



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rockville Town Center Master Plan defines a vision and describes expectations for the Town Center. By assembling a committed group of stakeholders to lead the effort, the City has demonstrated its commitment to the Town Center by broadening the group that can act in partnership with the City to realize downtown redevelopment goals. The planning process was an inclusive one that began with open public forums and was eventually channeled into an intensive collaborative effort between the consultant planning team and the Town Center Master Plan Advisory Group, which represents a cross section of Town Center stakeholders. This group, in conjunction with the City, must now champion the plan recommendations, promote them to the larger community, and act as stew-

ards for the guiding principles of the Master Plan as conditions change and actual development proposals are made.

One of the first tasks of the Advisory Group was that of finalizing a list of goals and objectives to guide the development of the Master Plan. After gathering feedback from surveys and open house participants, the planning team simplified three existing sets of goal statements (from the Planning Commission, Town Center Action Team, and City's Master Plan process) into one overarching goal for the Town Center with accompanying objectives. The Advisory Group then reviewed the document and endorsed the goal and objectives for the Town Center as shown below.

### *Town Center Master Plan Goal*

Create a daytime, evening, and weekend activity center that is easily identifiable, pedestrian-oriented, and incorporates a mix of uses and activities.

### *Objectives*

1. Provide an environment conducive to and supportive of living, working, shopping, and entertainment.
2. Accommodate a variety of densities and scales of development that are sensitive to an urban neighborhood environment and the demands of the marketplace.
3. Enhance links to transportation options which improve their visibility and accessibility.
4. Provide improved connections from neighborhoods to the Town Center.
5. Minimize the divisive impact of Rockville Pike and the Metro and CSX rail lines.
6. Make the Town Center a unique, high amenity destination for local and regional customers.
7. Utilize urban design to establish zoning and density requirements that will assist in defining the Rockville Town Center.
8. Provide sufficient parking for new mixed-use development and visitors to the Town Center.
9. Address integrating new aesthetic public parking garages with linkages from road networks.

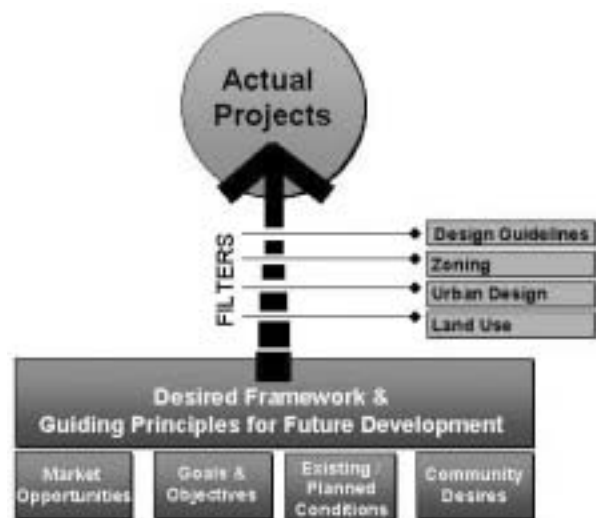
Rockville's Town Center has always been a source of interest from developers and potential investors; however, during the Master Plan process, serious interest seems to have intensified. It seems apparent that the City's commitment to the Town Center and the strength of the real estate market have generated that interest and, as a result of the Master Plan, the City will now have an effective tool for funneling and directing that interest and energy.

The primary tools to be used to direct private development interest are the *Desired Framework Diagram* and the associated *Guiding Principles for Future Development*. They represent the foundation of the Town Center Master Plan and are based on a synthesis of market opportunities, stated goals and objectives, existing and planned conditions, as well as the community's desires as expressed to the consultant planning team.

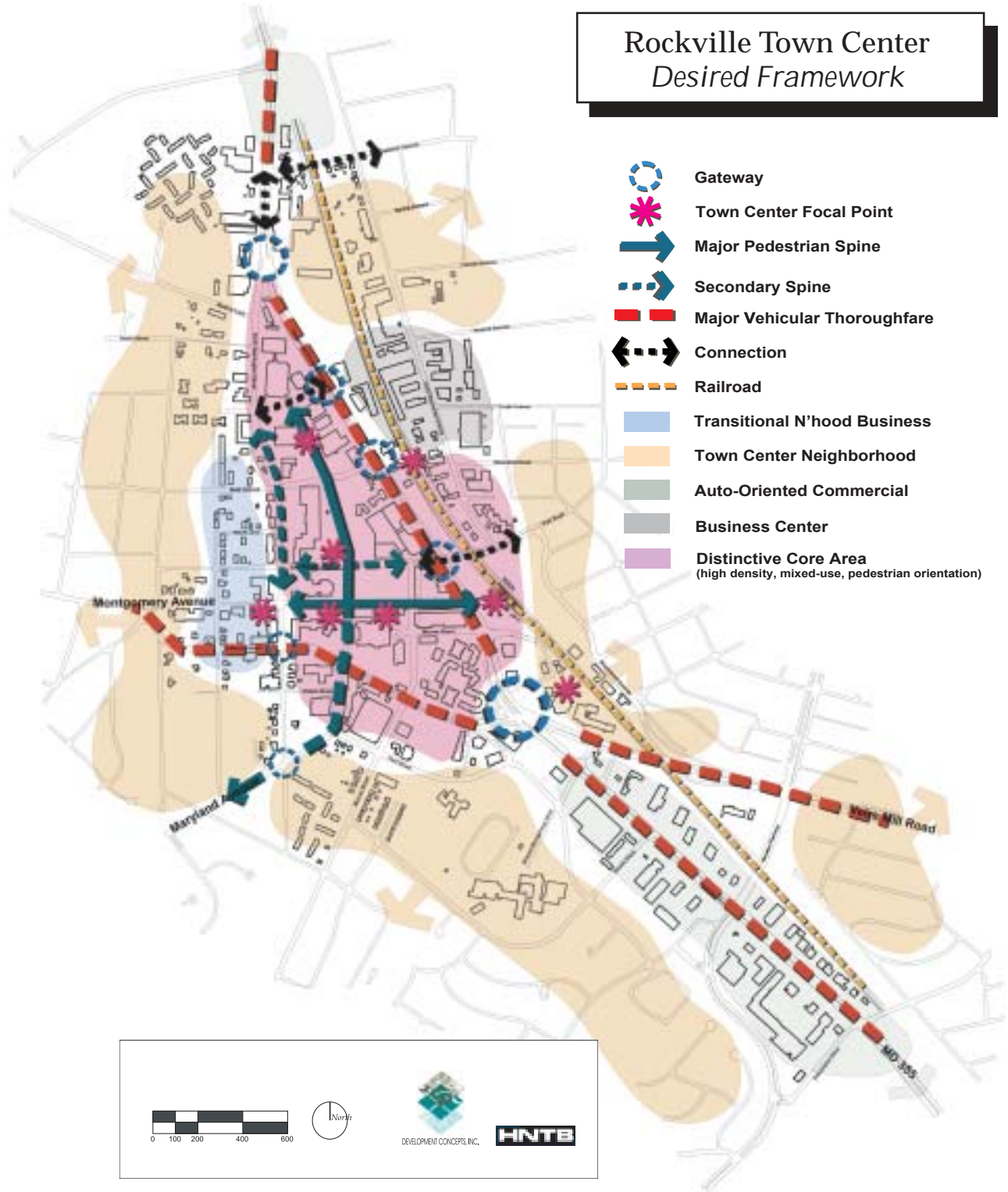
The course of most planning processes generally involves two broad phases of work: information gathering and recommendation preparation. The phase of the Rockville Town Center Master Plan during which the *Desired Framework Diagram* was prepared represents the 'turning point' between those two phases. Work prepared prior to the *Desired Framework* was based on documentable facts or data. Two items, the market analysis newsletter and the *Report on Public Input* (included in the Appendix), provide further documentation on the information-gathering phase of the Master Plan process. The generation of the *Desired Framework Diagram* marks the point where the planning process shifted toward the more forward-looking planning activities.

As the foundation for all of the subsequent recommendations, the *Desired Framework* (see page 7) and the *Guiding Principles for Future Development* (see page 10) are the building blocks of the Town Center Master Plan. They should be used as a benchmark for evaluating proposals. All of the work prepared by the consultant planning team after the *Desired Frame-*

### Building Blocks of the Town Center Master Plan



work was created were based on that framework and can function as filters for further decision-making. For example, the zoning recommendations, based on the framework, articulate more clearly what the community expects from developers and property owners. The *Illustrative Plan* drawing, however, represents only one approach— an interpretation of the guiding principles— that responds to the *Desired Framework* and the proposed Zoning map. It is not intended to represent the final or the only solution to creating a dynamic and active Town Center.



There are a number of elements within the plan that present a starting point for discussions within the community—both residents and investors. Those items are summarized in the list below:

- **Mixed-use theme:** The Master Plan proposes a broadening of uses within the Town Center in a variety of ways. Proposed zoning changes would allow for greater flexibility in the types of uses that could be developed. The plan recommends specific actions that can be taken to encourage the provision of more housing and retail. Requiring retail uses to be present on the ground floor of buildings on Maryland Avenue, but coupling that requirement with developer incentives is but one tool proposed that can help ensure that a mix of uses is achieved. Because housing is a key piece of the development program for the Town Center, the City should take the opportunity to combine the provision of parking with the provision of new retail and residential development on land that it currently owns.
- **Organizing elements:** In order to create a dynamic and unique sense of place in the Town Center, the Master Plan proposes an organization of design elements that celebrates existing features and that integrates new development with them. The L-shaped spine that is the backbone of the *Desired Framework* is defined in large part by the historic Red Brick Courthouse and the picturesque streetscape along Courthouse Square that ends in a view of the historic Post Office. Extending the uniqueness of that character eastward and northward is critical to the plan and is represented in 1) the proposal for the pedestrian promenade which would provide a more appropriate public plaza as an entryway from the Metro station to the Town Center and which would extend East Montgomery Avenue to the station; and 2) the development, streetscape improvements, and design guidelines proposed for new development along the Maryland Avenue extension.
- **Eastside relationship to Town Center:** Providing connections between the Town Center and East Rockville became an important focus of the Master Plan because of the lack of existing connections. In addition, the location of the Metro station suggests that a more efficient use of land in the immediate vicinity of the station could be realized. As Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) contemplates joint development proposals for the Metro station, there is the likelihood that traffic patterns in the area will be altered. Providing mechanisms for reducing traffic impacts on the neighborhood will therefore be important. If executed appropriately based on analysis and neighborhood input, connectors to the east side could provide relief while simultaneously improving access to the Town Center from East Rockville.
- **Opportunities for partnerships:** Because of the scope and magnitude of several of the proposed improvements, the Master Plan presents opportunities for new types of partnerships between existing groups and for new partnerships with groups which currently may not be actively involved in the Town Center. For example, partnerships between the City and County in a Parking District and a tax increment finance (TIF) district are proposed. The Master Plan proposes that the City engage in public-private partnerships with developers to provide projects (particularly housing) that fulfill the goals of the Master Plan.
- **Implementation focus:** While the Master Plan recommendations do not comprehensively deal with all areas of the study area

in the same level of detail, it does provide a great deal of information and ideas on how to realize the key elements of the recommendations. This implementation-focused approach to the Master Plan allows the public sector to understand what exactly its work program will be and how to create partnerships with citizens, developers, property owners, and investors. The planning process has also acknowledged that some areas are included in the Town Center boundaries that are really better addressed when comprehensively planned in conjunction with areas to which they have more in common. One example would be North Stonestreet Avenue, which is more closely related to the residential neighborhoods of East Rockville than to the Town Center. Another area is Rockville Pike south of MD 28 which is much more vehicular-oriented than is appropriate in the Town Center.

### **Conclusion**

Because economic shifts and an active regional real estate market will always result in a dy-

namic development process in Rockville, all of the partners committed to the Town Center will have to stay focused on the task at hand—creating a vibrant, active Town Center. The Master Plan is, in fact the beginning of a lot of hard work and more detailed planning for specific projects and improvements. While the projects described and the work program outlined in the Master Plan are ambitious, the plan is certainly achievable if there is community-wide commitment to the plan's recommendations. To reinforce the extraordinary lengths some communities have gone to in order to achieve their redevelopment goals, examples of implementation tools have been placed throughout this document. These examples are intended to illustrate that, when presented with a vision and a road map for how to better themselves, committed and innovative communities find a way to make things happen. In community and city building, no goal comes without a price tag; but price is a relative thing when one is committed to realizing that goal. As the classical Roman orator Quintillian said, "Nature. . . has ordained that difficulty should precede every work of excellence."

### *Guiding Principles for Future Development*

- Development in Rockville’s Town Center will be organized around an L-shaped, pedestrian-oriented spine extending from the Metro station westward along East Montgomery Avenue and a northward extension of Maryland Avenue to North Washington Street. As the primary organizational element of the Town Center, this spine would serve as the focal point for future development activities. All projects throughout the Town Center should be supportive of, and not detract from, that role. The street must exhibit outstanding streetscape, signage, landscaping, and architectural design solutions that make its centerpiece role immediately recognizable.
- North Washington Street will be a comfortable pedestrian and vehicular corridor that will serve as a transition area between western neighborhoods and the core of the Town Center while accommodating north-south vehicular traffic. Development along North Washington Street—particularly on its west side—will present a recognizable edge to the mid-to high-intensity uses present in the core of the Town Center.
- Connectivity between Maryland Avenue and other traffic corridors—particularly MD 355 and North Washington Street—will be provided in a manner that does not compromise the pedestrian character of Maryland Avenue or North Washington Street.
- The Metro station will have a recognizable presence in the Town Center. Redevelopment efforts including the station and area to the west are viewed as opportunities to bring the station perceptually closer by favoring development and densities of activity toward the Town Center. Connections between the station and the Town Center will be viewed as an extension of the L-shaped spine.
- As the center of the Rockville community, the Town Center will be well-connected to adjacent neighborhoods but will not use them for funneling tremendous amounts of traffic. Future development will be supportive of the economic viability of adjacent properties while not presenting dramatic conflicts in uses.
- Partnerships between property owners, businesses, citizens, civic associations, governmental entities, and other groups will be actively encouraged and supported. These groups will help support the implementation of the plan’s goals and objectives. Additionally, these groups will continue to be involved in future activities by providing comments, observations, support, and encouragement.