VOLUME II

DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

McLEAN

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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DOCUMENT OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND

1A   OVERVIEW OF URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Urban Design Guidelines for the County's Commercial Revitalization Districts/Areas (CRDs/CRAs) are contained in two documents, collectively "the Design Guidelines".

– **Volume I: Urban Design Guidelines for Fairfax County's Revitalization Districts and Areas** contains urban design principles and strategies that are applicable generally to all the CRDs and CRAs.

– **Volume II: District Design Guidelines** (District Guidelines) contains urban design guidelines that are tailored specifically for each CRD or CRA based on the guidance contained in the Comprehensive Plan for the individual area.

The two volumes of the *Design Guidelines* should be used together to inform design decisions. **There may be instances where guidance provided in the Volume II District Guidelines may elaborate upon or contradict material provided in Volume I. In such instances, the guidance in Volume II supersedes the guidance in Volume I.**

For the purposes of these District Guidelines, the acronyms CRD and CBC are used interchangeably to refer to downtown McLean.

1B   BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The *Design Guidelines* serve as companion documents to the *Comprehensive Plan*. The *Comprehensive Plan* describes desired land uses, levels of development intensity, and provides general guidance on the built form, open space, site design, and transitions. The *Design Guidelines* provide detailed guidance on these matters. Primarily, the *Design Guidelines* are used to inform the design of public realm components such as streetscapes, signage and public art, plazas, parks, and landscaped areas, as well as ways in which private development interacts with the public realm to promote a coherent urban character. Together, the *Comprehensive Plan* and the *Design Guidelines* provide the urban design guidance for McLean.

The *District Design Guidelines for McLean* are graphic and written principles which are intended to be incorporated into the design of a project to aid in achieving a high level of design excellence. The vision of these *District Guidelines* is to assist in the implementation of the Plan vision for a visually cohesive, livable, pedestrian-oriented, and economically viable urban community, and to promote a clear and consistent process for developments and/or capital projects. They provide design options for creating an inclusive, sustainable community that aspires to high environmental standards, a high quality of life for its residents, and its own unique identity.

RIGHT
Townhouse development along Fleetwood Road in McLean
Image Credit: Fairfax County

Fleetwood Rd, McLean

1C AREA OVERVIEW

The McLean Community Business Center (CBC) is located about seven miles northwest of Washington, DC and is approximately 230 acres in size. The CBC is centered around the intersection of two major roadways, Chain Bridge Road and Old Dominion Drive. Additionally, the CBC is bounded by Dolley Madison Boulevard on its northern edge, as shown in the map on this page.

The McLean CBC contains several neighborhood-serving shopping centers that are accessible from Chain Bridge Road or Old Dominion Drive. Dispersed between these centers are commercial uses that include automobile service stations, banks, restaurants, and former residences converted to professional offices or small retail establishments. Recently, the Signet and Palladium offered additional residential options in addition to existing multi-family residential developments including the Ashby and McLean House, and several townhome communities.

1D ORIGINS OF McLEAN

In 1719, Thomas Lee purchased 2,862 acres in the vicinity of what is now known as McLean and Langley. The Treaty of Albany with the Iroquois League of Six Nations was signed in 1722, pushing Native Americans out of the area. From the 1700's until the early 1900's, McLean remained largely a farming community. In 1797, Little Falls Bridge (Chain Bridge) opened as the first bridge over the Potomac River connecting Virginia with District of Columbia turning what is now Dolley Madison Blvd. into a main thoroughfare. Many historical figures are intertwined with the history of McLean. One notable event was in 1814, when President James Madison and first lady Dolley Madison fled the Capitol during the burning of the city, and it is thought that they spent the night in Solona Village.

McLean's growth has been influenced by the development of transportation systems, proximity to the Nation's Capital, and by an expanding urban economy, particularly after World War II. In 1902, John R. McLean and Senator Stephen Elkins of West

FIGURE 1-1: MAP OF THE MCLEAN COMMUNITY BUSINESS CENTER

ORIGINS OF McLEAN (CONT'D)

TOP LEFT
The intersection of Old Dominion Dr and Chain Bridge Rd in 1968 in McLean, Virginia
Image Credit: Boris Feldblyum

TOP RIGHT
McLean House was built in 1975. It is the only high rise condominium in downtown McLean
Image Credit: Realtor.com

McLean, circa 1968

McLean House

BOTTOM LEFT
McLean Area, Looking north on Chain Bridge Road at intersection with Old Dominion Drive
Image Credit: Donie Rieger, c. 1966
City of Fairfax Regional Library

McLean, circa 1966

Virginia obtained a charter to operate an electrified railroad named the Great Falls & Old Dominion Railroad. John McLean was the publisher of the Washington Post and Cincinnati Enquirer newspapers. The trolley was a business venture between the two men to promote the scenic beauty of the Great Falls of the Potomac. The fourteen-mile-long trolley line connected Rosslyn to Great Falls Park, linking with Washington D.C. via the old Aqueduct Bridge. Its rails were laid through forests, farmland, and fruit orchards, bypassing the existing villages of Lewinsville and Langley. The trolley began operating on July 4, 1906, with 21 stops in the county.

One of the trolley stops was at Chain Bridge Road which was a major transportation artery through Fairfax County since colonial times. Initially, the stop was called Ingleside after a subdivision that was developing along Elm Street and Poplar Street (now Beverly Road). However, a hub of activity quickly began to form at the location and by 1910, residents began calling the Ingleside stop "McLean" in honor of one of the trolley's founders. The next stop to the west became known as Ingleside. In June of that same

year, Henry Alonzo Storm took over the operations of a general store that was located at Chain Bridge Road between the tracks and Elm Street, which included the McLean Post Office. There was no trolley depot. People either purchased their tickets at Storm's Store or from a conductor on the train. The day that Storm opened his general store is considered the beginning of McLean.

The Great Falls & Old Dominion Railroad had a significant impact upon the Northern Virginia countryside because it provided easier transportation to and from the District of Columbia. Farmers found it less difficult to get their crops and dairy products to market. Many businessmen discovered the art of commuting and sought permanent or summer homes for their families in the area. Little settlements, such as Franklin Park and El Nido, developed along the route, but the area surrounding the McLean stop underwent the most change.

For instance, St. John's Episcopal Church, built in 1877 along Georgetown Pike, was mounted on casters and hauled to a site on Chain Bridge Road, near the McLean stop. The Franklin Sherman School, the county's first consolidated public school, opened in 1914 with 29 students, bringing students from the one-room buildings at Langley, Lewinsville, and Spring Hill. Few students lived in McLean at the time, and many traveled to the school by way of the trolley. The school's first principal, Charlotte Troughton [Corner] established the McLean School and Civic League to support the school and became its first secretary. The League, which later became the McLean Citizens Association (MCA), established the first McLean Day Fair in 1915, purchasing the lot next to the school on Chain Bridge Road to begin raising money. Led by local businessmen and area residents, the League functioned as an unofficial town council meeting in donated space at the school. In addition to supplies for the school, fair funds began to be designated for improvements such a paving streets, seed money for the library, clubs, churches and even electricity for downtown, sponsoring its streetlights beginning in 1932.

The McLean Volunteer Fire Department incorporated in 1923 as Station No. 1 in Fairfax County and a two-bay station was built on Chain Bridge Road a block from the trolley stop. Members of

Sharon Lodge 327 built the Sharon Masonic Temple at Emerson Avenue and Chain Bridge Road in 1921, and the congregation of McLean Baptist Church erected its first church in 1923 on Emerson Avenue adjacent to the lodge.

It was natural that development would occur around the trolley stop and an amorphous village-like settlement began to develop. By the early 1930s, ridership on the trolley had declined with the rise of the automobile. After the route was abandoned in 1934, its tracks were removed, and the roadbed was turned into Old Dominion Drive.

World War II brought changes to the area as people who had moved to Washington, DC region to support the war remained. In 1953, the McLean School and Civic League reincorporated as the MCA and became active in civic and land use issues as the area developed. The population increase transitioned McLean from a rural area to a suburban community, especially with the opening of the Central Intelligence Agency in nearby Langley in 1961.

Figure 2-2 (Chapter 2) highlights several structures within the McLean CBC described as "Places of Character". Although this acknowledgment is not associated with any historical designation, these properties and buildings exemplify the historic development driven by McLean's influences and are recommended for further study. The properties were identified during an Architectural Survey conducted by the Heritage Resources Division of the Department of Planning and Development in late 2018.

For more information on the history of McLean or individual sites within the CBC, visit the following resources:

The McLean History Portal, a joint project of McLean residents and the Fairfax County Public Library's Virginia Room, is a centralized repository of community archives documenting this history and includes maps, photos, periodicals, oral histories, manuscripts, and organization histories. McLean History Portal - Fairfax County History - FCPL Curated Content at Fairfax County Government

1E STRUCTURE OF THE MCLEAN DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

The *District Guidelines* for McLean are organized into six chapters. This chapter, **Chapter 1**, introduces the *District Guidelines* and explains how and where they should be applied. **Chapter 2** presents the Comprehensive Plan vision and urban design framework. **Chapter 3** provides urban design guidance for streetscapes including paving, furnishings, trees, and stormwater management facilities. **Chapter 4** contains building frontage recommendations. **Chapter 5** contains recommendations on parks. **Chapter 6** addresses gateways, art, and wayfinding and interpretive signage. An Appendix includes sidewalk construction details.

– **Design Principles:** summarize each urban design element, defines the goals to be achieved, and explains the purpose of each element, as well as the desired conditions needed to successfully achieve its intent.

– **Design Strategies:** provide concepts, schemes, dimensions, and details to articulate a means to implement the ideas contained in the design principles.

– **Suggested Specifications:** include suggested products with model numbers, sizes, colors, and installation recommendations to illustrate the intended appearance and quality for certain design elements. These are primarily contained in Chapter 3.

– **References:** where relevant, references are made to related sections of the *Volume I* Guidelines, along with other pertinent guidelines, standards, and resources.

1F HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

The *District Guidelines* apply to development proposals for all properties located within McLean CBC. They are intended to be used by citizens, developers, landowners, designers, Fairfax County staff, the Fairfax County Planning Commission, and the Board of Supervisors when either proposing, designing or reviewing development proposals in the CBC.

The content in this document is designed to be applied as guidelines rather than as regulatory (mandatory) "one size fits all" requirements. The Guidelines are meant to offer design guidance only and there is flexibility in how or whether a design element or recommendation can be realized. The Guidelines are intended to:

– provide a common language with which to discuss how to create developments that contribute to an attractive, vibrant and livable area;

– offer clarity on important aspects to consider in the design of developments;

– help facilitate the dialogue that occurs among stakeholders in the development review process;

– provide solutions that balance the desire for a high quality environment with the need for developments to be feasible;

– foster desirable and compatible development that responds to the surrounding context; and,

– encourage the design of communities of the highest quality, where each building and public space contributes positively to the overall character of the area.

The *District Guidelines* are not a substitute for the codes and ordinance provisions associated with the development review process. They are meant to offer design guidance only. There is flexibility in how a design element may be realized, provided the design intent can be achieved. As such, **the *District Guidelines* are not prescriptive; architectural style, specific street furnishings, or plant species are not dictated. Rather, a palette is provided that allows for flexibility and innovation.** The *Design Guidelines* are intended to provide a frame of reference to be used for making specific design decisions; however, it is strongly recommended that the *District Guidelines* be followed with respect to elements in the public realm.

1G RELATIONSHIP TO THE PUBLIC FACILITIES MANUAL

It is intended that designers and reviewers will apply the *District Guidelines* to all projects located in the McLean CBC. The *District Guidelines* may differ from the requirements set forth in the Fairfax County Public Facility Manual (PFM) based upon the unique characteristics of the urban environment. The treatments and designs described in the *District Guidelines* may be substituted for details found in the PFM. Criteria for using them as an alternative to the PFM is found in PFM Sec. 2-1100 Applicability of the Urban Design Guidelines.
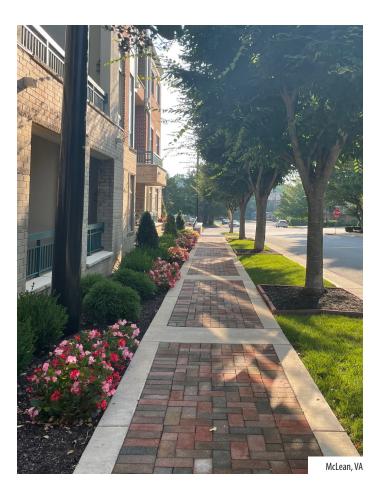
1H FLEXIBILITY IN APPLYING DESIGN GUIDANCE

There will be instances where the urban design and streetscape recommendations outlined in the Plan and the *District Guidelines* cannot be accommodated in the manner envisioned, even with reasonable adjustment and flexibility. Where pre-existing site constraints are present, or where infill or expansion of buildings or other existing features limit the ability of a development to satisfy the urban design recommendations, or when modifications to the streetscape guidance are necessary to conform to applicable County and/or Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) requirements, variations may be permitted on a case-by-case basis using the following criteria:

- The inability to conform to the recommendations is demonstrated through written and/or graphic evidence;

- Deviations are as minimal as possible; and,

- Modifications still meet the intent of the Comprehensive Plan and the *District Guidelines*.

1I FUTURE AMENDMENTS

As McLean and its surrounding neighborhoods develop and evolve, the *District Guidelines* may need to be amended to respond to those changing conditions. In addition, new technologies, maintenance challenges, and innovations may provide opportunities for different design strategies, new products, materials, etc., which should be reflected in updated versions of these *District Guidelines*.

McLean, VA

LEFT
Streetscape along the Palladium, a residential, mixed use development in McLean
Image Credit: Fairfax County