

# Chapter 3: Sector Area

## Character Analysis

### Historical Overview

The character of an area can be defined by the people who live and work there, businesses that support the local and regional economy, and residential communities that reflect long-standing commitment and/or more recent growth. In addition, amenities such as parks, schools, community facilities, and the transportation network provide the community with physical characteristics that identify it within a larger context. All of these factors, taken together, define the ability of a community to attract and sustain successful growth or to stagnate and decline.

During the 1970s and 1980s the Branch Avenue Corridor (BAC) was a commercial destination that attracted shoppers from around the region. Iverson Mall, Marlow Heights Shopping Center, Suitland Parkway, Branch Avenue, St. Barnabas Road, and Naylor Road all served integral roles in establishing economic support and prosperity for the area during this time. Iverson Mall, in Hillcrest Heights, measures 526,731 square feet and is one of the oldest enclosed malls in Prince George's County. The two-level mall opened on September 21, 1967, with Montgomery Ward and Woodward & Lothrop as anchor stores, though neither store exists today. They have been replaced by two discount stores, Forman Mills and Value City. On the other hand, the Marlow Heights Shopping Center, built in the late 1950s, was anchored by a Hecht's department store and a Giant grocery store. Today, Giant and Macy's anchor the shopping center.

Residential development in the area occurred quickly as the appeal of the Washington metropolitan area grew for both employers and residents. Joseph Fleischman developed the compact, colonial brick homes of Fleischman's Village in 1946 and Anthony Carozza developed Hillcrest Heights from part of the Addison family's eighteenth-century Colebrook plantation. With the completion of the Capital Beltway, development flourished and the area began to fill with residential construction.

See photos on facing page.  
**TOP:** Iverson Mall as it exists today is one of the oldest enclosed malls in Prince George's County.  
**BOTTOM:** Marlow Heights shopping center, built in the late 1950s, is anchored by a Giant grocery store and Macy's.



**Naylor Road Metro Station is a transit facility that presents an opportunity for increased density and intensity.**

## **The BAC Sector Plan Area Today**

In 2001 the Naylor Road Metro Station was completed. The Metro station was constructed with ancillary road improvements on Naylor Road and Branch Avenue, but the surrounding development, consisting of older, physically declining commercial uses, remained, including numerous liquor stores, a bar, a motel, a physically deteriorated condominium complex, and a night club. With few exceptions, including CVS on Branch Avenue, Chevy Chase Bank, a small shopping center on Silver Hill Road, and upgrades to some of the Pohanka car dealerships on St. Barnabas Road, very little new development has occurred since the 1980s. Today, the Branch Avenue Corridor within the sector plan area is marked by older commercial development with mostly commercial retail and service uses, some limited office uses, and strip shopping centers or stand-alone buildings, including the Iverson Mall and Marlow Heights Shopping Center. Although the Marlow Heights Shopping Center underwent a façade renovation a few years ago, very few other upgrades have been made to the commercial development along Branch Avenue or the other major roadways traversing the sector plan area. Many of these commercial buildings and strip shopping areas suffer from lack of maintenance and have become

functionally obsolete. Due to its strategic location, the corridor has been able to hold on, but there are signs of deterioration, both physical and social (increased crime). Without new significant investment in the corridor, particularly with increased competition from the planned new Suitland town center and the National Harbor development, it is likely that this decline will continue.

**View of development  
on Branch Avenue toward Naylor  
Road Metro Station.**

Adjacent to this commercial corridor is older multifamily development that ranges from garden apartments to high-rise apartments and condominiums with varying degrees of property upkeep and ground maintenance. Adjacent to the multifamily development are older, stable single-family neighborhoods, many of which are suffering from problems emanating from the distress of adjacent residential and commercial properties.



The Old Silver Hill Road commercial frontage includes a mixture of stand-alone commercial buildings, commercial miscellaneous uses (including automobile repair), older strip shopping centers, the Smithsonian Institution facility, and residential conversions to commercial/office uses in need of revitalization. These commercial uses are particularly fragmented and much of the road is fronted by parking lots without curbs, which makes for hazardous ingress and egress for automobile traffic and a complete lack of connectivity for

pedestrians. Barbed wire fences line the roadway, enclosing many of the miscellaneous commercial uses as well as the Smithsonian Institution.

Uses along Silver Hill Road within the sector plan area include the Smithsonian Institution facility and older multifamily development. Commercial uses are concentrated at the intersection of Silver Hill Road, St. Barnabas Road, and Old Silver Hill Road. Small pockets of older single-family residential development exist on both sides of Silver Hill Road at its intersection with Branch Avenue. (See Map 4, page 17.)

St. Barnabas Road south of Branch Avenue has a variety of commercial uses up to Temple Hill Road. These commercial uses and buildings clutter the streetscape and are visually unappealing. The commercial development fronting the industrial area is fragmented and includes many incompatible uses that do not provide the necessary neighborhood retail services needed by the adjoining community. Industrial-type uses have begun to creep onto the face of St. Barnabas Road and have further eroded the commercial character of this corridor.



TOP: Commercial development along St. Barnabas Road.  
BOTTOM: Well-maintained single-family homes on St. Barnabas Road.

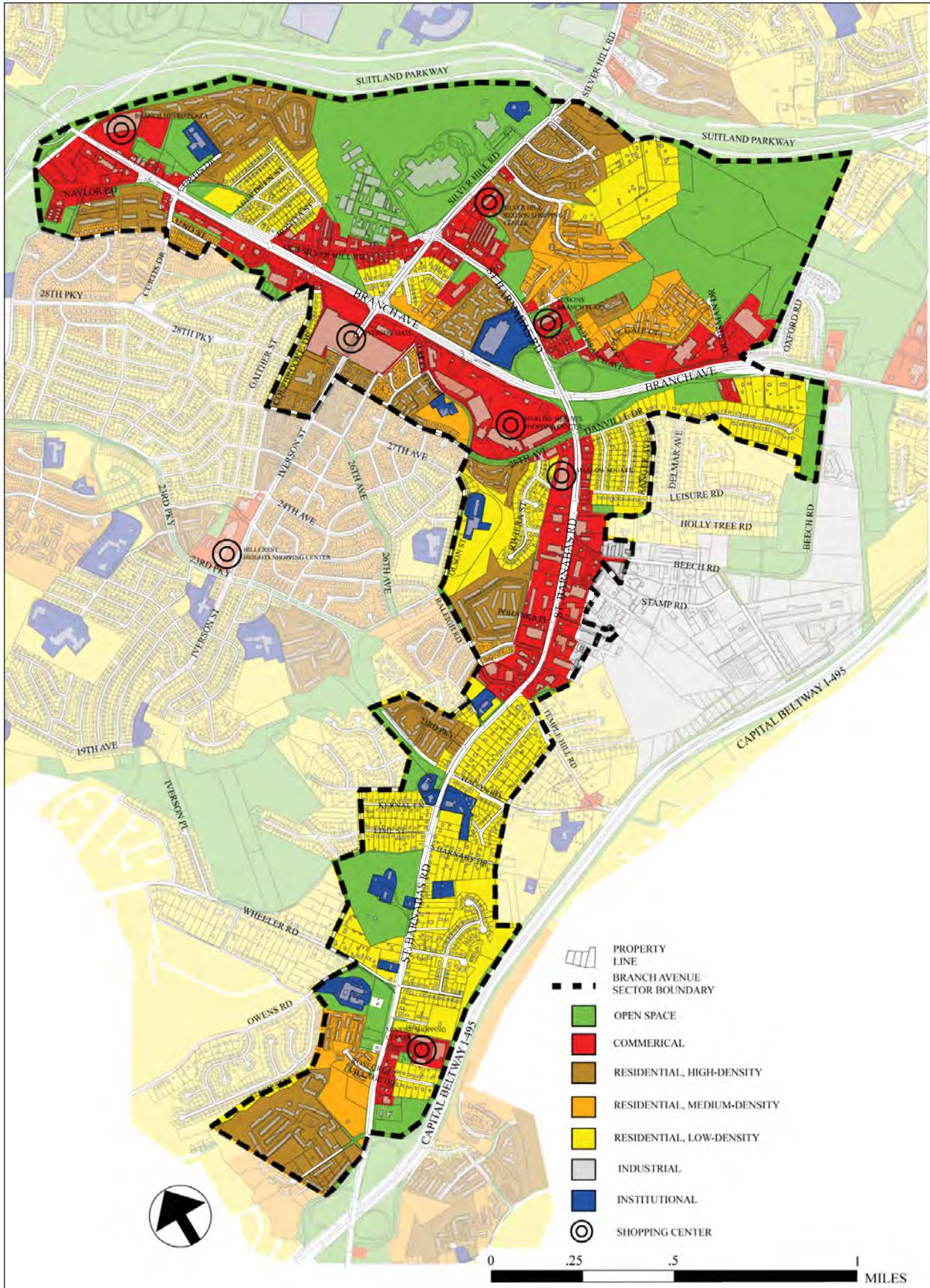


Several new and used auto dealerships and auto-related services dominate the streetscape. Adjacent to these businesses to the east of St. Barnabas Road are industrial uses and activities that will continue to contribute to the negative visual image of the St. Barnabas Road commercial corridor if appropriate actions are not taken, such as code enforcement, buffering/screening, or a special study to limit or address these uses and activities.

St. Barnabas Road south of Temple Hill Road contains an established residential community and institutional uses on both sides of the street, including a designated county historic site—the St. Barnabas Episcopal Church. The uses on both sides of St. Barnabas Road transition to commercial, townhouse, and multifamily development nearer to the Capital Beltway. This part of the sector plan area includes some new single-family development interspersed with a number of churches featuring attractive open space.

Residents today value their proximity to Washington, D.C., the availability of mass transit, and the easy access to major roads. All residents, however, are concerned about the lack of a safe and continuous pedestrian network that they can use for shopping and other activities. Most of the sidewalks along roads in the sector plan area are either too narrow, in poor condition, not continuous, or unlit at night. Safe pedestrian crossings are almost nonexistent on major roadways because the area is so heavily dominated by automobile traffic, much of it commuter in nature. Trail connections to the abutting park systems are lacking entirely (although they have been planned for many years). Sector plan area residents include a mix of newer property owners and renters who have moved to the area because of its strategic location and affordable property values. But while many value the sense of community they feel, all wish that the strong retail and commercial areas of the past be revived and that the community once again becomes a safe and inviting area.

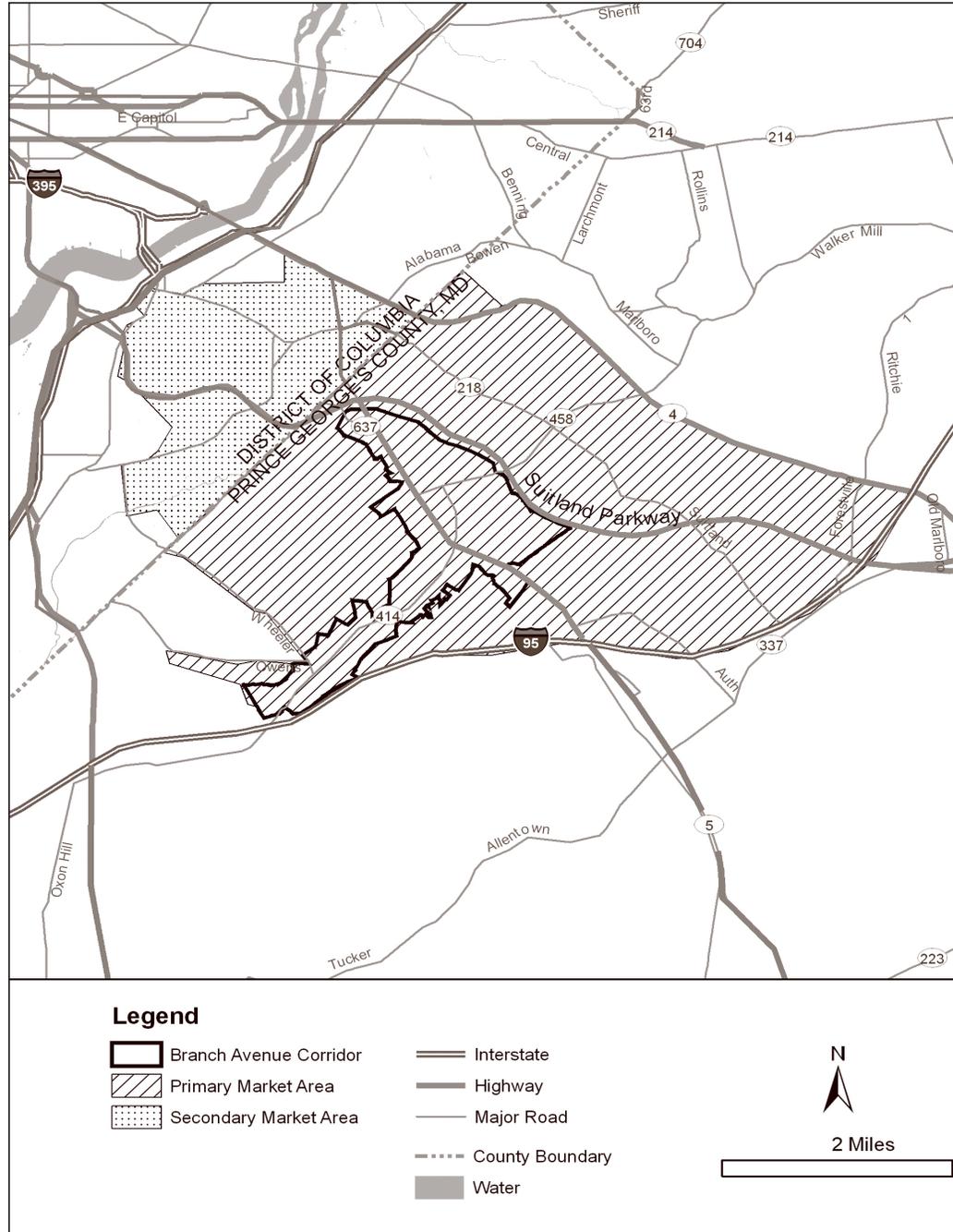
# Map 4: Existing Land Use



# Demographic and Market Profile

This section provides a more detailed demographic and market profile in order to examine the potential for new residential and commercial/office development opportunities. It does this by analyzing and understanding information on existing conditions and trends relating to area demographics, housing stock, retail, and office markets. For the purpose of this analysis, the primary market area and the secondary market area were identified. (See Map 5.) The primary market area is one from which retailers will draw 75–80 percent

**Map 5: BAC Sector Plan Market Areas**



of their customer base and is generally bounded to the north by Pennsylvania Avenue, to the west by the District of Columbia line, to the south by Wheeler Road (including the Eastover Knolls and Rosecroft Village communities), and to the east by the Capital Beltway. The secondary market area is one where retailers will draw 10–15 percent of their customer base and is generally in the District of Columbia, bounded to the north by Fort Dupont Park, to the east by the D.C. line, to the south by Wheeler Road, and to the west by I-295.

Over the past 20 years, the primary market area has grown as a bedroom community within the Washington metropolitan area. **Table 2** shows that from 2000 to 2006, a small but steady growth in population and household occurred in both the primary market area and the county, together with a decline in the secondary market area. The median household income stayed just under the pace of inflation, indicating a steady earning power over the past six years.

	Primary Market Area			Secondary Market Area			Prince George's County		
	2000	2006	Annual Growth	2000	2006	Annual Growth	2000	2006	Annual Growth
Population	68,569	71,370	0.7%	42,331	41,232	-0.4%	801,515	855,332	1.1%
Household	27,042	28,211	0.7%	16,184	16,050	-0.1%	286,610	307,422	1.2%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000; Claritas, Inc.; Bay Area Economics, 2006

**Table 3** shows that in 2000 the percentage of the prime working-age population (ages 25 to 44) in the primary market area was consistent with the rest of the county. The value of a significant working-age population is considerable when stabilizing or sustaining a viable community. Although the working age population shrunk throughout these three market segments, creating an environment and providing facilities that are conducive to attracting more working-age people will help to sustain the revitalization and redevelopment of this area.

	Primary Market Area		Secondary Market Area		Prince George's County	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
Under 18	26.0%	29.4%	30.3%	34.7%	24.4%	26.8%
18–24	12.5%	9.3%	11.7%	9.7%	13.1%	10.4%
25–34	21.4%	16.5%	17.9%	14.6%	20.7%	15.7%
35–44	17.0%	16.4%	14.4%	14.1%	16.6%	17.3%
45–54	10.4%	13.5%	9.9%	11.5%	11.1%	13.7%
55–64	6.5%	8.1%	7.1%	7.3%	7.2%	8.4%
65 and over	6.2%	6.8%	8.7%	8.1%	6.9%	7.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census, 1990 and 2000

The median household income stayed just under the pace of inflation, indicating a steady earning power. In 2006, the household incomes for the primary market area and secondary market area were \$50,210 and \$29,682 respectively, compared to \$64,034 for the county. The disparity between the county's household income and the primary market area should be narrowed by creating an environment that will retain and attract higher-earning households.

### ***Residential Market***

The primary market area and secondary market area have a higher percentage of renters, at 54.9 and 75.4 percent respectively, than the county at 38.2 percent. The primary market area's housing stock shows a large concentration of multifamily units at 55.9 percent compared to the county at 34.2 percent of the existing housing stock. More than 70 percent of the existing housing stock in the primary market area was built between 1950 and 1979 compared to 58.9 percent of the county's. Despite its large supply of rental units, these perform well at a 93 percent occupancy rate or better. This is probably due to the variety of rental housing (modest to luxury) that offers an array of choices for those unwilling or unable to buy homes. Construction of new and luxury apartments and condominiums, such as Metroplace at Town Center and Chelsea West, has been taking place within the vicinity of the Branch Avenue Metro Station.

The market analysis concludes that the primary market area can support more owner-occupied condominium and townhouse development, with the most residential redevelopment opportunities existing at the Naylor Road Metro Station and Suitland Manor. Similar to the town center at Camp Springs, both of these areas have the ability to produce significant densities and share the added benefit of transit access.

### ***Retail Market***

The primary market area retail and services inventory contains 17 shopping centers within the immediate vicinity of the primary market area, with more than 3.0 million square feet of space. Nine shopping centers are within the primary market area and make up approximately 1.2 million square feet of retail and services. These include two large centers—Iverson Mall and Marlow Heights Shopping Center. These centers offer an array of retail types and food services to a segment of the community, while the other segment is not well served, due to limited national chain stores, boutiques and sit-down restaurants. Businesses in these centers tend to be long-time tenants that have served the community for 15 years or more. Average lease rates range from as low as \$13 per square foot to as high as \$40 per square foot, depending on the size of the specific retail space and the location within the center. Commercial development within the primary market area occurred at various intervals since the 1950s. The construction of larger and more modern shopping centers further out in the suburbs has drawn tenants dealing in shoppers goods—apparel, furniture, home furnishings, gifts, books, and sporting goods—away from the older shopping areas, causing vacancies that are filled with marginal businesses and religious organizations.

The market analysis concludes that the sector plan area retail market is underserved, indicating that the primary market area with its household income could support full-service grocers, full-service drug stores, sit-down restaurants, a mid-size furniture store, a mid-size sporting goods store, miscellaneous store retailers, and general merchandisers over the next ten years. However, there are several barriers to achieving its full potential of supportable retail square footage. Physically, there are not many sites available for substantial development or redevelopment in the short-term within the sector plan area.

Both Iverson Mall and Marlow Heights Shopping Center (the two largest single-owner sites) are performing well enough to obtain an adequate economic return and are not yet motivated for redevelopment. Many of the underutilized properties are not large enough for redevelopment and because of multiple ownerships could not be assembled easily into larger sites. The antiquated nature of the sector area commercial corridor—its obsolete building design and conditions, hodgepodge of existing retail space, lack of continuous streetscape—lessens its ability to attract new retail development, especially from national chains. National retailers gravitate toward newly constructed centers that provide great transit/vehicular access and visibility, the opportunity to cluster with other retailers of similar quality, and adequate land and parking for their operations. Competition from other areas as well as this area's outdated and physically declining image, constrains its ability to appeal to a wide diversity of retailers.

### ***Office Market***

The office market in Prince George's County, compared to other markets around the Washington metropolitan region, is characterized by its affordable nature, older buildings, suburban environment, and its appeal to primarily small- to mid-size firms. The strength of other submarkets in the county (e.g., Laurel, Greenbelt, College Park/Hyattsville, etc.) weakens the primary market area's ability to attract additional growth from corporate tenants. These areas tend to have better proximity to executive housing, good schools, retail, entertainment options, and general quality-of-life provisions that are directly related to the location of companies.

With a limited supply, primarily Class B and C office spaces, and little to no growth in office inventory and demand, the Branch Avenue Corridor has minimal appeal as a Class A office location. The Branch Avenue Corridor submarket reveals a tight office environment with largely Class B and C spaces in small to mid-rise buildings or residential conversions, a predominantly aged building inventory, vacancy rates much lower than the county, no growth in inventory since 1997, and low average rents. Office tenants include small professional firms, institutional users, civic or government-related users, and neighborhood services (e.g., doctors, realtors, etc.). These tenants typically depend on good access to area residents or their specific clientele and are often more price sensitive than larger corporations preferring Class A office space.

The Branch Avenue Corridor does, however, have great access to downtown D.C. transit stations, and the Capital Beltway, which could make it attractive for some new office development in key locations (e.g., Naylor Road Metro Station). The success of any future office development along the corridor will largely depend on the ability to improve the image of the corridor and create an active environment over the long term. This means combining new office spaces with other uses such as retail, food services, and housing, and concentrating this development near the transit station. The availability of quality sites greater than three acres, with good access and visibility, along with the ability to attract an office tenant for any new development, will heavily influence the corridor's success.

The sustainability of the corridor's existing office market has largely been the consistent local demand for neighborhood-serving office users, government-related agencies, and small institutional users in need of more affordable office space with proximity to the District of Columbia and other points within Prince George's County. The corridor could support modest additional growth for neighborhood-serving offices as the trade area population and income continue to grow. Such users could enjoy new office condominiums that resemble townhouses or mid-rise, stick-built complexes.

# Transportation Infrastructure—Ways to Get Around

The sector plan area is in a prime location in the vicinity of the District of Columbia and the rest of Prince George’s County. It is presently served by a broad transportation network that includes four Metrorail Green Line stations less than two miles from one another (Southern Avenue, Naylor Road, Suitland, and Branch Avenue), residential streets, collector streets, arterial streets with regional and local bus services, and sidewalks, although some of them are fragmented.

## ***Transit***

The Naylor Road Metro Station is in the sector area, with a 2006 daily ridership of approximately 10,824 compared to 17,496, 18,281 and 17,115 respectively for the Southern Avenue, Suitland-Federal Center, and Branch Avenue Stations.

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and the Prince George’s County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPW&T) provide transit and bus service to the area. The WMATA bus routes of C12, C14, H11, H12, and H13 travel along Iverson Street and Branch Avenue within the sector plan area, while D12 runs along St. Barnabas Road through Marlow Heights Shopping Center and Silver Hill Road to the Suitland Metro Station. P12 provides bus service along Iverson Street and Silver Hill Road. DPW&T operates “THE BUS” routes 32 and 33, which serve communities west of Branch Avenue.

## ***Roadways***

The major roadways serving the Branch Avenue Corridor sector plan area are the Suitland Parkway, Branch Avenue, Silver Hill Road/Iverson Street, and St. Barnabas Road. The 2006 average daily traffic (ADT) volumes along these major roadways and other secondary roadways serving the sector plan area range from approximately 70,000 vehicles along Branch Avenue (MD 5); 42,000 vehicles along Silver Hill Road (MD 458); 38,000 vehicles along St. Barnabas Road (MD 414); 23,000 vehicles along Iverson Street, Naylor Road, and Wheeler Road; 16,000 vehicles along Temple Hill; to 11,000 vehicles along 23rd Parkway and Old Silver Hill Road. The majority of these roadways are operating at or above the acceptable level of service.

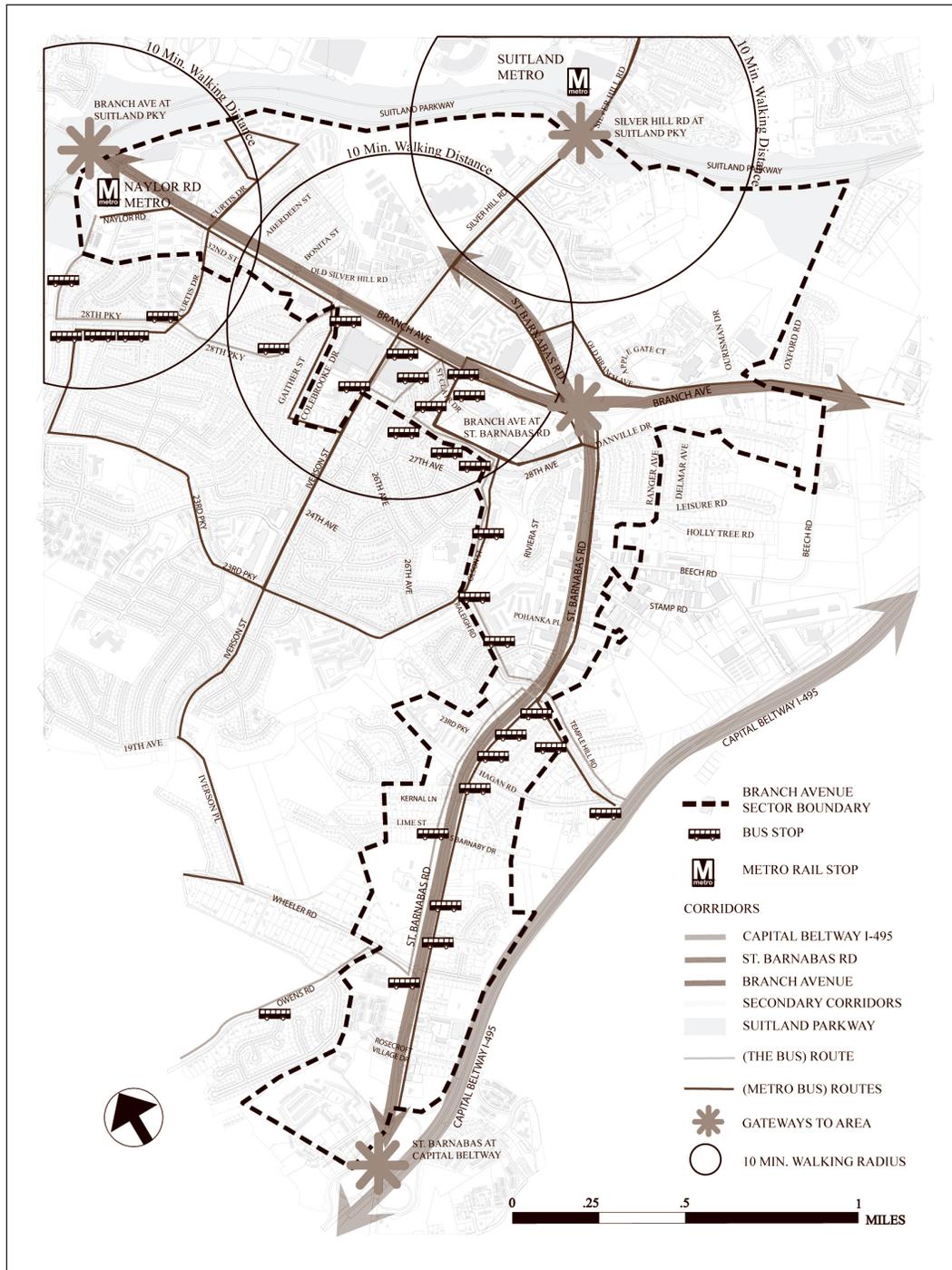
The volume of through traffic on major roadways (Branch Avenue, Silver Hill, and St. Barnabas Road) has resulted in relatively heavy traffic congestion, mostly during the morning and evening peak commuting hours. Closely spaced business entrances (individual curb cuts) create unsafe points of conflict between through traffic and traffic entering into businesses or entering the roadway. Ingress/egress into arterial and collector streets from residential streets are problematic due to high traffic volume and speed, especially at those intersections without traffic signals. Other vehicular accessibility issues include poor access, circulation and connectivity to and between Iverson Mall and Marlow Heights Shopping Center, and ingress/egress to the Branch Avenue and Old Silver Hill Road intersection.

## ***Trails and Sidewalks***

There are no trails in the vicinity of the sector plan area; however, the Heights Master Plan and the Henson Creek-South Potomac Master Plan recommend the extension of the existing Henson Creek Trail to the Branch Avenue Metro. Trail connections are also planned along Oxon Run, Barnaby Run, and Suitland Parkway, but none has yet been constructed. These planned trails will link to other trails or sidewalks and connect to the Metro stations and key destination points such as the Marlow Heights Shopping Center. Pedestrian circulation and usage are hindered by unsafe, fragmented and incomplete sidewalks in many portions of the sector plan area and in the surrounding residential communities. In addition, unsafe physical conditions such as the underutilized parking garage at Iverson Mall, numerous utility poles and cables, lack of signage and deficient pedestrian-scale street lighting, and traffic traveling at unsafe speeds discourage pedestrian mobility and usage. As a result, the area has become highly auto-oriented. Pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and walkable communities are important elements that Prince George’s County promotes in the Developed Tier, especially around centers and near Metro stations. In order to achieve this, efforts should

be made to implement sidewalk construction connectivity, particularly to schools and Metro stations. Due to the proximity of several Metro stations in the corridor, safe, convenient, and attractive pedestrian and trail connections need to be provided. Several stream valley corridors in or adjacent to the study area may provide opportunities for direct trail connections to Metro stations. As land is developed or redeveloped, trail connections between land uses or to adjacent land uses should be considered.

**Map 6: Existing Transportation Network**



# Environmental Sustainability and Preservation

The process of developing a master plan includes the assessment of existing natural features in order to ensure the effective protection, preservation, and enhancement of the area's environmental qualities. Although a major portion of the sector area has been built out, significant green areas such as the woodlands around the Smithsonian campus, the Suitland Parkway, and the natural areas adjacent to Henson Creek still remain. Much of the sector plan area was developed prior to the adoption of environmental protections that exist today. As a result, sections of some streams have been piped and/or the stream buffers have been eliminated. Piping, channeling, and the removal of stream buffers significantly impact water quality of individual streams and ultimately the Potomac River. In addition, the area was mostly developed prior to requirements for stormwater management. Limited stormwater management controls, combined with a relatively high percentage of impervious surfaces and a low percentage of tree and forest coverage, have resulted in very poor water quality for this area. Reducing impervious surfaces, increasing tree cover and riparian vegetation (native plants that grow along streams and rivers), and restoring stream channels where applicable will result in improved water quality and an improved quality of life for residents.

The sector plan area includes three streams of significance whose protection and preservation are integral to the environmental quality of the neighborhood. These include Henson Creek, Oxon Run, and Barnaby Run. The streams are described below and depicted in **Map 7, Green Infrastructure Plan, on the facing page**.

**Henson Creek:** Henson Creek is a tributary of the Potomac River and a primary corridor within the Branch Avenue planning area. The preservation of the natural environment and the river's scenic character is a priority in this plan. Much of the Henson Creek watershed requires innovative policies and strategies to improve water quality. The medium- to high-density residential development, particularly along Branch Avenue and at the southwest intersection of Silver Hill Road and the Suitland Parkway, should include conservation methods to protect this stream and its tributaries. Henson Creek supports a stream valley greenway and trail system running between the Suitland Parkway and the Potomac River. The 5.5-mile hiker/biker/equestrian trail in this corridor includes an estimated two miles that have not yet been completed. Upon completion, this trail will provide access to the Branch Avenue Metro Station and the Suitland Parkway Trail. M-NCPPC owns the majority of the corridor and the trail system is designated and managed by the Department of Parks and Recreation. The greenway provides water quality and resource protection benefits and a connection to the planned Potomac Heritage Trail. Where possible, stream buffers along this corridor should be restored, enhanced, and expanded either through public projects or new private development.

**Oxon Run:** The Oxon Run stream corridor within the sector plan area is highly urbanized and lacks a supportive green infrastructure. Because Oxon Run is a primary corridor within the planning area, it should be managed and protected to support the environmental integrity of the area. As part of the Oxon Run rehabilitation strategy, there are plans to provide a multiuse trail along this M-NCPPC stream valley. This trail will provide access to the Naylor Road Metro and Hillcrest Heights Community Center. Development should include the reestablishment of buffers where they do not exist and water quality treatment on all new and redevelopment sites.

**Barnaby Run:** This tributary falls within the Oxon Run watershed and is a secondary corridor within the sector plan area. The tributary offers opportunities for connectivity of environmental resources and access from the neighborhoods and community facilities to larger natural areas. Plans include the provision of a multiuse stream valley trail along Barnaby Run. This stream valley trail will provide access to the North Barnaby Park and Aquatic Facility that lies to the west of the sector plan area, to two schools, and to the Marlow Heights Shopping Center. This trail access should include the reestablishment of buffers.

**Suitland Parkway:** The Suitland Parkway is an established greenway connecting the study area with surrounding jurisdictions and communities. It serves as an environmental and recreational resource that