

LAND USE

INTRODUCTION

Poolesville is an independent, State of Maryland, Charter Municipality, that has a long history dating to colonial days. It has developed a supportive economic and cultural life that makes it unique in character from many other suburban areas ringing Washington, D.C.

In 1950, Poolesville was a rural town with a strong agricultural base, and only 58 single family homes. By 1970, the number of homes increased to 128, but during the post-1970 period, the Town experienced its greatest expansion, growing by more than 900 homes to 1,086 in 1977.

Poolesville residents are blessed with excellent schools, diverse and desirable housing, locally owned businesses, and a rich, traditional historical heritage. There are also many active church-based and secular organizations that provide strong support for the community.

Perhaps most unique is Poolesville's geographical location within the 93,000 acre Montgomery County, Maryland Agricultural Reserve - the largest percentage of preserved agricultural land in the United States and a hard backdrop to any land use decisions contemplated, planned or projected into the knowable future.

Land Use Today

The Town has continued to grow steadily since 1977 with the addition of the Seneca Chase, Tama, Woods at Tama, Elizabeth's Delight and Hunter's Run subdivisions. These developments have given the Town a suburban quality. Two large development projects, Brightwell Crossing and Stoney Springs, scheduled for completion within the next 3-5 years, will raise the total number of homes in Town to about 1,924. Such expansion has been made possible by the increased availability of public sewerage and water. Construction design since the 1980's has been more uniform in size, style and lot size, in part, due to Town planning and zoning guidelines. Densities reflect requirements in the Town's Residential Zones for $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, and $\frac{3}{4}$ acre minimum lot sizes for single-family homes. Poolesville's housing will continue to be dominated by single family, detached units, with one townhome development.

Poolesville's housing was built incrementally over a period of many years and thus styles, lot sizes and densities vary considerably. This long development process has resulted in a mixing of commercial and residential uses in some parts of Town, particularly along Fisher Avenue (Maryland Route 107). In addition, a few dwelling units are located in some of the commercial structures.

Despite development of additional housing subdivisions, the Town maintains a substantial attachment to its farming and agricultural roots. There is evidence of this along the Town's central artery (Fisher Avenue) where parcels of farmland, horse meadows and various open spaces can still be found.



A Village

Residents want to maintain Poolesville's small town or village character. It is important to describe what that concept means to ensure that local residents, businesses and community leaders know what to expect when they become part of the community. For the purposes of this Master Plan a small town or village:

- Is predominantly residential and has supporting commercial and public facilities at or near its center;
- Is compact compared to its surroundings, and to traditional suburban tract development;
- Is easily distinguishable from surrounding land which is usually farmland or forests, and is usually located in the midst of rural or only slightly developed areas;
- Encourages personal interaction and pedestrian movement among local origins and destinations through mixed land uses.

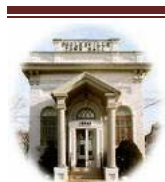
This description of a "village" reflects the rural, small town environment that Town residents value and is intended to help guide the development and planning activities of the Town going forward.

Poolesville's current mixed use zoning and land use designations in the business districts were initially established to help expand the village idea. However, land owners, the marketplace, economic conditions and other factors have hindered the commercial growth and development necessary to achieve this goal.

Town Center Emphasis

The Town's goal is to create a dynamic commercial area in Poolesville that blends the existing strip malls into a core downtown area that is visually appealing, has buildings of the right style, size and scale that face each other, and that encourages personal interaction and pedestrian movement. Such a core downtown area creates a street character and sense of place that functions as a social magnet, makes walking interesting, and stimulates economic growth and vitality.

There are four shopping centers located along the Town's central artery, two of which serve as "bookends" to the Town's commercial corridor. Most other businesses are operated from stand-alone buildings that are not uniform in their physical appearance, the way they are arrayed along this corridor, or their relationship to each other. This circumstance was noted in a 2008 Market Study commissioned by the Community Economic Development Committee (CEDC) to assess the Town's economic situation. The study report stated that businesses were spread too thin within the Commercial and Central Business Districts. The absence of a definable more compressed town center suppresses a more robust and sustainable marketplace.



A Citizens Survey conducted in 2010 reflected the strong desire of Town residents to protect and maintain Poolesville's historic heritage and small town character by a large margin over many other Town traits. These sentiments were also stated in the 2003 Citizens Survey. Some 2010 survey responses expressed the desire for an attractive downtown or town center such as that found in neighboring Leesburg or Old Town Gaithersburg, and economic development to sustain businesses through greater focus and cohesion of commercial interests within that Town center.

The following representative list of comments from residents participating in the 2010 Citizens Survey provides additional input that may be relevant to how and whether the Town prioritizes its goals and objectives concerning development in the future:

- Businesses and shops are spread too far apart;
- Businesses need to be moved closer together to form a town center;
- The downtown area needs major aesthetic improvement;
- The Town needs to grow "smartly" to increase business options;
- Improve shopping alternatives;
- Support and create a healthier attitude toward small businesses, and;
- Help fill vacant storefronts.

This convergence of ideas is telling and timely. While some businesses in Town are struggling to survive, the Poolesville community's commitment and desire to support local businesses has never been stronger.

The Town is legally and fiscally limited in its ability to make direct changes to achieve this goal; however, there are a number of short term and long term initiatives the Town should consider to support development and redevelopment in the Central Business and General Commercial Districts.

Short Term:

- Inform property owners in the business districts that financial assistance is available (grants, low-interest loans, etc.) for those wishing to make improvements to their property, i.e. TIZ, Heritage Montgomery, and other Federal, State or local sources;
- Establish financial incentives to support existing or new businesses;
- Exploit all opportunities to accelerate Poolesville's Streetscape implementation;
- Refine and strengthen the Architectural Guidelines for the CBD and GC Districts (Appendix C);
- Emphasize Poolesville's farming and trading history as another focal point for day trip visitors;
- Explore alternatives to expand the Thrift Store into larger commercial retail space within the business districts;
- Explore alternate uses for the Old Methodist Church, possibly by organizations associated with local tourism, historic heritage, etc.;



- Determine the viability of senior resident housing in the business districts;
- Maintain season or holiday related banners along Fisher Avenue and work with owners of historic structures to introduce lighting designs to enhance the Town's visibility and appeal.

Long Term:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of existing zoning prior to any additional water and sewer allocations;
- Evaluate whether Form-based Zoning (i.e. design over function) would be appropriate in achieving desired changes to Poolesville's commercial districts;
- Establish a mechanism to actively pursue and promote new businesses for the CBD and GC districts;
- Give super-priority status to development or re-development projects proposed within the CBD and GC districts, to include water and sewer allocation.

Housing Needs

Poolesville's housing stock is predominantly detached single-family homes with a substantial number of townhomes. Poolesville citizens are generally content with this mix of housing. Some residents have expressed an interest in more affordable housing for young adults entering the workforce as well as for the elderly. Each are important and are somewhat addressed by the current townhome communities in Town. However, housing built specifically for the elderly would likely include single story, compact units, preferably within the downtown area with easy access to shopping, transportation, and other resources and facilities.

Relative to a Town Center emphasis in the business district, the Town will need to address ways to include a significant increase in housing in the Town Center through its short and long term planning. Emphasis on the Town Center may result in smaller residential zoning such as zero-line lots or other small lots to encourage the type of street character, density and scale necessary to meet the vision outlined in this Plan. A mix of affordable housing types for young adults and the elderly should be emphasized as well, and as appropriate.

Land Use and Zoning Actions

The Town must take a number of actions if it is to achieve the land use objectives outlined in this plan. These actions are categorized as either: zoning, implementation guidance, or other related actions. All are described in the following sections.



Zoning

The Town has proceeded through an orderly process to revise and update the Town Zoning Ordinance and Code, review and adopt a new water allocation plan, and complete a comprehensive review of the Master Plan. Land uses and associated zoning are identified in Appendix E. They represent an attempt to achieve the following guiding principles:

- Support an ultimate Town population of approximately 6,500 for the life of this Plan;
- Encourage commercial uses in Poolesville – including retail, service, and office uses – within the CBD and GC districts;
- Discourage any further strip mall development within the Town;
- Encourage infill development within the commercial corridor;
- Remain vigilant in management and stewardship of Cluster Zoning in order to ensure that housing units are confined in a manner that preserves as much green space as possible.

Implementation Guidance

In addition to the land use and zoning designations provided in Appendix E, the following principles are provided as guidance when making future land use, site plan, construction and building remodeling decisions:

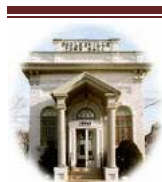
- Any new development or re-development must comply with the Town’s architectural guidelines and any new public facilities, such as a community center, should be located within the business/commercial districts;
- The architectural and streetscape guidelines shown in Appendices C and D should apply to all new construction or major renovations within the CBD and GC Districts.
- All utilities associated with new or renovated commercial structures or major residential developments should be placed underground.

Historic Preservation

The Town of Poolesville has historical roots that are long and rich. Construction of contemporary housing subdivisions in recent years has served to heighten the significance of the many historical buildings within the Town limits.

The Town should continue to emphasize the importance of protecting its historic structures. Such actions as requiring the developments of Tama, Hunter’s Run, and Elizabeth’s Delight to preserve and integrate existing structures into the development plans are good examples of historic preservation. Likewise, actions such as the restoration of the old Town Hall are in keeping with this philosophy.

Additionally, future developers are encouraged to review the report by the Historic Medley District showing various architectural themes prevalent and appropriate for Poolesville. That report is available in the Town library.



Properties of particular historic significance are shown in Appendix E, Map 3. Proposed impacts to these properties should be given careful consideration during the site plan review process.

Heritage Program

The Maryland Heritage Areas Program is designed to promote the economic potential of the State's many historic, cultural, and natural resources. This is accomplished through grants, loans, and State tax credits provided to individual property owners within a designated area (Target Investment Zone). Unlike some historical designation programs that use long term covenants to ensure continued participation in a program, properties in the heritage program are not so encumbered. Additionally, there is no requirement for property owners within the Target Investment Zone (TIZ) to participate in the program. Recipients are held to the terms of individual grant agreements, which vary from project to project. If a property owner disagrees with the terms of a grant agreement, the grant can be declined.

The Poolesville Master Plan adopts, by reference, the approved Montgomery County Heritage Area Management Plan, November 2002, including all the recommendations and implementation strategies. As previously referenced, the Town should actively participate in the pursuit of TIZ opportunities and promote and maximize other opportunities that capitalize on Poolesville's historic heritage presence. Poolesville's designated TIZ is identified in Appendix E, Map 3.

