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Planners initiate rezoning process for Aspen Hill commercial area

Plan could be approved by March 2015

by [Sarah Scully](#) Staff writer



Dan Gross/The Gazette

County planners have begun the process of rezoning a small section of Aspen Hill where an office building has stood empty since 2010.

The lot, at the intersection of Aspen Hill Road and Connecticut Avenue, is zoned as office space. Lee Development Group, which owns the property, has been unable to find a new tenant since British military contractor BAE Systems left the building four years ago. Business owners at the mall on the opposite side of Connecticut Avenue are eager for new retail to draw more customers to the area.

Planners are proposing an amendment to the Aspen Hill Minor Master Plan to allow other types of businesses to move in sooner. A scope of work document issued Jan. 23 got the process rolling.

Staff hopes the board can make a recommendation to the County Council and county executive by October. If all goes according to schedule, there will be an approved plan by March 2015.

This “kickoff document ... goes over some of the issues and opportunities that exist at the site,” senior planner Andrea Gilles said. She said planners are “looking at it really like it’s a blank slate and what is the most feasible and appropriate zoning for that location as we move forward.”

The company has been in discussions with retail giant Wal-Mart about moving into the space, pending rezoning, said Bruce Lee, president of Lee Development Group.

If the department waited to rezone the area as part of the next minor master plan review, [it could take up to 15 years](#) before the process was complete, Lee said. Meanwhile, the company continues to pay real estate taxes and upkeep on the building.

At a [community meeting](#) in December, neighbors and nearby business owners urged planners to expedite rezoning to allow for retail. Gilles said another community meeting will be planned for either late March or early April.

“We are hoping to bring a draft [of the amendment] to the Planning Board in June of this year,” she said.

Planners continue to accept comments, which may be emailed to Gilles at andrea.gilles@montgomeryplanning.org.