



Gaithersburg
A Character Counts! City

City of Gaithersburg
**PROCESS
AND
OVERVIEW**

A Master Plan Element

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2009
MASTER PLAN

CITY OF GAITHERSBURG 2009 MASTER PLAN

PROCESS AND OVERVIEW ELEMENT

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CITY OF GAITHERSBURG 2009 Master Plan

CHAPTER 1 PROCESS AND OVERVIEW

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1. Introduction

Article 66b of the Maryland Annotated Code requires that municipalities adopt a comprehensive, or master, plan composed of various elements, such as Land Use, Transportation, and Sensitive Areas, to serve the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing the coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the local jurisdiction and its environs.

The Master Plan is designed to establish a vision and long-range plan for the City's future. It sets policies, identifies and evaluates community planning goals and areas of community concern, and in the final analysis, presents a recommended plan. The process of developing and adopting a Master Plan involves many tasks such as social and demographic research, land-use review, identification of policy issues, community involvement and participation, and coordinating separate land use, transportation, community facilities, recreation and natural resource plans.

By evaluating current conditions and future trends, The City of Gaithersburg will develop a Master Plan to support its vision of leadership in the years to come. A unified vision for the future development of the City, representing ideas from the citizens, the local business community, industry, elected officials, regulatory agencies, and other interested parties, is a major achievement of the Master Plan.

Each of the Master Plan Elements will be prepared, reviewed, and revised separately. The first element of the City of Gaithersburg 2009 Master Plan update is "Process and Overview". This element will provide the basic strategy and visions that will guide each successive element, thus allowing the City to accommodate residential, commercial, institutional and industrial growth over the next six years.

2. Guiding Principles

In developing the Process and Overview Element, the City will continue to be guided by the Six Pillars of CHARACTER COUNTS (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship) as demonstrated by the following:

CUSTOMER FOCUS

We actively pursue the identification of citizen needs through citizen involvement to provide effective service to our community with efficiency, accountability, and a caring attitude.

OPEN COMMUNICATION

We promote honest, open communication and easy access to information.

CREATIVITY

We strive to improve the quality and efficiency of City services through creative approaches and new innovative, cost effective technologies.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

We provide quality services, of the best value, to effectively meet the needs of our community while maintaining a pay-as-you-go philosophy.

COOPERATION

We promote a spirit of fairness, trustworthiness, respect and teamwork among our elected officials, City employees, residential and business communities, neighboring jurisdictions, and other governmental agencies.

COMMITMENT OF EXCELLENCE

We strive to achieve excellence in all we do.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

We advocate good citizenship and support the freedom to actively pursue suggestions, ideas, and creative approaches, leading to continuous improvement in everything we do.

3. Master Plan Framework

Under Maryland's "Smart, Green & Growing legislative package," adopted in 2009¹, the City of Gaithersburg is required to incorporate twelve specific visions that will direct the goals of the Master Plan and help develop and implement a sound growth and development policy. These visions will enhance the City's Master Plan by reflecting a greater connection between where we live, where we work, and the quality of life we enjoy. The State's visions are actualized through the City of Gaithersburg's commitment to fulfill each vision. The City commitment will be achieved in the Master Plan through the incorporation of specific guiding strategies based upon the City's adopted Strategic Directions.

State Vision 1:

Quality of life and sustainability: a high quality of life is achieved through universal stewardship of the land, water, and air resulting in sustainable communities and protection of the environment;

***City Commitment:** The City of Gaithersburg strives to provide a higher quality of life for the community by preserving and enhancing open space and critical environmental areas; highlighting environmental design in its land use plans to support ecological systems, create parks, trails, and recreational facilities; and encouraging sustainable development through smart growth practices and green building techniques.*

Guiding Strategies:

- Utilize the City's 'Smart Growth' principles to encourage high quality infill redevelopment.
- Increase public green/open space through infrastructure re-designs in existing neighborhoods.
- Protect and restore environmentally sensitive areas during development and redevelopment by promoting land uses that are in balance with, and minimize adverse effects on, the natural environment.
- Protect and improve water resources (streams, wetlands, 100-year floodplains, and riparian buffers) that have significant functions and values related to flood protection, sediment and erosion control, water quality, groundwater recharge and discharge, education, vegetation, and fish and wildlife habitat.
- Improve public and private stormwater management (SWM) facilities; including performance, longevity, safety, ease of maintenance, community acceptance, and environmental benefit, by implementing new State SWM regulations such as Environmental Site Design (ESD) techniques.

¹ <http://www.mdp.state.md.us/green.htm>

- Continue to improve single family, multifamily, commercial, and municipal recycling programs.
- All new City facilities should be constructed in an environmentally sustainable manner and achieve a minimum LEED Silver certification.
- Participate in regional efforts to reduce solid waste, air, noise, visual, and lighting pollution to ensure a high quality of life that is sustainable for future generations.
- Seek to eliminate gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle network, creating more walkable communities and encourage the use of transit facilities to reduce traffic congestion, conserve energy and maintain air quality goals.

State Vision 2:

Public participation: citizens are active partners in the planning and implementation of community initiatives and are sensitive to their responsibilities in achieving community goals;

***City Commitment** The City of Gaithersburg will ensure effective and consistent communication activities and implement programs that promote citizen involvement. The City will continue to develop innovative ways to involve citizens to carry out the City's vision, embracing the Inclusive Communities principles and recognizing citizens for their contributions.*

Guiding Strategies:

- Target members of various demographics groups using multi-channel communication methods.
- Foster excellent working relationships with local media to ensure accurate, timely and comprehensive coverage of City news, events and activities is presented to the community.
- Work with homeowners associations and other community organizations to identify specific areas of concern.
- Ensure that public participation is all-inclusive by involving all the major interest groups of the City.
- Incorporate whenever possible public charettes, informational workshops, Council worksessions, and input from ad-hoc and standing advisory City committees in developing master plan element recommendations.
- Encourage active participation by stakeholders, local businesses, and other organizations early in the City's Master Plan development.

State Vision 3:

Growth areas: growth is concentrated in existing population and business centers, growth areas adjacent to these centers, or strategically selected new centers;

***City Commitment** The city shall ensure an efficient use of land, provide for livable communities, and manage growth, encouraging economic development with important jobs, businesses and residences located only where infrastructure or capacity exists or can be improved.*

Guiding Strategies:

- Explore opportunities for those areas located within the City's Maximum Expansion Limits.
- Diversify local economy so that approved development includes a variety of industries.
- Focus redevelopment opportunities on underutilized sites.
- Limit new development to where public utilities, facilities, and services can be established without unduly burdening the existing service provision or users.
- Focus growth within the City towards City activity centers.
- Include a mix of uses to create seven days a week activity with a balanced mix of commercial and residential uses.

State Vision 4:

Community design: compact, mixed-use, walkable design consistent with existing community character, located near available or planned transit options is encouraged to ensure efficient use of land and transportation resources and preservation and enhancement of natural systems, open spaces, recreational areas, and historical, cultural, and archeological resources.

***City Commitment** The City shall continue to practice innovative and smart community design by encouraging traditional neighborhood designs, mixed use developments, and transit-oriented developments, incorporating sustainable "green" techniques. New developments and redevelopments of existing areas should achieve the City's desire for walkable neighborhoods, inviting streetscapes, usable public open spaces, sensitivity to historic resources, and a unique sense of place.*

Guiding Strategies:

- Encourage the use of green building principles in both public and private development in order to support environmentally sensitive design, construction, operation, and maintenance of buildings and landscapes.

- Encourage compatible development when non-residential uses are adjacent to residential communities.
- Develop and implement design standards to assure compatibility and connectivity between adjacent land uses.
- Establish a street pattern for development that connects with the street pattern of the surrounding community.
- Continue to foster transit-friendly communities by providing infrastructure, transit shelters, pull-off lanes, and hiker-biker links to existing and planned residential and commercial developments, public facilities such as parks and schools, and transportation facilities such as park-and-ride lots and rail centers.
- Apply new land uses, development and design standards and encourage rezoning of certain properties to allow for development that integrates multiple uses (employment and/or housing) on the site.
- Include a mix of uses to create seven days a week activity with a balanced mix of commercial and residential uses.

State Vision 5:

Infrastructure: growth areas have the water resources and infrastructure to accommodate population and business expansion in an orderly, efficient, and environmentally sustainable manner.

***City Commitment** The City will continue to provide orderly and timely development by regulating growth through its Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (AFPO) requirements. This ensures new development or redevelopment will take place in an area that has the adequate school capacity, water and sewer capacity, and available emergency services; and produces no negative traffic impacts.*

Guiding Strategies:

- Work in close partnership with the State of Maryland, Montgomery County, the Board of Education, and the Maryland Department of Transportation to address transportation, open space, and school capacity issues.
- Consider the impact on transportation, schools, other public facilities, and the environment when approving new development and redevelopment.
- Continue working with the Board of Education, Montgomery County Government and the State of Maryland to secure upgrades to schools to meet the needs of City residents.

- Continue working with WSSC and developers to maintain and enhance the existing water and sewer infrastructure and any additions thereto.
- Implement a comprehensive approach to traffic management that includes planning, engineering, education, and enforcement that will integrate new transportation policies with design and construction of modern transportation facilities.

State Vision 6:

Transportation: a well-maintained, multimodal transportation system facilitates the safe, convenient, affordable, and efficient movement of people, goods, and services within and between population and business centers;

City Commitment The City will implement traffic and transportation planning and management strategies to improve the safety, structure, and function of streets, transit, bikeways, and sidewalks. The City will provide and encourage a safe, convenient, and economic transportation system. The City should plan for and serve the “transportation disadvantaged” and all transportation alternatives should be considered.

Guiding Strategies:

- Eliminate gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle network, and encourage the use of transit to reduce traffic congestion, conserve energy and maintain air quality goals.
- Integrate bicycle and pedestrian design elements into road design and traffic calming measures and implement traffic calming measures in existing communities where appropriate to encourage safe non-automotive transportation.
- Coordinate with Maryland Department of Transportation and Montgomery County on road projects, making sure that all new state and county roads in Gaithersburg contain appropriate design features.
- Optimize the location and utilization of parking through site plan review and by permitting parking on existing streets where appropriate to decrease impervious areas.
- Ensure compatibility of local transportation projects with regional transportation facilities.
- Require preservation or dedication of right of ways for future transportation projects.
- Promote alternatives to single-occupant vehicle trips, such as shared ride programs, transit, bicycling, and walking to reduce pollution and promote mobility for all residents.
- Consider the location of existing or providing public transportation options for new public improvement projects such as parks and other public land-uses.

- Identify and prioritize specific pedestrian and bicycle improvements including designated routes, road signage, new trails and sidewalks, and bike lanes.
- Fully integrate the consideration of bicyclists and pedestrians' needs into the community and the site design process to create facilities concurrently with development.
- Provide safe walking routes that connect communities to schools, transit, recreational facilities, commercial and retail areas, and other communities.

State Vision 7:

Housing: a range of housing densities, types, and sizes provides residential options for citizens of all ages and incomes.

City Commitment The City will implement programs that improve current housing stock and pursue development and redevelopment opportunities that provide an appropriate mix of housing types in inclusive communities. The City shall provide for the housing needs of all its citizens.

Guiding Strategies:

- Offer a wide range of housing types, preferably in a mixed-use setting.
- Adhere to the tenets of New Urbanism with aesthetic considerations in accordance with the urban design policies within the Master Plan – Smart Growth Policy Document for new housing development and re-development.
- Ensure that the current and future housing stock allows residents to remain in the City as their financial, employment, and familial situations change.
- Encourage renovations of suitable existing apartment communities and redevelopment of functionally obsolete and aging apartments.
- Consider approval of higher density in or near the existing or proposed City activity centers.
- Consider approval of multi-family dwellings to encourage redevelopment of dilapidated properties or infill projects on underutilized sites.

State Vision 8:

Economic development: economic development and natural resource–based businesses that promote employment opportunities for all income levels within the capacity of the state’s natural resources, public services, and public facilities are encouraged;

City Commitment Gaithersburg will foster a growing and sustainable economic base to provide a diversity of jobs and services for City residents. Community-sensitive economic development will support the City’s vision ~~in almost all areas~~ and help to improve Gaithersburg’s quality of life.

Guiding Strategies:

- Focus on retaining businesses currently in Gaithersburg and helping them to grow and prosper
- Work with other City departments, state and county agencies and legislative bodies to implement transportation infrastructure improvements that will facilitate development or redevelopment.
- Improve local transportation links between existing residential communities and business areas to facilitate home-to-work trips.
- Develop a plan for City-owned properties in Olde Towne.
- Develop City incentives to facilitate implementation of the Frederick Avenue Corridor and Olde Towne Master Plans and to encourage redevelopment opportunities for sites such as Lakeforest Mall and the Montgomery County Agricultural Center.
- Ensure employment and commercial uses are sited in close proximity to residential areas.
- Identify existing business districts throughout the City which need better infrastructure or potential re-zoning to strengthen their business core.
- Diversify the local economy, with equitable and balanced opportunities throughout the City, so that approved development includes a variety of industries.

State Vision 9:

Environmental protection: land and water resources, including the Chesapeake and coastal bays, are carefully managed to restore and maintain healthy air and water, natural systems, and living resources;

City Commitment The city will continue to implement programs and policies to protect, enhance, and monitor our natural and built environment to support a sustainable quality of life. The City believes in preserving and enhancing open space and environmental areas and will ensure a high quality of life that is sustainable for future generations.

Guiding Strategies:

- Encourage the use of green building principles in both public and private development in order to support environmentally sensitive design, construction, operation, and maintenance of buildings and landscapes.
- Develop environmental education programs and activities for citizens, staff, schools, and neighborhood groups to increase the community's involvement in environmental protection. Such issues could center on general environmental awareness, storm water management, integrated pest management, pollution prevention, recycling, climate protection, and green building.
- Preserve green space, flood plains, and stream valleys for passive recreation as well as seek opportunities to acquire open space with an emphasis on active use
- Continue to preserve and maintain environmentally sensitive areas through forest conservation, wetland and stream valley buffer protection, and floodplain management, while identifying those areas that are environmental hazards and encourage the proper mitigation and protection programs.
- Identify, designate, and protect key natural resources, sensitive environmental elements, and unique habitats.
- Protect and restore environmentally sensitive areas during development and redevelopment by promoting land uses that are in balance with, and minimize adverse effects, on the natural environment.

State Vision 10:

Resource conservation: waterways, forests, agricultural areas, open space, natural systems, and scenic areas are conserved;

***City Commitment** The City shall preserve natural resources and conserve scenic and historic areas and open spaces. The City strives to provide a high quality environment in which to live and work that includes the conservation of the City's green infrastructure (the interconnected networks of open space, parks, natural areas, forests, waterways, and wildlife habitat).*

Guiding Strategies:

- Work closely with Federal, State and Montgomery county agencies and the public to protect and enhance the City's natural resources and urban environment.
- Implement policies and projects to preserve, enhance and maintain an interconnected network of open spaces, greenways, and urban forests to provide ecological, economic, recreation, and aesthetic benefits.

- Minimize operation costs by using cost-effective solutions and green building technologies to increase building efficiency.
- Pursue pollution prevention policies addressing noise, light, greenhouse gases, and solid waste.
- Development and redevelopment should be planned and directed so as to conserve the needed amount of open space.
- Manage land conservation and development activities in a manner that accurately reflects the community's desire for a quality environment and a healthy economy and is consistent with state environmental quality statutes, rules, and implementation plans.
- Protect and improve water resources (streams, wetlands, 100-year floodplains, and riparian buffers) that have significant functions and values related to flood protection, sediment and erosion control, water quality, groundwater recharge and discharge, education, vegetation, and fish and wildlife habitat.

State Vision 11:

Stewardship: government, business entities, and residents are responsible for the creation of sustainable communities by collaborating to balance efficient growth with resource protection;

City Commitment The City will continue to encourage orderly and managed development by implementing smart growth planning techniques that will ensure the City's neighborhoods and communities maintain a high quality of life and sustainability.

Guiding Strategies:

- Address broad areas of concern such as: Future fiscal health of the City; future housing mix and affordability and demographic makeup of the City; future of the City's transportation network; and quality of life issues.
- Ensure that public participation is all inclusive by involving all of the major interest groups of the City.
- Adhere to the tenets of New Urbanism with aesthetic considerations in accordance with the recently adopted urban design policies within the Master Plan – Smart Growth Policy Document for new housing development and re-development.
- Support the preservation of both private and City-owned historic resources and designated sites.

- Incorporate the City’s Smart Growth Principles to encourage high quality development and redevelopment. Thoughtful design techniques should be considered to protect natural resources, utilize existing infrastructure, and promote traditional neighborhood design.
- Limit new development where public utilities, facilities, and services cannot be established without unduly burdening the existing service provision or users. Continue to enforce the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) and update requirements periodically, if needed.
- Support compact building design and a mix of land uses that promotes sustainable development, creates more secure communities, provides a variety of land use options, and improves environmental outcomes.
- Balance the future type, location, and phasing of major public and transportation facilities with the City’s urban expansion, including possible annexations and infill development.
- Implement programs and policies to protect, enhance, and monitor our natural and built environment to support a sustainable quality of life.

State Vision 12:

Implementation: strategies, policies, programs, and funding for growth and development, resource conservation, infrastructure, and transportation are integrated across the local, regional, state, and interstate levels to achieve these visions.

City Commitment The City will strive to Increase citizen awareness of, and participation in planning and other related community issues and processes and encourage active involvement in the City’s Master Plan process.

Guiding Strategies:

- Ensure effective and consistent communication activities and implement programs that promote citizen involvement.
- Work in close partnership with the State of Maryland, Montgomery County, the Board of Education, and the Maryland Department of Transportation to address transportation, open space, and school capacity issues.
- Ensure that all planning and development considers and responds to the city’s environmental, transportation, economic, social and civic needs.
- Educate Gaithersburg’s residents, businesses, and developers about Smart Growth principles, new urbanism, planning trends, etc.
- Work harmoniously with surrounding municipalities, Montgomery County, and the State of Maryland to achieve the implementation of a cohesive smart planning vision.