

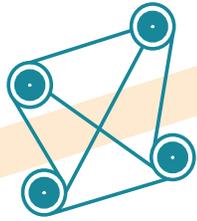
# Place + Opportunity

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING GREAT COMMUNITIES  
AND A STRONGER REGION



Metropolitan Washington  
Council of Governments





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STRATEGIES FOR CREATING GREAT COMMUNITIES AND A STRONGER REGION

Approved by the COG Board January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014



**Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments**

Project Partners: RCLCO | Reconnecting America | Urban Imprint | Mobility Lab



## About this Report

*Place + Opportunity: Strategies for Creating Great Communities and a Stronger Region* is an initiative by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) to strengthen Activity Centers, the places that will accommodate much of the region's growth in coming decades. This project identifies goals, strategies, and tools to assist local governments and other regional stakeholders in making investments in Activity Centers that enhance quality of life and strengthen the local and regional economy.

## About the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is an independent, nonprofit association that brings area leaders together to address major regional issues in the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia. COG's membership is comprised of 300 elected officials from 22 local governments, the Maryland and Virginia state legislatures, and U.S. Congress.

*Region Forward* is COG's vision. It's a commitment by COG and its member governments, who together seek to create a more accessible, sustainable, prosperous, and livable National Capital Region. COG's mission is to advance *Region Forward* by being a discussion forum, expert resource, and catalyst for action.

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# Executive Summary



*Place + Opportunity: Strategies for Creating Great Communities and a Stronger Region* is an initiative to strengthen and enhance Activity Centers throughout metropolitan Washington. Activity Centers—the places that will accommodate much of the region’s growth in the coming decades—attract residents, businesses, and visitors to the area, and are critical to ensuring the region’s future competitiveness and success. Incorporating in-depth research on market, physical, and socioeconomic characteristics of the region’s Activity Centers, **this report offers goals, strategies, and tools to assist local governments and other stakeholders working to create thriving, high-opportunity places.**

Strong Activity Centers are the foundation of a strong region. While they take many different forms throughout the region, strong, dynamic Centers share some common characteristics: communities that offer a range of housing, transportation options, jobs, services, and amenities. Most importantly, they provide access to opportunity for residents, workers, and businesses.

The importance of these places to local communities and the region is increasingly clear. Activity Centers will more efficiently accommodate the significant growth projected for metropolitan Washington. Centers with a mix of uses, amenities, and good pedestrian infrastructure have been shown to attract more people and growth, perform better economically, and prove more resilient during recessions than less mixed-use and walkable neighborhoods.

The region’s Activity Centers are diverse, ranging from highly urban places to suburban town centers to traditional towns. Each community has its own aspirations, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to achieving success.

However, Centers with common characteristics can benefit from similar strategies and investments. **This report presents a regional framework to understand common challenges and opportunities among Activity Centers in our region. It provides analysis, implementation strategies, and resources to complement local planning and development efforts and help communities meet their aspirations for their Activity Centers.**

This report examines a cross section of the region’s 141 Activity Centers. The *Place + Opportunity* Project Team, led by COG in partnership with RCLCO, Reconnecting America, Urban Imprint, and Mobility Lab, conducted detailed analysis of each Center’s market, urban form, and socioeconomic characteristics to identify six common Activity Center ‘place types’ and four ‘opportunity types.’ The six place types and four opportunity types provide a starting point to help local communities make sound decisions for their Centers and navigate potential actions and investments.



## Activity Center Place Types



Urban Centers

**Examples:**  
Downtown DC,  
Bethesda,  
Tysons East



Dense Mixed-Use Centers

**Examples:**  
Shirlington,  
Columbia Heights,  
Silver Spring



Suburban Multi-Use Centers

**Examples:**  
City of Falls  
Church,  
Fairfax City,  
Greenbelt Metro



Close-In & Urbanizing Centers

**Examples:**  
Columbia Pike,  
Rhode Island Avenue,  
West Hyattsville  
Metro



Revitalizing Urban Centers

**Examples:**  
Prince George's Plaza,  
Landmark/Van Dorn,  
Minnesota Avenue



Satellite Cities

**Examples:**  
Downtown Frederick,  
City of Manassas,  
Bowie Town Center



## Activity Center Opportunity Types



Transforming

**Examples:**  
H Street,  
Poplar Point,  
Langley Park



Transitioning

**Examples:**  
Wheaton,  
Braddock Road,  
U/14<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor



Connected Core

**Examples:**  
Crystal City,  
West End,  
Bethesda



Stable

**Examples:**  
Beacon/Groveton,  
Georgetown,  
National Harbor



For each place and opportunity type, the project team developed a set of development goals, strategies, and tools to support implementation of key priorities. Guided by the place and opportunity types, the following fifteen key strategies present a framework for enhancing economic development, urban form, and access to opportunity in Activity Centers:

## Place Strategies

- **Zoning Intervention**

Zoning tools play a critical role in accommodating and encouraging development, and in facilitating desired land use mix and densities. In locations with transit stations, having appropriate zoning is crucial to the success of the transit-oriented development.

- **Public Finance Options**

Public finance options include tools for financing or encouraging development and infrastructure investment, such as special tax districts that help finance improvements or reduce tax burdens for developers or property owners.

- **Development Incentives**

These include financial and other incentives to encourage development in particular locations or at higher intensities.

- **Public-Private Partnerships**

Public-private partnerships can help finance and implement infrastructure, redevelopment, or economic development projects that would not be possible without private sector investment. They can reduce costs and risks for local governments while allowing them to benefit from the capacity and experience of private sector partners.

- **Development Stewardship Entities**

These are organizations used to fund and manage improvements and promote the economic competitiveness of a particular district, generally funded by property owners located within the district. Organizations may be involved in planning and urban design, physical infrastructure improvements, business recruitment, maintenance and beautification, and branding.

- **Market Studies**

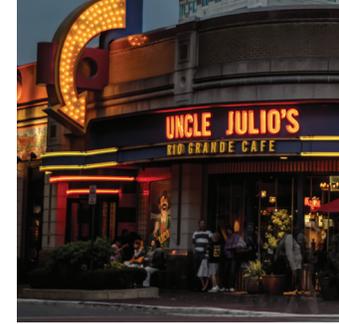
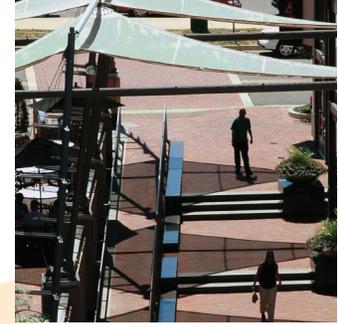
Market studies can provide analysis of development feasibility, evaluation of development and revitalization opportunities, and guidance for economic development plans and policies.

- **Branding/ Marketing**

Branding and marketing can help identify and communicate the character and identity of a community, usually to enhance economic development and competitiveness.

- **Acquisition of Key Parcels**

Acquiring land in key locations may be a necessary step in the redevelopment process.



## Opportunity Strategies

### • **Planning & Community Building**

Community or issue-specific plans (such as housing or transit-oriented development plans) can identify and build support for priorities, immediate actions, strategies, and responsibilities for implementation. Outreach and engagement efforts are an essential component of these planning processes, and are also particularly important in communities facing significant neighborhood change.

### • **Affordable Housing Preservation**

Potential loss of affordable housing stock is a major challenge in the region, particularly in communities experiencing gentrification. Preservation strategies and tools are often directed at subsidized housing stock, but may also apply to market-rate affordable housing stock and to homeowners and renters living in such properties.

### • **Affordable Housing Development**

Local jurisdictions may use a number of programs, zoning tools, development incentives, and partnerships to encourage the creation of new affordable housing stock.

### • **Diversification of Housing Stock**

Some Activity Centers need a greater variety of housing types to provide more options for current and future residents and workers, and increase affordability and income diversity. This may include adding multi-family rental, condominiums, townhouses, duplexes, or even single-family homes.

### • **Business Retention & Promotion**

Preserving and supporting businesses in communities facing significant growth pressures or other types of changing conditions is important to neighborhood stabilization. Small and locally-owned businesses may be particularly vulnerable as neighborhood rents increase. Strategies for business retention and promotion include both bricks-and-mortar investments and policies that provide assistance or opportunities to local businesses.

### • **Commercial & Job Base Diversification**

Many Activity Centers could benefit from and support a greater range of community services, such as retail stores, grocery stores, childcare, and service-oriented businesses. These businesses and services provide additional jobs within Activity Centers and generate additional revenue because residents can shop in their own communities. Workforce development efforts to train workers and connect them with key industries and occupations are also important to local and regional economic development.

### • **Transportation Access & Infrastructure Improvements**

Programs and investments to improve access and infrastructure can help communities with transit make the most of their infrastructure, and help communities without transit expand transportation options. In all communities, these types of tools can enhance safety and vitality, and can facilitate more walking, bicycling, and transit ridership.

# Strategies for Combined Place Types & Opportunity Types

Each Activity Center has a place type and an opportunity type. Considering both types together highlights the interplay between an individual Center's place and opportunity characteristics, and provides a more comprehensive understanding of common features and themes among Activity Centers region-wide. The Activity Centers were studied side-by-side to identify the most common place type and opportunity type combinations and key patterns. Six major place and opportunity type pairings were identified, and broad development strategies were then developed to accompany them.

- **Connected Core + Urban Centers**

*Overall Strategy: Expand Access and Housing Choice*

These Centers have the strongest real estate markets, as well as strong physical infrastructure and amenities. While meeting the demand for more affordable housing may be challenging given market conditions, there may be opportunities to leverage their strong real estate markets to create broader affordability through subsidized and workforce housing.

- **Connected Core or Stable + Dense Mixed-Use Centers**

*Overall Strategy: Infill and Enhance*

These Centers have strong urban forms and markets, and are well-connected internally and externally. They may be ideal locations for targeted place-making investments such as infill development that complements the current mix of land uses, and additional parks and public spaces. Opportunity-focused strategies may include diversifying housing stock to serve a range of households.

- **Stable + Suburban Multi-Use Centers**

*Overall Strategy: Connect and Catalyze*

These Centers have a mix of uses, but may need public intervention to catalyze more intensive mixed-use and walkable development. In Centers with transit stations, pedestrian features and other walkability improvements that increase station and corridor accessibility can help make the most of existing infrastructure and enhance connectivity to other job centers; these improvements could also serve to catalyze more mixed-use development.

- **Stable + Close-in and Urbanizing Centers**

*Overall Strategy: Build and Urbanize*

Centers in this category tend to have a variety of uses, but may have urban form and infrastructure challenges. These Centers may benefit most from targeted public investment and capital improvements to support existing uses, attract complementary uses, and strengthen accessibility.

- **Transforming or Transitioning + Revitalizing Urban Centers**

*Overall Strategy: Protect and Grow*

These Centers typically need incentives to catalyze development, and have high proportions of low-income residents. Many provide strong transit access to jobs because of the presence of Metro stations, suggesting opportunities for transit-oriented development. While redevelopment is not imminent, establishing proactive strategies to preserve affordability and capture community benefits from growth would benefit these Centers. This may include community-based partnerships for economic development, preservation of existing market-rate and subsidized affordable housing, and public/private partnerships to catalyze development.

- **Stable + Satellite City**

*Overall Strategy: Partner and Stimulate Demand*

These Centers would generally benefit from creating a framework for redevelopment, identifying catalytic sites, and assessing community needs and assets. Some of these Centers, particularly historic towns, already exhibit strong physical form and may benefit from partnership-type collaborations that brand or market the place to the broader region.

Building on *Region Forward*, the regional vision, and *Economy Forward*, a call to action on economic development needs, this report represents the next step in COG's work on Activity Centers. *Place + Opportunity: Strategies for Creating Great Communities and a Stronger Region* is a resource guide to support local governments and other stakeholders in implementing their visions and aspirations for their Activity Centers.



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