



City of Rockville

MEMORANDUM

February 16, 2007

TO: City of Rockville Planning Commission

FROM: Ann Wallas, Planner II, CPDS

THROUGH: Jim Wasilak, Chief of Planning

SUBJECT: Public Hearing on Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan - February 21, 2007

Background:

The Twinbrook area is located in the southeastern section of the City and the neighborhoods are bounded by the CSX and Metro railroad tracks to the southwest, First Street/Norbeck Road to the northwest and the City's eastern boundary along Rock Creek Park and Twinbrook Parkway. The neighborhoods are bisected by Veirs Mill Road, which contains the primary commercial node in the area.

The City of Rockville Master Plan considers the area north of Veirs Mill Road to be Planning Area 7, *Twinbrook Forest/Northeast Rockville*. Planning Area 8, *Twinbrook*, is south of Veirs Mill Road. However, many City residents consider the "Twinbrook" neighborhood to be located both north and south of Veirs Mill Road, and for the purposes of developing a new Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan, the two Planning Areas are being considered together. Considering the two adjacent planning areas together offers an opportunity to examine the land use and zoning elements, together with other shared concerns, in a consistent and even-handed manner.

A Public Hearing on the Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan is scheduled for Wednesday February 21, 2007 at 7:00 p.m. in the Mayor and Council Chambers at City Hall. An advertisement announcing the hearing has appeared in *The Gazette* on February 7 and 14, 2007; articles have appeared in the January and February editions of *Rockville Reports*, an announcement and link to the Draft Plan has been posted on the City's website and postcards have been mailed to all addresses (approximately 4,000) within the two Planning Areas.

The Planning Process:

The planning process began with two neighborhood meetings held on November 9 and 16, 2004 at Twinbrook and Meadow Hall Elementary Schools, respectively. The meetings were well

attended by both community residents and City staff. At each meeting participants were divided into groups and a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) exercise was conducted to help the community identify the issues facing them. Participants ranked their responses in order of importance and staff tallied the responses. In addition a survey was sent to every address within the two Planning Areas and more than 300 responses were received. The concerns expressed were similar to those brought out at the meeting. City staff of various departments were also surveyed to determine their concerns about the Twinbrook area.

The major issues, reflected throughout the SWOT and survey process, were that residents regarded the neighborhood's proximity to Metro, shopping and services, parks and recreational facilities as strengths. They also valued their neighbors and the diversity of the area. Increasing traffic, inadequate code enforcement, crime and loitering and the possibility of adverse impacts from adjacent redevelopment were regarded as weaknesses and threats. Opportunities were seen in the ability to improve and expand their homes; increased recreational options from both the City and the commercial sector and increased transit options – particularly in services to and from the Metro.

The Mayor and Council appointed the 22-member Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan Advisory Group (TNPAG) on March 7, 2005. The TNPAG consisted primarily of neighborhood residents, many of whom worked closely with their respective neighborhood associations. The Group, and City staff, sought input and participation from area business and commercial property owners. City staff has also maintained email contact with a group of community, business and County planning stakeholders throughout the Planning process.

The TNPAG held its first meeting on April 7, 2005, and met throughout the following year and a half on a bi-monthly basis. Initially, the Advisory Group met with City staff members from the Departments of Public Works, Recreation and Parks, Code Enforcement, and the Police as well as members of the Historic Preservation and Long Range planning staffs, and considered a range of topics related to the future of Twinbrook, including future land use, housing, non-residential areas, transportation, public facilities and community services and the impact of adjacent development. The Group then examined each of these issues as the Plan was drafted and discussed each Chapter as it was drafted and re-drafted. Once all the Chapters had been considered individually the Group discussed the document as a whole and additional changes were made. A collaborative approach was used throughout the entire issue identification, plan recommendations and plan drafting process as the Group sought to reach consensus at each stage. Three members of the TNPAG volunteered to edit the Draft Plan, which was further discussed by the Group before being presented to the public at Community-wide meetings.

Staff offered to visit neighborhood and citizen associations to discuss the Draft Plan and two presentations were made to the Twinbrook Citizens Association (TCA) in January and February 2006 regarding the draft plan at that time.

The Draft Plan:

The Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan lays out a vision for how the area might look in the next twenty years and the TNPAG has agreed upon the following vision statement for their community:

“Twinbrook has evolved from a low-density, single-family residential suburban area, into an increasingly diverse and densely populated neighborhood. One constant has always been a community that values civic engagement and quality of life issues.

The Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan seeks to preserve these strengths: by maintaining and enhancing the historic residential character of Twinbrook; by upgrading its publicly owned spaces and facilities; by intelligent planning/zoning that encourages easy access to retail and mass transit, provides for recreation while fostering community pride; and, by directing future growth towards mixed-use development on land currently zoned for commercial and industrial uses, as designated in this Plan.”

The Draft Plan makes recommendations to help improve the area in both the immediate future and over the next twenty years. These recommendations cover all aspects of the community: the residential areas, the non-residential areas, transportation, the environment, and community facilities, recreation, parks and open spaces. The Draft Plan addresses each of these major issues:

Community Characteristics (Chapter 1: Introduction p.7)

The U.S Census 2000 indicates that the total population for the Twinbrook neighborhoods is 10,847, with 5,414 residents in Planning Area 8 and 5,433 in Planning Area 7. There were a total of 4,689 housing units, with an average household size of 2.8 persons per household. This compares with an average household size of 2.6 persons for the City as a whole, indicating that there are more residents per household in Twinbrook than in the balance of the City.

Family households made up 71% of the households in Twinbrook. This figure includes both married-couple families (56%) and other families (15%). Nonfamily households made up 8% of all households in Twinbrook. Female single parent households comprised 11% of the population, and one-person households comprised 21% of the population.

According to the US Census 2000 there were 272 residents (17% of the City total) of 65 years and older living alone in the three census tracts that make up the Twinbrook neighborhoods.

22% of the residents of Planning Area 8 and 16% of Planning Area 7 identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino in the 2000 Census, making those of Hispanic or Latino origin the largest minority ethnic group in the Twinbrook neighborhoods

The Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan addresses issues important to its residents and seeks to define the neighborhood's role within the City of Rockville and in the surrounding area of Montgomery County. The economy of metropolitan Washington D.C. continues to thrive. Many people, and the businesses that employ and serve them, want to move here to enjoy the high quality of life and opportunity that this dynamic area offers.

Land Use (Chapter 2: Neighborhood Land Use p.19):

There are approximately 1,300 acres of land within the two Twinbrook Planning Areas (7 and 8), of which the vast majority – 1,053 acres, more than 97% – is devoted to single-family housing.

There is very little vacant land available in Twinbrook, and there is little vacant land immediately adjacent to the city limits that can be annexed in and developed. Future development within the existing corporate limits of Rockville will be either the redevelopment of existing sites, such as Twinbrook Commons (now Twinbrook Station), or in-fill on the few remaining vacant or underdeveloped lots.

Residential (Chapter 3: Residentially Zoned Areas: Housing p.27)

The 1982 Twinbrook Neighborhood plan was aimed at maintaining and enhancing the residential character of the area. The new Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan recommends retaining that commitment and seeks to ensure continued neighborhood viability and sustainability. Research, surveys and community input have indicated that, while Twinbrook residents appreciate the sense of community and access to amenities that their neighborhood affords, they have concerns about community maintenance and code enforcement issues. Lack of adequate code enforcement and overcrowding, together with parking, were considered to be major areas of weakness and threats to the community. On the more positive side, home improvement and expansion was regarded as a major area of opportunity.

There is concern that additions and infill development could alter the look and feel of the neighborhood. As land becomes more valuable, Twinbrook may also become the target of “teardowns”, where the existing homes are replaced with houses that approach the maximum height and bulk allowed by the existing Zoning Ordinance. The Plan offers the opportunity to explore ways to help the neighborhoods retain their character, while ensuring that residents are able to maintain and enhance their homes.

Non-Residential Land Use (Chapter 4: Non-Residential Areas p. 39)

While very little of the Twinbrook area is zoned for non-residential uses, it occupies an important place in the community. There are approximately 19.35 acres of commercially zoned land in the Twinbrook neighborhoods – on Veirs Mill Road and at the Burgundy Center.

The Veirs Mill Road corridor acts as both a common area and a dividing line between the two Twinbrook communities, and contains the main commercial area serving the neighborhood.

Shopping centers are located on both sides of Veirs Mill Road, near the intersection with Atlantic Avenue and there is an additional small retail site on Atlantic Avenue. The area comprises 17.41 acres, with approximately 11 acres on the northern side of Veirs Mill Road, and the balance on the southern side of the road. It is zoned C-2, the City's general commercial zone, which allows for not only the existing single story neighborhood retail structures but a variety of retail and office uses. Office buildings of up to 75 feet high (six stories) with an FAR of 2.0 may be allowed by right in this area under the current zoning.

The Veirs Mill Road commercial area serves both the surrounding neighborhoods and customers from further afield. The community has expressed concern about the future viability of the neighborhood shopping centers, their security, appearance and maintenance, and the challenges they face in acting as "good neighbors" to the residential areas around them. This area offers the potential for accommodating a portion of the residential growth that is anticipated within the City, and the region, over the next twenty-five years. It could be redeveloped into an attractive neighborhood center that would provide a "gathering place" for the neighborhood while meeting citizens' retail and service needs. Office and residential uses could complete the "mix". The new Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan therefore recommends that the existing C-2 commercial properties be re-zoned to a Mixed-Use Neighborhood Center Zone to create the conditions for such a center.

The Burgundy Shopping Center is a small neighborhood convenience center located at the intersection of Baltimore Road and First Street on the western boundary of the area. The 1.94-acre site is zoned C-1 Local Commercial, which is intended to allow small-scale, neighborhood oriented, goods and services

The Twinbrook area has a relatively small service industrial area adjacent to the Twinbrook Metro Station. The Lewis Avenue I-2 Industrial area comprises four sites with a total land area of approximately 5.40 acres that is zoned I-2 (Light Industrial). The low-rise office buildings at 12720 and 12750 Twinbrook Parkway are zoned I-1 (Service Industrial). Many of the sites appear to have very little room for expansion, and the 1982 Twinbrook Plan recommended that the light industrial zone should not be permitted to expand in size or height.

Many in the community value the Lewis Avenue businesses and believe that the service nature of the area should be retained. However, this area offers the potential to absorb some of the population growth that is anticipated in the next twenty years. A shift towards a mix of uses is an emerging trend and sites that are adjacent to Metro are proving to be especially attractive for residential development.

The new Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan recommends that the City should develop a Mixed Use Industrial zone for existing industrially zoned areas; specifically the Lewis Avenue I-2 zone and the Ardennes Avenue/Twinbrook Parkway I-1 and O-1 zoned areas. This new zone should allow suitable industrial uses to continue, while allowing a transition to a mix of uses. Montgomery County is considering a similar zoning category for the light industrial area that lies to the south of Twinbrook Parkway.

Traffic and Transportation (Chapter 5: Transportation p.47)

The Twinbrook neighborhoods are bounded by arterial roads carrying a large volume of both local and non-local commuter traffic. The neighborhood's internal circulation system is largely dictated by the land use pattern, and is designed to direct traffic on to a limited number of collector routes. Traffic backups occur at the limited number of entrance and exit points.

Major improvements, such as intersection improvements at First Street and Veirs Mill Road and the Veirs Mill Road Bus Rapid Transit Plan (BRT) being considered by the State of Maryland also bring challenges to the neighborhood, and should provide additional impetus for commercial and streetscape improvements in the corridor.

Several large developments, such as Twinbrook Commons and the Rockville Town Center will be completed in the near future and it will be important to limit any negative impacts that these developments may have on the Twinbrook neighborhoods.

Traffic and transportation issues are a major concern for the community. Residents are worried about both the volume and speed of traffic on the major roads and through the community, with vehicles cutting through the neighborhood being a primary concern.

Environmental Issues (Chapter 6: The Environment p.61)

The new Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan provides an overview of the existing environmental settings and natural resources for the Twinbrook community makes recommendations to enhance and preserve them. Sustainable practices are recommended for the neighborhood so that the parks, open space, streams and tree canopy will exist for future generations.

Twinbrook residents have indicated that they value their environment, appreciate the number of trees within the neighborhood and enjoy their access to recreational facilities and green space. However, several areas of concern were raised by citizens, were identified by staff and the Advisory Group, or have emerged in subsequent discussions. These issues include flooding, storm water management and tree maintenance.

Community Facilities (Chapter 7: Community Facilities: Recreation, Parks and Open Spaces p. 69)

The City provides the majority of the public services and facilities in the neighborhood. Responsibility for services such as education, fire/rescue, and libraries lies with Montgomery County, which is also responsible for a network of human service agencies and programs situated in the study area.

Demographic indicators show that the area is becoming increasingly multi-cultural. This change has an impact on both the kinds of social services that are required, and also on the kinds of recreational activities that appeal to a changing population. Flexible space is required – both indoors and outdoors - that can be programmed to serve the needs of different population groups.

The Twinbrook Commons (now Twinbrook Station) development will provide some measure of open space, but not recreational open space, such as ball fields, and there are very few opportunities within the area to create additional open space. The City and the neighborhood associations should investigate possible open spaces of whatever size for pocket parks, especially near the Twinbrook Metro Station.

The new Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan recommends that consideration should be given to the creation of a mechanism – such as conservation easements and/or an Open Space Zone - to protect City-owned parkland so that future residents may continue to enjoy it.

Implementation (Chapter 8: Implementation p.79)

The Draft Plan makes recommendations to help improve the area in both the immediate future and over the next twenty years. As noted above, these recommendations cover all aspects of the community: the residential areas, the non-residential areas, transportation, the environment, community facilities, recreation, parks and open spaces. Each of the subject chapters in the Plan was considered in the context of all other chapters. In order to organize the recommendations into an implementation strategy five key catalysts were developed. These catalysts are more fully explained in the Draft Plan Chapter Eight – Implementation. They are:

Catalyst 1 – Residential (p.80)

Maintain and enhance the residential character of the Twinbrook neighborhoods to ensure continued viability and sustainability.

- Develop zoning language and establish standards for a R-60 (Twinbrook) Overlay Zone for the Twinbrook neighborhoods.

Catalyst 2 – The Public Realm (p.81)

Maintain, upgrade and acquire publicly owned land to ensure that recreational opportunities, public accessibility and the natural environment enhance the quality of life for all residents.

- Develop and Implement a comprehensive Parks and Public Spaces Plan for the Twinbrook neighborhoods to improve and increase the public realm.

Catalysts 3, 4 and 5 – The Non-Residential Areas (p.82 – 85)

A key feature of each of the non-residential catalysts is that they recommend consultation with the property owners and the citizens who live in the immediate neighborhood prior to any zoning changes or redevelopment. The TNPAG believe that it is very important that those most affected by any changes be involved in the decision making process. As noted above, staff has maintained contact with the commercial and industrial property owners throughout the process and several of them have been interested in the Plan's recommendations for redevelopment of their properties over the next few years.

Catalyst 3 (p.82)

Promote the renewal of the Twinbrook neighborhood commercial areas.

- Develop a Mixed-Use Neighborhood Center Zone for application in the C-2 Veirs Mill Road commercial area.

Catalyst 4 (p.83)

Promote the renewal of the Twinbrook neighborhood industrial areas.

- Develop a Mixed-Use Industrial Zone for existing industrially zoned areas, specifically the Lewis Avenue I-2 zone and the Ardennes Avenue/Twinbrook Parkway I-1 zoned areas.

Catalyst 5 (p.85)

Promote improvement of the Burgundy commercial area.

- Seek ways to improve the physical plant and traffic circulation at the Burgundy Shopping Center.
- Should the Center redevelop it should do so within the existing C-1 Development Standards.

As noted, the Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan outlines a vision and makes recommendations to help improve the area in both the immediate future and over the next twenty years. It suggests a range of tools that might help the City, and the citizens of Twinbrook, reach that vision. Some of these tools – such as overlay zones - are currently employed in various ways within the City of Rockville and others – such as form-based zoning - have been used successfully in other parts of the country.

The Draft Plan makes several references to the future use of flexible zoning tools, should they be adopted by the Mayor and Council and made available.

Public Outreach:

In November 2006 the Draft Plan was presented to the community at two meetings, one at Meadow Hall Elementary School, and a second at Twinbrook Elementary School. Both meetings offered the same information and residents were able to choose the one that was most convenient for them. An extensive community outreach program was undertaken including:

- Rockville Reports – articles in English and Spanish.
- Press release through the Public Information Office.
- Postcard mailing to every address within the two Planning Areas.
- Letter enclosing Staff Draft Executive Summary sent to every commercial and industrial property owner in the Planning Areas.
- Flyers in English and Spanish distributed by members of the Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan Advisory Group.
- Flyers in English, Spanish, Korean and Chinese distributed to neighborhood business owners, Twinbrook Library and the Twinbrook Community Center.
- Email through the Neighborhood Services listserv.
- Announcement on the City's webpage.
- Announcement on Channel 11.

There was good attendance at both meetings – more than 60 visitors signed in at the first meeting and more than 80 at the second. Copies of the Staff Draft Executive Summary, containing all the Draft Plan recommendations, were available for each participant and boards illustrating the suggested catalysts were on display. Advisory Group members staffed the display area and discussed the Draft Plan with citizens. A presentation on the Draft Plan was given by Advisory Group members and staff, followed by questions from attendees. Attendees could also fill out postage-paid comment forms to be handed in or sent in later.

TNPAG met on November 30, 2006, and discussed the issues raised at the two Community Meetings. It was decided that the issues raised should be noted but did not merit changes to the Draft Plan at that time. The Group then voted to endorse the Draft Plan and recommended that it be presented to the Mayor and Council and the Planning Commission. The vote was 5-3, with the minority expressing discomfort with directly making recommendations that had not been formally adopted by the RORZOR Committee.

The Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan was presented to a Joint Worksession of the Mayor and Council and the Planning Commission on December 13, 2006. Issues raised included the possibility of some level of historic designation, the future of the commercial and industrial areas, outreach to the community and the question of whether or not the Draft Plan should be delayed because of the RORZOR process.

The Planning Commission received a presentation and discussed the Draft Plan on January 24, 2007, where the question of delaying the Draft Plan because of the RORZOR process was raised

once again. Planning Commission members suggested that stronger recommendations could be made with regard to greenspace and the use of community facilities. Additional clarification about which facilities are City-owned, and which are County-owned, was requested. Questions about historic designation were also raised and it suggested that the historic cemeteries be noted in the Plan.