on tree canopy, biodiversity, and impervious surfaces and what protections are included?

Impacts can be difficult to predict, as many recommendations are implemented through the development review process. However, the qualitative piece of the Climate Assessment anticipates potential impacts and that information is used to refine the recommendations in the plan. Some of those recommendations include mitigating tree canopy loss and urban heat island effects, improving stormwater management and encouraging biodiversity. The Plan also includes specific recommendations to reduce impervious cover, increase tree plantings and preserve existing tree canopy, and to prioritize native plantings. Every new development must also comply with County standards for Stormwater Management as well as Forest Conservation Law.

11. What types of housing are planned, how is affordability defined, and how realistic are affordability targets?

The Sector Plan does not prescribe a single type of housing. Rather, it recommends a mix of housing types and unit sizes to accommodate a diversity of households across a range of income levels, tenures, household sizes, and life stages. Given Friendship Heights' compact

urban form and access to transit, the plan particularly encourages additional multifamily residential development in the form of mid-to-high rise buildings downtown.

Affordability is defined as housing costs that do not exceed 30% of a household's income. The primary mechanism for delivering affordable housing in this Plan is through Montgomery County's MPDU program, which creates units that are affordable to households earning between 65-70% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

Friendship Heights requires new residential developments or redevelopments with 20+ units to provide 15% MPDUs, guaranteeing affordable units for moderate-income households. DHCA's maximum income for MPDUs in 2025 is attached. The Sector Plan also encourages affordable housing for lower income households earning below 65% AMI by making this a Priority Public Benefit. This provides additional incentives for developers to exceed the minimum affordability requirements and increase housing affordability in the Plan Area.

12. How has community feedback been incorporated into the plan and what mechanisms ensure accountability going forward?

Community feedback has been incorporated into the Plan in numerous ways. A few of the recommendations that stem from stakeholder input include, but are not limited to: preserving the open space at 5550 Friendship Boulevard, numerous park amenities to address active recreation and contemplative activities, recommendations about pedestrian safety, the nature of the height and massing transitions to the adjacent neighborhoods, incentivizing public amenities like affordable housing, a library, an arts center and recreation facilities, and the recommendation for public parking. As with all recommendations, future development applications for properties within the Plan Area will have to demonstrate that they substantially conform to the Plan during review of the application.

13. At the 5500 Friendship Boulevard site, how does the recommended 0.5-acre open space compare to the current amount of green space on the site?

The current green lawn that is in the southeast corner of the site is approximately 0.36 acres. There is additional lawn space to the north of the large entry driveway. 0.5 acres is approximately the existing amount of lawn space on the site today, and the recommended open space could be more accessible.

14. How wide is the linear park between Brookdale and the GEICO site's future development?

In Section 4.4 the Plan provides a performance standard for the park rather than a minimum width by describing the elements that the linear park should include and what the experience

in the park should be like. It is expected that the park may vary in width and a specific width is not provided.

15. When in the planning process is street lighting addressed?

Additional street lighting is recommended in Section 3.7 (Transportation) of the Working Draft. Street lighting can be addressed during the development review process for private development, where generally new development will install the current standard of street lighting along the lot frontage if it is not already there. It can also be addressed on the public side during the budgeting and Capital Improvement Program process, which would be implemented by the entity that controls the road, whether it be the Village of Friendship Heights, Montgomery County or the State of Maryland.

16. The high-rises in the Friendship Heights Village are up to 17 stories. How much is that in feet? How many feet is a 7-story building?

While design can vary from building to building, a good rule of thumb is that residential floors are 10 ft tall per floor, and commercial floors are 13 -15 ft tall per floor. Lobbies are taller and in a residential building a lobby may be 20 ft tall. A 7-story residential building could be around 80 ft tall, while a 7-story office building could be nearly 100 ft tall.

17. How will the Plan ensure there is affordable commercial space for local-serving uses if the plan is proposing high-rise development that generally yields high-rent commercial spaces that push out local-serving uses?

Generally speaking, the commercial real estate market is the dominant factor in determining commercial rents. The Plan cannot guarantee any particular type of retail or tenant in any building. However, new development can bring a wider variety of sizes and locations of new ground-floor space for retail and amenities. The market in Friendship Heights is starting to shift away from high-end retail and if more people are living downtown in the future, that may support a market for neighborhood-serving uses as well.

18. Why wasn't the GEICO HQ evaluated for historic preservation?

The 1998 *Friendship Heights Sector Plan* envisioned the redevelopment of the GEICO parcel, a recommendation that led to the Planning Board's approval of Preliminary Plan 119990390. This plan approved the redevelopment of the site including the demolition of the existing headquarters facility. Given that the Planning Board approved the resource's demolition in 1999, Montgomery Planning and the Historic Preservation office advised against evaluating the GEICO Headquarters for listing in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.