

GATEWAY MASTER PLAN

FAQ



GENERAL QUESTIONS

What does the Gateway Master Plan do?

The Gateway Master Plan offers a redevelopment vision for the future of Gateway—an area in Columbia, MD that encompasses approximately 1,100 acres of commercial and industrial properties.

The Master Plan introduces Gateway as a forward-thinking Innovation District – an innovative ecosystem designed to fuel sustainable job growth, foster long-term economic growth, and attract the brightest minds in research, entrepreneurship, and technology.

The Gateway of tomorrow is guided by a phased, multi-decade, mixed-use redevelopment strategy, with a focus on increasing density, enhancing connectivity, and creating spaces that inspire collaboration.

What is an Innovation District?

Innovation districts are geographical areas that enhance partnerships between industry, academia, and government while providing spaces for residents, employees, and visitors to live, work, play, and collaborate. Currently, there are over 100 innovation districts in cities across the world. [View this short video, produced by the Brookings Institution](#), for more information about innovation districts.

Why Gateway?

Spanning approximately 1,100 acres, Gateway's central location and existing infrastructure present a unique opportunity for future growth. Gateway is generally bound by Interstate 95, Maryland Route 175, Snowden River Parkway, and a CSX rail corridor. Conveniently located within 15 miles of BWI, Fort Meade, and the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, its strategic location, size, and current configuration contribute to the site's significant potential.

Gateway is fortunate to have many innovative, tech-driven enterprises within it, including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, defense/government contracting, scientific research and development, which will help position the Gateway Innovation District as a leader in the region.

Why now?

The Gateway Master Plan effort builds on the vision laid out in the County's recently adopted [General Plan](#), which envisions Gateway as a major hub for employment, entertainment, and innovation in Howard County – while emphasizing the importance of housing opportunities, new open spaces, transportation access and mobility, sustainable design, and public infrastructure.

Where is the process currently?

The Gateway Master Plan process launched in early 2024 with an Open House event. In September 2024, DPZ and its consultant team presented several master plan options for the redevelopment of Gateway – general concepts depicting different design and land use possibilities for the next 10-30 years.

After receiving public feedback on the master plan options, the team unveiled a preferred plan for Gateway – an illustrative concept that conveys the vision for Gateway's transformation as an Innovation District – at public meetings on January 21 and January 22, 2025.

The team then prepared a public draft document that expanded upon the preferred plan. This public draft was available for public review and comment from June 18 to July 8. Once the public comment window closed, the plan was refined for the Council adoption process, which involves Planning Board review and recommendations. The Council adoption process is underway as of fall 2025.

How can community members get involved?

A great plan starts with you! Throughout the engagement process, our team has sought feedback from Gateway businesses, property owners, and nearby residents, and explored how to best highlight and reflect community interests through the master plan.

Community engagement is an integral part of the planning process, and we strongly encourage you to [sign up to receive alerts](#) about engagement opportunities and plan progress.

When will the plan be implemented? What does it mean for community members now?

The Plan has a 30-year timeframe for implementation, which will be broken out into phases, including what should be prioritized in the first five years. Community members should get involved now to help shape the future and stay informed of Gateway's progress.

MASTER PLAN CONTENT QUESTIONS

The following questions relate to the [Legislative Draft](#).

What are some key features in the master plan?

The master plan envisions Gateway evolving into a complete, sustainable community that supports business growth, creates housing and employment opportunities, and allows a mix of uses that contribute to a thriving innovation ecosystem. A few of the key features of the plan include:

Innovation Hub

An Innovation Hub is a dynamic space dedicated to cultivating partnerships and networks among researchers, businesses, entrepreneurs and creators. These vibrant hubs combine cutting-edge research labs, coworking spaces and may even have recreational amenities to nurture an environment for innovation and growth. In Gateway, the Innovation Hub has the exciting potential to amplify the work of the Maryland Innovation Center (MIC) and help expand its network and partnerships around the nation and internationally.

The Innovation Hub may include accelerator spaces for companies, a maker space, coworking spaces, café, recreational amenities, and flexible meeting spaces to host lectures and conferences. The intent is to bring people and resources together.

Transformative Placemaking

The plan integrates an open space network with distinctive spaces, including a woonerf (inspired by the Dutch term for a “living street”), urban plazas at nodes, pathways, and more. Urban plazas will be a focal point for retail uses, serving as a scaled-down version of a town square at nodes, which are flexible areas featuring higher development intensity and a wide mix of uses. The existing trail along Columbia Gateway Drive will be retrofitted into a linear park with a wider bike/walk trail, native plantings, and other recreational amenities. Neighborhood and pocket parks will offer the community convenient access to shared open spaces.

Transportation & Mobility

The proposed transportation network welcomes people traveling via all modes, seamlessly connecting to existing paths and trails beyond Gateway, which will provide employees and residents with new ways to travel. This includes utilizing the CSX rail line – a 3.1-mile abandoned railroad spur as a unique connection to and from the Innovation District, designing new and reconfigured streets following the County’s Complete Streets policy, and creating a new welcoming entrance to the site from MD-175.

Climate-Resilient Design

Gateway also presents the opportunity to demonstrate climate-resilient design, in line with Howard County's Climate Action and Resiliency Plan. The plan recommends incentives for projects that incorporate sustainable design practices and also exceed the County's regulatory requirements. Examples of sustainable practices include high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, grid-interactive buildings, and solar photovoltaic systems. Recognizing the rapid evolution of technology, the plan ensures that Gateway remains adaptable and incorporates the latest in sustainability advances.

How does the plan address schools?

While further evaluation and coordination with the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) will be needed to more fully plan for public schools, the master plan outlines some preliminary recommendations for the County and HCPSS to consider. These recommendations address school capacity and potential site acquisition techniques, including alternative school designs and opportunities for co-location of school facilities with other public amenities.

What does the plan say about affordable and multigenerational housing?

The master plan builds on the General Plan's policies for diverse, accessible, and affordable housing options. It recommends Gateway pursue requirements and incentives, through a combination of housing programs and future zoning regulations, to achieve affordable and multigenerational housing options that are available for rental and/or homeownership opportunities.

Does the plan change zoning?

The master plan does not change zoning, though it offers guidance for subsequent zoning changes. The County does not have an existing zoning district that fits the vision for Gateway, so zoning changes will be needed. The master plan suggests that alternative zoning tools be explored to understand their suitability for Gateway, including performance-based zoning, incentive-based zoning, overlay districts, and form-based code elements (or design guidelines). The alternative zoning evaluation should determine how various approaches can incentivize the plan's envisioned built form and associated infrastructure and amenities.

What will drive redevelopment?

Once the master plan is complete, it does not mean that redevelopment is inevitable. Many factors influence and drive growth. Local government is one aspect that drives growth, primarily through our zoning and land development regulations, and through various types of incentives. However, other factors need to align for redevelopment to occur. Property owners and developers must choose to invest in redevelopment. There needs to be market demand for new space. The lending community must also support the investment.

What is the market demand for Gateway? Is market demand what will be built?

The consultant team determined that there is strong market demand that Gateway could capture. Specifically, they concluded that over 30 years, there is market demand for 4,500-6,600 multi-family units, 1,200-1,800 missing middle units (which could include stacked townhomes or other denser missing middle housing types), and a net addition of 1 million to 1.8 million square feet of employment-oriented uses (equating to approximately 4,700 to 8,100 new jobs).

However, market demand is not necessarily what will be built. It is important to keep in mind that market demand represents a snapshot in time, telling us what the market is now. Other factors, like zoning, property owner willingness, and the lending community, will all impact what can be realized on the ground.

What makes innovation districts successful?

Successful innovation districts are those that fuel innovation, economic growth, and create the environment and opportunity for industry, government, non-profits, and academia to collide and thrive. The master plan describes six characteristics shared by successful innovation districts:

1. Multi-level government and university/institutional support – stable support and buy-in from local and regional governments and institutions
2. A champion – influential representative(s) that raise awareness and build buy-in
3. Defined market demand – an articulated need for space, facilities, and collaboration
4. Unique value proposition – standout features, such as regional strengths, strong key industries, and strategic location
5. Strategic sector focus – the priority industries that an innovation district supports
6. Management dedication to supporting tenant growth – leaders and approaches that are committed to attracting and retaining the right tenant mix over the long-term

Gateway already possesses many of these characteristics. The first phase of implementation will focus on developing and enhancing the programming that supports them and drives business growth.

Where can examples of current Innovation Districts be viewed?

The Department of Planning and Zoning profiled several communities that have either established innovation districts and/or have developed master plans for one. While no community is a perfect match to the master plan's vision for Gateway, each offers valuable lessons. These case studies underscore what the Brookings Institution has found: innovation districts are most successful when they offer economic, physical, and networking assets.

In Silicon Valley, Warm Springs and Moffett Park are aspiring districts. Warm Springs showcases innovative zoning and developer partnerships, while Moffett Park leads in eco-district planning. Unlike most innovation districts, neither has a major anchor institution; instead, both rely on employers engaged in cutting-edge work, supported by strong planning efforts.

In contrast Brampton, Canada, and Innovation Quarter in Winston-Salem, North Carolina each feature significant anchors. Brampton, with multiple higher education institutions, is a model of multi-level innovation programming, especially in cybersecurity. Winston-Salem, anchored by Wake Forest University, stands out for its partnerships, communications, and placemaking.

What will be the key implementation steps in the near term?

After the plan is adopted, several important implementation steps will need to be prioritized. These include building up the innovation district programming, establishing the new zoning structure, planning for and financing infrastructure improvements, evaluating transportation and site access improvements along MD-175, seeking opportunities to acquire sites suitable for County public infrastructure needs (like schools, libraries, innovation hub, fire/police, etc.), and establishing all the entities, anchor institutions, and organizations needed to catalyze and facilitate redevelopment.

