



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT**  
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

March 6, 2009

To: Montgomery County Planning Board

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Transportation Planning Division

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Subject: Roundtable Discussion: Update on interagency findings on PHED-requested study to identify bikeway/trail inconsistencies in County master plans

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**Recommendation:** Discussion item only in preparation for PHED worksession.

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**Background**

During its review of the Little Bennett Regional Park Master Plan (LBRPMP) in fall 2008, County Executive staff alerted the County Council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee (PHED) to potential inconsistencies with bikeway and trail recommendations between the LBRPMP and the Clarksburg area local master plan and/or functional master plans. In particular, County Executive staff expressed concern about the LBRPMP removal of two bikeways through the park's interior that were recommended in the 1994 Clarksburg Master Plan. We briefed the Planning Board on this issue during a roundtable discussion item on November 20, 2008. The Planning Board supported our staff position that the Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan (CBFMP) intentionally eliminated the bikeway through the park's interior, modified the facility type from a bikeway to a park trail and recommended instead an alternative bikeway route along MD 355 on the park's western boundary.

At a PHED worksession on January 15, PHED Committee members concurred with Executive and Council staffs that the removal of the 1994 Clarksburg Plan bikeways through Little Bennett Regional Park was not done as deliberatively and explicitly through the CBFMP public process as desired. The PHED Committee did not ask for changes to either the park plan or the Clarksburg Plan. Instead, PHED asked M-NCPPC and County Executive staff to investigate other area master plans to determine whether similar bikeways were intended to be removed by the CBFMP without explicit statements. The PHED Committee wanted to learn whether these types of inconsistencies are isolated and few in number or whether a larger problem exists.

## **Study Process**

Led by Transportation Planning staff, during January and February an interagency team consisting of representatives from the Department of Parks and the Montgomery County Department of Transportation investigated a sampling of twelve master plans approved and adopted prior to 2005 and compared the bikeway and trail recommendations in these plans with recommendations in the 2005 CBFMP and the 1998 Countywide Park Trails Plan (CPTP, as revised in 2002).

The team reviewed two types of potential consistency concerns:

- bikeway and trails of countywide significance (crossing a master plan boundary or connecting to a major destination) that were therefore changed by the 2005 CBFMP as depicted on (or absent from) CBFMP maps, but omitted from Table 2-2 of the CBFMP.
- bikeways recommended through parkland in pre-1998 area master plans that were changed to park trails in the 1998 CPTP, and therefore subject to the Department of Parks' trail corridor study process that could recommend a surface type inconsistent with bicycle transportation. These discrepancies are noteworthy because a park master plan is approved by the Planning Board but not adopted by the County Council. Therefore, a change to a bikeway as part of a park master plan may create a conflict with the adopted area master plan or functional plan.

## **Findings**

The team found examples of inconsistencies in three of the twelve plans reviewed, suggesting that there have been some systemic differences concerning how area master plans have approached and treated bikeway and trail recommendations, and the extent to which subsequent functional master plans have modified the facility type and/or location or alignment (or "desire line") over time.

Generally, the inconsistencies we found reflect changing practices and policies related to hard surface trail construction in parklands. We believe these changes were generally evident at the time the CBFMP was adopted in 2005, which explains in part why these concerns were not raised during the extensive public participation and plan approval process. In summary, we find that the removal of hard surface bikeways through sensitive natural areas on parkland has occurred through a transparent public review process, but we note that this transparent evidence is not always captured in the final Plan documents used by decision-makers and the public, nor are some of the resultant bikeway/trail recommendations sufficiently clear. We will review our specific findings in the Clarksburg, White Oak, and Kemp Mill master plan areas with the Board at the roundtable discussion next week.

We do not believe the inconsistencies we have noted have led to any missed opportunities for bikeway connections during plan implementation. These inconsistencies can, however, create confusion for both agency staff and the public during facility planning and/or subdivision review.

The question is, are the inconsistencies serious enough to warrant a limited amendment to the CBFMP and/or the CPTP? A CBFMP master plan amendment would resolve many of the inconsistencies. In these tight budget times, however, we recommend that the Planning Board defer a plan amendment indefinitely but direct us to complete our inventory of concerns. This inventory of concerns can, in the meantime, inform decisions made by the Planning Board during subdivision review and mandatory referrals of transportation projects or park master plans.