The 2016 Plan for the Rockville Pike Corridor

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On August 1, 2016, the Mayor and the City Council of Rockville, Maryland adopted the Rockville Pike Neighborhood Plan (“the 2016 Plan”), which replaced the 1989 version as part of City’s overall Master Plan. The planning area is the land and infrastructure that straddle a two-mile portion of Maryland Route 355 (Rockville Pike), from the southern border of Rockville up to just south of the Rockville Town Center.

The history of what is now called Rockville Pike began perhaps 10,000 years ago, as a Native American trail. The portion of the corridor, which is in Rockville, is a ridge between the Rock Creek and Cabin John Creek watersheds, has been used continuously since then. The modern history began in the 1950s when Rockville Pike developed into a car-oriented suburban shopping-center corridor serving the needs of the rapidly growing population in Montgomery County and the City of Rockville. Through the 1980s, a few apartment complexes, garden and midrise, were built and some office buildings were constructed, but the general theme was retail.

The 1989 Plan was developed in response to the arrival of the Metro Red Line, which had just opened in 1984. The Plan encouraged more dense development in the southern part of the planning area near the Twinbrook Metro Station. Plan and zoning incentives were given to encourage residential development near the station, as there was a concern that the strong office market of the time would dominate new development. The Plan also attempted to improve pedestrian access to the Metro Station and from the sidewalks to the retail. Away from the Metro Station, the 1989 Plan did not encourage a more urban environment, as a base maximum height limit of 35 feet was retained, though a pathway to accommodating requests for more height existed.
Changes have come to the Maryland Chapter to better serve our members, with more on the way: we have a new website: visit us at http://www.apamaryland.org/. We continuously post new job offerings, Certification Maintenance, networking opportunities, and news of interest to planners. We have also launched a new mailing list and are sending out messages to members that are more immediate in nature. Look for messages from APA Maryland, check to make sure they are not going into your spam email box (!) We are working to hold as many activities for members as we can, in as many areas of the state as possible. Look for announcements in your mailbox and on our website. Look for a survey from us early next year asking for input on what else you would like to see from your chapter.

A reminder that The Maryland/Delaware Regional Conference is just around the corner: October 15 and 16, 2016 at the Sheraton North Hotel in Towson, Maryland and we have extended the regular registration fees until the day of the conference. The theme this year is Change the Mindset – Change the Planning! – Moving our Communities Forward into a Changing World. With three concurrent sessions to choose from during an hour and a half session and sessions addressing the changing face of transportation, the sharing economy, climate change, changing demographics, urbanizing suburbs: this is going to be a very exciting, dynamic conference. We will also offer two ethics sessions and a law session. All sessions will have certification maintenance credits. Go to our website to view the agenda: Regional Conference Agenda

Plan to attend the Regional Maryland/Delaware Conference, see planning in whole new ways, through the changes being made because of the circumstances we find ourselves in as the world changes around us. Or the dilemmas we find ourselves in because our Planning Departments are not changing with the times! Save the date!

In an attempt to evolve away from the old model of shopping centers being set back hundreds of feet from the road, a “build-to line” was established that required developers to place a portion of all new buildings no more than 135 feet from the center line of the road (or 270 feet between buildings across from each other). That distance would include 60 feet of State right-of-way (three main travel lanes, a berm and a sidewalk), easements for access roads, and space for frontage parking.

The new 2016 Plan builds on many of the 1989 concepts but also attempts to accommodate and embrace new economic trends and urban design preferences. The most important recent trends have been the greatly increased demand for housing near Metro, developer willingness to meet that demand through mixed-use development, and a general desire (and preliminary plans) for even more transit service via rapid bus service.

Montgomery County’s proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) includes a route along MD 355 and contains the Rockville Pike portion within the city of Rockville. The 2016 Plan accommodates the proposed bi-directional BRT in the center, which pushes the roadway outward by about 35 feet, while maintaining the three lanes of vehicular traffic in each direction. In addition, the Plan formalizes the local access lanes that run parallel to the Rockville Pike and that have been created piecemeal through easements and redevelopment over the past 50 years.
Although the BRT will widen the main driving areas of the Rockville Pike, the 2016 Plan draws buildings closer to the center, reducing the distance from building face-to-building face from the 1989 Plan’s 270 feet to 252 feet, or less in some cases. Buildings can be sited right at the sidewalks, which will be substantially widened from current conditions. Protected bike paths are included on the re-designed Pike, which will make a now-treacherous ride safer and more appealing for even recreational riders. All of this, including local access lanes and some on-street parking, can be located within the reduced distance.

The 2016 Plan for the Rockville Pike corridor acknowledges that the demand for housing near Metro stations along portions of the Red Line, including the Twinbrook Station, has been swelling, especially since the end of the recent recession. If current projections hold true, population increases in the Rockville Pike plan area will account for about 40% of Rockville’s total population growth between now and 2040, even though the corridor represents less than 5% of the City’s land area.

Throughout the planning process, there was general acknowledgement from stakeholders that more density and greater building height is appropriate close to Metro and that the plan area will continue to develop in a more urbanized format than the suburban development pattern that characterizes most of Rockville. While there was never any real call for the 300-foot building height that is allowed to the south of the City by Montgomery County’s 2010 White Flint Sector Plan, there is a range of opinions of what the limits should be. Can a five-story building provide sufficient density to take advantage of the transit-rich location? Will a twelve-story apartment building put too much pressure on roads, schools and other infrastructure? In the end, the plan gives general direction, providing for relatively more height near the Metro Station, while lowering maximums adjacent to existing lower density residential areas. Specific height standards will be worked out within the zoning framework, a discussion which is still to come.

The Rockville Pike Neighborhood Plan’s over-arching land use goal is to ensure that redevelopment emerges as complete neighborhoods, by ensuring that activity-inducing, life-enriching public amenities are also included. While Rockville is known for its abundance of parks (more than 1,100 acres), none of them are located within the corridor, even though 3,500 people already live in the planning area. The 2016 Plan calls for a minimum of 10 acres of parkland to be created through redevelopment and/or city acquisition and development.

Furthering this goal, the 2016 Plan emphasizes greatly improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, a more finely grained road network that will provide alternatives to the congested Pike, a mix of residential types affordable to a range of incomes, complementary non-residential uses, and support for the diverse commercial activity that has long made this corridor a popular retail destination. The anticipated result is that the segment of the Rockville Pike corridor within the city of Rockville will evolve as an interesting and appealing mixed-use neighborhood, and still be a great place to shop and dine.
Change the Mindset – Change the Planning!

Maryland Planners, mark your calendars! The 2016 Regional Conference is being held on October 15 and 16, 2016 at the Sheraton North Hotel in Towson, Maryland. Early check in, registration, and a meet & greet will take place on Friday evening, October 14, 2016. This year’s conference is centered on Change the Mindset – Change the Planning! – Moving Forward in a Changing World. With 26 ninety minutes sessions to choose from during this conference, this will be an exciting and dynamic symposium for professional planners from Maryland and Delaware.

The conference topics include:
- The changing face of transportation
- Climate change and the impact on development
- Changing demographics
- Urbanizing suburbs – Neighborhood revitalization.
- Generational lifestyles and new practices
- Infrastructure choices that create successful neighborhoods
- The importance of mixed use

The conference features two very exciting keynote speakers. Bernie Fowler, Jr., is the founder and president of Farming 4 Hunger and son of former Maryland Senator Bernie Fowler and Betty Fowler. Farming 4 Hunger has been responsible for growing and distributing 2.2 million pounds of produce to feed the working poor in the past several years. Wendy Moeller is the founder, principal, and owner of Compass Point Planning. Moeller also is currently serving on the Board of Directors of APA and Board of Directors for the Signage Foundation, Inc. Moeller is author of the recently released Best Practices in Regulating Temporary Signs.

The conference also offers two ethics sessions and a law session. All conference sessions are approved by the American Planning Association (APA) for the certification maintenance for AICP members.

Plan to attend the Regional Maryland-Delaware Conference. Embrace change by implementing innovative strategies and productive practices that will keep us focused and on track with new and innovative ways to plan as we find ourselves in a world quickly changing around us. Detailed information on the conference is available at www.apamaryland.org

Patricia Haddon, AICP, President, American Planning Association, Maryland Chapter
Ann Marie Townshend, AICP, President, American Planning Association, Delaware Chapter
Updates on Recent and Future Social Events of Emerging Planners Group

by Megan Griffith*, AICP, Mahan Rykiel Associates

By the time this newsletter lands in your inbox, the Emerging Planners Group (EPG) will have wrapped up three end-of-summer social events. Perhaps you were with us? In the second week of August, EPG and the Maryland Chapter of American Planning Association (APA) partnered to bring our friends two back-to-back happy hours. On August 11th, EPG hosted the first of hopefully many Cards against Urbanity game nights. New faces and familiar friends joined for an evening at Breaking Bread in Pigtown (one of Baltimore's Main Street communities) for brews, food, and laughs. The following evening, EPG and APA MD brought planners and friends together for a meetup at the Owings Mills Metro Centre.

As I wrote this update, I was anxiously awaiting our next event — a free tour and tasting at Baltimore Whiskey Company. New regulations in 2012 allowed Maryland distilleries to offer tours, while more recent legislation permits distilleries to set up at farmers’ markets.

Still, it's not all just fun and games; we've also been quite productive. The EPG bylaws have been finished (posted on our website), pending signatures. And now, the EPG board is coming together. We can now officially welcome Aviva Brown, as co-chair, and Jasmine Forbes, as secretary. Aviva and Jasmine, along with me, will hold these positions until next year's elections. Additional positions remain to be filled, including Treasurer, Marketing and Outreach Coordinator, and committee officers and members. Committees include: Fundraising and Financing, Professional Development, Membership Recruitment/Retention, and Community Service/Outreach. Anyone interested in getting involved with EPG may contact me at mdapaemergingplanners@gmail.com

This is truly an exciting time to be an emerging planner in Maryland. I am proud to say that EPG is not only offering planners a strong social network, but we're incubating the Chapter's future leaders. I do hope you'll continue to follow us as we grow and evolve! So stay connected!

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/mdapaemergingplanners
TWITTER: @MDAPA_EPG
INSTAGRAM: @EmergingPlannersGroup

*The author is chair of the Emerging Planners Group
The National Community Planning Month is taking place this October. The national American Planning Association (APA) launches this celebration, providing excellent opportunities for local APA chapters to recognize the local efforts for making great planning possible and encouraging communities’ participation in planning.

APA highly encourages the Maryland chapter to get involved with the National Community Planning Month celebration by outreaching to the chapter members. APA compiles a Resource Hub with easy-to-use media tools or templates already designed by APA for local chapters to use on the website, newsletters, or social media. APA also develops a recorded webinar to help APA members best utilize those tools or templates. You may click on one of the hyperlinks above to learn more about the APA’s media tools for celebrating the National Community Planning Month.

Sample: Social Media Profile Picture. Courtesy of APA.

Sample: Story Map. Courtesy of APA.
Harford County recently engaged the expertise of the American Planning Association (APA) to organize a community visioning workshop in an effort to bring together regional leaders and community groups to examine the topic of Green Infrastructure and resiliency planning. Given our region’s challenges of dealing with the increased frequency of flooding, shoreline erosion, deforestation, and habitat fragmentation, Harford County, Baltimore County, and the Aberdeen Proving Ground, took advantage of this spotlight opportunity in partnership with the Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition, to see what kind of creative ideas could be developed within the confines of a regional, interconnected network of green spaces.

Prior to the workshop, Harford County created a “Story Map” to educate citizens on green infrastructure planning and to provide examples of existing successful projects within the two study areas, which were the subwatersheds of the more rural, Upper Little Gunpowder Falls, and the more urban, Lower Gunpowder River. The various projects identified fall under the strategic categories of coastal defense, critical infrastructure protection, green stormwater infrastructure, urban forest enhancement, and natural resource protection. One of the main questions centered around the Green Infrastructure concept is whether or not we can increase resilience by focusing more land preservation and restoration practices within the network.

The APA routinely organizes volunteer planning teams through its Community Planning Assistance Teams (CPAT) program. The Harford CPAT team convened this past April to meet with the project steering committee and concluded with a driving tour of the area. In June, the CPAT team worked with Harford County staff to put the finishing touches on organizing the workshop. Forty participants attended the Green Infrastructure workshop at the Harford Glen Environmental Education Center in Bel Air, Maryland. The participants comprised a diverse group of stakeholders that included environmental restoration consultants, farmers, land conservancies, government agencies, and various community groups.

The workshop began after participants had an opportunity for a brief meet and greet session, which included poster boards with various topics regarding green infrastructure. Bryan Lightner of Harford County gave brief introductory remarks and members of the Steering Committee had the opportunity to introduce themselves and the organizations they represented. Eric Roach from APA introduced the members of the Planning Team followed by a presentation on the benefits of green infrastructure by Jean Akers.

During the workshop, stakeholders were asked about what three words come to mind when you hear “Green Infrastructure”. The participants’ wrote down their answers on an index card that was collected by the CPAT team. A word cloud of the responses was presented at the end of the meeting.
The group activity that followed was the focus of the workshop. Participants were organized in groups of approximately eight participants including a facilitator from the APA team. Participants began by performing a dot voting exercise. A large poster listing eleven of the benefits of green infrastructure was placed at each table. Each facilitator instructed the participants to put one dot next to three benefits of green infrastructure they thought were most important.

Next, each facilitator handed the participants a worksheet with four questions:

- What challenges limit creating an effective Gunpowder Watershed Green Infrastructure Network?
- What opportunities could help create an effective Gunpowder Watershed Green Infrastructure Network?
- Of all of the opportunities discussed, what is the highest priority?
- Who else should be here or part of this process?

Participants were given a few minutes to fill out the answer to the first question, and then the participants took turns reading their answers aloud. A volunteer scribe recorded the responses on a flip chart for the participants to view. The same process was followed for the remaining three questions. The meeting came to a close following 50 minutes of group discussion. Jean Akers presented the results from the index card activity in the form of a word cloud.

Harford County will use this experience as a starting point to delineate the remainder of the network countywide and develop a formal Green Infrastructure Plan. In order to remain forward thinking, the Department of Planning and Zoning will coordinate with the Departments of Public Works and Parks and Recreation to ensure a unified approach with green infrastructure planning on county-owned land. Moving forward with manageable conservation landscaping projects such as tree plantings, meadows/low mow zones, and other native plant demonstration gardens, will show stakeholders and citizens that Harford County is trying to lead by example by helping to increase resilience within the Green Infrastructure network.

The detailed information about the Harford CPAT project and the team’s final report and recommendations are available at [https://www.planning.org/communityassistance/teams/harfordcounty/](https://www.planning.org/communityassistance/teams/harfordcounty/)

*This article is contributed by the Harford CPAT Members. Team leader Jean Akers, AICP, RLA; Christina Arlt, AICP; Jack Heide, AICP; Nicole Hostettler, PP, AICP, LEED Green Associate; APA staff Eric Roach; and Harford Community Contact Bryan Lightner.

Bryan Lightner of Harford County kicks off the Green Infrastructure Workshop (Photo by Christina Arlt, AICP)