

City of Rockville

TNP Chapter 4: Commercial and Industrial Areas

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Planning Commission Recommended Draft - June 2008.

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Chapter 4: Commercial and Industrial Areas

Summary of Recommendations

For Re-zoning and Redevelopment:

- The City of Rockville should formulate a comprehensive Redevelopment Policy with appropriate incentives for the redevelopment of specified areas.

For the properties on Veirs Mill Road:

- Promote the renewal of the Twinbrook neighborhood commercial areas.
- Recommended land use: mixed-use neighborhood commercial, with a mix of residential and commercial uses including retail and office.
- Recommend the provision of publicly accessible open space.
- Ground floor retail should include a full-service grocery store and a variety of shops and restaurants to serve the neighborhood.
- Connect Atlantic Avenue through the Shopping Center to McAuliffe Drive to create two developable blocks and improve traffic circulation. Traffic calming and pedestrian safety and accessibility should be emphasized.
- Improve pedestrian safety and accessibility in the entire Veirs Mill Road commercial area.
- Recommended zoning, Mixed Use Neighborhood Commercial (MXNC) – with a maximum height of sixty-five feet.

For the properties on Lewis Avenue:

- The Lewis Avenue sites that are currently zoned for industrial use should remain within Planning Area 8.
- Recommended land use: Mixed Use Industrial with a mix of service and light industrial with residential and commercial uses.
- Commercial retail uses should be limited.
- No auto-related uses should be allowed.
- Residential units should be located on upper floors and facing on to Lewis Avenue.
- Live-work units should be encouraged.
- The mix of uses may be vertical or horizontal, depending upon site design.
- Recommended zone I-L. Amend I-L zone to allow Dwellings, multiple-unit, as a Conditional Use. Conditional use allowed only where recommended in the Plan.

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For the properties at Twinbrook Parkway/Ardennes Avenue:

- The properties located in the area bounded by Twinbrook Parkway, Ardennes Avenue and Halpine Road should remain within Planning Area 8.
- There should be no auto-related uses located in this area.

Uniwest/Meljay – Twinbrook Parkway/Ardennes Avenue – former Thompson’s Dairy Site

- Recommend the MXE zone.

12750 Twinbrook Parkway

- Recommend office/office laboratory use to be compatible with adjacent uses in the County and City.
- Recommend rezone to MXB.
- No auto-related uses should be allowed on this site.
- Site design should be compatible with surrounding area and take advantage of its unique shape and “gateway” location.

12710 and 12730 Twinbrook Parkway (located in Montgomery County)

- Should these two sites annex into the City they should be rezoned MXB.
- Recommended use office/office laboratory.
- No auto-related uses should be allowed on these sites.

12720 Twinbrook Parkway

- Recommend the site for all multi-family residential use that will create a horizontal mix of uses in the Twinbrook Parkway/Ardennes Avenue/Halpine Road area.
- Recommend the City-owned buffer located between the site and Halpine Road be improved by the owner of 12720 Twinbrook Parkway in accordance with City of Rockville specifications. The owner should work with the City to maintain the buffer in future years.
- Recommended zoning MXB, a transitional zone created for use in areas between Metro areas and single-family residential areas.
- No auto-related uses should be allowed on this site.

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5946 Halpine Road:

Maintain the R-60 zone for single family housing on the site if it is developed, or acquire the site for additional park and green space, should it become available. The Mayor and Council should explore ways to eliminate the existing non-conforming use and convert it to parkland or single-family residential use.

For the Burgundy Center on Baltimore Road:

- Promote the physical improvement of the Burgundy Center.
- Recommended land use: mixed-use neighborhood convenience center, with limited residential and a variety of stores, professional offices and restaurants to serve the neighborhood.
- Residential units should only be located on the upper floors.
- Recommended zone MXC. Amend MXC zone to allow Dwellings, multiple-unit as a Conditional Use.

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For On-going Maintenance and Management of the Commercial and Industrial Areas:

- The City should review its policies towards neighborhood commercial centers, with a view towards strengthening the relationships between the business and residential communities, and the City.
- Maintain and enhance Community Enhancement enforcement of City's commercial property maintenance regulations.
- Encourage business and property owners to work closely with the City of Rockville Police and to take proactive steps to reduce loitering, drunkenness and other undesirable behavior.
- The City should explore the possibility of establishing a City of Rockville Police sub-station in the Veirs Mill Road commercial area.
- The City should give consideration towards using vacant commercial space in the Veirs Mill Commercial area for community use, especially for teenagers and senior citizens.
- Request REDI to include Twinbrook service and retail centers as part of their mission to strengthen and broaden the economic base of Rockville.
- Encourage REDI to work with the Rockville Chamber of Commerce to broaden their membership base and to strengthen their services to retailers in Twinbrook.
- Encourage businesses in the Twinbrook area to form their own Business Association
- Implement a City-sponsored facade improvement loan program for neighborhood businesses.

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- Work with business and property owners to enhance the mix of stores and restaurants

Commercial Areas

There are approximately 19.35 acres of ~~commercially-zoned~~ land under commercial use in the Twinbrook neighborhoods.

Veirs Mill Road Commercial Area

The main commercial area in the Twinbrook neighborhoods is located on both sides of Veirs

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Mill Road at the intersection of Atlantic Avenue. The 17.41 acre area ~~is~~ was previously zoned C-2, General Commercial, and includes Safeway, Twinbrook Shopping Center, the Twinbrook branch of the Montgomery County public library system and a gas station on the north side of Veirs Mill Road. The Twinbrook Mart is located on the southern side of Veirs Mill Road and features a Post Office, the American Legion, a variety of small shops, restaurants, nightclubs, and a gas station. A convenience store and two restaurants are also on the southern side, at Atlantic Avenue.

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. The City is committed to providing its residents with accessibility to services, and the ability of local residents to walk to a neighborhood center reduces vehicular trips and both neighborhood and Town Center/Rockville Pike traffic congestion. These concerns have led staff to think about how the City might facilitate improvements to aging shopping centers within the City limits and, in addition, help them to become “good neighbors” to local residents.

A City-sponsored façade improvement program is being considered. Such a program would be a good start, and would give the City a tool to offer to local businesses, but it may not address all the issues facing retail centers in the City.

A Commercial Management District has been implemented at Rockville Town Square, but there is no formal organizational structure to address issues facing the retail centers in other parts of the City. The City’s smaller retail centers perform an important service for both the City and the community at large. They provide a wide range of goods and

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services for residents and visitors, while offering an opportunity for businesses to start up at a relatively reasonable cost.

However, this area also 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. (See Chapter 1.) 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”. This Plan therefore recommends that the ~~previously zoned existing~~ C-2 commercial properties be re-zoned to a Mixed-Use Neighborhood Center Zone to create the conditions for such a center. (Please see Catalyst Number 5 in Chapter 8: Implementation, for additional information on this proposal.)

A common indicator of whether or not an area is ripe for redevelopment is the ratio of improvement value to land value. If the improvements (buildings) are valued at less than the underlying land, the owner may consider redevelopment in order to maximize the value of his or her investment. The Twinbrook area has a mixture of both positive and negative ratios, indicating that some, but not all, sites may be ripe for redevelopment.

Burgundy Center

An additional smaller commercial area, the Burgundy Center (1.94 acres), is located at the intersection of First Street and Baltimore Road. It ~~was previously is~~ zoned C-1, Local Commercial, which allow~~eds~~ for a range of smaller-scale uses, such as convenience stores, restaurants and beauty shops, ~~that are~~ intended to serve residents in the immediate area. However, adjacent residents have complained for many years about the maintenance and appearance of the Center. In addition, access into and out of the Center is difficult; especially for those making left turns,

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who add to traffic delays and, at peak times gridlock, at the nearby intersection with First Street.

This Plan therefore recommends that the City explore ways to promote the physical improvement of the Burgundy Center. If the Center should redevelop it should do so as a mixed-use neighborhood convenience center, with limited residential on the upper floors, and a variety of stores, professional offices and restaurants to serve the neighborhood. The MXC zoning should be applied, amended to allow Dwellings, multiple-unit as a Conditional Use.

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Industrial Areas

The service sector is expected to remain strong in the City because it provides essential support to residents and businesses, such as printing, graphics, storage, and automobile repair. There is a demand for industrially zoned space and there is a desire to preserve the existing acreage for service and industrial uses, particularly as much of the previously industrially zoned land has been rezoned to other uses throughout the County. Indeed approximately 200 acres of industrial land have recently been re-zoned as part of Montgomery County's Shady Grove Plan, which aims to encourage a mix of uses at medium to high density levels in the Shady Grove metro station area.

In the past industrial land was located adjacent to the railway to enjoy easy access to the station, or siding, and to provide a buffer between the railroad tracks and the residential area. There are similar small light or service industrial areas with similar land use patterns throughout the country. Stonestreet Avenue, just east of the Rockville Town Center and north of the Rockville Metro Station, is another similar location in the City.

These locational factors can now pose constraints. The sites are shallow and bounded by the railroad tracks to the west, and Lewis Avenue to the east, leaving no room for expansion. The sites were developed at a time when site development standards did not limit building and pavement coverage, or require parking standards, buffers, or landscaping. Some of the sites may not have adequate off-street parking. This does not present a problem for sites surrounded by similar uses, but there are residential single-family houses directly across the street from the Lewis Avenue industrial properties. If the buildings and/or properties are not maintained, the condition of these industrial sites could have an adverse affect upon the adjacent residential neighborhood.

The residential nature of the surrounding area, with frequent on-street parking, can make access into and out of the area difficult for large trucks that bring supplies and equipment to the businesses. In addition, the area is adjacent to the Twinbrook Station project, which will change the character of the area over the next few years as the current surface parking lots and vacant land are turned into a neighborhood center offering residential, retail, commercial and recreational opportunities.

But even with these constraints, industrial land in this area is valuable. ~~State assessments show that the land on Lewis Avenue is more valuable per acre than similarly zoned land in other parts of the City.~~ Properties in the area are fully leased and appear to work to the benefit of both their owners and tenants. Industrial land on Lewis Avenue has a similar value to industrially zoned land just south of the City limits in Montgomery County.

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

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towards a mix of uses is an emerging trend, and property owners and developers are starting to look towards maximizing the value of existing sites for redevelopment.

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Sites that are adjacent to Metro are proving to be especially attractive for residential development.

Lewis Avenue Industrial Area

The Lewis Avenue Industrial area should remain part of the City's Planning Area 8. There are four industrially zoned sites ~~zoned I-2~~ on Lewis Avenue with a total land area of approximately 5.40 acres.

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This Plan recommends that the area should remain with Planning Area 8 so that it can act as a transitional buffer between Twinbrook Station and the adjacent residential neighborhood, even if a change of uses and development standards is implemented at some point in the future.

Should the area redevelop, the recommended land use should be mixed use industrial with a mix of service and light industrial with residential and very limited commercial uses. The mix of uses may be vertical or horizontal, depending upon site design. The area has not traditionally been used by auto-related businesses and none should be allowed in the future. However, the area's proximity to Metro may make residential uses attractive, and residential units should be located on upper floors and facing onto Lewis Avenue. Live-work units should also be encouraged.

The recommended zoning should be I-L, amended to allow multiple-unit dwellings as a Conditional Use.

5946 Halpine Road

This 766-square foot house occupies a 0.50-acre site adjacent to the future Twinbrook Station and the Twinbrook Metro, in between the former Suburban Propane site and the Cambridge Walk Townhomes. The house acts as an office for a construction business and construction equipment is stored in the rear yard. The site is zoned R-60 and is a non-conforming use. The R-60 zone should be retained for single family housing on the site if it is developed, or the site should be acquired for additional park and green space, should it become available. The Mayor and Council should explore ways to eliminate the existing non-conforming use and convert it to parkland or single-family use.

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Twinbrook Parkway Service Industrial Area

This is a triangular area between Twinbrook Parkway (on the east), Ardennes Avenue (on the south), and Halpine Road (further to the west). It is adjacent to the planned Twinbrook Station development, contains five separate properties and has a combined land area of approximately 8.0 acres. The area abuts the City boundary and poses particular issues as two of the properties in the area come under the County's jurisdiction, while the remaining three lie within City limits. If the sites are to be assembled into one parcel, it is recommended that the two properties currently in the County be annexed into the City.

This Plan recommends that the area should remain within Planning Area 8 so that it can act as a transitional buffer between Twinbrook Station and the adjacent residential neighborhoods. The MXB zone would be appropriate for this area, with the provision that no auto-related uses should be allowed.

12710 and 12730 Twinbrook Parkway (located in Montgomery County)

These two sites, which front onto Twinbrook Parkway, are located outside the City boundary and are thus covered by the MNCPPC Twinbrook Sector Plan. The two sites together have a land area of approximately one acre and the Sector Plan recommends that they be rezoned from O-M to TOMX-2 with a 1.5 FAR cap. Height and density are guided by the site size and FAR in the TOMX-2 zone and – should the sites redevelop - this should allow for buildings that are compatible with those across Twinbrook Parkway (in the County) and adjacent properties within the City limits.

This Plan recommends that should these two sites annex into the City they should be rezoned MXB, with a recommended land use of office/office laboratory.”

12720 Twinbrook Parkway

The property, while having a Twinbrook Parkway address, has street frontage on Ardennes Avenue. The site is 4.01 acres and was previously zoned I-1 which precluded residential development. It is currently occupied by a one-story office building that is leased to the GSA/FDA through May 2009. The northwestern boundary of the site abuts a treed buffer, owned and managed by the City of Rockville, which in turn abuts Halpine Road. The southern boundary of the site abuts the vacant Meljay-Uniwest property. Eight single-family homes are located on the opposite side of Halpine Road, seven within City limits and one, at the intersection of Pier Drive, in Montgomery County.

The property is owned by AvalonBay, an Alexandria, Virginia-based REIT that specializes in the development and management of “high-end” multi-family rental

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housing in urban areas adjacent to amenities and transit. AvalonBay has not formally filed a proposal with the City but are considering building a 3 and 4 story apartment building with a maximum height of 55 feet. This Plan recommends rezoning the site to MXB that would allow for all multi-family residential use and would create a horizontal mix of uses in the area.

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Uniwest/Meljay – Twinbrook Parkway/Ardennes Avenue – former Thompson’s Dairy Site

This 2.10 acre site lies at the intersection of Twinbrook Parkway and Ardennes Avenue and was previously zoned O-1. The property was annexed into the City from Montgomery County in 2003 and Meljay-Uniwest are constructing a 150,000 square foot, 85-foot high office building. Construction began in August 2007. In order to conform to the terms of the Annexation Agreement, this Plan confirms the MXE zone to replace the existing zone.

12750 Twinbrook Parkway

This two-story 16,230-square foot office building was built in 1967 and sits on a 0.81-acre site at the intersection of Halpine Road and Twinbrook Parkway. The property is used primarily as office space and was previously zoned I-1.

The recommended zoning for this area is MXB, and should the site redevelop the preferred land use would be office/office laboratory use to be compatible with adjacent uses in the County and City. The site has a unique triangular shape and acts as a “gateway” to the Twinbrook Station area. Any future site design should emphasize these features as well as be compatible with the surrounding area.