



Planning Area 15

FALLSGROVE AND RESEARCH BOULEVARD

Planning Area 15 contains two distinct areas within the city, the Research Boulevard corridor, with offices, laboratories and research & development firms, and the master planned community of Fallsgrove, consisting of attached and detached homes and apartment and condominium communities. The planning area is shown in detail on Figure 72.

Area Characteristics

Research Boulevard

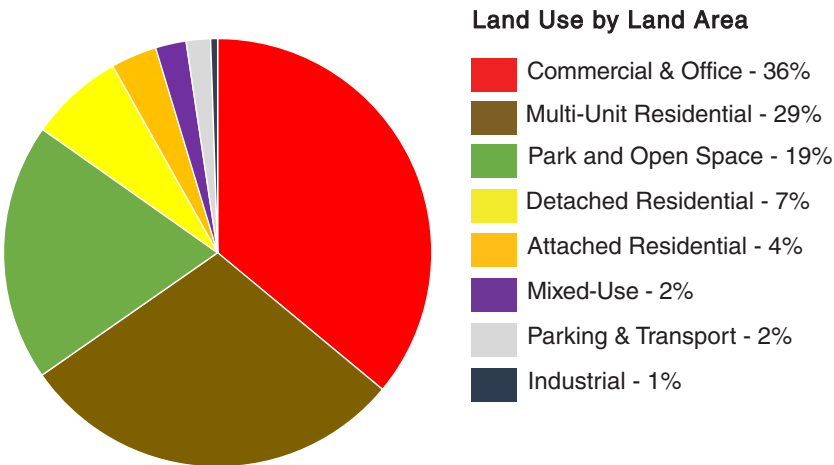
The Research Boulevard corridor is part of the I-270 High Technology Corridor, with visibility and accessibility to I-270 via its interchanges with Shady Grove Road and West Montgomery Avenue. It is also accessible to I-370 and the ICC (Inter-County Connector) via Shady Grove Road and MD-355.

Research Boulevard is a key employment center in Rockville, with some of the city’s most prominent businesses and approximately 9,000 employees. The development pattern along Research Boulevard is of office, laboratory, and medical research buildings on large lots. Some employers, such as Westat, have owned and occupied their buildings for decades and are expected to remain into the foreseeable future. Westat is the largest private employer in the city and a key office anchor for the corridor. Other buildings contain one or more leased tenants. Two hotels and a new retail area are also in this corridor.

Fallsgrove

The Fallsgrove neighborhood consists of 254 acres of the former Thomas Farm property that was annexed into the city in 1993 and developed according to a Comprehensive Planned Development (CPD) that was approved by Rockville’s Mayor and Council in 2000 and later amended. The amended Fallsgrove CPD authorized mixed-use development that included: 1,530 residential units; 150,000 square feet of commercial space; 950,000 square feet of office and R&D space; and 87 acres of open space, including sites for a community center and an elementary school. More

Existing Land Uses in Planning Area 15



Residential Dwelling Units	
Detached Residential	227
Attached Residential	437
Multi-unit Residential (apartment/condo)	748
Total units	1,412

Source: City of Rockville land records and GIS, 2019.



Residential townhouses in Fallsgrove



Thomas Farm Community Center

than half of the residential units within the Falls Grove planned development are multi-unit condominiums and apartments, including the Camden Falls Grove, Falls Grove Condos, and Post at Falls Grove. The neighborhood also includes attached townhouses and row houses, and single-unit detached homes.

As a planned development, Falls Grove was built to incorporate major design features, including:

- Extensive environmental protection areas;
- A network of well-designed and interconnected streets;
- A major public open space component;
- An integrated mix of uses;
- Higher standards for planning and site design than would be required under traditional zoning;
- Design and use features to accommodate alternative forms of transportation.

Thomas Farm Community Center opened in Falls Grove in 2009 and is the city's first and only community center west of I-270. City parkland surrounding the Center includes a reserved elementary school site, forested walking paths, and a large stormwater pond and wildlife habitat. The elementary school has yet to be built.

Planning History

Research Boulevard

The 1960 and 1970 City master plans laid out a vision for development of the farmland on both sides of the new

highway 70-S, now I-270, as a high-tech office district. The district was envisioned as a series of campus-like research and development office parks, developed with minimum five-acre lots under the I-3 (Industrial Park) zone. This vision continued through the 2002 CMP. An updated Zoning Ordinance in 2009 applied the MXE (Mixed-Use Employment) zone to allow development of medium-density office and light industrial uses, adding commercial and residential land uses as allowed uses.

In March of 2017, a panel of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Washington Chapter members convened at the request of the City to consider solutions for the Research Boulevard corridor. The ULI Technical Assistance Panel, or TAP, was jointly sponsored by the City of Rockville and Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. The panel's expertise was sought to address topics of much discussion in the planning and real estate professions: (1) What is the future of first-generation suburban office parks like those along Research Boulevard; and (2) How should the City of Rockville's planning efforts respond to changing market conditions and work cultures?

Some of the major recommendations from the ULI TAP report, *Research Boulevard – It's Not an Office Park!*, are included in this plan where they relate to the City's comprehensive planning policies. Other recommendations and background information can be found in the full report.

Falls Grove

The origin and make-up of the master planned Falls Grove community is described in the Area Characteristics, above. Except for a few remaining undeveloped parcels, build-out of the neighborhood is generally complete. The approved Comprehensive Planned Development for Falls Grove remains in effect today and any changes to the approved plan, and its subsequent amendments, require approval by the Planning Commission and Mayor and Council.

There is no neighborhood plan for this planning area and none is recommended.

Key Issues

The following issues were identified during the Rockville 2040 Comprehensive Plan effort:

- Consider the future of the Research Boulevard

corridor as a cluster for research and development, laboratory and office uses;

- Interest in improving bicycle and pedestrian safety and accessibility in the Research Boulevard corridor;
- Need to improve vehicle access and reduce congestion at the Fallsgrove Village Center shopping center.

Research Boulevard

In general, office buildings are classified into one of three categories: Class A, representing the newest and highest quality buildings in their market; Class B, generally a little older, but with good quality management and tenants; and Class C, which are typically older buildings that may be located on less desirable sites, from a market perspective, and are often in need of extensive renovation.

Primarily due to age, fewer than half of the buildings in the Research Boulevard corridor are classified as Class A. Overall office vacancy has been high, though most of the vacant space is concentrated in a few buildings. The majority of buildings have stable tenancy, but this could change given the weak regional office market, especially for offices in the suburban office-park setting, and the amount of Class B and C office space. Alternative uses, such as storage facilities, have begun to occupy some of the former office space. Older buildings that do not have amenities are difficult to lease and are the most likely to be demolished, but Class A buildings with good and modern amenities will likely continue to find strong tenants. There is demand for commercial laboratory space in the region and private development of such space has been increasing.

The Research Boulevard corridor was developed with a focus on automobile access. Although there are sidewalks on both sides of Research Boulevard, the existing infrastructure is not inviting to pedestrians. Sidewalks are narrow and lacking in streetscape features. Buildings are not located in a consistent manner, with some having deep setbacks and others being close to the street. The Fallsgrove Stream Valley Park is adjacent to office buildings south and north of West Gude Drive, but the park is underutilized and connections to Research Boulevard are lacking.

Within the Research Boulevard corridor, there are few food and beverage establishments or retail shops within walking distance of offices, although there are many within a ten-

minute drive. A new shopping center has been developed at the southern end of the planning area, providing a new dining and services destination for the area.

There is no direct proximity to Metrorail, yet bus routes connect the area to the Shady Grove and Rockville Transit Stations. The corridor is bracketed by two major intersections (Shady Grove Road and West Montgomery Avenue) that have direct access to I-270, which is an important marketing advantage for property owners. However, though buildings in the corridor are visible from I-270, their positioning away from the highway make them difficult to identify and locate.

Fallsgrove

Vehicular access to the Fallsgrove Village Shopping Center parking lot is primarily from Fallsgrove Boulevard and, less directly, Fallsgrove Drive. Patrons of the center complain about the limited access points, poor vehicular circulation, and insufficient parking capacity during peak hours.

Focus Area Recommendations

These land use policies and zoning and urban design recommendations apply to specific sites in the Planning Area.

AREAS 1-3

A1

A2

A3

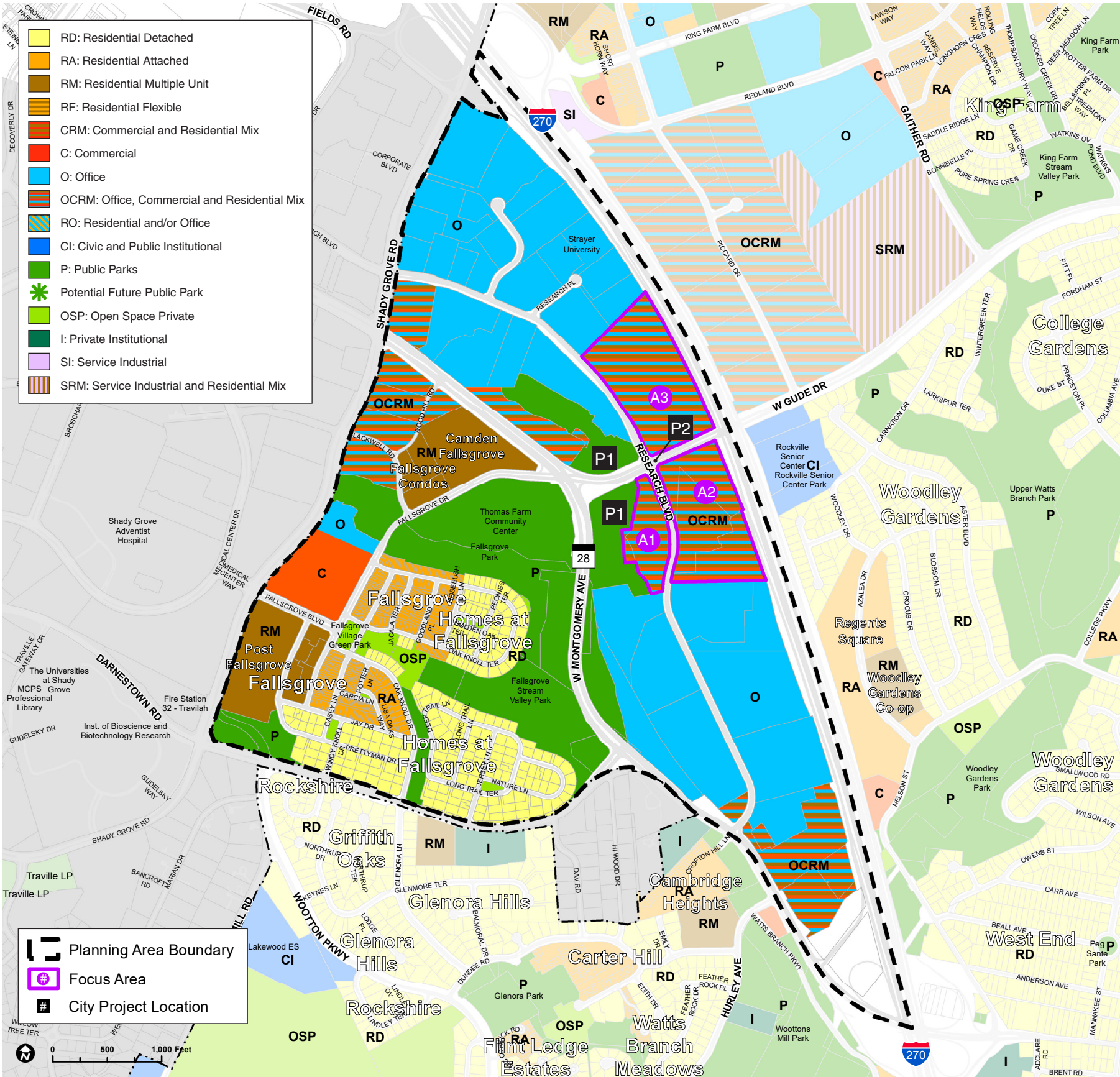
Intersection of West Gude Drive and Research Boulevard

Area 1 is one of the last undeveloped parcels of the Fallsgrove Planned Development. The parcel is located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Research Boulevard and West Gude Drive. Areas 2 and 3 are developed with a bank and office buildings.



The intersection of West Gude Drive and Research Boulevard

Figure 72: Land Use Policy Map of Planning Area 15



Land Use Policy Map

Areas 1 through 3 are planned for mixed-use development through the OCRM (Office Commercial Residential Mix) designation, encouraging a mix of office, commercial, and/or residential uses. (*See also Action 16.4 of the Land Use Element*)

Zoning Recommendation

Area 1 is zoned PD-FG (Planned Development - Falls Grove), which is regulated in accordance with the concept plan as approved by the Mayor and Council. The area was planned for “Office / Research & Development” in the concept plan. It remains an undeveloped site but, as of this plan’s adoption, is planned for residential development. The MXE (Mixed-Use Employment) zone is the equivalent zone for this area within the Falls Grove Planned Development and is not recommended to be changed. Similarly, areas 2 and 3 are zoned MXE (Mixed-Use Employment) and are not recommended to change.

Urban Design Recommendations

The intersection of West Gude Drive and Research Boulevard is identified as a potential community node in the Land Use Element (*see Figure 6 of the Land Use Element*). The concept for these nodes is that they will encourage non-vehicular trips to local shops, restaurants, or service businesses, and act as neighborhood anchors for social interaction as well as transit access. Any commercial uses should be as close to the corners of the West Gude Drive intersection as possible. Significant public open space, such as a plaza, urban park, or other amenity should also be encouraged as part of this node.

Redevelopment of property in this area should contribute toward a pedestrian-oriented, urban-scale streetscape. New developments should orient primary building facades and front doors toward a street or public open space to frame the edges of streets, parks, and open spaces, and to foster activated pedestrian areas. Building frontages should include ground-floor uses that attract customers or regular visitors, enhanced pedestrian areas and amenities, attractive landscaping, and bicycle infrastructure.

Recommended City Projects

These projects or studies are recommended to be undertaken by the City in specific locations within the Planning Area.

PROJECT 1 P1

Enhance Falls Grove Stream Valley Park between MD-28 (West Montgomery Avenue) and Research Boulevard to provide an accessible natural and open space amenity to this key employment area of the city.

PROJECT 2 P2

Study the potential for a community node at the intersection of West Gude Drive and Research Boulevard. (*See Figure 6 of the Land Use Element*)

Other Policy Recommendations

The following additional items are recommended to address key issues and opportunities in the Planning Area.

Land Use & Urban Design

1. The Research Boulevard corridor should remain focused on employment-generating office and commercial development, with some flexibility:
 - To provide amenities and uses that would support and complement office and commercial uses in the area; and
 - For properties facing Shady Grove Road that are appropriate for mixed-use development, including office, residential and commercial uses. (*See also Action 2.4 of the Economic Development Element*)
2. Implement key recommendations from the 2017 ULI TAP report, *Research Boulevard – It’s Not an Office Park!*, including the following:

Form Business Partnerships. Facilitate communication and organization among property owners in the corridor, possibly through the establishment of a Business Improvement District (BID) with the intent to improve the streetscape, provide a common shuttle to employees, and/or invest in common amenities.

Program Area-wide Improvements. Enhance the identity of Research Boulevard and improve walkability in the area by assembling a program of

area-wide improvements.

3. Work with local businesses and Rockville Economic Development, Inc. (REDI) to market the Research Boulevard corridor as a great place for a wide variety of businesses, including life sciences laboratories and offices.

Transportation

4. Improve bicycle and pedestrian access and safety within the Research Boulevard corridor through the completion of a transportation study and facility improvements.
5. Advocate for MDOT SHA to study potential approaches to peak-hour congestion and safety on MD-28 (West Montgomery Avenue) from Hurley Avenue to I-270. Support the State's recommendations for sight distance enhancements and improved pavement markings and signage from previous MDOT SHA studies (*See also Action 19.1 of the Transportation Element*)

Public Schools

6. Work with MCPS to determine the future plans for the reserved school site in the Fallsgrove neighborhood at Fallsgrove Park. If not used for a school, alternative school sites should be identified and the land retained as City parkland. (*See also Action 15.1 of the Recreation and Parks Element*)

Community Partnerships

7. Work with the community, including with churches and other institutions, to offer programming and events, within parks and other sites, in this planning area and others west of I-270.