

MEMORANDUM

November 20, 2019

TO: Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee
FROM: Pamela Dunn, Senior Legislative Analyst
SUBJECT: Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan
PURPOSE: Worksession to development recommendations for Council consideration

Participants:

Casey Anderson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
Gwen Wright, Director, Montgomery Planning Department
Mike Riley, Director, Montgomery Parks
Elza Hisel-McCoy, Area 1 Chief, Montgomery Planning Department
Leslye Howerton, Master Plan Supervisor, Montgomery Planning Department
Melissa Williams, Senior Planner, Montgomery Planning Department
John Marcolin, Planner Coordinator, Montgomery Planning Department
Tina Schneider, Senior Environmental Planner, Montgomery Planning Department
Rachel Newhouse, Planner Coordinator, Montgomery Parks
Hyojung Garland, Park Planning Supervisor, Montgomery Parks

This is the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee's first worksession on the Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills (FGMH) Sector Plan. A separate memorandum from Glenn Orlin addresses the transportation and school facility recommendations in the Plan. This memorandum covers Section 2.2 of the Plan. The worksession scheduled for December 2, 2019 will cover land use and zoning recommendations.

Councilmembers may wish to bring their copy of the Plan to the meeting.

BACKGROUND

The Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan covers approximately 230 acres, centered along a 2-mile stretch of Georgia Avenue lying between Dennis Avenue to the north and Spring Street to the south. The

Plan area is composed predominantly of commercial development along Georgia Avenue, intermixed with garden apartments, townhouses, religious institutions, and single-family detached homes. The area is bifurcated by two heavily-traveled major thoroughfares: Georgia Avenue (MD 97) and Interstate 495 (the Capital Beltway).

Just over half of the residents within the study area are Non-Hispanic Whites (52 percent), with African Americans representing 20 percent of area residents, and Hispanics and Asians representing 16 and 7 percent, respectively. The median household income is \$125,148, which is slightly lower than the Countywide average (\$133,543); however, the study area population is economically diverse¹. In addition, the study area is marked by a high degree of education, with 40 percent of the population over 25 years old holding a graduate or professional degree as compared to 31 percent across the County.

The vision of the Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan is to leverage existing and future infrastructure improvements within the Plan area to facilitate the creation of a safe, interconnected Georgia Avenue. Utilizing the themes of Reconnect, Reimagine, and Reinvest, the Plan offers recommendations designed to encourage equitable, attractive development, provide for housing choices at all economic levels, improve connectivity, and enhance ecological functions and open space.

As noted above, a separate memorandum from Dr. Orlin will cover transportation recommendations proposed under Reconnect, and school facility information under Reimagine. This report will cover the remaining recommendations under Reimagine – those related to urban design, historic preservation, the environment, and parks, trails and open space.

REIMAGINE: PLAN GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Urban Design (pages 49-50)

To support the unique identity of the Plan area, the Sector Plan establishes two principle goals related to urban design. The first is to encourage quality design that incorporates neighborhood compatibility and sustainable development practices. The second is to enhance the public realm by providing green infrastructure (safe, accessible parks, stormwater systems, and usable open space) that meets the needs of all users. Several recommendations, described on pages 49 and 50 of the Plan, are proposed to achieve these goals. No specific testimony was received regarding these recommendations. **Staff supports the recommendations as drafted.**

Historic Preservation (page 50)

The Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan area currently does not contain any sites or districts listed in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation; however, the Woodside District is listed in the Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites. The Plan lists several broad goals and two areawide recommendations on page 50 of the Plan. The goals principally encourage the future identification and potential designation of historic resources and sites within the Plan area and support the preservation of all historic resources, designated or not.

The second goal, “Encourage the utilization of the historic preservation tax credit program for the restoration and preservation of County-designated historic properties”, may be better suited as a

¹ 15.3 percent of households earning below \$35,000 per year, 26.1 percent earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000, 35.3 percent earning between \$100,000 and \$200,000, and 16.5 percent earning above \$200,000.

recommendation, recognizing that its implementation will be contingent upon future historic preservation designations. In addition, the fourth goal, “Safeguard the historical and cultural heritage of the County” seems to go well beyond the scope of this Plan. No testimony was received regarding the areawide recommendations for historic preservation.

The Committee may want to recommend that the second goal become a recommendation, and either strike the fourth goal or change the scope from “County” to “Plan area”.

Environment (pages 50-53)

The Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan proposes the following three environmental goals: (1) create solutions to improve the ecological health and wellbeing of the community and seek to eliminate disproportionate environmental burdens; (2) mitigate for past environmental impacts and protect against future ecological degradation; and (3) enhance the public realm by providing green infrastructure that meets the needs of all users. The third environmental goal is the same as the second Urban Design goal.

To achieve these goals, the Plan provides numerous environmental recommendations separated into three categories: Green Cover, Water Quality, and Air Quality and Carbon Emissions.

A. Green Cover

Vegetation or green cover is any surface with soil and vegetation. In Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills, the commercial areas have a green cover of between 6 and 20 percent. The Plan recommends improving green cover through planted roofs, trees, bioretention systems, planting beds, and lawns.

More specifically, for properties greater than 2.5 acres (108,900 sf) in size (with potential for redevelopment under the CRT zone), the Plan requires a minimum 35 percent green cover. Currently, under the CRT zone, 10 percent open space is required for any property larger than 10,000 sf. Recognizing that green cover and open space are not equivalent, below is a list of properties that would be affected by the 35 percent requirement, the amount of green cover required, and the amount of open space required, for context.

Property	Size (sf)	35% Requirement ²	10% Requirement
Doctors Medical Park	201,247	70,436	20,125
Dennis Avenue Health Center	303,613	106,265	30,361
Fields of Silver Spring ³	366,158	128,155	36,616
Belvedere ²	148,104	51,836	14,810
WMATA Site	378,972	132,640	37,897
Forest Glen Medical Center	172,553	60,394	17,255
Seminary Place Shopping Center	134,084	46,929	13,408
Silver Spring HHS Site	114,386	40,035	11,439

² On-site energy generation requiring the use of either the roof or open space may reduce the required percentage.

³ If recommended for CRT zoning.

While an admirable goal, this is the first sector plan to require a 35 percent green cover. The Bethesda Downtown Plan contains a similar recommendation regarding green cover; however, it explicitly states that the recommendation for 35 percent green cover is just that, a recommendation and not a requirement. Given the desire for redevelopment and/or reinvestment in this area, imposing this requirement may have the opposite effect. **The Committee may want to modify the green cover recommendation to more closely match that of the Bethesda Downtown Plan, whereby it remains a recommendation, not a requirement.** (See © 1-2)

The Plan contains additional recommendations related to green cover, primarily focused on best practices related to street/canopy tree plantings. One recommendation specifies the soil volumes required for canopy tree plantings be no less than 800 to 1,000 cubic feet. By comparison, the Bethesda Downtown Plan requires soil volumes for canopy tree plantings be no less than 600 cubic feet. **Given the challenges facing the redevelopment of Georgia Avenue through Montgomery Hills, a built environment not unlike Wisconsin Avenue through downtown Bethesda, the Committee may want Planning staff to clarify the need for a greater soil volume. Except as noted, Staff supports all other recommendations related to green cover.** (See © 2-3)

B. Water Quality

Local stream and tributary water quality can be directly correlated to the percentage of impervious cover within a watershed and the quality of stormwater management. Within the Plan area, the overall impervious cover averages from 65-70 percent. In the commercial zones, the impervious cover reaches 95 percent on some properties. The Plan makes several recommendations related to Environmental Site Design and stormwater management, to promote improved treatment of water runoff from impervious surfaces. **Staff supports the recommendations to improve water quality.**

C. Air Quality and Carbon Emissions

The causes of degraded air quality and carbon emissions are linked, and recommendations to improve air quality and reduce emissions overlap. The Montgomery County Code requires the Planning Board to model the carbon footprint of planning areas as part of any master or sector plan and to make recommendations for carbon emissions reductions. Carbon footprint is calculated by estimating the greenhouse gas emissions from the construction and operation of projected development.

The three main sources of greenhouse gases used in projecting total emissions are from embodied energy, building energy, and transportation emissions. Improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions involves making reductions in all greenhouse gas source areas. The Plan provides numerous recommendations that will result in reduced vehicle miles traveled and delays, reduced building energy demand and consumption, increased clean energy generation, improved carbon sequestration, and reduced heat island effects, all of which will improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions. **Staff supports the recommendations related to air quality and carbon emissions.**

Parks, Trails and Open Space (pages 54-55)

The *2017 Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan*, developed by the Department of Parks, serves as the planning policy for parks and recreation in Montgomery County. The PROS Plan suggests that each master plan include an open space system that addresses specific needs, including active

recreation destinations; a central “civic green” urban park; an interconnected system of sidewalks and trails to connect parks and open spaces; and wooded areas to provide a sense of contact with nature.

Parks, trails and opens spaces within the Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan **study** area include:

- Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park (Units 3 and 4)
- Capitol View – Open Space Urban Park
- Forest Grove Neighborhood Park
- McKenney Hills Neighborhood Park
- Capitol View-Homewood Local Park
- Forest Glen Neighborhood Park
- Montgomery Hills Neighborhood Park
- General Getty Neighborhood Park
- Woodside Urban Park
- Fairview Urban Park

In addition, the Sligo Creek Trail is located within the greater community and the Ireland Drive Trail connector to Rock Creek Trail is nearby. The Capital Crescent Trail lies to the west of the Plan area. The transportation recommendations of the Plan aim to improve and enhance the connectivity between park and trail facilities, neighborhoods, and major activity centers.

This section focuses on recommendations for additional parks, open space and recreational facilities as a result of projected redevelopment in the Plan area. Specific park and open space recommendations for Forest Glen and Montgomery Hills are shown on Map 17 (page 54) and described in Table 5 (page 55).

The Recommendations section under Parks, Trails and Open Space provides additional text for about half of the facilities listed on Map 17 and in Table 5. The Recommendations section also provides areawide recommendations such as “Reimagine public spaces by promoting the inclusion of art and sensory-integrated installations into parks and open spaces”. **Staff supports the broad, areawide recommendations noted in the Plan.**

Below is a modified version of Table 5, adding property size for comparison to the park size recommendation.

Park and Open Space Recommendations				
Map	Property/Location	Property Size	Park Classification	Park Size
Service Area - Countywide				
13	Silver Spring HHS Site	114,386	Urban Recreational Park and Community Gardens	2-3 acre (87,120-130,680 sf)
14	SHA ROW at 16 th and Georgia Ave	117,431	Urban Recreational Park	3 acres (130,680 sf)
18	WMATA Site	378,972	Civic Green Urban Park	½ -1 acre (21,780-43,560 sf)
20	Forest Glen Medical Center	172,553	Civic Green Urban Park	½ -1 acre (21,780-43,560 sf)
Service Area – Local Community				
19	Dennis Avenue Health Center	303,613	Plaza Urban Park	½ acre (21,780 sf)
17	Seminary Place Shopping Center	134,084	Civic Green Urban Park	½-1 acre (21,780-43,560 sf)
16	Sniders Super Foods & Fire Station	66,105	Pocket Green Urban Park	¼ acre (10,890 sf)
15	Parking Lot #12	29,191	Urban Recreational Parklet	1/10 acre (4,356 sf)
21	Luzerne Ave and Cedar View Ct	56,007	Neighborhood Green Urban Park	¼ acre (10,890 sf)

The Silver Spring HHS site recommendation, as noted in the table, is for a facility larger than the entire HHS site. Perhaps the Urban Recreational Park and Community Gardens recommendation includes neighboring Woodside Urban Park. However, under the Recommendations section on page 55, the Silver Spring HHS Site is recommended to remain in public use as either a school, park facility, or for the provision of affordable housing. **Given the size of the abutting urban park, the limited public facilities in the Plan area, and other park facility recommendations in the Plan, the Committee may want to limit the recommended future use of the Silver Spring HHS Site to either a school or affordable housing use⁴.**

The SHA ROW at 16th and Georgia Avenue recommendation is also for a facility, on average, larger than the property site. The simplest fix would be to adjust the size recommendation in Table 5 from “3 acres” to “2 ½ acres”. However, like the Silver Spring HHS site, this property is one of only a few publicly-owned sites within the Plan boundary. The Committee may want to consider co-locating a park with another public use, such as affordable housing. If so, this discussion would be more appropriate in the context of zoning, which will occur on December 2. The park recommendation for this site (as well as the Silver Spring HHS site) could be adjusted based on the outcome of that discussion.

The last three park recommendations listed in Table 5 and shown on Map 17 (sites 16, 15, and 21 respectively) are not included under the Recommendations section on page 55. It is unclear whether the recommendation for a park on the Sniders Super Foods and Fire Station properties should be required if

⁴ Information regarding the development potential of this site will be presented as part of the land use/zoning analysis.

either property redevelops, or only if both properties redevelop together. Individually, it would be a significant request to require that 28 percent (Sniders) or 40 percent (Fire Station) of a property be provided as parkland. Even if redeveloped together, a ¼ acre park would be about 16 percent of the property – a requirement that is more than 50 percent above the open space requirement for the zone.

Map 17 and Table 5 also include a recommendation for Parking Lot #12 (map site 15) and the properties at Luzerne Ave and Cedar View Ct (map site 21). However, like Sniders Super Foods and the Fire Station, there is no explanatory text under the Recommendations section. These are small properties and if other recommended park sites materialize (Seminary Shopping Center site and SHA site), the Committee may want to consider the need for five parks (of varying sizes and character) within an 1/8-mile radius. **Staff suggests revisiting the recommendations for park sites 13, 14, 15, 16, and 21 following the discussion of land use and zoning for these areas.**

Attachments

Reference material for environmental recommendations

Pages

© 1-3

Environmental Recommendations:

Recommendations regarding a minimum green cover requirement and soil volume in other recent master plans.

Plan	Green Cover	Soil Volume
White Flint 2	No	No
Rock Spring	No	No
Grosvenor	No	No
Lyttonsville	No	Minimum 600 cubic feet
Bethesda Downtown	Minimum 35% recommended	Minimum 600 cubic feet
Veirs Mill	No	No
MARC Rail Communities	No	No

1. Green Cover

For reference, below is the recommendation in the Bethesda Downtown Plan (page 15) regarding green cover.

1.3.3 Urban Ecosystems

A. Urban Green Recommendations:

The following recommendations may be achieved through the optional method public benefits in the CR zone and are simply recommendations, not requirements of this Sector Plan.

- Supplement tree planting along streets and public space to achieve a minimum of 50 percent canopy cover.
- On private property, provide a minimum of 35 percent green cover, which may include either singularly or a combination of the following:
 - Intensive green roof (6 inches or deeper) on 35 percent of rooftop.
 - Tree canopy cover on 35 percent of landscape.
 - A combination of tree canopy and intensive green roof for a total green cover of 35 percent or greater*.

** If on-site energy generation requires the use of either the roof or open space, accommodations for these features may alter the 35 percent minimum green cover requirement.*

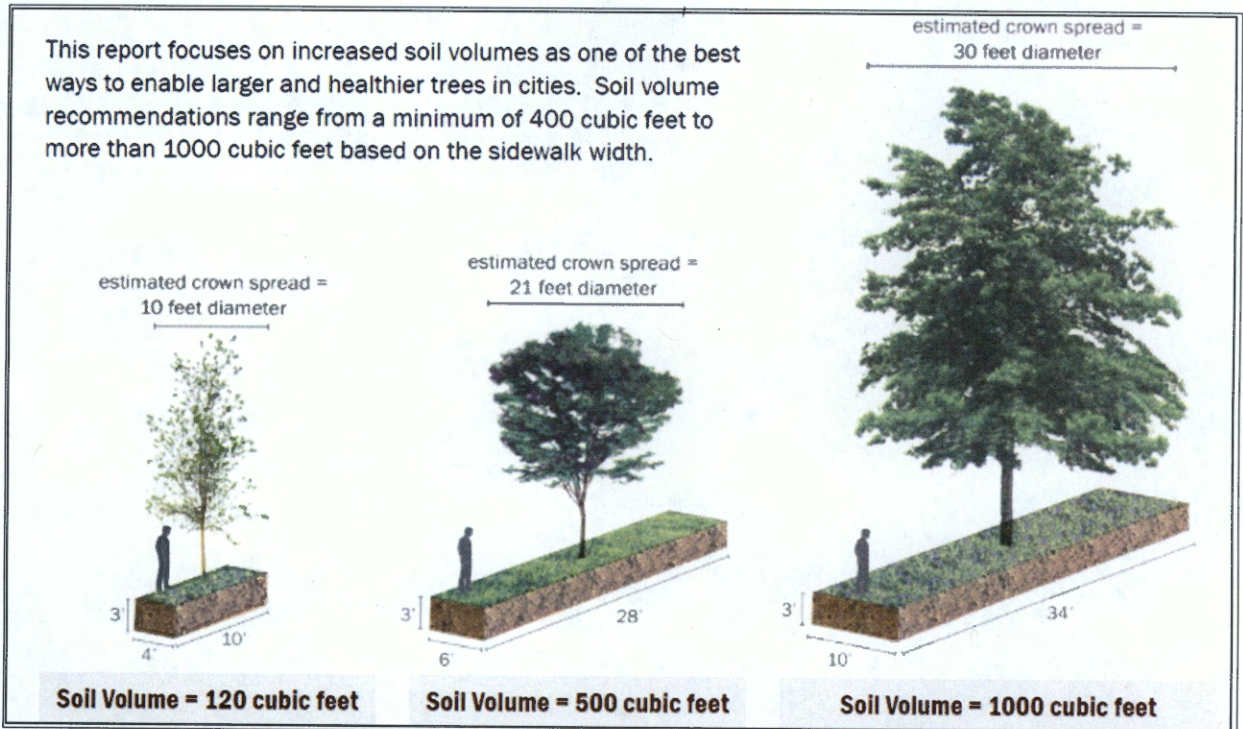
A quick review of recent applications for projects in downtown Bethesda found two applications that either indicated difficulty in achieving 35% green cover or received approval with less than 35% green cover (Metro Tower 32.5%). The majority of recent applications indicate that 35% green cover will be achieved and shown on the certified site

plan thus demonstrating the weight given to master plan recommendations in the development approval process. And, also demonstrating that in some cases, the flexibility of a recommendation in place of a requirement was necessary for approval.

2. Soil Volume

The Planning Board Draft recommends the following with respect to soil volume, "Provide soil volumes for canopy trees of no less than 800 to 1,000 cubic feet."

Soil volumes are calculated by depth, width and length of planting area. (See below)



Source: Tree Space design Study by Casey Trees.

Planting site width is critical to calculating available soil volume; a site's capacity influences the size of trees selected. Small trees require minimum widths of 4–6 feet, medium trees 6–8 feet, and large trees 8 feet or greater. Spacing depends on the size of adjacent or projected tree canopy diameters and should be no less than half of the projected crown. Each prospective planting site will vary in its tree-carrying capacity.

August 2015

Source: Cleveland Tree Plan Appendix A

As noted above width is a critical factor in calculating soil volume. Width is also an important element with respect to street cross-sections. Almost all street cross-sections in the FG/MH Plan show at least one (minimum) 6 feet wide planting strip. Looking at several landscape guides – a planting depth of 300 feet appears to be the state of the practice. The Plan recommends a planting distance of no more than 35 feet between trees – thus the minimum soil volume under these parameters would yield a soil volume of 630 cubic feet. Recommending a minimum soil volume of 600 feet is appropriate and consistent with tree planting parameters associated with recommended street planting strips.

