DESIGN, ARTS & CULTURE: Investing and Building Community Introduction: Why Design Matters

Design of the built environment can strongly influences our quality of life. The pattern of development across a city, county, and region; the configuration of neighborhoods and districts; and the architecture of individual buildings collectively shape our perception of places and shape how we choose to travel, recreate and socialize. Arts and cultural practices touch every corner of life and are among the most visible indicators of the social values and diversity of a place. Public art and cultural institutions highlight new perspectives, preserve local history and traditions, deepen our understanding of others, and expand our imaginations.

Design serves functional and aesthetic purposes. Functional considerations dictate where structures are placed and how they connect to the sidewalks, streets and spaces around them to facilitate movement, social interaction, and physical activity. Aesthetic aspects of design, along with the integration of arts and cultural elements, influence how streets, buildings and spaces look and feel to create beauty and a sense of place and inclusion.

As we strive to enhance the quality of life in Montgomery County for all of our residents and strengthen the appeal of our community as a place to live and work, both the functional and aesthetic aspects of design are more important than ever. For example, adding sidewalks and bicycling infrastructure can help make alternatives to driving safer, but detailed attention to the relationship between buildings and streets, the placement of street trees and quality of landscaping, and the cultivation of a sense of place are essential to making walking, biking, and transit attractive – and these are the same elements that make a neighborhood or business district inviting and inclusive.

Montgomery County has evolved into one of the most diverse jurisdictions in the nation and our arts and culture sector is impressive in its scope and depth. Public art and cultural institutions contribute significantly to the county's economy by attracting talent and spurring innovation through exchange of ideas. Taken as a whole, the sector would be the sixth-largest employer in the county. Arts and cultural practices touch every corner of life and are among the most visible indicators of the social values and diversity of a place. The arts and culture sector helps to foster the growth of creative, social, and economic ecosystems, and its practitioners have developed tools that can share untold stories, encourage empathy, and empower civic voices, fostering dialogue and building connections among people with different backgrounds and perspectives.

This chapter focuses on the urban design principles applicable to blocks and individual development sites, the architecture of public and private buildings, the landscape of plazas and public spaces, and elements of street design. And it emphasizes supportingsupports providing a healthy arts and culture ecosystem that can highlight new perspectives, preserve local history and traditions, deepen our understanding of others, and expand our imaginations.

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

Commented [A1]: This chapter is disorganized and confusing. "Arts and culture" does not belong in it - there is no need for language beyond noting that the built environment should include space, distributed equitably, for arts and cultural activities and those who engage in them. Regarding the appropriate concern with design of the natural and especially built environment, there is no differentiation between different types of areas, like the rural and residential areas. Similarly there are broad statements about roads and sidewalks but no distinction between more urban and residential neighborhoods. There is also no recognition that views about what is good design are subjective and change over time. As with other chapters, there is little acknowledgement that the vast majority of people rely on cars for essential activities, and that we all rely on vehicles for the delivery of goods and services. There are multiple, certain statements that doing this or that *will* accomplish goals we all share, but no explanation of how.

Commented [A2]: This may be overstating the situation. According to DataUSA, rankings are Leisure and hospitality, "other services," trade/transportation/utilities. Mining/loggin/construction, Professional and Business, education and health services, information, financial activities, government.
https://datausa.io/profile/geo/montgomery-county-md

Commented [A3]: This seems overstated.

Commented [A4]: Possible revised paragraph: The Wedges and Corridors Plan needs to be updated to reflect changed concerns about the environment and climate change, including the need to significantly reduce reliance on cars for daily living, while recognizing that converting to communities that function largely through walking, biking, and public transit will take time. Shifting to mixed use development requires extensive public involvement to ensure that there is buy-in for both the goals and the means to reach them.

The Wedges and Corridors Plan envisioned a variety of living environments and encouraged "imaginative urban design" to avoid sterile suburban sprawl. Unfortunately, design approaches intended to serve a range of functional objectives and aesthetic aspirations took a backseat to the convenience of driving and the assumption that different land uses, building types, and even lot sizes should be separated. Over time, these priorities produced automobile-centered design approaches that compromised quality of place at the expense of lasting economic and social value. The shift to mixed-use development in the last two decades has created more vibrant and walkable places around major transit hubs but the legacy of automobile-oriented development is evident even in our most walkable neighborhoods and districts.

Greenfield Regulatory Tools in a Post-Greenfield County

When the subdivision of farmland was the primary strategy for accommodating growth, the focus of land use regulation was on the entitlement process, which allocates development rights and responsibility for the provision of basic infrastructure such as roads and sewer pipes. The form and orientation of buildings to each other and to the public realm were a subsidiary consideration.

Entitlement-centered rules are well-suited to standardized subdivisions but poorly adapted to enable the design of distinctive projects that respond to local geography, history and culture and address the needs of increasingly constrained development sites. We must should prioritize whenever possible the attributes of neighborhood and site design that strongly influence perceptions of the quality and potential of a place. Dispersed buildings and sprawling parking lots lead to underbuilt sites that are poorly suited to repositioning, infill, and redevelopment and reduce the utility of investment in parks, transit, and other public amenities and infrastructure.

In addition, a future focus on form-based rules will allow for a more equitable process and outcome. When introduced with public education and input, and through the local master planning process, tThise process is can be more equitable in that all stakeholders – the property owner, the community, the reviewers – understand the parameters governing the review of a development application and can address community concerns about growth. The outcome is more equitable because itIt may facilitate the implementation of diverse housing types and neighborhood-serving retail, which will lead to more mixed income neighborhoods with essential services within walking distance.

Design for Cars at the Expense of People – and Adaptability

Within the designated central business districts and along major corridors, aAutomobile-oriented design led to the provision of abundant and often visually prominent surface parking, with buildings placed in the middle of large asphalt lots or entrances and front doors obscured by driveways and garages. Buildings were disconnected from public spaces and set back from streets. Streets were widened, pushing buildings farther apart and preventing a sense of enclosure, which discouraged walking by making it less convenient and comfortable. Space for sidewalks, seating, and greenery was sacrificed to make more space for parking and roads, shrinking the size and utility of public spaces. Other elements of street design such as lighting and signage were enlarged to make them more visible to passing motorists, making streetscapes less engaging to pedestrians and degrading the quality of the public realm.

Commercial buildings designed to accommodate single uses, while less expensive when considered in isolation, are inflexible and costly to reuse. Malls, office parks, and other large, single-use buildings are often difficult to repurpose and the high cost of adapting their layouts to meet new spatial needs due to technological shifts, demographic changes, and market preferences shrinks their useful lives and makes them less sustainable. The consequences of the limited adaptability of our building stock are evident in persistently elevated office vacancy rates accompanied by an acute shortage of housing.

These problems are every bit as evident in the design of public buildings as in private development. Typical parcel size standards for public buildings such as schools are too large to fit most available sites, limiting the location of new facilities. The shortage of "adequate" sites along with a growing student population leads to a tear-down-and-rebuild approach with larger and larger numbers of students in bigger and bigger buildings. Boundary areas draw students from farther away, leading to the allocation of more space for parking, less walking and bicycling, longer bus rides and drives for parents as well as longer commutes for staff.

Recalibrate Investments in Arts and Culture with Equity in mind

Placemaking and public art are essential in building great and inclusive communities. However, while the county makes significant investments in arts and culture, these investments are not always equitably distributed. Emerging organizations that support underserved communities often lack the funding and base of support enjoyed by some of their more established counterparts. Artists and arts organizations cite the lack of affordable living, working, and sales spaces as a major challenge. The field of public art has been expanding to embrace a wider range of approaches including civic and placemaking practices, but the county's art programs lag in its ability to apply these approaches. Making countywide investments in public art and placemaking will educate, connect, and build communities that thrive into the future.

What policies will solve the problem? Better design and more reliance on form-based tools to provide clear direction and build great places

In order to maximize the contributions of design —along with arts and culture— toward creating strong communities with lasting value, the county will should pursue the following policies and practices:

Use design-based tools with local area master planning to create attractive places with lasting value that encourage social interaction and reinforce a sense of place and inclusion.

• Consider changes to codes, design guidelines, and regulatory tools as well as broader use of form-based zoning that focuses on the physical forms of buildings, streets, and spaces to ensure development across the county satisfies the following:

  o Ensure that all architecture and landscape designs physically define streets and public spaces as places of shared use that engage the pedestrian and are configured to encourage social interaction. (Eq)

Commented [A8]: How can buildings be built to be more adaptable – won't that be expensive, are there developers willing and able to do this, isn't this secondary for developers to cost and market considerations? And the last sentence attributes high office vacancy rates and lack of housing to limited adaptability of building stock while ignoring the crying need for economic development.

Commented [A9]: Not accurate in terms of countywide figures at this time. https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/schools/mcps-enrollment-declines-for-second-consecutive-year-after-decade-of-growth/

Commented [A10]: So instead we will see elementary, middle, and high school in every complete community? This is expensive if feasible give population distribution and land availability, even with co-location and different design for schools.

Commented [A11]: Beyond calling for providing space for public art, this doesn't belong in a plan meant to address land use and natural resources.

o Link individual architectural projects seamlessly to their surroundings irrespective of style. Civic buildings and public gathering places ~~must~~ should be treated as important sites whose design reinforces community identity and a culture of inclusion and democracy. (Eq)

o Design buildings, streets, and parking to prioritize the pedestrian scale and encourage walking and bicycling through smaller blocks, narrower streets, buffered bike lanes and sidewalks. Slow vehicle speeds and minimize surface parking while adequately accommodating automobiles. (Eq, Env)

o Accommodate new development with a context sensitive approach to architecture and landscape design that acknowledges neighboring structures, local climate, and topography. (Env)

o Physically integrate government and private development sites into their surrounding neighborhoods such that they welcome the public and foster interaction between people ~~and support economic development by facilitating movement and interaction of people and transfer of ideas and innovation.~~ (Ec, Env)

o Preserve, renew, and reuse existing and historic buildings, districts, and landscapes to affirm the continuity and evolution of communities while celebrating local culture and identity. (Eq)

- ~~Support the development of housing by~~Consider ~~replacing vague and subjective~~ defining concepts such as "compatibility" with clear standards for form, site layout, setbacks, architecture, and the location of parking.

  o Examine options for allowing a wider variety of housing types such as tiny houses, cottages, courtyard clusters, duplexes, multiplexes, small apartment buildings; shared housing, co- housing and accessory dwelling units (ADUs). (Eq, Env)

  o Determine what changes may be needed to land-use, design, and zoning regulations, including the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, to remove regulatory barriers and facilitate development of range of housing types. (Eq, Env)

- Consider u~~U~~pdat~~ing~~e the zoning code to include basic form-based elements for all zones. Adopt context-sensitive design guidance for all master planning efforts.

Promote design strategies and retrofits to make new and existing buildings more sustainable and resilient to disruption and change.

- Encourage state-of-the-practice sustainability features such as net-zero/carbon-positive buildings, biophilic design and on-site energy generation for new public buildings and large private developments on sites across the county. (Env)

- Promote cost-effective infill and adaptive reuse design strategies to retrofit single-use commercial sites such as retail strips, malls, and office parks into mixed use developments. (Ec, Env)

- Incentivize the reuse of historic buildings and existing structures to accommodate the evolution of communities, maintain building diversity, preserve naturally occurring affordable space, and retain embodied energy of structures. (Eq, Env)

  > **Commented [A12]:** What does this mean?

- Establish standards for public facilities that align with infill and redevelopment strategies and acknowledge the county's limited land supply and ambitious climate-action goals. (Env)

• Implement policies to ensure that new buildings and parking structures are adaptable to changing technologies and market preferences and are able to mitigate effects of climate change over time. (Env)

Support arts and cultural institutions and programming to educate, connect and build communities that celebrate our diversity and strengthen pride of place.

- Promote an inclusive arts-and-culture environment by establishing a refreshed vision that sets goals, criteria, and priorities to support the county's arts-and-culture sector. (Ec, Eq)

- Promote public art, cultural spaces, and cultural hubs along corridors and in Complete Communities. (Ec, Eq)

- Eliminate regulatory barriers to live-work spaces, home studios, galleries, and other small-scale art-making and creative businesses to improve access for artists and arts groups to affordable living, working, and presentation spaces with a focus on economic, geographic, and cultural equity. (Eq)

- Enable all residents to experience public art daily by incorporating it into the design of buildings, streets, infrastructure, and public spaces. (Eq)

- Use new public facilities to demonstrate principles of architecture as civic art and broader cultural representation. (Eq)

- Encourage property owners, non-profit organizations, and government agencies to maximize use of parks and public spaces for artistic and cultural programming, activation, and placemaking.
- Partner with agencies to strengthen data collection about investments so as to ensure that arts-and-culture related policies align with Thrive Montgomery 2050's goals of economic competitiveness, social equity and environmental resilience. (Ec, Eq, Env)

> **Commented [A13]:** This bullet point is missing goals reference at the end.

> **Commented [A14]:** Does this belong in a general plan?

How these policies will serve the goals of Thrive Montgomery 2050?

Great Design Creates Great Places that Draw People and Businesses

> **Commented [A15]:** The statement below was deleted because 1) there is no evidence presented, 2) other things – pay, benefits, opportunities for career advancement among them – are far more important.

~~Well-designed places attract all kinds of residents and businesses. Workers in creative or knowledge-intensive occupations are particularly focused on quality of place, which includes an open and tolerant attitude toward different people, cultures, and lifestyles along with attention to the built and natural environment and excellent public services.~~

Design and public art, through their contribution to the built environment, help to create economically successful communities. Design-based tools ~~will~~ help create attractive buildings, streets, and public spaces that may retain greater economic value over time. The thoughtful arrangement of these elements ~~will~~ can create places that become destinations for commerce and social activity and add value to their surroundings, encouraging neighboring owners to reinvest in their own properties ~~to match and take advantage of adjacencies~~. Places designed with pedestrians in mind will lead to more healthy physical activity as well as human interaction, facilitating the exchange of ideas, attracting innovative companies and creative professionals. Comfortable, tree-lined streets will meet market demand for walkable places.

~~In addition to contributing to the built environment, the entire arts-and-culture sector generates energy and creativity that spur economic growth.~~ Affordable living, administrative, working, and presentation
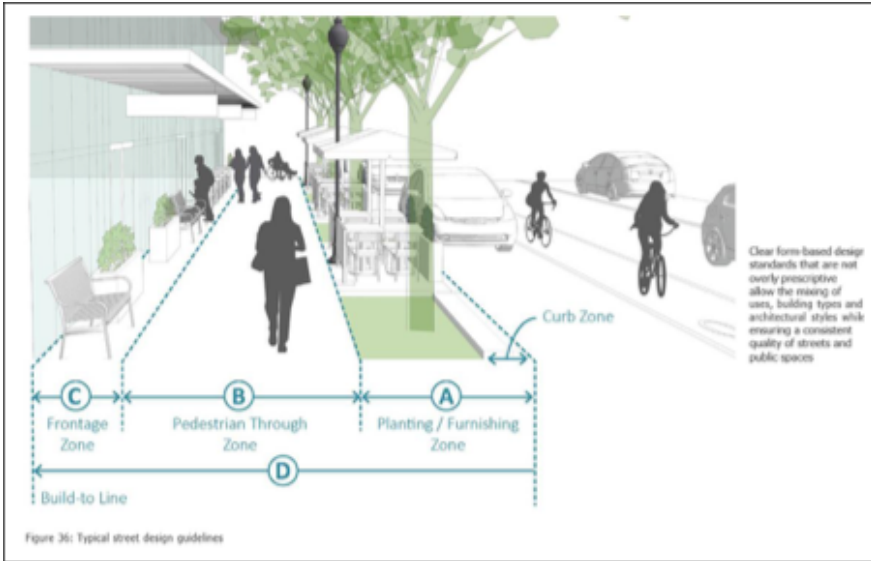
spaces for artists ~~will~~ can help to showcase our diversity and attract and retain cultural uses and arts-related businesses. Strategic investments in these kinds of spaces can increase the economic contribution of arts and culture over the long run by reinforcing the role of the sector in building centers for social gathering and cultural events which may in turn attract other business and investment.

Better Design Strengthens Community and Highlights the Benefits of Cultural Diversity

A desire for human interaction cuts across lines of age, race and ethnicity, and class and is critical to the happiness of most individuals as well as the collective well-being of a community. ~~Encouraging~~ Public spaces that encourage different kinds of people to interact ~~in public spaces~~ is important to building a sense of community with shared interests and values. Arts and culture spaces and programming can help us better understand and appreciate each other, strengthening support for diversity and inclusion and building trust.

Design codes that are well thought out with community input and based on physical form ~~will~~ can serve as more predictable guides for change, address community concerns ~~over~~ about accommodating growth, and illustrate hard-to-define concepts such as "character" and "compatibility." ~~A shift away from these kinds of vague and subjective standards will~~ They may help make regulatory decisions more equitable by applying more objective criteria in evaluating development proposals and their relationship to their surroundings. Clear standards governing acceptable form ~~will~~ may, depending on market conditions, encourage the introduction of different housing types and, if a community wants it as expressed through the planning process, neighborhood- serving retail, potentially facilitating the creation of mixed income neighborhoods where essential services are within walking distance of most residences.

Commented [A16]: There are people who do not have this desire and for whom human interaction can even be frightening.

Clear form-based design standards that are not overly prescriptive allow the mixing of uses, building types and architectural styles while ensuring a consistent quality of streets and public spaces

Figure 36: Typical street design guidelines

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Figure 37: Potential redevelopment of a typical suburban office park.

Diagram shows potential infill, adaptive reuse, and partial redevelopment of a typical office park that creates smaller development blocks connected by a complete street network and varying open spaces.

Artistic and cultural programming in our public spaces — with a calendar of events varying in scale, time, and location — will help improve the equitable distribution of resources to celebrate our cultural diversity. By focusing investments in public art, cultural spaces, and cultural hubs along corridors and in Complete Communities we can make these places welcoming and attractive to people from different backgrounds. Support for arts and culture can educate and provide creative tools to share untold stories, encourage empathy, give voice to diverse points of view, and foster civic dialogue and participation.

Design Plays a Critical Role in Environmental Performance

Sustainable design strategies for new construction and retrofits will enhance the environmental performance of buildings and neighborhoods, although it is important to keep up with new technologies that address environmental performance. Promoting sustainability features in new public and private buildings will restrain and may reduce the ecological impact of growth. Strategies for onsite energy generation, new tree plantings in redeveloped parking lots and along streets, and state-of-the-practice stormwater management will help increase the resilience of the power grid and mitigate the negative effects of flooding and excessive heat, resulting in more adaptable development in the face of a changing climate.

Encouraging adaptive reuse of existing buildings and incentivizing cost-effective retrofits of single-use sites into mixed-use projects will help reduce energy consumption and greenhouse- gas emissions. Compact

Commented [A17]: The statement above was deleted because it suggests government should drive what is done in the arts and culture realm, also because this goes beyond the scope of a land use/natural resources document.

Commented [A18]: Not clear how this makes development more adaptable.

site standards and colocation of public facilities along with state-of-the-practice sustainability features will help achieve ambitious climate action goals and make more efficient use of public land.

A focus on form and adaptability rather than use and density in regulatory systems will provide flexibility to respond to changing market conditions and demographic trends and help us take advantage of disruptive technological and cope with environmental change. Designing buildings and parking with adaptability in mind will prolong the useful life of structures and reduce scrape-and-replace development practices, conserving energy embodied in existing structures.

How will we evaluate progress?

In assessing proposals related to design, arts, and culture and measuring the success or failure of the approaches recommended in this plan, relevant measures may include:

- Types and amounts of publicly- and privately-owned public-use space

- Pedestrian traffic in downtowns and suburban activity centers

- Visitation and time spent in urban, suburban, and rural gathering places

- Number and spatial distribution of public art installations, temporary and permanent

- Number and spatial distribution of publicly and privately funded community events such as

festivals, street fairs, sporting tournaments, etc.

- Number, use type, square footage, and economic activity generated by businesses classified in

cultural categories by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) or its successor

- Average rent, total square footage, and spatial distribution of available art/creative/maker-space

- Retention and growth of arts- and culture-related businesses

- Number and spatial distribution of cultural heritage and historic designations

- Number of adaptively reused, retrofitted, and repositioned structures and structures designed with

flexibility for future uses and/or adaptability in mind

- Number of environmentally certified buildings (e.g. Leadership in Energy and Environmental

Design, LEED) in the county

- Amount of tree canopy in the county

Commented [A19]: How?

Commented [A20]: None of these are actually metrics, as they do not include parameters that show improvement – preferably through specific goals on a specified timetable.

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