City of Rockville

MEMORANDUM

January 28, 2011

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Cindy Kebba, Planner

VIA: David Levy, Chief of Long-Range Planning

SUBJECT: Presentation on the "Rockville Pike District Form Code", as proposed in the draft document *Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place*, Draft for Planning Commission Public Hearing

Consultant Presentations

On February 9, 2011, Mr. Kim Littleton, a member of the Rockville Pike consultant team headed by ACP Visioning + Planning (ACP), will make a presentation to the Planning Commission on the "Rockville Pike District Form Code", which is Chapter 6 of the recently released *Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place*, Draft for Planning Commission Public Hearing. This Form Code is the mechanism that ACP recommends Rockville use to regulate development in the Rockville Pike corridor. The recommendation includes that the City of Rockville, after adopting the Plan, amend the City's Zoning Ordinance so as to replace the existing zoning and regulatory approach in the plan area with this Form Code.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide a more thorough discussion of this key component of the Draft Plan and to allow the Planning Commission to ask more in-depth questions. For the Planning Commission, the form code presentation will provide important background and an opportunity to become familiar with this zoning tool that is new to Rockville. The presentation will be posted on the Rockville Pike Web site for viewing, at http://www.rockvillemd.gov/rockvillespike/index.html.

Mr. Littleton will be giving a similar presentation to the public during that same afternoon (3:00 pm on February 9) at City Hall in order to provide Rockville citizens, workers, property owners, business owners, developers and other interested parties the chance to learn first-hand about the form code and to ask questions. The presentation will assist the public in understanding form codes in general and how they differ from

traditional zoning, and aid in preparation for giving testimony, including at the public hearing on March 9.

The public may also attend the presentation to the Planning Commission on the evening of February 9 (but will not have the opportunity to ask questions at that meeting), watch the Planning Commission meeting live on Channel 11, view it later as a rebroadcast per the Channel 11 schedule, or access it on the Rockville Pike web page after it is posted.

In order to provide publicity regarding these educational sessions, the following actions have been, or are being, taken:

- Adding these public and Planning Commission educational sessions to the schedule on the Rockville Pike Plan Web page at: http://www.rockvillemd.gov/rockvillespike/meetings.htm.
- Sending an announcement to the Pike Plan interest group listserve.
- Sending an announcement to the large citywide listserve.
- Issuing a press release.

Significance of the Rockville Pike District Form Code

The Rockville Pike District Form Code is a key component of *Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place* and provides regulations that will guide redevelopment along the Pike corridor in a manner consistent with the plan's vision. The concept of the form code had not been developed as a regulatory tool when the 1989 Pike Plan was created. ACP has expressed its opinion that the absence of such a tool prevented the vision of the 1989 plan from becoming a reality.

Several of the recommendations related to the land use elements of *Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place*, such as the heights of buildings, their positions on sites, their relationships to the sidewalks, and the design characteristics of the public realm, are intended to be regulated and implemented through the Rockville Pike District Form Code. The draft plan is available at http://www.rockvillemd.gov/rockvillespike/2010DraftPlan/index.html

What is a Form Code?

A form-based code, or "form code", is a method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form. Form codes create a predictable public realm (all areas to which the public has open access) primarily by controlling physical form, with a lesser focus on land use, through various types of development regulations.

Form codes have been used across the country since the 1980s. A local example is the Columbia Pike district of Arlington, Virginia. The Form-Based Codes Institute, www.formbasedcodes.org, is the most recognized source of information on the subject. Staff will continue to provide the Planning Commission and the public more sources of information as they become available.

Form codes address the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. The regulations and standards in form-based codes are presented in both words and diagrams. They are keyed to a regulating plan that designates the appropriate form and scale (and, therefore, character) of development, rather than just distinctions in land-use types.

Form codes are an alternative to conventional zoning and are adopted into local law. They are not design guidelines, general policy statements, or recommendations. They are a regulatory tool to implement a community plan and achieve a community vision. As mentioned, the Rockville Pike District Form Code (Chapter 6 of *Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place*) is intended to be incorporated, by adoption, into the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Rockville, thereby advancing the goals of the existing mixed-use districts in the corridor.

Form codes typically follow one or more of four organizing principles: transect-based, building type-based, street-based, and frontage-based. A transect-based code organizes neighborhoods in a continuum of intensity, ranging from rural to urban. A building type-based code applies particular building types to respective lot types on a regulating plan. Street-based codes focus primarily on the specific design and location of streets. A frontage-based code focuses its regulations on the way that buildings address the public realm. The form code presented in *Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place* is a frontage-based code.

Form-based codes commonly include a regulatory plan which is a plan or map of the regulated area designating the locations where different building form standards apply, based on community intentions regarding the physical character of the area being regulated. The regulating plan for the Rockville Pike corridor is divided into three distinct subareas: North Pike, Midlle Pike and South Pike. Each of these sub-areas includes all or a combination of some of five street frontage types: Urban Corridor, Urban Core, Urban Center, Urban General and Urban Neighborhood. Each frontage type is color coded on the regulating plan as are the standards that apply to each.

Form codes include a number of standards that regulate building form, architecture, streets, and/or other components. The frontage-based Rockville Pike District Form Code includes the following components:

Building Form Standards control the configuration, features, and functions of buildings that define and shape the public realm.

Block Standards specify maximum block length and perimeter dimensions and apply to sites that are two acres in size or larger to help create a more interconnected street network.

Thoroughfare standards address vehiclular traffic lane widths, sidewalk and tree planting area dimensions, pedestrian crossing times, and on-street parking configurations for Rockville Pike and the four other street frontage types in the code.

Open Space Standards provide specifications for the size, location and physical qualities of public and private open space using a combination of on-site provision and fee-in-lieu of land dedication. Properties fronting the Pike apply their fee-in-lieu toward streetscape improvements along the Pike's frontage.

Building Types regulate building types according to the type of street they front on and are based primarily on the physical form of a building and less by its use. Building type standards complement building form standards.

Frontage types serve as the interface between the public and private realm and to ensure that once a building is located on a site that its relationship to the streets creates a viable public realm.

Architectural Standards control external architectural materials and quality and promote a coherent and pleasing architectural character.

Streetscape Standards ensure the coherence of the street space. They establish an environment that encourages and facilitates pedestrian activity by setting parameters for the placement of street trees and other amenities on or near each building site and coordinated with the street specifications.

Administration. A clearly defined application and project review process allows for administrative review for all projects that comply with applicable form-based requirements with Planning Commission review retained for approvals that require special exception, variance or other approval.

Glossary defines terms as they are used in the form code and which may or may not be similar to those in the zoning ordiance.

The Presenter: Kim Littleton, AICP

Kim Littleton, Principal of KCL Planning, Design, and Coding, was formerly a senior planner, specializing in development regulations, with ACP Visioning + Planning. He is a practicing urban planner with more than 30 years of experience planning projects for all levels of local government. Mr. Littleton has managed numerous comprehensive and land use plans, urban design, economic feasibility, and site planning projects. He holds a Bachelor of Urban Planning and Design from the University of Cincinnati and a Masters of Business Administration from Capital University. He successfully completed the inaugural course on form-based codes that was offered by the Form-Based Codes Institute at Virginia Tech.

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