

HOUSING GOALS Chapter, from General Plan Refinement - approved by Montgomery County Council in November 1993

SCOPE

The Housing Goal addresses Montgomery County's present and future housing needs. It focuses on housing type, quality, quantity, location, and affordability. Housing for less affluent members of the community is of special concern, but the goal, objectives, and strategies are designed to recognize the housing needs of all current and future County residents, including the full spectrum of ages, incomes, lifestyles, and physical capabilities. Providing housing opportunities for all employees of all income levels who work in Montgomery County is of particular concern.

KEY CONCEPTS

Consistency with the Wedges and Corridors concept is fundamental to the Housing Goal. The Refinement expects all residential development to conform to this pattern. It also expects consistency with master plans, recognizing them as an integral part of the General Plan. These constraints especially affect appropriate locations for and types of affordable housing development and the sites and intensities of multi-family complexes.

CHANGES FROM THE 1969 GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

Since 1969, employment has doubled and a significant portion of the land appropriate for housing has been developed in the County. These two major changes have meant shifts in emphasis in the Housing Goal of the General Plan Refinement. Both the 1964 General Plan and the 1969 General Plan Update focused on "an orderly conversion of undeveloped land to urban use." Both advocated the creation of new towns and the use of clustering to achieve this goal. And both included housing as a major element of such development. Neither, however, emphasized the need for housing to support employment.

With the exceptions of Clarksburg and a few scattered but significant tracts of land in other areas, attention today is turning away from the development of vacant land. The current emphasis is on the maintenance, infill, and redevelopment of land, and appropriate increases in housing densities in the Urban Ring and the I-270 Corridor. This shift leads to increased attention to the attractiveness and compatibility of higher density housing.

The reduced supply of undeveloped land puts great pressure on land prices, leading to increased difficulties in providing affordable housing, even for middle income households. Some geographic areas of the County are especially affected. In addition, high-rise housing development raises unique financial feasibility issues and merits special attention. The General Plan Refinement addresses these issues.

The Refinement looks at the relationship of employment growth and the need for housing in a new way. In fact, the Housing Goal adds a new objective regarding the quantity of housing to serve employment in the County as well as the needs of residents at different stages of their lives. The new objective is designed to be flexible, relating the desirable amount of housing to the needs of residents at different stages of life and to the

needs of workers in the County at different wage levels. It does not specify the means of achieving this objective nor does it attach a numerical target to it. Instead, the Refinement, while encouraging a balance between jobs and housing on a County-wide basis, leaves decisions about any changes in the number of housing units and/or jobs to master plans and other more local forums.

The General Plan Refinement adds a second new objective to the Housing Goal as well. This objective concerns the land use distribution of housing. It seeks to concentrate the highest density residential uses in the Urban Ring, I-270 Corridor, and especially near transit stations. Of the Housing objectives, this one most specifically reinforces the Wedges and Corridors concept.

The proposed Housing Goal deletes obsolete language from the 1969 General Plan Update. The 1969 General Plan Update Housing Goal read as follows: "Stress the present quality and prestigious image of residential development in Montgomery County by further providing a full range of housing choices, conveniently located in a suitable living environment for all incomes, ages and lifestyles." The General Plan Refinement reflects a consensus that a "prestigious image" is no longer needed as a housing goal for the County. The stock of prestigious housing has greatly increased in the past two decades and will remain as an important County asset without its mention as a prospective goal.

The new goal defines the word "quality" as referring to design and durability of construction. It drops the word "environment," which had been used to mean "neighborhood" or "surroundings" but is now more commonly used to mean "natural resources." Finally, it drops the words "preserve" and "established" from the objective concerning neighborhoods. This language was sometimes read as meaning that there should never be change to existing neighborhoods and that "established" neighborhoods, which many citizens interpret as being the most prestigious ones, should be protected more than other.

The General Plan Refinement adds other new strategies and, occasionally, new concepts to the Housing Goal. These include mixing residential densities in each planning area consistent with master plans, encouraging employer assistance in meeting housing needs, and redeveloping existing properties when identified as appropriate in the master plan.

INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER GOALS

Land Use

Housing is a major component of the Land Use Goal. Location and intensity cannot be separated from other housing issues, however, and are included in the Housing Goal as well. The Housing Goal addresses topics such as affordability, quality, and variety, which are not addressed by the Land Use Goal. The Housing Goal also encourages the search for improved methods of financing and staging residential construction, and it addresses the need to protect existing neighborhoods from unwarranted intrusions by encouraging compatible infill development with suitable transitions between areas of higher and lower density. The Land Use Goal addresses specific geographic issues. One of the most important of these is the definition of the Residential Wedge, which is a newly highlighted geographic component of the Wedges and Corridors concept. The

Residential Wedge primarily contains one- and two-acre estate zoning. The Land Use Goal discusses its function as a housing resource for the County.

Economic Activity

Housing and economic activity may be considered as two-sides of the same land use coin; each constitutes a major resource for the other. Housing provides the consumers and employees to support economic activity, while economic activity provides the means of support for residential areas. In many cases, high quality housing was the impetus for economic development. The Housing and Economic Activity Goals are thus interrelated; each addresses the need for the other. This Refinement calls for greater integration of housing and economic activities. Insofar as the provision of housing is itself a major economic activity and depends on a stable economic climate, it is discussed in the Economic Activity Goal.

Transportation

Access to a variety of transportation modes to promote efficient travel, especially to work, and to protect the environment is an underlying theme of many of the Housing objectives and strategies. Improved transportation and pedestrian access is one of several important reasons why the Housing Goal stresses the desirability of mixed uses. The Housing Goal encourages housing plans that foster transit serviceability and proximity of affordable housing to transit. It also emphasizes housing in close proximity to employment opportunities. These strategies are generally consistent and complementary of the Transportation Goal.

Environment

The Environment Goal is a source of both support and potential conflict with the Housing Goal. The Environment Goal seeks to protect healthy and attractive surroundings for present and future County residents. The objectives also address the provision of the utilities and water and sewer service needed by local households. At the same time, some of the Environment objectives, such as preservation of trees, wetlands, stream valleys, and bio-diversity, can present major constraints to housing construction. Such issues must be resolved through the master plan and development review process.

Community Identity and Design

The Community Identity and Design Goal complements the Housing Goal. It guides the development of the community framework for housing and encourages lively, livable neighborhoods for County residents. It also encourages the preservation of historic resources, some of which are unique housing resources.

Regionalism

Housing in Montgomery County is part of a regional market. Consequently, planning for residential uses in the County needs to consider the regional context. This is especially true of affordable housing, which is one of the greatest needs of the County and the regional housing market. Montgomery County will continue to cooperate with appropriate agencies to achieve an equitable distribution of affordable housing in the region.

Compliance with the Maryland Planning Act of 1992

The Housing Goal is responsive to several of the Maryland Planning Act's visions. Objectives 3, 5, and 6 respond to concentrating development in suitable areas (Vision 1). The Housing Goal encourages economic growth and also proposes that regulatory mechanisms be streamlined (Vision 6). In addition, strategies are included to assure the availability of adequate housing near employment centers (Objective 3), to ensure adequate housing choices and to encourage innovative techniques to reduce the cost of housing, including the examination of regulations and policies and development standards (Strategy 1E).

GOALS, OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

Encourage and maintain a wide choice of housing types and neighborhoods for people of all incomes, ages, lifestyles, and physical capabilities of appropriate densities and locations.

OBJECTIVE 1

Promote variety and choice in housing of quality design and durable construction in various types of neighborhoods.

Strategies

- A. Permit increased flexibility in residential development standards to meet a broader range of needs and to foster more creative design.
- B. Expand opportunities for a variety of housing densities within communities to offer more choice to a broader economic range of households.
- C. Encourage the use of new and innovative housing construction techniques, including pre-fabricated components and housing units, to increase the supply and variety of housing types.
- D. Explore the feasibility of rural centers in appropriate locations, such as the Residential Wedge.
- E. Assess the development review process to determine the ways to streamline the process and to encourage creative housing design.
- F. Encourage both ownership and rental opportunities for all types of housing.

OBJECTIVE 2

Promote a sufficient supply of housing to serve the County's existing and planned employment and the changing needs of its residents at various stages of life.

Strategies

- A. Provide adequate zoning capacity to meet the current and future housing needs of those who live or work in the County.
- B. Explore ways to improve the economic feasibility of housing development as compared to employment-related buildings.

- C. Phase mixed-use development so that housing is constructed in a timely fashion relative to other uses within the project.
- D. Develop additional techniques to provide housing opportunities to meet the special housing needs of young workers, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.
- E. Encourage employer assistance in meeting housing needs.
- F. Development new techniques to provide housing, including incentives.

OBJECTIVE 3

Encourage housing near employment centers, with adequate access to a wide variety of facilities and services. Support mixed-use communities to further this objective.

Strategies

- A. Assure the availability of housing near employment centers.
- B. Integrate housing with employment and transportation centers with appropriate community services and facilities, especially in transit stop locations.
- C. Examine County regulations and policies for opportunities for mixed-use development; develop additional options.
- D. Ensure a reasonable distribution of residential and commercial uses in mixed-use zones.
- E. Encourage housing plans that foster transit serviceability.
- F. Encourage the provision of appropriate indoor and outdoor recreational and community facilities in multi-family and single-family residential development.

OBJECTIVE 4

Encourage an adequate supply of affordable housing throughout the County for those living or working in Montgomery County, especially for households at the median income and below.

Strategies

- A. Encourage the provision of low-, moderate-, and median-income housing to meet existing and anticipated future needs.
- B. Distribute government-assisted housing equitably throughout the County.
- C. Plan affordable housing so that it is reasonably accessible to employment centers, shopping, public transportation, and recreation facilities.
- D. Encourage well-designed subsidized housing that is compatible with surrounding housing.
- E. Assure the provision of low- and moderate-income housing as part of large-scale development through a variety of approaches, including the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit program.
- F. Preserve existing affordable housing where possible.
- G. Encourage development of affordable housing by the private market.
- H. Designate government-owned land, other than parkland, that meets appropriate housing site selection criteria for future housing development.

- I. Identify County policies that have a burdensome effect on the cost of housing; find alternatives if possible.
- J. Encourage the provision of innovative housing types and approaches, such as single-room occupancy housing and accessory apartments, to meet the needs of lower income single persons and small households.
- K. Development zoning policies that encourage the provision of affordable housing while protecting the Wedges and Corridors concept.

OBJECTIVE 5

Maintain and enhance the quality and safety of housing and neighborhoods.

Strategies

- A. Discourage deterioration of housing through well-funded code enforcement, neighborhood improvement programs, and other appropriate techniques.
- B. Ensure that infill development and redevelopment complements existing housing and neighborhoods.
- C. Mix housing with other uses with special care in ways that promote compatibility and concern for residents' needs for safety, privacy, and attractive surroundings when introducing new uses into older neighborhoods.
- D. Provide for appropriate redevelopment of residential property when conditions warrant.
- E. Protect residential neighborhoods by channeling through traffic away from residential streets and discouraging spill-over parking from non-residential areas.
- F. Use special care to plan uses at the edges of high-density centers that are compatible with existing neighborhoods.

OBJECTIVE 6

Concentrate the highest density housing in the Urban Ring and the I-270 Corridor, especially in transit station locales.

Strategies

- A. Designate appropriate, specific locations in sufficient amounts for higher density housing and mixed-use development in master plans.
- B. Modify County zoning regulations and other policies to improve the feasibility and attractiveness of higher density housing.
- C. Encourage air rights development in areas designated for higher densities.
- D. Encourage development of affordable, higher density housing in the vicinity of transit stations.