

Chapter 1 Planning Context for the Sub-Area Plan

Introduction

This Waldorf Sub-Area Plan (the Plan) has been developed to guide future land use and development in the Waldorf area of Charles County, Maryland. The Plan addresses land use and development, transportation, environment, open space, and public facilities such as parks and schools. The Plan also establishes a “vision” for the area; an overall image of what the Waldorf area should be and how it should look in the future.

Located approximately 20 miles south of Washington D.C., the Waldorf Sub-Area covers approximately 35 square miles (22,320 acres), a little under eight percent of Charles County’s land area (Figures 1-1 and 1-2). Waldorf is the major center of population, employment and commerce both in Charles County and in Southern Maryland. As of 2000, the Sub-Area was home to nearly half the population of Charles County, approximately 56,600 people out of a County population of 120,500. The Sub-Area’s population is projected to increase to almost 90,000 people by 2020.

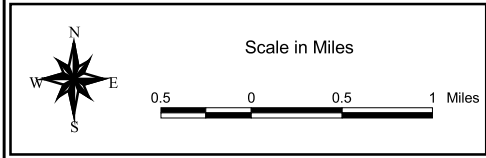
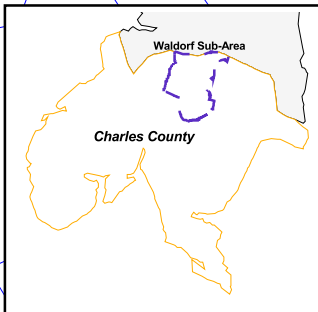
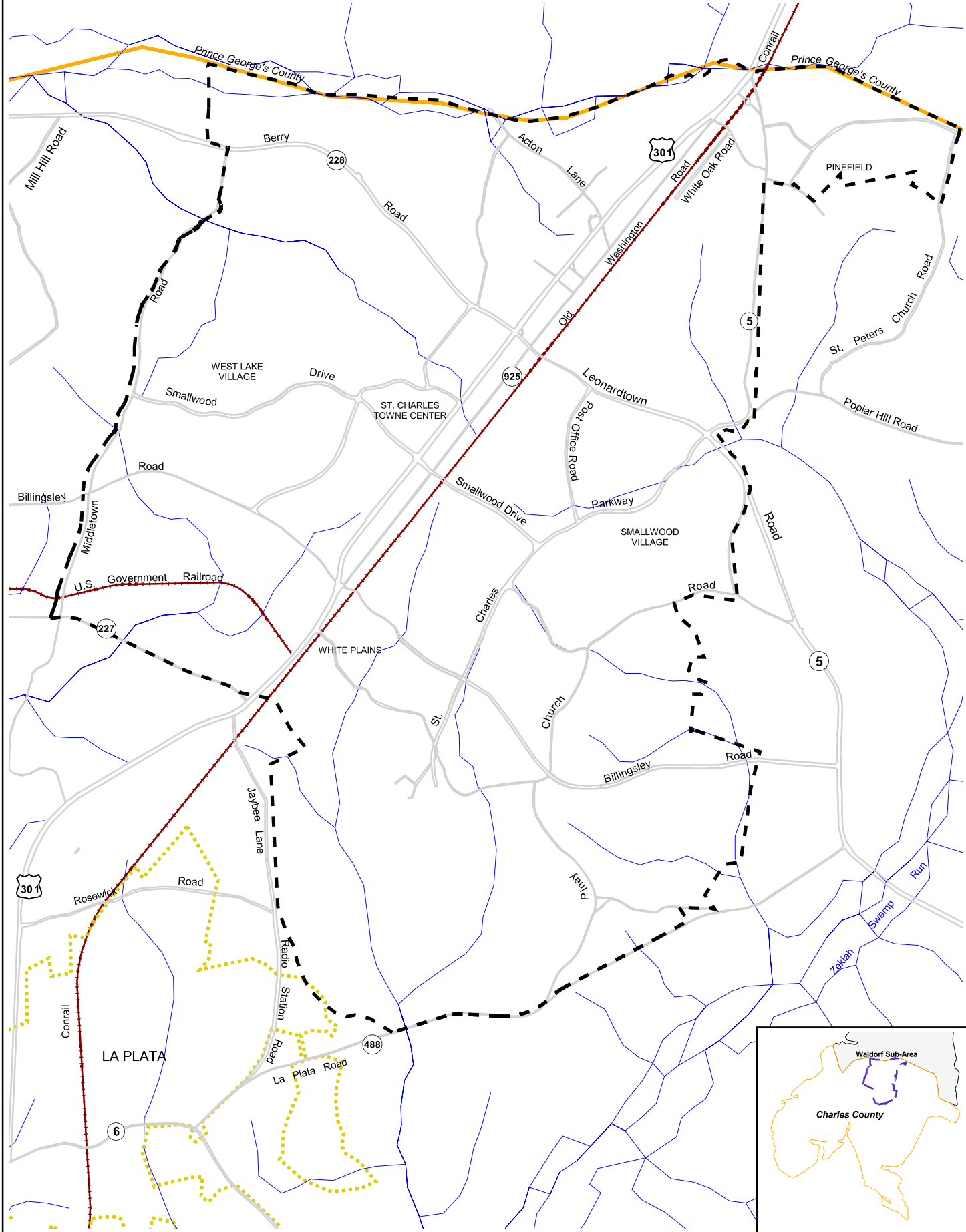
The Sub-Area Within Charles County

The Waldorf Sub-Area is part of Charles County’s Development District. Located in the north and northwest part of the County, and covering approximately 83 square miles, the Development District has been designated by the County as its principal center of population, services, and employment. The Development District is planned to accommodate 75 percent of the County’s future population growth.

In 1997 the County adopted a Comprehensive Plan that addresses land use, growth management, and development for the whole county. The Comprehensive Plan noted that detailed plans were needed for parts of the county experiencing rapid growth or facing special issues. These detailed “Sub-Area Plans” would offer an opportunity to examine issues and explore opportunities in greater detail than was possible in the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan divided the Development District into three sub-areas: Waldorf, Central, and Bryans Road-Indian Head. The County adopted the Bryans Road-Indian Head Sub-Area Plan in 2001 and this Waldorf Sub-Area Plan is the second one to be prepared.

The Sub-Area Plan is prepared within the context of Charles County’s growth management program which includes the Comprehensive Plan, Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plan, Land Preservation and Recreation Plan, and Zoning and Subdivision Regulations.

The Town of La Plata lies immediately south of the Waldorf Sub-Area, actually abutting the Sub-Area near Radio Station Road. Because the Town has planning authority within the town boundaries, the Plan makes no specific recommendations for land in the Town and the Plan has no legal authority within the Town. Nevertheless, efforts were made to ensure that the Sub-Area Plan’s recommendations are compatible with and supportive of the Town of La Plata.



Waldorf Sub-Area Plan
 Figure 1-2
 Sub-Area Boundary
 1-3



Surrounding Areas

The Waldorf Sub-Area anchors the eastern side of Charles County's Development District. West of Sub-Area lies the central portion of the Development District, which is planned for mostly residential development.

South of the Sub-Area, between the Sub-Area and the Town of La Plata, is an area designated Rural Residential in the Comprehensive Plan, and planned mostly for low density residential development. South of this area is the Town of La Plata. The Town has engaged in major planning efforts since the late 1990s including a Vision Plan for Greater La Plata (2000), a Plan for the Future of Downtown La Plata (2001) and an updated Comprehensive Plan (2001).

East of the Sub-Area is a large rural area designated Rural Conservation in the Comprehensive Plan and planned for low-density residential development and preservation of the rural environment. Much of this area is in the County's state-designated Zekiah Swamp Run Rural Legacy Area.

The area north of the Sub-Area is in Prince George's County. Much of the area adjoining the Waldorf Sub-Area is in Prince George's County's Rural Tier, a policy area designated in the 2002 General Plan for rural low growth. The area on both sides of MD 5/US 301 is in the General Plan's Developing Tier and is further designated as a possible future Development Center called Brandywine. The west side of US 301 was a special study area in Prince George's County's 1993 Subregion V Master Plan that recommended a mix of residential, employment, and retail uses.

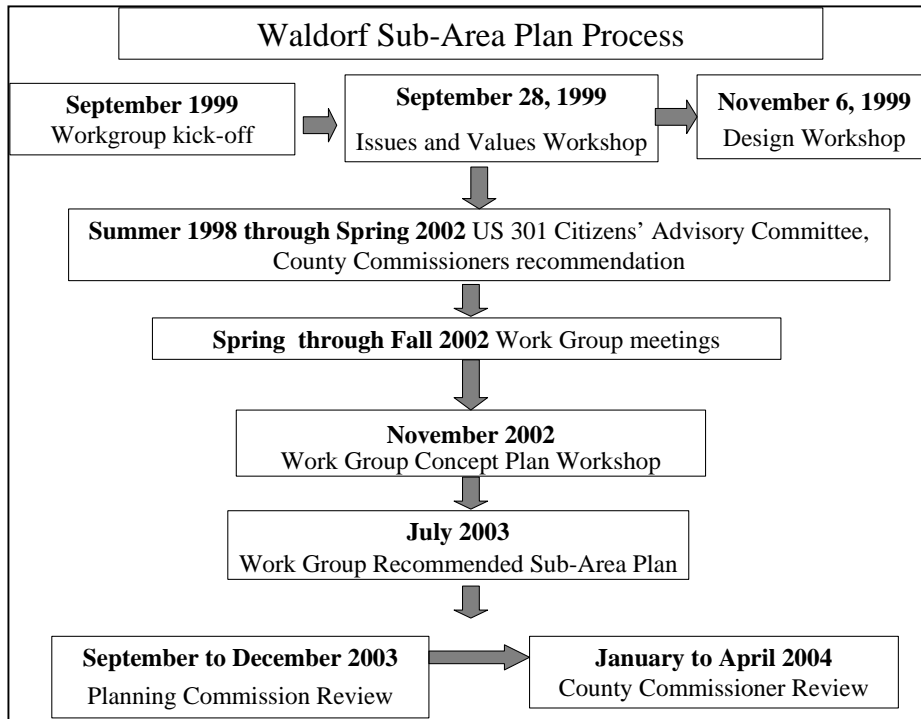
The Planning Process

The Sub-Area Plan process took place over an approximately four year period (Figure 1-3). The County's Department of Planning and Growth Management, with the assistance of a team of consultants, prepared the plan. The County Commissioners appointed a Citizens' Work Group to represent interest groups and affected parties, and assist in developing the plan. The Waldorf Work Group began work on the Plan in 1999. Two large, public visioning workshops were held in September and November 1999.

A major issue for the Plan was the land use implications of the County's decision on whether to support an upgrade or bypass for US 301. Work on the Sub-Area plan continued through Fall 2000 but was put on hold pending the US 301 Citizens' Advisory Committee recommendation on US 301 to the County Commissioners (made in September 2001) and the County Commissioners decision on US 301 (made in March 2002). The Waldorf Work Group recommenced work on the Sub-Area Plan in Spring 2002 and presented a Concept Plan at a public meeting in November 2002 following which the Work Group developed a full Sub-Area Plan in June 2003.

The Work Group held its last meeting on June 18, 2003 and recommended forwarding the Sub-Area Plan, with final changes, to the Planning Commission. This revised Plan was issued in July 2003. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the Plan on September 8, 2003 and, following work sessions, on December 1, 2003 forwarded the Plan with amendments to the County Commissioners. The County Commissioners received a presentation on the Plan in January 2004, held their own public hearing on March 1, 2004 and adopted the Plan on April 20, 2004.

Figure 1-3 Waldorf Sub-Area Plan Process



Issues and Challenges

The Sub-Area Plan is “issue driven”, in the sense that it focuses most attention on the issues and challenges participants in the planning process identified as being important. These were identified at the important public workshops held in the Fall of 1999; an Issues and Values held in September and an all-day Design Workshop held in November (see Appendix A for a detailed summary of these workshops). These issues and challenges have changed little. The top issues were and remain:

- **Traffic.** How will the transportation system best serve the community?
- **The economy.** How to attract more and better quality jobs and make beneficial use of undeveloped land?
- **Role and position.** What kind of town can and should Waldorf be?
- **Adequate public facilities.** How to ensure that roads, schools, emergency services, parks, libraries etc. are in place to serve development?
- **Development.** What housing density and non-residential development intensity is appropriate for Waldorf?

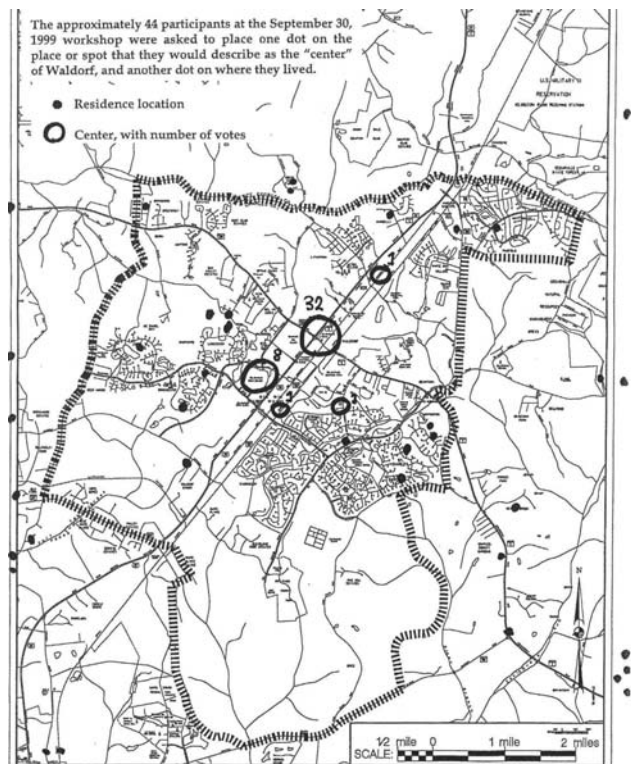
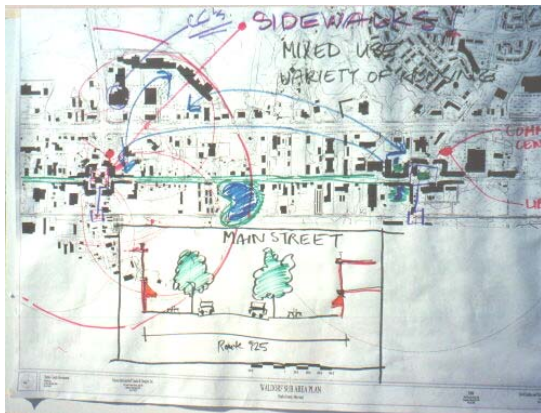
Particularly interesting results emerged from two of the exercises at the workshops. In the first exercise participants were asked to draw a line on a map around what they thought of as the approximate boundaries of the “town” of Waldorf. In the second exercise participants were asked to place a dot on the place or spot they would describe as the “center” of Waldorf.

Altogether the results were consistent with the general perception that Waldorf, like many other largely post World War II places in the U.S., lacks a “sense of place”. The results showed great variation in what participants consider Waldorf to be. Based on the first exercise, many people

consider Waldorf to be much smaller than the sub-area boundary, but quite a few participants think it an even larger place. With respect to the center of Waldorf, the largest number of participants identified the center as at or very close to the intersection of US 301 and MD 5 Business (Leonardtwn Road). While this location is near to the former train station location around which the village of Waldorf originally developed, the area today is dominated by busy roads and has few of the functions of a town center.

The vision for Waldorf that emerged from the 1999 public workshops has also changed little, and can be summarized as follows:

- Create an attractive “place” or “places” in Waldorf that can serve as a town center or activity nodes for the community;
- Make Waldorf a more balanced business community attracting more economic activity from outside Charles County. Create the environment to attract a broader range of retail/employment uses;
- Keep Waldorf’s business/commercial area in the US 301 corridor;
- Create a complete road network, integrated with transit and accessible by pedestrians/cyclists; and
- Create more recreation opportunities.



Top left: participants at one of the break-out sessions at the Waldorf design workshop, Fall 1999. Bottom left: resident-generated concept sketch from the workshop that the Concept Plan uses in the plans for Old Washington Road and the Waldorf Center activity center. Above: At the Issues and Values Workshop, participants identified what they thought of as the “center” of Waldorf.