

FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS MTAP

TEAM 5 PROPOSAL

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Context

Friendship Heights, straddling the Maryland/DC border, grew over the past 40 years into a regional destination center for high-end retail, with a form and function that no longer matches evolving consumer preferences or appropriately serves the surrounding neighborhood. At the same time, the convenient, transit accessible neighborhood is a very desirable location for additional multi-family residential development particularly given the significant regional need for more housing.

The transformation of Friendship Heights presents significant challenges:

- **Excess Retail Space** - High density retail complexes in both jurisdictions now exceed market demand, while lacking in other uses such as housing and community-focused services.
- **Community Pressures** - Resident preferences for lower densities make it difficult to redevelop properties.
- **Retail Leases and Inflexible Spaces** -The inflexibility of large interior mall and parking structures, as well as institutional property ownership, inhibit the redevelopment of key properties.
- **Walkability** -Lot size and the scale of commercial buildings and streetscape along major roadways discourage pedestrian activity and walkability.
- **WMATA Bus Lot** - As a key part of the transportation infrastructure which must be maintained, this use inhibits redevelopment options.
- **Identity of Friendship Heights** - Finally, the lack of cross-jurisdictional cooperation, disjointed transit linkages, and an incongruous mix of high-end and discount retailing prevent Friendship Heights from having a clear and compelling image and brand.

In considering the history and constraints of the neighborhood and the needs of the stakeholders, Team 5 articulated an overarching challenge, vision, and set of recommendations for phased development and revitalization of Friendship Heights.

Challenge:

How can Friendship Heights be transformed into a people-centric, "everyday neighborhood" with its own identity serving those who live and work there?

Vision:

Reimagine Friendship Heights as a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood, with a network of walkable, interconnected streetscapes that unify the neighborhood beyond the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor, and leverage redevelopment of a key catalyst site to stimulate the conversion of vacant retail space into residential and other community focused uses.

The goal is to create a neighborhood destination that is welcoming and inclusive, with shared green spaces and public art; a walkable experience that empowers non-car mobility; a curated retail experience that is a healthy and sustainable mix of food, beverage and small/flexible retailers; a place with shared amenities that promotes health and wellness; and additional residential development that establishes a critical mass to the neighborhood, ensuring long-term vitality.

Phase One: The Experience

Goal: Unify the district through branding and place management, while enhancing the pedestrian experience.

Beginning with interventions that can be implemented quickly with a high impact-to-cost ratio, we propose a series of cross-jurisdictional projects and collaborations, to unify the district's image and market the Friendship Heights "experience" through strategic placemaking initiatives and wayfinding.

Due to the complexities posed by the study area spanning both DC and Montgomery County, we propose creating a stewardship entity composed of residents, property, and business-owners for long-term "place management", (based on models similar to the Tysons Partnership or the Friends of White Flint). Members would voluntarily contribute an annual assessment to generate funds to be used for capital improvements, ongoing maintenance, branding, marketing, and staffing.

The scope of this phase would also lay the foundation for a new pedestrian framework of walkable alleys and upgrades to existing streetscapes, along with the introduction of pocket parks and public gathering spaces, resetting the commercial district as a hub of neighborhood activity.

Phase Two: The Catalyst

Goal: Catalyze the transformation of Friendship Heights through the redevelopment of underutilized sites as a mixed-use pedestrian-oriented development.

In Phase Two we kickstart the redevelopment of the existing retail setting in the neighborhood through a key catalyst site, shifting away from destination retail towards a blend of housing, community-focused retail, and educational uses. The scope of this phase includes redevelopment of the sites occupied by Lord & Taylor, the WMATA bus garage, and the surface parking lot between Jennifer St and Western Ave. Development of these properties into a mixed-use project addresses the need for more housing and vitality in the neighborhood, a shift to community focused retail, and the opportunity to create new open greenspace and pedestrian paths using the "Wedge" (see diagram) as the catalyst for the entire neighborhood.

Additionally, this phase includes reorientation of the Mazza Gallerie (rear) facade facing the surface parking as a primary entrance, enhancing connectivity to the Wedge, and facilitating pedestrian traffic. Redevelopment of these properties should occur as a joint development with WMATA to ensure their participation as well as to create a workable solution to replace their existing bus facility. By consolidating these three parcels, an expanded underground facility could be built that would achieve WMATA's objective of increasing its capacity while remaining in Friendship Heights.

Phase Three: The Evolution

Goal: Transition outmoded or surplus retail centers to neighborhood-oriented mixed use and activities.

In Phase Three we will build on the momentum of the previous two phases and spur the evolution of underperforming retail spaces in the neighborhood, beginning with Mazza Gallerie. Redevelopment of this high-profile property with a high density mixed-use project will set the stage for other property owners to reimagine surrounding retail spaces for creative new uses that can serve the surrounding communities. Chevy Chase Pavilion, for example, could be repurposed with educational, medical, or other types of uses. We anticipate additional underperforming retail properties on both sides of the border would continue the redevelopment trend and contribute to the vitality of Friendship Heights.

Phase Three -



- Current Automotive Thoroughfare
- Future Pedestrian/ Bike Thoroughfare
- Existing Retail Development
- Catalyst Site
- Future Multi-Family Development
- Transit Site
- Green Space

