Downtown Waldorf

PRESENTATION & LAUNCH
PHASE ONE DEVELOPMENT PLAN
FOR DOWNTOWN WALDORF
In 2007 the Charles County Commissioners launched an initiative to transform the Old Washington Road corridor of downtown Waldorf into a vibrant, transit-oriented, mixed-use, walkable new urban center. The Commissioners funded the “Waldorf Urban Design Study” (WURC), focusing on an area of approximately 300 acres along the Old Washington Road corridor (MD Route 925), from Leonardtown Road (MD Business 5) to Acton Lane, and between U.S. 301 and the CSX railroad tracks. In 2010 this initial study was completed, and the Commissioners adopted the results – a Downtown Waldorf Vision Plan, Design Guidelines, and Zoning Ordinance – amending the 2006 Charles County Comprehensive Plan.

The Transit Component

The timing of this county initiative coincided with a concurrent state study being launched by the Maryland Transit Administration, the “Southern Maryland Transit Corridor Preservation Study,” which was also completed in 2010. For the first time, the state had defined a specific alignment for future high-capacity, fixed-route mass transit service between Charles County and the Branch Avenue Metro station in Prince George’s County, connecting Waldorf and Washington, D.C.

Charles County’s one-third of the 18.8-mile transit alignment, which has been endorsed by both Charles and Prince George’s counties, runs parallel to the CSX railroad right-of-way along Old Washington Road from White Plains through downtown Waldorf.

A New Transit-Oriented Downtown

The complementary nature of the two initiatives – creating a dynamic new urban center in downtown Waldorf connected to light rail transit service – was evident from the start. It was clear that the successful implementation of a plan for the redevelopment of the Old Washington Road corridor, focusing on higher-density, mixed-use transit-oriented development, would significantly enhance the feasibility of bringing high-capacity, fixed-route transit to Charles County – preferably light rail transit, which has been a regional goal for 25 years.

A successful transit-oriented development (TOD) strategy for the Old Washington Road corridor could be replicated within walking distance.
distance of the three other proposed transit stations along the entire six-mile Charles County Transit Development Corridor. During the 12 or more years that will be needed to plan and construct the new light rail transit system, getting an effective TOD program underway will help make sure that Charles County has the transit ridership necessary to compete for federal and state funds and build the system.

The Phase One Project

The steady progress achieved on both initiatives encouraged the Charles County Commissioners to take the next logical step and sponsor the development of a “plan of action” or implementation strategy to kick-off a “Phase One” TOD project in the renamed “Waldorf Urban Redevelopment Corridor,” or WURC, that would breathe life into the vision plan adopted in 2010.

This “Phase One” project will have the potential to begin the transformation of the Old Washington Road corridor into a transit-oriented new urban center – with an integrated design concept for a new urban place with the potential to deliver a high quality of life, new residential housing choices, rapid and efficient transit service, and enhanced economic opportunities.

The foundation for this concept rests on transit-oriented development and urban design concepts that have proven successful in other places, where visionary public and private sector leaders are working together to transform their communities and build competitive local economies linked to efficient rapid transit infrastructure.

This implementation plan is the result of two years of work by an interdisciplinary consultant team of experts in all aspects of urban planning, design, engineering, infrastructure, land use, economics, and intergovernmental relations. The consultant team analyzed all the ingredients of success: site selection, the local and regional market, infrastructure and land requirements, cost-benefit and revenue potential, the funding strategy, and the institutional capacity needed to implement the project.

After an extensive review of various locations within the larger, 300-acre WURC, the consultant team identified a prime location for the “Phase One” project on 26 acres north of the intersection of Leonardtown Road (MD Business 5) and Old Washington Road (MD 925), between U.S. 301 and the CSX Railroad. This site, “Waldorf Center,” has long been identified as a prime opportunity for redevelopment and reinvestment, at one of the most highly visible and accessible locations in Charles County and Southern Maryland. The Maryland Transit Administration’s 2010 study defined a high-capacity, fixed-route transit alignment corridor between Waldorf and Washington, D.C. adjacent to the selected “Phase One” development site, a potential future catalyst for private sector investment in TOD at this location.

A market analysis conducted for the “Phase One” project indicated support for a development program consisting of 659,000 square feet of mixed-use development – residential, commercial office and retail – including a specialty grocer, a new 80–100 room hotel, Class A office space, and a fitness center. This first phase is enhanced by community assets and public amenities such as a public square urban park, a wetland nature park and open space, a fine arts/performing arts/civic center, and a public market. A new urban street grid would feature tree-lined “complete streets” with sidewalks and bikeways. The entire “Phase One” site is within a quarter-mile or a five-minute walk of the future light rail station – which initially would be a commuter bus transit station with a 540-space park-and-ride lot until — Continued
plans for light rail transit service are implemented. The “Phase One” plan is therefore not dependent on access to light rail transit on day one, and acknowledges that completing the transition from automobile and commuter bus service to high-capacity fixed-route transit at this site will evolve through a steady progression of improvements over the next dozen years.

**Investment in Infrastructure**

The in-depth infrastructure analysis performed for this report determined that significant public sewer improvements are needed at the “Phase One” site and in Waldorf generally. The sewer system in this part of Waldorf is antiquated in some locations, and deteriorating or undersized in other locations. Steps need to be taken to upgrade and modernize the sewer system. The need for these improvements is greater than the “Phase One” project or the WURC alone would justify, but this initiative provides the impetus for action necessary to maintain the economic growth potential of northern Charles County.

Given the importance of these supporting infrastructure needs, the Charles County Commissioners have fully funded the necessary upgrades and replacements of these water and sewer facilities, as well as the reconstruction of Old Washington Road. The Commissioners have committed almost $30 million to making infrastructure investments in the Waldorf area in the county’s adopted Capital Improvements Program.

In addition, the Commissioners have committed $300,000 in first-year operating funds to create and staff a “Downtown Waldorf” redevelopment office to implement the “Phase One” development plan and supervise the implementation of the WURC initiative.

**Taking the Next Steps**

It is typical for new transit-oriented redevelopment projects to rely on local funding in the early years of implementation, with state, federal and private sector contributions playing a greater role later in the process. The opportunity exists for the state to play a major role in this project, through the agencies and funding resources represented on the “Governor’s Smart Growth Subcabinet.” The redevelopment of “Downtown Waldorf” as a walkable new urban community linked to transit will be the best example of “smart growth” planning in Southern Maryland, deserving of the state’s full support. Sustained state funding for the completion of the “project planning” phase of the high-capacity, fixed-route transit initiative in the MD 5/U.S. 301 corridor will be crucial, as will the state’s partnership with the county on diverse key components of the “Phase One” development plan. New partnerships with developers and the continuing support of the citizens of Charles County will ensure the success of this project and the creation of a dynamic new urban center in downtown Waldorf, contributing to the future economic growth and prosperity of Charles County in the 21st century.

For additional information, please contact Mr. Steven Ball, Planning Director:
301-645-0632 • BallSt@CharlesCountyMD.gov

---

**Mission Statement** - The mission of Charles County Government is to provide our citizens the highest quality service possible in a timely, efficient and courteous manner. To achieve this goal, our government must be operated in an open and accessible atmosphere, be based on comprehensive long- and short-term planning and have an appropriate managerial organization tempered by fiscal responsibility. We support and encourage efforts to grow a diverse workplace.

**Vision Statement** - Charles County is a place where all people thrive and businesses grow and prosper; where the preservation of our heritage and environment is paramount; where government services to its citizens are provided at the highest level of excellence; and where the quality of life is the best in the nation.