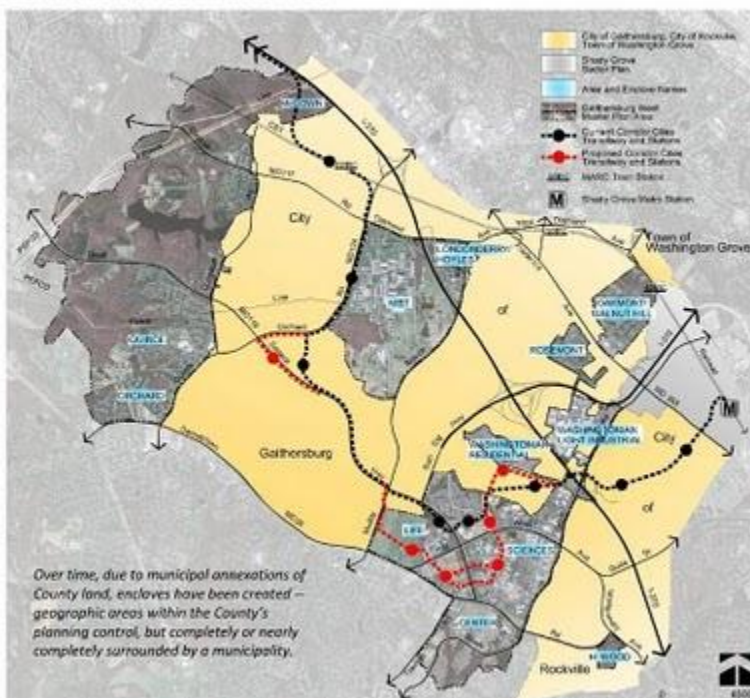


Is Gaithersburg West a Sleeping Giant? Part One

The dispute over the Planning Department's new Master Plan for Gaithersburg West has gone on for nearly a year and may be heading for a resolution. Or maybe not. Whatever the case, it is turning into a potent political issue that may have consequences for the 2010 at-large County Council race.

In the summer of 2009, the Planning Department released its draft [Gaithersburg West Master Plan](#), which is an amendment to several earlier master plans covering a number of unincorporated areas near the Cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg. The focus of most of the discussion on the plan covers the "Life Sciences Center" (LSC), an area sandwiched between the City of Gaithersburg to the north, the City of Rockville to the east and the unincorporated areas of North Potomac to the south and west. The two city governments control land use decisions within their boundaries, but the county government controls land use in all unincorporated areas (and in many incorporated ones as well). Because the LSC area borders both cities' limits, their residents and officials are understandably interested in what the county is considering there.

Gaithersburg West Master Plan



The LSC area currently contains a number of science-based and academic employers including Johns Hopkins University, the Universities at Shady Grove, Shady Grove Adventist Hospital, Human Genome Sciences, BioReliance and the J. Craig Venter Institute. This is no accident since the county encouraged these employers to come to this area and excluded residential and retail uses from much of this zone. The Planning Department's proposed Master Plan intends to take advantage of the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), which passes through the LSC, to locate additional density near its stations. The major features of the plan are:

More Commercial Space and Employment

The 1990 Master Plan allows 13 million square feet of commercial space, of which 6.94 million square feet has been built and 3.76 additional square feet has been approved.

The new plan would allow 20 million square feet in the LSC. The 1990 Master Plan allows enough space to support 38,000 jobs, of which 21,200 already exist and another 9,350 would be created under approved site plans. The new plan would allow enough commercial space to create 60,000 jobs.

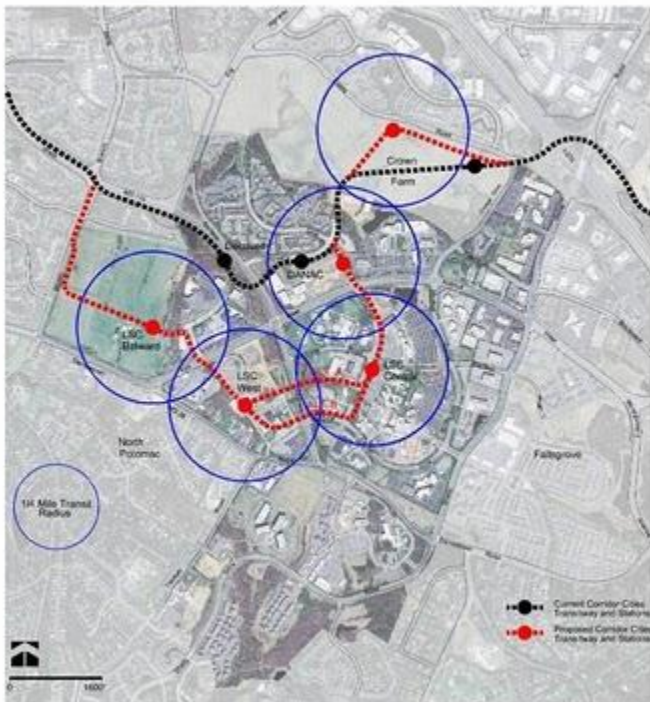
More Dwelling Units

The 1990 Master Plan allows 3,800 dwelling units, of which 3,300 exist and no more have been approved. The new plan would allow 9,000 dwelling units.

More CCT Stations and a Different Alignment

The original CCT alignment called for three CCT stations in or near the LSC. The new plan calls for five CCT stations. Instead of skirting the northern edge of the LSC, the CCT would swoop down through the heart of the LSC in an “S” shape under the new plan. This would lengthen the CCT by about a mile. The additional stations are intended to support additional density and would therefore add ridership. In the graphic below, the original alignment is marked in black and the new alignment is marked in red.

Corridor Cities Transitway Alignments and Stations



More Grade-Separated Interchanges

The 1990 Master Plan recommends grade-separated interchanges at four intersections: Sam Eig Highway at Diamondback Drive, Sam Eig Highway at Great Seneca Highway, Great Seneca Highway at Key West Avenue and I-270 at Watkins Mill Road. The new plan retains those recommendations and adds three more intersections for grade separation: Key West Avenue at Shady Grove Road, Great Seneca Highway at Muddy Branch Road and Quince Orchard Road at Great Seneca Highway. If all of these improvements were completed, most of the major intersections in and near the LSC would be grade-separated.

Staging

The new plan is structured to allow increases in density only when infrastructure milestones are met. Some of these milestones include full funding, construction and operation of the CCT, full funding and construction of specific grade-separated interchanges and percentage targets for commuters using non-auto modes. Unless the milestones are met, the density increases are not supposed to be allowed.

The proposed Gaithersburg West Master Plan has provoked some debate. We'll get into that in Part Two.

[Summary only...](#)

Posted by Adam Pagnucco at [7:00 AM](#) [0 comments](#)