In 2000, President Dan Mote appointed a steering committee to develop a new master plan for the University of Maryland campus. Although state law requires universities to submit a revised plan every five years to ensure that facilities meet the institutions' needs, this committee decided to go a step beyond. Under the leadership of the provost and the vice president for administrative affairs, the 28-member group began by adopting a set of principles to provide not just guidelines for future development but a vision of a campus that truly reflects the values of the university.

In recognition of the university's special responsibility as the leading public research institution in a region noted for Smart Growth, the committee imagined a campus of coherent design based on four broad principles or goals.

- Create a campus that continues the architectural heritage of the past, embraces the wider community, and reflects the mission and values of a world-class public research university

- Create a campus that respects the natural environment, practices environmental stewardship and sustainability, and emphasizes harmony between natural and man-made landscapes

- Create a campus dominated by open spaces and carefully-sited buildings that invite pedestrian movement among the districts and help foster a sense of community

- Create a campus in which easy movement is facilitated in ways that minimize vehicular traffic and congestion