QUINCE ORCHARD/FIRSTFIELD CORRIDOR
CITY OF GAITHERSBURG – MTAP 2017
The Team

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Firstfield/Quince Orchard Road Corridor
City of Gaithersburg mTAP Questions

• How can reinvestment in aging light industrial, flex, and Class B office be encouraged given uses and conflicts?
• What regulatory mechanisms could the City pursue to engage partners and support reinvestment?
• What capital improvements and collaborative actions will best connect the various uses?
• What tools could stimulate adaptive reuse of under-performing commercial buildings?
• Should the character/direction of this corridor change from employment? What are the highest and best uses of the land?
MTAP Process/Approach

- Review City and County Documents
- Review Similar mTAPs
- Site Visit and Discussion with City Staff
- Interview Existing Developers
- Team Work Sessions
- Individual Research
Current Conditions: Planned Land Use

• 2009 Master Plan
  - Land Use Element
  - Adopted December 19, 2011
Current Conditions: Zoning

• Study Area Zoning
  
  – C-2 General Commercial
    • Purpose: Commercial uses serving regional and local area and compatible with cohesive and attractive shopping and office area

  – E-1 Urban Employment

  – MXD Mixed Use Development
    • Purpose: Implementation of master plan land use recommendations through a flexible approach to design and multi-use
• Office, flex, R&D space
• 74+ acres and 21 parcels
  – ~13 parcels are major focus
  – Approved MXD on 15+ acres
• Three main developers
• Buildings from 1970s/early 1980s
Current Conditions: Access

- Less than 1 mile to I-270
- MARC: 1.2 miles
- Metro: 4.5 miles
- RideOn:
  - 71/78: Peak period/peak direction
  - 56: All day, but few key connections
- Unlimited parking
- No bike lanes
- Some sidewalks
Critical Issues: City of Gaithersburg

- Master Plan recommends as employment hub
- City has been successful in attracting R&D, particularly biotech
- Older buildings, high potential, limited incentive for reinvestment
- Far from frequent transit
- Little connectivity between parcels
- MXD approval may increase developer interest in residential

**Big Question:** How to maintain goal of employment hub while encouraging reinvestment and remaining successful in the tech sector market?
Critical Issues: Alexandria Realty

- Maximize profit
- Focus on maintaining high occupancy rates
- Promote existing amenities and encourage tenant engagement
- Seeking a campus feel with interconnections between tenants
- Traffic flows, congestion, and connectivity

Big question: How to maintain 100 percent occupancy with minimal improvements to their properties?
Critical Issues: Federal Realty

- Long term retail leases
- Potential redevelopment along frontage as retail leases expire
- Mixed-use not likely because of competition from Metro-accessible sites
- Improved transit connectivity, links to Lakeforest Mall and Shady Grove desirable
- Civic use
- Limited connections between flex office and retail center
- Questions in the area remain and make it difficult to determine the identity of this site.

*Continue to promote their value-based retail center*
Critical Issues: Regional

• Crashing market for suburban office parks
• Millennials, millennials, millennials
• Worsening traffic congestion
• Limited funds to expand transit
Summary of Critical Issues

**Identity**
*What is the future vision for the Firstfield Corridor? What distinguishes the corridor in Gaithersburg? How can the area be marketed to the outside?*

**Consistency**
*Are policies and regulations in place that are consistent with the future vision?*

**Amenities**
*What keeps residents and employees nearby? Are uses lacking that would help fulfill the future vision?*

**Connectivity**
*Are uses sufficiently connected to create a cohesive community? How do you promote synergy and movement within the corridor?*

**Transportation**
*How can the Firstfield Corridor make better transportation connections within and outside of the area?*
(1) Visioning: Redefine the “Study Area”
(1) Visioning: Stakeholders and Leaders

• City officials
• City staff
• Residents
• Business owners
• Employees
• Developers
1) Visioning: Charette and Scenarios
(2) Area Plan

- Vehicular Connectivity
- Firstfield Corridor
- Pedestrian Connectivity
- Land Use Relationships
(2) Area Plan: Vehicular Connectivity

- Perform area-wide traffic study to relieve residential traffic on Quince Orchard by way of Firstfield Corridor.

- Promote parking reduction at R&D parcels.

- Encourage structured parking (podium).

- Encourage inter-parcel connections where possible.
(2) Area Plan: Firstfield Corridor

- Characterize the ultimate corridor through a modified road section
(2) Area Plan: Pedestrian Connectivity

- Require sidewalk connections on both sides of Firstfield Road.
- Encourage through-block connections.
- Encourage amenity paths to provide a residential loop.
- Incentivize more public open space.
(2) Area Plan: Land Use Conceptual Site Plan

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(2) Area Plan: Land Use Conceptual Site Plan
(2) Area Plan: Architecture and Placemaking
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(3) Zoning: Evaluate Zoning Ordinance

Reinforce master plan intent, of employment hub targeted for growth and revitalization, through Zoning Ordinance

• Establish and adopt purpose statements
  – E-1 Urban employment
  – E-2 Moderate intensity industrial park
  – I-1 Light industrial
  – I-3 Industrial and office park (has existing purpose)
  – I-4 General industrial
(3) Zoning: Evaluate Zoning Ordinance

Review **allowed uses** in E-1 district and consider:

- **Limiting general office, retail and restaurant uses to accessory only**
  - General office accommodated in MXD, C, CD, CBD and other
  - General office competes with R&D; drives up land values

- **Expanding use list with breweries, distilleries, industrial catering, tech incubator/maker spaces**
  - Light industrial uses compatible with R&D use
  - Similarly require specialized buildings and zoning
  - Provides diversification of uses
  - Attracts people after business hours
• Establish use classification system for employment and industrial uses

  – Groups land uses and activities based on similar functional or physical characteristics

  – Provides Zoning Administrator with basis for interpretations about specific uses both listed and not listed in Ordinance

  – More effectively anticipates future uses by providing an objective basis for similar use determinations
(3) Zoning: Evaluate Zoning Ordinance

Review E-1 bulk, placement, parking

- Height: increased to 85-feet in 2016
  - Provides for expansion/redevelopment

- Consider reducing setbacks to back of sidewalk
  - Creates urban edge;
  - Flexibility for redevelopment
  - Maintain increased setbacks for height >45 feet and adjacent to residential

- Consider reducing parking ratio
  - Eliminates excess parking;
  - Flexibility for redevelopment;
  - Opportunities for gathering spaces
(3) Zoning: Evaluate Zoning Ordinance

Review **other E-1 provisions**

- Consider use classification system for public assembly uses, such as athletic events; theatres; religious institutions – applied across the city

  • Treat similar uses equally

  • Consider whether public assembly use appropriate in E-1 district

  • Reserve industrial and employment districts for industrial and employment uses (maintaining lower land values)
(4) Branding and Marketing Strategy

- Realign existing City Plans
  - 2009 Master Plan
    - Outline vision for Firstfield Corridor
  - Strategic Plan
    - Market and promote distinct areas of the City, including Firstfield as the City’s center for R&D
  - Growgaithersburg.com
    - Highlight the advantages of Firstfield as well as other distinct areas of the City
(4) Branding and Marketing Strategy

• Short-term Alternatives to a Business Improvement District
  – Initial steps towards branding by the City
  – Stakeholder councils for residential, office, and retail
  – Set the stage for community and private stakeholder ownership
• Expand City message to include Firstfield Corridor
  – Financial incentives specifically for the corridor
    • Technical assistance in finding and combining funding sources and incentives
    • Financial assistance for architectural/planning services
    • Periodic tax relief
(5) Citywide Investments

- Gaithersburg Shuttle
- Corridor Cities Transitway
- Conference Center
Summary of Recommendations

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