DRAFT

The Mount Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan

The City of Alexandria, Virginia

Department of Planning and Zoning

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EDAW

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Executive Summary

Mt. Vernon Avenue is a vital corridor, with a rich history and eclectic character that makes it an attractive place to live, work and shop. Building upon its unique characteristics, the Avenue will remain a special neighborhood as change takes place. The vision for Mt. Vernon Avenue involves preserving its traditional neighborhood character, protecting its unique historical identity, serving the needs of the surrounding community and maintaining the Avenue as a competitive and viable place for business.

Vision

Mt. Vernon Avenue is a vibrant and welcoming Main Street that reflects the surrounding neighborhoods' diversity, integrity and small town charm.
The Avenue is comprised of enthusiastic, successful and responsible community partners. We offer an eclectic and friendly living, working and shopping environment for Alexandrians and visitors alike.

Planning Process

Over the years, the area has been improved and enriched, with businesses and residents working together, through the efforts of the Del Ray Citizens Association (DRCA) and the Potomac West Business Association (PWBA), among others. These organizations worked with the City on the development of the Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan (the *Plan*) to ensure that the Avenue continues to meet the needs and expectations of the community while realizing its potential as a vibrant place to meet, gather and conduct business.

The Mt. Vernon Avenue Work Group (Work Group) was formed by the City of Alexandria in the spring of 2003 to collaborate on a comprehensive planning effort for Mt. Vernon Avenue's "Main Street retail district" from Glebe Road to Luray Avenue. Along with DRCA and PWBA, the Work Group was comprised of community stakeholders, including business owners, property owners, residents, representatives of the Mt. Jefferson Civic and Warwick Village Citizens Associations and City officials. Over the course of 16 months, the Work Group defined a future direction for the Avenue, guiding neighborhood change while protecting the adjoining residential neighborhoods.

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles were developed through extensive community input to define the vision for Mt. Vernon Avenue and provide a framework to guide future development and other activities. The guiding principles of the Plan are to:

- **Preserve existing historic scale and character**
- **Protect and enhance Mt. Vernon Avenue as a vibrant commercial corridor**
- **Encourage and support mixed-use development**
- **Celebrate the "Town of Potomac Historic District"**
- **Preserve and protect existing residential areas**
- **Promote partnerships**
- **Enhance public spaces**
- **Provide convenient parking and transportation solutions to support retail growth**
- **Encourage independent retail**
- **Capitalize on the neighborhood arts community**
- **Provide alternative multi-modal transportation linkages**

Land Use Strategy

The land use recommendations in the *Plan* are designed to promote and reinforce a consistent, vibrant and pedestrian-oriented retail environment, while protecting adjacent residential neighborhoods. Strategies are recommended that apply to the entire length of the Avenue as well as specific strategies for the three focus areas, described below.

Avenue-Wide Recommendations

PROMOTE APPROPRIATE INFILL DEVELOPMENT

- Ensure that new development is consistent with the neighborhood's existing character through the use of Building Form Design Guidelines
- Allow modest increases in allowable floor area along Mt. Vernon Avenue, consistent with the Building Form Design Guidelines, where new construction retains historic buildings, maintains the historic character and scale, provides open space where feasible, and protects adjacent residential.

PROTECT RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

The potential for negative impacts on adjacent residences is reduced by:

- Stepping the height of buildings; and,
- Providing a buffer to reduce the visual impact on the neighborhood.

ENHANCE PEDESTRIAN STREETSCAPE

Build upon and enhance the existing pedestrian orientation of the Avenue and improve pedestrian safety through:

- Pedestrian scale lighting;
- Streetscape and crosswalk improvements;
- Strengthened connections to the Braddock Road Metro Station;
- Enhanced public transportation;

- Design guidelines for new construction; and,
- Improvement to the appearance of service and auto-related uses.

Pedestrian and streetscape improvements, as well as private investment in properties and buildings, should be made along the entire length of the Avenue from Braddock Road to W. Glebe Road, to improve the appearance of the Avenue and create stronger visual and physical connections to the Arlandria neighborhood on the north.

ENCOURAGE A MIX OF USES

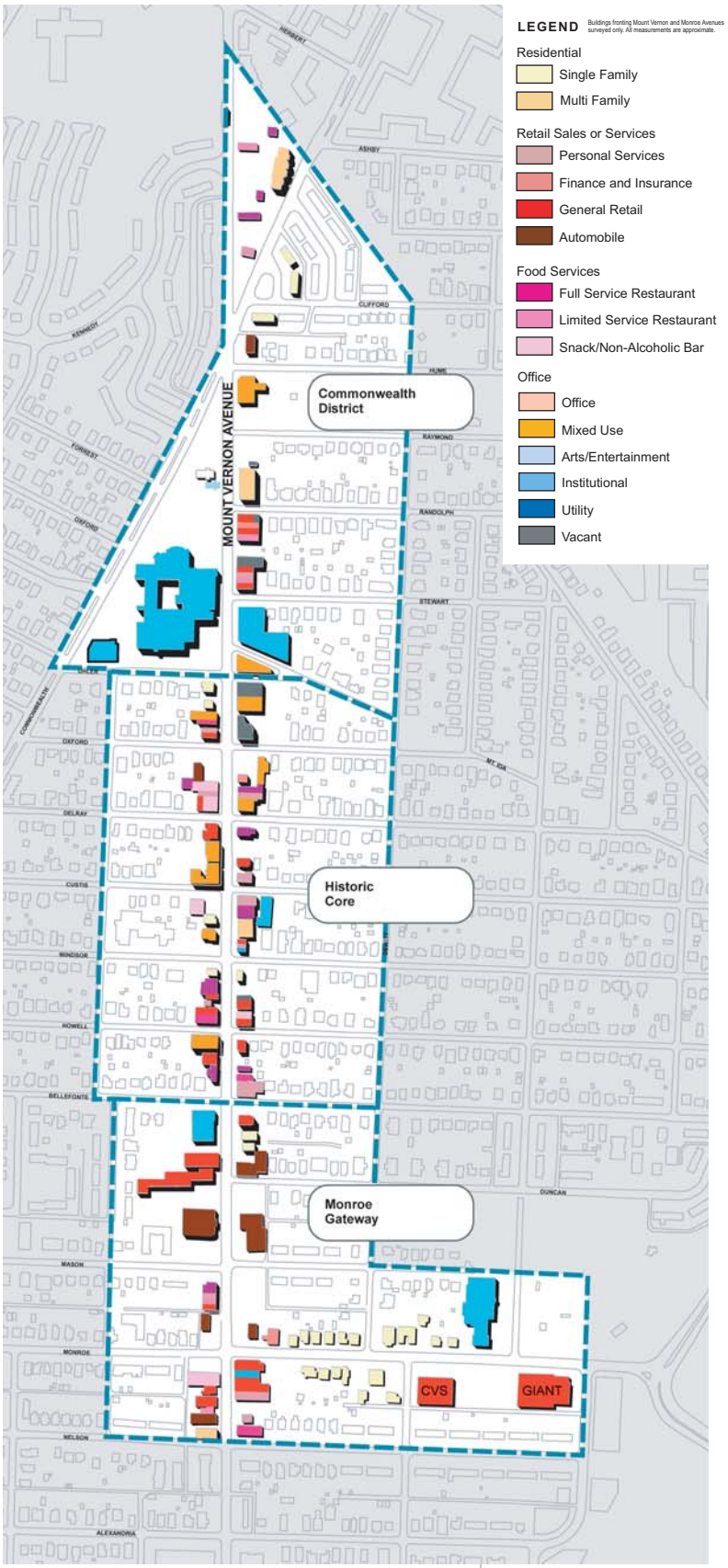
The overall concept for the Avenue is to encourage new multi-family residential and 2nd floor office uses to support the retail activity, and to concentrate the retail activity on the ground floor in key locations. The mix of residential and office uses help to provide a 16 hour/7 day level of activity desirable for a successful retail environment.

The market analysis has projected a limited demand for additional retail uses. Thus, it is critical not to spread out the retail uses along the length of the Avenue, but to concentrate retail to benefit from the synergy created by continuous retail street frontage.

Focus Area Recommendations

The planning area is divided into three major focus areas:

- Commonwealth District from Herbert Street to Uhler Avenue;
- Historic Core from Uhler to Bellefonte Avenues; and,
- Monroe Gateway from Bellefonte to Nelson Avenues, including the small shopping center located on the west side of the Avenue at Luray Avenue and the Giant grocery store and CVS pharmacy located in the 400 block of Monroe Avenue.



Land Use with Focus Areas

Land use, open space, streetscape improvements and other recommendations were developed for each focus area.

Commonwealth District

ENCOURAGE A MIX OF USES

- Encourage residential, office, and institutional uses, with limited retail, with a compatible building scale
- Encourage a mix of the type of residential units and provide affordable housing

PROMOTE COORDINATED DEVELOPMENT

A key site in the Commonwealth District is the triangular-shaped assemblage of property north of Commonwealth Avenue on the east side of Mt. Vernon Avenue. The 11 parcels in this area, totaling approximately 2 acres, are underutilized and offer a significant opportunity for redevelopment that complements the entire district and strengthens the Avenue as a whole. The *Plan* recommends the coordinated redevelopment of these parcels, with a potential increase in floor area ratio, consistent with defined development standards for a quality multi-family development with publicly visible and usable open space. Coordinated Development District zoning would be applied as an overlay to these parcels.

IMPROVE STREETSCAPE, OPEN SPACE AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

The *Plan* envisions a high quality streetscape in the Commonwealth District area, with healthy street trees, pedestrian-scaled lighting and street furnishings to reflect an attractive and safe pedestrian environment. Pedestrian improvements are incorporated at the intersection of Commonwealth Avenue and Mt. Vernon Avenue, and recommendations are made to enhance pedestrian safety north of Commonwealth Avenue by reducing the number of travel lanes from four to two and placing on-street parking and bike lanes within the existing curb-to-curb section. Improvements are recommended to Colasanto Park to enhance it as a key community asset.

Historic Core

ENCOURAGE STREET-LEVEL RETAIL

The Avenue will be more vibrant and retail uses will be more successful by focusing ground floor retail and personal service use in this area. To achieve this, the *Plan* recommends to:

- Limit office and residential uses to the floors above the ground floor; and,
- Limit frontage of new personal service and financial uses in this area to a maximum storefront width.

PRESERVE HISTORIC CHARACTER

The Historic Core is that area of Mt. Vernon Avenue located within the Town of Potomac National Register Historic District and includes a number of contributing historic buildings. The *Plan* outlines strategies to preserve the historic character by allowing infill development that is compatible with and respects the scale of existing historic structures and the residences that immediately abut the commercial properties along the Avenue.

CREATE A PUBLIC GATHERING PLACE

Following evaluation of options, enhancement and possible expansion of the City lot/Farmer's Market site as a public gathering place is desired. This location provides the opportunity to create a small public space, centrally located within the active retail area, while retaining the parking function. It will provide greater flexibility in the operation of the Del Ray Farmer's Market and is highly visible along the Avenue.

CONSIDER FIRE STATION REUSE

The City's Fire Station #202 is housed within the original Town of Potomac Town Hall and Fire Station on Windsor Avenue. Historically the center of the Town of Potomac's civic and social life, this building is an historic landmark within the community. Should the needs of the Fire Department change and the City seek to relocate this function, the *Plan* recommends consideration of this building for reuse for community functions and activities.

Monroe Gateway

ENCOURAGE A MIX OF USES

The Monroe Gateway area is a suitable place for residential, retail, and commercial uses that promote a transition into the Historic Core area. Additional residential development can contribute to the commercial success of the Avenue by placing potential clientele nearby.

ENHANCE STREETSCAPE AND URBAN DESIGN

The appearance of the public right-of-way can be enhanced with street trees, sidewalk pavers and other amenities. A key factor in improving this segment of the Avenue is addressing the existing service and automobile dealership uses with screening of parking lots, relocation of contractors' vehicles and materials to less visually prominent locations on the sites, and related building and site improvements. It is recommended that all streetscape improvements extend to Luray Avenue in order to connect the small commercial center at Luray Avenue with the business area to the north.

IMPROVE GATEWAY PARK

As improvements are made to the Route 1/Monroe Avenue bridge and the existing Simpson Stadium Park expanded, the design for this additional parkland should emphasize a park-like gateway for the community with views provided into the Park.

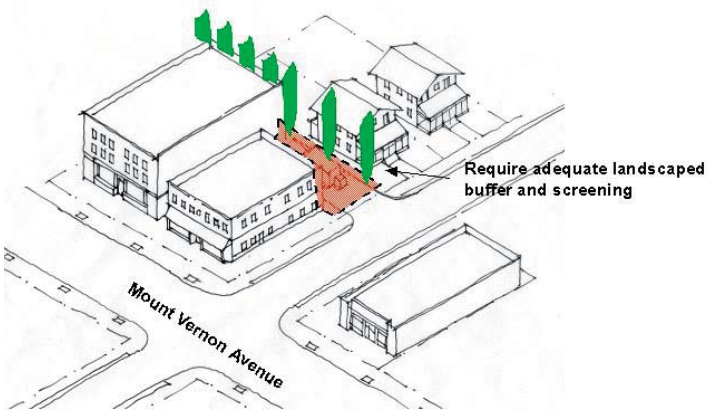
Watercolor by Alice Kale.

ENHANCE THE NEIGHBORHOOD GIANT AND CVS SITES

While the community strongly desires to retain the existing grocery and pharmacy uses in the present location on Monroe Avenue, it is recognized that market forces may result in future changes that make retention of the existing uses difficult. In such case, it is critical that the City provide adequate leadership in directing a new vision for this site. Should market forces push the redevelopment of these parcels, the *Plan* recommends the coordinated redevelopment of the two sites for mixed-use, incorporating a grocery and retail at the ground level and compliance with specific development standards. Coordinated Development District zoning would be applied as an overlay to these parcels.

ENHANCE ACCESS TO THE METRO STATION

The *Plan* recommends identifying opportunities for pedestrian improvements linking the Braddock Road Metro Station to Del Ray and coordinating with the improvements to Potomac Yard. New signage and lighting to encourage evening travel between the Metro and Mt. Vernon Avenue are recommended.



Buffer adjoining residences

Historic Preservation

The Mt. Vernon Avenue Plan seeks to strengthen the existing historic district for the Town of Potomac, especially the commercial buildings located along the Avenue, by encouraging the retention of the contributing buildings through reuse, appropriate renovations and infill construction. Design guidelines are included for infill development that complement the existing mass and scale of these buildings.

Strategies included to strengthen and improve the historic district are to:

- Designate additional identified contributing structures to the National Historic Register;
- Explore the expansion of the existing Town of Potomac Historic District boundaries;
- Create and install heritage and interpretive signs; and,
- Promote awareness of the Town of Potomac Historic District and the tax benefits of the rehabilitation of contributing structures.

Parking Strategy

A parking utilization study was conducted to understand the current and potential future parking conditions along Mt. Vernon Avenue and to assist in formulating the appropriate parking strategies. Generally speaking, the parking study indicated that the existing parking supply and demand for the spaces is balanced with sufficient surplus spaces to accommodate regular turnover of the spaces. Utilization of the existing parking spaces varies depending on the time of day and day of the week. The mixed-use and walkable nature of the neighborhood, with businesses often frequented by area residents without the use of automobiles or by drivers who park once and visit more than one business during a single trip, contributes to the relatively stable parking conditions.

Convenient parking and transportation solutions are recommended to support retail growth, including alternative forms of transportation. The goals of the parking strategy are to:

- Maintain a balance in the supply and demand for parking;
- Maximize the use and turnover of on-street parking to serve retail customers, with employees and longer term customers using off-street parking;
- Optimize the utilization of existing parking resources; and,
- Ensure that parking demand is met without negatively impacting nearby residences.

Strategies to accomplish these goals are to:

- *Develop a shared parking program* to more efficiently share use of the underutilized private parking resources to alleviate some of the demand on the existing parking supply particularly during evening and weekend hours;

- *Create a parking overlay district* that provides parking flexibility where the ability to provide additional parking is severely constrained by small lots and the desire to maintain the historic character of the area. Some flexibility in the parking requirements for new retail uses and small compatible infill development is recommended by:

  · *Waiving or reducing parking requirements in specific circumstances where business activity would be enhanced without impacts on the community;*

  · *Providing no parking reduction for tear downs of contributing buildings;*

  · *Continuing the requirement for an SUP to reduce parking for any use other than retail that does not comply with the current parking requirement; and,*

  · *Implementing a parking reduction policy to guide the review of future requests.*

- *Monitor parking demand and supply over time* to ensure that parking supply and demand will continue to be accommodated without resulting in spillover parking or congestion on residential streets. The development of utilization thresholds is important to ensure that greater proactive measures are undertaken when found necessary to address the changing demand for parking.

Pedestrian and Multi-Modal Strategy

To support and enhance the existing pedestrian-oriented nature of Mt. Vernon Avenue and its nearby residential neighborhoods, the *Plan's* multi-modal strategy includes transit, walking and bicycling, as well as parking and circulation improvements, with the following elements:

- Encourage greater use and availability of transit by enhancing bus stops, promoting public transit, and providing better pedestrian connections to the Braddock Road Metro Station;
- Provide DASH bus service along the Avenue (by 2008);
- Encourage walking and bicycling by providing streetscape and pedestrian lighting improvements along the Avenue;
- Reduce the potential for speeding, increase pedestrian safety, and enhance the streetscape along the four-lane section of Mt. Vernon Avenue north of Commonwealth Avenue by reducing the number of travel lanes, providing crosswalks and bulb-outs, bicycle lanes and a parking lane; and,
- Prioritize the pedestrian over the automobile in the redevelopment of automobile-oriented uses, such as the gas stations, service uses, and automobile dealerships, to ensure a pedestrian friendly environment.

Colasanto Park

Retail Marketing/Arts Promotion Strategy

The retail market study projected demand for an additional 10 percent "Main Street" retail/restaurant space along the Avenue by 2010. Retail recommendations include:

- Targeting new complementary businesses such as specialty food stores, housewares and home furnishings, antiques and artwork, art supply stores, and custom card/stationery stores;
- Encouraging new restaurant opportunities, such as a diner, family-oriented restaurant and restaurants with entertainment, to round out the dining opportunities along the Avenue; and,
- Undertake a detailed arts promotion effort that includes the creation of artists' studios, either in a single building or dispersed throughout the area; public art displays and exhibitions, arts festivals and an art education and/or supply store.

The recommended marketing strategy builds upon the recent Potomac West Business Association (PWBA) successes, including:

- Utilizing a variety of media such as radio station commercials, regional publications, advertisements on Metrobuses and the like;
- Integrating retail marketing into events and festivals, such as Art on the Avenue and First Night Alexandria;
- Maintaining unified store hours among retailers; and,
- Installing community banners, heritage signage, and gateway improvements to create a greater sense of identity for the Avenue.

To continue and support the successful efforts of the PWBA, the establishment of a business improvement district is suggested to ensure that the current efforts are continued on a long-term basis and to provide a consistent funding source to sustain and expand on existing efforts.

Urban Design Strategy

Mt. Vernon Avenue has a unique, small town, Main Street character. The urban design strategy focuses on enhancing that character with a flexible design-oriented approach. The purpose of this approach is to ensure that the form and scale of new or infill development will be compatible with the historic scale and character of the existing buildings along the Avenue. The current zoning regulations do not provide the necessary framework to support and encourage such appropriately scaled and compatible development. The *Plan* outlines a series of Building Form Design Guidelines to guide the design of new construction.

The major design principles incorporated in the *Plan* meet the following objectives:

- New construction should reflect the scale of existing buildings;
- A consistent street wall should be maintained, with some variations to allow for landscaped open space, an opportunity for side windows and for other site use where desired;
- New construction should be two to two and one-half stories, with a setback where a third story is provided;
- New buildings should help define the corners where side streets intersect Mt. Vernon Avenue. Ground level retail storefront windows should extend onto the side streets;
- Appropriate building setbacks and parking lot screening will minimize impacts on adjacent residential properties;
- Ground level retail storefronts should contribute to the vitality of the streetscape and the pedestrian experience;
- Direct driveway access to Mt. Vernon Avenue is not desirable; and,
- Off-street parking lots should be located to the rear of the property, with access provided from rear alleys, when available, side streets or access easements from adjoining properties.

Zoning Strategy

The main zoning approach to implement the *Plan's* vision and recommendations is through the development and application of an overlay district. The purpose of the Mt. Vernon Urban Overlay District is to encourage a mix of land uses and compatible infill construction, protect residential neighbors, support the historic character and the preservation goals of the historic district, preserve and enhance the existing urban character of the corridor and promote enhanced economic activity. A key element of the Overlay District is the application of the Building Form Design Guidelines. The Overlay District will allow a waiver of the underlying CL (Commercial Low) requirements for floor area ratio, yards, open space, etc. by Special Use Permit, where a proposed building is consistent with the design guidelines in the *Plan*. In addition, due to the goal to maintain a pedestrian environment on Mt. Vernon Avenue by limiting curb cuts, as well as concerns about the potential for larger, incompatibly-scaled building on larger parcels, the Overlay District will provide a three-tier approach related to the size of the parcel to address parking and open space needs.

Tier 1 —
Lots of 7,000 square feet or less in size

- Waive open space and parking requirements for land-locked lots
- Waive some required parking for corner lots and lots with rear access

Tier 2 —
Lots between 7,001 and 15,000 square feet in size

- Provide 15% minimum ground level open space, a portion of which is visually accessible from Mt. Vernon Avenue
- May reduce parking up to half for uses, except residential where at least one parking space is required per unit

Tier 3 —
Lots larger than 15,000 square feet

- Provide 25% minimum ground level, publicly visible open space
- Provide required parking on-site
- Additional requirements for building massing and open space to ensure compatibility of building size and scale

The consolidation of individual lots to create a larger development is strongly discouraged.

The overlay district will apply to properties fronting along Mt. Vernon Avenue from Nelson Avenue on the south to Commonwealth Avenue on the north. The district will include provisions for land use, building form, parking and access, building signage, outdoor display and administrative permits. The existing CL/Commercial Low zoning will remain as the underlying zoning. A retail focus area is defined in the overlay district between Uhler Avenue and Bellefonte Avenue (the Historic Core) and will target the location of new retail and complementary businesses at the ground floor along the Avenue.

Implementation

The *Plan* concludes with a series of implementation measures designed to bring together the planning and design recommendations, outlined in the strategies for land use, zoning, urban design, retail/arts promotion, parking and enhancing pedestrian/multi-modal opportunities. A key element for implementation will be a coordinated effort of public and private entities. The Potomac West Business Association is the recommended organization to lead the marketing, business organization and retail promotion efforts. A Business Improvement District approach is outlined to provide a source of regular funding in benefit of the business along the Avenue. A series of actions and steps are outlined to ensure the successful implementation of the vision, guiding principles and strategies recommended in the *Plan.*

With limited public funding available to undertake the suggested physical improvements, working with the community to prioritize the public improvements in an initial implementation step. As part of the *Plan,* the Work Group determined pedestrian scale lighting of the sidewalks along Mt. Vernon Avenue and Monroe Avenues to be the highest priority to address pedestrian safety concerns and to encourage people to walk from the Braddock Road Metro Station to and along the Avenue. Their second highest priority is the restriping and related improvements to the four-lane section of the Avenue from Commonwealth Avenue north to Glebe Road. These improvements will have the most immediate, positive impact on the Avenue and adjacent residential neighborhoods and support the *Plan* recommendations.

Introduction

1.0

Mt. Vernon Avenue in Alexandria, Virginia has long been a vital corridor that has linked communities, neighbors and businesses. The City of Alexandria, in conjunction with the Mt. Vernon Avenue Work Group, has prepared the Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan (the *Plan*) to ensure that the Avenue continues to meet the needs and expectations of the community while realizing its potential as a vibrant and competitive place for business.

Mt. Vernon Avenue has a rich history, beginning as a main thoroughfare connecting the Del Ray and St. Elmo subdivisions in the late 19th century. The corridor went on to become an important regional route, paralleling U.S. Route 1 between Washington, D.C. and Alexandria. The Avenue's rich history parallels that of the Potomac Yard rail yard, a major railroad switching station on the East Coast.

Today, Mt. Vernon Avenue has a unique character that is a showcase for the different periods of its eclectic past. The purpose of the *Plan* is to ensure that Mt. Vernon Avenue remains a special place. The *Plan* provides a framework for the future growth of the corridor. The following chapters outline a strategy for preserving the traditional neighborhood character, protecting its unique and historical identity, serving the needs of the surrounding community and maintaining the Avenue as a competitive and commercially viable place for business.

This *Plan* defines a future direction for the corridor and provides recommendations to help guide neighborhood change, while protecting the adjoining residential neighborhood. The *Plan* outlines detailed concepts for key focus areas and recommendations for land use, zoning, historic preservation, urban design and public space, parking, retail/marketing, and implementation strategies. The principal objective of the *Plan* is to protect the unique identity of the corridor, and capture its potential as a lasting amenity for the community and for the region.

1.1 The Study Area

This planning effort initially encompassed the length of the Mt. Vernon Avenue corridor from Braddock Road on the south to W. Glebe Road on the north, including the neighborhoods known as Del Ray, Mt. Jefferson and Warwick Village. During the course of the planning effort, the study area was focused, as follows:

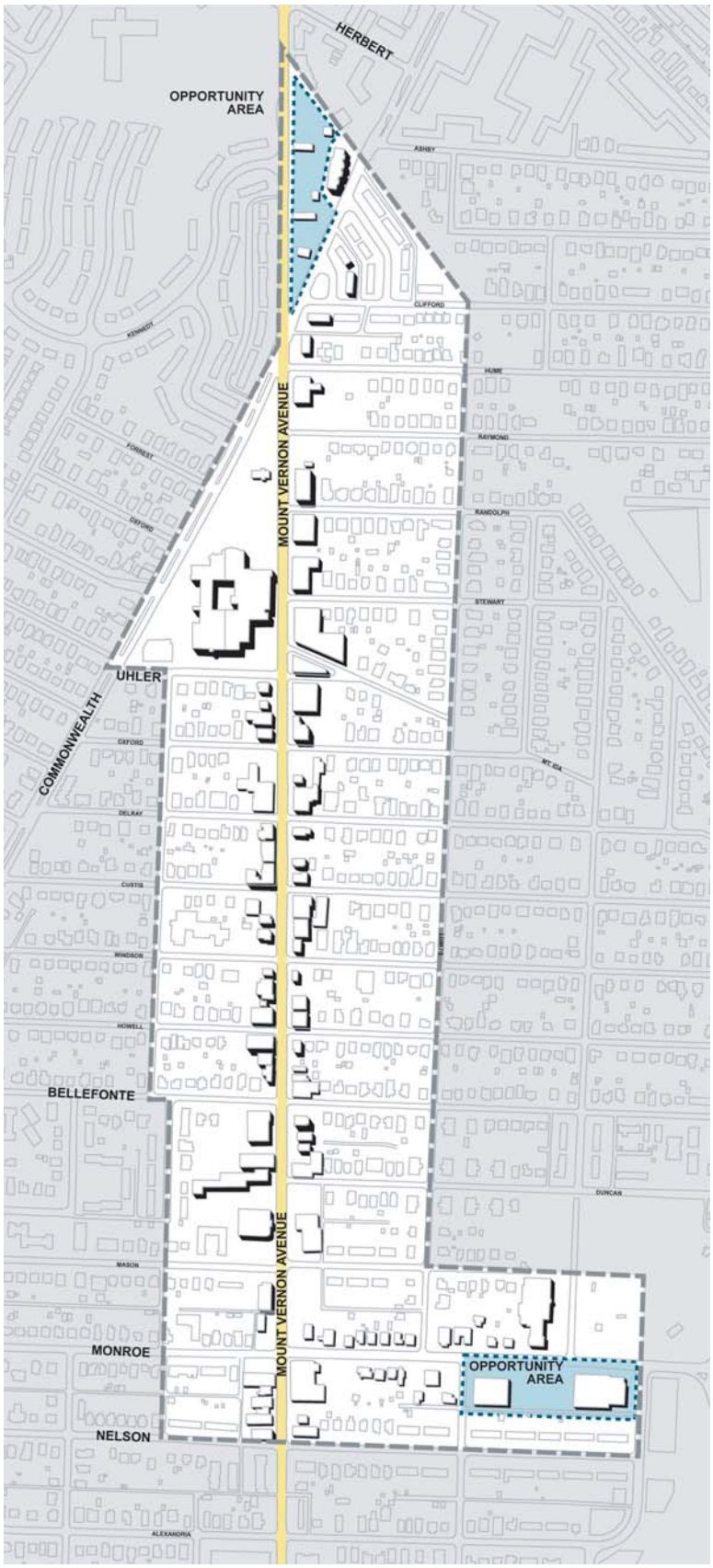


Figure 1.1 The Study Area

- Primary study area along the Avenue between Nelson Avenue and Herbert Street—this area is further defined into focus areas discussed later.

- Two opportunity areas:

  Mt. Vernon Avenue north of Commonwealth Avenue

  Monroe Avenue east from Mt. Vernon Avenue to Route 1

The two opportunity areas have a direct interaction with the primary area and the adjoining neighborhoods. Activity and changes within these areas will likely have an impact on the business core of Mt. Vernon Avenue. The section of Mt. Vernon Avenue to the south, between Luray Avenue and Braddock Road, is a stable residential area, where little change is anticipated. This *Plan* focuses on the primary study area, with recommendations for specific properties within the opportunity areas.

1.2 Mt. Vernon Avenue Work Group

The Mt. Vernon Avenue Work Group (Work Group) was created by the City of Alexandria in the spring of 2003 to advise the City on the planning of Mt. Vernon Avenue. The Work Group is comprised of community stakeholders including business owners, property owners, residents, and City officials. The group has met on a regular basis to discuss its vision for the future of the Avenue as well as alternative concepts and recommended actions to guide its vision. In addition, several open public meetings have been held to elicit input from the broader community.

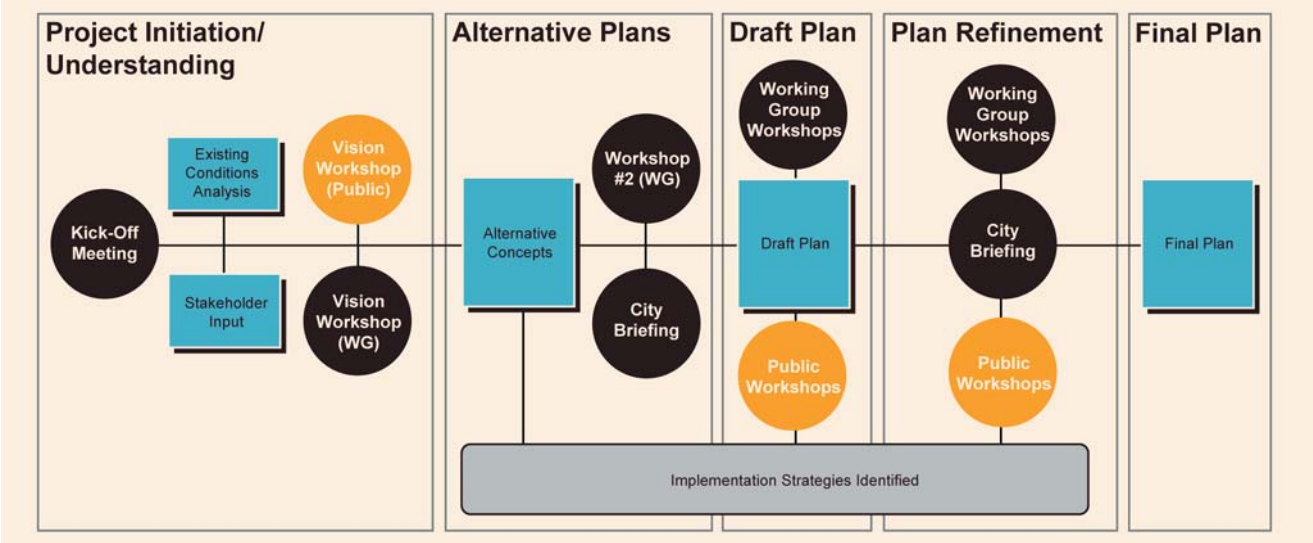


Figure 1.2 **Planning Process Diagram**

1.3 Planning Process

The planning process for Mt. Vernon Avenue was conducted in five phases (See Figure 1.2). First, the City planning team examined existing conditions of the Avenue by conducting site visits, analyzing physical and market conditions, and interviewing a number of key stakeholders. The results of the existing conditions analysis are included in Chapter 2.0 of the *Plan*. As part of the analysis process, there were two Work Group meetings and a Public Workshop held on June 25, 2003 to discuss the existing conditions and identify key opportunities and constraints for planning the Avenue.

With the analysis of the area, specific study was made of the retail market conditions, the parking resources along the corridor, and the form and character of the built environment. With the retail market analysis, the existing conditions were evaluated and the potential for additional demand for retail space in the future was determined. The parking study included an evaluation of the existing on-street parking supply, identification of underutilized parking lots and their potential for shared parking, as well as the future demand for parking. Analysis of the form of existing buildings provides the basis for recommendations on the desired form of infill development. During the second phase, the planning team developed alternative concept plans for the Avenue. These concept plans were discussed with the Work Group on October 2, 2003 and November 13, 2003. They were then presented to the public on December 3, 2003 and the City Council on February 2, 2004. The planning team took the comments based on the input from both the Work Group and public and developed a *Draft Plan*.

Two subcommittees of Work Group members were formed to study the retail/marketing and parking issues in greater depth. These groups met several times in February and March 2004 to discuss and develop specific approaches and recommendations for the retail/marketing and parking strategies, and later, shared their recommendations with the full Work Group. This information formed the basis for the recommended retail and marketing, and parking strategies, outlined later in this *Plan*.

With input from the Work Group, the *Plan* was further developed and refined to present more detailed recommendations for the study area including:

- Overall Concept Plan
- Land Use Plan
- Recommendations for Opportunity Sites
- Streetscape Enhancements
- Parking Strategies
- Retail/Marketing Strategies
- Historic Preservation
- Affordable Housing
- Building Form and Design
- Zoning Recommendations

1.4 Mission

A subcommittee of Work Group members crafted a mission statement to guide the vision and implementation of the *Plan* that was later endorsed and adopted by the entire Work Group. The mission reads:

Mt. Vernon Avenue is a vibrant and welcoming Main Street that reflects the surrounding neighborhoods' diversity, integrity and small town charm.
The Avenue is comprised of enthusiastic, successful and responsible community partners. We offer an eclectic and friendly living, working and shopping environment for Alexandrians and visitors alike.

1.5 Guiding Principles

The guiding principles were developed through extensive input from the Work Group and key community stakeholders to define the vision and provide a framework for the future development of Mt. Vernon Avenue. The guiding principles of the *Plan* are to:

- **Preserve existing historic scale and character**
- **Protect and enhance Mt. Vernon Avenue as a vibrant commercial corridor**
- **Encourage and support mixed-use development**
- **Celebrate the "Town of Potomac Historic District"**
- **Preserve and protect existing residential areas**
- **Promote partnerships**
- **Enhance public spaces**
- **Provide convenient parking and transportation solutions to support retail growth**
- **Encourage independent retail**
- **Capitalize on the neighborhood arts community**
- **Provide alternative multi-modal transportation linkages**

Avenue Characteristics 2.0

2.1 The Study Area

Within the study area, the *Plan* identifies three focus areas along the Avenue located between Herbert Street on the north and Nelson Avenue on the south. These focus areas were defined with the Work Group during the initial site analysis phase, by distinguishing the unique physical and economic characteristics of each focus area. These focus areas provide a way to define specific recommendations and organize the Avenue into manageable sections, relative to their characteristics.

The focus areas from north to south are:

- Commonwealth District, extending from Herbert Street to Uhler Avenue;
- Historic Core, the six block area from Uhler Avenue south to Bellefonte Avenue; and,
- Monroe Gateway, extending generally from Bellefonte Avenue south to Nelson Avenue, but also including the Giant grocery store and CVS pharmacy sites located on Monroe Avenue, and the small commercial district on the west side of Mt. Vernon Avenue at Luray Avenue.

While not in the detailed study area, the section of Mt. Vernon Avenue south to Braddock Road and north to W. Glebe Road are an integral part of the Mt. Vernon Avenue corridor.

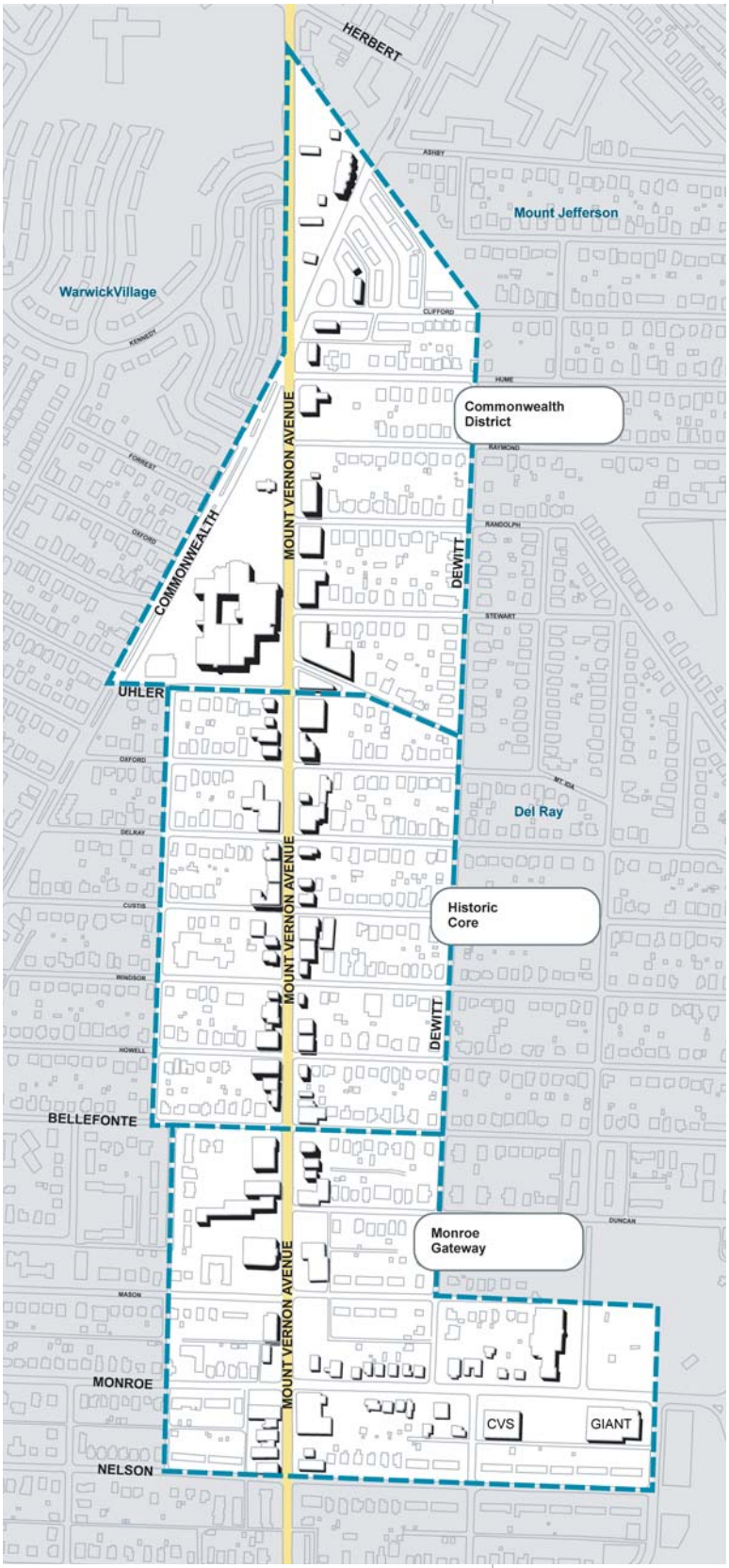


Figure 2.1 Focus Areas

Commonwealth District

The north end of the study area, between Herbert Street and Uhler Avenue, has a distinct character based upon its variety of uses, scale and character of the streetscape. It functions as a transition area between the pedestrian-oriented, traditional urban form of the Historic Core area and the more automobile-oriented form of the street and properties to the north. Neighborhoods in this area include Del Ray, Mt. Jefferson and Warwick Village.

North of Commonwealth Avenue, on the west side of the Avenue, the predominant land use is residential, with a mix of townhouse and multifamily units. With the exception of the high-rise Calvert Apartments further to the north, the scale of the residential is generally two-story. On the eastern side of the Avenue is a series of underutilized and vacant properties. Existing land uses in this area include two taxicab companies and two small restaurants, with street frontage surface parking. This eastern area has been identified in the *Plan* as a redevelopment area, known as the "Triangle Site" with a vision for redevelopment that is defined in Section 4.3.

Commonwealth District Character

South of Commonwealth Avenue, the existing land uses include a mix of commercial, residential, and institutional, including the Mt. Vernon Community School and Recreation Center and the office building occupied by the City's Department of Human Services. The development pattern for this section of the Avenue is unique in that the community school and Colasanto Park extend along the entire western side of the Avenue. Retail, personal service, restaurant and office uses are located along the eastern side of the Avenue. With the exception of a few second-story residential units, the only residential use in this part of the Commonwealth District is a four-story apartment building, located at the north-east corner of Randolph and Mt. Vernon Avenues. A vacant property, proposed for development as residential or live/work use, is located in the same block, at the southeast corner of Raymond and Mt. Vernon Avenues.

Historic Core

The Historic Core is the area between Uhler Avenue and Bellefonte Avenue and includes the portion of Mt. Vernon Avenue located within the Town of Potomac National Register Historic District. This area is characterized by small retail buildings interspersed with office and residential uses that have maintained a traditional Main Street feel throughout the years. This Historic Core is considered to be the heart of Mt. Vernon Avenue. Neighborhoods in this

Historic Core Character

area include Del Ray and Mt. Jefferson. This portion of the Avenue was established as a national historic district in 1992, and has come to take on a special character that is unique to the region and distinct from other, nearby Main Street corridors. The characteristics of this focus area include a quaint visual appeal and walkable scale. With few exceptions, the "street wall," defined by the buildings that line the street and the streetscape, is visually consistent, creating a pleasant pedestrian environment on the Avenue.

Monroe Gateway

The Monroe Gateway area is a diverse section of the Avenue, comprised of a wide range of uses including service uses, automobile service stations, automobile dealerships, small retail shops, restaurants, offices and residences. It extends from Bellefonte Avenue south to Nelson Avenue and includes a small shopping center located at the corner of Luray and Mt. Vernon Avenues. This area includes the two properties developed with a Giant grocery store and CVS pharmacy on Monroe Avenue, between Mt. Vernon Avenue and Route 1 (Jefferson Davis Highway).

Monroe Avenue currently provides a direct link to Route 1, a major transportation corridor. Monroe Avenue and Route 1 will be significantly changed by the planned reconstruction of the Route 1 / Monroe Avenue Bridge that is likely to begin in 2006 and by the development of Potomac Yard. The bridge will be straightened to directly connect Route 1 north and south, and the access to Monroe Avenue will be relocated through Potomac Yard's Main Street, thus transforming the connection between Route 1 and the Del Ray neighborhood. This realignment will provide new development opportunities on the west side of Route 1 that are described in Section 4.3 of the *Plan*.

Monroe Gateway Character

2.2 History

The Del Ray and St. Elmo sections of the Town of Potomac were platted in 1894 by developers from Ohio. Originally, the grid layout of the subdivisions consisted of long blocks oriented in an east-west fashion to maximize access to transportation networks, including the Washington Alexandria Turnpike (now Route 1), the Washington Old Dominion Railroad to the east and the Washington, Alexandria and Mt. Vernon Electric Railroad (built between 1892 and 1904) along the western boundary of the town. In the late 1880s, a ceremonial route was envisioned to transport visitors from Washington, D.C. to Mount Vernon through northern Virginia:

The road was to have begun at the Virginia end of a memorial bridge from Washington, to run along a path to the present day Ridge Road [in Arlington County] and Mt. Vernon Avenue, through Alexandria to Mt. Vernon, ending at Washington's tomb…The road as planned was never built, although a portion of the route still carries the name Mt. Vernon Avenue.[1]

The town was incorporated in 1908 and included vacant land, the "notorious" St. Asaph Race Track, residences and commercial uses.

Between 1910 and the 1920s, the Town of Potomac grew into a self-sufficient community. By 1925 it had a combination Town Hall and Fire House, a public high school with a gymnasium, a fire department 'with motorized apparatus and two volunteer companies of fifty members each' and a complete sewer system connected to every house in town.[2]

Residents of the town commuted by railroad and electric rail to Washington, where many people worked for the federal government. Residents also worked at the Potomac Yard, a major railroad switching

1. *Excerpt from Robert L. Crabill, "History of the Town of Potomac", 1982, pp. 11-12.*

2. *ibid, pp. 9.*

Artist's rendering of Mount Vernon Avenue circa 1915. *Watercolor by Alice Kale.*

Town of Potomac Town Hall

Sampson Collection, Alexandria Library

station located adjacent to the Washington Alexandria Turnpike. The Town of Potomac remained independent for only a short period of time until it was annexed by the City of Alexandria in 1930.

Originally more of a residential street, Mt. Vernon Avenue evolved over time into a commercial corridor. During the 1950s and 60s, property values in the area were in decline. A turnaround began in the early 1970s, when younger, more affluent homebuyers started to move in from outlying areas. Under the Community Develpment Block Grant Program, the City initiated a revitalization effort in the late 1970s with the development of the Mount Vernon Avenue Revitalization Plan. Revitalization efforts continued over the next two decades with a series of public actions, including infrastructure improvements, a loan subsidy program to assist neighborhood businesses and to encourage business growth along the Avenue, a neighborhood conservation program involving housing rehabilitation loans and grants, home ownership assistance and the removal of blighting influences, and the location of a major City agency, the Department of Human Services, on the Avenue. To recognize the historic character of the area, designation of the Town of Potomac as a National Register Historic District took place in the early 1990s. In 1996, the City funded the establishment and work of the Potomac West Alliance, a public/private partnership of area businesses, residents, civic and business organizations, with the City, to coordinate City and community economic development activities and to engage in other activities to improve the Potomac West area. That organization continued until 2000.

In recent times, this area has continued to grow and evolve. Through the combined efforts of the City, the Potomac West Business Association and active citizen associations, the community continues to attract new residents and businesses.

Many homes in Del Ray were constructed between 1910 and 1920. The newly-constructed home above was for sale in 1920

2.3 Demographic Characteristics

The neighborhoods surrounding the study area, including Del Ray, Warwick Village and Mt. Jefferson[1], have experienced a significant change in demographics over the past 15 years. Generally speaking, the area has become attractive to urban professionals, with higher educational levels, more income and fewer children.

1. Census Tracts 12.02, 13.00 and 14.00

While the area experienced a 6.8% loss in population during the 1990s, the number of households increased by 3.8%. Thus, the average household size has been reduced, from 2.4 persons per household in 1990 to 2.17 persons in 2000 (though still higher than the city-wide average of 2.04 persons per household). The number of single-person households rose by 21.3% during the 1990s to represent 38.5% of all households. It should be noted that the number of housing units in the area remained constant during the time period; the increase in the number of households is attributable to the reduction in the number of vacant units, from 6% of the housing stock in 1990 to 2.5% of the stock in 2000.

During the 1990s, an increasing number of homes were purchased and renovated by urban professionals, with the percentage of owner-occupied homes rising by 13.6% to encompass 53.1% of all households, substantially higher than the 40% owner-occupancy experienced city-wide.

Almost all of the 6.8% population loss can be attributed to a loss in minority residents. Overall, the minority population in the neighborhood declined modestly as a percentage of the total population between 1990 and 2000 (from 39.4% of the population to 36.8%). However, a significant number of Black residents (1,028 persons) left the neighborhood over the 10 year period, reducing that population by 33.3% from the 1990 count of 3,085 persons. At the same time, the Hispanic population increased by 295 persons (or 34.6%).

The educational levels of residents also increased substantially, with the percentage of residents over 25 years of age with a college degree increasing by 31.8% between 1990 and 2000.

In 2000, the average household income was $80,069, about 4.8 % higher than the $76,370 average for all City households. This is a substantial reversal from 1990, where the average income of all City households at $52,581 was 12.6% higher than the neighborhoods' average of $46,684, and from earlier decades when there was a much larger disparity between incomes of neighborhood residents and those of City residents as a whole, with neighborhood residents having significantly lower incomes.

The increased vibrancy of the area as a mixed-use urban neighborhood has been attracting new residents, who are generally single, with higher educational levels and higher incomes—those most able to afford the rapidly rising housing prices.

2.4 Existing Land Use

Mt. Vernon Avenue consists of a dynamic mix of land uses and building functions. (see Figure 2.2) Currently, the predominant land uses involve a variety of commercial activities, including retail and office uses. The variation of establishments and restaurants, ranging from small antique stores and coffee shops to full-service restaurants, offers residents and visitors convenience-type shopping and entertainment opportunities. Typical office uses consist of small businesses such as professional services, printing, banking, graphic arts and other enterprise support services.

Service uses, such as Kesterson Plumbing and Heating, R&B Heating and Air Conditioning, and Fannon Printing are also located on the Avenue. There are several large institutional uses on Mt. Vernon Avenue, including Mt. Vernon Community School and Recreation Center, George Washington Middle School, the Salvation Army and the City of Alexandria Department of Human Services. Automobile-oriented uses are also prevalent in the southern part of the Avenue and include two car dealerships, two gas stations with car repair service.

Though residential uses surround the Mt. Vernon Avenue commercial area, residential uses along the Avenue are generally located north of Commonwealth Avenue and south of Nelson Avenue. These include single-family town homes and multifamily apartments. A limited number of residential structures also exist between Commonwealth and Nelson Avenues, including both single-family detached units and residential apartments above commercial uses. Several single-family detached and multifamily units are also located along Monroe Avenue.

Figure 2.3 provides a summary of the land uses that are adjacent to the Avenue.

As part of the planning process, the Work Group identified a series of opportunity sites. (see Figure 2.4) The opportunity sites are properties that are either vacant, underutilized or have a propensity to change over time. See Section 4.3 for a list of the sites and recommendations to guide future short and long term changes for each site.

Use Type		Units
Residential	493	Dus
Retail	151,000	SF
Restaurants	45,250	SF
Office	163,500	SF
Institutional	371,500	SF
Auto Oriented	65,000	SF

Figure 2.3 Land Use Summary

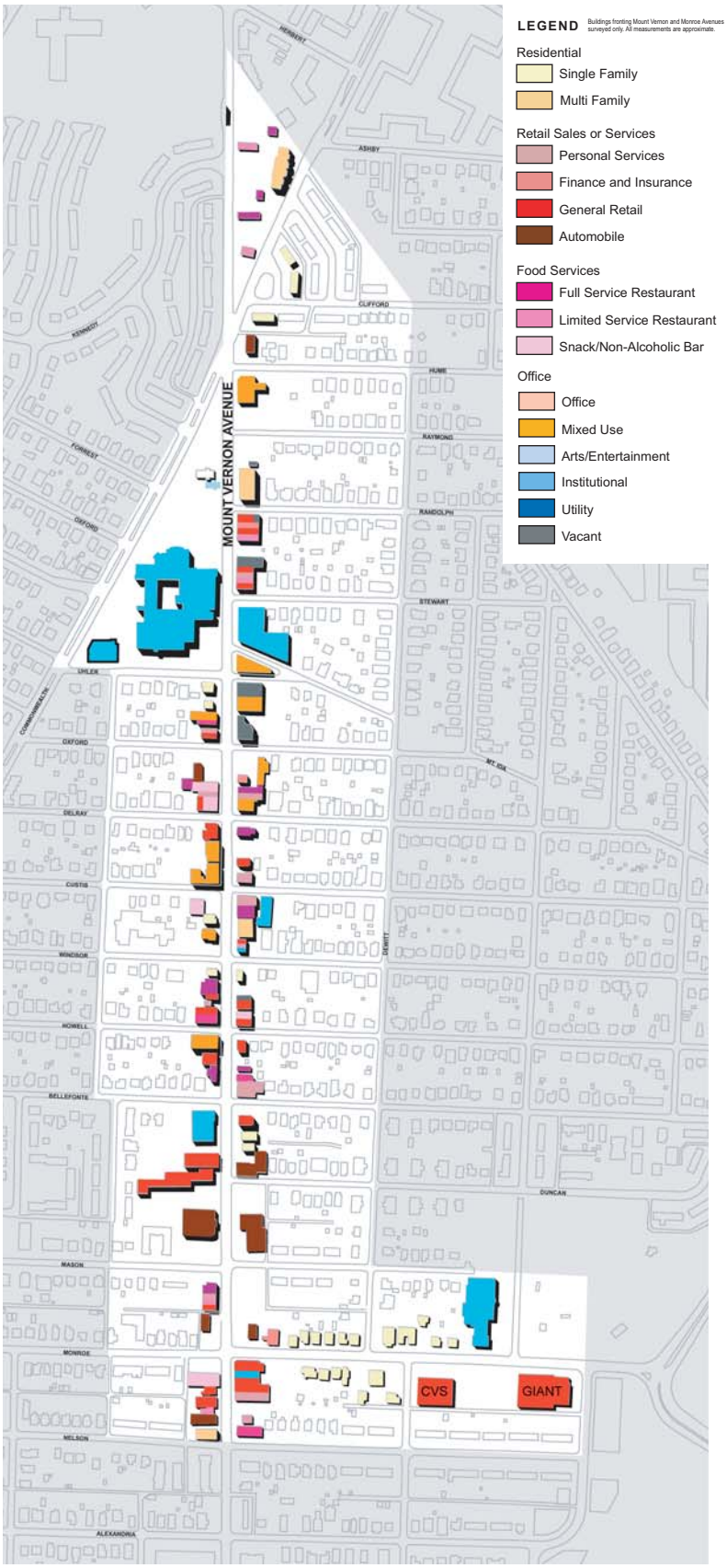


Figure 2.2 Land Use

Figure 2.4 **Opportunity Sites**

2.5 Existing Zoning

The predominant zoning of the commercially developed properties fronting Mt. Vernon Avenue is CL/Commercial Low. The purpose of the CL zone is to provide for small scale retail and service uses that are pedestrian-oriented and typically serve the neighborhood. Permitted uses include residences, business and professional offices, retail shops and personal service uses such as beauty salons. Special use permit uses include day care center, massage establishment, outdoor garden center, restaurant, and social service use.

Along the Avenue, the publicly-owned institutional properties are not zoned for commercial use. These include the Mt. Vernon Community School, zoned R-2-5/Single and Two Family zone; and the Mt. Vernon Recreational Center and Colasanto Park properties zoned POS/Public Open Space. The residences between Nelson and Luray Avenues are zoned RB/Townhouse zone, and the residential neighborhoods that abut the corridor south of Luray Avenue and north of Commonwealth Avenue are primarily zoned RB and R-2-5.

Prior to the adoption of the 1992 Potomac West Small Area Plan and the 1992 City-wide comprehensive rezoning, the commercial properties along Mt. Vernon Avenue were zoned to allow a significantly larger scale of development than the neighborhood (and the character of the neighborhood) could support -- a 3.0 Floor Area Ratio (FAR), with a 150 foot building height. This zoning was immediately adjacent to low and medium density residential neighborhoods.

Recognizing that this scale was incompatible with, and would have substantial impact on the small lot, 2-3 story pattern of existing development, the zoning was changed to include an FAR of .75 for lots with an area of 5,500 square feet or less

for nonresidential uses, and .5 (up to .75, with special use permit approval) for lots larger than 5,500 square feet. Maximum residential FAR is .75, with the density not to exceed a maximum of 27 dwelling units per acre for multifamily uses or 22 units per acre for townhouse developments. The building height was reduced to 35 feet for a flat roof and up to 45 feet for a pitched roof.

The maximum allowable FAR of up to .75 was identified in this planning process as a key issue that constrained the ability to have infill development consistent with the existing building pattern, particularly in the Historic Core. A number of existing buildings along the Avenue are already developed beyond this FAR, including a one-story structure and a number of historically-contributing buildings. The sections of the Avenue that create the strongest traditional main street character have a consistent facade of two stories or more. The current FAR is too low to acheive this ideal building form. In addition to the preferred two-story height of buildings, a number of lots are small and may not be feasible to develop or redevelop at a .75 FAR when designed to modern building code requirements.

In addition, with the adoption of the CL District in 1992 a purposeful effort was made to focus the area for more pedestrian-friendly uses. Automobile-oriented uses, such drive through windows, gas stations, auto sales, and services, were removed from the listing of allowable uses. Existing uses were made noncomplying and no new ones can be established.

2.6 Open and Public Spaces

Given the existing development pattern along Mt. Vernon Avenue within the study area, there are few open spaces and public gathering spaces. There are several large public park/open spaces on the edges of the study area. Colasanto Park (named for the late Alexandria resident—Nicholas Colasanto—who was the city manager of Alexandria during the late 1940s and served five terms on the City Council) is located north of the Mt. Vernon Community School and Recreation Center. The park includes the triangular green, open space, the swimming pool and tennis courts. Simpson Stadium Park is another large park located just beyond the boundaries of the study area on Monroe Avenue, near Route 1. The 13-acre park includes basketball and tennis courts, a playground, jogging/walking trail, demonstration gardens, baseball fields, a dog exercise area, and restrooms. Ball fields are located at Braddock Field adjacent to the George Washington Middle School, at the intersection of Mt. Vernon Avenue and Braddock Road. A series of small neighborhood parks abut the study area, including the Mt. Jefferson Park and Greenway, Mt. Ida Greenway, Charles W. Hill Park, St. Asaph Park, and Mason Avenue Mini Park.

While not part of this planning process, the community recently identified, in response to the Open Space Steering Committee's report to City Council on priority open space sites, several sites in the neighborhood that could be acquired and preserved as open space. In order to be designated by City Council as open space sites, the site(s) must be nominated for official consideration and acceptance. None of the following sites have undergone this process to date. Of the sites suggested, only one is located within the study area: the vacant property located on the east side of Mt. Vernon Avenue between Custis and Del Ray Avenues that is periodically used for community events, including the Art on the Avenue festival held in October each year.

Colasanto Park

Mt. Vernon Recreation Center

The Work Group has identified this property as a potential opportunity site for infill development. (See Section 4.3 for details.) The other sites identified by the community, though outside the boundaries of the *Plan*, are located at the:

- Intersection of Del Ray Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue
- Intersection of W. Mt. Ida Avenue and Hickory Street
- Intersection of Russell Road and Rosecrest Avenue
- Intersection of W. Glebe Road and Mt. Vernon Avenue
- Intersection of Howell Avenue and Jefferson Davis Highway (Route 1)
- Intersection of Lloyds Lane and Russell Road
- Property within Potomac Yard

The community meets informally at shops, restaurants, and along the Avenue. Community events are held in a variety of locations, including on the Avenue, at the Mt. Vernon Avenue Community School, the Mt. Vernon Recreation Center and at Colasanto Park. The most formalized public gathering space along the Avenue is the public parking lot located at the corner of Oxford and Mt. Vernon Avenues. From April to December, the Del Ray Farmers' Market is held on Saturday mornings. First Thursday events sponsored by the Potomac West Business Association also use this space during summer months. The staging of other annual events, such as Art on the Avenue, also occurs there, as do other special community events.

Work Group and community members have expressed a strong desire for a town square that could accommodate small and large gatherings. Several locations for a town square were evaluated. See Section 4.3 for the details of the evaluation and recommended location.

2.7 Affordable Housing

The need for affordable housing citywide is a critical issue facing the City as a whole. Increasing property values and attractive market conditions are rapidly pricing the average Alexandrian out of the housing market. Between 1998 and 2004, assessed values for single family homes increased 112.1% in the Potomac West area[1] versus 99.6% city-wide. A similar pattern has occurred with condominium properties where assessed values rose faster in Potomac West (176.8%) than in the City as a whole (111.7%).

In the Potomac West area alone, the number of single-family homes and condominium units assessed at less than $100,000 dropped from 1,055 in 1997 to 47 in 2004. As depicted in Figure 2.5, the number of homes assessed at $250,000 and over skyrocketed from 429 in 1997 to 4,595 in 2004, with very little new construction activity. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find affordable housing in the neighborhood. Thus, the provision of affordable housing on Mt. Vernon Avenue is a critical component of the City's goal to ensure that housing is available and affordable to residents at all income levels.

1. The Potomac West area is one of the City's 14 planning areas, encompassing this study area as well as portions of the surrounding area

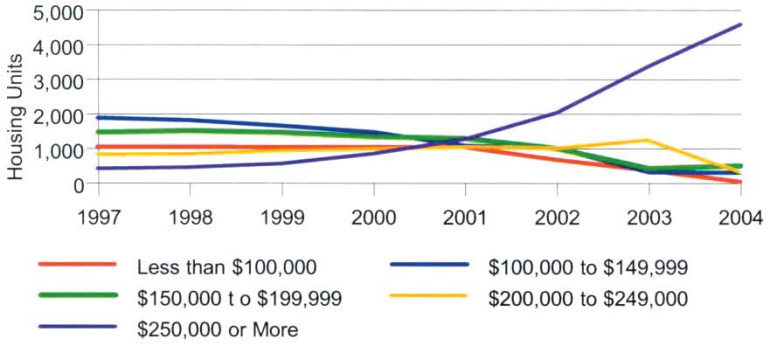


Figure 2.5 Median Assessment for Single Family Homes and Residential Condiminiums *Source: Department of Real Estate Assessments*

In 1993, the City adopted an affordable housing policy to address many key concerns, including the high cost of housing in the City, the loss of previously affordable market rate housing, insufficient federal expenditures for housing, and a need for rental housing appropriately sized for families.

The City's Affordable Housing Policy was last updated in November 2002 and defines affordable housing as housing that a household can afford without paying more than 30 percent of its income for rent or 32 percent of its income for mortgage payments. The maximum income limits for City homeownership assistance programs currently ranges from $68,700 for one or two persons to $79,500 for three or more persons. The maximum sales price limit for City homeownership assistance programs is currently $370,800. With the rising values in the Potomac West area, it is increasingly difficult to find housing at a price where the prospective purchaser can participate in the City's homeownership assistance programs.

For new rental housing, the City has a Set-Aside Rental Unit Program. The City arranges for set-aside rental units in new developments and monitors these programs to ensure that the units are rented to persons within the specified income limits and at the specified rents. The maximum income limits for this program are based on the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development criterion of 60 percent of area median income. At this writing, these income levels range from $36,540 for a single person household to $68,880 for a household of eight or more people. Maximum gross rent limits for the Set-Aside Rental Unit Program are based on the Federal Low Income Tax Credit Program. Rents allowed in the City for households at 60 percent of the median income range from $913 for an efficiency unit to $1,670 for a five-bedroom unit. These figures, along with the City's Affordable Housing Policy, are reviewed and updated from time to time.

2.8 Streetscape

The City of Alexandria implemented streetscape improvements over 15 years ago, including utility undergrounding, new sidewalks, street trees and street signs, along the Mt. Vernon Avenue frontage from Arlandria south to Bellefonte Avenue. Recent work has focused on the last phase of the undergrounding of utilities from Bellefonte Avenue to Nelson Avenue that will be completed this fall. In addition, the City recently implemented crosswalk improvements at each intersection along the Avenue within the Historic Core area, between Uhler and Bellefonte Avenues.

While the City has committed resources over time to improve Mt. Vernon Avenue, some outstanding streetscape issues remain. Members of the Work Group and the community have expressed concern about an insufficient level of lighting on the sidewalks. Cobra-head light fixtures light the street but do not, in many cases, provide adequate illumination of the sidewalk. As a consequence, residents have expressed safety concerns and strongly support the installation of pedestrian scale lighting along the Avenue.

There is a discontinuity of street tree planting on portions of the Avenue, with some portions completely lacking in street trees. A number of the existing trees have reached maturity and may need to be replaced in the near future. There is a similar lack of or discontinuity of street furniture, including benches, trash cans and bus shelters. With regard to sidewalk paving, many property owners did not participate in the City's offer many years ago to extend the sidewalk pavers onto their private property, when the original

Lack of trees

Poor quality pavers

Lack of street trees and amenities

Figure 2.6 Trail Map with Mount Vernon Avenue Study Area shown in yellow.

streetscape improvements were made. Thus, there are a number of instances in the main retail core of the Avenue where the area of private property between the building wall and the property line consists of asphalt or concrete, rather than pavers or landscaping.

The streetscape along the entire length of the Avenue varies. While the Avenue has seen many recent improvements, it requires maintenance to ensure that it continues to embody its present character. Recommendations to strengthen and improve the streetscape are detailed in Section 6.5 of the *Plan*.

2.9 Pedestrian Circulation

During the planning process, community and Work Group members have stressed their desire to enhance and strengthen the existing pedestrian connections along Mt. Vernon Avenue to reinforce the primacy of the pedestrian over automobiles, to increase pedestrian safety and to encourage people to walk to the Avenue.

The pedestrian experience along the length of the Avenue varies. While past streetscape improvements made in conjunction with the City's program of placing overhead utility lines underground have resulted in attractive public sidewalks, with street trees, many private properties that abut the sidewalk have not been similarly improved. These semi-public spaces should be improved with pavers and/or landscaping that will enhance the street frontage. The final section of the public program from Bellefonte to Nelson Avenues will be completed this year, with streetscape improvements to follow. In other sections of the Avenue, additional improvements to screen parking or on-site storage, and widen sidewalks, should be undertaken to enhance the pedestrian environment and encourage people to walk comfortably along the Avenue.

In addition to pedestrian circulation along the street, Mt. Vernon Avenue has access to both local and regional trail networks. (See Figure 2.6.) These include off-street and on-street bike trails, out-of-city bike trails, historic trails and future trail connections. There is a concentration of trail access points and the junction of Mt. Vernon Avenue and Braddock Road, and there are opportunities to enhance access to trails to the north and the east of the Avenue. Recent streetscape improvements along the Avenue include bulb-outs designed to slow down traffic along the Avenue and provide a safe area for pedestrians to wait to cross the street. Section 4.3 for recommended improvements designed to enhance and promote pedestrian circulation.

2.10 Vehicular Circulation

Mt. Vernon Avenue is a two-way street along its entire length with a single lane of traffic in each direction from Braddock Road north to Raymond Avenue. The number of travel lanes increases to four between Raymond Avenue and West Glebe Road, with a free flow right in the southbound direction where the four lanes transition down to two lanes. This change in roadway size dramatically alters the character of this northern portion of the study area, and has raised issues related to vehicle speeding and pedestrian crossing safety. In this .39-mile (about 2,060 feet) stretch from W. Glebe Road to Commonwealth Avenue, there are no controlled intersections to help reduce travel speeds and to provide opportunity for safe pedestrian crossing.

On-street parking is generally permitted on both sides of Mt. Vernon Avenue from Braddock Road to Commonwealth Avenue, except in front of Mt. Vernon Elementary and George Washington Middle Schools. The parking is generally signed for 2-hour parking (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) to encourage turnover and

availability for retail customers. There is currently no on-street parking in the four lane section north of Raymond Avenue.

2.11 Transit

The Braddock Road Metro Station is the nearest Metrorail stop to Mt. Vernon Avenue, with access to both the Yellow and Blue Lines. The proximity of Metrorail adds great value for area residents who use it for leisure or commuting. Existing bus routes along Mt. Vernon Avenue are currently limited to WMATA Metrobus service. These bus routes include:

- 10A—Hunting Towers to the Pentagon via Crystal City
- 10B—Hunting Towers to Ballston via Shirlington
- 10E—AM rush north to Pentagon (return travels on Route 1), PM rush heading south (return travels on Route 1)
- 10P—Braddock Road Metro Station to Crystal City via South Glebe Road and Potomac Yard Shopping Center

During peak and non-peak hours on weekdays and Saturdays, headways along Mt. Vernon Avenue average about 15 minutes. The 10 E bus has a shorter, 10 minute headway, however, it provides limited weekday service from the intersection of Mt. Vernon Avenue and Monroe Avenue to the Pentagon, traveling northbound in the morning and southbound in the afternoon. In addition, the service provided by the 10P tends to overlap the 10 A and 10 B, traveling within one or two minutes of both buses, which generally have 30 minute headways. This overlap creates service inefficiencies leading to gaps in service and uncertainty among bus riders as to the bus schedules.

The City of Alexandria's bus system, DASH, is currently planning for an expanded maintenance facility that will permit the agency to acquire new buses in future years. The new facility, anticipated to be completed in 2008, will allow DASH to initiate service on Mt. Vernon Avenue, providing the opportunity for expanded routes, including a loop route between Potomac Yard, the Braddock Road Metro Station, and the Avenue, and for more frequent headways. It is anticipated that the DASH service could likely replace the service currently offered by WMATA's 10P route. Based upon demand, 10- to 15- minute peak headways are anticipated, with 20- to 30- off-peak headways. Although the non-peak headways will increase slightly, as a practical matter, the service will reduce existing inefficiencies by providing increased schedule reliability, thus promoting bus ridership to the Avenue.

2.12 Parking

Consistent with other urban neighborhoods whose development generally predates the use of the automobile as a primary means of transportation, parking is often mentioned as a concern by residents and business owners in Del Ray. The perception of an insufficient amount of parking is widely held and causes neighborhood concern when new businesses seek to locate on Mt. Vernon Avenue or existing businesses desire to expand their operations. Much of the area was developed with small, shallow lots that constrain the ability to provide parking for these businesses. The same development pattern exists on the nearby residential streets in Del Ray, with many residences built with no or limited off-street parking. As is the trend citywide, a substantial number of residents in Del Ray own more vehicles than can be accommodated on their property, with additional vehicles parked on the street. As a result, there is competition for parking spaces between residents and business owners, their employees and customers.

As a consequence, parking is often a concern by the community. To address these concerns, the Work Group, assisted by staff, studied the current demand and utilization of parking on the Avenue, in the first block of streets that cross the Avenue, and several parking lots to evaluate parking supply, demand and make recommendations. See Section 5.2 and 5.3 of the *Plan* for a discussion of the parking study and recommended parking strategy.

2.13 Business Characteristics

The first Enterprise Zone in Northern Virginia was designated for the northeast section of the City of Alexandria in 1994. The boundaries of the Enterprise Zone extend from the City limits on the north, to a portion of Windsor Avenue on the south, the west side of Route 1 to the east, and portions of Russell Road and West Glebe Road to the west. The Zone consists of approximately 690 acres and represents 6.5% of the 10,048 total acres in the City. The commercial properties located in the Commonwealth District and a portion of the Historic Core are located in the Zone. The purpose of the Zone is to stimulate private investment and job opportunities by offering state and local incentives to businesses. The estimated number of total businesses in the Zone is 598, with approximately 70 new business licensed in 2002. The Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP) administers the Zone, and interested businesses should contact them for details about Zone incentives.

Although built for the requirements of a bygone era, Mt. Vernon Avenue's retail position remains competitive today as a location for shopping and dining in a small town atmosphere. The Avenue's small town feel is reflected in its retail and restaurant businesses, most of which are independently owned and operated. Several of the Avenue's businesses have a regional reputation, which has helped the area gain more recognition in recent years among many Washington-area consumers.

Figure 2.6 **Mt. Vernon Avenue Restaurants, 2004**

Restaurant	Address
Fireflies	1501 Mt. Vernon
Al's Steakhouse	1504 Mt. Vernon
Mancini's Cafe	1508 Mt. Vernon
Mt. Vernon Deli	1606 Mt. Vernon
Los Amigos	1905 Mt. Vernon
Evening Star Cafe	2000 Mt. Vernon
Sundae Times	2003-A Mt. Vernon
Thai Peppers	2018 Mt. Vernon
St. Elmo's Coffee Pub	2300 Mt. Vernon
Del Ray Dreamery	2310 Mt. Vernon
Taqueria Poblano	2400-B Mt. Vernon
Caboose Bakery	2419 Mt. Vernon
Tsim Yung Chinese Food	2603 Mt. Vernon
Los Tios Grill	2615 Mt. Vernon
Georgio's Piatsa	3015 Mt. Vernon
Mandarin Inn	3045 Mt. Vernon

Figure 2.7 **Retail-oriented Businesses along Mt. Vernon Ave., 2004**

Type of Business	Quantity
Food Service (restaurants, etc.)	12
Misc. Shoppers' Goods	9
Salon	8
Housewares, etc.	8
Misc. Personal Services	7
Auto Sales and Service	7
Convenience/Food/Drugs	5
Apparel	4
Financial Services	4
Studio (dance, etc.)	3
Total	**67**

Note: Retail-Oriented businesses include restaurants, retail stores, and personal services that derive a significant share of business from walk-in clientele.

The Avenue has a mix of restaurant, retail and service businesses. With the restaurants, the food service options range from full table service restaurants, to quick-service and take-out establishments, to dessert-oriented businesses. These restaurants offer, on average, indoor seating for about 40 patrons. A few restaurants have outdoor seating as well. The current restaurants in the main commercial core are listed in Figure 2.6.

Non-restaurant businesses are also prevalent along the Avenue. Most of the Avenue's retail-oriented businesses are located in buildings with storefronts that face directly onto the street. These retail and personal service businesses range from household goods to vintage clothing.

As shown in Figure 2.7, food service is the most common retail-oriented category, with 12 restaurants and related establishments along the Avenue. Nine stores sell miscellaneous shoppers' goods (ranging from electronics to pottery to general merchandise), and eight sell housewares such as antiques, hardware, etc. The Avenue also contains eight beauty salons, the most common type of personal service establishment.

The Avenue's three focus areas, as identified in this *Plan*, have distinct characteristics regarding their business composition, as follows:

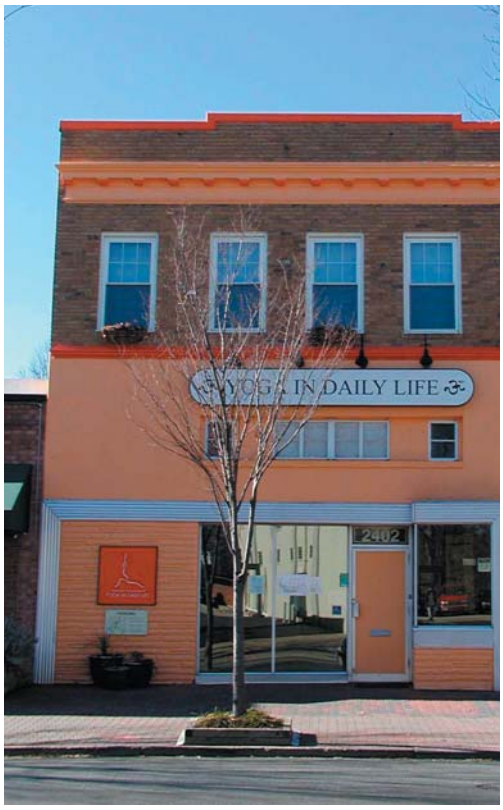
Alexandria Department of Human Services

Commonwealth District

In the Commonwealth District, commercial development exists only along the east side of the Avenue across from the Mt. Vernon Community School and Recreation Center properties. Consequently, the overall intensity of commercial activity is less than in the Core or in the Monroe Gateway areas, where retail exists on both sides of the street.

The south end of the Commonwealth District houses two institutional uses, the First Agape Baptist Community of Faith and the Alexandria Department of Human Services. Directly across from the Mt. Vernon School in the 2600 block, there are two strips of retail shops, containing nine retail businesses. A number of these shops have high business turnover. To the north, separated by an apartment building and two vacant parcels, is the underutilized one-acre site that currently contains SunTrust Bank and ASAP Printing & Mailing. The retail in this area lacks in continuity and retail character to be a successful part of the pedestrian retail experience in the long term.

Building in Commonwealth District



Multi-story retail and office space

Historic Core

The Avenue's Historic Core, in the 1900-2400 blocks of Mt. Vernon Avenue, contains the majority of corridor's retail and restaurant establishments. Of the 67 retail-oriented establishments noted in the preceding table, 37 are located within the Historic Core, including seven of the 12 restaurants and six of the eight salons.

Both sides of Mt. Vernon Avenue throughout the Historic Core are developed with buildings that are suitable for retail use, creating a continuous expanse of retail and restaurant activity through most of the six-block area.

Many other businesses, besides those that are retail-serving, are located within this area as well. Commercial buildings in the Core tend to be multi-story structures with retail-appropriate space on the ground level, and office space available on the upper stories. As a result, there is considerable business activity, in both retail and non-retail sectors. Figure 2.8 illustrates the overall business mix within the Historic Core area.

As shown, retail, restaurants and personal services combined constitute just over 40% of the total businesses located in the Historic Core, with the remainder consisting primarily of offices uses, such as professional service firms and non-profit organizations. Many of these non-retail establishments are located above retail stores, or in small-scale office buildings such as the Potomac Town Square office condominium at the northwest corner of Mt. Vernon and Custis Avenues.

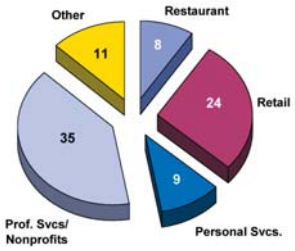


Figure 2.8 Historic Core Businesses by Category, 2004

Monroe Gateway

The Monroe Gateway area along Mt. Vernon Avenue has less intensive retail development than does the Core itself. Contributing to this lack of retail intensity is the cluster of auto sales and service uses between Monroe and Duncan Avenues, with two service stations and two recently renovated car dealerships. The two dealerships, Alexandria Hyundai and Audi of Alexandria, utilize a series of adjoining parcels on both sides of Mt. Vernon Avenue that combine to a size of over two acres.

In addition to the automotive businesses, the Monroe Gateway area is home to the Salvation Army Alexandria Corps headquarters (at the corner of Mt. Vernon and Bellefonte Avenues), and two non-retail contracting firms. Retail-oriented uses, in buildings similar to those found in the Historic Core, are interspersed with the automotive businesses and other non-retail establishments. The automobile dealerships and service uses interrupt the continuity of retail uses along this section of the Avenue, making it difficult to have an active retail environment.

Another important area within the Monroe Gateway is the section of Monroe Avenue running east of Mt. Vernon Avenue to Route 1. While this 1/3-mile stretch contains largely residential uses, it also houses a Burke & Herbert Bank, located near the Mt. Vernon Avenue intersection, as well as a Giant supermarket and CVS pharmacy situated on adjoining parcels with a shared parking area. The Giant supermarket is located in a 24,000 square foot building, considerably smaller than is common in the market today. As new grocery stores are provided on redevelopment parcels in other proximate areas of the City, there is concern about the long-term viability of this undersized store.

Two sizable institutional uses are also located along Monroe Avenue, the Alexandria Branch YMCA, and the St. Andrew & St. Margaret of Scotland Anglican Catholic Church. Both the YMCA and the church are located on the north side of the street, while the Giant and CVS are on the south side.

Varied uses make it difficult to activate a retail environment.

Retail Market

3.0

This chapter provides an analysis of existing market conditions, market projections through 2010, and outlines a strategy and recommendations to enhance the market.

3.1 Guiding Principles

Encourage independent retail

- Strengthen efforts to retain existing independent businesses
- Focus on recruiting unique retail stores that are locally owned and operated, and compatible with the character of the Avenue
- Focus on retail sectors that pose the greatest opportunity for growth in a main street environment

Capitalize on neighborhood arts community

- Incorporate public art into the Avenue's streetscape
- Continue to offer events and festivals that promote the wares and abilities of local artists

Watercolor by Alice Kale.

3.2 Retail Market Analysis

A retail market analysis has been prepared to identify retail development opportunities for Mt. Vernon Avenue. This analysis examined current retail activity along Mt. Vernon Avenue from Nelson Avenue northward to Commonwealth Avenue, as well as projected changes in retail demand through 2010.

The analysis has found that:

- The retail market along Mt. Vernon Avenue is largely in balance between the supply and demand of retail space. With help from the enhanced marketing efforts recently undertaken by the Potomac West Business Association, there will be a modest demand for retail space through 2010 along the Avenue—estimated at approximately 10,000 square feet.
- The strongest demand is for restaurants, with some demand for Convenience Goods stores. Overall, there is projected to be a diminishing demand for Comparison Goods stores; however some sectors, such as home furnishings, are identified as potential growth areas.
- Retail sectors that pose the greatest opportunity for growth along Mt. Vernon Avenue include specialty/gourmet food markets, confectionary shops, home furnishings, antiques, art supplies, and restaurants such as diners and family-style establishments.

The retail component of Mt. Vernon Avenue consists primarily of older, unanchored shopping nodes and small stand-alone buildings. The Avenue itself contains a mixture of retail, services, commercial and residential uses. Restaurants are the most common retail use along the Avenue, and the increase in the number of restaurants in recent years has helped establish the Avenue as an attractive alternative to Old Town, especially for residents of the nearby neighborhoods.

Suitability of Retail Space

With the character of the Avenue and the small sizes of sites that are potentially available for retail development, it is clear that only certain types of retailers will fit into the Avenue. In particular, the Avenue is a strong location for Main Street-type retail stores, but is not an acceptable location for larger, more conventional shopping centers.

Given this situation, this analysis examines only the demand for Main Street-type stores—those that would seek a smaller store in an urbanized environment such as exists in the Del Ray portion of Mt. Vernon Avenue.

It should be noted that the establishment of the Avenue as a quaint retail district should not cloud the realities of the Washington region's competitive retail environment. Mt. Vernon Avenue will continue to compete with other established "urban Main Street" locations such as Old Town Alexandria, and Clarendon/Courthouse, Shirlington and Pentagon Row in Arlington. These locations have more regional drawing power, and will continue to overshadow the Avenue in the greater metropolitan marketplace.

Market Report Methodology

To examine which retail sectors hold the greatest promise for success along Mt. Vernon Avenue, this analysis uses a 2002 report by Robert Charles Lesser & Co. entitled Preliminary Market Analysis for Mt. Vernon Avenue Corridor as a starting point. This *Plan* augments the Preliminary Market Analysis with more detailed information concerning a recommended mix of retail stores to guide future development along the Avenue.

The Preliminary Market Analysis used marked-based economic assumptions to reach a level of "unmet retail demand"—that is, how much net new retail activity can be supported along the Avenue. The projections were calculated for 2006 and estimated, among other things, the total expenditure potentials for residents of the nearby areas and the amount of inflow (from outside of Alexandria) retail traffic. The majority of these assumptions and the methodology used to calculate expenditure estimates are carried forth into this analysis, but modified to reflect projected market conditions to 2010.

Throughout this analysis, retail establishments are divided into three broad categories based on the nature of goods and services provided. These categories are as follows:

Convenience Goods Everyday items such as groceries, toiletries, cards and gifts, drug store items, florists' products, and related merchandise that consumers typically purchase in establishments that are proximate to their place of residence. There is relatively little comparison shopping for individual items.

Comparison Goods Items that typically involve a certain degree of comparison shopping for price, quality or selection.

"Comparison Goods" include durable items such as furniture, appliances and household goods, as well as items such as clothing, books, electronics, etc.

Food and Drink Establishments that serve prepared food and/or drink products to patrons, either in a dining or carry-out format.

MARKET AREAS

Although the Avenue has, and will continue to have, appeal to residents of other areas, the largest share of retail demand originates from residents within the Primary Market Area (PMA) which includes Del Ray and its immediately surrounding neighborhoods. Other significant sources of retail patronage include the areas to the south, west, and east. Figure 3.1 shows these four market areas, as referenced throughout this analysis.

A critical component of projecting future retail demand is population growth in the immediate areas. The number of households in the PMA is growing slowly, primarily because this area is mostly built out with stable residential neighborhoods. Most new household growth in the identified market areas is projected to occur in the East and South market areas, due to residential projects such as those in the Potomac Yard, Carlyle, Eisenhower East and Braddock Road Metro areas.

This analysis projects retail demand to the year 2010. Figure 3.2 shows City demographic projections of household growth for each of the four market areas along with the number of households recorded in the 2000 Census.

As shown, the number of households within the four market areas is projected to increase by about 14 percent (or 4,000 households) between 2000 and 2010.

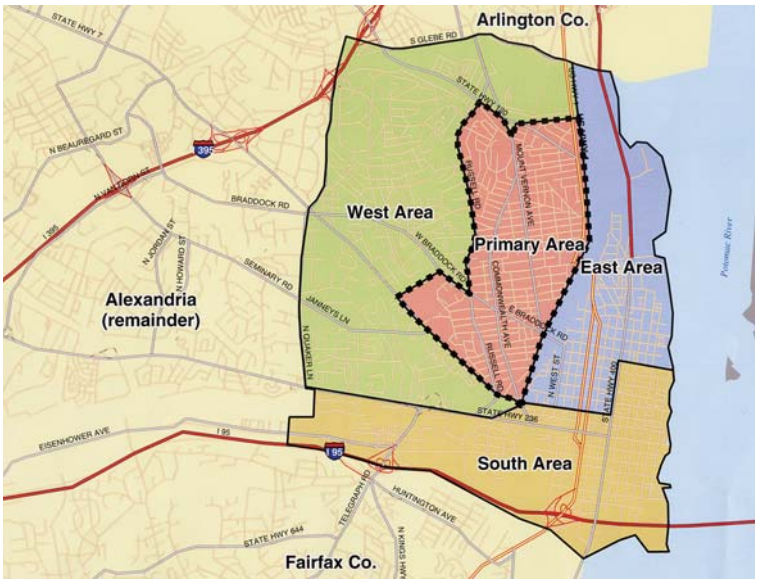


Figure 3.1 **Market Areas from Preliminary Market Analysis**

Trade Area	2000 Census	2010 Projection	% Increase
Primary Area	7,362	7,492	1.8%
East Area	5,049	6,322	25.2%
South Area	7,025	8,978	27.8%
West Area	9,479	10,168	7.3%
Total	**28,915**	**32,960**	**14.0%**

Figure 3.2 **Market Area Population Projections**
Sources: US Census Bureau and Alexandria Department of Planning & Zoning.

Inflow Estimates

Another input into the calculation of retail demand potential concerns the rate of "inflow" expenditures—or dollars spent by customers who live outside of these four market areas. The analysis calculates inflow by estimating the percentage of total retail sales that would likely come from out-of-area patrons. The percentage of sales from "inflow consumers" is estimated at between 6 and 50 percent, depending on the store category (generally Restaurants and Comparison Goods stores generate more inflow sales than do Convenience Goods stores). Figure 3.3 provides a summary of the estimated retail inflow percentages by store category.

Note: Figures represent percentages of total market-area sales.

Store Category	Est. Inflow %
Convenience Goods	
Grocery	25.0%
Pharmacies / Health	6.3%
Liquor / Gas / Convenience	31.3%
Misc. Retail	6.3%
Comparison Goods	
General Merchandise	20%
Apparel / Accessories	20%
Sporting / Books / Music	20%
Office / Pets	20%
Electronics / Computers	20%
Furniture / Housewares	20%
Restaurants	
Restaurants (all)	50%

Figure 3.3 Inflow Sales percent Estimates, 2010
Sources: US Census Bureau and Alexandria Department of Planning & Zoning.

The estimated inflow is somewhat higher than corresponding estimates within the Preliminary Market Analysis report. This is justified given the Avenue's increasing visibility among consumers throughout the Washington region—due in large part to effective marketing efforts such as those undertaken by the Potomac West Business Association.

Market Projections

The market projections that follow are derived from the 2010 household and inflow sales projections and estimate the amount of net new demand for retail stores along Mt. Vernon Avenue through 2010.

As shown in Figure 3.4, the major retail categories are predicted to experience the following increased or reduced retail demand through 2010:

Retail Category	SF Existing	2010 Projection	Retail Demand
Convenience Goods	22,000	26,500	4,500
Restaurant	40,000	48,400	8,400
Comparison Goods	38,000	35,300	-2,700
Total	**28,915**	**32,960**	**10,200**

Figure 3.4 Retail Demand in Square Feet, 2010

Sources: US Census Bureau and Alexandria Department of Planning & Zoning.

- **Convenience Goods**
  Approximately 4,500 square feet of increased retail space.

- **Restaurant**
  Approximately 8,400 square feet of increased restaurant space.

- **Comparison Goods**
  The market analysis predicts an overall shrinkage in demand of approximately 2,700 square feet for main-street type Comparison Goods retail along Mt. Vernon Avenue. However, this does not mean that there will be no further development in this retail category. Within the Comparison Goods category, there is projected to be approximately 5,000 square feet of increased demand in the Furniture/ Housewares retail sector.

These figures indicate that there is modest, yet meaningful demand for additional main street retail space along Mt. Vernon Avenue. In light of the projected net new retail demand along Mt. Vernon Avenue through 2010, specific retail sectors have been identified that have the greatest potential to generate new sales along Mt. Vernon Avenue, and at the same time reflect the community's expressed preference for a vibrant and unique main street experience. These retail sectors are:

CONVENIENCE GOODS DEMAND

Dominated by grocery goods and drug store items, the vast majority of the nation's Convenience Goods market is satisfied by large-scale retailers such as supermarkets, drug store chains and convenience stores. Consumers are highly sensitive to pricing and to selection quantities, giving mass retailers an immense advantage over smaller, independent retailers in the

Convenience Goods market. Independent retailers are generally not competitive with the larger stores when offering a general line of merchandise.

However, specialized Convenience Goods merchants are able to compete in the marketplace when they offer a competitive advantage based on specialization or quality of their goods.

The market analysis identifies a modest demand for Convenience Goods retailing in the Mt. Vernon Avenue corridor, and this demand will likely be satisfied by specialized Convenience Goods retailers offering specific services with personalized customer service. Key Convenience Goods sectors that can satisfy this requirement include:

Meat, Seafood or Gourmet Foods

The food retailing market is undergoing a dramatic transformation. On one hand, supermarkets are becoming increasingly large (often exceeding 50,000 or 100,000 square feet) and are being included as components of superstores or warehouse clubs. On the other hand, many consumers are increasingly shopping at specialty or gourmet food retailers for fresh food.

Traditional butcher shops or seafood markets were once thought to be obsolete, but are now gaining preference, particularly among high-end food shoppers who believe such stores offer fresher or healthier merchandise. The Washington region is home to many well-off households that have ample disposable income and an interest in high-end food merchandise. Yet there are relatively few specialty food markets such as butchers in the region, and there are few dedicated (non-restaurant) meat or seafood markets in Alexandria.

Gourmet food stores that sell either a variety of goods, or have a specialty, are also a growth segment in the retailing sector. Such retailers often sell packaged, ready-to-eat foods and accompaniments such as appetizers, cheeses and condiments. Consumer tastes, particularly in urban markets, are shifting towards a preference for gourmet and imported food items. Accordingly, expenditures in gourmet foods categories are expected to increase in coming years—U.S. cheese expenditures alone are forecast to increase by 20 percent over the next five years.

Establishments such as gourmet or specialty food stores can draw customers from the local Del Ray market, as well as establish a broader geographic base due to a relative lack of direct competition.

Chocolatier or Confectionary

Some Convenience Goods can both satisfy local customers' needs yet also complement a shopping district's Comparison Goods sector. One example would be an establishment that produces or sells sweets such as candies, chocolates, preserves, etc.

Such stores also have the ability to offer products that appeal to a wide range of budgets—from inexpensive or individually-wrapped treats to gourmet items such as truffles, taffies, fudge products and others. In addition, gourmet chocolate sales are regarded as being a fast-growing segment of the overall food retailing market.

Shops that sell sweets can be very successful in a pedestrian-oriented retail setting due to their proclivity to attract impulse buyers and to have a symbiotic relationship with other nearby retailers. Customers will often shop at other stores, and then stop into a candy store for a dessert or a special treat.

Florist

Gourmet Food

Chocolatier

Housewares

Home Furnishings

Antiques

Mt. Vernon Avenue currently has establishments that specialize in ice cream or related products, showing that sweets-based retailing can be successful along the Avenue. A candy-oriented store would complement these stores and enhance the overall retail setting of the neighborhood.

COMPARISON GOODS DEMAND

Similar to Convenience Goods, the Comparison Goods market is largely dominated by national-name chain stores. Customers of mainstream Comparison Goods tend to be very price conscious and will patronize stores that offer a competitive advantage on prices.

Many retail sectors, such as apparel, have long been controlled by chain stores, and the chains' reach into the overall Comparison Goods market has grown stronger in recent years. Some retail sectors have only recently seen a large amount of expenditures at chain stores—for example, sporting goods, music, pet supplies, and computer equipment are all sectors in which chain stores have made significant advances in recent years.

Yet there are still opportunities for smaller stores that sell these goods. Customers who seek specialized or higher-end merchandise value the expertise, customer service, and personalized attention that smaller stores can offer. It is important for smaller retailers to avoid concentrating on any product that large nearby retailers sell because smaller stores are generally not competitive on price, and therefore must gain an advantage through other means.

While the retail market analysis has found there is no additional net new demand for Comparison Goods retailing along the Avenue, there are still some growth areas that offer retailing potentials. The most promising Comparison Goods retail sectors include:

Housewares and Home Furnishings

Consumers in the Washington region spend much more on furniture and housewares than do residents of most parts of the country. Washington households spend 60 percent more on furniture and nearly 50 percent more on housewares than do most American households.

Much of this is attributable both to the high incomes of many area households and also to the transient nature of the region's population—when people move into a new house, their expenditures on furniture and housewares increase dramatically.

While much of the housewares market is dominated by mass retailers and specialty chains (Crate & Barrel, etc.), there is still ample demand in the marketplace for specialty housewares, particularly upscale or handmade/custom-made goods. The housewares market is thought to be one of the most recession-proof retail industries, especially in areas such as Northern Virginia that are growing in wealth and population.

The overall housewares retail category includes a diverse array of products, and the niche potential for housewares retailing is substantial. The general rule of thumb in housewares retailing in recent years is the supposed shift from a needs-based to a desire-based market—meaning that people are more inclined to purchase luxury goods than they have been in the past. Long-term retail trends point to a divaricating industry where housewares are sold to either extremely budget-conscious buyers or to the exact opposite—buyers interested in uniqueness and exclusivity. It is the exclusive buyers who represent a major source of purchasing power for the types of housewares stores that would fit into Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Examples of these types of stores include those offering unique or hard-to-find articles of household equipment such as kitchen/cooking supplies, bathroom merchandise, lamps and fixtures and related goods.

Antiques/Artwork

Antiques and artwork retailers are generally subject to the same economic trends as general housewares retailers. In retail markets such as the Washington metro area, where housewares sell well, antiques and artwork similarly enjoy a large pool of potential customers.

However, one distinguishing feature about antiques and artwork retail store locations is that such stores tend to be more successful if they are located near other, similar stores such as in an "antique row" or an arts district.

In this capacity, Mt. Vernon Avenue is well positioned to take advantage of its existing retail mix (which includes numerous arts/antique related establishments), current arts-related events such as Arts on the Avenue, and also the general reputation of Alexandria among the regional arts community.

Artwork retailing may include visual arts such as paintings and sculptures, and also other handmade wares such as ceramics or jewelry. Antique retailing may incorporate both generalized stores and also those antique stores specializing in one particular pursuit.

Antiques and artwork retailers depend on an appreciative customer base that can afford to spend money on luxury goods such as art or antiques. Mt. Vernon Avenue satisfies this criterion. This retail category also conforms well to the Avenue's vision of promoting unique retail offerings.

Art Supplies

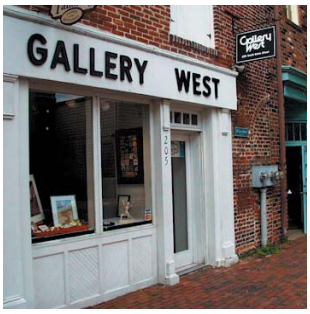
Alexandria is renowned as an arts-savvy city—due largely to the widespread reputation of the Torpedo Factory Art Center and art galleries in Old Town. More locally, the Del Ray Artisans group has long been driving arts-based development along Mt. Vernon Avenue and the recent success of Art on the Avenue has helped to heighten the neighborhood's reputation among the region's arts community.

While Alexandria has built a notable reputation for the arts, there is no large-scale arts supply store within the City. In fact, there are few throughout the entire region. An art supply store offering personalized expertise and service, as well as hard-to-find supplies, could fill a gap that currently exists in the marketplace. The art supply store currently located in the Torpedo Factory is extremely small, while other retail choices include large chain craft stores that cater to a more generalized customer base or specialty arts stores located elsewhere in the metro area.

The operation of an arts supply stores also dovetails with the community's desire to continue stressing the arts in its development strategy. Arts stores have the potential to draw artists from a region-wide base and can augment the neighborhood's reputation among arts enthusiasts.

Stationery/Custom Cards

Another sector for Main Street-type retailing opportunities is stationery and related goods. At first glance, the stationery retailing industry is not one in which to expect growth among smaller retailers. The mainstay of the industry, greeting cards, are available at most supermarkets and drug stores for as little as 99 cents—not leaving much room in the market for independent competition.



Artwork

Art Supplies

Further, many stationers' products, such as calendars and planners, have been overtaken in the market by electronic goods—available at reduced prices at big-box electronics stores.

However, there are growth areas within the independent retailing end of the stationery market—stores that would be suitable to Mt. Vernon Avenue. One such area is in Custom Cards—greeting cards that are printed specifically for one customer (i.e., wedding invitations and the like).

The Custom Cards market is one that thrives on consumers who are looking for a more unique product than what is available at a mainstream retail outlet—featuring items such as hand-made cards and paper, along with journals and scrapbooks. The overall demand for such products is a small component of the total stationery and card market, but it is a demand that can be satisfied by quality stores in desirable retail locations. These are all items that a small retailer would be able to sell competitively.

The stationery market is also subject to fast-moving consumer trends, such as the popularity in the last few years of "scrapbooking." While these trends alone are not enough to support a store in the long term, smaller retailers are often able to more quickly respond to such trends than are their larger counterparts, and therefore can keep at the cutting edge of consumer preferences.

Independent stationers do not require a lot of retail space, particularly if the retailer does not sell many space-demanding greeting cards. Because of this, one feasible set-up for this type of store (and one that would fit in along Mt. Vernon Avenue) is as an ancillary use to another, existing business.

RESTAURANT DEMAND

The development and success of restaurants along Mt. Vernon Avenue continues to be one of the Avenue's defining characteristics. Del Ray has built a regional reputation for its unique restaurants, and with the market analysis indicating a continuing demand for new restaurant services, considerable opportunity still exists for new food service establishments along the Avenue.

For most of the past decade, American families' expenditures at restaurants have grown annually. Current research by the National Restaurant Association predicts that restaurant expenditures will increase by over four percent during 2004 alone. This high tendency to eat out is particularly true in the Washington region. It is estimated that Washington-area households spend on average one-third more on eating out than do typical American households.

In Del Ray, the greatest opportunity for restaurant growth is in the dinner-oriented casual table-service market segment. The more upscale fine-dining segment is well satisfied by nearby King Street and other high-priced areas, and the "quick service" segment is largely dependent on heavy lunchtime or tourism customer traffic, neither of which Del Ray has in abundance. However, an upscale fine-dining restaurant would be a welcome addition to the neighborhood.

The most successful approach to restaurant development along the Avenue is to attract restaurants that fill a market niche that is currently empty. Given this touchstone, there are several specific restaurant themes that potentially fill a need in the current market structure, as follows:

Diner

Within the casual table service restaurant market, one sector that is not currently represented along the Avenue is the traditional diner. After years of losing market share to fast food and other quick-service restaurants, the popularity of diners is again increasing, as consumers look for traditional value-conscious home-style food.

Diners offer an informal, family-friendly atmosphere, and rarely serve alcohol. One hallmark of diners is that breakfast is often available throughout the day, and the hours of operation frequently extend beyond customary suppertime hours.

Throughout the country, the diner market has seen increased popularity in recent years. This is a theme that, in a traditional urban storefront setting, would work well on Mt. Vernon Avenue, and fit in with the community's desire to maintain a casual, unpretentious, but yet unique retail environment.

Family-oriented

Many of the restaurants located along Mt. Vernon Avenue have been oriented towards mature customers, not necessarily targeting the family dining market. A restaurant that is directly targeted towards families would be a welcome addition to the restaurant mix along Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Given the market demand for additional restaurant space, a family-oriented restaurant, with quality table-service food, a varied menu, and reasonably competitive pricing would find ample market support from a Mt. Vernon Avenue location.

Restaurant with Entertainment/Arts

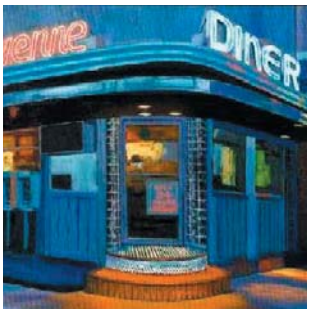
One way for a restaurant to stand out among competing establishments is to offer some type of live entertainment in addition to food service. While a purely entertainment-oriented venue such as a club would not be in character with the Avenue, live music or entertainment in an intimate setting within a restaurant would add a unique customer experience to the Avenue's retail mix.

Entertainment is good for a restaurant's business because it creates a pleasant diversion from the dining experience. Such an offering also increases revenues by encouraging patrons to stay longer and creates a buzz among local residents and other potential customers.

Live music or other entertainment tends to be very effective in higher-average-check restaurants as well as at establishments such as coffee shops. Since performers at such venues are often local artists, such a restaurant could contribute significantly to Mt. Vernon Avenue's arts promotion strategies.

A restaurant needs little in the way of physical improvements to be ready for live music or entertainment, and such activities can easily be added to an existing restaurant. A stage is helpful, and accessories such as acoustic ceiling or wall tiles help to improve sound quality. Amplification technology has improved to the point where speakers are small and unobtrusive, and can be easily aimed at specific parts of the restaurant. Most performers bring their own equipment, so that is typically not within the restaurateur's concern.

Live entertainment provides people with an additional reason to come to a particular area. Mt. Vernon Avenue could benefit from an establishment offering entertainment—whether it is a new establishment altogether or a re-theming of an existing restaurant. The *Plan* recommendations are designed to build on the existing market, promote independent retail businesses, and foster opportunities for continued market growth.



Diner

Family-oriented

Entertainment/Arts

Art Supply Store

Public Art Program

Public Art Sculpture

Example of Artists' Loft Building, Artspace Projects Inc.

3.3 Market Strategy and Recommendations

New Retail Business Attraction

- Focus retail business attraction on sectors that have the greatest potential to generate new sales along Mt. Vernon Avenue, and at the same time reflect the community's expressed preference for a vibrant and unique main street atmosphere. These include the following:

  Meat, seafood or gourmet food stores

  Chocolatier or confectionary

  Housewares and home furnishings stores

  Antiques and artwork stores

  Art supply stores

  Stationery/custom card stores

New Restaurants

- Focus restaurant attraction on types of food service that can fill a market niche that is currently empty. There are several specific restaurant themes that potentially fill a need in the current market structure, as follows:

  Diner

  Family-oriented restaurant

  Restaurant with entertainment/arts

Business Organization Approach

- Enhance and strengthen the Potomac West Business Association as an organization to develop and implement marketing, promotions, and retail management district initiatives

  Consider use of a business improvement district (BID) as discussed in Section 3.5 to provide continuing funding for marketing and business related activities

Arts Promotion

- Promote the arts in tandem with promoting other retail activity along the Avenue. This would include various elements of arts promotion (art galleries, public art, etc.) would still generate excitement for the Avenue and is a goal that is reachable for the neighborhood

3.4 Arts Promotion Strategy

The arts comprise a fundamental component to both the Avenue's retail marketing strategy and community development strategy. A strong arts promotion strategy will not only encourage the arts to flourish along Mt. Vernon Avenue, but it will also contribute to the vitality of the Avenue in general.

An arts promotion strategy that includes the development of a major anchor project would generate the most excitement for Mt. Vernon Avenue, but is likely not practicable given the land and space constraints in the neighborhood. A non-anchor strategy that incorporates various elements of arts promotion (art galleries, public art, etc.) would still generate excitement for the Avenue and is a goal that is reachable for the neighborhood. Regardless of the anchor strategy however, other components of the arts promotion strategy such as encouraging public art or pursuing an art supply retail store or education center, should be vigorously pursued.

Promoting the arts in tandem with promoting other retail activity along the Avenue will help to ensure that this unique component of Mt. Vernon Avenue's character will remain a significant feature of the area.

An essential component of the planning process for Mt. Vernon Avenue involves promoting the arts. The arts have consistently played an important role in Mt. Vernon Avenue's growth into the vibrant Main Street atmosphere that it is today. From the work of the Del Ray Artisans organization to the success of Art on the Avenue, arts and the Avenue have gone hand-in-hand. This *Plan* places a high priority on developing and maintaining the arts as a prominent feature of Mt. Vernon Avenue's retail and cultural offerings.

This section addresses the specifics of an arts-based marketing strategy for Mt. Vernon Avenue—an effort intended to run concurrently with other planning and business-related efforts.

An arts promotion strategy for Mt. Vernon Avenue could follow one or more of the following routes:

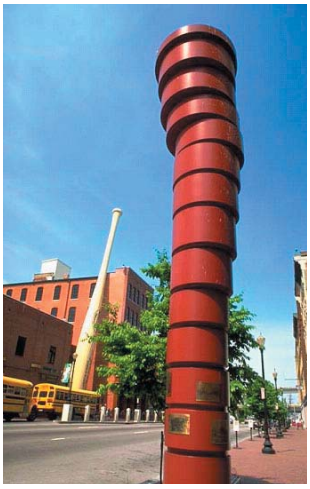
- **Option 1—Anchor Strategy**
  Having an "anchor" facility, such as a large artists' studio development as the focal point of the strategy.

- **Option 2—Non-anchor Strategy**
  Conducting the arts promotion strategy without an anchor development, using artists' studios scattered throughout the Avenue, as well as other means of arts promotion.

- **Option 3—Bolstering Art by Other Means**
  Including other elements in the arts promotion strategy besides artists' studios, such as increased arts festivals, promoting public art displays, and attracting an art supply store or an art education center.

These three options are presented in detail below:

Example of Artists' Loft Building, Artspace Projects Inc.



Themed Public Art Sculptures

Loft Building Concept Sketch, Artspace Projects Inc.

Option 1—Anchor Strategy

An anchor facility, when referring to an arts promotion strategy, is a single facility that serves as the center of an area's arts and cultural scene and attracts a substantial number of customers to the neighborhood. For example, the Torpedo Factory Art Center serves as Old Town's arts anchor and central point of attraction related to the arts in Old Town.

Along Mt. Vernon Avenue, an arts anchor would be smaller than the Torpedo Factory, but would likely have a similar mission. Such a facility would be composed of artists' studios and other facilities such as education and/or gallery space.

FINDING A LOCATION FOR THE ANCHOR

An arts and cultural anchor appropriate for Mt. Vernon Avenue would likely contain between 5,000 and 15,000 square feet of gross building space—this would be large enough to allow at least a dozen separate studios. A larger facility could also permit the inclusion of classroom space or other artists' space as demanded by the market.

However, no discussion concerning a project of this size along Mt. Vernon Avenue can be complete without a consideration of where such a facility would be located. Most likely, such a project would locate in an existing building, if one should become available. This is a more economically feasible option than building a new facility altogether. However, this brings about certain challenges:

- **Locating a Site** There are few buildings along Mt. Vernon Avenue that are suitable for redevelopment into an arts anchor. From a physical standpoint, the building currently housing the Alexandria Department of Human Services at 2525 Mt. Vernon Avenue would be an acceptable location should space within the building become commercially available (the City's lease runs through 2009 for its space in the building). Other potentially suitable sites for an anchor include the existing retail strip on the 2700 block (opposite the Mt. Vernon Community School) and the current Verizon building at 301 E. Alexandria Avenue. Another alternative would be the construction of the anchor as part of the redevelopment of the properties known as the Triangle Site on the east side of Mt. Vernon Avenue north of Commonwealth Avenue.

- **Owner Participation** If an arts anchor facility were to be developed along Mt. Vernon Avenue, it would probably be on privately owned land. Thus, such a project would not occur without the participation and enthusiasm of the property owner(s). Art studio leases tend to be somewhat trickier than standard commercial leasing arrangements because artists' studio developments are often subsidized to some extent by grants, foundations, or government agencies.

Given these challenges, the success of such a project would hinge upon having a property owner who is eager to enter into an artists' studio venture, and would also depend on having a strong management organization that is able to pull together and work with various stakeholders in the process.

DECIDING ON THE TYPE OF STUDIO

Should an arts anchor be created along Mt. Vernon Avenue, its primary function would likely be a location for artists' studios. But within artists' studio developments, there can be substantial differences in what a studio contains. The two most common types are Standard and Live/Work studios. These are described following:

- **Standard Artists Studio**
  Similar to the Torpedo Factory in Old Town, standard artists' studio buildings contain individual studios meant for retail sales of visual art. The buildings have a single management entity that leases studios to either individual artists or to multiple artists who would then share the studio. Studios range from 250 square feet to 1,000 square feet, depending on the numbers of lessees and/or the types of artwork being sold.

  Physical Needs Art studios can be retrofitted into a wide range of buildings. The studios themselves are not demanding from a physical needs standpoint—no more than the bare minimum is generally required for utilities unless specialized equipment is being installed such as kilns or equipment that requires gas. Open floor plans tend to work well with studios because they let in more light, and also facilitate the construction of modular walls to separate individual studios.

- **Live/Work Artists Studio**
  The Live/Work Studio is similar in execution to the Standard Artists Studio as described above, however the artists live in the building in addition to creating and selling artwork. The living space is either provided separate from the studio itself, or as a combined unit. Because of the living space component, live/work studios tend to require a larger building than do standard artists' studio projects.

  Physical Needs Live/Work studio developments require more extensive retrofitting work when a building is being converted from another use. The inclusion of residential units necessitates more extensive utilities, and the overall floor plan needs to be more elaborate in order to accommodate living spaces.

DECIDING ON THE BEST ANCHOR

Given the limited availability of suitable building space or available buildable land, a Standard Studio would be a more feasible option on Mt. Vernon Avenue than a Live/Work Studio arrangement. Further, new construction would require higher start-up costs than would a rehabilitation project on an existing building—making a rehab project more fiscally manageable. A Standard Studio created from an existing building would be the most suitable anchor development strategy given current market conditions.

If the challenges of finding a suitable space are overcome, an artists' studio development would serve to heighten the Avenue's arts environment and bring additional activity and liveliness to the area in a manner consistent with the community's vision to promote arts-based development strategies.

DETERMINING HOW TO FINANCE

To operate in a market-based economy, particularly in an area with high real estate values such as Mt. Vernon Avenue, artists' studio developments tend to receive considerable support from external sources such as from grants or foundations. In addition, many studio projects receive some manner of subsidy from municipal or state governments. Subsidies could entail in-kind contributions, such as below-market rent on a municipally owned building, or could include other kinds of operating assistance or tax credits.

It is in the long-term interest of the Mt. Vernon Avenue neighborhood to promote a plan that relies as little as possible on continuing operating subsidies for any commercial entity on the Avenue. The most pragmatic way to achieve such a goal is to find a private-sector or non-profit partner for the construction and operation of the studios. Such an

Outdoor Market / Festival Venue

An anchor draws other investment

approach is often used by municipalities seeking to create a studio-type project. For example, an artists' studio project currently underway in Mt. Rainier, Md.—the "Gateway Arts District"—is using a private management company to build and operate an artists' loft development. The project is also assisted by state and local government financing.

An arrangement similar to that being used in the Gateway Arts District would likely be suitable for an artists' studio project along Mt. Vernon Avenue, if such a development were to occur.

Storefront Galleries

Option 2—Non-anchor Strategy

As detailed above, a major obstacle to achieving an artists' studio development along Mt. Vernon Avenue is the challenge of finding a suitable building or appropriate buildable lot. There is a shortage of both land and building resources along the Avenue, meaning that an arts-based marketing strategy may have to take place without the benefit of an anchor development such as a stand-alone studio building.

A more viable approach would be for the Mt. Vernon Avenue community to plan for a first-rate arts promotion strategy that is not wholly dependent on opening an anchor development such as an artists' studio building.

ATTRACTING ARTISTS TO RETAIL STORES

The first step in this strategy is to attract artists themselves to set up galleries along Mt. Vernon Avenue. There are three main components to such a strategy:

- **Coordination with City Agencies**
  City agencies involved in retail promotion, such as the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP), should actively market Mt. Vernon Avenue as an arts corridor to interested and relevant retailers. This would best be accomplished in partnership with the local arts community. The Avenue has the advantage of being in a known arts-appreciative location (due in large part to the success of Art on the Avenue), but offers retailers a substantial savings in rent from a location such as one in Old Town. Active marketing of the Avenue as an area with great potential from an arts retailing perspective will encourage artists to consider a Mt. Vernon Avenue location.
- **Differentiate Del Ray from Old Town**
  If Mt. Vernon Avenue in Del Ray is to be marketed as an arts location, it is important that that marketing effort not compete for business with other parts of Alexandria, notably Old Town, which already has an established arts community. Therefore, it is important for Mt. Vernon Avenue to market itself as being different from Old Town.

  One way to be different is to be more affordable—both in terms of the rent that artists pay and also in terms of the cost of their merchandise. This would seemingly carve out a niche for Mt. Vernon Avenue as a hub for relatively affordable artwork. But if this strategy is to be pursued, there would emerge the question of whether "affordable" artists can pay market rents in Del Ray.

  Differentiating based on price necessitates having affordable spaces for artists to rent. This is difficult to achieve because the cost of rent—while less costly than Old Town—could still be out of reach for many artists. One possible solution is to seek a cooperative arrangement where a group of artists or an artists' association is the lead tenant, and individuals would either sublease portions of the given store, or operate in a format where various artists' goods are sold in the same store. This effectively pools together resources and makes a Mt. Vernon Avenue location that is realistic for emerging artists.

- **Artwork Diversity**
  Given the community's desire to be unique and different, one way to build on that goal within the context of arts-based marketing is to attempt to offer types of artwork different than what is available elsewhere in the City or region. For example, one or two quality art galleries with specializations such as textile arts, sculpture, etc. would be helpful in making Mt. Vernon Avenue a unique destination and would further the goal of differentiating the area from other arts-intensive districts.

The attraction of artists' studios or galleries would be a capstone goal in any Mt. Vernon Avenue arts promotion strategy. But there are other means as well to fortify the position of the arts in the Avenue's overall plan; some of these means are detailed in the following section.

Option 3—Bolstering Art by Other Means

A comprehensive arts promotion strategy would include items other than the "big-ticket" goals of establishing art galleries or studios. Other means are equally important to developing a broad-based arts strategy for Mt. Vernon Avenue—regardless of whether an anchor strategy or non-anchor strategy is pursued. These include the following:

ARTS-RELATED FESTIVALS AND PROMOTIONS

The Mt. Vernon Avenue area has enjoyed tremendous success with its annual Art on the Avenue festival. The festival, which brings together artists and craftsmen from throughout the region, draws thousands of visitors each year and has been instrumental in raising awareness of the Mt. Vernon Avenue retail corridor.

If arts promotion is to be a major thrust of a Mt. Vernon Avenue marketing strategy, the area should host more events such as Art on the Avenue. In addition to the general benefits to the Avenue's businesses, such events enable area artists to gain valuable exposure to potential customers.

An arts-related festival strategy could be undertaken using the following general approach:

- **Events should reflect the diversity of Mt. Vernon Avenue.** The Avenue and its surrounding neighborhoods are diverse, not just in an ethnic sense, but also among types of businesses, ages of residents, etc. By hosting festivals throughout the year, continued interest can be maintained by offering activities that appeal to a variety of interests and ages, but all centering on the arts.

- **Coordinate events with other Alexandria neighborhoods.**
  The concept of increasing the number and visibility of community events is not unique to the Mt. Vernon Avenue area—other neighborhoods in the City have similar goals. These goals, however, need not be exclusive of each other; there is ample opportunity to coordinate events with nearby neighborhoods such as Old Town or Arlandria, or other City neighborhoods.

- **Don't overdo it.** Community events are excellent ways to generate interest in the Mt. Vernon Avenue business district, but care should be taken to avoid hosting too many events. Events that occur too often tend to dilute the effectiveness of individual ventures and can generate opposition from nearby residential areas due to increased numbers of visitors and parking demand. During the spring-to-fall season when the weather is conducive to outdoor festivals, such events should not be held more often than once every two months. This will

Street Festival Tents

Arts Festival on the Avenue

Public Art incorporated into sidewalk paving creates interest and ornamentation.

maintain a level of excitement for each of the events, but will not overwhelm the Del Ray residential community with visitors.

- **Events should be managed by one individual.** An events strategy for Mt. Vernon Avenue will be most effective if it is managed by one designated individual. Should a "Business Improvement District" be created (in coordination with other programmatic and promotional activities) to fund improvements along the Avenue, funding for a designated individual could be secured through the revenue thereby collected. In the absence of funding for a full-time position, such an individual would most likely operate on a volunteer basis.

OTHER PROMOTIONAL GOALS

Besides organized events, there are other goals that should be pursued regardless of the community's ability to recruit artists or to hold festivals. These goals reinforce the Avenue's commitment to the arts and would go a long way to raising awareness of the arts throughout the City.

- **Public Art** A strategy that incorporates provisions for public art displays to be integrated into Mt. Vernon Avenue's urban design will be an important element to the overall arts strategy for the Avenue. This should be done in close collaboration with one or more local arts groups (i.e., Del Ray Artisans and the Alexandria Commission for the Arts). Public art displays should feature distinctive works of art by artists throughout the region on a rotating basis (with displays rotating annually or biannually). Art would initially be destined for public places along the Avenue, but should also come to include private property whose owners would like to participate in the public arts strategy.

- **Art Supply Store** As mentioned previously in the Retail Strategy section of this report, an art supply store is one of the proposed retail sectors to target for recruitment along the Avenue. Such a store would heighten the Avenue's reputation as an arts district and would attract artists and art enthusiasts from a wide area.

- **Art Education Center** Another type of potential arts-related tenant is that of an art education center—either a local branch of an established institution (i.e., Northern Virginia Community College or The Art League) or a separate independent facility. An art education center can rent space in a building that is not necessarily well suited to retail stores (lower-visibility space such as second- story space), and would be a good ancillary tenant for a building that is already rented to arts-related establishments (such as art galleries, or supply store).

3.5 Business Improvement District Approach

The Mt. Vernon Avenue community has made significant accomplishments in marketing and promotion through a dedicated group of volunteers. In endeavors of organizing events, marketing the Avenue, and making community improvements, PWBA (and other groups such as Del Ray Artisans) have significantly contributed to the improvement of Mt. Vernon Avenue's business climate.

Such efforts should continue, however, a permanent approach needs to be established to financially ensure a consistent level of effort will continue year after year. This structure could take one of three forms:

- Through a membership organization and paid by membership dues.[1]
- Operated directly by the City of Alexandria or a city agency.[2]
- Funded through a Business Improvement District.

Of these options, the Business Improvement District (BID) would best suit the needs of Mt. Vernon Avenue by giving the business community ownership of the organization. A BID (also called a "Special District") can fund improvements and/or marketing efforts though an additional levy on real estate assessments within a defined district. A detailed discussion of BIDs follows.

Characteristics of a Business Improvement District

A BID is an entity established to create a steady funding source for community-oriented services that are not typically provided by City government, such as marketing and promotions, landscaping, beautification, sidewalk improvements, parking resources, and other services that provide a direct benefit to properties in a given area. Funding for these services is made possible because properties within the BID incur an additional levy on top of the properties' standard real estate tax rate. This additional payment is dedicated to fund improvements within the District and thereby provide a reliable funding stream for special services.

Additional Tax Levy

The per-parcel amount of this additional levy would vary depending upon each property's valuation and the size of the district that is established. Tax levies on individual properties would be significantly lower if the BID boundary includes the length of the commercial corridor (1500-2900 blocks) as opposed to the smaller Historic Core (1900-2400 blocks), by virtue of the larger area's bigger tax

1. PWBA currently operates as a membership organization; however the revenues generated are not sufficient, in and of themselves, to fund enhanced marketing and promotions activities.

2. A prior effort by the City of Alexandria with the funding of the Potomac West Alliance was not found to be the best approach to meet the needs of the community.

Annual BID Budget	Additional Tax Levy (¢ per $100 of Assessed Value)		Additional Tax Levy on Properties with $400,000 Value		Additional Tax Levy on Properties with $600,000 value	
	Total Area	Historic Core	Total Area	Historic Core	Total Area	Historic Core
$35,000	5.37¢	10.91¢	$215	$436	$322	$654
$40,000	6.14¢	12.47¢	$246	$499	$369	$748
$45,000	6.91¢	14.02¢	$276	$561	$415	$841
$50,000	7.68¢	15.58¢	$307	$623	$461	$935
$55,000	8.45¢	17.14¢	$338	$686	$507	$1,028
$60,000	9.21¢	18.70¢	$369	$748	$553	$1,122
$65,000	9.98¢	20.26¢	$399	$810	$599	$1,215
$70,000	10.75¢	21.82¢	$430	$873	$645	$1,309
$75,000	11.52¢	23.37¢	$461	$935	$691	$1,402
$80,000	12.28¢	24.93¢	$491	$997	$737	$1,496

Figure 3.5 Estimate of Additional BID Property Tax Payments

Note: Calculations based upon City of Alexandria property tax assessments, Jan. 2004.

BID Banner in Rosslyn, VA.

base. Should the Mt. Vernon Avenue BID operate on a budget of $50,000 per year, the additional tax levy on a $400,000 property would be $623 if the District's boundary were limited to the Historic Core, but would be $307 if the boundary includes the total Mt. Vernon Avenue area. See Figure 3.5 for an estimate potential revenue needs for the two district options based on possible budget amounts.

A BID along Mt. Vernon Avenue would yield benefits to commercial property owners throughout the length of the commercial corridor—not just limited to properties located within the historic core. Therefore, due to the wide range of benefits, and the fact that individual properties' BID levies would be much less if the BID has a larger boundary, it is more practicable for a Mt. Vernon Avenue BID to include the total area from Nelson Avenue northward to Commonwealth Avenue. In Virginia, a city may enact a Service District by ordinance, with the boundaries and purpose of the district specifically outlined as part of the ordinance. The tax rate would be established on an annual basis based on a defined work program for the use of the funds.

Examples of BIDs in Virginia

BIDs have been used widely in Virginia as part of business vitalization efforts for smaller "Main Street" communities, as well as in defined business districts in larger cities. Many of these districts are analogous in size, scale and type of business to the Mt. Vernon Del Ray area. Such districts can be found in:

RICHMOND serves and promotes the downtown area and coordinates new real estate development

ROANOKE two separate BIDs; a downtown BID and a commercial corridor BID that seek to attract and retain businesses, plan and organize events, and fund or undertake other beautification efforts

NORFOLK markets downtown area, and funds uniformed staff to assist visitors, and funds maintenance workers to keep public areas clean

STAUNTON enhances economic development in downtown through promotions, implements design standards and recruits businesses

WINCHESTER focuses on promotion, and increased maintenance activities in the downtown area

For the most part, the purpose of these districts is to make streetscape improvements and ensure maintenance of public spaces, undertake marketing and promotion activities, and recruit new businesses. They are generally structured as 501(c)(6) non-profit organizations.

Although BIDs have been used for many years in other parts of Virginia and in other states, they are still relatively new in Northern Virginia. The first BID in Northern Virginia was formed in 2003 to service the Rosslyn neighborhood of Arlington County, and a second BID was recently created by the City of Fairfax for the Lee Highway commercial corridor.

The functions of a Mt. Vernon Avenue BID could include enhanced marketing and promotions, business recruitment and retention, oversight of a shared parking program and other similar activities.

Land Use

4.0

4.1 Vision

Mt. Vernon Avenue is a vibrant and welcoming Main Street that reflects the surrounding neighborhoods' diversity, integrity and small town charm.
The Avenue is comprised of enthusiastic, successful and responsible community partners. We offer an eclectic and friendly living, working and shopping environment for Alexandrians and visitors alike.

4.2 Guiding Principles

Protect and enhance Mt. Vernon Avenue as a vibrant commercial corridor

- Market the Avenue locally and regionally
- Focus commercial uses in the Historic Core between Uhler and Bellefonte Avenues
- Preserve the small town, Main Street character

Encourage and support mixed-use development

- Emphasize retail uses on the ground floor
- Promote new residential on upper floors
- Create new affordable housing opportunities

Celebrate "Town of Potomac Historic District"

- Protect and enhance the corridor's visual appearance through streetscape and façade improvements
- Define and enhance the unique community identity through interpretive graphics program

Preserve existing historic scale and character

- Allow for appropriate infill development and redevelop incompatible buildings
- Adopt standards and guidelines to ensure quality development that reflects the scale of existing historic structures

Preserve and protect existing residential areas

- Protect nearby residences from impacts associated with commercial activity
- Ensure new development is compatible with neighboring residential uses.
- Protect existing affordable housing stock

Enhance public spaces

- Improve existing green space, parks and urban trails
- Promote the use of gathering spaces such as a Town Square

4.3 Land Use Recommendations

The *Plan* recommendations for land use are designed to promote and reinforce a consistent, vibrant and pedestrian-oriented retail environment that supports living, working, and playing on Mt. Vernon Avenue, while protecting the adjacent residential neighborhoods. Strategies are recommended that apply to the entire length of the Avenue, as well as specific strategies for the three focus areas. Recommendations for the specific opportunity sites identified during the planning process are also included for each focus area.

PROMOTE APPROPRIATE INFILL DEVELOPMENT

Ensure that new development is consistent with the neighborhood's existing character through the use of Building Form Design Guidelines.

Allow modest increases in allowable floor area along Mt. Vernon Avenue, consistent with the Building Form Design Guidelines, that achieve the following performance criteria:

- Retains historic buildings;
- Maintains historic character and scale;
- Provides open space, where feasible and desirable; and,
- Protects adjacent residential neighborhoods.

To assure that new development is in keeping with the existing neighborhood character, new zoning provisions are recommended that incorporate elements of Building Form Design Guidelines. In addition to controlling setbacks and heights, Building Form Design Guidelines establish a preferred pattern of development along the street and a virtual "envelope" to define the desired form of new buildings. The specific recommendations for the Building Form Design Guidelines are outlined in Section 6.3 of this *Plan*.

PROTECT RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

To reduce the potential for negative impacts on adjacent residences, the *Plan* recommends:

- *"Stepping" the height of buildings to minimize impact on adjacent residential properties*

  This approach would physically concentrate building density on the portion of the property that adjoins the Avenue making the commercial activity oriented toward the street, and away from homes that border the commercial properties. See Section 6.3 for specific recommendations.

- *Providing a buffer to reduce the visual impact on the neighborhood*

  Special treatments such as fences, screening and plantings should be used for buffering residences from the retail areas. In addition all exterior lighting and service facilities should be designed to mitigate the lighting and noise impacts on the adjacent residential properties. See Section 6.3 for specific recommendations.

ENHANCE PEDESTRIAN STREETSCAPE

The *Plan* seeks to build upon the existing pedestrian-orientation of the Avenue with specific recommendations to improve pedestrian safety, including new or improved crosswalks and pedestrian-scale lighting; provide streetscape improvements, including benches to promote walking along the Avenue; strengthen connections between the Braddock Road Metro Station and the Avenue by working collaboratively with the Alexandria Schools to identify a foot path that is safe for pedestrians and school children; enhance public transportation with bus shelters, benches, and schedules and improved connections between the Avenue and the City of Alexandria; and

ensure that new and infill development improves the pedestrian environment by locating parking behind buildings, or underground where feasible, and provide public benefits such as public art, landscaping and other improvements which enhance the pedestrian environment, create vibrancy, and reinforce the unique character of Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Additional recommendations include:

- Providing improved pedestrian lighting on the sidewalk;
- Implementing a coordinated approach to public signage;
- Enhancing the visual appearance of service and auto-related uses by improving individual building facades and business signage to enhance the pedestrian and visual quality of the Avenue; and,
- Completing the sidewalk and/or landscaping improvements, especially between the inside edge of the existing sidewalk and the face of the buildings.

Improvements to the northern area (north of Commonwealth Avenue to W. Glebe Road) provide the opportunity to create stronger visual and physical connection between the Arlandria neighborhood to the north and the Del Ray neighborhood to the south. All public streetscape improvements and tree planting should extend in this northern area. In addition, private investment in properties and buildings is encouraged to improve the appearance of the Avenue.

PROVIDE VISUAL OPEN SPACE

The pattern of open space located along Mt. Vernon Avenue that is visually accessible to pedestrians varies along the length of the Avenue. As new construction occurs, maintaining the visible open spaces is important in order to maintain the character of the Avenue. In many cases, the existing visual open space consists of the lawn of a residential building or simply a small courtyard. These spaces are character defining elements of the street. For commercially developed properties, such open space may be nonexistent or may consist of planters with landscaping.

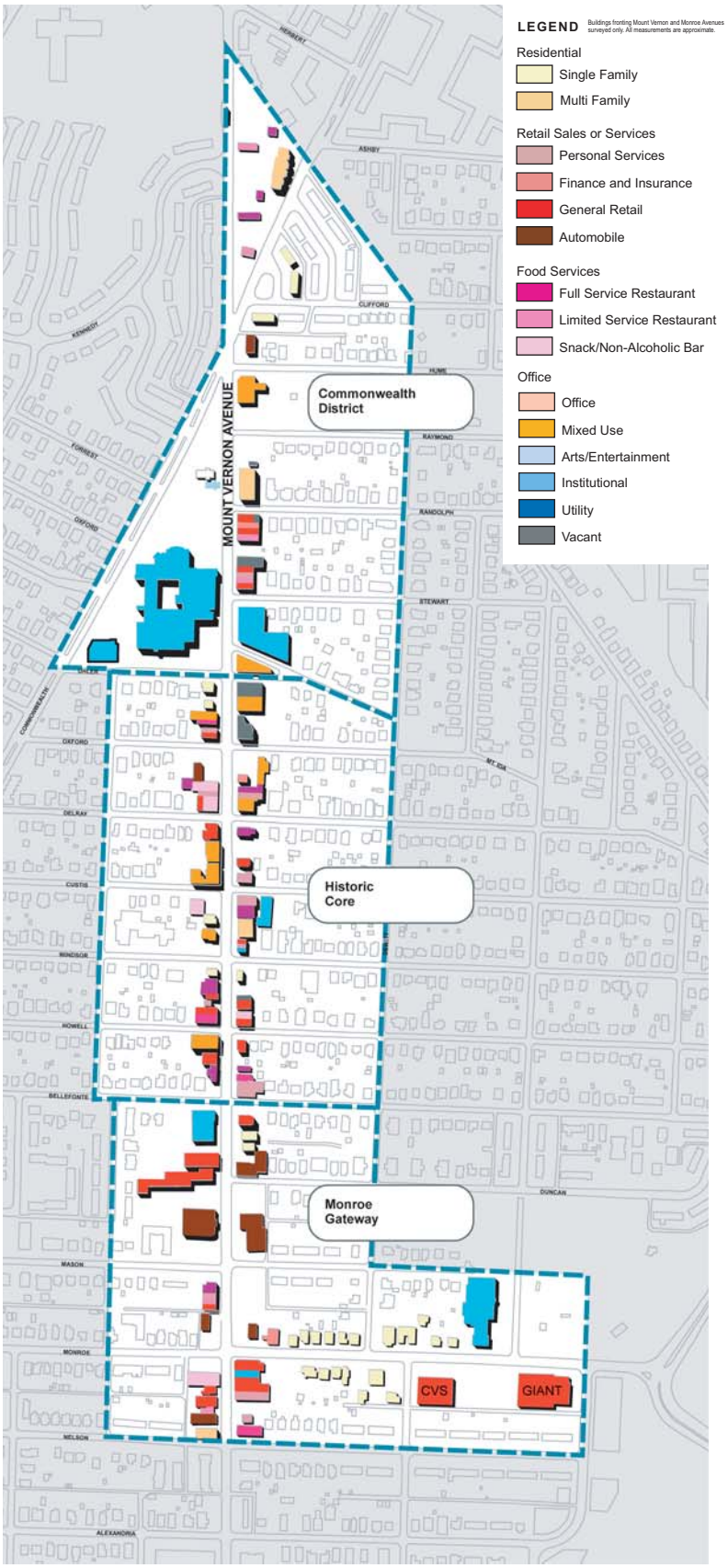
In the future, when new contruction is proposed, publicly visible open space is desirable in a consolidated manner for the enjoyment of the future user and for visual and environmental benefits that accrue to the broader community. On individual parcels it may not be possible to provide publicly visible open space. In those cases, streetscape and/or other public benefits should be provided. In cases of construction on more than one parcel or where commercial uses are proposed, a fountain, plaza or similar gathering space may be considered. Although not green, this type of open space is appropriate in urban, pedestrian-oriented Main Street environments like Mt. Vernon Avenue and provides other important respite/recreational opportunities. See Section 4.6 Land Use Controls for additional details.

ENCOURAGE A MIX OF USES

A key approach to the enhancement of Mt. Vernon Avenue as a vibrant commercial "Main Street" is to encourage and maintain a mix of land uses, including retail, residential, office and service uses. The residential and office uses help to provide a 16 hour/7 day level of activity desirable for a successful retail environment.

The overall concept for the mix of uses is to encourage new multi-family residential and 2nd floor office in the corridor to support the retail activity, and to concentrate the retail activity on the ground floor in key locations. As previously discussed in the market analysis, the Avenue has limited projected demand for additional retail uses, thus it is critical to concentrate retail uses to benefit from the synergy created by continuous commercial street frontage.

Modified Cobrahead Light Pole



Land Use with Focus Areas

Commonwealth District

The Commonwealth District is appropriate for primarily residential, office, and institutional uses, with modest retail – a strategy that promotes and strengthens the concentration of commercial activity in key locations, or nodes, such as the Historic Core. The success of traditional Main Street retail districts depends on the ability for customers to shop both sides of the street. That pattern does not exist in this area because of the predominantly residential and institutional uses, such as the community school and the park, developed along the west side of the Avenue. Given the existing development pattern, new residential, rather than retail, uses are highly appropriate in this area and will provide new affordable housing opportunities, as well as strengthen the commercial core to the south.

Figure 4.1 **Triangle Site Parcels**

ENCOURAGE A MIX OF USES

- Encourage residential and office uses, with limited retail, in a building form that is compatible in scale with adjacent uses and protects adjacent residences.
- Encourage a mix of residential units and provide affordable housing; a varied housing stock enhances the housing choices for residents in the neighborhood and citywide.

PROMOTE COORDINATED REDEVELOPMENT

One of the key sites in the Commonwealth District is the triangular-shaped assemblage of property north of Commonwealth Avenue on the east side of Mt. Vernon Avenue. This "Triangle Site" consists of several parcels that are currently occupied by two restaurants and two taxicab companies and a few vacant parcels. The combination of these parcels creates an approximately 2.0 acre site. (See Figure 4.1 highlighting the parcels.) Due to its grade change, with access opportunity from Commonwealth Avenue, as well as the site's visibility, this assemblage of property offers a significant opportunity for redevelopment that complements the entire district, and strengthens the Avenue as a whole.

The *Plan* recommends the coordinated redevelopment of these parcels, with potential FAR increases from .75 to 1.25. Achieving this density requires a development plan that meets or exceeds the following goals:

- Redevelopment is undertaken as a single unified development, with a site design that addresses the unique topography of the sites and the frontage on both Commonwealth Avenue and Mt. Vernon Avenue;
- Building height is limited to three stories along Mt. Vernon Avenue, stepping down to meet the residential scale of buildings along Commonwealth Avenue;
- Publicly-visible usable open space is provided on-site;
- Buildings complement existing character of Mt. Vernon Avenue and are of high architectural design and quality of materials;
- Underground structured parking is provided to meet the requirements of the development, with access from Commonwealth Avenue;
- On-site affordable housing units are interspersed in the development; and,
- Consistent streetscape improvements along both Mt. Vernon and Commonwealth Avenue frontages are provided.

Figure 4.2 illustrates one concept for a consolidated redevelopment of these underdeveloped parcels. The sketch illustrates a mixed-use concept that would consist of multifamily residential units, with some supporting retail on the first floor, and usable public open space at the intersection.

Figure 4.2 **Triangle Site Development Concept Sketch**

IMPROVE STREETSCAPE AND OPEN SPACE

A high-quality streetscape in the Commonwealth District area should be consistent with those in the Historic Core. The streetscape on both sides of the Avenue, south of Commonwealth Avenue, should be improved by integrating healthy street trees where there is currently deteriorating vegetation. Pedestrian-scale lighting, as well as street furnishings such as benches and waste receptacles should reflect an upgraded, attractive and safe pedestrian environment.

Areas in the northern section of the Commonwealth District should receive streetscape improvements, and new development projects should uphold the aesthetic integrity of the community. Specifically, when the "Triangle Site" is redeveloped, the development should implement the streetscape improvements on the adjacent portions of Mt. Vernon Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue.

Pedestrian improvements should also be incorporated at the intersection of Commonwealth and Mt. Vernon Avenues. These improvements should include pedestrian count-down signals, special paving in the crosswalks and bulb-outs where feasible to minimize crossing distance.

A key open space element for the Avenue is the Colasanto Park. (See Figure 4.3) This space provides a number of neighborhood recreation uses including a playground, athletic fields, basketball courts, a swimming pool and the location for the annual Christmas

SunTrust Lot

2707-2711 Mt. Vernon Avenue

Figure 4.3 **Colasanto Park Concept Sketch**

tree display. While not in the center of the Avenue's activity, this site should be improved as a key community asset. Potential improvements include the following:

- Provide attractive seating areas at the entrances to the park;
- Improve or remove the existing fencing around the park in areas where it has become visually outdated or deteriorated in condition;
- Connect the park to Mt. Vernon Avenue through signage and improved sidewalks that can accommodate strollers, wheelchairs, etc.; and,
- Create an upgraded gathering area at the north end of the park incorporating the Christmas tree display area, using landscape elements and public art that showcase the area's established art community.

Opportunity Sites

- **Triangle Site (Yellow/Diamond Cab and Adjacent Sites). 3015-3111 Mt. Vernon Ave.**

  As previously discussed, the vision for these properties is a coordinated redevelopment plan for multifamily residential uses or office with modest ground floor retail. Incorporation of an arts anchor or artist live/work space as recommended in the Arts Promotion Strategy Section 3.4 could also be considered as part of the redevelopment of the site.

- **SunTrust Lot. 2809 Mt. Vernon Ave.**

  This is a large underutilized site near the corner of Commonwealth and Mt. Vernon Avenues, developed with a bank/office building oriented to the northwest corner of the lot, with surface parking areas to the side and rear. The property is constrained by sanitary sewer and stormwater lines that bisect the site under the existing parking lot and by a 10 foot wide sewer easement located along the frontages of Mt. Vernon Avenue and Hume Avenue. In the short term, the underutilized parking lot is targeted as a possible shared parking lot. Mixed-use development, with underground or structured parking, is an appropriate future reuse of the site. Any redevelopment should respect the scale of the adjacent residences.

- **Lots at southeast corner of Mt. Vernon Avenue and Raymond Avenue. 2707-2711 Mt. Vernon Ave**

  These two lots are currently vacant and abut a property to the south that is developed with a series of one and two story structures. A coordinated development of all three properties is recommended, with residential and/or live/work units. Parking should be provided on-site either below grade or behind the buildings.

Historic Core

ENCOURAGE STREET-LEVEL RETAIL

Limit office and residential uses to the floors above the ground floor of buildings located within the Historic Core.

The Avenue will be more vibrant and retail uses will be more successful by focusing ground floor retail and personal service uses in this area.

Limit frontage of new personal service and financial uses along the Avenue to a maximum storefront width of 30 feet

A variety of retail uses and a diverse pattern of storefronts on each block creates interesting looking places, resulting in a vibrant street-level pedestrian environment.

Vibrant retail streets are typically characterized by a continuous frontage of active uses at the street level. Such uses may include restaurants, shops and services, and the Historic Core of Mt. Vernon Avenue generally conforms to this pattern. In order to maintain the retail vibrancy of this area, ground floor retail activity must be emphasized in future development within the Historic Core.

PRESERVE HISTORIC CHARACTER

Allow appropriate infill development that respects the scale of existing historic structures

The Historic Core is part of the Town of Potomac Historic District, and includes a number of contributing historic buildings (see Figure 4.4 on the next page). The *Plan* outlines a series of strategies to strengthen and improve the historic district. These historic preservation strategies are outlined in Section 4.5.

New development projects within the Historic Core should retain and incorporate any historic structures existing within their respective development sites. The physical design of all new development projects should complement the historic character and scale of the area. Additional discussion on appropriate character and scale of buildings is included in Chapter 6.0.

CREATE A TOWN SQUARE

Enhance the City parking lot (Farmers Market site) at the corner of Oxford and Mt. Vernon Avenues to serve as a gathering space for community events

This location, as shown in Figure 4.4, is centrally located to accommodate community events, as well as small gatherings.

Several properties in the core area were evaluated for their potential as a town square, based on an evaluation of the physical attributes, location and cost to acquire and develop. The ideal attributes for a town square are that it is centrally located, enclosed by commercial or public buildings, accessible on more than one side and properly sized based upon the scale of the adjoining buildings and the street. In addition, the space should contribute to the street and not simply as a break in the street wall.

In addition to the Oxford Avenue site, two other locations were evaluated; however, while centrally located, both sites were developed with historically contributing structures and bordered residential uses on the side street. These sites were removed from consideration due to the potential cost of acquisition and the impact on the neighborhood. In the potential site evaluation, a portion of the Mt. Vernon Community School site,

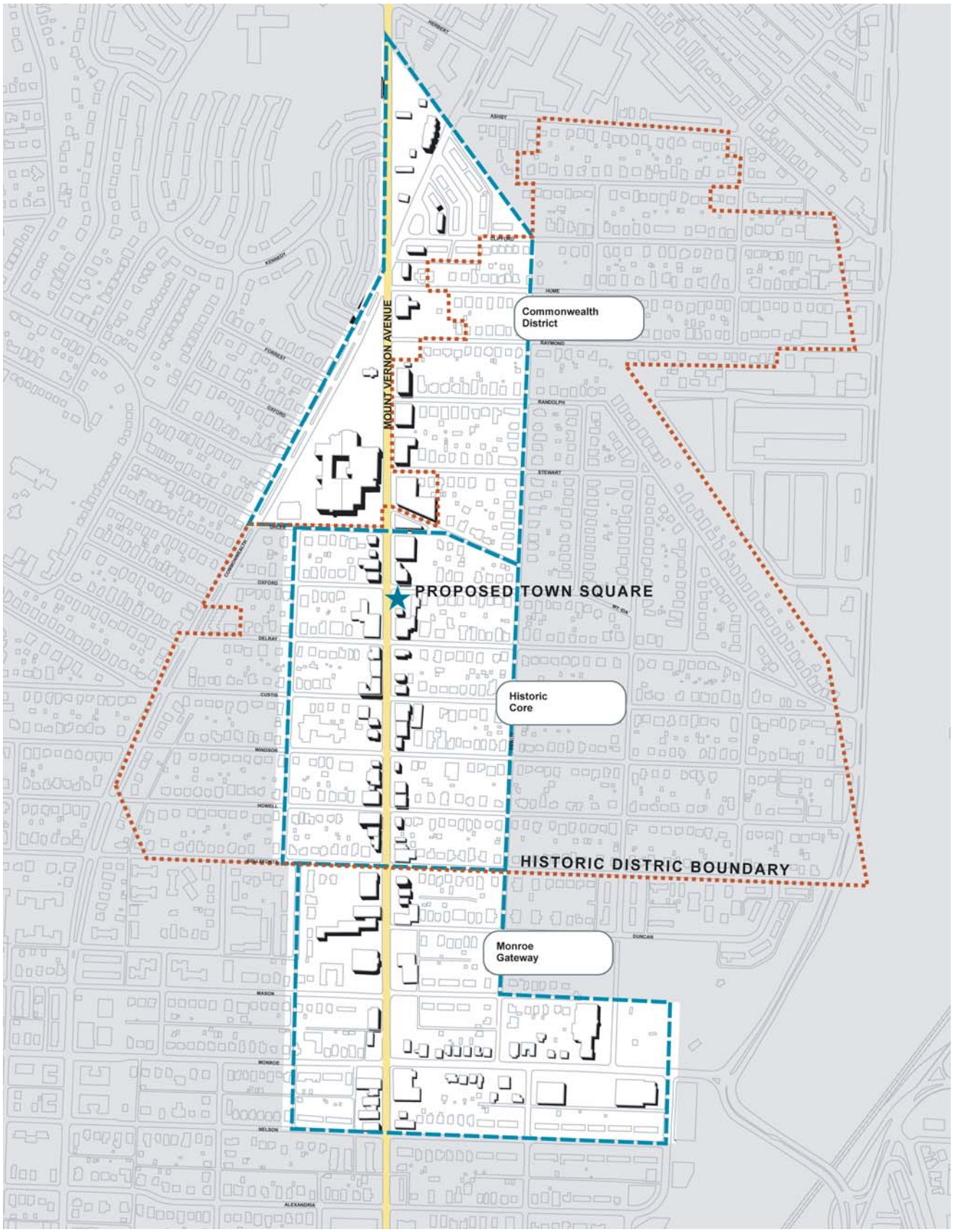


Figure 4.4 Historic Distric Boundary and Proposed Town Square Site

at the northwest corner of Uhler and Mt. Vernon Avenues was also considered, but ultimately was rejected due to the lack of alternative sites for the tot lot currently existing on the property.

The most feasible opportunity was found to be the enhancement and possible expansion of the City lot/Farmer's Market site. Expanding the existing parking lot to the south would require the acquisition of the adjacent property and either the demolition of the existing structure or its incorporation into the design of the square. This location provides the opportunity to create a small public space central to the active retail area, while retaining the parking function and offers an additional opportunity to provide greater flexibility in the operation of the regular Del Ray Farmers' Market. This location is also ideal for the town square because it is highly visible along the Avenue and is buffered from nearby residences by buildings occupied by commercial uses.

Figures 4.5 and 4.6 illustrate two possible concepts for the recommended Town Square site. The first concept depicts the expanded town square with the acquisition of the adjacent property and demolition of the building. (Figure 4.5) The intent is that the square would be a multi-function space with handsome paving. During most of the week it would function as a parking resource for the commercial uses with a small gathering area, but on Saturdays it would provide an expanded plaza for the Farmers' Market, as well as provide public space for special events and larger gatherings. Public benches shaded by trees are provided along the sidewalk edge.

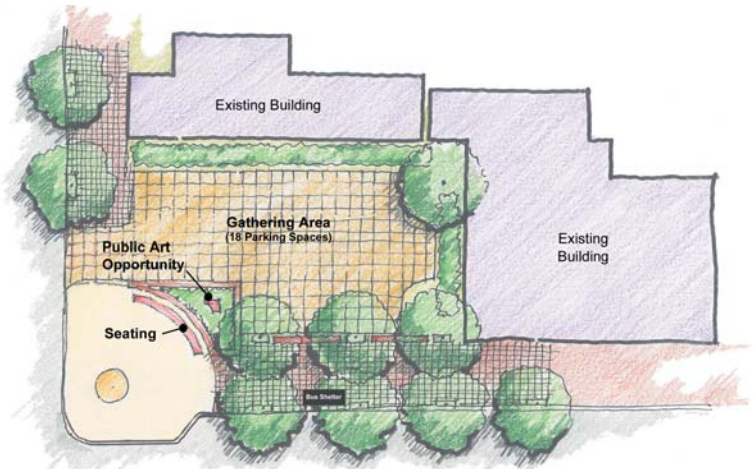


Figure 4.5 **Town Square Concept One**

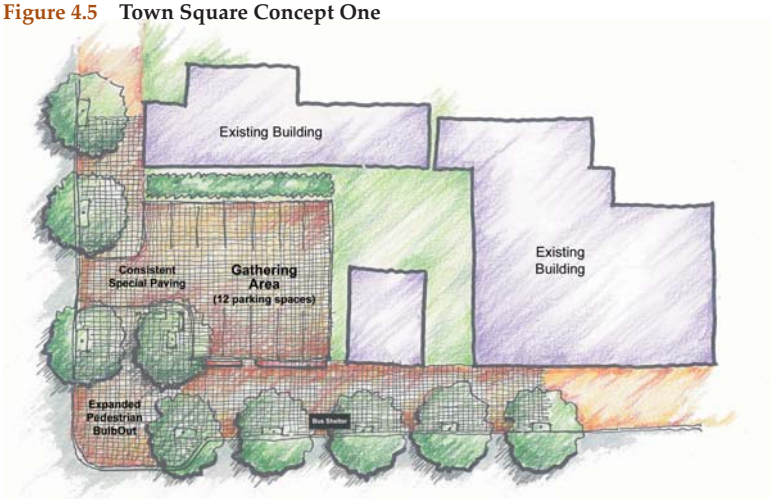


Figure 4.6 **Town Square Concept Two**

The second concept (Figure 4.6) depicts the redevelopment of the existing parking lot area only. This concept would reduce redevelopment costs, but would not include the additional parking spaces as shown in the first option and would result in a smaller plaza. While the proposed town square affords many benefits, including the creation of a few additional off-street parking spaces, it must be large enough and designed to function properly as a town square. There are costs associated with the acquisition of additional land and subsequent improvements. Regardless of which option is implemented, the space must be designed to retain its functionality as a public gathering space, as well as a parking area.

Outdoor Market

Fire Station #202

CONSIDER FIRE STATION REUSE

Should Fire Station #202 outgrow the existing facility, consider reuse of the building for community functions/activities

Constructed in 1926 and used as a town hall/fire station, this historic building located on Windsor Avenue was the center of the Town of Potomac's civic and social life. The Fire Department continues to occupy the building that is home to a hazardous materials team.

If the needs of the Fire Department outgrow the existing facility's ability to meet them and consideration is given to relocating their operations, the *Plan* recommends that the building be preserved and reused for community functions/activities. Although not located along Mt. Vernon Avenue, the site is centrally located in Del Ray and offers the additional advantage of off-street parking to accommodate community meetings and events. The *Plan* supports the reuse of the building as gathering space because it is compatible with its residential neighbors and desired by the community.

Opportunity Sites

- **Parking lot behind 2401 Mt. Vernon Ave.**

The existing parking lot behind this privately-owned building is heavily utilized during the day as parking for the City's Department of Human Services and on weekends, but is only moderately used in the evenings. The parking lot was evaluated as a potential location for a parking structure. However, the construction of above-grade parking will impact adjacent residences and the Avenue. If, in the future, the neighborhood finds the construction of a parking structure is warranted, this site may be appropriate for new above-grade parking, provided any negative impacts on adjacent residences and the Avenue are mitigated.

- **Vacant lot on east side of Mt. Vernon Avenue between Del Ray and Custis Avenues. 2207 Mt. Vernon Ave.**

Located between two developed properties, this lot could be developed with a mixed-use building, with ground floor

Figure 4.7 **Concept for new infill project at 2207 Mount Vernon Ave.** *Image by Larson Koenig Architects*

retail and residential or office uses on the upper floors. Access to the property should be provided from the nearest side street (Del Ray Avenue) and not directly from Mt. Vernon Avenue in order to maintain the street wall, enhance the pedestrian experience and minimize obstructions to the Mt. Vernon Avenue sidewalk. On-site parking should be located behind the building. One concept for an appropriately-scaled infill project is shown as Figure 4.7.

- **7-Eleven Convenience Store Site. 2108 Mt. Vernon Ave.**

Currently the site, at the southwest corner of Mt. Vernon and Custis Avenues, is developed with a 7-Eleven convenience store. As developed, the site is automobile-oriented, with surface parking located in front of the building adjacent to the sidewalk and vehicular access provided by curb cuts on both streets. Redevelopment activities should reorient the building to the front of the site, placing the parking area behind the building with vehicle access provided exclusively from Custis Avenue.

Until redevelopment is feasible, interim measures should be undertaken to enhance the appearance of the building and site and to make the site more pedestrian friendly. Improvements should include a new building façade, new landscaping along both street frontages to screen the parking lot and create additional green space on site, attractive pedestrian connection from the street to the building and a lower scale monument sign to replace the existing freestanding sign. These improvements will have a dramatic impact on the Avenue and will improve both the visual appearance of the site and the streetscape along the Avenue.

Monroe Gateway

The area south of the Historic Core, between Bellefonte Avenue and Nelson Avenue, including the small shopping center at Luray Avenue, is a gateway into Mt. Vernon Avenue from the south and east, and acts as a transition area between the retail core and residential areas to the south. The Monroe Gateway can reinforce the sense of entrance into a special place by creating a distinction through signage, landscaping and scale. These concepts should be incorporated to showcase the identity of the Avenue and surrounding community, and to create a sense of arrival. This section of the Avenue currently includes a combination of retail, service and residential uses. Although it has the same Main Street scale as the Historic Core, it lacks the continuous retail street frontage given the mix and location of service and automobile-oriented uses. There is an opportunity to strengthen the traditional Main Street retail environment by filling the gaps in street wall where incompatible uses or underutilized parcels exist and by improving uses that currently detract from the quality of the street environment.

ENCOURAGE A MIX OF USES

Due to its location on the southern edge of the Historic Core, the Monroe Gateway Area is a suitable place for complementary uses such as residential and retail uses that promote a transition into the Historic Core area. Additional residential development in this area can contribute to the commercial success of the Avenue by placing potential clientele nearby.

7-Eleven Convenience Store Site

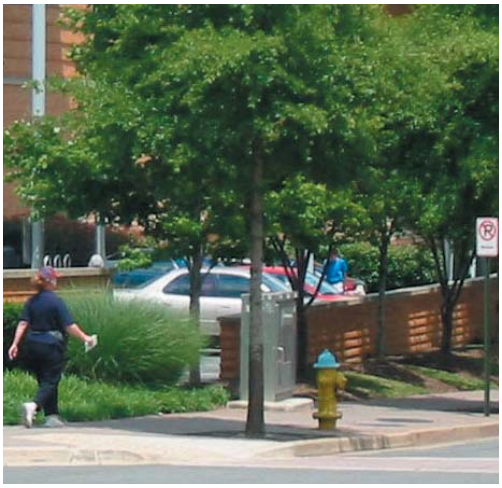
ENHANCE STREETSCAPE AND URBAN DESIGN

Complete the streetscape improvements along the Avenue and improve the appearance of automobile-oriented uses

Much of the streetscape in this section of the Avenue will be improved as the City completes the final phase of the undergrounding project. New pavers, street trees, and street furniture will be installed.

A key factor in improving this portion of the Avenue is addressing the appearance of the existing service uses. The visual appearance of automobile-oriented uses such as fuel and service stations, may be greatly minimized by orienting buildings, instead of the parking areas, onto the Avenue, and using attractive seating walls and vegetative screening to visually buffer car uses. The City should work with individual property owners on innovative ways to complement the streetscape and visual appeal of this gateway.

Parking area without screen



Parking area with wall and buffer

All streetscape improvements should extend down to Luray Avenue in order to connect the small commercial center at Luray Avenue with the business area to the north.

IMPROVE GATEWAY PARK

The realignment of the Route 1 / Monroe Avenue Bridge offers an opportunity to expand the existing Eugene Simpson Stadium Park to the east. Design of this additional parkland on the north side of Monroe Avenue should emphasize a park-like gateway for the community. Currently, the park is surrounded by a retaining wall. With any park expansion, views into the park should be emphasized to provide a high quality gateway for the community.

ENHANCE THE NEIGHBORHOOD GIANT AND CVS SITES

The community has expressed a desire to maintain the combination of the CVS Pharmacy and Giant Foods Grocery Store at their current locations in the 400 block of Monroe Avenue. As such, the primary goal is to work with the existing property owners and tenants to identify ways for the site to continue to operate with the current uses and meet the establishments' future requirements. The current uses appear to be very compatible with and complementary to the surrounding neighborhoods. However, the stores are considerably smaller than the industry standard and may be subject to market forces as grocery stores in nearby neighborhoods are developed or enlarged.

Should a future shift in market realities render the current sites or uses obsolete and unsuitable for long-term operation, it will be critical that the City provide adequate leadership in directing a new vision for this site.

Given its location in relation to major transportation routes, the attraction of the Historic Core and surrounding neighborhoods, there are two appropriate directions for the long-term development of these sites. The first option is to maintain the sites as commercial parcels with locally serving uses. The second is to redevelop the sites as a consolidated mixed-use project incorporating commercial uses on the ground floor and residential uses above. The addition of residential uses onto the site will enhance the existing residential neighborhood. The new ground floor commercial uses would continue to support the needs of the local community. No other changes to the existing properties along Monroe Avenue between Route 1 and Mt. Vernon Avenue are proposed.

Should market forces push the redevelopment of these parcels, the *Plan* recommends the coordinated redevelopment of the two sites, with potential FAR increases from .75 to 1.25. Achieving this density requires a development plan that meets or exceeds the following goals:

- Redevelopment is undertaken as a single unified mixed-use development, with the desired mix of uses to include a grocery, pharmacy and other retail on the ground floor and residential or office use on the upper levels;
- Building height is limited to three stories along Monroe Avenue, stepping down to adjacent residences;

Figure 4.8 **Giant / CVS Site Development Concept Sketch**

- Publicly-visible usable open space is provided on-site;
- Buildings complement existing character of the Del Ray area and are of high architectural design and quality of materials;
- Underground structured parking is provided to meet the requirements of the development;
- On-site affordable housing units are interspersed in the development; and,
- Streetscape improvements along the Monroe Avenue frontage are provided.

Figure 4.8 illustrates one concept for redevelopment of the Giant and CVS sites. This concept illustrates a consolidated redevelopment of these two parcels, with a total lot area of almost two acres. The principal goal is to maintain these community-supporting uses on these sites. The intention of this concept plan is to illustrate an approach to redevelopment if market forces drive a change of use. The sketch illustrates a mixed-use concept that includes residential with retail uses on the first floor that should include a grocery store and/or pharmacy and other retail uses.

ENHANCE ACCESS TO THE METRO STATION

Another element of the *Plan* for the Monroe Gateway Area is to take full advantage of some of the additional changes that will occur to the south of this area due to the Route 1/Monroe Avenue bridge reconstruction. Current plans call for improvements to Leslie Avenue, which runs parallel to the Metrorail tracks. This road should be upgraded to provide pedestrian and bicycle access along the east side of George Washington Middle School to the Braddock Road Metro Station.

In addition, other opportunities should be identified for pedestrian improvements linking the Braddock Road Metro Station to Del Ray and coordinated with the Potomac Yard improvements. New signage and lighting to encourage evening travel between the Metro and Mt. Vernon Avenue should also be included. In addition, an attractive bus shelters should be integrated along the Avenue for visitors who arrive by bus. Information kiosk(s) near the Braddock Road Metro and along the Avenue could be incorporated as part of a wayfinding system to direct visitors to Mt. Vernon Avenue and other nearby amenities.

Opportunity Sites

The following opportunity sites play an important role in filling existing gaps within Mt. Vernon Avenue's street wall with a scale of development that frames the Avenue and is consistent with the existing character and scale of buildings.

With many of the sites, it is not anticipated that they will redevelop in the short term. However, the *Plan* provides a vision for future use of the sites when redevelopment is considered. In the short term, the *Plan* recommends that building facades and properties be upgraded with improved signage, landscaping and other features that contribute to an enhanced streetscape and shift the emphasis from the primacy of the automobile to the safety of the pedestrian.

- **Salvation Army Sites, 1800 Block of Mt. Vernon Avenue**

The Salvation Army owns several properties in the 1800 block of Mt. Vernon Avenue. The church building is located on the west side of the Avenue (1804 Mt. Vernon Avenue) and has a large surface parking lot behind it. The Salvation Army currently allows shared parking on its lot during non-peak hours and this parking resource should continue to be available in the future, which will help to reduce the demand for limited on-street parking. As a consequence, any future redevelopment of the site should retain the parking resources. Directly across the Avenue from the church to the east are two single-family homes (1805 and 1807 Mt. Vernon Avenue) owned by the Salvation Army and operated as transitional housing. The *Plan* supports the transitional housing use in this location and recommends that any redevelopment on the site include one-for-one replacement of the transitional units, as well as additional affordable housing units and market rate units. Partnering with the newly-formed nonprofit Alexandria Housing Development Corporation (AHDC) should be explored to facilitate the provision of affordable housing.

- **Fannon Printing/Arlandria Floors/ R&B Heating and Air Conditioning/ Kesterson Plumbing and Heating properties, 1800 and 1900 blocks of Mt. Vernon Avenue**

Although redevelopment of any of these sites is unlikely in the near future, a mix of uses, with ground floor retail, is recommended when reuse or redevelopment of these sites is considered. If structurally feasible, the Arlandria Floors building, a fine example of Art Deco architecture, would be an appropriate candidate for the addition of second-floor residential or office use.

In the short term, building and site improvements should be undertaken to enhance the appearance of the contractor sites and improve the streetscape. Recommended improvements include the relocation of heavy equipment to a less visually prominent location on the site; removal of old building appurtenances or site features, such as chain link fencing located immediately adjacent to the sidewalk; and the screening of parking areas facing the Avenue. Other recommended improvements include new, pedestrian-oriented signage, landscaping and other similar improvements designed to enhance the appearance of the property and streetscape.

Contractors' vehicles and equipment are visible from the street through chainlink fence.

Salvation Army Transitional Housing

Figure 4.9 **Service Station Improvement Concept**

Car Dealerships

- **Auto Dealerships, 1600 and 1700 Blocks of Mt. Vernon Avenue**

Two automobile dealerships, Alexandria Hyundai and Audi of Alexandria, currently operate in the 1600 and 1700 blocks of Mt. Vernon Avenue. These uses are inconsistent with the Potomac West Small Area Plan and with the existing zoning that does not allow automobile-oriented uses such as automobile dealerships. Although it is unlikely that either dealership property will redevelop in the foreseeable future, mixed-use buildings, with ground floor retail and residences or offices above would be compatible with adjacent residences and would complement the Historic Core and the nearby retail area at Mt. Vernon and Monroe Avenues. On-site parking should be provided below grade, and access to the sites should be provided via a side street and not directly from the Avenue. Any new construction activity should seek to define and develop the street wall in these blocks, while providing building breaks with publically visible open space and landscape areas.

Recommended interim improvements to the properties include new, pedestrian-oriented signage, replacement of pavement adjacent to the sidewalk with pavers that complete the streetscape, landscaping to screen parked cars, and other similar improvements designed to enhance the appearance of the property and streetscape.

- **Service Stations, 1600 and 1601 Mt. Vernon Ave.**

The Mt. Vernon Exxon station located at the northeast corner of Mt. Vernon and Monroe Avenues is a nonconforming use. The business is allowed by Special Use Permit (SUP) approved prior to the 1992 comprehensive rezoning to operate until 2010 at which time the SUP expires. The Alexandria Shell station located directly across the street on the northwest corner is a noncomplying use and may continue to operate indefinitely. Similar to the automobile dealerships, service stations are not permitted under the existing zoning and are inconsistent with the Potomac West Small Area Plan that calls the redevelopment of auto-oriented uses to pedestrian-oriented uses.

Although it is unlikely that the service station properties will be redeveloped in the near term, the expiration of the approval for Mt. Vernon Exxon in 2010 will provide an opportunity for reuse or redevelopment of the site. The site abuts the nonconforming Alexandria Hyundai automobile storage lot, and the operator of the lot must seek an extension of the lot's SUP approval prior to 2011, with continuance of the use to be reviewed by the Planning Commission and City Council. Thus, there is a potential for redevelopment or reuse of both the Mt. Vernon Exxon and Hyundai storage sites within the next ten years. A coordinated redevelopment of both sites could create an anchor in this area that would draw people down the Avenue and strengthen the small commercial area at Monroe Avenue. Mixed-use, including residential or office uses, with ground floor retail, is appropriate in this location and compatible with its residential and commercial neighbors. Figure 4.9 shows a simple approach for improving the sites on an interim basis.

- **1503 Mt. Vernon Avenue**

This site is an undeveloped lot located immediately adjacent to the shopping center at the southeastern corner of Mt. Vernon and Monroe Avenues. It is currently used as the display area for the Eclectic Nature Garden Center, which began operating in 2004. While it is unlikely, given the recent investment in the property, that any change in use will occur in the near term, any future infill development should include ground floor retail uses. In order to maintain a streetwall in this block, vehicular access to the property should be provided from a side street or an access easement with an adjacent property rather than directly from Mt. Vernon Avenue.

- **Verizon Building, 301 Alexandria Avenue**

Located along the west side of Avenue, at the corner of Alexandria and Mt. Vernon Avenues is the telephone switching station owned by Verizon. Although Verizon has no plans at present to vacate the building, as communications technology changes and evolves, this station may be rendered obsolete. If that occurs, it is recommended that the building, if retained, or the property be used for residences, provided adequate provisions for parking are made without impact on the adjoining neighborhood. A residential use is compatible with existing residential neighborhood.

- **Giant and CVS sites, 415 and 425 Monroe Avenue**

As previously discussed, the community strongly desires to retain the grocery store and pharmacy in this location. In the short-term, measures should be taken to identify ways for the current tenants to continue to operate on the sites. However, given the relatively small footprint of the Giant store (much smaller than most modern supermarkets), and competition from new, large or specialty grocery stores, it is likely that market conditions will dictate whether the uses remain in operation. To guide future redevelopment of these sites, a coordinated redevelopment of both parcels is envisioned, with grocery and drug store uses accommodated on-site.

1503 Mt. Vernon Avenue

Service Stations

Verizon Building
301 Alexandria Avenue

4.4 Affordable Housing

Guiding Principles

Preserve and protect existing residential areas

- Protect existing affordable housing opportunities

Encourage and support mixed-use development

- Create new affordable housing opportunities

Affordable Housing Apartment Building

Affordable Housing as a second story above retail

A two-pronged strategy is recommended along Mt. Vernon Avenue to ensure the provision of affordable housing. The recommendations are designed to provide guidance to the development community as to the City's goals for affordable housing both citywide and on Mt. Vernon Avenue, and to encourage the development of new affordable housing units on Mt. Vernon Avenue.

As previously discussed, retail is the most beneficial ground floor use on Mt. Vernon Avenue to reinforce and strengthen the commercial areas. As opportunities for infill or new development occur, new affordable housing is encouraged and should be provided on the floors above the ground floor. Residential uses at street level may be appropriate on Mt. Vernon Avenue north of Uhler Avenue and south of Nelson Avenue. On-site affordable housing is the most desirable condition as it helps to provide housing for a wider variety of people. However, there may be cases where it is not feasible to provide on-site affordable housing. In those instances, the developer should contribute to the City's Housing Trust Fund as set forth in the Affordable Housing Policy.

For the two larger properties where future redevelopment is desired or likely, specifically the "Triangle Site," and the Giant/CVS site on Monroe Avenue, new on-site affordable housing units should be provided. New Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs) for those properties would require the developer to provide on-site affordable housing units in accordance with the affordable housing policies in effect at the time, but no fewer than 10% of the units should be affordable.

The *Plan* recommends encouraging new home ownership opportunities and resident participation in the homeownership programs sponsored by the City, to minimize the number of people that are priced out of the market over time.

An important part of this affordable housing strategy is educating residents and the development community about the need for affordable housing in the City, the City's Affordable Housing Policy guidelines, and the types of funding available to provide affordable housing. The *Plan* recognizes and supports the ongoing programs and homeownership fairs offered by the Office of Housing and encourages all community stakeholders to actively participate in the efforts to expand awareness of and support for affordable housing.

4.5 Historic Preservation

Guiding Principles

Celebrate the "Town of Potomac Historic District"

- Protect and enhance the corridor's visual appeal through streetscape and façade improvements
- Define and enhance the unique community identity through interpretive graphics

Preserve the existing historic scale and character

- Allow for appropriate infill development and redevelop incompatible buildings
- Implement standards and guidelines to ensure quality development that reflects the scale of existing historic structures

The Mt. Vernon Avenue Plan seeks to strengthen the existing historic district, especially the commercial buildings located along Mt. Vernon Avenue, by encouraging the retention of the contributing buildings through reuse and appropriate renovations or new construction. The *Plan* also includes design guidelines for infill development in the Historic Core area that complement the existing mass and scale of these buildings.

There are numerous architectural styles prevalent in the Town of Potomac Historic District. The Town's commercial buildings include examples of Art Deco and Moderne architecture as well as many vernacular two-story brick commercial buildings built with second floor apartments. The architectural styles of the town's residences include foursquare, bungalows, and modified Queen Anne style.

In the early 1990s, a survey of over 900 properties in the Town of Potomac area was conducted and an application was submitted nominating the area for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Close to 700 of the buildings surveyed were deemed to be contributing structures, i.e., those structures whose original features are still intact and that contribute positively to retention of the character of the historic fabric.
In 1992, the Town of Potomac was officially entered into the National Register of Historic Places.

Watercolor by Alice Kale.

The *Plan* recommends the following strategies to strengthen and improve the historic district:

- **Update the National Historic Register to designate certain previously noncontributing structures as contributing buildings within the historic district**

Twelve years have passed since the City's nomination for designation of buildings to the National Register. Three buildings that did not meet the National Register age threshold (i.e., at least 50 years of age at the time of the nomination) could not be included in the nomination as contributing structures at the time, but are of sufficient age and architectural merit to be designated as contributing structures today. The *Plan* recommends amending the designation of the following buildings from noncontributing to contributing:

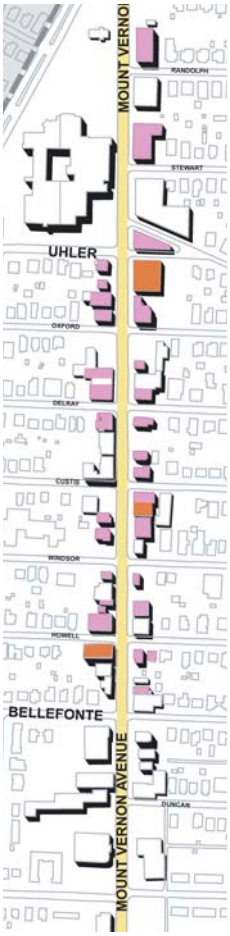


Figure 4.10
Contributing Structures (Pink)
Potentially Contributing Structures (Orange)

Figure 4.11 **Post Office Building**

1. Post Office building, 1908 Mt. Vernon Avenue; A.F. & A.M. Lodge Building, dedicated 1946 (cornerstone)

This structure is a three story brick, commercial, fraternal and office building occupied by the United States Post Office on the first floor and offices on the upper floors. This is perhaps the most distinctive building along Mt. Vernon Avenue. It is a combination of Federal Revival and Art Deco stylistic influences. The building combines traditional seven course American bond red brick and twelve-over-twelve wood windows with a glass block window and transoms and fluted cast concrete door surrounds. The building is slightly asymmetrical in composition and has five bays fronting on Mt. Vernon Avenue. The first floor has a central entry door with a cast concrete surround, glass block transom above with an inset of a stylized cast concrete American eagle and is flanked by metal storefront system. A secondary entrance with a fluted cast concrete door surround with glass block transom provides access to the offices on the second and third floors. Incised letters over this entrance read: "A.F. & A.M. Lodge #349 Henry Knox Field" (Ancient Free and Accepted Masons). Both entrances are flanked by Art Deco influenced wall sconces. The second level has central cast concrete circular window centered over the entrance below flanked by twelve-over-twelve double hung windows with brick jack arches with cast concrete keystone. An over large glass block window is set over the secondary entrance. The third level has four twelve-over-twelve double hung windows. The secondary elevations are more regular in fenestration with all windows being twelve-over-twelve double hung windows with brick jack arches and cast concrete keystone. There is a loading dock on West Howell side of the building. The roof is flat and there is an elevator penthouse. It seems likely that the disparate building materials employed in the construction of the building reflect the shortages of available building materials in the immediate post war years.

Figure 4.12 **2107 Mount Vernon Avenue**

2. A two story office building, 2107 Mt. Vernon Avenue

This is a simple, essentially vernacular retail and office building. It was constructed 1954-1955 by Mr. Jen Mallis. It is two stories in height and is covered in unpainted buff brick. The building is approximately 45′ in width and 59′ in length. There are two storefronts facing Mt. Vernon Avenue both with aluminum storefront systems. The second level

fenestration facing Mt. Vernon Avenue has two picture windows each flanked by multi-pane metal casement windows. The fenestration on the secondary elevations is all metal windows and a mixture of double hung and casement types. The roof is flat.

Figure 4.13 **2401 Mount Vernon Avenue**

3. Buildings occupied by a restaurant (Caboose Bakery), Pilates studio, 2401 Mt. Vernon Avenue, stylistically 1935-1940

The existing two story brick building was originally constructed with retail uses on the first floor, with offices above and the "Del Ray Bowling Alleys" in the basement. In 1955, the second floor office uses were converted to apartments. Stylistically the building is stripped down Art Deco with eight projecting brick piers on the front that extend beyond the roof parapet dividing the building into symmetrical bays with a central, projecting entry feature with recessed doorway. The entry way has a two story surround of brick laid up in a contrasting pattern outlining the entrance. Windows for apartments are replacement casement windows. Retail uses on first floor have replacement metal and glass storefront systems with glass block windows on the south side. The roof is a flat slag roof.

The *Plan* further recommends that the designation of additional noncontributing buildings in the Town of Potomac Historic District be reevaluated as additional buildings meet the 50-year old test in the future.

- **Explore the expansion of the existing Town of Potomac Historic District boundaries**

There may be other buildings outside the existing boundaries of the Town of Potomac Historic District that should be preserved as contributing to the historic character of the area. These buildings need to be identified and research conducted to determine whether the boundaries of the existing district should be expanded to include additional buildings. The *Plan* recommends seeking a cost-share grant with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) to survey the buildings on the edge of the Town of Potomac and evaluate the possible expansion of the boundaries of the historic district.

- **Specific recommendations for infill and new construction**

Specific recommendations include the preservation of existing contributing buildings in the Town of Potomac Historic District. The *Plan* recommends against the demolition of any contributing buildings over 750 square feet in size in this area. New infill development and construction should respect the style and scale of the preserved buildings and authentic Art Deco and Moderne styling, and the design elements of new construction should incorporate existing characteristics. New buildings and additions should not overpower historic buildings and should step down to them. (See Section 6.3 for additional discussion of building design guidelines.)

Examples of Art Deco styling

Historic Marker

- **Create and install heritage and interpretive signs**

In order to help identify and raise awareness of the historic district, heritage and interpretive signs should be installed in the district.

- **Promote awareness of the Town of Potomac Historic District**

Residents and business owners may not be aware that their buildings are located in a historic district. In addition, they may also not be aware of existing rehabilitation tax credit programs offered by the Commonwealth of Virginia and the federal government that could be utilized to reduce the overall cost of renovations.

The Commonwealth of Virginia provides a 25 percent tax credit, which is applied to an individual's or corporation's state income tax for the rehabilitation of contributing properties within the National Historic Register District. 'The federal tax credit is 20 percent for income producing-properties. (Thus, the rehabilitation of a personal residence does not qualify for the federal tax credit, but would qualify for the Virginia tax credit.) An income-producing property, such as a business, multifamily apartment building or single-family home that is rented, would qualify for both the federal and state tax credits.

A 10 percent federal tax credit is also available for the rehabilitation of noncontributing structures in the historic district. Neither the state nor federal program is mutually exclusive, however, a property must be income-producing to qualify for the federal tax credit. In that case, up to a 45 percent credit is possible to defray renovation costs.

Efforts to promote awareness of the historic district are recommended, as follows:

- *partnering with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to provide information to the community about the Town of Potomac Historic District and programs offered by the DHR including state preservation grants, rehabilitation tax credits, and other programs. Educational efforts could include a presentation to the Del Ray Citizens Association, semiannual workshops, and other similar efforts.*
- *providing technical assistance to the community regarding the design of compatible infill and new construction, and the use of rehabilitation tax credits as incentives.*

The *Plan* recommends these strategies both to ensure the preservation of historic resources in the Town of Potomac and to guide improvement of existing buildings and new development activities in a manner that protects the historic elements and promotes a quality retail district.

4.6 Land Use Controls

Mt. Vernon Urban Overlay District

The *Plan* recommends the creation of the Mt. Vernon Urban Overlay District to provide the zoning mechanism to implement the *Plan's* land use, parking and urban design recommendations. The purpose of the Mt. Vernon Urban Overlay District is to encourage a mix of land uses and compatible infill construction, protect residential neighbors, support the historic character and the preservation goals of the historic district, preserve and enhance the existing urban character of the corridor and promote enhanced economic activity.

The overlay district will apply to properties fronting along Mt. Vernon Avenue from Nelson Avenue on the south to Commonwealth Avenue on the north. The district will include provisions for land use, building form, parking and access, building signage, outdoor display and administrative permits. A retail focus area is defined in the overlay district between Bellefonte Avenue and Uhler Avenue and is co-terminus with the section of the corridor located within the Town of Potomac National Register Historic District.

Major elements of the overlay district are the application of the Building Form Design Guidelines as outlined in Sections 6.2 and 6.3 of the *Plan,* allowance for variation to the requirements of the underlying CL zoning district through the Special Use Permit (SUP) approval process and the potential for reduction of parking requirements for infill development. This overlay will:

- Allow waivers of lot size, floor area ratio, yards and open space
- Ensure the preservation of the historic character, mass and scale of the Avenue through the use of the Building Form Design Guidelines

PARKING AND OPEN SPACE

- Allow for the reduction in parking requirements for infill development that does not involve the demolition of historic buildings (over 750 square feet) that are designated as contributing structures in the Town of Potomac Historic District
- Provide a three tiered approach to requirements for parking and open space for construction in accordance with the Building Form Design Guidelines, based on the size of the development parcel, as follows:

  - *Lots of 7,000 square feet or less: Allow waiver of ground level open space requirements for new mixed use involving upper floor residential, the waiver of parking requirements for land-locked interior parcels and the reduction of parking requirements for corner lots and lots with rear access.*

  - *Lots of 7,001 - 15,000 square feet: Require 15% ground level open space, a portion of which is visually accessible from Mt. Vernon Avenue; and a reduction up to half of the parking required. A minimum of one parking space per residential unit must be provided.*

  - *Lots greater than 15,000 square feet: Maintain a minimum of 25% ground level, open space, visible from the public way, appropriate for the size of the project and ensure that sufficient parking is provided to meet the full needs of the development. Additional open space and massing requirements will ensure that larger projects maintain compatibility with the existing character of buildings along Mt. Vernon Avenue.*

The consolidation of individual lots to create a larger development is strongly discouraged.

- Allow waiver of parking requirements for:
  - *Change of use from personal service/ office to retail*
  - *Outdoor dining*

RETAIL FOCUS

- Defines a retail focus area from Uhler to Bellefonte Avenues
  - *Only retail, restaurant and personal service uses permitted on first floor; personal service uses limited to 30 feet of frontage*
  - *Arts and crafts studios or stores are not considered personal service uses provided that retail sales areas occupy at least 75 percent of the frontage along Mt. Vernon Avenue*

RESTAURANT / RETAIL

- Admin approval for:
  - *Restaurants with 60 seats or less with outdoor dining*
  - *Live theater*
  - *Outdoor markets*
  - *Outdoor garden center*
- Administrative approval for outdoor display
- Incorporate storefront guidelines for new retail

Existing noncomplying uses are allowed to continue indefinitely under existing noncomplying rules. The zoning overlay district will not replace the existing underlying zoning regulations. The overlay district provides design recommendations aimed at achieving appropriately scaled and designed commercial and mixed-use infill development that closely resembles neighboring buildings and complements the existing character of the Avenue.

Coordinated Development Districts

Two areas are designated as Coordinated Development Districts (CDD). These two areas are 1) the properties on the east side of Mt. Vernon Avenue between Commonwealth Avenue and Herbert Street, referred to as the "Triangle sites", and 2) the Giant and CVS sites on the south side of the 400 block of Monroe Avenue.

TRIANGLE SITES

The following elements are recommended in the designation of this property as a CDD:

- Underlying zoning remains CL
- Underlying zoning district to exclude single-family and townhouse dwellings
- Allow increase in FAR from .75 to 1.25 with SUP and compliance with the following performance standards:
- Desired development includes mixed use building with ground floor retail and residential and/or office uses on upper floors;
- Greater density and height to be provided on the northern portion of the site; provide a mix of building typology;
- Building mass and scale compatible with existing mass, scale and character of area;
- Sufficient building articulation is required to break up the mass into smaller components;
- Building height limited to 2 1/2 – 3 stories, with step downs in building mass along Commonwealth Avenue;
- Protect adjacent residential neighborhood with appropriate building stepbacks, breaks in massing and the provision of rear buffers and setbacks;

- Provide a minimum of 25% ground-level, consolidated and usable open space, a significant portion of which shall be publicly visible from Mt. Vernon Avenue ;
- Provide a large functional open space area at the corner of Mt. Vernon and Commonwealth that is physically accessible;
- Vehicular access to the site from Mt. Vernon Avenue is strongly discouraged;
- Provide underground structured parking to meet parking requirements, with access provided along Commonwealth Avenue in a manner that does not conflict with the access to Commonwealth Terrace Apartments; service access from Mt. Vernon Avenue is prohibited;
- Where underground parking is adjacent to public streets, residential use as a liner use shall be provided on the street frontage; in other locations, architectural treatment shall be provided;
- Provide on-site affordable housing in accordance with policies in effect, but no fewer than 10% of the units;
- Provide public art, including sculpture, murals, fountains, other similar features;
- The primary facades of the building shall be masonry (brick, stone or precast), secondary façade may include cemetious siding;
- The site design and building massing shall consider the location of Commonwealth Terrace Apartments and include appropriate setbacks and height reductions to minimize potential impacts, and provide an appropriate transition.

GIANT/CVS SITES

As discussed earlier, retention of the existing grocery and pharmacy is desired. However, given concerns that market conditions may force a change in the ability of these establishments to compete, the Plan recommends the designation of these sites as a CDD with the following elements:

- Underlying zoning remains CL
- Allow increase in FAR from .75 to 1.25 with SUP and compliance with the following performance standards:
- Desired development includes grocery store with pharmacy, other ground floor retail uses, with residential and/or office uses on upper floors;
- Building mass and scale compatible with existing mass, scale and character of area;
- Sufficient building articulation is required to break up the mass into smaller components;
- Building height limited to 2 1/2 – 3 stories, with step downs in scale to any adjoining residential use;
- Protect adjacent residential neighborhood with appropriate building stepbacks, breaks in massing and the provision of rear buffers;
- Provide a minimum of 25% ground-level, consolidated and usable open space, a significant portion of which is publicly visible;
- Construct underground structured parking to meet parking requirements;
- Provide on-site affordable housing in accordance with policies in effect, but no fewer than 10% of the units;
- Provide public art, including sculpture, murals, fountains, other similar features;
- Coordinate internal streets and open space with Potomac Yard and the existing neighborhood.

The vision for these sites is described in detail in Section 4.3 of the *Plan*.

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Parking and Multi-Modal Linkages

5.0

5.1 Guiding Principles

Provide convenient parking and transportation solutions to support retail growth

- Maintain a balance in the supply of and demand for parking
- Maximize the use and turnover of Mt. Vernon Avenue on-street parking to serve retail customers
- Serve employees and longer term customers with off-street parking
- Develop innovative parking strategies to optimize existing resources

Provide alternative multi-modal transportation linkages

It is essential to improve the utilization of existing parking resources and balance the supply and demand for parking along Mt. Vernon Avenue in order to ensure that parking demand is met without negatively impacting nearby residences. The following recommendations are important to accomplishing this goal:

Key Strategies:

- Develop a shared parking program
- Create a parking overlay district
- Establish a parking reduction policy
- Monitor parking demand

Other Recommendations:

- Improve access and circulation in the parking lots behind buildings
- Enforce existing parking limitations
- Identify spaces for shorter-term parking
- Resolve conflict in parking limitations in key locations
- Identify alternative locations for the existing taxicab stand

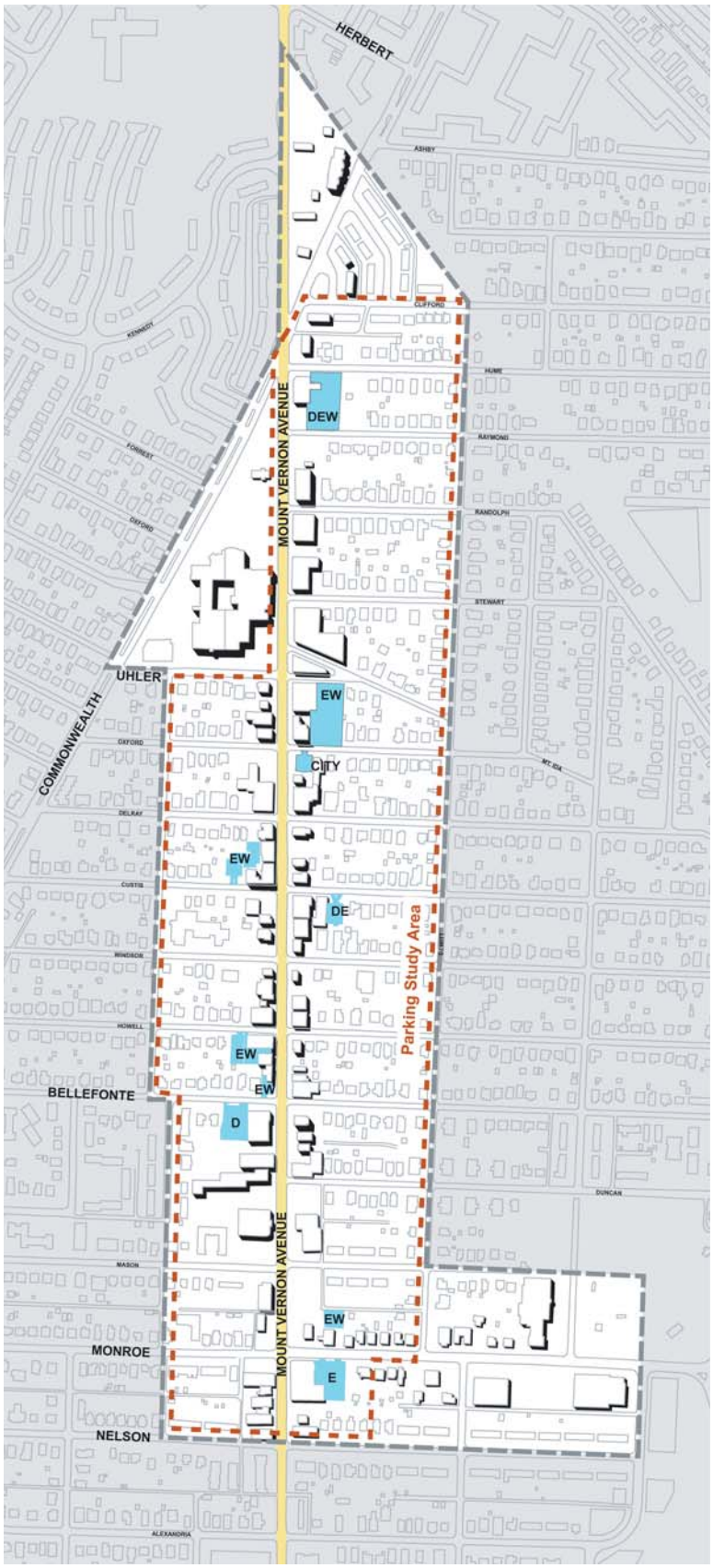


Figure 5.1 **Potential Shared Parking Lots:** **D=Day, E=Evening, W=Weekend**

5.2 Parking Utilization Study

A parking utilization study was conducted as part of this Plan to understand the current and potential future parking conditions along Mt. Vernon Avenue and to assist in formulating the appropriate parking strategies. The study surveyed parking spaces serving businesses including the on-street spaces on Mt. Vernon Avenue, the public parking lot located at the corner of Oxford and Mt. Vernon Avenues, and ten targeted private parking lots identified by staff as having the potential for shared parking due to low observed utilization of the spaces. A total of 361 spaces exist on these lots. In addition, the first blocks of east-west residential cross streets (from Hume Avenue to Nelson Avenue) were analyzed to assess the ability of these streets to handle their adjoining residential parking and to explore potential impact of overflow business parking.

Custis Avenue residential cross street

Purple Goose Shops

Findings

The neighborhood currently has an overall supply of parking spaces that exceeds the measured demand. Generally speaking, the parking study indicates that the existing parking supply and demand for the spaces are balanced with sufficient surplus spaces to accommodate regular turnover of the spaces. Utilization of the existing parking spaces ranges from 60 to 69 percent midday during weekdays. On weekday and weekend evenings between 40 and 56 percent of the existing parking spaces are utilized. A contributing factor to this relative equilibrium is the mixed-use and walkable nature of the neighborhood, with businesses often frequented by area residents without the use of automobiles or by drivers who park once and visit more than one business during a single trip.

In addition, the study has found that the majority of unused spaces are located in private, off-street parking lots. In the Historic Core area, for example, between 139 and 176 unused private parking spaces in the targeted lots were observed during the parking study on weekday evenings. The parking study found that the utilization of the lots depended upon the principal users of the spaces, and that peak and non-peak hours of utilization varied depending on the type of use as well. Private parking lots associated with office uses were predictably heavily utilized during regular office hours, with large amounts of available parking in the evenings. Parking spaces are available in these lots that could be used, during their respective off-peak hours, to accommodate parking demand from other Mt. Vernon Avenue businesses.

Commonwealth District

The highest utilization of on-street public parking spaces in the Commonwealth District is on weekend days when between 62 and 65 percent of parking spaces are utilized. The next highest utilization is on weekday evenings, when between 51 and 57 percent of spaces are occupied. Utilization of parking on weekend evenings is much lower than daytime rates, ranging from 42 to 45 percent. Weekday daytime utilization fluctuates from a low of 22 percent to a high of 48 percent.

Utilization of the single targeted private off-street parking lot in the Commonwealth District is the same for both weekday and weekend daytime parking and ranges between 35 and 40 percent. Weekday and weekend evening utilization rates are also similar, with between 14 and 24 percent of the spaces occupied. The low utilization rates of the private parking spaces on weekday evenings (when demand for parking is high) afford considerable opportunity for shared parking. Shared parking of the private spaces is also possible on weekend days when the utilization of the public spaces is highest, because almost 60 percent of the private parking spaces are unused at that time.

As for residential parking on the Commonwealth District's cross streets, there are 130 registered vehicles and 84 residences, roughly 1.5 vehicles per residence. This is less than the ratio of vehicles-to-residences in both the Historic Core (1.75) and the Monroe Gateway (2.0). A total of 206 on-street and off-street parking spaces exist in this area, or 76 (37%) more spaces than the number of registered vehicles. Although the parking utilization rates in this area are comparable to those in the other areas, the lower number of

Mt Vernon Avenue in the Commonwealth District

St. Elmos

Typical Residences

Mancini's Cafe

Residences on the Avenue

vehicles per residence and the number of additional spaces provides a significant cushion should demand for parking increase and also reduces the potential for competition of parking spaces.

Historic Core

In general, the on-street public parking spaces in the Historic Core area are heavily utilized throughout the day and evening, on weekdays and on weekends. This area has the highest demand for, and utilization of, public on-street spaces.

The highest occupancy of spaces occurs on weekday evenings, when between 79 and 95 percent of the on-street parking is full. Weekend daytime parking has the next highest utilization with between 82 and 89 percent of the spaces fully occupied. Weekend evening utilization is slightly lower than the daytime rate and ranges between 71 and 73 percent.

Utilization of parking in the Historic Core's six private, off-street lots, identified for potential shared parking, ranges from a high of 71 percent during weekday days to a low of 10 percent on weekend evenings. A similar utilization pattern occurs on weekday evenings when only 10 to 29 percent of the parking lot spaces are utilized. Thus, these private parking lots experience the least demand for parking when the nearby on-street spaces are most in demand – on weekday evenings and weekend days. Given the underutilization of the private parking lots during times of peak overall demand, shared parking of the private spaces is possible and would provide more efficient use of existing parking resources.

In the first blocks of the residential cross streets (those blocks intersecting Mt. Vernon Avenue), there are 312 registered vehicles and 178 residences in this area, or roughly 1.75 registered vehicles per residence. A total of 425 residential on-street and off-street parking spaces exist along these blocks, or 113 (27%) more spaces than vehicles. While this indicates a surplus of residential spaces relative to the number of registered vehicles, there may still be competition for those spaces by Mt. Vernon Avenue's business operators, their customers and employees, who may not find parking on the Avenue and park instead on these adjoining residential blocks. Sharing the existing underutilized private parking lots would reduce this competition and allow for greater turnover of the public on-street spaces on Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Monroe Gateway

The Monroe Gateway area has a lower demand for and occupancy of public on-street parking spaces than does the Historic Core area. In terms of weekday evening and weekend day parking, the demand in this area is comparable to the demand for spaces in the Commonwealth District area north of the Historic Core.

Peak utilization of on-street public spaces occurs on weekday evenings and weekend days. On weekday evenings, 53 to 58 percent of the spaces are occupied. Weekend daytime parking utilization ranges from 72 to 85 percent. Utilization of parking during weekday days falls between these ranges, with roughly 61 to 77 percent of the spaces full.

Peak utilization of the three targeted private, off-street parking lots in this area occurs on weekday days, and ranges from 47 to 59 percent. The next highest utilization occurs on weekend days with 32 to 34 percent of the spaces full. Weekday and weekend evening utilization rates are the lowest and range from 14 to 19 percent.

Given the low utilization rates of the private parking lots when parking demand for on-street spaces in this area is high (i.e., weekday evenings and weekend days), an opportunity exists to share private parking resources at those times. Although demand for parking is not as high on weekend evenings, low utilization of the private parking lots at that time also offers another opportunity to maximize the existing parking resources and reduce competition among residents, business operators, their customers and employees for parking in this area.

With regard to residential parking on cross streets within the Monroe Gateway area, there are 259 registered vehicles and 129 residences in this area, or roughly 2 vehicles per residence. This ratio of vehicles to residences is the highest of all three areas. A total of 302 on-street and off-street parking spaces exist on the cross streets, only 43 (14%) more spaces than vehicles. Again, while there is a measured surplus of residential spaces in this area, there may still be competition for those spaces by business operators, their customers and employees, who may not find parking on the Avenue and park instead in these blocks. As in the Historic Core and Commonwealth District areas, sharing the existing underutilized parking lots would reduce this competition and allow for greater turnover of the public spaces on Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Future Parking Demand

The study also evaluated future parking demand and utilization if building density on Mt. Vernon Avenue is increased. Building density is measured by Floor Area Ratio (FAR), the ratio of allowable building square footage to land area. The current maximum FAR permitted along Mt. Vernon Avenue under existing zoning regulations is 0.75. At a 0.75 FAR, a property consisting of 10,000 square feet of land may be developed with a maximum building square footage of 7,500 square feet. Currently, the overall average FAR for Mt. Vernon Avenue properties is about 0.53, although many sites are developed at an even higher density than what is currently allowed.

The additional development levels up to 0.75 FAR that could be achieved on a property were calculated for those properties currently developed at less than 0.75 FAR. For properties that currently exceed the allowable FAR, no increase in development was assumed as part of this analysis.

The study found that the maximum additional development at 0.75 FAR would result in the need for 372 parking spaces. For an overall increase in development to a higher 1.0 FAR, 687 spaces would be needed. In both cases, with the utilization of only on-street spaces and targeted parking lots, the number of needed spaces exceeds the number of unused spaces. The study assumed that it was not desirable to consider using spaces on the residential cross streets to accommodate increased demand generated by additional development along Mt. Vernon Avenue. As a consequence, without the provision of additional off-street parking, there is insufficient parking to meet the demand generated by those hypothetical increases in density.

As shown, the analysis focused on future parking demand as a function of maximum build-out of all the properties developed at lower densities; this was done to ensure an equitable measurement of the Avenue's greatest possible future parking demand. However, it is extremely unlikely these properties will uniformly increase to the maximum allowable density. In addition, the market analysis determined that a modest increase in retail demand is likely over the course of the next five years. Thus, while some increase in density is possible,

market forces are unlikely to spur every property owner with the potential for additional square footage to fully build out their properties.

The parking strategy seeks to balance the technical parking requirements with the constraints of providing new private off-street parking for a range of uses and development intensities while protecting the residential neighborhoods from adverse impacts. For small sites that cannot accommodate parking, waiving or reducing the requirements in certain cases is recommended. Allowing changes from existing office or personal service uses to retail without requiring additional parking provides flexibility for commercial property owners and their tenants and obviates the requirement for technical parking reductions. New residential units must provide at least one off-street parking space. Significant development is required to comply with the current off-street parking regulations to ensure that the parking demand it generates is fully accommodated on the site as is appropriate for large developments.

Potential New Parking Resources

During the planning process, a comprehensive analysis was performed to evaluate potential locations for new public parking, identify the impacts on the street and the adjoining neighborhoods, and determine whether the construction of new parking resources would be suitable. The creation of new public parking lots or garages is not recommended along Mt. Vernon Avenue due to the potential conflicts of new parking facilities with the existing streetscape and neighborhood atmosphere.

The analysis found that new on-site parking on Mt. Vernon Avenue is difficult to achieve because the commercial parcels are small and shallow, and generally have no rear yard access. Allowing direct access via curb cuts on Mt. Vernon Avenue is not desirable as such curb cuts conflict with pedestrian movement and safety, interrupting the continuity of the retail street wall. Furthermore, the consolidation of lots and demolition of existing buildings to provide on-site parking is not desirable as it adversely impacts the fabric and character of the street. The creation of additional surface parking spaces in this area would harm the existing streetscape and detract from the qualities that make it an attractive place.

In addition to these impacts, the provision of new surface parking where it is most needed, within the Historic Core, would require the acquisition and demolition or relocation of existing buildings. In analyzing several properties, site acquisition and construction of new surface parking spaces were found to be prohibitively expensive at approximately $25,000 per space, while yielding only a modest number of new spaces. Thus, it is not economical, practical, nor desirable to construct new public parking lots along Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Another option explored was the construction of structured public parking. Very limited opportunities to construct such parking exist along the Avenue, due to the developed nature of the street and the small platted lots. Two potential properties were evaluated and it was found that the development of a new parking structure on the Avenue would have significant impacts to the character of the street and the pedestrian retail environment, in addition to the negative impacts on adjoining residential properties.

As a consequence, neither strategy is recommended to accommodate the current and future demand for parking. The negative physical and visual impacts of these strategies and associated construction costs far outweigh the benefit of some additional parking in this area.

5.3 Parking Strategy and Recommendations

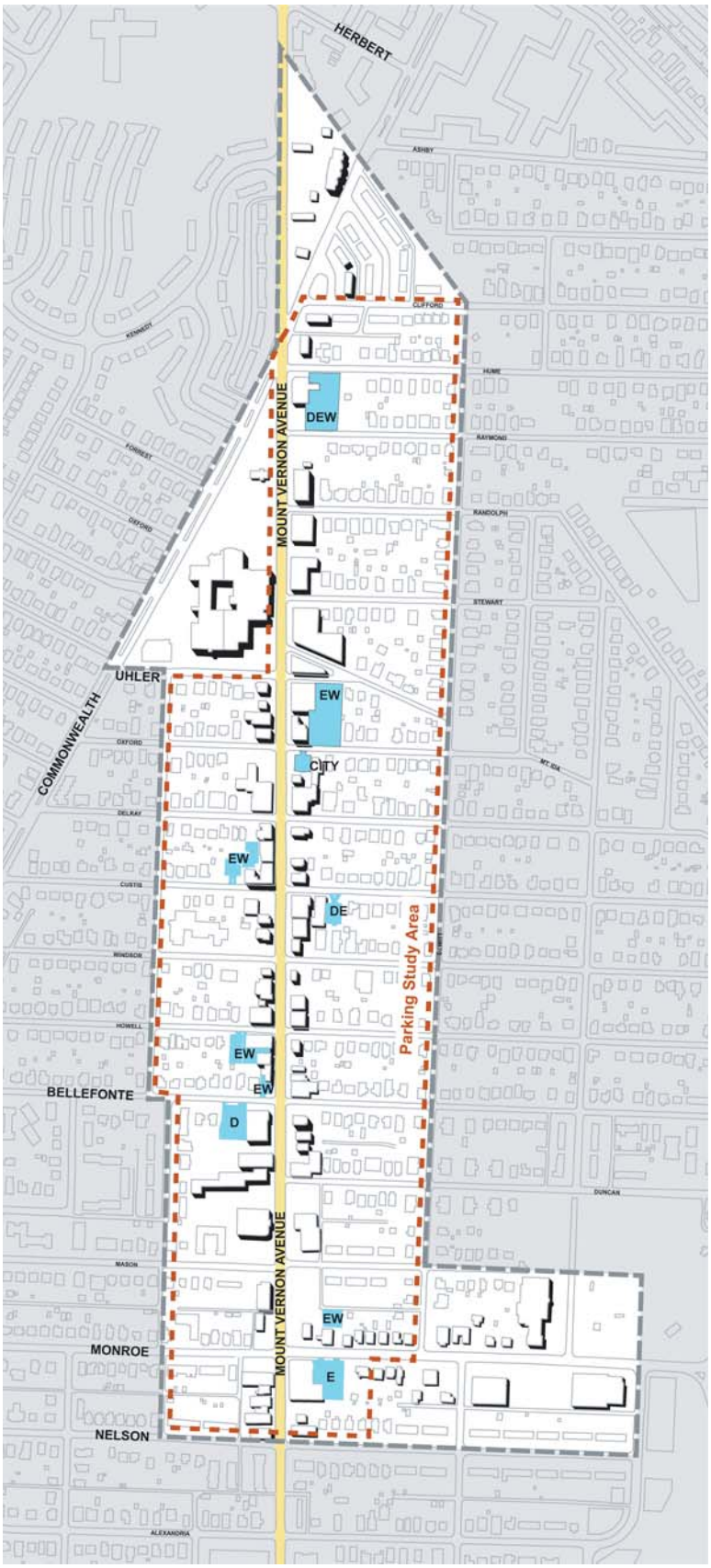
To respond to the concerns about parking availability and location, this parking strategy is designed to capitalize on available resources, provide flexibility in the existing business environment, increase the supply with new construction activity, and monitor the parking situation over time to ensure that a balance of supply and demand is maintained.

Recognizing both the issues and impacts associated with the creation of new parking and the underutilization of existing parking, several strategies are recommended to better utilize and manage the existing parking resources. These strategies include a shared parking program, reducing or waiving parking requirements in certain cases, and other related strategies.

Key to ensuring the future success of the Avenue as a retail center is implementing a parking strategy that allows for additional development and changes in use that will not significantly impact the neighborhood. In addition, parking management can be enhanced through an environment that encourages alternative modes of transportation, such as walking, biking, and public transit. See Section 5.4 for the multi-modal strategy and recommendations.

Shared Parking

In each of the three areas along the Avenue, overall demand for and utilization of public on-street parking spaces is high. The utilization of the ten targeted private parking lots is lower at those times when demand for on-street parking spaces peaks. A shared parking strategy could greatly reduce the competition for limited on-street parking, provide greater turnover of the spaces, and more efficiently use an underutilized resource in proximity to the commercial district.



(Figure 5.1) **Potential Shared Parking Lots: D=Day, E=Evening, W=Weekend**

SunTrust parking lot

Parking lot behind 2401 Mt. Vernon Avenue

Shared lot with Burke & Herbert

The existence of many underutilized private parking spaces presents an opportunity to capitalize on this resource to alleviate some of the demand on the existing supply of parking, particularly during evening and weekend hours.

A shared parking program would create greater efficiency in the use of existing public and private parking resources and reduce competition among residents, business employees and customers for on-street parking. In addition, relocating employee cars to off-street parking lots maximizes the use and turnover of on-street parking spaces by customers.

A shared parking program includes the following elements:

- **Organization**—Identify an organizational structure to initiate and manage program planning and implementation, preferably through an existing organization such as PWBA
- **Targeted Users**—Identify businesses, employees and tenants as potential parkers
- **Operational Factors**—Identify and address issues and costs associated with:

  Liability insurance

  Parking lot maintenance

  Parking usage and availability

  Possible conflicts with existing SUP approvals
- **Promotion**—Develop an approach to promote the use of the lots, provide incentives, if needed, to encourage employee use, and create community awareness
- **Monitoring**—Establish a program to monitor and evaluate the operation and success of the program over time

Instituting a shared parking program would require the cooperative and collaborative efforts of the owners of targeted private parking lots, business owners and their employees, and nearby residents. In order for the strategy to work and to shift some existing parking demand from on-street spaces to these private lots, lot owners must be willing to allow shared parking on their lots during non-peak hours. Initial discussions with property owners of the targeted parking lots were favorable and owners expressed an interest in a shared parking program.

Business owners and their employees would be the most likely group to utilize the shared parking lots. These individuals could park in the shared lot spaces, thus allowing greater utilization of the on-street spaces by customers. This would afford greater turnover of the highly visible on-street parking spaces that are preferred by customers.

With business owners and employees being the main users of the shared private parking lots, the lot owners would have a degree of certainty as to the users of their parking, and tags or stickers could be assigned to those parkers. Initial discussions with private parking lot owners have been mostly favorable, however some owners have expressed concerns about liability, lot maintenance, lighting and compensation. These concerns must be addressed to as part of the implementation of this strategy. In addition, the ability to monitor, promote and address parking-related issues that may arise is necessary to ensure the success of this strategy.

Parking Overlay District

Another element of this parking strategy is to create parking flexibility within the Historic Core where the ability to provide additional parking is severely constrained by the small parcels and the desire to maintain the historic structures and character. A parking overlay district for the Historic Core area provides a zoning mechanism to allow a reduction or waiver of parking requirements for defined situations. Currently, whenever a change of use occurs (e.g.., from office to retail use), the new use is required to comply with today's off-street parking requirement. However, in most cases, buildings were not constructed with off-street parking spaces or with enough land to construct new parking. Many properties along Mt. Vernon Avenue share these constraints, so in order to allow for uses to change without discouraging new businesses or requiring special use permit approval by City Council, it is recommended that flexibility be provided in certain cases.

In the Historic Core, the recommendations are to:

- Waive the increase in parking requirements when an existing office or personal service use changes to retail;
- Waive the parking requirement for outdoor seating at restaurants and cafes;
- Reduce parking requirements for compatible infill development and additions, consistent with the Building Form Design Guidelines, except where such construction results in the demolition of existing historically contributing buildings.

Given the size and shape of existing parcels, it is nearly impossible to construct a new building or addition and provide all of the required parking on-site. Moreover, the demolition of existing buildings and consolidation of lots is not desirable in this historic district as it detracts from the visual quality and historic character of the area.

The parking strategy balances small increases in density and changes in use with significant development, and requires the latter to comply with the existing parking regulations thereby accommodating parking demand on the site.

A rational reduction in parking requirements for infill projects will allow small buildings or additions while providing some on-site parking. It is expected that this approach will result in minimal, if any, adverse impacts on the balance of supply of and demand for parking due to the mixed-use nature of the neighborhood

Parking Reduction Policy

The above parking recommendations recognize that the typical land parcel in Del Ray does not allow opportunity for parking sufficient to meet the requirement as expressed in the zoning ordinance. At the same time, it is important to maintain those small lots in order to retain the Main Street character of the area, with its small and varied buildings and uses. The goal of the *Plan* is to protect adjacent residential neighborhoods, while encouraging the neighborhood-oriented eclectic mix of retail, personal service and residential uses.

The Building Form Design Guidelines for infill and new buildings address the parking issue and anticipate a waiver of parking in development cases. The extent of the waiver will depend on the size of the development and the land parcel, the type (residential or commercial), and the development's compliance with the form based Building Form Design Guidelines for development.

As to individual uses that may not involve new building, the parking reduction SUP has been routinely employed in the past to allow new uses to occupy buildings without compliance with standard parking requirements. While it would be preferable for new restaurants or other uses to avoid the necessity of the SUP, there is a concern that a global alternative, such as a legislative waiver of parking for all uses on Mount Vernon Avenue, would be too sweeping in application, and that a waiver as to some uses would be too prejudicial. In fact, the uniqueness of each application – both the use and the location – argues in favor of continued treatment on a case by case basis.

On the other hand, this *Plan* is an opportunity to address the issue with regard to future parking reduction cases. The following policy statements should be considered in assessing those cases:

1. Generally, parking reduction SUPs for individual uses are favored where individual small lots are not capable of providing sufficient parking to meet requirements.
2. The small size of most Mount Vernon Avenue lots is a desirable and character defining feature of the area.
3. Continued economic development of Mt Vernon Avenue involves the attraction and approval of new uses, including restaurants and music venues, as well as retail uses. From an economic development standpoint, it is important that new uses of a type consistent with this *Plan's* vision for the street not be foreclosed because the technical parking requirements have not been met.
4. It is imperative that adjacent residential neighborhoods be protected from overflow parking from Mount Vernon Avenue uses, especially in the evenings. Many of residences were built without parking or without adequate parking, and the occupants rely on public street parking, thus competing with commercial uses at peak times.
5. The parking analysis completed as part of this *Plan* shows that current parking demand and availability is relatively in balance, despite the fact that many uses on the Avenue do not provide the ordinance required amount of parking. This fact suggests that the natural ebb and flow of demand at various times of the day, for different uses, coupled with the pedestrian factor, works to supply approximately the right amount of parking. In fact the analysis shows that there are free spaces at certain times of the day and in some places. The *Plan* calls for periodic updated analysis, which should be considered when evaluating parking reduction cases in the future.
6. The City should review the *Plan's* parking analysis with regard to the different areas of the Mt Vernon corridor and their different parking utilization and demand characteristics when considering a parking reduction case.

7. On new development sites, the City should encourage as much parking as possible, especially where land parcels are being consolidated. The City should not allow a development to maximize its size if that means that less than full parking is provided.

8. Therefore, a parking reduction SUP should be assessed with regard to the following criteria, without limitation, as appropriate to the case:

A. Is the use providing the maximum reasonable amount of conveniently located parking possible;

· Are spaces uniquely for the use being provided;

· Are there shared parking opportunities, i.e., available private parking opportunities, not in use at peak times of proposed use;

· Are there other arrangements for parking that are or could be made?

B. Is there parking available in the area, as a practical matter, at the peak times of the proposed use?

C. Is the applicant taking steps to ensure that its employees will not burden the parking situation in the area?

· Will they be required to park off street;

· Will they be provided off street parking;

· Will their Metro or transit use be subsidized or otherwise promoted?

D. Is the applicant taking any additional steps to reduce demand or add to supply?

Monitoring Parking Demand

Inherent in these strategies is the need to monitor parking demand and utilization as well as the responsiveness of the strategies as the area changes and demand increases. The *Plan* recommendations seek to better utilize existing parking resources, while recognizing that these resources have a finite capacity.

To ensure that parking supply and demand will continue to be accommodated without resulting in spillover parking or congestion on residential streets, it is important that parking demand and utilization be monitored over time. Utilization thresholds should be developed to ensure that greater proactive measures are undertaken when necessary. At present parking utilization rates, no additional action is necessary. However, should utilization rates increase, several options should be considered to manage the parking supply, including:

- As a long term strategy, the installation of parking meters and enhanced enforcement of 2-hour parking along Mt. Vernon Avenue; and
- Creation of a residential parking permit system for adjacent streets similar to the permit system in place in Old Town.

Lastly, a public-private partnership should be established to develop new parking to accommodate demand generated by increased development or demand that exceeds the available supply of parking.

Figure 5.2 Parking Access and Connections Diagram

Additional Strategies

The following strategies are recommended to complement the proposed shared parking program.

Rear Yard Access or Rights-of-Way from Alleys

There is opportunity to provide rear access to existing parking lots and between adjoining lots where alleys do not currently exist. To take full advantage of the opportunities, it will be necessary to work with property owners to obtain cross-access easements to allow people to drive across the rear yards to access parking. While this strategy does not create many new parking spaces, it does provide the opportunity to better utilize existing resources, improve connectivity between lots and promote the use of these rear parking lots.

Improvements to the rear yards and rear portions of buildings will make these areas more attractive and desirable to use. A program similar to the existing facade improvement grant program could be developed with the goal of improving these rear yard spaces. The provision of signage along Mt. Vernon Avenue, as part of a coordinated approach, should also be aimed at directing drivers to these rear parking areas. In the case of new construction and substantial property upgrades, implementation of connections should be required where feasible.

Greater Enforcement of Existing Limitations

Enhanced enforcement of the existing parking restrictions on Mt. Vernon Avenue will ensure consistent turnover of the spaces and allow greater parking opportunities for customers.

Identify Spaces for Short-Term Parking

Several business operators who depend on providing quick in-and-out service to their customers have expressed the desire for a few, shorter-term parking spaces on Mt. Vernon Avenue. The suggestion is to allow a single 15-minute or 30-minute parking space adjacent to those businesses whose customer base is characterized by a series of brief customer visits over the course of a day. Unlike other retail stores, customers to these businesses usually spend a brief amount of time inside the business and use the parking for a few minutes at most.

To accommodate this demand, it is recommended that two, shorter-term spaces be provided on Mt. Vernon Avenue. To address current business needs, one space should be located on the west side of Mt. Vernon Avenue in the 2300 block adjacent to St. Elmo's Coffee Pub and the UPS Store. The second space should be located on the east side of Mt. Vernon Avenue in the 2600 block adjacent to Happy Photo. These spaces should be periodically evaluated after designation to ensure they function as intended.

Resolve Conflicts in Parking Limitations at Mt. Vernon Community School

The existing parking restrictions on the west side of Mt. Vernon Avenue adjacent to Mt. Vernon Community School are inconsistent and oftentimes confusing because there are numerous signs with different hours and regulations posted within the school's immediate vicinity.

Short Term Parking Space adjacent to St. Elmo's Coffee

Short Term Parking Space adjacent to Happy Photo

It is recommended that these restrictions be reviewed in toto and changes made to:

- Clearly identify and simplify the hours during which parking is and is not permitted along the street;
- Allow 2-hour parking in the existing 30-minute parking space area during non-pick-up and drop-off times for the school; and,
- Extend the existing 2-hour parking north along Mt. Vernon Avenue in the vicinity of the Nicholas A. Colasanto Center.

Taxicab Stand location at Alexandria Hyundai

Taxicab Stand location at Windsor Avenue

Identify Possible Locations for Existing Taxicab Stand

A taxicab stand with three spaces is currently located on Mt. Vernon Avenue at the northwest corner of the intersection with Windsor Avenue, a location where the demand for parking spaces is high to serve the nearby businesses. In its present location, the stand is underutilized and occupies nearly 70 feet of street frontage. This area would be better utilized as parking for adjacent businesses; thus relocation of the stand is recommended.

The most suitable location for the taxicab stand is the east side of the 1600 block of Mt. Vernon Avenue, in front of the Alexandria Hyundai storage lot. The advantage of this location is that there is currently a prohibition of parking at that location, thus no on-street spaces would be lost to the taxi stand relocation. Additionally, it is near the active uses in the vicinity of Monroe Avenue (including laundry, convenience retail store, and a deli/carry-out) that are likely to generate more taxicab fares than the commercial uses in the vicinity of the existing taxicab stand.

Bus Shelter

DASH Bus

5.4 Pedestrian Strategy and Recommendations

Improvements on the Avenue should continue to be geared towards "heels and wheels," to ensure that it is safe and attractive for pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles alike. Provisions for alternative modes of transportation, in addition to vehicular, can improve the pedestrian experience, alleviate congestion, and reduce parking demand. A multi-modal strategy is recommended, consisting of a series of interconnected and supporting strategies designed to increase the use of various modes of transportation.

Recommendations

To support and enhance the existing pedestrian-oriented nature of Mt. Vernon Avenue and its nearby residential neighborhoods, the Plan's multi-modal strategy includes transit, walking and bicycling, as well as parking and circulation improvements, with the following elements:

Encourage greater use and availability of transit by:

- Enhancing existing bus stops with benches, shelters and schedules
- Promoting public transit as a way to get to the Avenue
- Providing better pedestrian connections to the Braddock Road Metro Station

  Work with the School Board to formalize a safe, accessible path for pedestrians and students

- Provide DASH bus service along the Avenue

  Contingent on the construction of a new bus maintenance facility and purchase of new buses (anticipated completion of the bus maintenance facility in 2008)

  Provide new cross-town routes to connect the Avenue with other neighborhoods in the City

  Provide loop service to Potomac Yard

Encourage walking and bicycling by providing streetscape and lighting improvements along the Avenue:

- Improve pedestrian crossings
- Provide bicycle racks

Reduce the potential for speeding, increase pedestrian safety, and enhance the streetscape along the four-lane section of Mt. Vernon Avenue north of Commonwealth Avenue by:

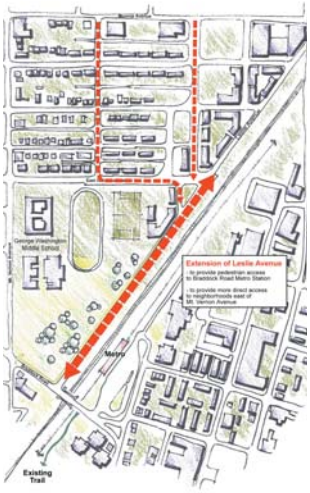
- Restriping Mt. Vernon Avenue between Commonwealth Avenue to West Glebe Road to create two, 11-foot wide travel lanes, two 5-foot wide bicycle lanes, and an 8-foot wide parking lane; or 2 travel lanes and two parking lanes. Work with the City of Alexandria's bicycle community on the need for / desirability of bike lanes.
- Constructing bulb-outs on each side of the Avenue at Commonwealth Avenue, Kennedy Street, and Sanborn Place

Prioritize the pedestrian over the automobile in the redevelopment of automobile-oriented uses, such as the gas stations, service uses, and automobile dealerships, to ensure a pedestrian friendly environment.

Wherever possible, the signage and wayfinding systems along the Avenue should direct pedestrians and cyclists between the trail system, Mt. Vernon Avenue and links to the bus and rail networks. Where appropriate, trails should be improved by reinforcing them with proper striping when part of the street, and with markers and lighting when part of natural surfaces in off-road areas. Trail systems should be highlighted on kiosks and bus shelters along with route and on scheduling information for buses and Metrorail.

An existing dedicated bicycle lane is located just west of the study area along Commonwealth Avenue. To encourage residents and visitors to use the bicycle trails, bicycle storage should be integrated in the streetscape improvements along Mt. Vernon Avenue, with clearly marked bicycle racks in public view to maintain the safety of bicycles. Bicycle racks should be designed to contribute to the character of the Avenue without disrupting pedestrian flow.

Mount Vernon Four Lane Section



Connection to Metro

Recommended Bike Racks

Lack of Crosswalks

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Urban Design and Streetscape

6.0

Urban design involves the character and definition of those elements that make up the public realm, including the public streetscape, public and private open space, and the buildings that define and address the street. Urban character is defined by the scale and form of the buildings, the pedestrian scale, and the public spaces created by the buildings.

The urban design concept for the *Plan* recognizes the historic and eclectic character of Mt. Vernon Avenue and seeks to protect and enhance its unique character as change takes place. The *Plan* guides future development to maintain a vibrant, low-scale mixed-use neighborhood where Alexandria residents may live, work, shop and play. This chapter provides urban design recommendations for the public streetscape and the private building form to ensure quality design as envisioned by the *Plan*.

The design guidelines outlined in this chapter incorporate the existing Mt. Vernon Avenue Design Guidelines (adopted by Council in 1993). The guidelines herein shall supercede the previously adopted guidelines for this portion of Mt. Vernon Avenue.

6.1 Guiding Principles

Preserve and protect existing residential areas

- Protect nearby residences from impacts associated with commercial activity

Encourage and support a mixed-use development

- Emphasize retail uses on ground floor

Preserve existing historic scale and character

- Allow for appropriate infill development and redevelop incompatible buildings
- Implement standards and guidelines to ensure quality development that reflects the scale of existing historic structures

Celebrate the "Town of Potomac Historic District"

- Protect and enhance the corridor's visual appearance through streetscape and façade improvements

6.2 Building Form Design Approach

Mt. Vernon Avenue is regarded as one of the region's most unique neighborhoods, due in large part to its small town, Main Street character. The current zoning regulations, however, do not provide a framework to ensure that the form and scale of new or infill development will be compatible with the historic scale and character of the existing buildings along the Avenue. With its emphasis on form, quality, and the relationship of buildings to each other and the street, a more flexible design-oriented zoning approach is appropriate to support and encourage appropriately scaled and designed new construction.

The preparation and application of a building form design approach for a particular neighborhood requires a deep understanding of the existing built environment and the relationships between the adjacent properties, uses and the street. In order to understand the unique built environment in this area, an analysis of properties along the Avenue was conducted. The analysis found several commonalities among the various sections of the Avenue, including:

- Typical commercial lot sizes are approximately 40-60 feet wide by 110 feet deep;
- Typical residential lot sizes are approximately 24 feet wide by 110 feet deep;
- Sidewalk width varies;
- Typical width of the Avenue from curb-to-curb is 40 feet;
- The street wall (i.e., the location of the face of the building) varies, but is generally located 10-15 feet from the curb; and,
- Buildings are primarily 2- 2 ½ stories in height, with some one- and three-story structures interspersed.

Existing Building Typologies

Mt. Vernon Avenue has a variety of building types (Figures 6.2 – 6.4).

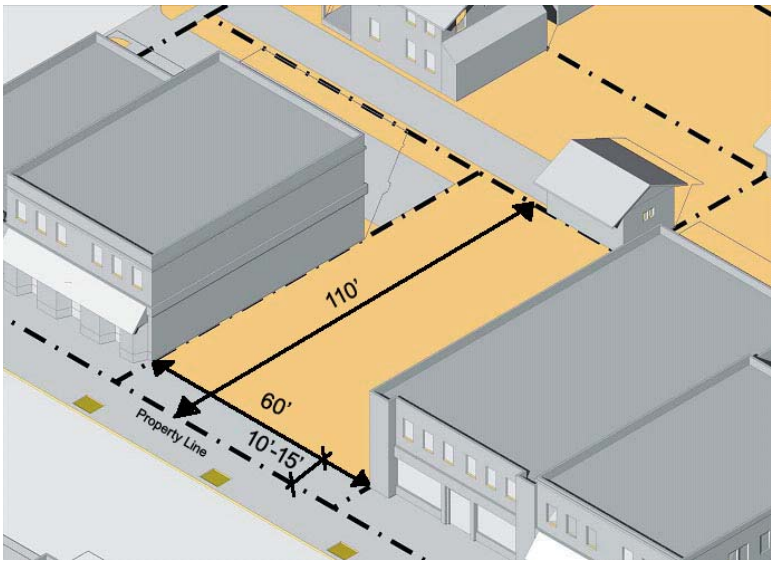


Figure 6.1 Typical infill site

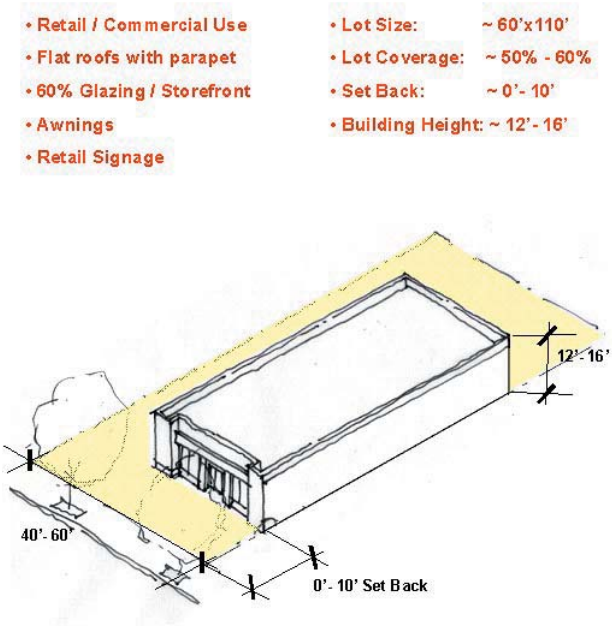


Figure 6.2 Building Typology: One Story Retail / Commercial

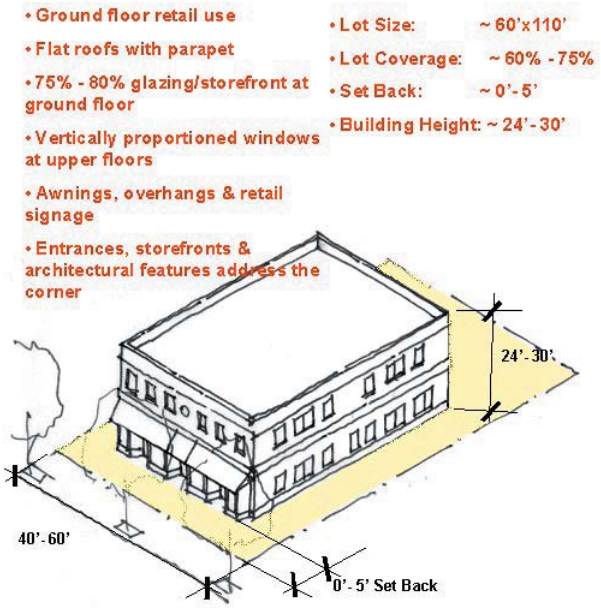


Figure 6.3 Building Typology: Two Story Retail / Commercial

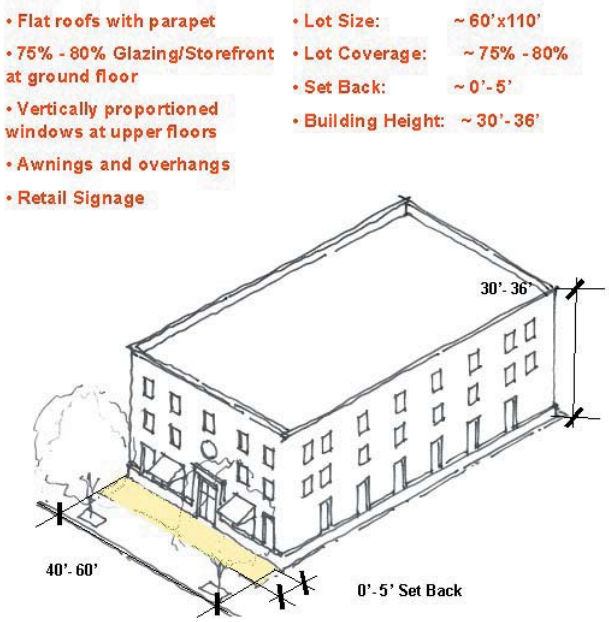


Figure 6.4 Building Typology: Three Story Retail / Commercial

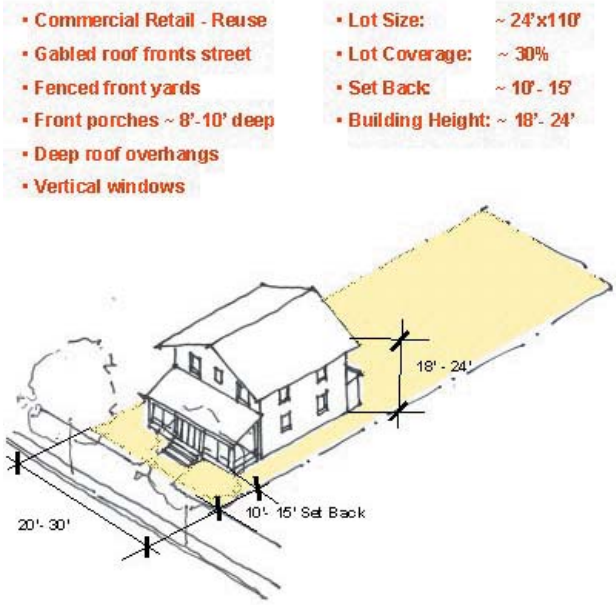


Figure 6.5 Building Typology: Single Family Detached

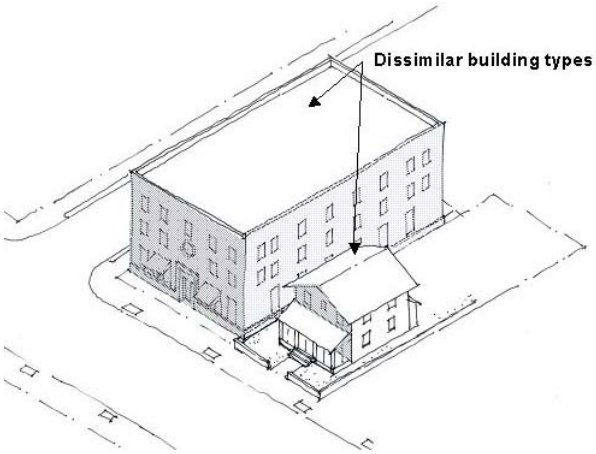


Figure 6.6 Dissimilar building types

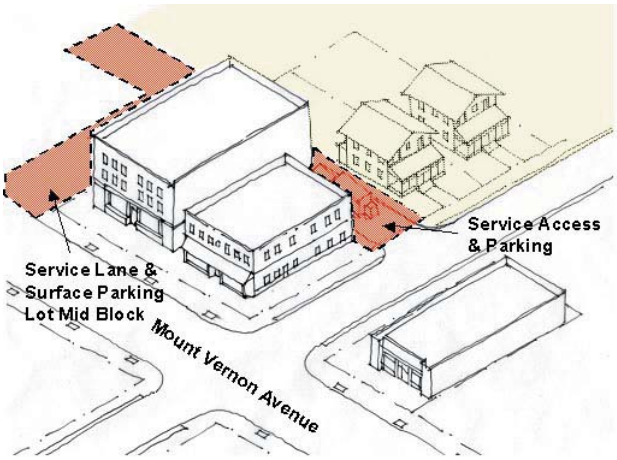


Figure 6.7 Discontinuity of pedestrian flow with mid block curb cut

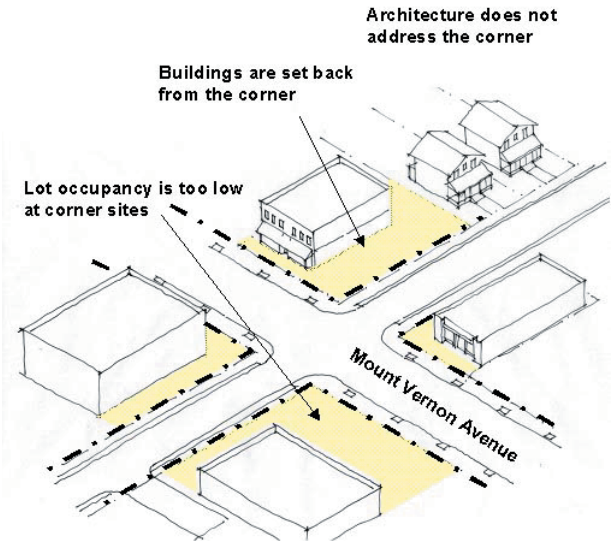


Figure 6.8 Lack of street wall and definitions at corners.

Issues and Challenges

Critical to this analysis was an understanding of the location of the buildings and parking and their relationship to adjacent commercial and residential properties. As part of this analysis, issues and challenges were identified to assist in the development of the design principles that underlie the building form design approach. These issues and challenges include:

- Instances of dissimilar building types that create variety and diversity in some places and discontinuity of the street wall in other places;
- Building scale, setbacks and massing that are out of proportion or lack appropriate transition between building types;
- The presence of historic structures that should be preserved to maintain the history and character of the street;
- Small infill lots with little opportunity for access to rear yards for parking;
- Some building setbacks and surface parking lots compromise the definition of the street wall;
- Retail and commercial service uses abut to residential uses creating undesirable impacts when the screening/ buffering is inadequate;
- Vehicle access directly from Mt. Vernon Avenue interrupts the street wall, as well as the continuity of pedestrian flow and retail when located mid-block; and,
- Lack of street wall definition at some corners where the lot occupancy is low, the buildings are set back from the corner or the architecture does not address its corner location

Overall Design Principles

The building form design approach is intended to build on the existing pattern of development along the Avenue while preserving the scale of buildings within the historic district and minimizing impacts on the residences that abut the commercial properties.

Generally, the design principles meet the following objectives:

- New construction should reflect the scale of existing buildings;
- A consistent street wall should be maintained, with some variations to allow for landscaped open space, an opportunity for side windows and for other site use where desired;
- New construction should be two to two and one-half stories, with a setback where a third story is provided;
- New buildings should help define the corners where side streets intersect Mt. Vernon Avenue. Ground level retail storefront windows should extend onto the side streets;
- Appropriate building setbacks and parking lot screening will minimize impacts on adjacent residential properties;
- Ground level retail storefronts should contribute to the vitality of the streetscape and the pedestrian experience;
- Direct driveway access to Mt. Vernon Avenue is not desirable; and,
- Off-street parking lots should be located to the rear of the property, with access provided from rear alleys, when available, side streets or access easements from adjoining properties.

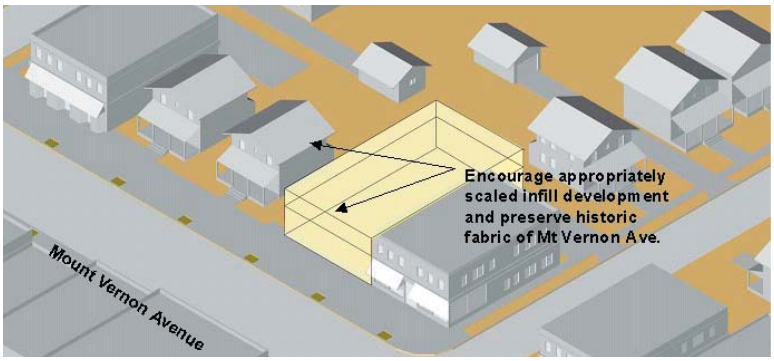


Figure 6.9 Encourage appropriately scaled infill

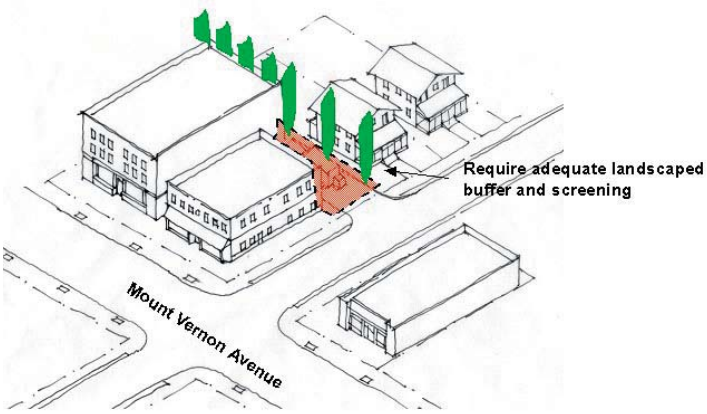


Figure 6.10 Buffer adjoining residences

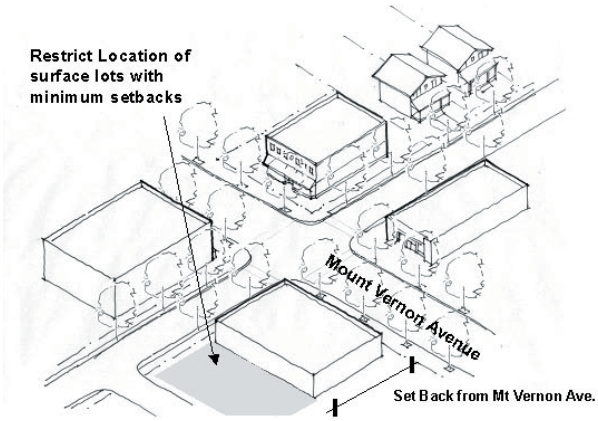


Figure 6.11 Parking in rear

6.3 Specific Building Form Design Guidelines

The guidelines are set forth visually, with graphics depicting the desired form and location of buildings and parking areas, building massing, height and scale, building facades, and screening requirements. A brief discussion of the design intent accompanies each graphic.

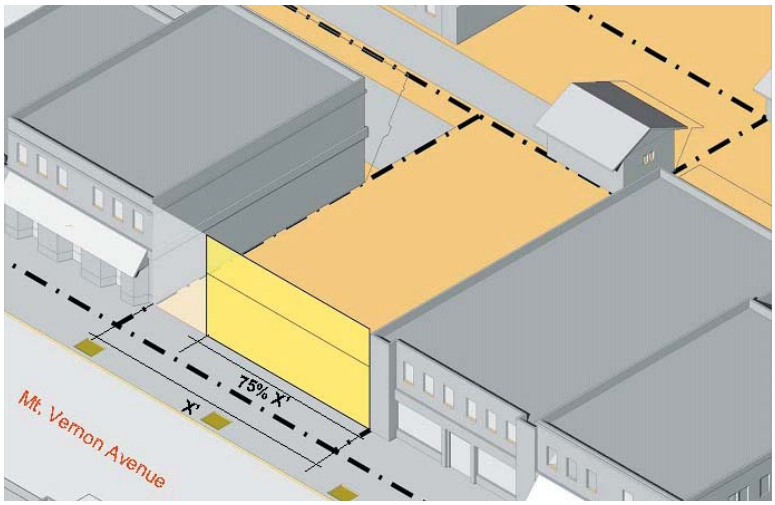


Figure 6.13 **Street frontage interior site**

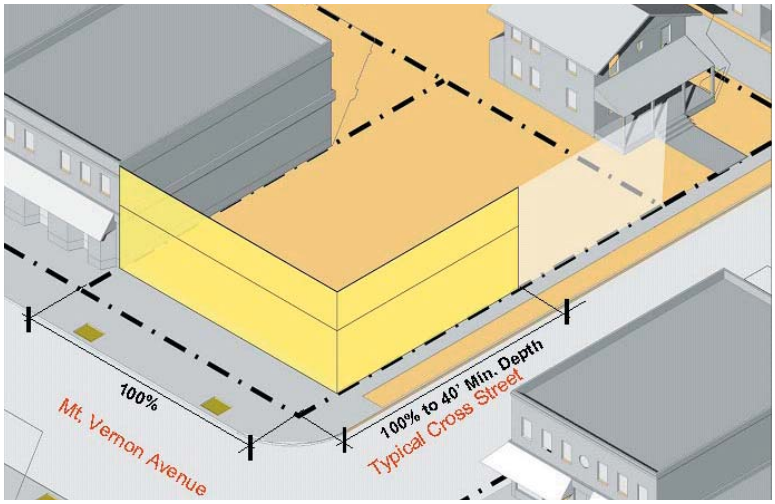


Figure 6.14 **Street frontage corner site**

Street Wall and Frontage

DESIGN INTENT

New construction will define the street wall with a similar height and scale to existing buildings, while minimizing gaps in the continuity of the urban fabric along the Mt. Vernon Avenue corridor and the commercial transition on the corners of the side streets.

On interior sites

It is desirable to have definition of the full frontage along the street. Buildings should define a minimum of 75% of the street wall for the width of lot. The remaining 25% of lot width may be occupied by landscaping, garden walls or similar defining features. (Figure 6.13)

On corner sites

Buildings are expected to define 100% of the street front along Mt. Vernon Avenue and 100% of the street front to a depth of 40 feet back from the front building wall on the cross street. The primary building entrance should be on Mt. Vernon Avenue or, where appropriate, oriented toward the corner. However, when the corner is used as an entry or architectural focal element, alteration of the street wall at the corner may be appropriate. (Figure 6.14)

DESIGN INTENT
New development will maintain the continuity of the street wall and contribute to the subtle variety and complexity of building facades along Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Building facades must be located within 10 – 15 feet of the front property line and align, where appropriate, with at least one existing neighboring building face to maintain continuity in the street wall. (Figure 6.15)

DESIGN INTENT
Architectural elements are used to provide architectural interest and heighten pedestrian activity at the ground level.

Entry to retail, commercial and institutional buildings should be directly at ground level. The entry to the building should be clearly visible from the street. Prominent, defined entries are encouraged for both architectural interest and as an element of scale and orientation.

Architectural details, such as a change in materials, ornamentation and the use of smaller, human scaled elements will be provided at the pedestrian level. (Figure 6.16)

Building Height and Massing

DESIGN INTENT
New construction will be similar in height and scale to existing buildings along the Mt. Vernon Avenue corridor.

A minimum two-story façade (a minimum of 25 feet in height) is required along Mt. Vernon Avenue. A maximum of three stories, where compatible with existing scale, with a required 10-15-foot setback at the third floor, is permitted along Mt. Vernon Avenue. Where a sloped roof and dormers are proposed, no setback is required at the third floor.

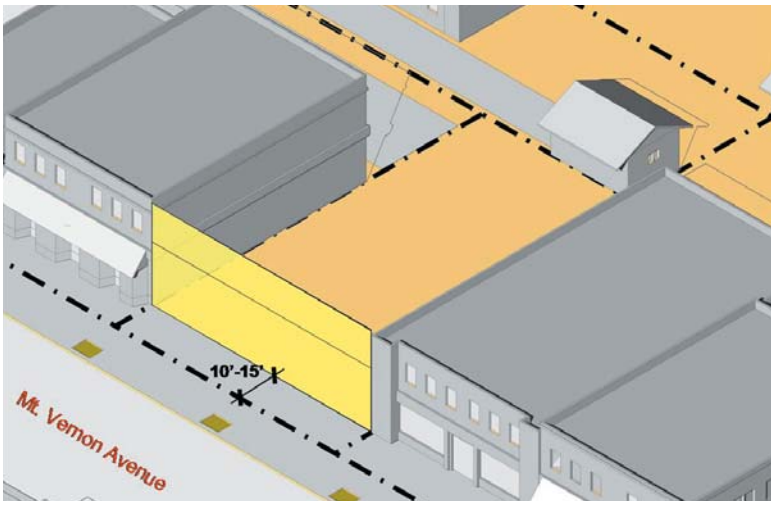


Figure 6.15 Continuity of street wall

Figure 6.16 Architectural detail and interest

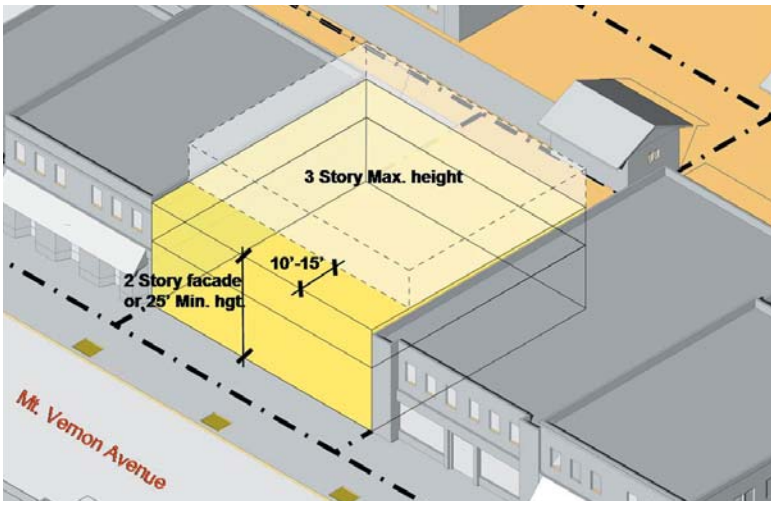


Figure 6.17 Building height and massing

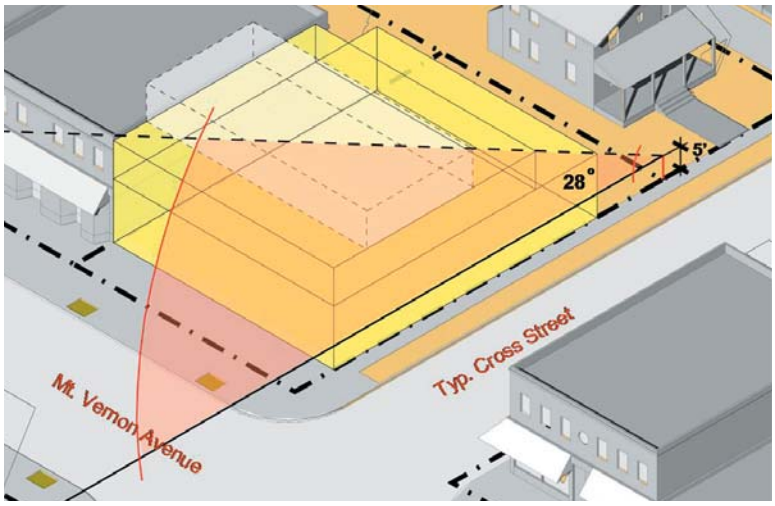


Figure 6.18 **28 degree setback angle**

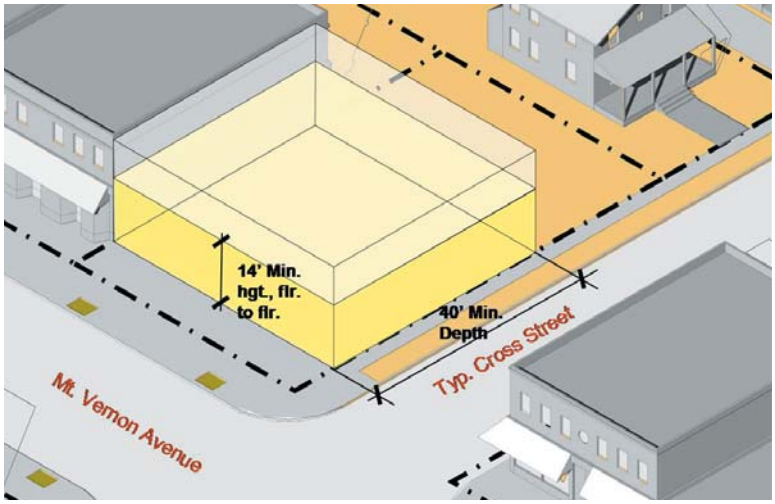


Figure 6.19 **Retail floor height and depth**

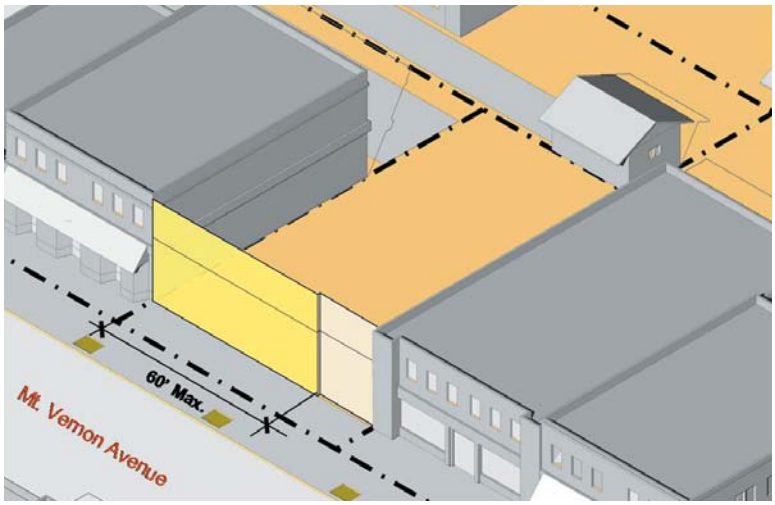


Figure 6.20 **Maximum width of continuous facade**

DESIGN INTENT

Appropriate massing for new construction provides adequate setbacks for light, air and privacy to neighboring residential uses, while maximizing development opportunity

Building mass and height may not exceed a 28-degree setback angle measured from 5-feet above the ground at the rear property line. (Figure 6.18)

Ground floor retail in newly constructed buildings must have a minimum height of 14 feet floor to floor and a minimum depth of 40 feet for the width of the building. (Figure 6.19)

DESIGN INTENT

Facades on new construction have surface articulation and variation in a scale and complexity similar to existing building facades along Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Building facades may have a maximum width of 60 feet of continuous vertical surface, after which a change in material, plane or vertical articulation is required. Further articulation within the 60-foot width is necessary to break down the building mass into smaller units. Large blank facades are not allowed. (Figure 6.20)

All new development must approximate in street front appearance the existing Mt. Vernon Avenue character of 40-foot to 60-foot wide two story buildings with varying roof heights and setbacks. For new construction that occupies a lot or lots larger than the typical lot of 60 feet by 110 feet, the buildings must be designed to look smaller or have the appearance of separate buildings, with a change in architectural treatment of facades, setbacks, roof lines and styles in order to break up the mass of the buildings. (Figure 6.21)

DESIGN INTENT

Appropriate massing and roof forms enhance the architectural character of the street and add to the continuity and variety of the street wall.

Architectural elements, such as dormers or details at the cornice level help to break down the apparent mass of the building, compensate for changes in height and scale with existing buildings and create interest in the skyline.

Roof forms may include flat with a parapet, sloped with ridge parallel to Mt. Vernon Avenue or a combination of sloped and flat. Roofs are restricted to a maximum height of 40 feet to the top of the parapet for flat roofs and 40 feet to the mid-point of the slope for all sloped roofs. (Figure 6.22)

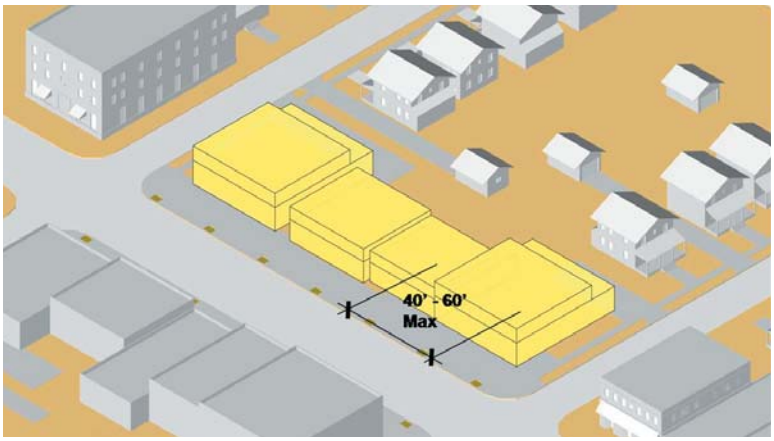


Figure 6.21 **Maintain 40–60 foot module**

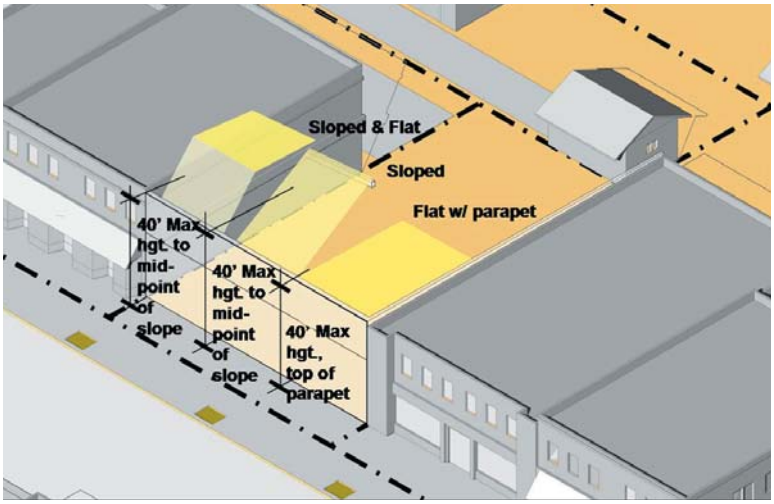


Figure 6.22 **Building height**

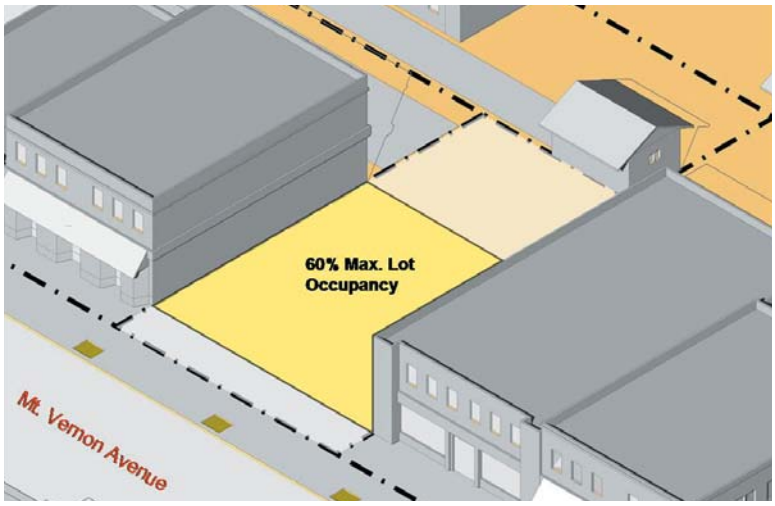


Figure 6.23 Lot occupancy

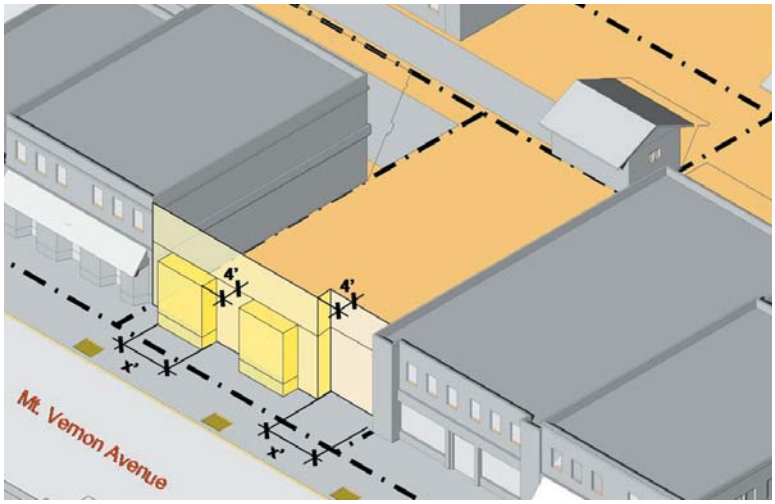


Figure 6.24 Facade articulation

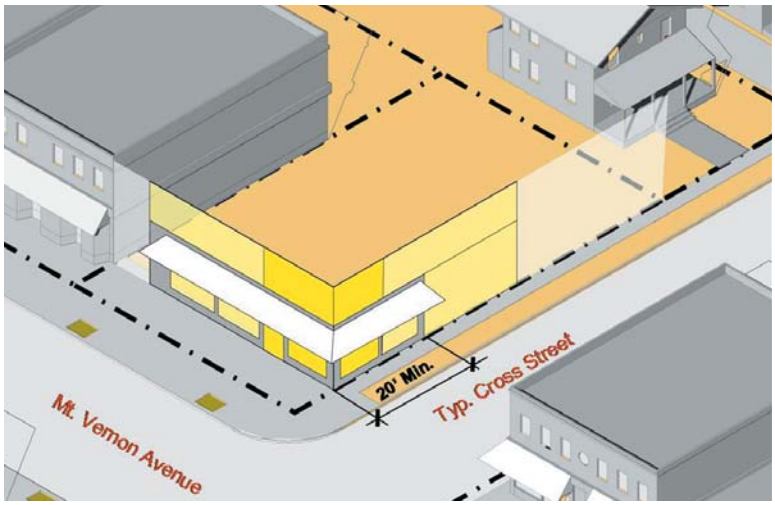


Figure 6.25 Corner articulation

Lot Occupancy

Maximum lot occupancy of 60% is required on Mt. Vernon Avenue to accommodate building placement on the front of the lot and parking/screening on the rear of lots, except on small lots where off-street parking is waived. In such case, consideration may be made to increase the lot occupancy based on the merit of a given proposal. (Figure 6.23)

Facade Articulation

DESIGN INTENT

Diversity of the surface articulation and variation of building facades is accomplished through setbacks and projections while minimizing their intrusion into the building setback or detraction from the continuity of the street wall.

Building façade projections and setbacks may have a maximum depth of 4 feet while maintaining the desired 10-foot setback. Bays or other more subtle means of façade articulation are encouraged. (Figure 6.24)

DESIGN INTENT

Architectural features address the corner and ensure the character and activity of the streetscape extend along the cross streets of Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Ground level retail storefront windows should extend a minimum of 20 feet along cross streets. The building's primary entrance shall be on Mt. Vernon Avenue or on the corner. Architecture is expected to address and articulate the corner of intersecting streets. (Figure 6.25)

DESIGN INTENT

Building façades contribute to the architectural character by creating a high amount of transparency at the ground level and a higher opacity on the upper floors.

For retail/commercial uses the wall/window ratio must be a minimum of 25/75, with 75% glazing on the storefront. For all uses other than retail/commercial, ground and uppers floors of building facades must have 30% to 50% glass, as a percentage of the wall surface. Individual "punched" or framed windows shall be provided on the upper levels. (Figure 6.26)

The upper floor windows of new buildings must be vertically proportioned and appropriately scaled to the building façade. The ratio of window height to width should be 1.75/1 or greater. (Figure 6.27)

Parking and Screening

DESIGN INTENT

Gaps in the continuity of the street wall are minimized and the pedestrian experience is strengthened by prohibiting curb cuts along Mt. Vernon Avenue and restricting the width and number of curb cuts along side streets.

On interior sites

Curb cuts along Mt. Vernon Avenue are strongly discouraged. Vehicular access to the property should be provided in the rear from alleys or easement from adjoining property/parking area. Where that is not feasible and the proposed development is well-designed, strong consideration will be given for reasonable waiver to parking requirements. (Figure 6.28)

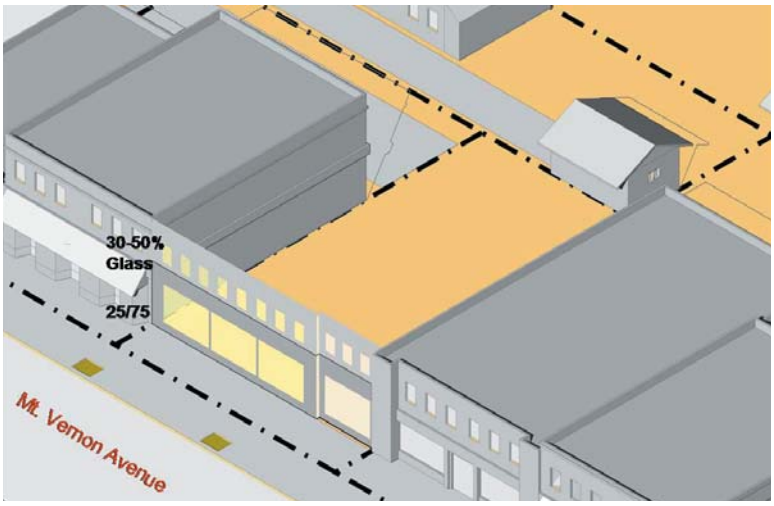


Figure 6.26 Wall / Window ratio

Figure 6.27 Window proportion

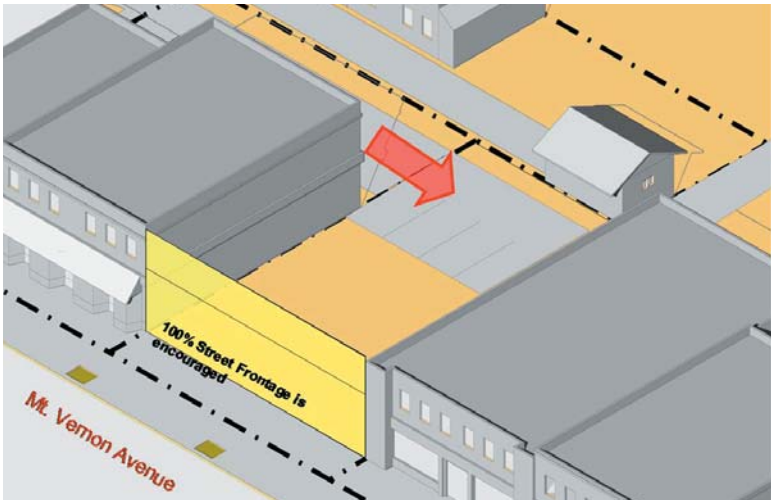


Figure 6.28 Restrict curb cuts on Mt. Vernon Avenue

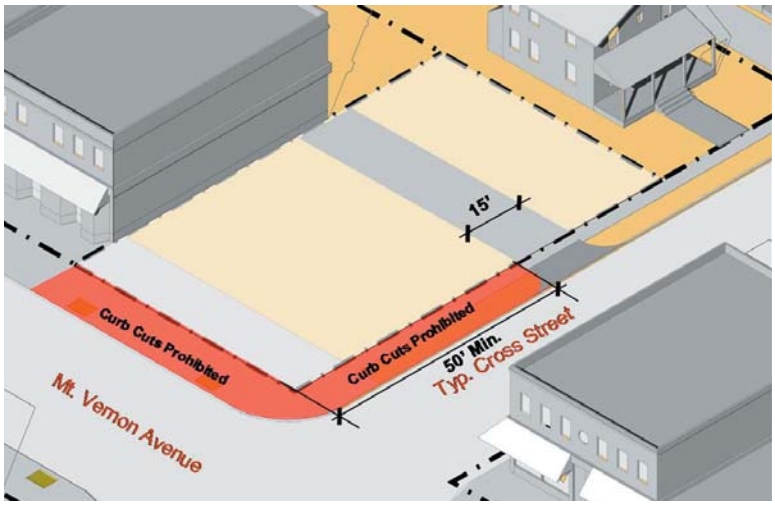


Figure 6.29 Access on corner lots

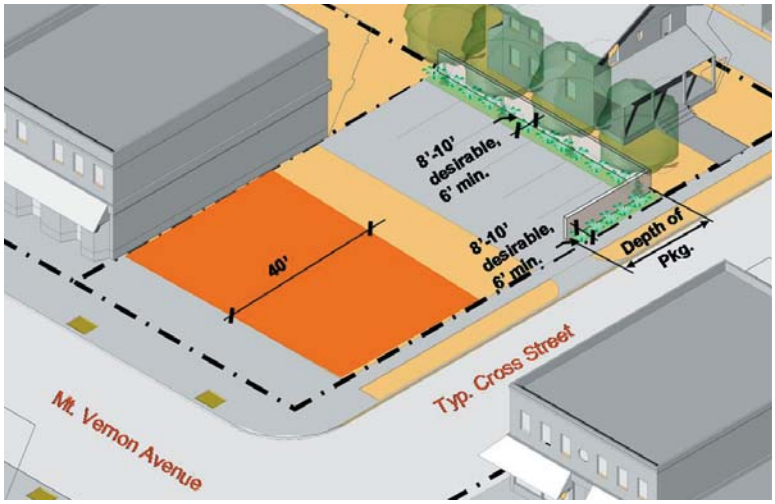


Figure 6.30 Parking and screening

On corner sites

Curb cuts are prohibited along Mt. Vernon Avenue for corner sites. Rear yard and parking for corner sites must be accessed from cross streets. While 100% street frontage is encouraged, one curb cut with a 15-foot drive lane is permitted along the cross street provided it is set back 50 feet from the property line at Mt. Vernon Avenue. (Figure 6.29)

DESIGN INTENT

The suitable location of surface parking minimizes gaps in the continuity of the street wall and provides appropriate setbacks for screening and landscape buffering to reduce impacts on neighboring residential uses.

Above grade and surface parking lots must be setback a minimum of 40 feet from Mt. Vernon Avenue. An 8 – 10-foot landscaped screening buffer is desired (with a 6-foot minimum depending on the quality of the screening) at the rear of the lot (and on the side street for corner lots) for the entire depth of the parking lot, except where a rear alley intersects perpendicular to the lot. In such instance, a break in the screening buffer is required to accommodate current or future access. Regardless of whether the parking requirement has been waived or reduced, a buffer must be provided as described above to provide screening for adjacent uses.

This design standard does not apply to the Town Square site, as it abuts commercially used property to the rear and the goal in the design of the square it to integrate it into the design of the streetscape, providing the opportunity for both large and small gathering spaces.

6.4 Storefront Guidelines

It is important to maintain consistency in building facades and related treatments throughout the Avenue, particularly with Mt. Vernon Avenue's mix of architectural styles and colors that have evolved as

the surrounding areas have grown over the last few decades (Figures 6.31 and 6.32 illustrate various configurations of appropriately desired storefronts).

Storefront Design

Storefronts are generally the first point of contact with potential customers and define the character of a neighborhood and retail street. Standardized or generic storefronts are strongly discouraged on Mt. Vernon Avenue. Storefront design should reinforce the "Main Street" quality of the Avenue, with its unique small town character. Storefront design should include as many of the following elements as possible:

- Individual storefronts displays should change often to add richness to the Avenue
- The primary pedestrian entrance should directly front along the sidewalk or at the corner
- On corner sites, ground level retail storefront windows should extend a minimum of 20 feet along the side street, and both the architecture of the building and the storefront design should address and articulate the corner at intersections along the Avenue
- Storefrontsshould have a minimum of 75 percent glass at the ground floor facade
- Creative displays of merchandise and services should be included in storefront windows
- Ground level storefronts are encouraged to have exterior awnings that are coordinated with the storefront design. Along the Avenue, particularly in the historic district, shed or sloped awnings are strongly encouraged and are more appropriate than other awning forms. Awnings shall not overwhelm or obscure the architecture and decorative features of historically contributing buildings. Awnings shall not be backlit.

Figure 6.31 Quality storefront

Figure 6.32 Quality storefront

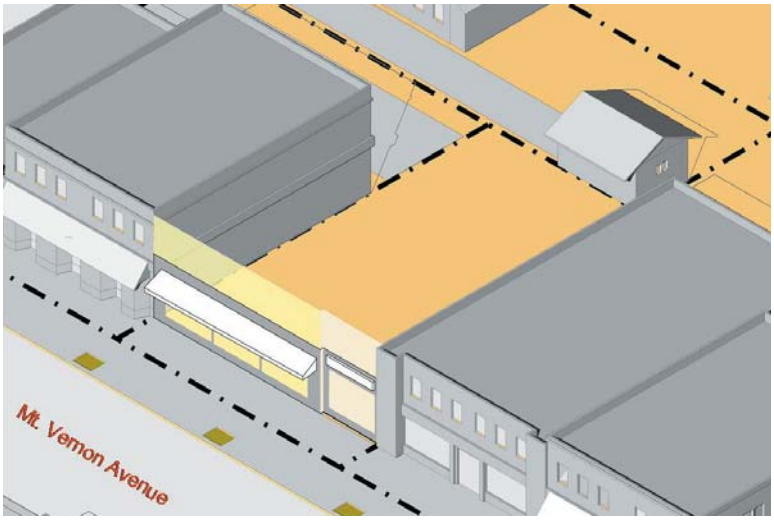


Figure 6.33 Awnings

Building Signage

Business name on Awning

Variety of sign types

Signage should clearly communicate the business name and should be restricted to the ground level. Facades should be enhanced through awnings, decorative signage, unique window dressings and displays, and detailed trim to add variety to the street wall and distinguish stores from one another. These improvements will enhance the pedestrian experience by offering interesting outposts of stores, eateries and miscellaneous services through a unique visual journey along the Avenue.

Signage should be consistent in scale and language, appropriate to the surrounding context and oriented to the pedestrian. Bright and flashy themed signs should be avoided, as they are not in character with the local neighborhood. Most architectural facades along the Mt. Vernon Avenue are traditional in style; in order to preserve this character, they should not be overwhelmed with signage. Commercial signage on the Avenue should consist of small scale, wall mounted signs located between the first and second floors of a building, glass-applied signage in storefront windows, or those hung from posts perpendicular to the building facade. Internally illuminated box signs should be prohibited and existing signs should be replaced with appropriate signage. Freestanding signs should be prohibited. For buildings with multiple retail units, a coordinated signage approach is desired.

6.5 Pedestrian Environment and Streetscape Recommendations

The *Plan* recommends improvements to lighting, sidewalks, crosswalks, street trees, signage, site amenities, including street furniture and public art to improve and enhance the pedestrian environment.

Sidewalks and Right-of-Way Treatment

Sidewalks are generally adequate and easily navigable by foot, but paving type and texture are inconsistent throughout the Avenue. As the Avenue evolved from residential uses to a combination of uses, sidewalks outside of the improved area have remained narrow and unimproved. This is particularly evident in the treatment of the strip of land between the public right-of-way and private property.

Consistency in sidewalk surfaces would result in an improved appearance and cohesive boundary of the Avenue. The *Plan* recommends using two to three paving types such as concrete, brick pavers, and stone that will not only provide an aesthetic improvement but also distinguish areas of use, such as incorporating one paving type for outdoor dining directly adjacent to a clearly marked concrete walkway (Figures 6.34 and 6.35).

In most locations there is a narrow space (approximately 5-10 feet) between the edge of the public sidewalk and the front of the buildings, called the "public/private zone." This is private property, but this area plays an important role in complementing the sidewalk. There are several options for the treatment of this area, as follows:

- The area is utilized as part of the outdoor seating for the cafes and restaurants;
- It serves as part of the entrance to retail and service uses – so it should be treated as a continuation of the sidewalk;
- It acts as the foreground to existing residential or office uses on the Avenue. As such, it should be planted and maintained with appropriate foundation plantings, with adequate sidewalk area to serve the use.

Figure 6.34

Figure 6.35 **Paving defines retail entrance**

Outdoor Dining

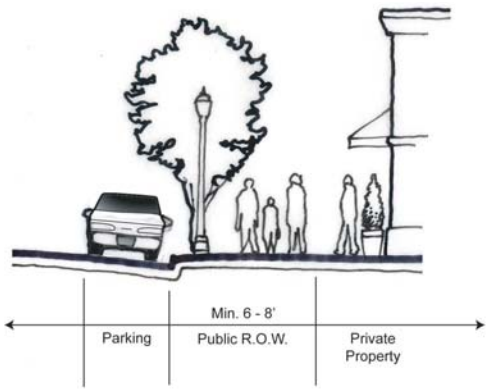


Figure 6.36 **Retail, Pave to building foundation**

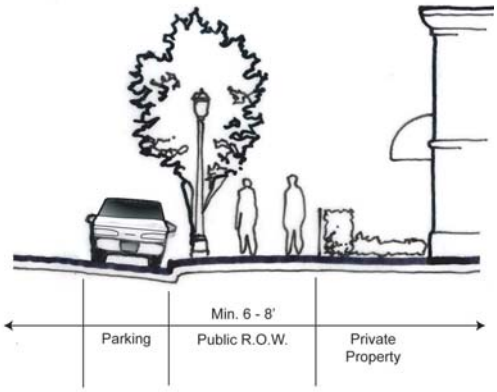


Figure 6.37 **Residential Landscaping at entrance**

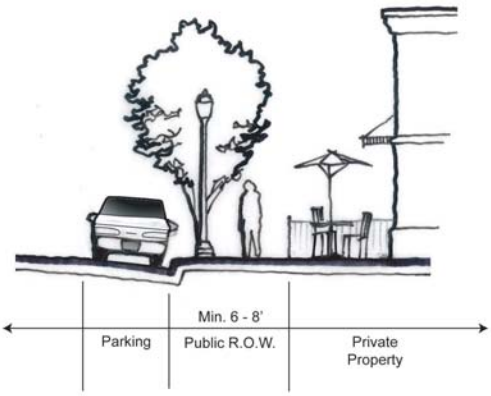


Figure 6.38 **Outdoor Dining**

The *Plan* recommends that the area located between the city right-of-way and the sidewalk-entry of businesses be paved using the same style of pavement as the existing sidewalk areas – generally brick pavers. Consistency in the treatment of the public/private zone will enhance cohesive identity along Mt. Vernon Avenue. In areas where a residential use is adjacent the right-of-way, ground surfaces is typically planted. For the areas adjacent to commercial and retail uses, the *Plan* recommends that sidewalks be paved to the building foundation. (Figure 6.36 and 6.37). An edge treatment, such as precast white concrete tree planter curb or brick edging for the unidecor pavers, is recommended where the sidewalk meets planting areas or grass.

In order to create activity on the street, outdoor, cafe-style seating should be encouraged and can have areas designated by special paving materials (Figure 6.38). Outdoor seating already occurs in some limited areas of the Avenue, and encouraging additional restaurants and cafes to provide outdoor seating will contribute to the street as a lively public area. Where outdoor dining currently occurs, this space is identified with temporary bollards or planters that identify the edge of the dining area, while others have installed low height metal, or wrought iron fencing. Areas that are used as outdoor dining may be paved in materials that differentiate the areas from pedestrian flow.

The *Plan* recommends that the portions of the Avenue adjacent to parking lots should be treated with a screen or planted buffer. In conjunction with vegetation, low walls can reinforce the delineation and screening of parking areas. (Figures 6.39 and 6.40).

There are several parking lots and service uses within the Historic Core and Monroe Gateway areas that should be screened to the greatest extent possible. This buffer could include a low seat wall that would provide multiple uses, such as screening and an attractive seating space along the Avenue.

Figure 6.39 **Parking area without screen**

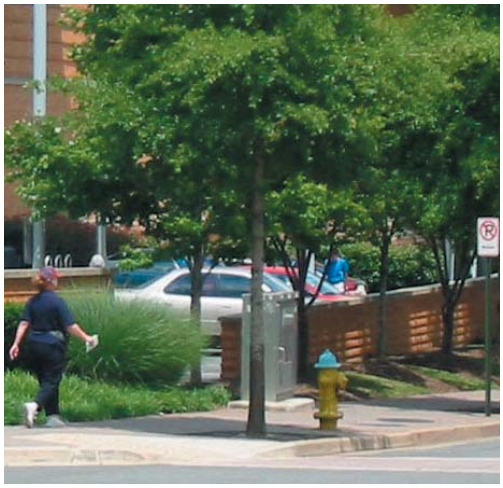


Figure 6.40 **Parking area with wall and buffer**

Pedestrian Crosswalks

The existing crosswalks on the Avenue vary in design and maintenance, and several crosswalks are currently being upgraded from painted stripes to stamped asphalt, an attractive and cost effective method for highlighting crossing areas that can be easily updated with routine road maintenance.

A series of actions are recommended to improve the existing conditions of many crosswalks to optimize pedestrian safety. Existing crosswalks in poor condition, such as those at the intersections of Nelson and Monroe Avenues, warrant re-striping at a minimum in the short term. A related issue is the variety in the treatment of crosswalks at other intersections. For example, the crosswalks at the Howell and Mt. Ida Avenue intersections are constructed of brick pavers, while both a painted ladder-style and a stamped asphalt crosswalk are provided at Del Ray and Oxford Avenues. A unique, but consistent crosswalk treatment is recommended to reinforce the character of the Historic Core area.

The *Plan* also recommends a standard treatment for the crosswalks outside the Core area, with special care taken at the two public schools, George Washington Middle School and Mt. Vernon Community School, to upgrade the existing faded and poorly marked crosswalks. These particular crosswalks should be upgraded in the short term with signage, lighting and enhanced treatment to help distinguish these crossings for drivers and to enhance pedestrian safety for children and others crossing the Avenue

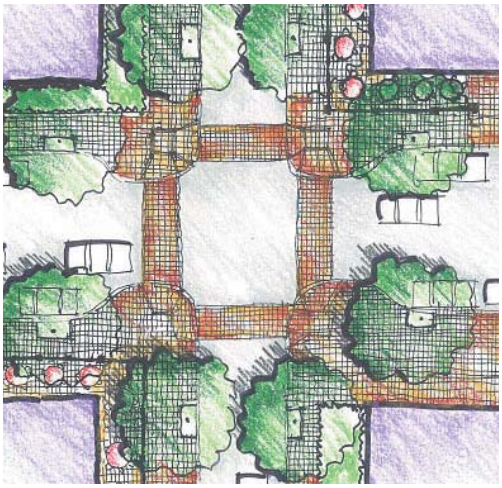
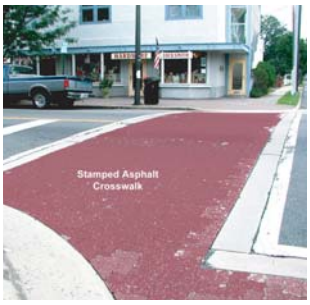


Figure 6.42 **Crosswalk, alternative materials**

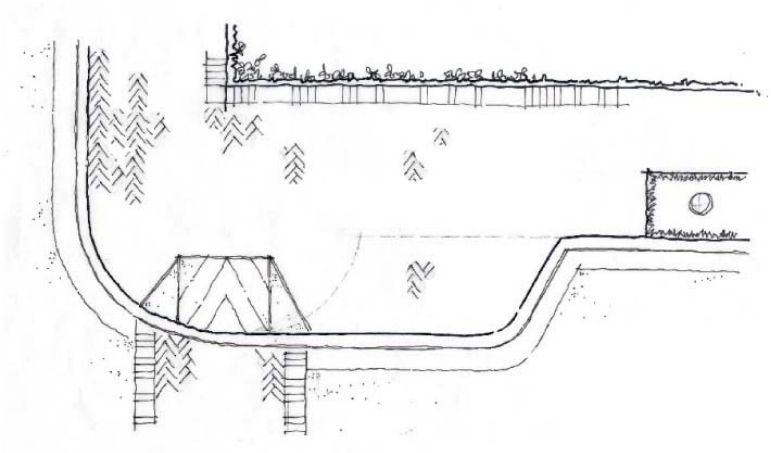


Bulb-outs

Bulb-outs generally serve to slow traffic, shorten road crossing distance and enhance pedestrian safety. The use of paving materials should continue to be integrated in areas where people and vehicles interact, particularly within the Monroe Gateway and the Historic Core.

The City has provided pedestrian bulb-outs at several intersections. These should also be incorporated at other intersections within the Historic Core area. Such improvements strengthen the Avenue as a safe, pedestrian domain.

Larger bulb-outs are recommended for intersections that accumulate greater numbers of pedestrians and can also offer an opportunity for planted areas or wayfinding at key intersections.



Recommended Bulb-out design

Example of Existing Bulb-out

Lighting

A major concern expressed by community members is the lack of pedestrian-scale lighting along the length of Mt. Vernon Avenue. Currently, the street is lit by tall, cobra-head style lights located on one side of the street that illuminate a broad area of the street for vehicular traffic. In many instances, light from these fixtures is directed away from the sidewalk onto the street and may be obscured by the existing tree canopy, with little light filtering down through the trees onto the sidewalk. These conditions create an illusion of a poorly-lit and undesirable space for pedestrians. Installing pedestrian-scale lighting along the entire length of the Avenue, connecting to the Braddock Road Metro Station will help promote street-level activity during the evening hours and encourage pedestrians and others to use the Metro station during non-daylight hours.

In developing the specifications for streetscape lighting, luminares should not exceed 14 feet in height. This height preserves the scale of the overall community and its adjacency to residential neighborhoods.

Other options to provide additional light on the sidewalk during evening hours are building lighting and lighted storefront windows. Lighting of storefronts should be done in such a manner that provides light on the sidewalk while not negatively impacting adjacent residences.

As an alternative to the expensive installation of new fixtures, the existing cobra-head style light poles could be modified to include an additional light source oriented towards the sidewalk and pedestrians.

The *Plan* recommends that the cost and feasibility of the pedestrian-scale lighting options be considered, and that whichever alternative is selected, a phasing

plan is developed to implement the new lighting over time. In addition, a plan for new bulb-outs should be developed as part of the overall streetscape improvements to coordinate the installation of these improvements.

Street Trees

The existing street trees are reasonably mature and generally appropriate for the scale and traffic speed of Mt. Vernon Avenue. However, they are irregular in spacing in some areas and discontinuous in the northern segment of the Avenue.

The *Plan* recommends that trees along the length of the Avenue be replaced over time to ensure consistent streetscape pattern. Deteriorating vegetation easily detracts from the positive elements that the Avenue has to offer.

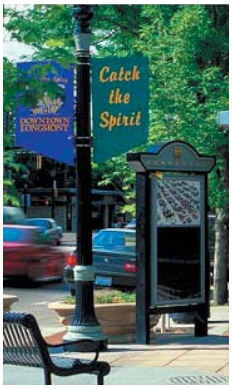
Newly planted trees should not exceed 30 to 40 feet in spacing so that buildings are not obscured and to ensure the provision of adequate space for both pedestrian movement and lighting (Figures 6.41 and 6.42).

Tree planting will be implemented with the streetscape improvement accompanying the undergrounding from Bellefonte Avenue to Nelson Avenue. A tree planting plan should be developed to infill the remainder of the street.

Figure 6.41 **Street Trees**

Figure 6.42 **Street Trees**

Bus Stops lack distinction



Banners and historic markers identify the area.

Public Signage

The signage for both public and private uses is inconsistent throughout the Avenue. Older painted street signs are non-reflective and must be replaced. No signs exist to identify the Town of Potomac Historic District. Bus stop signage is consistent with WMATA signage, but the signs are small and inconspicuous. Bus stops along Mt. Vernon Avenue are generally constructed of asphalt and only marked by Metrobus signage.

Light pole mounted banners are recommended for displaying screen-printed vinyl or fabric signs. Banners can be good theme-oriented displays for neighborhood character that should be considered as one element of a comprehensive package to reinforce and celebrate the identity of the area. Banners should be placed at pedestrian level above head height and could be used to reduce the scale of the cobra head lighting to a more pedestrian scale. The banners should be installed on the sidewalk side of the pole to better orient the banners towards the pedestrian.

Another streetscape improvement should be the incorporation of identity signage at the edge of the Town of Potomac Historic District to coincide with the boundary of the Historic Core (Uhler and Bellefonte Avenues). This signage will provide a special identity feature for this important district and help reinforce the Avenue as a historic main street area. Historic district signage should be incorporated where there is adequate space, such as in planted areas, and where they do not obstruct pedestrian flow.

The Del Ray Citizens Association and Town of Potomac Historical Association have sought to provide interpretative signage in the neighborhood to raise awareness of the Town of Potomac National Historic Register District and to educate residents and visitors about Del Ray's unique history. A grant has been awarded to the group to design and install signs at several key sites in the community explaining the history of Del Ray and highlighting significant sites. A total of five signs are proposed at the following locations:

- The public parking lot at Mt. Vernon and Oxford Avenues

  The sign in this location will describe the evolution of Del Ray/St. Elmo into the Town of Potomac and its annexation by the City of Alexandria. The sign will include photos showing Mt. Vernon Avenue in 1915 and 1929.

- The former Town of Potomac Town Hall, now Fire Station #202, 213 E. Windsor Avenue

  A sign will be installed at the Fire Station describing the town fire department, with photos of the fire station at its opening in 1926 and the personnel and equipment of the original fire company.

- The Mt. Vernon Recreation Center, 2701 Commonwealth Avenue

  A sign is planned for the area adjacent to the recreation center and will describe the electric railway that ran down present-day Commonwealth Avenue. A map of the route, including stations, and photos will also be included.

- Along Route 1 (Jefferson Davis Highway), exact location to be determined

  A sign will be installed along Potomac Yard to describe the former rail yard operations and will feature photos of the old yard.

- Charles Hill Park on Oxford Avenue

  This sign will depict the racetrack that was formerly located north of the park.

The *Plan* supports implementation of this interpretative sign program. The program will complement the related *Plan* recommendations that are intended to better identify and celebrate the area's history.

A wayfinding system should be designed to orient pedestrians and vehicles toward parking, historic attractions, the Avenue, public parks, and the Braddock Road Metro Station. These signs should be designed in accordance with the local character.

Drawing on the strengths of the local arts and crafts community, local artists should be invited into the process for designing local signage and wayfinding features. This can provide a unique element to the Avenue, while highlighting the eclectic identity of area residents.

Site Amenities

The community character could be better identified through the integration and improvement of certain amenities. The existing architecture and urban design in the public realm is eclectic and has evolved over time. Elements such as street pole banners, consistent lighting styles and street furniture could help to express the local character. For example, the current street furniture is traditional-style wood and wrought iron benches that are generally in good condition. However, many benches appear weathered from years of exposure and should be updated. Trash receptacles are consistent along parts of the Avenue, but are mixed randomly with aging metal bins that have been painted as part of a local art project. The local touch of art should be supplemented with maintained receptacles.

Site Furniture/Public Art

Benches, bicycle racks and trash receptacles should be in keeping with architectural standards of the Avenue. Given the arts and crafts character of the Del Ray neighborhood, there is an opportunity to capture the creative talent on the Avenue by engaging local artists in the design of benches, sculptures, signs, street lamps, murals and mobile art. Art can often serve as functional material such as a sculpture that operates as a seat, outdoor table for games, etc. The physical integration of art into the public realm can help to express the diverse community character in a unique way, showcasing the eclectic essence of the Avenue and its residents. This is can also work to further the goals of an Arts Promotion Strategy as outlined in Section 3.4.

Utilities and Service

Access to buildings for service such as delivery or trash removal should be from the rear of the site wherever possible. Trash dumpsters should be screened from view by plant materials, fences or walls. Special consideration should be give to the long-term durability of such screening.

New construction should provide space for pad-mounted transformers within the building footprint. If this is not feasible, other alternatives may be explored. In priority order, these alternatives are: 1) transformers are located adjacent to an alley or at the rear of the property; and 2) they are located behind the building line and screened by an opaque wall and evergreen plantings. On larger redevelopment sites, such as the triangle sites, underground placement in a vault is the most desirable location for transformers.

Bus Shelter

Bus Shelters

Currently, there are three bus shelters within the study area. The first shelter is located on the east side of Mt. Vernon Avenue at Oxford Avenue, and the second shelter is located on the west side of Mt. Vernon Avenue adjacent to the Nicholas A. Colasanto Center at Raymond Avenue. Another shelter is located just north of the Commonwealth District area on the west side of Mt. Vernon Avenue at Sanborn Place.

Bus shelters should be located at strategic points to capture the greatest ridership, and conveniently deliver and pick up riders in activity nodes along the Avenue. Activity nodes include spaces along the Avenue where there is an accumulation of pedestrian flow and street-level activity; areas near major destinations or intersections; and areas with connections to other transportation modes including additional bus routes, bicycles trails, or pedestrian routes. Shelters should act as points of information for orientation on the Avenue, local trail connections, and local route and schedule information for all transit serving the vicinity (DASH and Metrobus), as well as Metrorail system-wide maps and taxi service information.

Three existing bus stops on Mt. Vernon Avenue meet WMATA's boarding and alighting standards for bus shelters: on the east side at Hume Avenue and Bellefonte Avenue, and on the west side of the Avenue at Commonwealth and Mt. Vernon Avenues. While the ridership warrants bus shelters in these locations, the existing right-of-way is not sufficiently wide to accommodate a shelter. The *Plan* recommends exploring the possibility of acquiring additional right-of-way or an easement from private property owners to allow the installation of bus shelters.

Implementation 7.0

Strategies for implementing the *Plan* recommendations are key to ensuring that the goals of the *Plan* are achieved. This chapter outlines suggested approaches for realizing the *Plan's* recommendations, and identifies the principal agencies involved in implentation. The lead agency is shown in bold.

7.1 Land Use

Create a public gathering space at the corner of Oxford and Mt. Vernon Avenue (**P&Z;** RPCA; T&ES)

- Develop conceptual designs for the two options
- Conduct a cost and design feasibility study for acquisition of land, design and construction
- Work with the community to select the preferred design option based on the feasibility analysis
- Incorporate the preferred design option into the City's Capital Improvements Program and/or work with the community on alternative funding strategies
- Should the property acquisition option be favorable, consider negotiating a right of first refusal for acquiring the property at a future date

Improve Gateway Park at Route 1 and Monroe Avenue (**RPCA;** P&Z; T&ES)

- Design improvements and gateway features in conjunction with the design of the Monroe Avenue bridge improvements and the development at Potomac Yard
- Coordinate gateway and park improvements with the realignment of the Monroe Avenue bridge

Work with existing property owners and tenants of Giant/CVS sites to continue to operate in the present location (**P&Z;** CMO)

- Meet with property owners and express community's desire to retain the uses

7.2 Affordable Housing

Encourage new home ownership opportunities and resident participation in City-sponsored home ownership programs through fairs and other means to expand awareness of and support for affordable housing (**OH;** P&Z)

- Work with the City's Office of Housing on programs in the Del Ray area
- As new development is proposed, work with the property owner and developer to ensure incorporation of as much affordable housing into the project as possible in accordance with the City's overall Affordable Housing Policy but no fewer than 10% affordable units in the two CDD zones

AEDP—Alexandria Economic Development Partnership

BID—Business Improvement District

CA—City Attorney

CMO—City Manager's Office

DASH—Alexandria Transit Company

HA—Historic Alexandria

OH—Office of Housing

P&Z—Planning and Zoning

PWBA—Potomac West Business Association

RPC&A—Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities

T&ES—Transportation and Environmental Services

7.3 Historic Preservation

Update the National Historic Register to designate certain previously noncontributing buildings within the historic district (**P&Z;** HA)

Explore the expansion of the boundaries of the existing Town of Potomac Historic District (**P&Z**)

- Conduct a formalized survey of the identified buildings along Mt. Vernon Avenue
- Identify other potential contributing structures on the edges of the Historic District that should be included within the District
- Seek a cost-share grant with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources or other grant funding to survey the identified structures and to prepare the nomination package for inclusion in the Historic District
- Once the nomination package is complete, submit it to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Develop and implement a heritage and interpretive sign program (**HA;** P&Z)

- Coordinate sign programs with other public sign programs, including gateway and wayfinding signage
- Support installation of five proposed neighborhood interpretative signage

Promote awareness of Town of Potomac Historic District, state and federal historic preservation tax credits, and technical assistance regarding the design of infill and new construction (**P&Z;** HA)

- Work with Virginia Department of Historic Resources staff to host community workshops to promote the awareness and use of historic preservation tax credits, to provide technical assistance and other means of support to encourage historic preservation and rehabilitation of contributing structures in the Town of Potomac Historic District

7.4 Streetscape

Develop a design plan that identifies the following improvements: (**P&Z;** T&ES; RPCA)

- Enhance existing crosswalks or provide new crosswalks, bulb-outs and other features to increase pedestrian safety

  As new bulb-outs are constructed, consider relocation of existing bus stops to align with new bulb-outs to accommodate disabled passengers
- Enhance existing bus stops with shelters, benches, schedules
- Identify locations for new public art, bicycle racks, trash containers, benches and related street furniture, and opportunities for on-street loading areas within each block
- Evaluate condition of street trees and install new trees, as appropriate, to replace deteriorated trees and infill where trees are lacking
- Complete the sidewalk and/or other landscaping improvements

Proactively work with property owners in final phase of the undergrounding project about extending paving and otherwise improving their private property, with the goal of ensuring the highest level of participation (**P&Z;** T&ES)

Involve community representatives in discussion of streetscape improvements, with particular attention to the intersection of Mt. Vernon and Monroe Avenues, and develop a comprehensive streetscape plan that can be phased in over time and would anticipate future improvements to private property (**P&Z;** T&ES; RPCA)

Work with PWBA, businesses, and property owners for coordinated building and storefront lighting that illuminates the sidewalk (**P&Z**)

Evaluate cost and feasibility of pedestrian scale lighting (**T&ES;** P&Z)

Pedestrian scaled lighting has been determined to be the top priority to address safety concerns. The desire is to have pedestrian scaled lighting along Mt. Vernon Avenue beginning at the Braddock Road Metro Station and extending north along the Avenue, and including the blocks along Monroe Avenue.

Develop and implement a coordinated approach to public signage either through the City's comprehensive signage program if it is funded in the near future or as a separate approach focused on Mt. Vernon Avenue (**P&Z;** T&ES; HA)

Encourage and support the enhancement of the visual appearance of automobile-oriented uses through technical assistance and façade improvement grant money (**P&Z;** AEDP)

Evaluate suggested improvements to Colasanto Park (**RPCA;** P&Z)

Work with the community to continue to prioritize public improvements (**P&Z;** T&ES; RPCA)

Develop a steering committee to include Work Group members, representatives from the residential community (Del Ray Citizens Association, Mount Jefferson Civic Association, and Warwick Village Citizens Association), the business community (PWBA), property owners, and City staff to assist in the implementation of the Plan recommendations, including but not limited to streetscape, business improvement district, and other implementation measures. (**P&Z**)

7.5 Pedestrian and Multi-Modal Strategy

Provide DASH service along Mt. Vernon Avenue (**T&ES/DASH**)

- Develop a promotional campaign for the use of public transit as a way to get to Mt. Vernon Avenue

Work with the school system and developers of Potomac Yard to enhance access to the Braddock Road Metro Station from Mt. Vernon Avenue (**P&Z;** T&ES)

Explore new opportunities to improve connections between Mt. Vernon Avenue and existing trails (**RPCA;** P&Z)

Restripe Mt. Vernon Avenue between Commonwealth Avenue and West Glebe Road from 4 lanes to 2 travel lanes, with bicycle and parking lanes, or two travel lanes and two parking lanes. Work with the bicycle community about desireability for bike lanes. Construct bulb-outs and crosswalks on Mt. Vernon Avenue at Commonwealth Avenue, Kennedy Street and Sanborn Place. These improvements were the second highest priority of the Work Group in addition to pedestrian scale lighting to address pedestrian safety issues. (**T&ES/P&Z;** RPCA)

7.6 Development of a Shared Parking Program

Develop and implement a shared parking program (**P&Z;** CA)

The parking study confirmed that the ten targeted off-street parking lots have excess capacity at various times of the day and could be made available as shared parking for others when underutilized by principal users. These steps have been identified as critical to the development of a shared parking program:

- Work with parking lot owners to identify shared parking issues and to develop formal commitment to the program
- Develop an organizational structure and identify the roles of the organization, the City and other identified groups for the planning and implementation of the shared parking program
- Evaluate potential costs for the individual lot owner in terms of liability insurance, lot maintenance and lighting.
- Develop an equitable approach for cost sharing and a program for the generation of revenues. Consider use of BID funds to assist in program funding.
- Promote interest and participation among business owners, employees and tenants
- Develop a mechanism and criteria to monitor and evaluate the operation and success of the program.

7.7 Other Parking Enhancements

Explore rear access opportunities (**P&Z;** T&ES)

- With new development proposals and use applications, explore opportunities to provide rear yard access or rights-of-way from alleys to improve access and circulation between adjoining lots. Where opportunities are found, proactively work with property owners to obtain easements or shared access.

Provide a few shorter-term parking spaces and adequately spaced loading zones; resolve conflicts in parking limitations; and consider relocation of taxicab stand (**T&ES;** P&Z)

- Develop and submit recommended approach for these issues to the Traffic and Parking Board for approval and implementation

Provide consistent enforcement of existing parking limitations on Mt. Vernon Avenue (**Police**)

7.8 Retail Strategy/Arts Promotions

Work with the Small Business Development Center to: (**AEDP/CMO**)

- Conduct merchandising audits with individual businesses and provide input on store layout, merchandising, operations, and marketing strategies.
- Provide assistance in the development, or revision, of 3 to 5 year business plans for individual independent businesses (not for franchised businesses).
- Provide Small Business Administration (SBA) loan package information and other financing information for individual businesses to invest in capital improvements, or for working capital and marketing.
- Communicate information about Alexandria's small business assistance programs to existing business owners.

Promote participation in the Enterprise Zone and monitor/evaluate the program to ensure it functions to stimulate private investment and job opportunities in the Enterprise Zone. (**AEDP;** P&Z)

Establish a working group comprised of representatives of the Avenue's arts community to best plan for implementing the arts promotion strategy. (**PWBA/BID**; RPCA; P&**Z)**

7.9 Marketing/Promotions

Ensure coordination to market to the types of businesses outlined in the retail strategy (**PWBA/BID**; AEDP**)**

- Create promotional materials in printed and/or electronic formats that highlight the Mt. Vernon Avenue area, focusing on the area's suitability for the targeted types of businesses.
- Actively market suitable commercial properties to tenants in targeted industries, when such properties come on the market for sale or for rent.

7.10 Business Improvement District Implementation

(**P&Z/CMO**; PWBA; AEDP**)**

The Plan envisions the Potomac West Business Association (PWBA) as the organization to develop and implement marketing, promotions, and retail management district initiatives. To strengthen and support the work of PWBA, a Business Improvement District (BID) is recommended as a source of regular funding in benefit of the businesses along the Avenue.

In order to initiate a BID along Mt. Vernon Avenue, the following steps need to be taken:

- Organize a committee comprised of PWBA, City of Alexandria representatives, and affected property owners to work on the BID implementation process.
- Define the potential boundaries and properties to be included in the BID.
- Develop, with the Committee, a general business plan for the prospective BID, including responsibilities and a projected annual budget.
- Publicize the concept of the BID to property owners and businesspeople within the prospective service area in order to inform people and to gauge a general level of support. Prepare outreach materials to explain and promote the benefits and responsibilities of the BID. Hold community meetings to discuss the BID concept.
- Hold a public hearing to discuss BID details, as required by State legislation, prior to the creation of any service district including a BID.
- Depending on the outcome of the public hearing, City Council may adopt an ordinance authorizing the creation of a BID along Mt. Vernon Avenue.

7.11 Development Controls

(P&Z)

The implementation of the Plan necessitates the following changes to the Master Plan, zoning ordinance and map:

- Mt. Vernon Avenue Overlay: Adopt a new overlay zone for CL/Commercial Low zoned properties on Mt. Vernon Avenue between Commonwealth and Nelson Avenues that includes building form principles and design guidelines to build on the existing pattern of development along the Avenue while preserving the scale of buildings within the historic district and minimizing impacts on the residences that abut the commercial properties. The overlay district should include the following objectives:

  · *To maintain the existing mass and scale of buildings while allowing infill development subject to performance standards*

  · *To provide flexible parking requirements for new retail uses and small infill development*

  · *To encourage new small businesses by providing an administrative approval process for certain businesses*

  · *Waive certain parking requirements in historic core*

  · *Allow certain uses administratively*

- New Coordinated Development District 13 –Triangle Site

  · *Encourage the coordinated redevelopment of the 11 individual parcels known collectively as the "Triangle Site"*

  · *Conduct informational meetings with property owners and solicit buy-in to the vision for redevelopment*

  · *Ensure the new CDD designation and regulations, as well as any new development, are consistent with the Plan recommendations for floor area ratio, development level, building height, mix of uses, open space, underground parking and streetscape improvements.*

· *Seek public input and adoption of the revisions as part of the Zoning Ordinance.*

- New Coordinated Development District 14 – Giant/CVS Sites, 415 and 425 Monroe Avenue

  · *Should market forces adversely impact the continuation of the existing uses, proactively work towards reuse or redevelopment of the sites to include a grocery and pharmacy and other ground floor retail uses and residential or office on upper floors*

  · *Ensure the new CDD designation and regulations, as well as any new development, are consistent with the Plan recommendations for floor area ratio, development level, building height, mix of uses, open space, underground parking and streetscape improvements.*

  · *Seek public input and adoption of the revisions as part of the Zoning Ordinance.*

Revise and adopt Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan to incorporate this planning effort, the recommended land use and zoning changes, and updated demographic information.

7.12 Capital Improvements Program

(**P&Z**; T&ES; RPCA**)**

The City of Alexandria has a six-year Capital Improvements Program (CIP) that, beginning with the current update for FY2006-2011, will be updated on a biannual basis. The CIP establishes the City's capital priorities within available resources.

The *Plan* outlines a series of public improvements, focused on the streetscape and the public gathering space at Oxford Avenue. These improvements should be prioritized with the community prior to consideration for inclusion within the City's Capital Improvements Program. The Work Group has initially prioritized pedestrian-safety improvements as the most pressing need. Such improvements with the highest priority are:

1. Pedestrian lighting and

2. Measures to reduce road width, deter speeding and increase safety on Mt. Vernon Avenue north of Commonwealth Avenue

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