

Characteristics of Efficient Planned Development Zones

*Best Practices for Mixed-Use Zoning
in Prince George's County, Maryland*

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Abstract

This report details best practices for planned development zones (PDZs) for Prince George's County. While jurisdictions define PDZs differently, Prince George's County seeks to incorporate developing practices for greater flexibility and mixed-use zones. The goal of such development is intentionally vague so that developers can more creatively provide amenities and services that achieve broader objectives such as sustainability.

This study used academic literature, case studies, and interviews with subject experts to report on the best practices of planned development zoning. The research suggests that best practices for planned development zones should include greater flexibility within zoning ordinances and freedom from unnecessary bureaucratic processes that hinder development. From these resources, the team found six major trends for successful PDZs. The research demonstrated that such zones are flexible, allow for mixed-use, maximize density, minimize unnecessary bureaucratic procedures, and can be accomplished in greenfield or urban renewal development.

Based on these findings, the report includes recommendations for PDZ development in Prince George's County.

Keywords: planned development zone, zoning, development, urban planning, revitalization, mixed-use, density

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Introduction

Problem Definition

For the Prince George's County Planning Department, as part of the PALS program, this report addresses developers' under-use of planned development zones, devise methods to attract developers, and ways to encourage projects that bring direct public benefit. Between 1973 and 2010, the State's developed land grew 154% to 1.6 million acres according to the Maryland Department of Planning. With Maryland's growing population, jurisdictions must employ more creative development projects and zoning that reflect citizen desires, stimulate social/economic development, and fulfill sustainability goals.

Planned development zones are a new approach in Prince George's County, but not new in the state—Montgomery County uses a similar zoning scheme. By reviewing zoning solutions in other local jurisdictions, this report compiles the best practices and recommendations to move forward.

The Research Gap

The literature and research on planned development zones has significantly improved in recent years. This is partly due to the introduction of the federal opportunity zones that were a part of the 2017 tax cut. Across the country, studies have examined the effectiveness of planned development, such as policies on opportunity zones. A

noticeable research gap persists in Maryland, specifically in planned development zones in Prince George's County.

There is abundant literature on zoning ordinances in the greater D.C. area, such as Prince George's, Fairfax, and Montgomery Counties. However, this research falls short in evaluating the regulations and ordinances' practical implications and effectiveness. The literature review reveals a lack of studies that explore the impact of the requirements that shape the development process, influence community dynamics, and impact the environment in these counties.

This report addresses the gap by looking at the ordinances and requirements for evidence of the importance of each point and if there are places where the development process can be improved for all stakeholders. Understanding the ordinances and policies will reveal the best methods for stakeholders to implement them so that planned development zones can be more commonplace in Prince George's County.

It is important to note that existing literature touches on some of the impacts of changes in zoning policy, such as an Urban Institute research article addressing the need for affordable housing for low-income households. However, this report intends to provide a holistic view of how the planned development process can generate better stakeholder outcomes and shed light on the deep relationship between policies and the development process they impact.

Limitations

Information about implementing planned development (PD) zones can be nuanced, posing several limitations. This team also lacks exposure to the issue and

spent time spent gaining general knowledge and striving to understand basic zoning practices. To formulate adequate recommendations for Prince George's County, our team must obtain a comprehensive understanding of zoning practices, which will require research, including literature sources, zoning ordinance resources, and interviewing experts. Literature sources will be primary; however, the literature is scattered, with many different terms referring to PD zones. This lack of consistency required the team to spend time searching for viable sources while understanding new terms associated with planned development. Finally, the team has focused on case studies close to Prince George's County so that our recommendations can have more relevance. However, every area has key differences, and the unique situation of Prince George's County is considered in the recommendations.

Contribution of this Study

Given the current research gap, this report will provide critical insight into successful best practices for planned development zones in Prince George's County. The motivation for the study is to address the problem of disorganization and uncertainty in the current process for planned development zoning. As discussed earlier, the lack of clarity prevents developers from working most effectively to revitalize disadvantaged districts within the county.

The report contributes to the existing literature on planned development zones in several ways. First, it consolidates the existing literature and policies on best practices and commonalities within the jurisdictions. One problem developers face is a lack of inter-jurisdictional communication and a wide variety of terminology and methodologies

for approaching this process. This report collects and organizes information to be most helpful to Prince George's County. It clarifies different terminology and organizes the best practices of different case studies into a common format useful to the County Planning Department. Because it is a newer aspect of economic policy, planned development zoning requires greater organization of existing literature to provide clear guidelines to developers and policymakers.

Second, the report analyzes and organizes the literature and expert opinions to provide evidence-based recommendations for the County. Using research and best practices in other counties, it will establish a clear framework for the Prince George's County Department of Planning. Providing these guidelines will help the county be more informed as it establishes planned development zones.

The objective of this research is to provide the Prince George's Planning Department with critical information about best practices for planned development zones. Our client repeatedly clarified that the goal of such zoning is to decrease developers' restrictions so they can take a more creative approach to stimulating economic growth, pursuing sustainability, and providing amenities to residents. This report should provide greater clarity on these best practices to accomplish Planning Department goals through the use of planned development zones.

Methodologies

Literature

The primary goal of the literature review was to gather as much fundamental background information as possible. The client provided some documents as starting points to understand planned development zones and research included zoning maps, journal articles, and planning documents and codes from several jurisdictions.

The broad interpretation of planned development zones provided valuable findings into their application and community effects and informed the interview questions to get insight into topics such as displacement considerations, defining planned development, and how PDZs were adapted in local jurisdictions. After client check-ins, interviews and site visits began.

Interviews

The interviews included experts from neighboring jurisdictions and from a consulting firm that has worked with planned development zones. Interviews with jurisdictional representatives gave a more holistic understanding of how planned development zones work in those areas, what works best, and challenges in applying planned development zone ordinances. From the Montgomery County Planning Department, we spoke with Robert Kronenberg, Deputy Director of Planning, and Ugonna Njeze, Regulatory Planner II. From Fairfax County, we interviewed Katie Quinn, Senior Staff Coordinator and Mary Ann Tsai, Senior Staff Coordinator of the Zoning

Evaluation Division. From Baltimore City, we spoke with Eric Tiso, Land Use and Urban Design Chief.

We asked ten foundational questions, with follow-up questions.

- Please tell us about your role and what you do in your county.
- Are you familiar with the concept of planned development zones? How would you explain it?
- What planned development zones have you worked on during your career?
- How are policies and regulations about planned development zones created?
- What are the biggest challenges of planned development zones?
- Were there any unintended consequences you encountered with planned development zones?
- Has planned development zoning changed during your career?
- What changes would you make to the current planned development zoning process?
- What are some of your County's best practices when it comes to planned development zones?
- Do you know of a specific site we can visit to better understand and see the implications of planned development zones?

These questions clarified residual concerns from our research phase and synthesized recommendations from our subsequent findings.

Site Visits

The team visited two planned development zones: The Village at Cabin Branch, in Montgomery County and Tysons Corner, in Fairfax County, which added a physical

understanding of what planned development zones looked like in action. The literature sources gave insight into the issues of development and zoning; however, they offered a theoretical perspective. Applying the knowledge from the literature and interviews through site visits proved to be vital in formulating recommendations for Prince George's County.

Findings

The team used academic literature and structured interviews with subject experts to identify best practices in planned development zoning but often found literature to be vague and nonspecific. Academics aren't studying the processes of planned development zones but examining the effects of zoning and development on communities over time. Developers and planners rarely take this long-term perspective, so the literature provided a broader context.

Overall, findings came from case studies and interviews with professionals and experts. Montgomery County, Maryland; Fairfax County, Virginia; and Baltimore City, Maryland because of their similarity and proximity to Prince George's County. These interviews provided six key findings about best practices in planned development zoning.

1. Zoning ordinances need to be as flexible as possible.

Every jurisdiction has different regulations and practices. From our interviews, we realized that in Prince George's County "planned development zones" resemble "mixed-use" zones in Montgomery County and "commercial-residential" zones in Fairfax County. Therefore, zoning ordinances need to be specific in defining the zone's parameters to prevent confusion. Despite naming differences, Prince George's County's Planned Development Zones need as much flexibility in its regulations as possible. All the interviewees mentioned that mixed-use development projects are often restricted by regulations that slow the process and prevent the integration of different uses. Each

professional suggested adopting greater flexibility. A process with greater flexibility generates more creativity in project development without causing the project to stall. This shift allows for more development flexibility and increased clarity at all levels of the process, highlighted by Kronenberg as a Montgomery County best practice for planned development zones. Overall, increasing flexibility for Planned Development Zones was a clear finding mentioned by all interviewees for successfully implementing zones for mixed-use development.

2. Planned development zones are being replaced with commercial-residential zones.

Interviewees mentioned that their jurisdictions have moved away from traditional planned development-style zoning. With a growing population in the Washington, D.C. region, community needs are diversifying. For example, Baltimore City integrated planned development zoning in the 1970s to modernize the city's planning. Planned development was a new zoning format primarily used as a last-ditch effort to push complex projects without overhauling zoning ordinances.

Because development projects have diversified in Baltimore and Montgomery County and slowed in Fairfax County, these jurisdictions are shifting toward zoning categories that fit their community's specific needs. These new categories are variations of commercial-residential zones, with Fairfax County being the exception.

Commercial-residential zones, as implemented by Fairfax County, are areas that allow for residential and commercial uses to coincide. This zoning model is popular in the

market due to its convenience and to meet the trend of people moving back to cities and more densely populated areas.

This pattern is a critical consideration in zoning changes in general, but as a new zoning format in Prince George's County, it can still reasonably accommodate citizens.

3. Zoning should maximize density (how many people can live per acre).

Most interviewees mentioned that a primary goal of planned development is to maximize density, that is, the number of people and uses allowed in a zone. Matthew Leakan from Rodgers Consulting, a firm that has worked extensively with planned development in Prince George's County, explained that historically, zones functioned to separate people and uses. These Euclidean Zones set the pattern for modern zoning. However, planned development and mixed-use zones seek the opposite: to incorporate multiple uses in high-density residential zones.

Due to technological changes, transportation, and lifestyle, highly populated zones can be clean and efficient. Montgomery County Planner, Ugo Njeze, explained this change is efficient for both development and practice. He emphasized the benefit by saying, "density for the price of one," demonstrating how much more can be accomplished and included in a planned development zone compared to a traditional Euclidean zone. Furthermore, Kronenberg says that mixed-use zones follow a current market trend. More people want to live in densely populated areas with easy access to stores, restaurants, and other amenities.

Overall, the consensus from interviewees is that planned development zones should seek to maximize density to provide amenities and accommodate future development.

4. Distinguishing between greenfield and grayfield development is key.

From the interviews the team became aware of the differences between greenfield and grayfield development. Greenfield development refers to residential zones in previously undeveloped areas. Kronenberg explained that the primary mode of development in Montgomery County was greenfield due to the County's large amount of open space and lack of urban areas.

In contrast, grayfield development is the redevelopment of built areas to become modernized to fit current needs. Katie Quinn and Mary Ann Tsai, from Fairfax County noted that the County primarily uses urban renewal rather than greenfield development because most of the County has already developed. Similarly, Eric Tiso from Baltimore City, uses urban revitalization projects; there is no open space for new development, as in Montgomery County.

These two modes of development pose different challenges. For example, greenfield development has environmental and land-use concerns, with open land developed into residential properties. Grayfield projects could lead to concerns regarding community displacement or loss of history. Overall, it's important to consider the type of development that is a priority for Prince George's County before planning a project.

5. Seek to minimize bureaucratic operations that slow development.

Throughout the interview process, several experts mentioned that the process for approving and implementing a planned development or mixed-use zone is unnecessarily complex. This finding especially applies to the Baltimore case study in which the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals (BMZA) works with the City Council. Until around 2010, the Council rarely changed the zoning code, and the Board operated as an independent entity. In its consultations with the council's multimember districts, the BMZA was able to mediate development issues; if one member was not in agreement, there was a reasonable chance other members would support a project. Since Baltimore City shifted to single-member districts, antiquated aspects of the zoning code were amended. Still, BMZA applications have slowed, and mediation is increasingly difficult as there is less leverage to use. As a result, council elections and surrounding politics are critical considerations and can significantly affect planning decisions.

Because Prince George's County is a charter county, not a code jurisdiction such as Baltimore, it retains general power over its zoning. In Montgomery County, Ugo Njeze indicated that the "outdated" PDZs needed more review and to go through more red tape. In contrast, modern CRZs require less review because they have greater flexibility in their development standards. Like the other interviewees, Njeze noted that the biggest process challenge is navigating the regulations and review in a timely and efficient manner. Overall, we found that a given jurisdiction's governance structure directly affects planning and can make or break developers' overall application rate.

6. There is an overall lack of research, including research on displacement and gentrification.

We asked a specific question on the challenge of displacing communities: “*Are there any concerns about displacement? How are you ensuring that this is serving the people already living in these areas?*” While only a small portion of the literature review focused on resident displacement, it seemed even less of an issue for most of the interviewees. While Eric Tiso addressed displacement directly, there was some hesitation from other interviewees. Tiso talked about single-family housing in Baltimore and noted that single-family housing zones can be rezoned for multi-use to maximize density. In Fairfax County, Quinn and Tsai mentioned that because residential developments are waning and limited, displacement and gentrification are not necessarily planning priorities. Our team recognizes the need to expand research and focus the role of planned developments in displacing existing communities.

Discussion and Recommendations

Researching planned development zones yielded surprising results and valuable information for best practices for the Prince George's County Planning Department. When comparing our findings to the literature, we found many inconsistencies. First, most academic literature didn't include specifics about zoning and development practices. Such knowledge is relatively niche; only developers, planners, and regulators who are directly involved fully understand the process. They have the most experience, which leads to the development of best practices, however, they're not skilled in disseminating this information. Academics, who are publishing and sharing their work lack a deep understanding of the process, and therefore most literature includes only a contextual overview of planned development rather than insight into specific best practices. The most valuable findings came from subject experts in Prince George's County and the three case study communities.

As stated above, many of the findings focused on increasing the speed and efficiency of planned development zones. Interviewees suggested that public sector development tends to be slow due to regulatory constraints. Therefore, providing greater flexibility and removing unnecessary bureaucratic processes would make the process more efficient. By removing some traditional zoning ordinances, such as Euclidean zones, developers can incorporate multiple uses and move through the development process more quickly without navigating extra regulations. This is especially important in urban redevelopment because construction projects should be

as efficient as possible to minimize the inconvenience to those living and working in an area.

Overall, these findings will help the Planning Department improve its process for planned development zones to maximize efficiency for Prince George's County.

The most surprising findings are the widely different definitions of planned development zones in different jurisdictions. For example, in Montgomery County, a planned development zone refers to an outdated form of development for single-family residential communities, rather than the mixed-use zoning that Prince George's County is seeking to adopt. Similarly, Fairfax County has also abandoned the term planned development zone with past practices and instead uses "commercial-residential" zones. This can cause some confusion, but this report may help standardize terms for the various best practices.

Another surprising finding is the difference between greenfield and grayfield development. Prince George's County contains both undeveloped land and urban areas in need of redevelopment, so the Planning Department needs to consider both options for planned development zones.

Although the research provided valuable information about best practices for planned development zones, there are still significant information gaps. This report doesn't include all aspects of planned development. Two specific areas requiring further research are gentrification and community involvement in the development process. Gentrification is the displacement of residents after redevelopment due to increased prices and should be a principal concern of developers and policymakers alike. While the literature focused heavily on this concept, the subject matter experts barely

addressed it. They generally ignored or said it was not an issue. This disconnect between the literature and interview findings warrants further research.

Another area requiring more information is how to engage the community to ensure that new development meets citizens' needs. Multiple interviewees mentioned the challenges of navigating market trends and balancing constituencies when planning but couldn't provide further insight into the best practices for engaging with the community. For Prince George's County to implement successful planned development zones, it will need to learn more about how to best hear and implement community needs.

Overall, the report findings provide key structural advice for successful planned development zoning in Prince George's County. It consolidates best practices and current strategies from three nearby jurisdictions to support the Planning Department.

1. Make zoning ordinances as flexible as possible.

From various interviews with professionals, we find that many zoning practices can be restrictive by nature, making the development process increasingly difficult and time-consuming. Practices in Montgomery County, Fairfax County, and Baltimore City planning departments, revealed well-rounded viewpoints, including different terms to describe planned development zones. However, all the interviewees believe that planned development zones need more flexibility. Increased flexibility allows for more clarity and creativity in the development process, without the delays often experienced with rigid zoning practices. Flexible, mixed-use, zoning ordinances allow developments to provide various housing and commercial commodities to residents, instead of strictly

residential planned development zones, which were, for example, used in Montgomery County. To achieve more flexible planned development zones, our zoning officials and legislators should ensure fewer restrictions for planned development zones, as well as promoting flexibility during the development process. Being open to changes and shifts as a project progresses can prevent delays and out-of-date development patterns.

2. Implement more mixed-use or commercial-residential zones.

All the jurisdictions that have moved beyond planned development zones have done so to better accommodate community needs. Because Prince George's County has an unusual amount of grayfield space—abandoned or failing strip malls and shopping centers—office and roadway-adjacent development could be a viable option. Grayfield sites that stand in stark contrast to the County's bustling, vibrant communities are eyesores, but are also opportunities to create centers for collective social and economic activity. As large swaths of partially developed land, grayfield sites are a clear canvas for all kinds of development ideas. As the County attracts economic activity and more residents, providing spaces that are accessible by transit and open for business should be a priority. If sites allow, dense residential developments, upscale or mixed income, can also sustain the County's growing population even while integrated into multi-use spaces. Redevelopment should be supported by expanding transit (bus, train, microtransit) and community amenities that are integrated into new developments. Amenities could include retail centers, office buildings, hybrid spaces, and open play spaces/parks.

3. Zoning ordinances should maximize density.

The interviews made it clear that the jurisdictions have zoning ordinances that maximize density. Njeze explains this change is efficient for both development and practice. He emphasized the benefit by saying, “density for the price of one,” demonstrating how much more can be accomplished and included in a planned development zone compared to a traditional Euclidean zone. Some options that support increased density allow single-family homes on smaller lots, and the opportunity to subdivide large lots to build additional housing units. Other recommendations to maximize density include zoning for attached housing, including duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes, each with individual entryways, which optimize land use compared to stand alone single-family homes; zoning for mid-density multifamily structures, which can create rental or condominium units. These options increase density on existing lots and buildings.

4. Planners should consider whether greenfield and grayfield development most benefit their zones.

After speaking with zoning professionals, our team realized the stark differences between greenfield and grayfield development projects, differences that are not always apparent to members of the public. Greenfield development refers to residential development projects on previously undeveloped sites. Montgomery County planners stated that many of their county’s planned development projects are greenfield development due to the availability of undeveloped land, and lack of large urban areas needing renewal. On the other hand, Fairfax County and Baltimore City largely engage

in grayfield development, redevelopment projects that improve or modernize existing development. Fairfax County and Baltimore City have urban centers, high density, and a lack of undeveloped land.

Prince George's County should assess its needs, and weigh the concerns associated with each development type, for example, the loss of green space in greenfield development and the possibility for displacement in grayfield development. Public and market feedback could prove useful in assessing which type of development is needed in Prince George's County.

5. Minimize bureaucratic operations that slow development.

One reason development moves slowly is the long bureaucratic process to review and approve development proposals. Some jurisdictions have streamlined the application process. Encouraging developers to engage in pre-application consulting and interview can help the application go more smoothly.

One of the primary reasons for the sluggish pace of development in Prince George's County is the extensive bureaucratic procedures that development proposals must navigate. This report's discussions and analyses underscore the critical need to facilitate more efficient and timely development initiatives. Furthermore, implementing an expedited review processes for certain types of development proposals could help. By establishing clear criteria and guidelines, projects that align with strategic objectives or are smaller scale can be identified, and may warrant accelerated approval timelines. This targeted approach ensures that critical projects move forward while maintaining adherence to regulatory standards.

6. Pursue increased research on community displacement.

In the research and interviews, the least discussed aspect of development was the displacement of current residents. As much as zoning should create space for new residents and businesses, it should also preserve communities that have contributed to the county's greatness for years, or even generations. Based on the available research, formalizing community input in the development application and construction process could be an effective solution. The existing community feels involved in the proposed changes while meeting a developer's goals within a given zone.

Although a substantial portion of Prince George's County residents are middle and upper income, the county must equitably treat low-income residents. Their communities are the ones needing new development and local amenities, and nothing should be done without assessing their needs, desires, and goals throughout the zoning application process. The county's application process already requires development meetings and it should be feasible to allot some of these meetings for community input.

Resources

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