



URBAN PARTNERSHIP INC.



# 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

2019  
2024





# INTRODUCTION

## Bethesda Urban Partnership

The Bethesda Urban Partnership, Inc.(BUP) is the organization responsible for the management and marketing of Downtown Bethesda. Established by Montgomery County in 1994, BUP fulfills the streetscape maintenance needs of the Downtown, creates cultural events and provides exciting festivals for the community. BUP also operates Bethesda Transportation Solutions (BTS) to manage the Bethesda Transportation Management District (TMD), manages the Bethesda Arts & Entertainment District as well as the artist spaces Studio B and Gallery B, and is responsible for the operation of the Bethesda Circulator. It has 32 employees working in maintenance, marketing, transportation and administration.

BUP’s volunteer Board of Directors is comprised of residents, business owners, and landowners. Board members are appointed by the County Executive and approved by the County Council to ensure that all the Urban District’s stakeholders have a strong voice in its management. The Board of Directors oversees BUP’s work program, management and finances.

BUP’s guiding principle is service to the Urban District Community. It strives every day to ensure Downtown Bethesda is clean, beautiful and welcoming. Its world-class events, artistic programs, and public art installations highlight the talent and skills of local chefs, artists and businesses, and attract over 100,000 people annually into Downtown Bethesda. BTS sets the standard for a successful TMD management in Montgomery County. The Bethesda Circulator services over 38,000 riders a month.

With the adoption of the Bethesda Downtown Plan, the selection of Bethesda as the future location of Fortune 500 companies like Marriott International, the construction of millions of square feet of commercial office space, as well as new residential units, and the opening of the Purple Line, Downtown Bethesda is positioned to see incredible growth over the next five years. The BUP Board of Directors understands the importance of aligning BUP’s services to help manage that growth and meet the needs of current and future constituents. To that end, the Board has spent the last year reaching out to its stakeholders to develop a comprehensive five-year Strategic Plan that will guide the organization through this transitional period and position it for even greater success.

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## FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

On behalf of the Bethesda Urban Partnership (BUP), I am pleased to present our Five-Year Strategic Plan. With the adoption of the new Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan and the prospect of significant, new development, this document will guide the organization's efforts during an exciting time of change in Downtown Bethesda.

Bethesda is one of the most admired communities in the nation because of its location, energetic business community, first-class residences, hotels, acclaimed schools, public transportation, restaurants, shops and the arts. All of us, residents, business owners, employees and visitors, have a vested interest in Bethesda's ongoing success. The vision of Downtown Bethesda in this document has been crafted to ensure BUP continues to offer the highest quality of service to the community.

Thank you for your interest in Bethesda's vibrant downtown and we look forward to a fantastic five years.

Best regards,

*John C. Alexander, Chair  
Bethesda Urban Partnership*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the direction of the BUP Board of Directors, a Strategic Planning Committee was formed to spearhead the strategic planning process. In April 2017, BUP contracted with the Alineo Group to conduct stakeholder engagement meetings, interviews, an online survey, and strategic planning sessions with BUP's various boards and committees. The findings of the stakeholder engagements are aligned with the community feedback that informed the approved Bethesda Downtown Plan and staff recommendations for best practices. (See Attachment 1 for the Stakeholder Engagement Findings.)

The goal of the stakeholder engagements was to assess the realities and perceptions of the the Bethesda Urban District in general, and BUP specifically, by those who "experience" our community daily. Stakeholders included residents, visitors, County partners, retailers/restaurateurs, employers, Marriott employees and developers. This data, in combination with the approved goals of the Bethesda Downtown Plan, an internal staff assessment of the future opportunities and challenges facing the Urban District, and an understanding of downtown management best practices has been used to inform the following five-year strategic plan.

Despite all Downtown Bethesda's advantages, no growing and dynamic urban center is without challenges. Downtown Bethesda will see rapid residential and commercial growth during the next five-years. BUP is in the unique position to anticipate the changes to its built environment and must plan to meet the current needs of its constituents while considering their future needs and the needs of new stakeholders. BUP will play an integral part in managing growth over the next five years and ensuring the Downtown retains its world-class reputation.

The BUP Board of Directors envisions a Downtown Bethesda that is a nationally recognized urban center with the physical, economic, and cultural infrastructure of a world-class community. BUP can achieve this vision by focusing on four core areas:

- The Bethesda Brand
- Beautification
- Arts & Entertainment
- Mobility



## 5-YEAR STRATEGIC VISION

Downtown Bethesda will be a nationally recognized urban center with the physical, economic, and cultural infrastructure of a world-class community.

BUP will achieve this vision through enhanced marketing and branding strategies; distinctive cultural programming; and innovative public space management with a focus on beautification and mobility. The Strategic Plan is organized into four core areas that correspond to the key elements of BUP's mission.

- The Bethesda Brand
- Beautification
- Arts & Entertainment
- Mobility

Each core area is distinct, but they are not mutually exclusive. Many of the action items discussed in the Strategic Plan will impact multiple core areas. The desired outcome is that they feed off and build upon each other to create a "vibrant, urban community."

**Downtown Bethesda will be a nationally recognized urban center with the physical, economic, and cultural infrastructure of a world-class community.**

## THE BETHESDA BRAND Strategic Goals

**Inform a regional, national and global marketing plan to express the Bethesda Brand**

### 1. A clearly defined Bethesda Brand Communicated Regionally and Globally

#### Action Item

- BUP will create a Bethesda branding masterplan that will:
  - Articulate the Bethesda Brand narratively and visually.
  - Inform a regional, national and global marketing plan to express the Bethesda Brand.
  - Update the Downtown Bethesda's Wayfinding Plan to help pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers navigate the downtown, as well as enhance the visual and physical connectivity of the distinct districts within Downtown Bethesda.
  - Help promote the economic vitality of Downtown Bethesda.
- Attract patrons to retail and entertainment options.
- Maximize the utilization of public parking facilities.
- Increase foot traffic in commercial areas.

### 2. Enhanced Communication by BUP with Constituents and Stakeholders

#### Action Item

- Leverage BUP, its County relationships, and technology to keep constituents informed about such issues as construction and traffic impacts, and general maintenance and management of the Downtown.
- Continue to develop a communication process that efficiently reaches the evolving residential demographics of the Downtown and can adapt to technological change.
- Enhance outreach to civic and residential organizations, local retail businesses, arts organizations, Naval Support Activity Bethesda and the National Institutes of Health.
- Continue strengthening relationships with our private and public employers through outreach and partnerships.

### 3. A shared Sense of Place

#### Action Item

- Continue to provide events that bring residents, visitors, shoppers and employees into Downtown Bethesda.
- Create and/or facilitate smaller, more social events for the community.
- Activate Downtown Bethesda's parks and plazas through innovative programming, a high level of maintenance, and both public and private partnerships.



# BEAUTIFICATION Strategic Goals

## Beautification Through Art

### 1. Beautification Through Art

#### Action Item

- The Arts & Entertainment District will work with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC) to prioritize public art projects in high traffic locations, both pedestrian and vehicular.

### 2. Enhanced Branding and Wayfinding

#### Action Item

- BUP will commission a new Districtwide Branding and Wayfinding Master Plan. The plan will not only help pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles navigate through Bethesda in a safe and efficient manner, but also contribute to the visual cohesiveness of the Urban District while respecting its unique neighborhoods.

### 3. Activated and Attractive Urban Spaces

#### Action Item

- BUP will work with the MNCPPC to leverage our collective expertise in event programming and public space maintenance to ensure that Bethesda's green spaces are beautiful, maintained to the highest standards, and meet the programming needs of a dynamic urban community.

### 4. Updated Streetscape Guidelines

#### Action Items

- BUP will coordinate with MNCPPC on the revised guidelines.
- BUP will continue to work with the Department of Permitting Services and developers on implementation of the guidelines.

### 5. Focus on sidewalk and crosswalk enhancements

#### Action Item

- BUP will work with Montgomery County Department of Public Transportation (MCDOT) on a five-year capital improvement plan to upgrade the streetscape infrastructure in areas not slated for development or in compliance with the new streetscape guidelines, with special attention to increased pedestrian safety and connectivity.

### 6. Targeted Fundraising Efforts

#### Action Item

- BUP will focus on securing additional funding for beautification projects from state, federal and private sources.



# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT Strategic Goals

### 1. Beautification Through Art

#### Action Item

- The A&E District will work with MNCPPC to prioritize public art projects as part of new developments in high traffic locations, both pedestrian and vehicular.

### 2. Economic Development Through Art

#### Action Item

- BUP and the A&E District will place enhanced focus on cultural programming that attracts visitors to and retains residents and employees in the Downtown, thereby enhancing the vitality of the retail economy.
  - The BUP and the A&E board will look at how to better support local artists and artistic programming both in the public realm and in private venues.
- The A&E District will continue to work with MNCPPC on realizing the Downtown Plan's goal to, "Provide flexible community theatre/stage space (known as a "black box") of approximately 5,000 square feet with potential seating of 200–250 seats." This will supplement existing entertainment spaces in, and the number of people attracted to, Downtown Bethesda.

### 3. Incorporate Art into the Streetscape

#### Action Item

- BUP will consider necessary streetscape infrastructure as opportunities for public art installations.

### 4. Increased Fundraising

#### Action Item

- BUP and the A&E District will focus on the fundraising potential of the its 501 (c) 3, non-profit charitable status to help fund projects and programs.

# MOBILITY

## Strategic Goals

### 1. Enhanced Mobility Infrastructure

#### Action Items

- BUP will work with MCDOT on a five-year capital improvement plan to upgrade the streetscape infrastructure in areas not slated for development, with special attention to increased pedestrian safety.
- BUP and BTS and its Advisory Committee will work with MCDOT, Montgomery County Police and the Maryland State Highway Administration on identifying and mitigating locations that pedestrians and cyclists consider hazardous.
- BUP and BTS will continue to review developer Traffic Mitigation Agreements with MNCPPC and MCDOT to identify infrastructure improvements that can be included during the development of each project.
- BTS will highlight locations in the Urban District that need bike racks to encourage cycling as an alternate means of transportation.

### 2. New Wayfinding Masterplan

#### Action Items

- BUP will commission a new Districtwide Wayfinding and Civic Identity Master Plan which will help pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles navigate through Bethesda both safely and efficiently. BUP will engage the community in developing the master plan.
- The Wayfinding component of the Master Plan must enhance connectivity between neighborhoods and support the maximum utilization of public parking facilities.

### 3. Progress Toward Meeting the Downtown Bethesda Plan's Non-Auto Driver Mode Share (NADMS) Goals

#### Action Items

- BTS will work with our County partners to make significant progress towards the new NADMS goal of 55%.
- BTS will work with the MCDOT and other TMDs to understand the implications of including residents in the NADMS calculation and develop best practices for surveying and modeling the mobility in Bethesda.
- BTS and BUP will also work on public transportation options with Marriott International as it transitions its 3,500 employees from their current location to Downtown Bethesda.



### 4. Activate Norfolk Avenue as a main street.

#### Action Item

- BUP will work with MNCPPC on advancing the “shared street” concept highlighted in the Downtown Plan by engaging stakeholders in proof of concept programming.

### 5. Construction Impact Mitigation

#### Action Items

- BUP will work with our County partners and developers to systematically disseminate information to our constituents.
- BUP will also act as additional “boots on the ground” to mitigate emerging issues and make sure all parties are aware of any challenges.

### 6. Bethesda Circulator Expansion

#### Action Items

- Given that the Bethesda Downtown Plan recommends future expansion of the Bethesda Circulator to include an East/West route and possible stops at NIH/Naval Support Activity Bethesda, BUP will work with MCDOT to analyze possible routes, financial impacts and ridership projections.
- BUP will ensure that any expansion of routes must consider how to maximize both the utilization of public parking garages and the impacts of more efficient circulation of people on the local economy.



**BUP will work with MCDOT on a five-year capital improvement plan to upgrade the streetscape infrastructure in areas not slated for development, with special attention to increased pedestrian safety.**

## CONCLUSION

The BUP Board of Directors envisions a Downtown Bethesda that is a nationally recognized urban center with the physical, economic, and cultural infrastructure of a world-class community. BUP can achieve this vision by focusing on four core areas: The Bethesda Brand, Beautification, Arts & Entertainment and Mobility.

The BUP Board of Directors can accomplish its strategic vision by focusing on defining and communicating the Bethesda Brand through marketing, the Arts, new streetscape infrastructure, and integrated wayfinding and placemaking programs. Furthermore, BUP can enhance the livability of the Downtown by working with County partners to enhance its mobility infrastructure, expand the Circulator, and work to get employees and residents to use alternate means of transportation through communication and education.

Downtown Bethesda is a world-class community with all the characteristics of a growing, dynamic urban center: robust public transportation, high-wage corporate employment, great schools, hundreds of dining and entertainment options, and engaged citizens who care about their quality of life. As Downtown Bethesda undergoes rapid residential and commercial development in the next five years, BUP will remain committed to doing everything in its power to maintain or improve the quality of life for all its stakeholders.

**The BUP Board of Directors can accomplish its strategic vision by focusing on defining and communicating the Bethesda Brand through marketing, the Arts, new streetscape infrastructure, and integrated wayfinding and placemaking programs.**

## BETHESDA DOWNTOWN

### DENSITY ASSESSMENT

Residential.....	10,776,480 sq. ft.
Office.....	8,389,579 sq. ft.
Retail .....	3,252,741 sq. ft.
Source: Research & Special Projects, Montgomery County Planning Department., SDAT, CoStar, Department of Housing and Community Affairs, StreetSense	
Rental Units.....	6,239
Source: Department of Housing and Community Affairs, Research & Special Projects, Montgomery County Planning Department.	
Condominium Facilities .....	1,750

### DOWNTOWN BETHESDA POPULATION BY AGE

Under 5 years .....	6%
5 to 9 years old .....	4%
10 to 14 years old .....	2%
15 to 19 years old.....	2%
20 to 34 years old.....	39%
35 to 54 years old .....	26%
55 to 64 years old .....	8%
65 to 74 years old .....	8%
75 to 84 years old .....	4%

### FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

- 3,350 New Residential Units
- 130,000 sq. ft. of New Retail
- 380,000 sq. ft. of Hotel Space
- 3.1 million sq. ft. of New Trophy Office Space





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