Prince George's County: Learning From The Past, Planning For The Future

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A Brief Overview

The rapid growth and expansion of the federal government during the early 20th century brought many employment opportunities to the Washington Metropolitan Area. By mid-century, the "big three" counties benefiting from this growth the most—Prince George's County, Montgomery County, and Fairfax County—experienced even more economic development with the construction and completion of the Capital Beltway in 1964.

Between 1930 and 1970, Prince George's County grew the fastest and became the most populated suburban county in the metropolitan area. By 1965, it housed a majority of the workers employed in the region and provided plenty employment opportunities.[1] However, during this period political decisions were being made and social change was occurring within the county that would shape its future role in the regional economy.

During the 1980's, Prince George's County fell to third of the "big three" counties. It now has a smaller population and less commercial activity than Montgomery and Fairfax Counties. Many credit this to the county's higher crime rates and its lower performing public school system, which hinder private investment. Others argue that its standing as a bedroom community in the regional economy strains its tax base: its large residential population continually creates the need for improved and extra services.

The first half of this paper will trace milestones in Prince George's County history that have been significant in shaping the differences between it and its neighboring jurisdictions in the Washington Metropolitan Area. These notable events have led to the county's current economic position and put it at a disadvantage in competing for the region's higher-class office space and high-end retail.

The second half of this paper will identify barriers preventing the county from capitalizing on its strategic location in the region and its educated residential population. Then, strategies that could address these barriers will be explored to serve as examples for the type of action that can be taken.

The sources used for obtaining information on the past development of Prince George's County were gathered from official documents and plans, many historical articles from *The Washington Post*, and commentaries from historical libraries in the county. Interviews with numerous planners of the Prince George's County Planning Department were a valuable resource of information as well. Most economic data shown for the county and other jurisdictions were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, local planning agencies, and other large national databases.

Prince George's County 1955-1970: A Period of Uncontrolled Growth

Early History

When established on April 23, 1696, Prince George's County consisted of its current boundaries in addition to what is present-day Montgomery, Frederick, Washington, Allegany, and Garrett counties; the District of Columbia; and part of Carroll County.[2] During this time, the economy of the county grew around the crop of tobacco and created a very wealthy society of planters. By 1776, the county's boundaries were redrawn to cover a less extensive area. The same boundaries remain today except for where Tacoma Park ceded to Montgomery County in 1997.

By the mid 19th century, slaves were a majority of the population. In 1860, blacks made up most of the labor in the county and comprised of almost 60% of the total population.[3] This labor force sustained the tobacco wealth of the area. However, the end of the Civil War brought significant changes to the economy of the county. A number of large plantations broke up into small farms and were operated by newly freed blacks. This helped establish a local economy based on diverse agricultural goods.

Federal Affordable Housing Programs

By 1940, the growing federal government in the District of Columbia had eclipsed the local economy that emerged after the Civil War. The population in the county had grown by roughly 70% since 1890 to about 89,000 residents.[4] The county's new residential population was coming from heavily populated areas in the District of Columbia. These new—mostly white—residents began to steadily diffuse into single family suburban communities that were located along major railway lines with access to sewer connections. In Prince George's County, most of this new development occurred along the B&O Railroad and present day U.S. Route 1.

People moving from the District of Columbia were not Prince George's County's only new source of residents. In this time of WWII many changes were made in the federal housing policy to accommodate returning soldiers and veterans. One such legislation was the G.I. Bill. The bill provided low interest home loans for servicemen. It also enabled millions of American military families to move out of urban apartments and into suburban homes. Prior to WWII, the suburbs were the homes of the wealthy upper-class.

By the late 1950's, national housing policy placed more emphasis on the importance of affordable housing for all middle income families. A housing measure passed in 1954 authorized preliminary urban planning grants and called for thousand of new public housing units. Following this, in 1959 Congress passed a housing bill authorizing thousands of more new public housing units and millions of dollars for urban renewal programs. One of the programs authorized by the National Housing Act of 1959 was the Section 221(d)(3) BMIR program; it insured and subsidized low-interest rate loans to private developers in order to promote the construction of affordable housing. The program was discontinued in the mid-1960s after it had help create over 100,000 units.[5] By making homes more affordable, these policies helped create a greater demand for housing in the county.

Section 608 of the National Housing Act of 1934 spurred construction of rental housing. It provided flexible definitions of "project costs" and maximum allowable mortgages combined with a decline in construction costs. This permited builders to pocket the difference between inflated estimates and actual expenses. The housing measure provided incentive for profit-driven developers to build more suburban garden apartments in the county versus single family homes. It also encouraged land speculation and the rapid construction of affordable residential dwelling units in excess of demand.

A Population Boom

The total dollar value of land in Prince George's County has been historically lower than Montgomery County. This may be credited to the county's proximity to industrial and lower income residential areas of the District of Columbia. The northwestern part of the District of Columbia that boasted higher income residents and more commercial development was closer to Montgomery County. Prince George's County possessed more land bordering the southeast portion of the District of Columbia. Many who lived in this eastern part of the District of Columbia—especially east of the Anacostia River—were low-income workers and blacks.

Because land was cheaper in Prince George's County, it was more attractive to new and expanding government agencies looking for a home. Federal agencies were locating outside the District of Columbia due to the threat of an atomic bomb attack. Prince George's was not only an affordable choice, but it possessed more land available for development within a 20-mile radius of the District of Columbia than any other neighboring jurisdiction. Federal agencies that located to Prince George's County by the mid-60's included Andrews Air Force Base, the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, the Food and Drug Administration, Goddard Space Flight Center, and the U.S. Census Bureau. By the end of the sixties, Prince George's County had more federally-owned land than the District of Columbia

The presence of the federal government and affordable housing options made the county a magnet for young mid-skilled workers. The new workforce brought young families and many school-aged children of the Baby Boom. The disproportionate amount of these young families coming into the county contributed to it having one of the largest and fastest growing school systems in the nation by the late sixties. Between 1950 and 1970 the total population grew from 194,182 residents to 661,719 residents.[6] That's about a 70% increase in population in only 20 years.

Aside from housing programs and employment opportunities that helped stimulate suburban development in the county, issues of race helped promote sprawl away from the District of Columbia as well. During this time, the District of Columbia shared much of the same ideology on race as most southern states. In the early 1950's, the District of Columbia and much of its metropolitan area still practiced racial segregation. By the 1954 ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education—which ruled against the "separate but equal" doctrine for public education—17 states along with the District of Columbia required their public schools be segregated.[7]

Shortly after the District of Columbia began complying with the ruling, it triggered a wave of "white flight" from the city to outlying suburbs. Such a large demand for housing was generated that numerous multifamily units were built just to keep up. Although Prince George's County had the second largest black population in the region at the time, the housing market was affected very little because neighborhoods along with schools remained segregated.

Government Struggles To Responsibly Handle Growth

<u>Negligent Rezonings.</u> Up until 1970 the county operated under a county commission structure of government. Under this form of government there was no single person responsible for the administration of county functions. A board of five part-time commissioners oversaw administrative and legislatives tasks for the county. Still, responsibility for many governmental tasks were shared and divided amongst autonomous agencies. This allowed for a lack of accountability in county government.

Montgomery and Fairfax Counties also had a commission structure of government before the great influx of residents to the region. However, they both changed to a county executive structure of government—Montgomery in 1948 and Fairfax in 1952—20 years before Prince George's County did. This form of government provided both counties with a means to achieve administrative accountability during the region's most crucial period of growth.

The commission form of government caused the county a number of problems. It placed governmental functions in the hands of officeholders who awarded county jobs and gave special treatment to friends. In many ways the county was being run like the tobacco center it once was when it was first established; then, the county's most elite families influenced politics. What seemed evident was that the county wasn't adapting to the great population increases within its borders. Perhaps many of the county's high-ranking officials only saw the county seat of Upper Marlboro as the county's boundaries.

It was not uncommon for county

planners and elected officials to have close ties to developers and zoning attorneys. The conflicting interests resulting from these relationships became more apparent in the 1960's with the rapid development of garden apartments and other multifamily units in the county. Notable scandals arose concerning county zoning irregularities. Land parcels that were zoned for rural or light residential use in the county master plans, were being quickly rezoned for higher density multi-family uses without amendments to master plans or citizen approval.

One developer that constantly made millions in multifamily projects involving rezoning was Ralph Rocks. He served as an officer for a savings and loan association with Prince George's County Commissioner Chairman, Jesse Baggett, with whom he was friends.[8] This was significant because Commissioners possessed a considerable amount of authority in overseeing development in the county: they served as the final authority on zoning matters. A 1970 issue of *The Washington Post* examined Rocks' dealings in the county:

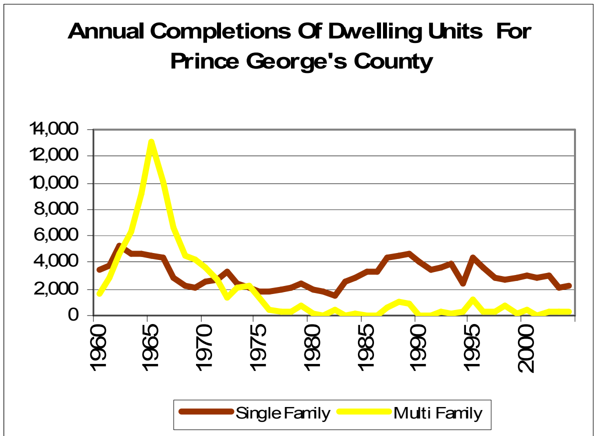
> *In 1963, developer Ralph Rocks…paid $415,000 for 138 acres of land on which the Potomac Heights Apartments now stands. Six months later Rocks…and his partners agreed to sell the land for $2,752,000[.] Zoning made the difference. When the Rocks partnership bought the land, everything around it was farms and single-family houses on large lots in accordance with a master plan prepared by [M-NCPPC]. [When the master plan was submitted at a public hearing, everyone there was in favor of it except Rock's lawyer]. The lawyer asked that the designation for the land be changed from rural to apartment use… when the master plan map was published in final for a few months later, there it was: authority for an island of high-rise and garden apartment zoning in the middle of rural and single-family house zoning.*[9]

Despite controversy surrounding this, Rocks continued building multifamily units in the county through the help of FHA loans and rezoning. Many of his projects were substandard; but, they attracted an influx of blacks seeking an affordable suburban environment. Much of the FHA money available to developers was due to the county's designation as a model city by the federal government's Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This was a designation fought against in Montgomery and Fairfax County, but openly received by County Commissioners in Prince George's County. Through rezoning, Rocks capitalized on building low-income HUD housing. He made profits large enough to offset paying 10% of the project cost, which was required by FHA.[10] Many of the projects developed by Rocks eventually were condemned or renovated due to poor management and upkeep.

Following this, it was alleged that Rocks bribed Baggett with thousand of dollars to influence zoning decisions in the county's planning department. The two were later charged and convicted for the zoning irregularities that surfaced in this case. Unfortunately, this represents the typical bargaining between politicians and developers during this time in the county.

From 1960 to 1969, 4,000 acres of county farmland were rezoned for apartments and 70,000 apartment units were created.[11] In the years between 1960 and 1965 alone it is reported that 38,763 multifamily units were constructed in the county; Montgomery and Fairfax Counties had only 14,607 and 12,985 multifamily units constructed within the same period, respectively.[12] In addition, Montgomery and Fairfax boasted more high-rise luxury apartments. In the period between 1953 and 1968 the assessed value of apartments in Montgomery rose by approximately 51% while in Prince George's they rose by 16%.

The construction of so many multifamily units would eventually lead to the county allowing only 9% of its new residential development to be multifamily during the early 80's. However, the new focus on single-



Source: Prince George's County Planning Department, Information Center.

family homes would overshadow the importance of strengthening commerce in the county. While 72% of new development would be devoted to single-family homes, only 20% was anticipated for commercial construction.[13]

Lack of Foresight. Another problem during the sixties indicating the lack of accountability in the county government related to budget spending. One notable incident in Prince George's illustrating this involved a new county administration building. In 1968 County Commissioners spent over $2 million in tax payer money for a well known architecture firm to draw up plans for the building.[14] This firm was linked to making campaign contributions to one of the County Commissioners in office at the time. The plans provided by the firm included details such as power driven sidewalks, a television studio, saunas, and a 20-foot administration building. Much of these things were beyond the county's means to finance. Citizens were outraged at the large amount of money spent on plans that would not even be used.

Additional controversy arose on whether to build the administration building in Largo—the county's new emerging center both geographically and economically—or in the county's rural legislative seat of Upper Marlboro. Citizens wanted the new building to be in an accessible location along the Capital Beltway closer to other county agencies and new commercial development. In addition, Upper Marlboro did not have a commercial district large enough to support the arrival of hundreds of new employees and visitors to the area. It was so far away from recent development in the county that many employees felt it was a burden to have to commute over 30 minutes. Despite this, the building was built in Upper Marlboro. This probably was due to the powerful influence of older wealthier families in Upper Marlboro. It was an issue that spanned about 10 years in the county and resulted in what still appears to be an illogical location for the county's administration building.

Unfair Tax Burden. The large amount of garden apartments built in the county throughout the sixties left a heavy property tax burden on homeowners. Apartment dwellers, mostly renters, brought with them thousands of children to place in the school system; however, they were not contributing their incomes to the property tax which went towards the county budget. By the end of the sixties, funding for the public school system made up 70% of the county's total budget.

Homeowners in Prince George's County were dissatisfied with the situation for two reasons. For one, they were paying the highest property taxes in the region; yet, their children's school system was constantly undergoing budget cuts. Secondly, they felt as if they were paying for county renters' children to attend school. In 1968, property taxes were increased by $0.65 to the rate of $3.58 per $100 of the assessed value. In comparison, property taxes for Montgomery County at the time were only $2.91 per $100 of the assessed value.[15]

The county government structure was too inflexible to deal with rising taxes. Under the commissioner form of government, the governing Board of Commissioners did not have complete authority over taxing matters. Some issues in regards to taxation required approval from the county's delegates in the state legislature. While other counties could quickly look for new sources of revenues though adopting new local taxes, Prince George's could not without consent from its state delegates.[16] As a result, property taxes continued to soar in the county, while Montgomery and Fairfax Counties were able to lessen their property tax burden by collecting new taxes on things such as income, utilities, and commercial sales.

In addition to the high property taxes homeowners were paying, many were contributing to high municipal taxes. Prince George's has 27 municipalities. That's about twice the amount of Montgomery County and nine times the amount of Fairfax County. By 1961, 35% of Prince George's residents were living in incorporated areas. However, in Montgomery and Fairfax, 16% and 10% of residents were living in incorporated areas respectively.[17] Unlike other counties in the region, Prince George's did not rebate tax money to residents in municipalities. As a result some residents were being taxed twice for the same services. The county didn't start rebating money to municipalities until 1983.

Sewer Control. During this 20 year period of tremendous growth in the county, it is apparent that development was not properly overseen or controlled by county officials. One reason for this that has not been mentioned was the county's inability to dictate the placement of sewer lines: these pipes ultimately determine where new development can go. This responsibility was in the hands of the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC), a bi-county agency in power since 1918.

WSSC was run by commissioners representing both Prince George's and Montgomery Counties. Many of them were wealthy lawyers and prominent land owners. They even had closer ties to developers in the region than county elected officials. More importantly, WSSC commissioners—who had so much influence in the development of suburban Maryland and had many conflicts of interest in their decision making—were not elected officials.[18] They were appointed by the two counties' governing boards. As a result, they were not accountable to the public for their decisions.

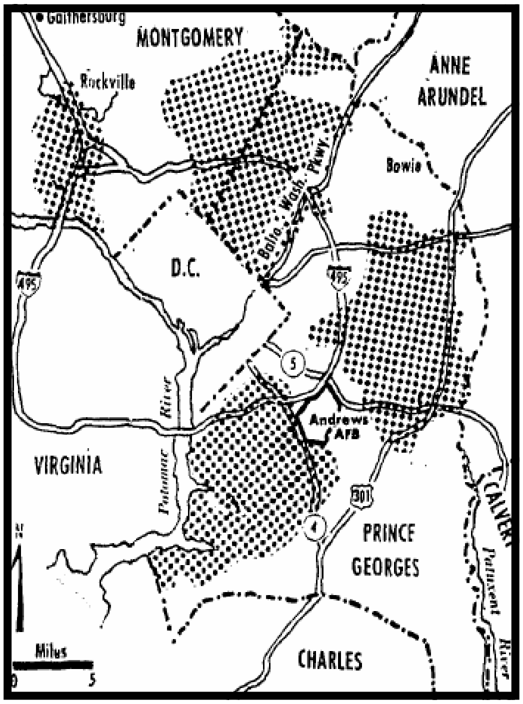
Prince George's County 1970-1980: Responding to Uncontrolled Growth

Sewer Moratorium

A sewer moratorium in Prince George's County imposed by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) followed the massive amount of apartments built in the county during the 50's and 60's. This ban on sewers in 1970 represented the failure of planning in county over the last 10 years. Past development in the county was lightly regulated and often developers would build structures that lacked adequate sewage facilities. Often sites were developed with sewer lines, but sometimes the lines weren't sufficiently connected to sewer and water treatment plants. This was the case in the Potomac Heights development mentioned earlier:

> *…months after tenants had moved into Potomac Heights, their sewage went through a "temporary sewage treatment plant." This was an open field a few hundred feet from the project, where raw sewage was sprayed with a mixture of chemicals into the air. It then settled to the ground and ran off into Henson Creek and down the Potomac River. The sewage entering the river was virtually raw, and residents of the area can still remember the foul odor created by the spraying of the sewage into the air.* [19]

Hazardous pollution wasn't the only problem caused by such lightly regulated growth. The capacity of available treatment facilities was being maxed out. As a result



Source: The Washington Post. Maryland Suburb Construction Ban Imposed, May 21, 1970, A25. Shaded area's show sections affected by the sewer ban.

WSSC placed a sewer moratorium on sewer authorizations in most of Prince George's County. Montgomery County was also affected by the orders of the bi-county agency. Still, Prince George's was hit harder by the order. The ban affected areas where 70% of it's population resided while it only affected areas where 43% of the population lived in Montgomery County.[20] It wasn't until 1978 that the sewer ban was lifted.

Home Rule Charter Passes

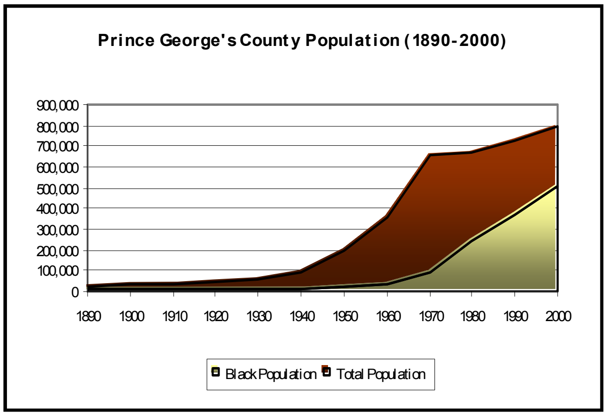
By 1970, county government spending and increasingly higher taxes resulted in residents voting for approval of a home rule charter. The charter called for an elected county executive that would be held accountable for all administrative responsibilities. In addition the five part-time county commissioners would be replaced by an 11-member at-large county council that would be solely responsible for legislative policy.

Racial Tensions Grow

By the early 1970's, major social changes were taking place in the county. More black residents than ever began moving into the county in the 1970s. They moved mostly inside the Capital Beltway to take advantage of the large number of newly constructed affordable garden apartments and condominiums. Almost simultaneously, a second white flight began taking place in the county. Many whites in the county—whom originally settled in the central corridor during the first white flight—moved away from the county's central corridor and into the outlying, predominately white areas of the county.

At the same time, the Supreme Court began pressuring school districts across the country that had not been effectively promoting integration within their public schools to do so immediately. In addition, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, was given the power to withhold federal funding from school districts operating on a segregated basis. Because most communities were racially segregated in the county anyway, simply ordering a lift on segregation policies in schools would not be enough to ensure integration. Finally in 1973, almost 20 years after the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, Prince George's County enacted court-ordered busing of students. In order to guarantee an integrated school system, many students were prevented from attending schools closer to their neighborhood.

The decision to bus students had long-lasting effects on the county. Many white and black parents alike did not like their children being bussed to schools far outside their community. Others believed that busing would breakup friendships and even make it harder for students to be involved in extracurricular activities. Some parents of white students were also afraid that their children would receive an inferior education in an integrated school system. Shortly after court-ordered busing, many white families left the county. In 1973, the year when busing was ordered, white enrollment in the county's schools dropped; it would continue to drop in the years to come. Between 1970 and 1980, the total population of the county changed very little compared to previous years. However, between these years the population of whites in the county decreased by 37% while the



Source: Prince George's County Planning Department, Information Center.

population of blacks increased by 37%.[21]

Consequence of Poorly Planned Development: Crippled Growth

TRIM

By the end of the 1970's, strong citizen movements were forming in the county to express disapproval and affect change in the county government. In 1978, an amendment to the county charter—a proposal known as TRIM, or the Tax Reform Initiative By Marylanders—limited the collections of real property taxes. It allowed the tax rate to no longer be affected by the county's approved budget; hence, taxes would only change correspondingly with the assessed value of property.[22]

The adoption of the measure resulted largely from two things. One was the fear that the county government was becoming too big and that the large county budget was representative of wasteful spending habits by officials. The largest area of spending under debate was education. The school system at that point accounted for about 60% of the county's expenditures.[23] However, recent drops in school enrollments and the amounts spent on busing were reason enough for some residents to urge education cutbacks in exchange for tax relief.

The second factor related to past development trends in the county. The small commercial base in the county left residential property taxes to account for a larger amount of county revenues. As a result, Prince George's residents still had the highest tax rates in the region. This was only exacerbated by the fact that 38% of the county's population was apartment dwellers—who typically require more services than single-family homeowners—and the buildings they lived in only supplied approximately 9% of property tax revenues. In addition, another 20% of the county's real estate was occupied by tax-exempt groups, such as the federal government. [24]

The expectation for TRIM was that the tax burden could be distributed more evenly by relying more on income vs. property taxes. However, the flaw in this idea was that the state and not the county controlled the collection of income taxes. In years to come, the county would find itself relying heavily on the state to bail them out of tight budget crunches.

TRIM had serious implications for the county. It capped property tax collections at the level collected in 1979—$143.9 million dollars—with no leeway to adjust for inflation or population growth (this cap would last until 1984, when the TRIM measure was modified to set a cap on the tax rate only).[25] New home construction continued and added to the amount of services needed. However, because of the cap on revenues, new residents did not mean more money for the county. As a result, a number of county budget cuts were necessary for Prince

PRINCE GEORGE COUNTY JOBS: THE IMPACT OF TRIM							
Fiscal Years	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	% Change 1979-1984
All County	$18,453	$18,043	$17,290	$16,737	$15,751	$15,391	-20%
General Government	$602	$601	$576	$483	$458	$422	-43%
Criminal Justice	$482	$492	$511	$533	$585	$585	18%
Public Works	$675	$649	$624	$618	$620	$588	-15%
Education:							
Instruction	$7,793	$7,466	$7,135	$6,931	$6,170	$6,201	-26%
Non-Instruction	$5,401	$5,418	$5,163	$4,838	$4,493	$4,210	-28%
Library	$368	$348	$358	$335	$335	$330	-12%
Human Services	$694	$710	$596	$586	$579	$577	-20%
Police:							
Sworn Officers	$894	$864	$840	$894	$944	$908	2%
Civilians	$329	$288	$292	$324	$337	$324	-2%
Fire:							
Sworn Officers	$424	$424	$424	$422	$443	$443	4%

Source: The Washington Post. The Trim Years, Aug. 15 1983, A22.

George's County to operate under a limited pool of funds.

The school system was hurt hardest in the mist of all the budget cuts that followed. Ten million dollars in budget cuts were made to the school board in 1980. This resulted in school closings, reductions in extra curricular activities, and the canceling of summer school programs. By 1982, over 900 school employees were laid off to compensate for budget deficiencies.[26] County government was hurt as well. Many important governmental positions were cut and salaries were drastically reduced. Well-qualified employees were being replaced by non-experienced volunteers and gaps emerged in some of the most important operating functions of the county.

TRIM also had an effect on private investment and commercial development in the county. After TRIM was passed the bond rating of the county fell from AA to AA-.[27] This made the county's bonds more risky and less attractive to investors. The reduction of public services and questions over the adequacy of the public school system made it hard for Prince George's County to compete with neighboring jurisdictions for drawing new businesses and economic development.

It is notable that during the election year TRIM was adopted in Prince George's County, the same measure was up for decision in Montgomery County. In Montgomery County, the measure failed to pass. There is one underlying reason for this: government trust. Prince George's County politics—with its recent history of government corruption, planning failure (illustrated by the sewer moratorium), and politically unpopular handling of school desegregation—was becoming more and more disfavorable to county citizens. Knowing this, once the commissioner form of government changed to a council member form of government in 1970, council members became more sensitive to citizens wants from fear of not being reelected. Although many councilmen at this time were doubtful TRIM would be successful, it was supported publicly by most. Winfield M. Kelly, county executive at the time of TRIM's passage, reflected most county politicians' attitudes over the issue at that time:

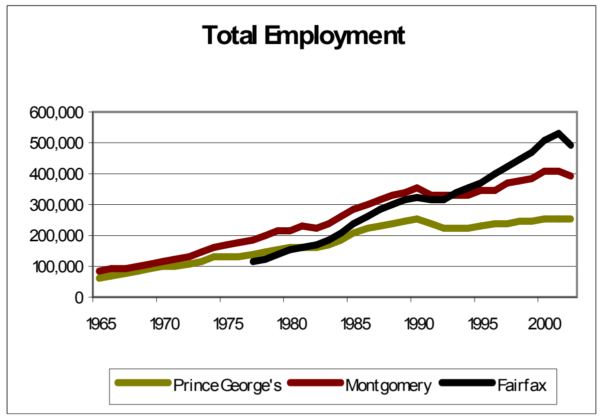
> *"Privately I said "It's wrong. It's going to ultimately destroy the county." But my aides said it's going to be political suicide [not to back it]… My compromise with myself was that I could live with it for two years and then modify it."*[28]

In Montgomery County the opposite was true. County officials recognized the seriousness of the proposed legislation and spoke out adamantly against it. In addition, groups, such as the Fair Share Coalition spent a lot of time analyzing the impact TRIM would have and educated citizens on its negative consequences.

Big Development Cautioned

As mentioned earlier, residents' recent memories of scandals in the county government made them hesitant to trust local officials and motivated them to be more politically active. As a result, county councilmen became more sensitive to the concerns of citizens for fear of not being reelected. In one way this was good: the county government was being run in a way that was more accountable to voters. On the other hand, fear of citizen disapproval could make council members exchange sound decision making for quick voter support. The relationship between councilmen and citizens became more delicate in 1982. A referendum was passed by voters to limit the number of councilmen from 11 to 9 and to replace at-large members with members from separate election districts.

This decision came at another critical period of Prince George's County's growth. The ban on sewers in the county had recently been lifted and its effects on development in the county were very significant. Before the ban, Prince George's County was the most populated and fastest growing county in the Washington Metropolitan Area. By 1980, its population growth had barely increased and its growth rate had been surpassed by Montgomery and Fairfax Counties. While much of Prince George's and some of Montgomery County had ceased development through the 70's, Fairfax County had been able to capitalize on the lack of its neighbors' development activity. By 1980, Fairfax County had already established a number of single-family communities geared toward white-collar workers and it had fostered an educated workforce attractive to big businesses. Prince George's, stifled by the ban and TRIM, now had to play catch up in the regional economy before it fell too far behind.



U.S. Census Bureau. County Business Patterns (note: data for Fairfax County was not collected before 1976).

A number of big development opportunities presented themselves to Prince George's County by 1983. One of them was Konterra, a 2,000 acre planned mini-city that would accommodate 20,000 residents and 40,000 employees in the Laurel area. Konterra was projected by its developer to create at least $500 million in tax revenue for the county; more than $700 million for the state; a $1 million annual construction payroll; and more than 40,000 jobs with $764 million in salaries by the year 2020.[29] The project was expected to finally bring the county the type of successful development seen across the region in places such as Reston, Columbia, Tyson's Corner, and

Crystal City. However, the rezonings needed for the development to get started was constantly prohibited by the County Council.

The development of Konterra called for 1,730 acres of rezoning. Most of the rezonings would be to seek special "M-X-T" zoning, allowing different types of structures and uses to locate anywhere on the properties. Expectedly, the development met strong disapproval from civic associations and other community activist. However, the County Council's conflict over how to vote for the rezoning held up development on the project until 1986. In the end only 533 of the 1,730 acres were approved to be rezoned; but that was only under the stipulation that major road improvements be made. A 1984 *Washington Post* article reflected the views of leaders in the county at that time on how development was effected by the new election structure:[30]

> *They as a council understand that we need to have economic development, and that we made some very serious mistakes in the late '50s and the '60 with garden apartments and runaway zoning. But I'm not sure that they know how to get a handle on it.. The council just doesn't have a countywide vision. [They] look at each one of the trees without standing back and trying to look at the forest... Had we let them run all at-large, there would be more of a countywide perspective as opposed to the little fiefdoms which we have set up.*
>
> *-William J. Ferguson , West Laurel Civic Association*

> *There's no question in my mind that the Konterra outcome would have been different under the at-large system. That was very much a parochial vote.*
>
> *-Floyd Wilson, County Council Chairman*

> *One of the things we need is a consistent policy [on development]. Mixed signals are being given.*
>
> *-Parris Glendening, County Executive*

> *If we don't seize the opportunity [for quality development] this time, we've lost it forever. It seems they're taking this district council thing so seriously that they're almost deferring to the individual councilman. There needs to be more countywide perspective.*
>
> *Raymond LaPlaca, Developer*

Unfortunately, by the time Konterra was approved the county's image had decreased even further. It was now dealing with an escalating crime rate, higher unemployment, and a deteriorating school system. Also, all the office space constructed in Fairfax and Montgomery Counties during the 80's reduced the demand for suburban office space. Today, Konterra remains largely undeveloped. The past visions of high-rise office buildings at the site have been replaced by much lower density flex space, which can be used for offices, warehouses, or research and development.

Another development opportunity passed over was Brookefield, a proposed 2,500 acre planned community that would be located in the more rural southern portion of the county close to present-day Brandywine. The development was planned to consist of 2,400 detached homes, 2,100 town homes, 1,000 apartment units, and 800,000 sq. ft. of commercial space.[31]

Not surprisingly, there was an outcry from residents that would be affected by the proposed development. Many of them believed that big development would mean the same type of unattractive sprawling development of the county's past. As a result, the County Council rejected the plan to rezone for Brookfield. The lawyer of the development was quoted as saying before the ruling on the project: "[If the current council turns Brookfield down] it will have a very chilling effect on other development efforts in the county's future".

Summary

The previous discussion of important milestones in Prince George's County development history has shown how different circumstances and political decisions have influenced development in the county. Historical land use patterns positioned the county to be home to moderate and low-income workers of the Washington Metropolitan Area. By the

1950's, federal housing programs encouraged a housing boom across the county. However, instead of managing the boom of it's low income population during the 1960's, it was accommodated by a mass building of garden apartments that would soon hurt the county's image. Once it was realized that residential construction had exceeded sewer capacity, an eight year moratorium on development was enacted. This allowed Fairfax and Montgomery Counties to pull ahead in commercial and residential construction. By the time the moratorium had ended, citizen unrest towards rising taxes—caused by the amount of rental units in the county—pushed the TRIM measure. This put a serious strain on public services and the school system for the next six years. In addition, a new district elected County Council brought parochialism to Prince George's County, which would narrow the scope of decision making for years to come.

Prince George's County Today

Today, Prince George's County has a workforce population size comparable to Montgomery and Fairfax Counties. Despite this, it has lagged behind these jurisdictions as a major business player in the region. Federal contractors in the Washington region earned $42.2 billion in 2004, which was up $1.6 billion from the year before. Contractors also accounted for 42,000 new jobs, or two-thirds of the region's job growth.[32] Most of this money went to Fairfax County with Montgomery getting a considerable amount as well; Prince George's County only received a dismal piece of the pie when compared to the other two counties.

As of 2004, Prince George's County not only had an unemployment rate higher than Montgomery and Fairfax Counties, but the entire Washington Metropolitan Area as well. The total number of employment opportunities in the county is less than those available in its two neighboring jurisdictions. Also, median annual earnings are lower in comparison. This reflects the type of job opportunities available in the county. A look at business trends in Prince George's County show that most job opportunities are found in the blue-collar and retail services trades. The percentage of knowledge jobs (managerial, professional, and technical jobs) in the county is much lower than in Montgomery and Fairfax Counties. These measures of economic performance show that Prince George's County's local economy falls short of Montgomery and Fairfax Counties when it comes to retaining and creating jobs; using human resources efficiently; and providing higher quality jobs.

Although the county is well positioned to provide growing contractors with far cheaper spillover space than in the District of Columbia and has access to an educated work force, the image of the county, more often than not, discourages private investment. The following will illustrate trends that have contributed the county's position in the regional economy.

Jurisdictional Differences

A study conducted by the Brookings Institution showed that company founders and their employees have a lot to say about where a company locates. Many times the decision solely rests on where the CEO of the company prefers to live.[33] More of the region's private sector employees live in Fairfax and Montgomery Counties; Prince George's County has the largest population of government workers in the region. It is not surprising that the county is often overlooked by firms looking to locate or expand in the region. The county has a disproportionate amount of the region's poor and faces problems addressing crime and its school system.

There are more rental units in Prince George's County when compared to Montgomery and Fairfax Counties. In addition, rental units make up a larger percentage of occupied housing units and are cheaper than in

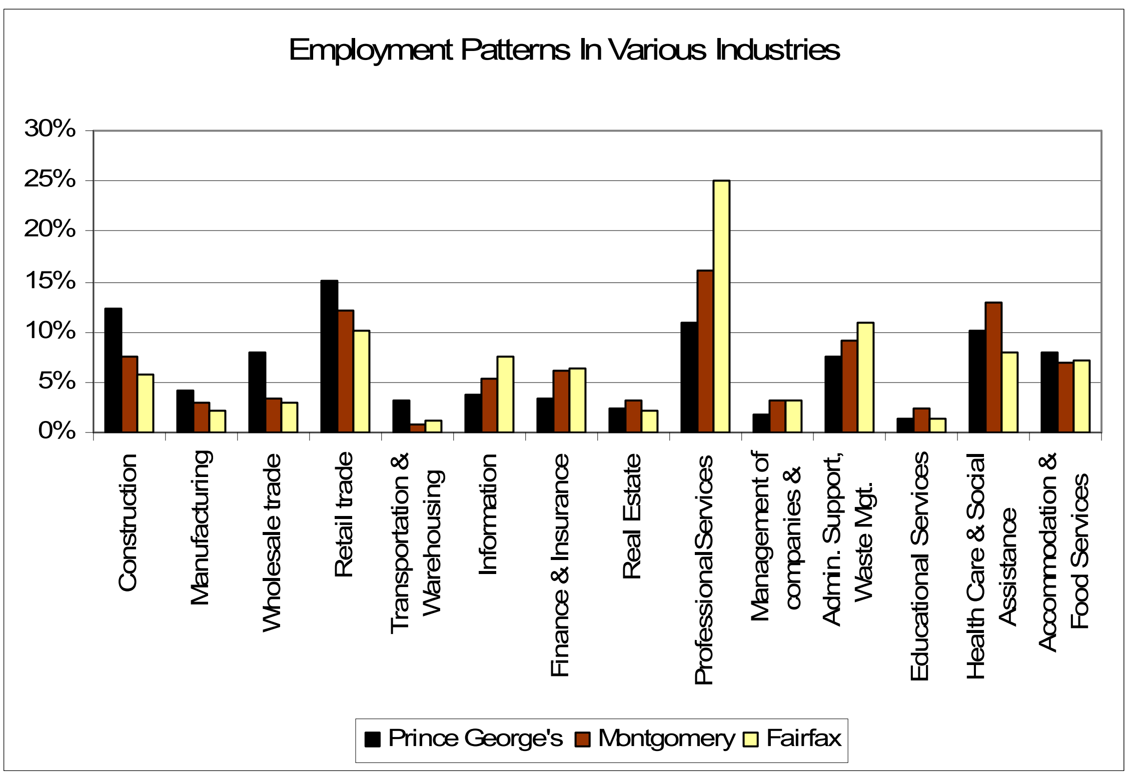
2004 County Comparisons

2004 Employment Figures				
	Prince George's	Montgomery	Fairfax	Wash. Metro Area
Unemployment Rate	4.6	3.1	2.7	3.7
Total Employment	421,469	481,555	554,781	2,697,498

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2004 American Community Survey.

2004 Annual Earnings Profile			
	Prince George's	Montgomery	Fairfax
Med. Earnings Per Worker	$35, 374	$41,572	$45,393
Aggregate Earnings	$15,795,969,300	$24,782,097,800	$29,813,671,800

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2004 American Community Survey.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2003 County Business Patterns.

Housing				
	% Rental Units	Total Rental Units	Med. Rent	Median House Value
Prince George's	37%	108,321	$899	$208,023
Montgomery	27%	92,684	$1,134	$394,022
Fairfax	26%	95,674	$1,166	$415,418

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2004 American Community Survey.

the other two counties. As a result, the available housing stock in the county is more attractive to low wage earners and less skilled workers in the metropolitan area. According to the *2004 American Community Survey*, only 37% of Prince George's residents possessed post high school degrees compared to 63% and 64% in Montgomery and Fairfax, respectively. This is an important detail for the county to recognize: significant economic development will not occur until the county's workforce can compete with the regional economy.

More renters and more low-income residents often mean less money available from taxes to provide important public services. This has been the case in Prince George's County and the public school system has been hurting the most as a result. On average 60% Maryland high school students passed algebra and English requirements in 2004; however, in Prince George's county just under 40% of high school students passed these courses.

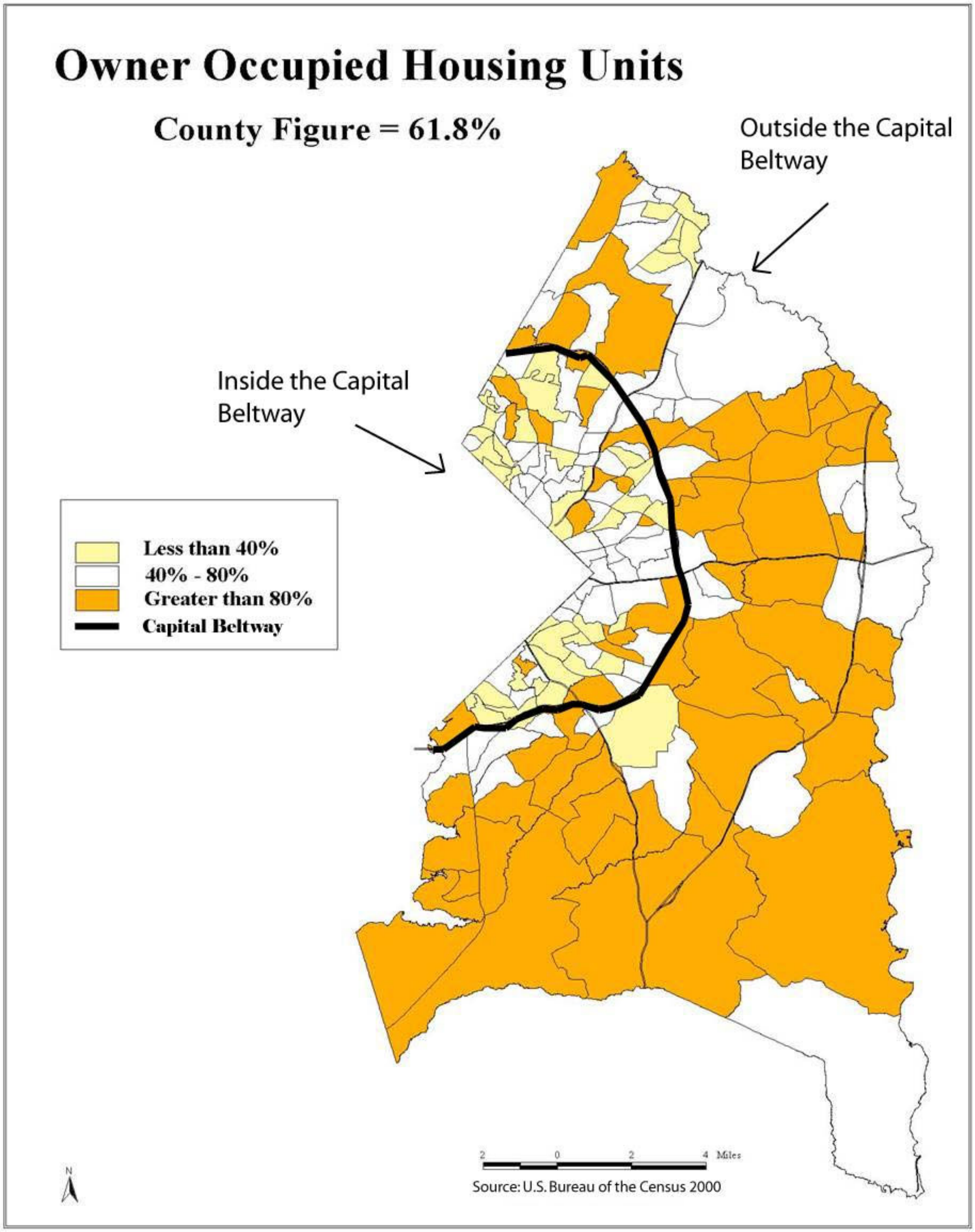
Crime statistics for the county are also bleak. According to the *U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics*, between 1992 and 2002, the number of reported crime offenses increased from 46,229 to 52,653. This is dramatically different from Fairfax County which actually decreased from 26,389 to 17,870 between the same years. In trying to attract high quality job opportunities, these facts are just as important for the county as the quality of its workforce population. In order for the county to encourage private investment, it is crucial that these issues area addressed and the concerns of potential newcomers are alleviated.

Beltway Disparities.

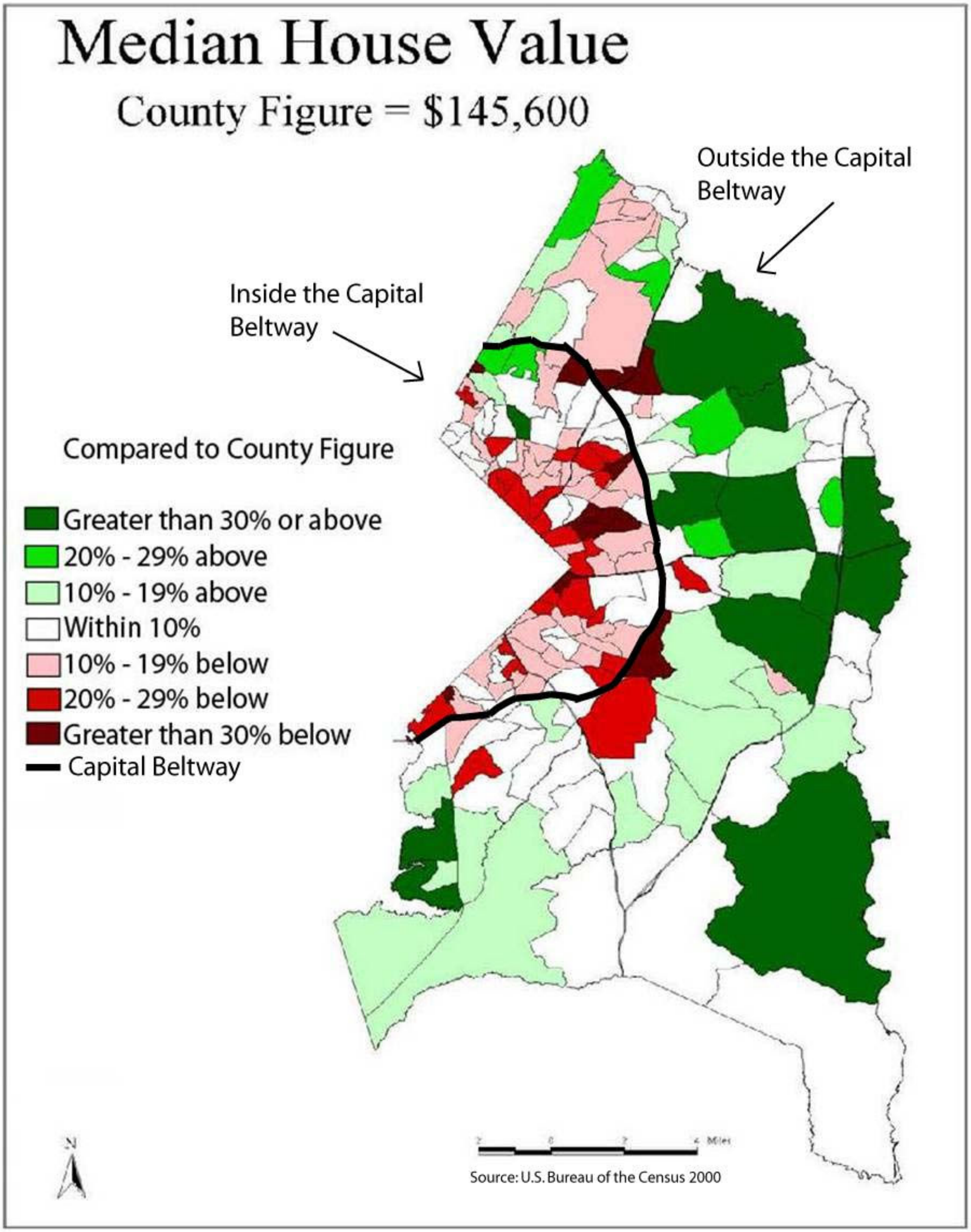
Although Prince George's County has more low-income earners, crime, and a less successful school system than neighboring jurisdictions, this is mostly true for parts of the county located inside the Capital Beltway. The key reason for this stems back to the large amount of multifamily units constructed inside the Capital Beltway between the 1940's and 1960's. The affordable rents provided homes for many families right inside the Capital Beltway in close proximity to the District of Columbia. However, after the out-migration of many whites in the late 70's and more affluent blacks in the early 80's, mostly lower-income blacks were left to reside within the Beltway. The number of multifamily units in the county allowed for a high concentration of poor and single-headed households in these areas.

The concentration of poorer residents inside the Beltway and possibly TRIM have strained public safety and education services to what they are today. Having more rental units gives Prince George's a smaller property tax base than Montgomery and Fairfax Counties. Looking at 48 Census Designated Places (CDP's) in the county from the 2000 Census it is apparent that 24 selected places inside the Beltway—which account for approximately 25% of the county's total land area—have less available economic resources when compared to 24 selected places outside the Beltway. Those living inside the Beltway are more likely to be renting, making a lower income, and living in homes with only one wage earner.

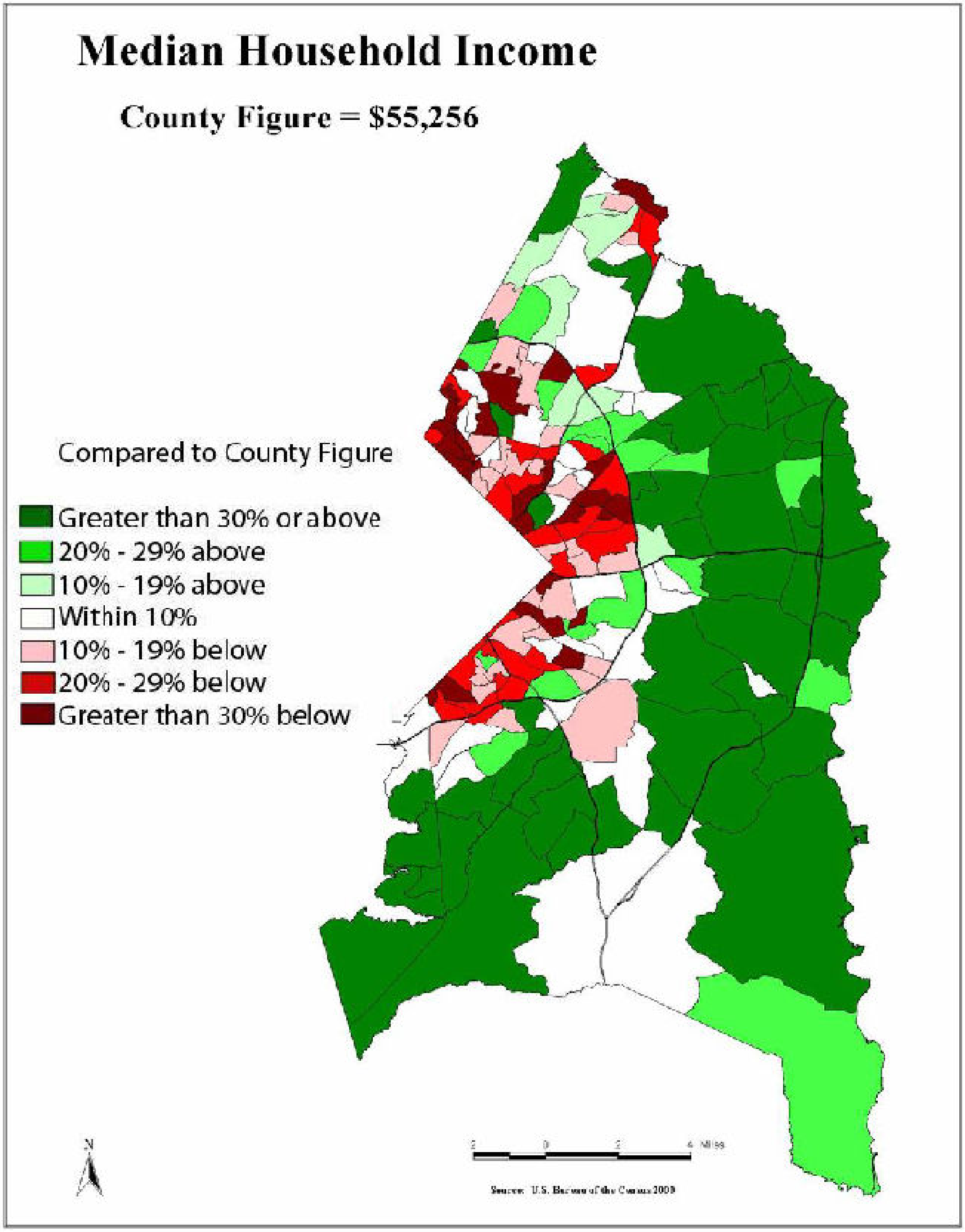
Similarly, crime is more prevalent inside the Beltway. Of the six police districts in the



Source: Prepared by the Prince George's County Planning Department.



Source: Prepared by the Prince George's County Planning Department.



Source: Prepared by the Prince George's County Planning Department.

	CDP's Inside The Capital Beltway	Prince George's County	CDP's Outside The Capital Beltway
Median Gross Rent	$712	$737	$916
Median Value of Owned Units	$124,448	$145,600	$153,880
Median Household Inc.	$46,748	$55,256	$67,979
Owner-Occupied Units	57%	62%	81%
Renter-Occupied Units	43%	38%	19%
Married Family w/ Own Children	57%	61%	72%
% of Families With Children That Are Single Parent Families	43%	39%	29%

US Census Bureau. 2000 US Census.

county, two completely lie inside the Beltway (Hyattsville and Lanham), three sit completely outside the Beltway (Laurel, Bowie, and Clinton), and one has boundaries inside and outside the Capital Beltway (Oxon Hill). Together, the three districts with jurisdiction inside the Beltway account for 70% of the total occurrences of crime in Prince George's County, most of which are property crimes.

There are a number of reasons why crime is more prevalent inside the Beltway in Prince George's County. For one, parts of Prince George's inside the Beltway share borders with high crime neighborhoods in the District of Columbia. Many criminals find this location convenient because they can easily flee where county police have no jurisdiction. Also, the presence of so many renters inside the Beltway makes it harder for residents to build a stable community, where neighbors know each other and have a strong interest to protect their property. Furthermore, higher density inside the Beltway allows for a larger population. As a result, occurrences of crimes would naturally be higher and stress police services more.

Disparities among public schools inside and outside the Beltway are also noticeable. High schools outside the Beltway perform better on average than high schools inside the Beltway. Although graduation rates are fairly similar, state math and reading proficiency differ amongst students at these schools. In 2005, while all nine public high schools outside the Beltway met state reading proficiency requirements, 3 of the 11 county high schools inside the Beltway did not. Students' proficiency in math was worse than reading performance overall in the county. However, while 4 out of 9 county high schools outside the Beltway met state math proficiency requirements, only 1 out of 11 schools inside the Beltway did. [34]

A possible reason for why disparities between these schools are not greater is that more parents in the county who can are enrolling their children in private schools. In 2001 there were 23,082 private school students enrolled in one of at least 133 private schools across the county; that figure is up from 22,314 the year before.[35] This is one of the biggest challenges facing Prince George's school system: it is left to educate a large number of economically disadvantaged children, who often require greater resources to achieve at the same level as their wealthier peers. Providing those resources, such as early reading programs, often requires more staff and money.

Unfortunately, perception has hurt Prince George's economically over the past years. Media attention that the county grabs often show residents that are lower income, negative crime statistics, or concerns about the school system. This results in potential new companies to the area doubting the skill level of the available workforce and higher-end retailers doubting the purchasing power of residents.

Being perceived as a crime magnet in the region effects the county's ability to attract new industries and higher-income home buyers. Likewise, the school system receives an unfair criticism when parents that can afford to are putting their children in private schools, leaving the county to educate a disproportionate amount of economically disadvantaged children.

Addressing Barriers To Improved Economic Development

Understanding Prince George's development history and its current position in the regional economy is important for identifying steps the county can take to improve economic development. From the previous sections it is apparent that housing, education, and crime are all important issues that need to be addressed. The following will suggest things the county can do on it's own to improve the attractiveness of the county to homeowners and employers alike.

Housing

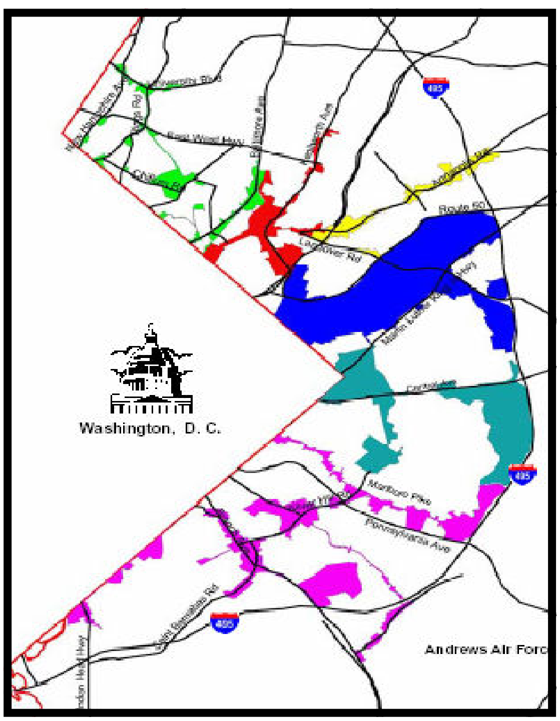
Lessening the concentration of low-income residents inside the Capital Beltway would be an important first step in revamping Prince George's County's image and improving public services. The county has a number of local programs available to help achieve its community development and housing goals. However, many of them do not address the issue of deconcentrating the poor that reside within the Capital Beltway. One of the goals listed in the county's *Year 2000-2005 Housing and Community Development Consolidated Plan* called for a greater balance of housing types and values throughout the county. The strategy to achieve such socio-economic balance in suburban and urban areas in the county is to expand the capacity of more "upscale" homes and rehabilitate the existing housing stock. Since most areas in the county within the Beltway are fully developed, most of these upscale homes will be built in areas that are rural and more affluent. This strategy shows that the county is more concerned with increasing the value of the overall housing supply rather than balancing the current housing stock available throughout the county.

Unlike Montgomery and Fairfax Counties, Prince George's County does not have well established programs in place that address the location of affordable housing. Montgomery County implemented a Moderately-Priced Dwelling Unit (MPDU) program in 1974 that requires developments of more than 50 units to include 15% MPDUs. Of that 15%, two-thirds are sold to moderate-income first-time homebuyers. The remainder is purchasable by the local housing commission or local non-profits for use in their affordable rental programs. To make the program work, Montgomery County provides a density bonus to developers that grant the builder the ability to build 22% more units in the subdivision than otherwise would be allowed. Thus, the land for the MPDUs is "free."[36]

Fairfax County has a similar program as well. Its Affordable Dwelling Unit (ADU) program applies to developments of 50 or more units at densities of more than one unit per acre. Homeownership opportunities are restricted to condominiums and townhouses priced between \$80,000 and \$120,000 and are targeted to families at 70% or less of area median income. Rental opportunities are targeted to those at 65% of area median income (2/3 of units) and 50% area median income (1/3 of units).[37]

To many, such affordable housing programs are not the solution to Prince George's County's problems: the county already has some of the most affordable housing in the region. Thus, to provide such programs alone would not help to alleviate the problems of income segregation in the jurisdiction. However, if implemented with other instruments that could draw higher-income residents into lower-income neighborhoods, elements of these programs could help in modeling a potential strategy.

Focus on Community Reinvestment. One way a program similar to Montgomery's MPDU could be implemented in the county is along side a community reinvestment project. Many times these projects provide local tax incentives to businesses that expand or locate to designated areas. The county currently offers such incentives in its Enterprise Zones. Among the benefits offered to business locating to these zones is the 10-year Real Property Tax Credit. The credit is applied when there are increases to real property taxes resulting from qualified new construction or improvement to real property. A 10-year Business Personal Property Tax Credit is also available. It credits 80% of the amount of tax otherwise due on new qualified business personal property.



Source: Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation. Enterprise Zones.

The county could implement a program that gives similar incentives to households above a certain income or those households that make improvements to their personal property within the Enterprise Zone. The areas in the county's Enterprise Zone similarly reflect some of the poorer areas lying inside the Beltway.

The first phase of this program would provide low-income households within these zones with the opportunity to purchase or rent affordable units in new or expanding residential developments in the county. The second phase of the program would provide property tax credits to households moving to the Enterprise Zone and making above a certain income. This would help lessen the chance that units in the Enterprise Zone, which are vacated by residents participating in the affordable housing program, will be reoccupied by more low-income residents. This is not suggested as an easy task to perform. Similar efforts have been used to encourage business diversity and racial diversity across the nation, but rarely to achieve income diversity. Also, such methods often result in total regentrification. For such a program to work functionally, there are a number of things that should be considered:

1. Higher-income individuals have a wider range of housing options since they are limited less by financial constraints. As a result, their housing choice is based on personal preference, which may be influenced by a number of factors (proximity to work or other amenities, adequate public facilities, safety, etc.).
2. Efforts to deconcentrate the poor within the Beltway may not be effective if resources for the program are scattered among a number of distressed neighborhoods all at once.
3. Financial incentives alone may not be

enough to attract higher-income residents to move into these inner-Beltway areas.

4. Many neighborhoods within the Beltway offer transit services valuable to lower-income families.

As a result, to maximize the effectiveness of such a program it is important that:

1. Middle versus high-income households are targeted to move to reinvestment areas and are given extra incentive to make property improvements.
2. Priority is given to young professionals with no children and senior citizens. These groups require less in public services than families with young children.
3. Minimum time requirements for the length of stay at a residence in the reinvestment area is set. This will help prevent buyers from selling for a quick profit.
4. Efforts to deconcentrate the poor within the Beltway are focused on up to three designated areas at a time.
5. An intense marketing campaign, both within and outside the county, is launched to promote the county's strengths. Also, the benefits of participating in the community reinvestment program should be promoted.
6. Low-income participants have the option to be relocated to areas that are accessible to some range of transit services.

Make Developers Contribute. In the Prince George's County 2002 General Plan, the concepts of "tiers" were created to establish standards of development in certain areas of the county. The three existing tiers include the developed, developing, and rural tier. In the rural tier, which consists of much of the county's southeastern land, development was limited to preserve environmental features, maintain a rural character, and allow mostly large-lot estate residents. Recently the idea of implementing a TDR in the rural in tier is being discussed in the county.

TDRs (Transfer of Development Rights) can help preserve rural or farm lands by transferring the "rights to develop" from one area and giving them to another. However, county officials are hoping that establishing a TDR system in the rural tier will bring an economic incentive for builders to bring denser and more attractive development to the other two tiers.

Once again, this shows the county's focus on getting more attractive development vs. balancing the effects of development in the county. The developed tier, which mostly consists of all development inside the Beltway, is practically built out. This means TDRs would benefit the developing tier more: site's with more available land provides a developer with more flexibility for design. In addition, it just adds incentive for more high density residential—not commercial use—because the market for commercial office space in Prince's George's County is not high in comparison to other jurisdictions.

If county official want to make new development in Prince George's have a positive bearing on older neighborhoods inside the Beltway, they could implement a community reinvestment fee on new development in the county. This would mean that in order for developers to build outside the Beltway, they would have to contribute a certain amount for improvements, new facilities, or land acquisitions inside the developed tier.

Improving Education

The problem with Prince George's County Schools seems to be a mix result of declining public confidence, inadequate funding, and questionable management. Despite the fact that Prince George's spends more of its operating budget on public schools than Montgomery County, the amount it spends per pupil is less than what Montgomery County spends. Since 1991 Prince's George's has had four school superintendents, all of whom left after being faced with the tremendous task of improving performance with a budget limited by TRIM. Evidently, if there is to be significant change in the performance of the county's public school system it can not continue to operate as it does today. Finding new revenue sources and learning from innovative education models is extremely important for Prince George's County.

Change the Tax Structure. The full affects that TRIM has had on potential development and budgetary problems of the county are much debated. Some—who are more likely to be public county officials rather than residents—believe that the future of the county, especially its public school system, hinges on eliminating TRIM. The cap is currently 96 cents per $100 of assessed value (Montgomery's property tax rate is .73 cents per $100 of value).[38] Although the amount of money available to the county increases over time as property assessments rise, officials say it is not enough to meet expanding needs. Former County Executive Wayne K. Curry even tried to roll back the cap through a 1996 referendum. In spite of this, 63% of the county's voters opposed repeal.[39]

Others believe that sprawl and not TRIM is the problem: lenient growth management practices have been used to stimulate the economy with new tax revenue from new homebuyers where it is unable to create jobs. As a result, provision of services to these dispersed areas limits the money available for an inner Beltway revitalization.

Although TRIM is in place, the county's tax rate has been consistently higher than Montgomery County's for the last five years. Moreover, even though the overall assessed value of property in Montgomery County is higher – when multiplied by it's lower tax rate – the amount of property taxes paid by residents in Prince George's and Montgomery County is comparable. Unfortunately, TRIM leaves county residents paying some of the highest taxes in Maryland for poorer services.

What magnifies the impact of TRIM is the fact that the county has limited control over the amount of funds collected from property taxes. Of the $1.42 per $100 of taxable valuation collected in the county from property taxes, only $0.96 per $100 goes to the county. The rest of the money raised through property taxes goes to the state, the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC), WSSC, and other agencies. The county has no control over how these funds are spent. However, if the county was able to take more control over taxing agencies in the county, such as MNCPPC and WSSC, it would provide the county with more money to allocate for education, without raising any new taxes. Ironically, tax rates assigned by these agencies are not capped by TRIM; therefore, they can comfortably raised as needed.

In order for the county to increase the flexibility in which it can raise funds for the school system and other services, it has to be able to gain the political support of its residents. However, this proves to be a difficult task considering the number of times county-sponsored tax reform has been rejected on referendum ballots. It seems that any change that would make it possible for the county to raise more taxes has no chance of passing in Prince George's County. The only way the county could gain more support would be through an extensive education campaign that would broaden residents' understanding on the effects of TRIM. Obviously, county officials expressing their disapproval for the measure is not convincing enough for residents. Instead, the county should provide a report detailing how TRIM stymies the budget. It should also propose different methods for raising additional revenues. During this campaign, there should be strong efforts to alleviate voter concern through open forums and a participatory process.

Encourage Charter Schools. Over the last decade charter schools have been established to decrease existing achievement gaps by improving the educational opportunities available to certain segments of the student population. In 2003, the state of Maryland passed a new law authorizing the establishment of public charter schools in Maryland. Although, no charter schools have been started in Prince George's County yet, the passing of this law in Maryland provides the county with an opportunity to allow parents to choose what school their child attends with out having to pay tuition.

Like public schools, charter schools are open to all students; however, some may have a specific focus that is likely to appeal to some families more than others. Charter schools are also similar to private schools in that they are independent and self-governing, and the students, parents, and teachers choose to participate in the school. Unlike traditional public schools, charter schools are viewed by many as being more accountable for student performance. This is because the school may be closed if it fails to produce promised or desired results.

Recently, the idea of charter schools has had mixed reaction from the county school board. Some feel charter schools may take away necessary funding from the public school system. Still, in many low-income urban areas where a majority of the student population is minority and underperforming academically, charter schools offer good prospects. In the neighboring District of Columbia, which has 51 charter schools, test scores show that charter school students outperform their peers in the city's traditional schools. In math, 54.4% of charter school students are proficient versus 44.19% of students in traditional schools. In reading, 45.37% of charter school students are proficient, compared to 39.14% for other public schools.[40] Encouraging charter schools, especially inside the Beltway, could help stir academic innovation in some of the neediest areas of the county. This could be done by providing grants to charter schools locating inside the Beltway.

***Improve Early Childcare*.** Many studies show that funding for services such as public education and safety does not have as large of an impact on retention or crime rates as many people may think. In O'Sullivan's *Urban Economics,* it is reported that approximately 50% of differences in crime rates in urban areas are due to varying concentrations of female-headed households.[41] A similar finding featured in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* showed that the amount of time spent by parents with their children has a significant effect on a child's school grades.[42]

These two findings are noteworthy to Prince George's County. It has twice the number of single-parent families than most of its neighboring jurisdictions and twice the percentage of its family population being headed by single parents. In the metropolitan region, only the District of Columbia has more single-parent families than Prince George's County. This fact relates to the availability of

Single-Parent Families			
	Prince George's	Montgomery	Fairfax
Total Single-Parent Families	40,111	23,387	21,023
Total Population of Families	199,524	226,024	252,836
% of Families Headed By A Single Parent	20%	10%	8%

US Census Bureau. 2000 US Census.

affordable housing within the county. Many single-parent families live off a much lower income than other families; as a result, they are limited to choose from affordable housing or rental options. With the county providing a good amount of the region's affordable housing, it is no surprise that it has so many single-parent families.

This fact has significant implications for the county. Many children of single-parent households spend limited time with their parent because the parent often has to work more than one job to provide financial stability. This can result in stunted development in gaining confidence about oneself, learning to trust others, and working towards reaching a goal, especially for younger children who may feel neglected:

> *If parents are absent or not involved with their children, then strong relations between parents and children will neither be created nor maintained. If social capital is lacking, then the level of human capital that parents posses is an irrelevant source for the child because the mechanism for transferring human capital does not function.*[43]

The number of single-parents families in the county would technically make it twice as prone to crime and an unsuccessful school system. With this taken into account, it is important for the county to acknowledge this special feature of its demographic character and learn how cater to this group more effectively.

According to recent research, children in single-parent or low-income households are less likely to do as well in school as their peers. This especially holds true in the absence of early high-quality child care and preschool experience. However, more often than not, social programs created to help such families tend to focus on getting low-income parents in to work versus quality child care. Unfortunately, high-quality child care is often least available to those who would benefit the greatest from it—the poor.

Surprisingly, despite the fact that Prince George's County has more single-parent families, it has less youth and child day care services than Montgomery and Fairfax Counties. Prince George's County also has two-sevenths the amount of early childhood programs accredited nationally or by the state of Maryland than Montgomery County has. Accredited programs help identify and define quality program services in administration, program operation, and home and community partnerships.

The county does provide some programs that help subsidized the cost of childcare for parents; nevertheless, it could improve efforts to make quality childcare available to those who need it the most. Half of the accredited child-care programs in the county are located outside the Beltway where there are less single-parent and low-income families. In order to change this the county could provide tax incentives, not only to employers who purchase or build qualified childcare facilities for their employees, but for independent accredited childcare operations as well. Regardless of whether the county would consider enabling such policy, the amount of single-parent families in the county remains an important issue to be further addressed.

Crime

If issues with housing and the budget are addressed, it is possible that problems with crime could be alleviated to some extent. Still there needs to be a great effort to improve community development in the county. This can be done through targeting the group most likely to engage in criminal acts: the youth. Increasing the number of police does not necessarily mean crime will decrease; it may just result in criminals being caught. The social circumstances affecting those committing crimes need to be better understood and programs tailored for youth services should be expanded. This may require providing more funding in low-income areas for job training, job placement programs, community-based mentoring, and recreation programs.

Tying It All Together

Prince George's County is not an unpleasant place to live. It is the most affluent African-American county in the United States as well as one of the more thriving counties in the country. However, in the Washington Metropolitan Area it is not considered a top competitor for economic opportunities or employment growth as its wealthier neighbors. The amount of affordable housing and rental units the county offers not only draws lower-income residents and single-parent families, but concentrates them in certain areas of the county as well. As a result, many public services offered in these areas are strained and inadequate. Unfortunately, the inadequacies of some parts of the county are often misinterpreted to suggest the state of the entire county. Ultimately, it is this perception that prevents the county from receiving the economic investment it has the potential to receive.

If the county is to ever move forward in encouraging the commercial development it desperately wants, it must understand what top firms in the region want. Prince George's County shares many of the same attributes as other jurisdictions in the region: an educated work force; close proximity to the District of Columbia; good transportation networks; and environmental quality. However, its reputation of having higher than average crime rates and lower than average schools deters much investment. Therefore, before the county begins offering tax incentives for companies to locate to the county, or begins building new upscale homes away from its urban core, it should consider reinvesting in its inner Beltway communities that are fully developed and in the public services needed the most. Once significant improvements are made with housing, schools, and crime, the county can then focus more of its resources on attracting private investment.

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