

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **Heavy council land use and planning schedule**

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This County Council has a very ambitious land use and planning work program, approved by the previous Council last October for the upcoming four years. If members can meet the program target, this Council will hold hearings on nine master plans, vote on a tenth plan for which they've already held a hearing, and consider a revised Master Plan of Highways.

By comparison the previous Council set a six master plan work program to act on between 2007 and 2010, but only managed to consider and vote on plans for four planning areas: Twinbrook; Germantown; White Flint; and, the Great Seneca Science Corridor also known as Gaithersburg West. Lest anyone think this was a minor accomplishment, I should explain that the upzoning (increase in allowed density of development) in those four plans added 35,000 more dwelling units to the total that can be built in the county.

When the previous Council took office in December 2006, the residential capacity of the county--that is, the total number of dwelling units that could be built under existing zoning--was between 70,000 and 80,000 units, with 30,000 of those units in development projects already approved by the Planning Board but not yet built. By their final session in December 2010, the previous Council had increased the number of housing units that could be approved and built to between 105,000 and 115,000 units, with some 30,000 units still in the "pipeline" of approved but unbuilt projects.

This Council has a more aggressive target for number of master plans it will revise, all of which will surely include an increase in the density of allowed development. But first it must consider legislation to add two new members to the CR, or Commercial/Residential, family of mixed use zones--the CR Neighborhood (CRN), and CR Town (CRT) zones.

The high density CR zone was created for the White Flint Sector Plan approved last Council. But it was felt that additional mixed use zones were needed that allowed less height and density, and required less in the way of public benefits from the developer. So the Council will consider adding a medium density CR Town zone, and a low density CR Neighborhood zone to be used as a transition from urbanized areas to surrounding residential neighborhoods.

The Council has already held its public hearing on the Takoma/Langley Crossroads Sector Plan, and has referred it to the PHED (Planning, Housing, and Economic Development) Committee for worksessions. Following approval of the new CRN and CRT Zones by Council, they will be applied to properties in the Langley Park area plan in committee worksessions, and the plan will be reported out for full Council discussion and vote.

Meanwhile, the Planning Board and staff have been working on the Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan, applying the as yet unapproved CRN and CRT zones to properties in this plan area. This draft plan will be posted on the Planning Department website this week with a Board vote scheduled for March 31, after which the plan will be transmitted to Council for a hearing, consideration, and adoption.

A draft of the Kensington Sector Plan had been sent by the Board to the Council, which held its public hearing but decided to send the plan back so that Planning staff could apply the as yet unapproved CRN and CRT mixed use zones to properties in this plan. The Board has set a tentative date for its hearing on

the Kensington Plan for April 28, after which they will vote and transmit it to the Council for a public hearing, consideration, and approval.

The Long Branch Sector Plan is scheduled to be the fourth plan to come before this Council for consideration, followed by the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan and the East County Science Corridor Plan.

Planning staff work and public meetings are scheduled to begin soon on the Lyttonsville (Brookeville Road) Purple Line Station Sector Plan, the Glenmont Sector Plan, the White Flint Phase II Sector Plan, and the Gaithersburg East/Montgomery Village plan. The Council is also expected to hear and approve a revision of the county's Master Plan of Highways.

This Council also has unfinished land use and planning business to deal with which is left over from the previous Council. When it was discovered developments already built in the Clarksburg area were having a deleterious impact on the Ten Mile Creek watershed, the last Council formed a working group to study whether or not to allow moving to Stage 4 implementation of the Clarksburg Master Plan. The working group filed its report with the previous Council, which failed to take action. So it falls to this Council to decide whether or not, or how, to proceed with the buildout of that master plan.

The previous Council did change the timing for what had been the biennial Growth Policy, an analysis of how much new development can be approved based on how much supportive infrastructure (schools, roads, transit, etc.) can be budgeted and built. In 2009 they renamed it the Subdivision Staging Policy and voted to approve it every four years, in the second year of each four year Council term. So this Council will need to adopt new policy levels by November 15 of next year, 2012.

In 2010 a new set of transportation tests was created by a consultant hired by County Executive Isiah "Ike" Leggett, for use in the growth policy to analyze the road and transit capacity of the various communities in the county, and thereby the amount of new development to allow. But, after initially saying they would do so, the previous Council failed to consider Mr. Leggett's alternative, so it falls to this Council to act on it, too.

That's a lot of growth to be planning for a county already experiencing severe traffic congestion.

*The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to [theelms518@earthlink.net](mailto:theelms518@earthlink.net)*