







Platt Ridge Drive Extended Drive, Mandatory Referral No. MR2014012

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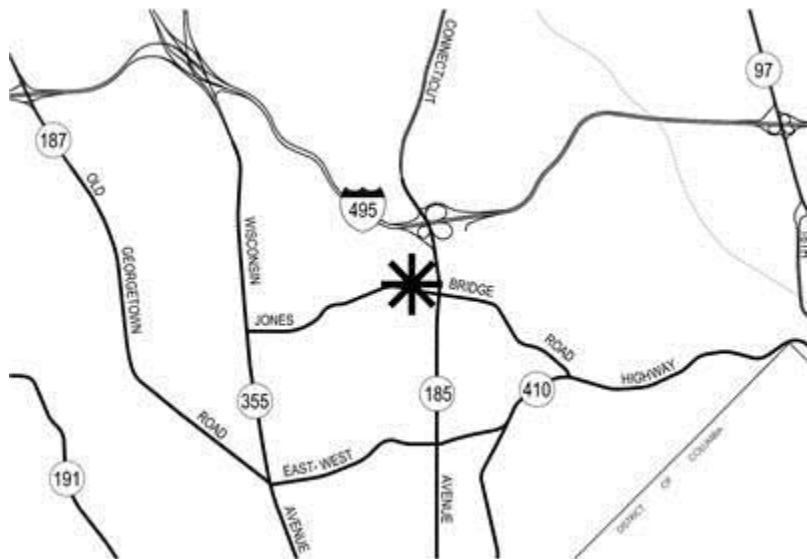
Completed: 03/27/14

Description

This project would construct an extension of the existing two-lane Platt Ridge Drive from its current terminus at Jones Bridge Road to the current terminus of Montrose Driveway just west of Spring Valley Road, a distance of approximately 490 feet. This non-master plan road project is proposed to be constructed through North Chevy Chase Local Park.

Mandatory Referral approval is requested for these improvements, for which a Forest Conservation Plan (FCP) is also required. The FCP is covered in a separate staff memo and must be approved before the Board acts on the Mandatory Referral. A separate memo will also be provided by Parks staff on the disposition of park property.

The project is located within the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan area. See Vicinity Map below.



Summary

Staff recommends that the Board disapprove this project with comments to MCDOT. We also recommend that the Board transmit comments to the County Council advising them as part of their CIP deliberations to cancel the project or, alternatively, to delay the project for several years (see Attachment 1).

The Platt Ridge Drive Extended project is proposed as the new main entry to the Chevy Chase Valley community to resolve longstanding access issues to and from Jones Bridge Road. This project was presented to the Board in September 2010 as the solution to avoid an expected safety problem with installing an “interim” traffic signal at Spring Valley Road, which had been requested by Chevy Chase Valley residents. Both SHA and MCDOT expected that a signal at this location would cause safety problems, but MCDOT agreed to install it on an interim basis to resolve the residents’ concern about a forecast increase in traffic resulting from the BRAC move of Walter Reed Hospital to the National Military Medical Center (NMMC) in Bethesda. MCDOT stated that they would monitor the safety of the signal but would continue the design of the Platt Ridge Drive Extended project in expectation of the signal’s failure.

While the forecast increase in traffic because of the BRAC move increased the urgency of correcting what was a long-term access problem for Chevy Chase Valley, the 2011 BRAC move was completed without the forecast increase in traffic materializing, apparently because the NMMC was so successful in reducing single-occupant vehicle (SOV) use. (Between 2007 and 2011, employee SOVs decreased from 72 percent to 40 percent while transit use increased from 11 percent to 44 percent.)

The expected traffic increase from BRAC did not appear and neither has a safety problem with the “interim” signal. Most of MCDOT’s comments in regard to safety at the Spring Valley Road intersection have focused on generic concerns about queuing through the intersection rather than the specifics about what our collision experience has been since the signal was installed. SHA’s planned addition of an eastbound left turn lane at Connecticut Avenue that would reduce the queuing on Jones Bridge Road has not yet been constructed but would reduce the length of the queue. It appears that MCDOT’s and SHA’s greater interest in the construction of this road is to lengthen the eastbound left turn lanes for the Jones Bridge Road/Connecticut Avenue intersection, not because of a concern about the safety of the Spring Valley Road traffic signal.

Both Parks and Planning staff recognize the importance of achieving good operations for our major roadways, but traffic benefits need to be balanced against the impacts of making improvements. We believe that this project should not be approved for the following reasons:

- the safety experience at this traffic signal is not significantly different from the pre-existing condition and therefore the construction of this non-master plan project is not needed for that purpose;
- the proposed roadway design is inadequate to serve as the entry to the Chevy Chase Valley community and to the Chevy Chase Recreational Association clubhouse and facilities and would in itself constitute a potential safety hazard; and
- the detrimental impacts of this project on parkland and on forest exceed the potential incremental traffic benefits.

Comments to MCDOT

1. The traffic signal at Spring Valley Road and Jones Bridge Road appears to have adequately resolved the access problem to the Chevy Chase Valley community without major safety problems. If MCDOT believes that the safety of this intersection needs to be improved, consider

changing the signal to a half-signal that would facilitate the eastbound left turn movement to Spring Valley Road by stopping westbound Jones Bridge Road traffic.

2. The horizontal and vertical alignments of the proposed road are inadequate to serve as the entry to the Chevy Chase Valley community and the Chevy Chase Recreational Association clubhouse and facilities and would create a potential safety hazard.
3. Should this project be pursued despite the Board's disapproval, the proposed horizontal and vertical alignment should be revised to meet the standards of a Primary street to the extent practicable but no facilities should be added, such as sidewalks or a wider roadway that would increase the impacts on forest and parkland. Pedestrians and bicyclists can continue to be adequately accommodated via Spring Valley Road. The cost to acquire any park and private property required to construct this road at a satisfactory horizontal and vertical alignment should be reflected in this project's PDF.
4. Any park property that is required for this project must be replaced at a 2:1 ratio. The replacement property should:
 - a. comprise four acres of land adjacent to an existing Local Park or Neighborhood Park in the same service area and watershed as the North Chevy Chase Local Park;
 - b. afford reasonable public access;
 - c. preferably be mature forest; and
 - d. have an equal or greater resource value than the parkland proposed to be taken.

The transfer of park property would require the approval of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (both the Montgomery County and Prince George's County Planning Boards).

5. Non-native Invasive species must be removed from all remaining forested area at North Chevy Chase Local Park, to be coordinated and approved by the M-NCPPC Forest Ecologist. This work would cover approximately 20 acres of forest and require at least two growing seasons to complete.
6. If the existing 8-inch sewer line in the area of disturbance requires relocation or replacement, that work should be shown on the plans and the cost should be reflected in this project's PDF.

Previous Board action

On September 16, 2010, the Planning Board discussed MCDOT's traffic study of the Chevy Chase Valley area and the potential construction of an extension to Platt Ridge Drive (see Attachment 2). The Board did not take an official vote but the guidance to MCDOT was that the Board was agreeable to proceeding with the study with the understanding that MCDOT would assess the adequacy of the "interim" traffic signal at Spring Valley Road and Jones Bridge Road and quantify the environmental and park impacts when the project was submitted for the Board's formal review.

The Mandatory Referral of Phases 1 and 2 of the Maryland State Highway Administration's (SHA's) Jones Bridge Road/Connecticut Avenue intersection project was denied by the Board on July 22, 2010, in part because they felt that inadequate coordination had taken place to address the concerns of the Village of

North Chevy Chase and of the residents of the west side of Connecticut Avenue north of Jones Bridge Road. SHA overruled the Board's denial and proceeded with the project but made access changes along Connecticut Avenue at the residents' request. (See Attachment 3 for SHA's response to the Board's comments.)

In its Mandatory Referral review of Phase 3 of SHA's Jones Bridge Road/Connecticut Avenue intersection project on July 16, 2012, the Board approved the relocation of a portion of the Forest Conservation Easement on the south side of Jones Bridge Road at Howard Hughes Medical Center to accommodate the improvements on the west leg of Jones Bridge Road. But the Board denied the proposed improvements on the east leg of Jones Mill Road because the impacts to residents of Chevy Chase Park at the southeast corner (removal of an existing boundary wall and approximately 90 trees) were felt to be too great. SHA is proceeding with this project – including the improvements on the east leg of Jones Bridge Road - but the construction is not anticipated to begin until this fall. (See Attachment 4 for SHA's response to the Board's comments.)

Site Context and Background

The project would be constructed through North Chevy Chase Local Park and abut, but not impact, adjacent single-family residential properties. One property with two single-family homes fronting on Jones Bridge Road abuts the project on the west. Abutting the project on the east are seven single-family homes, including one on the north side of Montrose Driveway. These homes are part of the Chevy Chase Valley community, consisting of 51 homes and the private Chevy Chase Recreational Association which includes the historic David Fairchild mansion. The Spring Ridge Drive/Jones Bridge Road intersection provides the principal ingress/egress to this community and is just east of the park.

In accordance with the recommendations of the 2005 Base Closure and Realignment Commission, Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, DC was moved in 2011 to the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (NMMC), immediately west of North Chevy Chase Local Park. NMMC now serves as the headquarters for Joint Task Force National Capital Region/Medical – and is the core of an integrated tri-service, military medical facility serving the National Capital Region. As noted above, SHA will construct two intersection improvement projects at the Jones Bridge Road/Connecticut Avenue intersection, one block east of Spring Valley Road, to mitigate their forecast increase in traffic from the BRAC move.

Project Description

The proposed Platt Ridge Drive Extended would be built as a 490-foot-long, 20-foot-wide closed-section road (with curbs) that would be elevated as much as 14 feet above the existing ground level. The proposed site includes an existing drainage channel with drainage structures at either end. The significantly eroded channel would be partially regraded.

The southern end of the project is at the existing intersection of Jones Bridge Road and Platt Ridge Road, which primarily serves as the access to Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) on the south side of Jones Bridge Road. Directly opposite Platt Ridge Drive is the southeast corner of North Chevy Chase Local Park. (See map below.) The proposed road would extend from the intersection north for a distance of about 600 feet, passing beside the homes on the west side of Spring Valley Road. The northern end of the project would tie into the existing terminus of Montrose Driveway, which has one additional house on the north side that fronts on Spring Valley Road.



Master Plan Consistency

The 1990 Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan recommends that the access problems associated with the Spring Valley Road/Jones Bridge Road intersection be addressed, however no extension of Platt Ridge Drive is recommended in this plan. (See Attachment 5) We believe that the installation of the traffic signal is sufficient to fulfill the master plan’s recommendation for better access to the Chevy Chase Valley neighborhood, whereas the roadway extension does not have such master plan support. Preservation of parkland and woodlands are noted as objectives of the plan; the construction of the proposed road would require the removal of forested parkland that would be inconsistent with the plan.

Additional analysis

Transportation

Access

Ingress into the neighborhood is currently provided only from Jones Bridge Road via Spring Valley Road, which would be turned into a right-in/right-out operation with the proposed elimination of the traffic signal at this intersection and closure of the median opening on Jones Bridge Road. The proposed new road would provide the primary ingress into the Chevy Chase Valley neighborhood for people traveling east on Jones Bridge Road; Spring Valley Road would continue to be the primary ingress .

Ingress into the neighborhood was previously also provided directly from Connecticut Avenue via Woodlawn Drive, Montrose Driveway, and Parsons Road, but that access was removed by SHA in response to a request by residents to reconfigure the intersections to prohibit turns into the neighborhood; that work was completed last year. Egress from the neighborhood is still permitted to southbound Connecticut Avenue at these three streets.

Egress from the neighborhood to Jones Bridge Road is currently provided by the traffic signal at Spring Valley Road; access to Connecticut Avenue in both directions is provided via eastbound Jones Bridge Road. In conjunction with the construction of Platt Ridge Drive Extended, SHA would remove the signal at Spring Valley Road and close the median opening on Jones Bridge Road at MCDOT's request; this would prohibit left turns to eastbound Jones Bridge Road and relocate them to the Platt Ridge Drive intersection.

Safety

On September 16, 2010, MCDOT presented a concept for this project to the Planning Board and promoted the new road as the long-term solution for safe access to the Chevy Chase Valley community, with the expectation that the "interim" traffic signal at Spring Valley Road/Jones Bridge Road would prove to be unsafe. The Planning Board agreed to allow the study to proceed on that safety basis even though the new road is not in the master plan and would be constructed on parkland. The impacts of such road construction had not yet been identified and the expectation was that when MCDOT returned for approval of the project, those impacts and the safety experience of the "interim" signal would be detailed. Indeed, following up on an October 4, 2010 public meeting attended by Planning, MCDOT, and SHA staff, the Chevy Chase Valley Citizens Association wrote in their letter of November 15, 2010, *"It is our hope that once the light is installed, the actual operation of the intersection would disprove the assertions that the signal would inadvertently cause more harm than good."* (See Attachment 6.)

The initial traffic study report for the Platt Ridge Drive Extended project was submitted to us for review about a year ago but did not document the safety experience at this intersection even though this was the basis for pursuing the project. After our request to have MCDOT flesh out what the safety experience has been at this intersection since the signal was installed in 2011, the initial traffic study report was revised to include plenty of information on what the traffic capacity benefits of constructing the new road would be, and even what the theoretical safety problems that would be expected with a close spacing of traffic signals, but almost nothing about what our actual safety experience was now that the signal was installed.

The focus of the traffic study report was duplicated in the letter that was sent on March 25, 2014 by MCDOT Director Art Holmes to Parks Director Mary Bradford in response to several questions she had posed (see Attachment 7). The need for the project was stated to be both safety and operations. Of the seven bullets addressing safety, only one of them (#6) concerns our actual experience since the signal was installed. It states that while that safety data is not conclusive – a point on which we agree – *"it can logically be inferred that there will be an even higher rate of crashes at Spring Valley Road if the signal remains at the current location and there are more conflict points (i.e., more lanes through the intersection in the proposed SHA intersection improvements)."* On the latter point, we disagree. There is a planned increase of one eastbound lane that is intended to reduce the queuing that now exists; if the signal works reasonably well now and the period of queued traffic will decrease, safety should improve overall. And as the State Highway Administrator Melinda Peters stated in her March 17, 2014 letter to Deputy Director of Parks Mike Riley, SHA's intersection improvements project at MD185/Jones Bridge Road will work whether or not the traffic signal at Spring Valley Road stays in place (see Attachment 8).

We received a collision history from MCDOT but no analysis of that history, and in response we asked four direct questions that should have been included in such an analysis:

- The history does not go back far enough to establish a trend, and the introduction of a new signal could trigger new or different types of collisions during the break-in period. What length of time is typically considered as adequate to establish the operations of a new signal?
- What variation in collisions would be considered statistically significant? (This analysis is done for all the pedestrian projects being considered in the Pedestrian Safety Initiative.)
- How does the collision history of this road measure up against similar roads statewide?
- How have the traffic volumes on this road changed since the BRAC move to the National Military Medical Center?

MCDOT did not provide the answers to these questions, so we asked a consultant we had under contract to do an analysis to answer the questions so that we would have a complete Mandatory Referral submission. The consultant's analysis was based on the crash data provided by MCDOT and considered the entire segment from Platt Ridge Drive to Connecticut Avenue as it is difficult to meaningfully isolate just the Spring Valley Road intersection from the influence of the other intersections due to the close spacing. The subject segment appears to have had:

- 8 crashes in 2009, with 5 occurring at Connecticut/Jones Bridge
- 5 crashes in 2010, all occurring at Connecticut/Jones Bridge
- 10 crashes in 2011, 4 before and 6 after the signal installation (6 of the 10 occurred at Connecticut/Jones Bridge)
- 9 crashes in 2012, with 4 occurring at Connecticut/Jones Bridge

<p style="text-align: center;">Accident Rate Formulas</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Highway Section Rate (Accidents/100MVM) = $\frac{\text{Annual Accident Frequency}}{\text{Annual Vehicle-Miles of Travel (in 100 millions)}}$</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Intersection Rate (Accidents/MVE) = $\frac{\text{Annual Accident Frequency}}{\text{Annual Volume Entering Intersection (in millions)}}$</p>

Given the crash frequency, segment length and ADT, the following crash rates were calculated for this segment using the above formula:

Road Segment	Year	Number of crashes	ADT	Segment Length (mi.)	Crash Rate ¹
Jones Bridge Road from Connecticut Ave to Platt Ridge	2009 (pre-signal)	8	18300	0.17	705
	2010 (pre-signal)	5	18300	0.17	440
	2011 (pre-signal)	4	18400	0.17	707
	2011 (post-signal)	6	18400	0.17	1042
	2012 (post-signal)	9	18250	0.17	795
<i>Statewide Average (For All Roadway Types 4 lanes No Access Controls)</i>					300

Discounting the first six months after the signal was installed in 2011 which is typically a period of motorist adjustments, there is no statistically significant change in the rates before and after, even though the collision rate is higher than the statewide average for similar facilities.

While the crash rate at the Spring Valley Road/Jones Bridge Road intersection is not significantly different from what it was before installation, our consultant suggested possibly changing the signal to a half-signal that would facilitate the eastbound left turn movement to Spring Valley Road by stopping westbound Jones Bridge Road traffic (see Attachment 9). Left turns out of Spring Valley Road would be prohibited and eastbound Jones Bridge Road traffic would not be required to stop, thereby eliminating the issue of left-turns out of Chevy Chase Valley conflicting with the queue from the signal at Connecticut Avenue extending through the intersection. These left turns would be accommodated either at one of the three roads intersecting Connecticut Avenue or by making a right turn and then a U-turn at the existing Platt Ridge Drive intersection on Jones Bridge Road.

Note that the change to a half-signal would be a safety improvement at Spring Valley Road but the signal does not itself appear to cause a more unsafe condition than existed prior to its installation.

Capacity/Efficiency

MCDOT's traffic report said little about our actual experience at the Spring Valley Road signal, but focused more on the theoretical concerns with close spacing of intersections including queuing through the Spring Valley Road intersection. While the queuing problem through this intersection would be reduced by means of SHA's Phase 3 improvements to the Jones Bridge Road/Connecticut Avenue intersection, these improvements are not a panacea. Backups for eastbound traffic on Jones Bridge Road in the afternoon peak period currently extend about a half-mile past Platt Ridge Road, as confirmed by SHA staff in a recent meeting.

SHA's improvements to the Jones Bridge Road/Connecticut Avenue intersection were intended to ensure that the traffic congestion after the BRAC move of Walter Reed Hospital to the National Military Medical Center (NMMC) was no worse than it was prior to the move. While the objective was also to get

these improvements done prior to the move, that did not occur. Some of the projects, including Phase 3 of the Jones Bridge Road/Connecticut Avenue project, have not yet been advertised even though the BRAC move was completed in 2011. The expected increase in traffic congestion has also not occurred because NMMC was so successful in encouraging its personnel to carpool and take transit.

We agree that the intersection spacing with the additional traffic signal at Spring Valley Road is less than guidelines call for and would work better in terms of the vehicular operations of the roadway without it. However, traffic volumes have not increased since the BRAC move and SHA's Phase 3 improvements - now scheduled to start construction later this year - will add a third eastbound left turn lane on Jones Bridge Road at Connecticut Avenue, reducing the problem of queuing through the Spring Valley Road intersection. The incremental traffic benefit does not appear to be worth the cost of the project.

Priorities and Funding

This project is in the County Executive's Recommended Capital Improvements Program with an estimated cost of \$3.7M for a 490-foot-long 20-foot-wide road, about \$7,551 per linear foot. This is actually more expensive on a linear foot basis than the master plan alternative for M-83, a four-lane divided roadway, which is estimated at \$350M for a 12.2-mile road, or about \$5,433 per linear foot.

The cost for the Platt Ridge Drive Extended project however does not include right-of-way, which is noted as being acquired via donation from M-NCPPC or through the Advanced Land Acquisition Revolving Fund (ALARF). Staff does not recommend donating park land for a non-master plan transportation project and ALARF is only intended as a temporary funding device to be paid back when a project is listed in the CIP as an individual project. Since this project is already in the CIP, the cost of replacing the parkland should be included. Assuming that the parkland would have to be purchased in the same general area on a 2:1 basis, and that additional private property may need to be taken (as discussed below), that could increase the total cost by more than \$2M. Given all the competing interests in the CIP, this would not seem to be a good use of the County's funds.

We also question whether the County should be the entity that is funding this project. In July 2010, Councilmember Roger Berliner asked that SHA *"set aside \$2 million when funds become available so that this project can proceed with funding if and when the solution is embraced."* (see circle 8, Attachment 2) The following month, then-State Highway Administrator Neil Pedersen responded by saying, *"When funds become available, SHA agrees to begin the preliminary engineering phase for the Platt Ridge Road Extension, provided that MCDOT accepts ownership and maintenance responsibilities of the new roadway and the Montgomery County Planning Board and M-NCPPC support the park impacts of the new roadway. The SHA will not exhaust funding and move forward with the Platt Ridge Road Extension without full support from MCDOT, M-NCPPC, and the Planning Board."* (see circle 10, Attachment 2)

Despite the August 2010 assumption of responsibility for this project by SHA, no State funding has yet been provided.

Design

The design of the roadway could create a safety problem in itself. Since this proposed new road is not in the master plan, it has not been classified. However, since the road is intended to serve as the primary point of access for Chevy Chase Recreational Association, which includes swimming pools, tennis courts

and a nursery school/daycare among its facilities, as well as the 51 homes in the Chevy Chase Valley neighborhood, it is appropriate to evaluate it as a Primary street.

Horizontal Alignment: Section 50-26(d) of the County Code establishes 300 feet as the minimum centerline radius for a primary street, but Platt Ridge Drive Extended is proposed to have only a 100-foot radius. In addition, the Code requires a tangent (a straight length of roadway) at least 100 feet long between two reverse curves, except in a secondary or tertiary residential street, but no tangent is proposed between the sharp 100-foot-radius curve and the adjacent 500-foot-radius reverse curve. The proposed horizontal alignment is therefore sufficient to meet only the standard for a tertiary road, which is inadequate to serve its purpose.

Our concerns with the combination of the substandard centerline radius and the lack of a tangent between the two curves are:

- A blind spot could be created at the curve, which is almost a 90-degree turn
- Drivers will tend to cross the centerline to avoid making the sharp turn
- Northbound drivers could travel too fast to negotiate the sharp turn

Redesigning the proposed road between Montrose Driveway and Jones Bridge Road to meet the standards for a primary street with an intersection at Platt Ridge Drive would be very difficult. It appears that this would require the taking of one lot with two homes on Jones Bridge Road nearest the southern project terminus, and it would likely impact the single-family property on the south side of Montrose Driveway nearest the northern project terminus (see Attachment 10).

Vertical Alignment: The proposed grade of the road is 10.75 percent, significantly in excess of the normal eight percent maximum for primary streets. (Six percent would be a more desirable maximum.) The steep grade would increase the above concern about northbound drivers perhaps traveling too fast as they approach the curve since they would also be on a downslope.

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Official's policy on geometric design of streets states, "Sharp horizontal curvature should not be introduced near the bottom of a steep grade approaching or near the low point of a pronounced sag curve" "Vehicle speeds....are often high at the bottom of grades, and erratic operations may result, especially at night." The combination of the steep grade and sharp turn also raises a safety concern in itself, but one that is compounded by the potential for winter icing at the curve, particularly since the only proposed curb inlets are on Montrose Driveway, below the curve.

Design Summary: The road design is deficient in regard to both horizontal and vertical curvature and the combination of the two creates a significant safety concern. If the road is built, it should be redesigned to meet the standards of a Primary street.

Bike and Pedestrian Accommodation

Bicyclists and pedestrians would not be accommodated on the proposed road, which is intended to bring vehicles to a signalized intersection and for which the minimum roadway width is proposed to reduce impacts to parkland. Should the road be built, we agree with keeping the typical section as small as possible through parkland and that there is no reason to provide additional bike or pedestrian accommodation since there are no additional destinations on this short road.

Environmental Impacts

The project as designed would require the clearing of 1.35 acres of forest, including 0.35 acres of forest that would be converted to impervious cover. This project would require an approved Forest Conservation Plan (FCP) and Tree Variance in order for the Board to act on the Mandatory Referral; however staff recommends denial of the FCP and variance. These issues, along with a greater description of the environmental impacts are discussed in a separate memo to the Board.

Parks

Background

North Chevy Chase Local Park serves the Bethesda/Chevy Chase area. It is located south of Interstate 495, west of MD Route 185 (Connecticut Avenue), east of the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, and north of Jones Bridge Road. The park is approximately 31 acres in size and includes a park activity building, two tennis courts, a full basketball/multi-use court, playground, three athletic fields, and parking area. The three athletic fields include two diamonds and a rectangular overlay. One of the diamonds serves as the home field for Bethesda Little League.

Unimproved areas of the park are covered with relatively high quality, mature, mixed deciduous forest. Because of its structural complexity and maturity, the forest supports a wide variety of wildlife species and offers significant aesthetic appeal. The forest also provides significant air quality and stormwater management benefits.

The 1990 Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan noted that the park acreage per person in the planning area is low compared to other planning areas and that these parks provide “relief from concrete and asphalt.” The plan also notes that the sense of openness and beauty of the area is enhanced by the presence of “wooded vacant developable land” in parks. Preservation of woodlands is also noted as an environmental objective.

The Department of Transportation Act (DOT Act) of 1966 included a special provision - Section 4(f) - which stipulated that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and other DOT agencies cannot approve the use of land from publicly owned parks, recreational areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, or public and private historical sites unless the following conditions apply:

- There is no feasible and prudent alternative to the use of land.
- The action includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the property resulting from use.

The deficiencies in the design of the horizontal and vertical curvature noted above appear to be the result of MCDOT trying to keep impacts of the road limited to park property rather than avoiding park property. Unlike SHA’s adjacent Jones Bridge Road/Connecticut Avenue project that is federally funded, this is a County project and therefore not subject to Section 4(f), but avoidance of using parkland as the first choice was the reason the law was put in place.

Anticipated Impacts on North Chevy Chase Local Park

The proposed road alignment runs along a glen in the southeast corner of North Chevy Chase Local Park with an average grade from Jones Bridge Road to Montrose Drive of close to 11%. Given the existing topography, the project design relies heavily on retaining walls and engineered slopes. The project

would result in the loss of approximately 2 acres of parkland -- all of which supports relatively high quality, mature, mixed deciduous forest. The proposed impact area includes 1.15 acres of physical land disturbance, 0.35 acres of expected additional forest dieback related to critical root zone and physical impacts to parkland forest, and 0.55 acres of impact associated with existing parkland that would be cut-off and isolated from the rest of the park by the road project. The 1.15 acres of land disturbance would result in the loss of approximately 17 specimen trees- mostly tulip trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). Perhaps most significant, the project will convert 0.35 acres of down-county mature forest to impervious surface. A separate memo to be discussed at this Board session will also be provided by Parks staff on the disposition of park property.

In addition to the road construction, the project would require relocating a sewer line and an intermittent drainage channel. This channel at about 330 feet in length, daylights from a storm drain adjacent to Jones Bridge Road at the point of a severe head cut, and goes into an inlet at the end of Montrose Drive. Based on the project design concept, the relocated channel would be incorporated with a bio-swale type of stormwater management (SWM) structure.

The Park Development Section has concerns about the design. The original Concept set of plans submitted in late February of 2013 showed that SWM for the road project would be handled in the existing storm runoff channel with bio-swale treatment. Current plans show the SWM treatment in a separate SWM Pond facility at the NW corner of the road where it connects to Spring Valley Road. This change would require more disturbance to parkland and would necessitate additional forest clearing beyond what was previously identified.

Should this project be constructed, Parks staff recommends that DOT use their original concept design for SWM treatment to eliminate the increased land disturbances, or provide a different SWM approach of providing structural treatment under the road. An additional concern is that the construction plan set does not adequately provide for the storm flows from the pipe crossing under Jones Bridge Road. There are no details provided for reviewing the required channel stabilization methods necessary to control the runoff in the newly created conveyance channel and avoid future erosion of that channel.

An existing 8" sewer line goes through the park and house connections are provided for the adjacent property owners. No additional information is provided on the plans (other than showing its location) regarding the impacts of the project construction and road fill grading over the top of this aging pipe infrastructure. If a relocation or replacement of this pipe is required, it should be shown in the project plans and accounted for in the project cost.

Mitigation/Compensation

According to language in the Platt Ridge Drive Extended PDF, M-NCPPC is expected to dedicate the right-of-way for the project, or it will be purchased by Montgomery County using ALARF funds. Since the PDF for this project already exists, the use of ALARF funds does not seem appropriate; any right-of-way expenses should be reflected in this PDF.

Since this project is not a master planned road, dedication of parkland for the roadway right-of-way at no cost is not appropriate. A no-cost land transfer would set a bad precedent by making road projects through parkland cheaper than alternatives outside of parks. Any land exchange or sale of parkland for this project would require approval of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (Montgomery County and Prince George's County Planning Boards).

If the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project moves forward as proposed and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission authorizes disposition of the park area, the Department of Parks recommend the following compensation, assuming approval of the Commission:

- 2:1 replacement - preferably 4 acres of mature forest adjacent to an existing Local Park or Neighborhood Park in the same service area and watershed as the park, that affords reasonable public access and equal or greater resource value.
- Non-native Invasive species removal of all remaining forested area at North Chevy Chase Local Park to be coordinated and approved by the M-NCPPC Forest Ecologist. Work to involve at least 2 growing seasons and involve approximately 20 acres of forest.

Outreach

A public notice of this Planning Board meeting was sent by staff to area community associations.

In addition to attending a Chevy Chase Valley Citizens Association board meeting in 11/14/13, MCDOT held a public meeting on this project on March 26, 2013. There was confusion and concern on the part of residents who feared that they would lose safe access to their neighborhood without the construction of the Platt Ridge Drive Extended project.

Both MCDOT and SHA staff at the meeting stated that median on the Jones Bridge Road at Spring Valley Road would be closed as part of SHA's Jones Bridge Road/Connecticut Avenue intersection project, leaving the Platt Ridge Drive Extended project as the only way to retain reasonable safe access to Jones Bridge Road. Planning staff at the meeting was adamant that the median had to remain open until the Board concurred on the Platt Ridge project, but the SHA project manager said the median would have to be closed and MCDOT staff said that if the median was not closed, all of the benefits of extending the left turn lanes for Connecticut Avenue intersection project would be lost. While it's true that SHA does have the power to close the median at Spring Valley do this even if MCDOT objects, it is highly unlikely since they work in a very collaborative way with MCDOT. And MCDOT has the responsibility to ensure that adequate access for the County's residents is retained in any project undertaken by the State.

One resident asked for metrics of the problem that the project was trying to address: how long would the queue be both with and without the Spring Valley signal and what percentage of the time would the Spring Valley median be blocked compared to Platt Ridge with the relocated signal. While they had brought their traffic report to the meeting and Traffic Division staff was in attendance, MCDOT provided no answers to these questions.

In a discussion with some residents after the meeting, Planning Department staff tried to make it clear that the Board had not made a decision on the project and that MCDOT had not yet demonstrated that the interim signal did not work adequately.

The information presented at the meeting concerning the median closure and the traffic signal was recently refuted by the State Highway Administrator in a letter dated March 17, 2014 (see Attachment 8), in response to a request for information from the Department of Parks in regard to the Section 4(f) impacts on parkland. The following are excerpts from that letter:

- *In response to your letter requesting clarification of whether the SHA project requires closing the median at Spring Valley Road, it does not. The SHA project will provide the expected benefit whether the median is open or closed.*
- *MCDOT installed a temporary traffic signal at Spring Valley Road, which will operate until the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project is completed.*
- *The median at Spring Valley Road is proposed to be closed by SHA's Phase 3 project **at the request of MCDOT** (emphasis added), but not until the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project is completed.*

We note that SHA's letter states that the proposed median closure came at MCDOT's request rather than SHA imposing it on MCDOT.

The information presented at the March 26, 2013 meeting likely made the project more controversial than it would have been otherwise, as did the lack of an explanation to those in attendance the public opportunities to influence the outcome, such as the Mandatory Referral process and the future public hearing. Thus the true, informed public sentiment on this project has been difficult to gauge. SHA's letter was distributed to the President of the Chevy Chase Valley Citizens Association as soon as we received it on March 17, 2014 in an effort to clarify the situation concerning the potential median closure and removal of the Spring Valley Road traffic signal in advance of the posting of this staff memo.

County Council Review of the County Executive's Recommended FY15 Capital Budget and FY15-20 Capital Improvements Program (CIP)

The Board reviewed the County Executive's Recommended CIP on February 6, 2014 and transmitted comments to the County Council the following day (see Attachment 12). These comments included the statement that the Platt Ridge Drive Extended project had not yet been reviewed but may not be needed. When the Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy, and Environment Committee (T&E) subsequently reviewed the transportation portion of the CIP, they decided to delay consideration of the project until the Board had acted on the Mandatory Referral. T&E now plans to discuss it on April 21, 2014 as part of their review of the operating budget.

Since the traffic signal at Spring Valley Road appears to have adequately addressed the need for better access to the Chevy Chase Valley community, we believe that the Board should recommend to the Council that they delete the project from the CIP. If the Council decides to retain it in the CIP, the project should be delayed by several years until SHA's Jones Bridge Road improvements have been completed and can be evaluated as to their effectiveness in reducing the queue on Jones Bridge Road. The traffic signal at Spring Valley Road can then be judged in that context, as well as having a longer period of time to assess the safety record. In addition, if the project is retained in the CIP, the cost of replacement parkland should be included in the PDF.

Conclusion

While the expected increase in traffic because of the BRAC move increased the urgency of correcting a long-term access problem for Chevy Chase Valley, the BRAC move has come and gone and the increase in traffic has not materialized. In addition, half of SHA's road improvements to improve traffic conditions at the nearby Jones Mill Road/Connecticut Avenue intersection have not been implemented.

The Platt Ridge Drive Extended project was intended as a backup solution should the “interim” traffic signal at Spring Valley Road not work safely, but insufficient documentation has been provided to substantiate a safety problem with that signal. The intersection appears to operate at about the same level of safety as it did previously and the incremental traffic benefit is not worth the impact on forested parkland.

The proposed road design is clearly deficient and would potentially create a safety hazard in itself. Correcting that design to meet the standards for a Primary street would likely require the taking of two homes and impact another. This design has not been vetted with the community nor has it been reflected in the project costs, which are already extraordinarily high.

The proposed project should not be approved by the Board.

Attachment 1: Draft letter to Council

Platt Ridge Drive Extended (P501200)

On February 7, 2014, the Planning Board transmitted to the County Council our comments on the County Executive's Recommended CIP (see Enclosure x). These comments included the statement that the Platt Ridge Drive Extended project had not yet been reviewed by the Board but that it may not be needed. When the Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy, and Environment Committee (T&E) subsequently reviewed the transportation portion of the CIP, they decided to delay consideration of the project until the Board had acted on the Mandatory Referral. On April 3, 2014, we voted to deny the Forest Conservation Plan and to disapprove the mandatory referral for the project, finding that the project was not needed to provide safe access to the Chevy Chase Valley community. We therefore recommend that the Council delete this project from the CIP.

This project was added to the CIP in response to concerns raised by the community that their already deficient access would be worsened by BRAC traffic. The community requested a traffic signal at Spring Valley Road, which MCDOT was hesitant to approve because they believed it would cause a safety problem, however the signal was installed on an interim basis pending a post-installation safety evaluation. The signal appears to have adequately addressed the need for better access to the community without creating a safety problem. The 490-foot-long road project is therefore unnecessary and would cause the following impacts:

- Loss of approximately 2 acres of parkland
- Loss of 1.35 acres of forest
- Likely cost in excess of \$5M, once all the right-of-way costs for park property replacement and private property acquisition are included in the PDF

While there does not appear to be a safety problem with the current traffic signal at Spring Valley Road, the design of the Platt Ridge Drive Extended project has the potential to cause its own safety problem. The road would serve the function of a Primary street but is far below Primary standards in regard to its horizontal and vertical alignment. The project would have to be redesigned to meet County standards but would have greater construction costs and appear to require the taking of at least one residential property with two single-family homes and perhaps impact one other single-family property.

We believe that the project should be cancelled, but should the Council decide to retain it in the CIP, we believe that the project – in addition to being redesigned - should be delayed by several years until SHA's Jones Bridge Road improvements have been completed and can be evaluated as to their effectiveness in reducing the queue on Jones Bridge Road. The traffic signal at Spring Valley Road can then be judged in that context, as well as having a longer period of time to assess the safety record.

In addition, if the project is retained in the CIP, the cost of replacement parkland should be included in the CIP. The PDF for this project currently states that the land will be donated by M-NCPPC for the project or that any replacement parkland can be purchased with Advanced Land Acquisition Funds (ALARF). Any parkland needed for the project will not be donated but must be replaced, and ALARF is typically only used when there is not a project to charge the costs to, which is not the case with this project. Therefore, the cost of replacement parkland, as specified in our enclosed letter to MCDOT, should be reflected in the Platt Ridge Drive Extended PDF. The cost of any additional private properties that would need to be taken to construct a design to County standards for its horizontal and vertical alignment should also be reflected.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. Please feel free to call me at 301-495-4605 to discuss, or you may call Larry Cole at 301-495-4528.

Sincerely,

Francoise



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

MCPB
ITEM # 17A-2
September 16, 2010

DATE: September 8, 2010

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Dan Hardy, Chief *DKH*
Move/Transportation Planning Division

FROM: Larry Cole: 301-495-4528, for the Planning Department *LC*

DISCUSSION: BRAC roundtable: Chevy Chase Valley/Spring Valley Study Report
Platt Ridge Drive Extension through North Chevy Chase Local Park

The roundtable discussion of the traffic study performed by the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) for the Chevy Chase Valley neighborhood was originally scheduled for July 29, 2010. This memo is intended to update the Board on any changes that have occurred since July 21, 2010, the date of our original memo, which is shown as Attachment 1. The report itself is shown as Appendix C-9 on our BRAC website.

Planning and Parks Department staff will be meeting with MCDOT on September 13, 2010 at North Chevy Chase Local Park to discuss the new road recommended by MCDOT's study. The September 16, 2010 roundtable will provide the forum for MCDOT to brief the Board on the study and discuss the next steps.

Mandatory Referral of the Connecticut Avenue (MD185)/Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway intersection

The Board reviewed and disapproved SHA's Mandatory Referral of the intersection project on July 22, 2010. The follow-up letter on that Board action is shown as Attachment 2. One reason for the Board's disapproval of that project was that the Chevy Chase Valley community expressed concerns that the potential adverse impacts of the intersection project had not been addressed. The potential extension of Platt Ridge Drive through North Chevy Chase Local Park is recommended by MCDOT as one of the measures to address Chevy Chase Valley neighborhood access and circulation concerns. This road extension is not recommended in a Master Plan and has not yet been reviewed by the Board.

Platt Ridge Drive Extension

MCDOT has endorsed the consultant's recommendation to install a temporary traffic signal on Jones Bridge Road at Spring Valley Road. Their proposed permanent solution to Chevy Chase

Valley's access problem would be to extend Platt Ridge Drive through North Chevy Chase Local Park. The Maryland SHA staff have also expressed support for this Platt Ridge Drive extension concept from a traffic safety perspective. Two optional alignments are proposed in the consultant study; one connecting to Woodlawn Road and the other to Montrose Driveway. Attachment 3 shows the proposed connection options (the recommended alternative is called Alternative 3 in the consultant's study) and the full study is available at the Planning Board's BRAC Mandatory Referral Supporting Documents Appendix C-9:

http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/transportation/brac/supporting_documents.shtm

All agencies recognize that community, environmental, and park impacts of the Platt Ridge Drive extension concept have not yet been addressed.

Subsequent to the Board's July 22 disapproval of the MD 185/Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway intersection project, Councilmember Roger Berliner's wrote a letter to Maryland State Highway Administrator Neil Pedersen asking that funds be set aside for a possible Platt Ridge Drive extension (see Attachment 4). Mr. Pedersen responded that SHA was willing to begin preliminary engineering on the extension, conditioned on the Board's approval of the road and MCDOT's acceptance of the maintenance responsibility for the road, and indicated that available funds would be set aside for this project (see Attachment 5).

SHA and MCDOT have initiated discussions regarding lead agency roles, funding, process, and schedule for continued design work on the Platt Ridge Drive extension concept. The design studies would be expected to begin toward the end of calendar year 2010 and would take several months to complete. M-NCPPC involvement would be integral to the continued study regardless of whether MCDOT or SHA leads the next stage of study.



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

DATE: July 21, 2010

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Dan Hardy, Chief *DKH*
Move/Transportation Planning Division

FROM: Larry Cole: 301-495-4528, for the Planning Department *LC*

DISCUSSION: BRAC roundtable: Chevy Chase Valley Study Report

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) recently released its report on the traffic study they performed at the request of residents of the Chevy Chase Valley neighborhood (The report is shown as Appendix C-9 on our BRAC website). These residents are concerned that access to their neighborhood is already very difficult from both Jones Bridge Road and Connecticut Avenue (MD185), and that it will be made more so by SHA's proposed intersection improvements.

Purpose of today's discussion

We are briefing the Board on the study to provide you an opportunity to express any concerns or opinions you may have in advance of a more detailed discussion with MCDOT and to discuss Planning Department and Parks Department staff recommendations that is will occur this fall.

Spring Valley Road

As part of the work to relocate the access to the Inner Loop for northbound traffic from Kensington Parkway to MD185, the Master Plan recommended that special attention be paid to the intersection of Jones Bridge Road and Spring Valley Road to improve access to the Chevy Chase Valley neighborhood in the northwest quadrant of the MD185/ Jones Bridge Road intersection.

SHA's proposed intersection improvements at MD185/Jones Bridge Road include construction of a continuous southbound right-turn lane on MD185, as discussed by the Board on July 22, 2010. The community fears that a continuous flow of traffic using this lane will make it more difficult for them to get in and out of their community. SHA proposes to allow right-turns-on-red from the right-turn lane, so while drivers are legally required to stop at a red signal before proceeding, there likely will not be significant breaks in the stream of traffic at many hours of the day.

The community originally requested a traffic signal on Jones Bridge Road at Spring Valley Road, but were told that the short distance between this signal and the one at MD185 would adversely affect the latter signal. They then suggested that a new roadway connection be constructed between the western terminus of Montrose Driveway and Jones Bridge Road opposite Platt Ridge Drive.

In response, MCDOT offered to conduct a neighborhood traffic study to look at four options for alleviating this problem. The alternatives, developed with input from the community and our staff, were:

1. Installation of a new traffic signal at MD185/Montrose Driveway, as noted above.
2. Installation of a new traffic signal at Jones Bridge Road/Spring Valley Road.
3. Construction of a new road extending through North Chevy Chase Local Park from the western terminus of Montrose Driveway or Woodlawn Road to Jones Bridge Road at Platt Ridge Drive, a signalized intersection.
4. Construction of a new road from the western terminus of Montrose Driveway (as noted above) or Woodlawn Road to the existing park road in North Chevy Chase Local Park.

MCDOT's consultant's concludes that the Alternative 3 is the best permanent solution -- a new road through North Chevy Chase Local Park tying into Platt Ridge Drive. However, the Planning Department and Planning Board need to develop a formal staff recommendation on the consultant report, particularly since the recommended alternative requires parkland. Since SHA's goal is to get the BRAC intersection projects constructed as near as possible to the September 15, 2011 BRAC opening date, there is not sufficient time to develop interagency consensus on recommendations, design and construct any new road in advance of SHA's project. Therefore, the consultant also recommended that Alternative 2 -- a traffic signal at Jones Bridge Road/Spring Valley Road -- be built as an interim solution.

MCDOT has endorsed the consultant's findings and indicated that they will be installing the signal prior to SHA's construction. They would like to meet with our staff and the Planning Board to discuss the proposed new road on parkland sometime this fall.

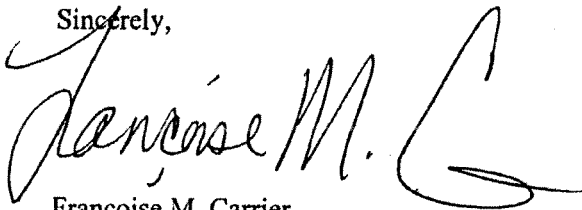
prematurely presume M-NCPPC concurrence on a new roadway crossing North Chevy Chase Local Park.

5. The eastern end of the Jones Bridge Road Shared Use Path project proposed by MCDOT is affected by your project as submitted and also by the Phase 3 project. In our approval of MCDOT's project on July 15, 2010, we recommended that the eastern 350 feet be constructed as part of your intersection project, but also that an alignment of the path along the south side of Jones Bridge Road be considered (see Enclosure 2).
6. Providing a good level of landscaping as part of these projects is important in achieving the residents' vision for their community, the fulfillment of the Master Plan's vision for the Green Corridors Policy, and the General Plan's vision for the county (See Enclosure 3, a memo from our Urban Design Division). This is true on Connecticut Avenue as well as the other state highways covered by these projects.
7. While the BRAC coordination process demonstrated extensive community coordination, the public testimony we received revealed that the affected communities and individual property owners at this location do not yet have either an understanding or consensus on how their long-standing access and safety concerns are being addressed. The community's concerns, and ours, are exacerbated by the many moving parts itemized above.

We request a response in 60 days to the issues raised above, including the status of the Section 4(f) evaluation (avoidance, minimization, and mitigation strategies), and how improvements at this intersection will be pursued.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions or comments concerning our review, please do not hesitate to call me at 301-495-4605, or you may call Larry Cole at 301-495-4528.

Sincerely,



Françoise M. Carrier
Chair

Enclosures (3)



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
 THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

August 18, 2010

Neil Pedersen
 State Highway Administration Transportation
 Office of the Administrator
 707 North Calvert Street
 C-400
 Baltimore, MD 21202

RE: Connecticut Avenue (MD185)/Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway Intersection
 SHA Contract No. MO5935570

Mandatory Referral No. MR2010808

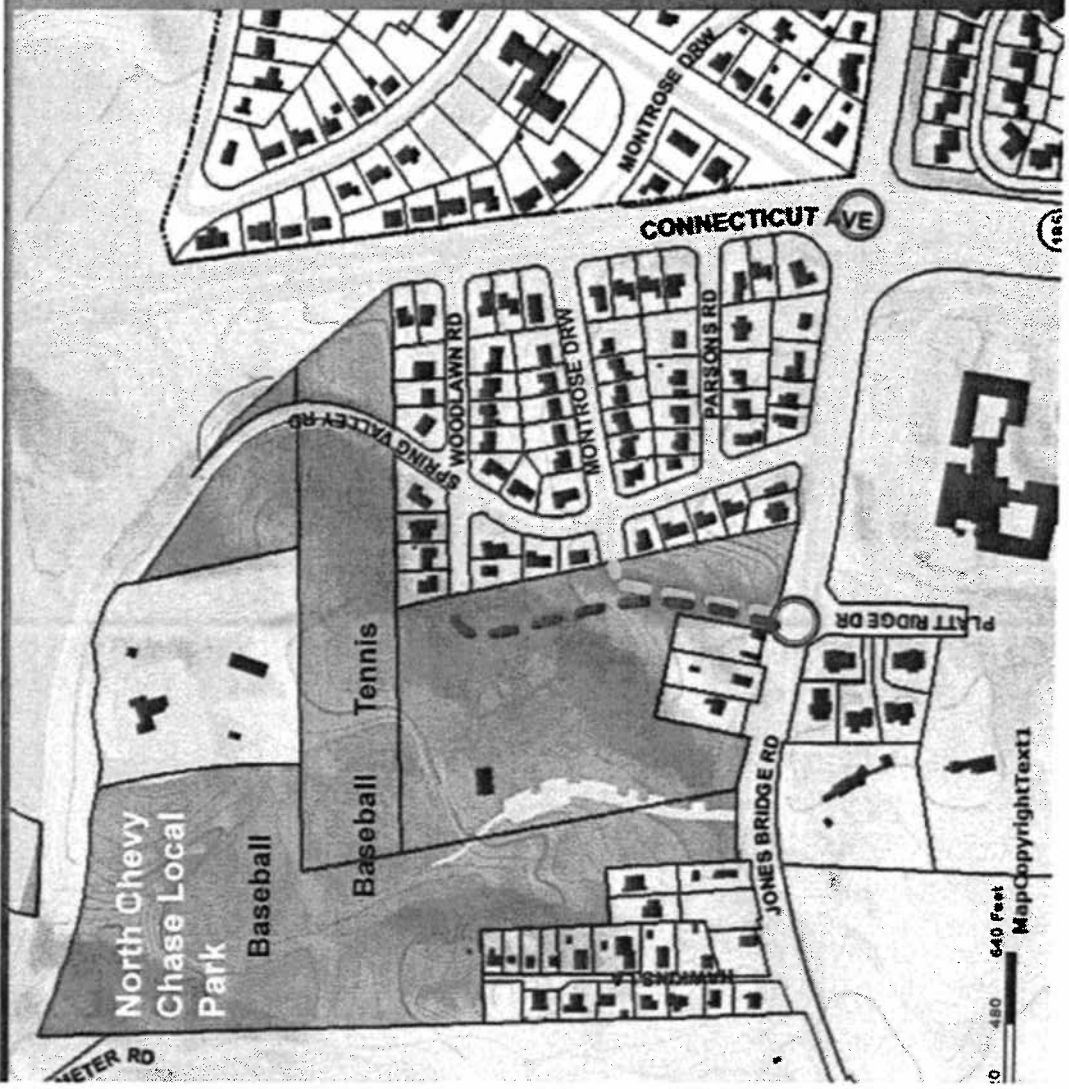
Dear Mr. Pedersen:

The Planning Board reviewed the Mandatory Referral of this project at our regularly scheduled meeting on July 22, 2010 and disapproved the project because of the reasons listed below.

As with the other intersection projects being pursued in response to the BRAC move of Walter Reed Hospital to the National Naval Medical center campus, we appreciate the State Highway Administration's efforts to mitigate the transportation impacts to this area of the county. We believe, though, that in addition to the concerns raised by our staff in their memo to us (see Enclosure 1), we did not have sufficient information to be able to approve this project. Our concerns are:

1. Our staff received a revised Mandatory Referral submission on July 7th, only one week prior to the due date for a public posting of their memo to us. We believe that the truncated review time was not sufficient for a full review.
2. Phase 3 was deleted from the project under review, but since the intent is to build it as part of the same overall BRAC program, it should have been submitted with Phases 1 and 2.
3. The ultimate SHA proposal requires the Board's approval of a forest conservation easement revision as well as additional park impacts that were not submitted for Mandatory Referral review.
4. The combined SHA and MCDOT agency proposals to address access concerns to the Chevy Chase Valley community that could be adversely affected by the proposed project seem to

Study Alternative 3



Construction of a new road through North Chevy Chase Local Park from the western terminus of Montrose Driveway or Woodlawn Road to the existing traffic signal at Jones Bridge Road and Platt Ridge Drive.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

ROGER BERLINER
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT I

July 27, 2010

Mr. Neil Pedersen
Administrator
Maryland State Highway Administration
PO Box 717
Baltimore, MD 21203-0717

Dear Administrator Pedersen:

Thank you for the many hours you and your staff have worked to make the improvements around the revamped National Navy Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland a hoped for success. I realize this has been a very difficult challenge given the federal, state and local competing and over lapping jurisdictions and the lack of certainty for funding for these improvements.

There have been many many hours of public and private meetings, numerous phone calls and much cooperation prior to the consideration of the proposed intersection improvements before the Montgomery County Planning Board last week. Much of the deliberations before the Board last week centered upon the Connecticut Avenue and Jones Bridge Road intersection. Earlier this year, members of the Chevy Chase Valley community asked for help with ingress and egress for their community with the proposed improvements to Connecticut Avenue in mind.

As a result, the County funded the Spring Valley Traffic Study that was completed in June 2010. The study's recommendations call for a traffic signal at Jones Bridge Road and Spring Valley Road as an interim measure anticipating the BRAC improvements designed by your agency. Further, the study describes as the operationally best option to be the construction of an extended Platt Ridge Drive. Other options were considered as a part of this study.

During last weeks' considerations, our staffs conferred on the possibility that BRAC designated monies could be used in the event that the Platt Ridge Road option becomes viable. We are early in this review process and need more consideration of community views as well as a concurrence from the Montgomery County Department of Parks as their land would be impacted for this possible solution.

Given the timing of the BRAC intersection improvement construction schedule, my understanding is that when monies are available they will be allocated for these projects. I was gratified that your staff indicated a willingness to include the possible Platt Ridge Road project for funding under BRAC. I am hoping you will set aside \$2 million when funds become available so that this project can proceed with funding if and

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when the solution is embraced. I understand this set side would not be forever but, at this time, it would be appropriate for the community to understand that their concerns are being addressed on equal footing with all intersection impacts.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,



Roger Berliner
Councilmember
District 1

Martin O'Malley, Governor
Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor



Beverley K. Swaim-Staley, Secretary
Neil J. Pedersen, Administrator

August 18, 2010

The Honorable Roger Berliner
Montgomery County Council
6th Floor
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville MD 20850

Dear Councilmember Berliner:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Intersection Improvement Project at MD 185 (Connecticut Avenue) and Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway. The State Highway Administration (SHA) understands the importance of this project, not only for the BRAC implementation in Bethesda, but also for the residents of the surrounding area. In particular, your letter urges SHA to set aside \$2 million.

Mitigating for BRAC and providing improvements that benefit all stakeholders have been, and continue to be, challenging endeavors. My staff and I will continue to work to seek resolution to the concerns of the Chevy Chase Valley Community. Communication and coordination with that community has been ongoing, and I am confident we will be able to reach consensus.

The SHA has reviewed and evaluated the Spring Valley traffic study provided by the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT). The SHA concurs with the county's findings that the Platt Ridge Road Extension will provide the best solution to address the community access concerns, while minimizing the impacts to the surrounding roadway network. The extension of Platt Ridge Road will have impacts to the North Chevy Chase Local Park, owned by the Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). The SHA also supports the construction of a temporary traffic signal at Jones Bridge Road and Spring Valley Road. We also agree that the Spring Valley Road signal is a reasonable way to address the access concerns in the interim, while the ultimate solution is sought.

My telephone number/toll-free number is 410-545-0400 or 1-800-206-0770.
Maryland Relay Service for Impaired Hearing or Speech 1.800.735.2258 Statewide Toll Free

Street Address: 707 North Calvert Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21202 • Phone 410.545.0300 • www.roads.maryland.com


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The Honorable Roger Berliner
Page Two

The BRAC intersection project at MD 185 and Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway has been separated into three phases. At this point, only Phase 1 and Phase 2 will be moving forward, given funding and timing constraints. When funds become available, SHA agrees to begin the preliminary engineering phase for the Platt Ridge Road Extension, provided that MCDOT accepts the ownership and maintenance responsibilities of the new roadway and the Montgomery County Planning Board and M-NCPPC support the park impacts of the new roadway. The SHA will not exhaust funding and move forward with the Platt Ridge Road Extension without full support from MCDOT, M-NCPPC, and the Planning Board.

Thank you again for your letter. If we may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me or Ms. Barbara L. Solberg, Assistant Division Chief, Highway Design Division, SHA at 410-545-8830, toll-free 1-888-228-5003 or via email at bsolberg@sha.state.md.us.

Sincerely,



NJP Neil J. Pedersen
Administrator

cc: Mr. Arthur Holmes, Director, Montgomery County Department of Transportation
Ms. Barbara L. Solberg, Assistant Chief, Highway Design Division, SHA
Mr. Brian W. Young, District Engineer, SHA

Martin O'Malley, Governor
Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor



RECEIVED
OCT 26 2010

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
Beverley K. Swaim-Staley, Secretary
Neil J. Pedersen, Administrator

October 22, 2010

Ms. Françoise M. Carrier
Chair
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Montgomery County Planning Commission
Office of the Chairman
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring MD 20910

Dear Chair Carrier:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Mandatory Referral Review for the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Intersection Improvement Project at MD 185 (Connecticut Avenue) and Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway. The State Highway Administration (SHA) understands the importance of this project not only for BRAC in Bethesda, but also for the neighborhoods of the surrounding area. The SHA has reviewed your concerns on this project, to which we offer the following responses:

1. *Our staff received a revised Mandatory Referral submission on July 7th, only one week prior to the due date for a public posting of their memo to us. We believe that the truncated review time was not sufficient for a full review.*

Response: Since the official submittal of the Mandatory Referral package in March, SHA has been working extensively on the review with the Montgomery County Planning Board, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), local communities, and other stakeholders. The submittal was not intended to be an official submittal; rather, it was an interim submittal to address comments prior to an official submittal to the Montgomery County Planning Board. Once an official submittal is made, SHA will provide enough time for a thorough review by M-NCPPC.

My telephone number/toll-free number is 410-545-0400 or 1-800-206-0770.
Maryland Relay Service for Impaired Hearing or Speech 1.800.735.2258 Statewide Toll Free

Street Address: 707 North Calvert Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21202 • Phone 410.545.0300 • www.roads.maryland.com

2. *Phase 3 was deleted from the project under review, but since the intent is to build it as part of the same overall BRAC program, it should have been submitted with Phases 1 and 2.*

Response: The BRAC intersection project at MD 185 and Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway has been separated into three construction phases and, at this point, only Phase 1 and Phase 2 will be moving forward due to funding and time constraints. Phases 1 and 2 will include the widening along southbound and northbound MD 185, and Phase 3 will include the widening along eastbound and westbound Jones Bridge Road. Phase 3 of the proposed scope will affect the Montgomery County Category I Forest Conservation Easement along the frontage of HHMI. At the request of HHMI in early July, SHA decided to pull out Phase 3 from the Mandatory Referral Review package and only submit Phases 1 and 2.

3. *The ultimate SHA proposal requires the Board's approval of a forest conservation easement revision as well as additional park impacts that were not submitted for Mandatory Referral review.*

Response: At the request of HHMI, Phase 3 has been pulled out from the submittal for Mandatory Referral review and deferred to a later date. The SHA has been working actively with the Montgomery County Planning Board, M-NCPPC, and HHMI regarding impacts and mitigations to the Forest Conservation Easement and park property. Our goal is to provide all necessary improvements at this intersection with minimum impacts to the environment and surrounding neighborhoods including M-NCPPC and HHMI, and to look for appropriate treatments and locations, both on-site and off-site, to mitigate the impacted forest conservation easements.

4. *The combined SHA and MCDOT agency proposals to address access concerns to the Chevy Chase Valley community that could be adversely affected by the proposed project seem to prematurely presume M-NCPPC concurrence on a new roadway crossing North Chevy Chase Local Park.*

Response: The SHA has been in close coordination with MCDOT and the Chevy Chase Valley Community on the access and safety issues associated with the Chevy Chase Valley area. We have reviewed and evaluated the Spring Valley Traffic Study provided by MCDOT. The SHA concurred with the findings of the county's study that the Platt Ridge Road Extension will provide the best solution to address the community access concerns, while minimizing the impacts to the surrounding roadway network. The SHA also supported the construction of a temporary traffic signal at Jones Bridge Road and Spring Valley Road. And SHA agreed the Spring Valley Road signal is a reasonable way to address the access concerns in the interim, while the ultimate solution is being sought.

During the past years, SHA attended four community meetings, with the residents seeking resolution to their concerns. At the latest meeting on October 4, the Chevy Chase Valley Community agreed to the interim solution of a temporary traffic signal and the ultimate solution of Platt Ridge Road Extension. The Platt Ridge Road Extension will have impacts to the North Chevy Chase Local Park, owned by M-NCPPC. The SHA agrees to begin the Preliminary Engineering phase for the Platt Ridge Road Extension when funds become available, provided MCDOT accepts the ownership and maintenance of the new roadway and the Montgomery County Planning Board and M-NCPPC supports the park impacts of the new roadway.

5. *The eastern end of the Jones Bridge Road Shared Use Path project proposed by MCDOT is affected by your project as submitted and also by the Phase 3 project. In our approval of MCDOT's project on July 15, 2010, we recommended that the eastern 350 feet be constructed as part of your intersection project, but also that an alignment of the path along the south side of Jones Bridge Road be considered (see Enclosure 2).*

Response: The Jones Bridge Road Shared Use Path project proposed by MCDOT will tie into the sidewalk improvement of this BRAC intersection project at MD 185 and Jones Bridge Road. The SHA has been in close coordination on the design and schedule with MCDOT and M-NCPPC. With regard to the proposal to relocate the path from the north side of Jones Bridge Road to the south side, we will evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of these two options, including physical constraints, park impact, forest easement impact, community opposition, and funding availability, with input from MCDOT, M-NCPPC, HHMI and other stakeholders.

6. *Providing a good level of landscaping as part of these projects is important in achieving the residents' vision for their community, the fulfillment of the Master Plan's vision for the Green Corridors Policy, and the General Plan's vision for the county (See Enclosure 3, a memo from our Urban Design Division). This is true on Connecticut Avenue as well as the other state highways covered by these projects.*

Response: The SHA is aware of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase (B-CC) Master Plan in regards to the Green Corridors Policy and strives to construct Master Plan amenities throughout the project limits with support from the affected property owners. As stated in previous correspondence, the proposed design will provide a 3- to 10-foot-wide buffer or wider curb-attached sidewalks, wherever feasible. Wide enough median areas will receive turf grass, perennials, shrubs, flowering trees or street trees. Where it is not possible to provide a median of adequate size for trees, other appropriate types of plant materials will be provided. When determining the location and selection of plant materials, SHA will take into consideration issues such as sight visibility, signs, overhead and underground utilities, and any other potential conflicts. The SHA will also consider your recommendations on the selection of plant materials.

Ms. Françoise M. Carrier
Page Four

7. *While the BRAC coordination process demonstrated extensive community coordination, the public testimony we received revealed that the affected communities and individual property owners at this location do not yet have an understanding or consensus on how their long-standing access and safety concerns are being addressed. The community's concerns, and ours, are exacerbated by the many moving parts itemized above.*

Response: Mitigating for BRAC and providing improvements that benefit all stakeholders have been, and continue to be, challenging endeavors. The SHA has attended four community meetings with the Chevy Chase Village Community, two community meetings with the Chevy Chase Park Community, and five meetings with HHMI, working with affected property owners and addressing citizens' concerns. Communication and coordination with the surrounding neighborhoods has been ongoing, and our goal is to reach an understanding in the near future.

Thank you again for your letter. If we may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me or Ms. Yuqiong Bai, Project Engineer, Highway Design Division, SHA at 410-545-8816, toll-free 1-888-228-5003 or via email at ybai@sha.state.md.us.

Sincerely,



Neil J. Pedersen
Administrator

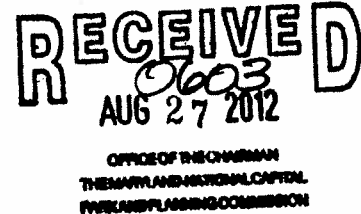
cc: Ms. Yuqiong Bai, Project Engineer, Highway Design Division, SHA
Mr. Brian Young, District Engineer, SHA

Martin O'Malley, Governor
Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor



MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Darrell B. Mobley, Acting Secretary
Melinda B. Peters, Administrator



August 21, 2012

Ms. Françoise M. Carrier
Chair
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Office of the Chairman
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring MD 20910

Dear Ms. Carrier:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Mandatory Referral Review for the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Intersection Improvement Project at MD 185 (Connecticut Avenue) and Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway Phase 3. We have reviewed your conditions and comments for this project, and offer the following responses.

1. No disturbance will be permitted in the area of the Category I Conservation Easement until a plat of the revised easement has been submitted to the Planning Board, and approved. The mitigation for the approximately 11,357 square feet of impacts to the easement must include a minimum of 2,615 square feet of new Category I easement along the south side of the existing easement, and an additional area of approximately 20,099 square feet of Category II easement along the MD185 frontage of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) property, for a total of 2:1 easement mitigation.

Response: SHA agrees that a plat of the revised easement should be submitted to the Planning Board and approved prior to any disturbance in the area of the Category I Forest Conservation Easement. SHA will work with HHMI on the mitigation plan and plat record.

2. Maintain the existing median break at Spring Valley Road until the Planning Board has approved the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project.

Response: The Platt Ridge Drive Extension project is currently under preliminary engineering design by the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT). The State Highway Administration's (SHA) understanding is that MCDOT will apply to the Planning Board for the approval on this project. SHA will maintain the existing temporary signal at the MD 185/Spring Valley Road intersection and keep the median open until the Platt Ridge Drive Extension is constructed.

My telephone number/toll-free number is 410-545-0400 or 1-800-206-0770

Maryland Relay Service for Impaired Hearing or Speech 1.800.735.2258 Statewide Toll Free

Street Address: 707 North Calvert Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21202 • Phone 410.545.0300 • www.roads.maryland.gov

Ms. Françoise M. Carrier
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3. Provide an update at the time of the submission of the revised Conservation Easement on the effectiveness of the temporary signal at Spring Valley Road.

Response: The temporary signal at Spring Valley Road was designed and constructed by MCDOT as an interim solution to concerns of the Chevy Chase Valley Community. The Platt Ridge Road Extension will provide the best solution, while minimizing impacts to the surrounding roadway network. As stated in SHA's response to your second comment, the Platt Ridge Road Extension project is currently under design by MCDOT. It will be MCDOT's responsibility to evaluate the temporary signal before implementing any traffic control changes at the Spring Valley Road intersection. SHA will follow up with MCDOT on the status of their evaluation when submitting the revised Conservation Easement.

4. Provide a median pedestrian refuge island on the west leg of Jones Bridge Road at Connecticut Avenue (MD185).

Response: Under the current SHA design, triple left-turn lanes are provided on the west leg of the intersection. The location of the median was designed to accommodate the tracks of the left-turn movements. Due to this reason, a median pedestrian refuge island cannot be safely accommodated. The amount of time provided by the pedestrian crossing signal is adequate for a pedestrian to fully cross the intersection.

5. Provide a two-foot-wide minimum offset from the curb for all proposed sidewalks wherever possible.

Response: Wherever feasible, SHA will provide a two-foot or wider buffer between the curb and sidewalk throughout the project limits.

6. Work with our staff to identify additional areas where trees can be planted in the right-of-way.

Response: The proposed design provides appropriate landscaping, where possible. Areas that are wide enough will receive turf grass, perennials, shrubs, flowering trees or street trees. Where it is not possible to provide trees, other appropriate types of plants will be provided. When determining the location and selection of plants, SHA will take into consideration issues such as sight distance, signs, overhead and underground utilities, and any other potential conflicts. SHA will also coordinate with your staff and consider their recommendations on the location and selection of plant materials.

Ms. Françoise M. Carrier
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7. Work with the Chevy Chase Park Home Owners Association (HOA) on how best to achieve an acceptable replacement for their boundary wall, fence, and trees.

Response: SHA has been in regular communication with the Chevy Chase Park HOA. SHA is evaluating several items brought up by the community, such as shifting the eastbound through lane at the intersection, removing an eastbound or westbound travel lane, and reviewing grading options to reduce impacts to the community (2:1 slope, 1:1 slope, or retaining wall). SHA will continue to seek resolution to the concerns of the community.

8. Coordinate with MCDOT on these recommended changes to the traffic-calming devices along Jones Bridge Road to ensure the safety of North Chevy Chase Elementary School students and other pedestrians:
 - a. Relocate the proposed median pedestrian refuge island to the east leg of the Montgomery Avenue intersection, in line with the existing sidewalk on Montgomery Avenue, and provide handicap ramps at this location.
 - b. Provide an ADA-accessible crossing of Jones Bridge Road at Montrose Driveway, including the use of a pedestrian refuge in the proposed traffic island.

Response: SHA will coordinate the recommended changes to the traffic-calming devices in front of North Chevy Chase Elementary School with MCDOT to ensure the safe crossing of students and other pedestrians.

9. Coordinate the design of the proposed improvements with area citizens associations, including the Coquelin Run Citizens Association.

Response: SHA is working with MCDOT and Coquelin Run Citizens Association to schedule a community meeting in early September.

10. Coordinate with the Village of North Chevy Chase on the proposed sidewalk improvements on the north side of Jones Bridge Road.

Response: SHA will coordinate the sidewalk improvements with the Village of North Chevy Chase.

11. Ensure that the home at the corner of Jones Bridge Road and Kensington Parkway will continue to have adequate driveway access.

Response: The driveway access at the corner of Jones Bridge Road and Kensington Parkway will be maintained; the proposed median will create a less direct access.

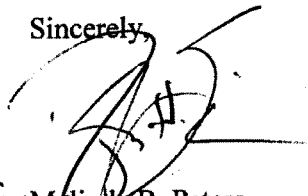
Ms. Françoise M. Carrier
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12. Provide an eight-foot-wide shared use path along Jones Bridge Road from the southeast corner of the intersection with MD185 to the eastern project limit:
 - a. Consider the use of pervious concrete for the path.
 - b. The handicap ramps at intersecting driveways along this path should be eight feet wide to accommodate bike traffic.
 - c. Where the path is bordered by the future Chevy Chase Park HOA boundary wall and/or fence, the path should be separated from both the curb and the wall by a minimum of two feet.
 - d. East of the future Chevy Chase Park HOA boundary wall and/or fence, the landscaped offset of the path from the curb should be a minimum of five feet wide.

Response: SHA's current design does not include an eight-foot-wide shared-use path along eastbound Jones Bridge Road, west of MD 185. Between the curb and community wall and fence of the Chevy Chase Park HOA community, the proposed design will provide 12 feet, which includes a five-foot green buffer, a five-foot sidewalk, and two-foot offset to the community wall. The proposed design in front of the school will provide a five-foot green buffer and a five-foot sidewalk. SHA is evaluating the possibility of adding the shared-use path, including use of pervious concrete for the path. A decision has not been made. SHA is taking into consideration issues such as right-of-way impacts, overhead and underground utility, tree impacts, SHA's storm water management obligations, soil type, the community wall, embankment stability as well as the Planning Board's recommendation, and the master plan. The current design does not preclude widening the sidewalk to eight feet in the future. SHA will continue to coordinate with your staff as investigation of this option advances.

Thank you again for your letter. If you have additional questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Yuqiong Bai, Project Engineer, Highway Design Division, SHA at 410-545-8816, toll-free 1-888-228-5003 or via email at ybai@sha.state.md.us. She will be happy to assist you.

Sincerely,



Melinda B. Peters
Administrator

cc: Ms. Yuqiong Bai, Project Engineer, Highway Design Division, SHA
Mr. Brian Young, District Engineer, SHA

Table 13

SUMMARY OF THE BETHESDA-CHEVY CHASE MASTER PLAN HIGHWAY NEEDS

Name (Route #)	Limits	Recommendation	Current LOS	Conditions, Guidelines, Other Recommendations	Possible Long-term Changes
Major Highway Needs					
East-West Hwy (MD 410)	Rock Creek Park to Montgomery Ave	Four lanes with safety improvements and turning lane; capacity improvements at intersections		Support State Highway Administration study of safety and capacity	
- at Jones Mill Rd and Beach Dr	Intersection	Increase capacity and safety	E		
- at Connecticut Ave (MD 185)	Intersection	Implement at-grade improvements for capacity and safety	F		
Connecticut Ave (MD 185)	I-495 to the Western Ave Cir	Retain six lanes		From Georgetown Branch south, widening of the road is undesirable due to excessive impacts on property and community character	Add an additional lane from Georgetown Branch to Western Ave only if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o can be used as an HOV lane in peak periods o endorsed by the County Council, as needed to reduce severe congestion and community impact
- at I-495	Interchange	Recommend new access ramp location, removal of access from Kensington Pkwy and other measures to lessen community impacts			
- at Jones Bridge Rd	Intersection	Implement at-grade improvements for safety and capacity	F	Also include sidewalks, provide for safe pedestrian crossing, and address Spring Valley Road access	
- at Manor Rd	Intersection	Increase capacity and safety	F	Improvement should provide for safe pedestrian crossing	
- at East-West Hwy (MD 410)	(see East-West Hwy)				



8811 Spring Valley Road
Chevy Chase, MD 20815
November 15, 2010

Mr. Edgar Gonzales
Deputy Director for Transportation Policy
Montgomery County Department of Transportation
101 Monroe Street, 10th floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Ms. Barb Solberg
Assistant Chief, Highway Design Division
Maryland State Highway Administration
707 North Calvert Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Mr. Larry Cole
Master Planner, Montgomery County Planning Department
Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission
8787 Georgia Ave
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Gonzales, Ms. Solberg, and Mr. Cole,

Thank you for attending our neighborhood meeting last month and making your presentation and recommendations regarding the Base Realignment and Closure Intersection Improvement Project at MD 185 (Connecticut Avenue) and Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway.

This letter outlines the decision our community made about possible solutions to eliminate cut-through traffic in our neighborhood. And it also states our position on the recommendation of the Chevy Chase Valley Traffic Study for an extension of Platt Ridge Road to connect with our neighborhood at Montrose Drive.

Our community voted in overwhelming support of making our side streets of Woodlawn, Montrose, and Parsons exit only, prohibiting vehicles going south on Connecticut from making right turns onto those streets and into our neighborhood. As is the current practice, vehicles would be allowed to exit onto Connecticut.

To add an additional deterrent to cut-through traffic from Connecticut, we would also request that the curbs along Connecticut be extended to the middle of the side streets to obstruct the path of any vehicle that would try to turn off Connecticut. (These curbs should be planted with large shrubs for a more residential look.) Such a design would leave an opening only on the south side of the side streets for cars exiting onto Connecticut. We would also request the standard "Do Not

Enter” signage for each of the streets, replacing the current signs that restrict access from 7am – 11am.

We anticipate that any reconstruction of the curbs would be made in conjunction with the larger proposed changes for the Connecticut/Jones Bridge Road intersection. However, our community requests that temporary barriers simulating that effect be installed at the same time the county plans to install the traffic signal at the Jones Bridge/Spring Valley Road intersection.

Our community is aware the Spring Valley traffic light is planned as a temporary measure because of concerns raised by the County Executive, the State Highway Administration, and in the traffic study. However, it is our hope that once the light is installed, the actual operation of the intersection would disprove the assertions that the signal would inadvertently cause more harm than good.

But if our community’s “hope” fails to materialize into an intersection that effectively works with the surrounding roadway network, there is strong support for building the extension of Platt Ridge through an unused section of North Chevy Chase Park. We agree with MCDOT’s proposal for a modest two-lane access road, constructed in a way the yields the smallest impacts on the parkland and the residential property that would abut it.

To be clear, the Platt Ridge extension is not an ideal solution for our community or North Chevy Chase Park. But because safe ingress and egress to our community is paramount -- a view also expressed by Montgomery County transportation officials -- we support the county and state efforts to address this concern in the most expedient and effective way possible.

Sincerely,



Ken Strickland, president
Chevy Chase Valley Citizens Association

cc: Françoise Carrier, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
Roger Berliner, Council member, Montgomery County Council
Phil Alperson, Coordinator, Montgomery County BRAC
Andy Scott, Special Assistant to the Secretary, Maryland Department of Transportation



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

March 25, 2014

Arthur Holmes, Jr.
Director

Ms. Mary Bradford, Director of Parks
9500 Brunett Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20901

RE: Platt Ridge Drive Extension Project

Dear Ms. Bradford:

Thank you for your March 17, 2014, letter regarding the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project. Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) appreciates your interest in the design and construction of this project and your concerns over the impacts the project will have on park property. MCDOT does not take lightly the impacts to park properties from any of our projects. In this case, we believe that construction of the proposed Platt Ridge Drive Extension project will improve the safety of the traveling public in general and for the residents of the Chevy Chase Valley community in particular; it will provide important operational enhancements over the existing temporary traffic signal at Spring Valley Road and minimize impacts to the park.

The October 2010 Spring Valley Road Traffic Study investigated ingress and egress alternatives for the Spring Valley community. Of the alternatives studied in the report, MCDOT decided on a temporary traffic signal at Jones Bridge and Spring Valley Roads as an interim solution, and the construction of Platt Ridge Drive Alternative 3B) as the ultimate solution. The ultimate solution provided the best access for the community, and had the least impact to overall traffic operations along Jones Bridge Road. It should also be noted that of the four western access roads analyzed in the study (3A, 3B, 4A and 4B), the proposed alignment results in the least impact to park property.

MCDOT will continue to work with the Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) staff to minimize the impacts of the proposed alignment as much as possible. And, as is consistent with past practice, MCDOT will work with M-NCPPC staff to provide fair and appropriate compensation or mitigation for the ultimate impacts.

Our responses to your specific questions are provided below:

- 1) *What are the primary reasons that the traffic signal at Spring Valley Road is deemed not adequate to remain in place permanently to provide safe ingress and egress for the Chevy Chase Valley community?*

Office of the Director

As noted above, there are two primary reasons why the existing median opening and temporary traffic signal are not adequate to provide primary access for the Chevy Chase Valley community:

- a) Safety of the traveling public in general and the residents of the Chevy Chase Valley community in particular, and
- b) important operational enhancements along Jones Bridge Road.

It is important to note that these issues are interrelated, as operational problems lead to driver frustration and increased risk taking, leading to unsafe behavior.

Safety

The State Highway Administration (SHA) Traffic Engineering Delay and Queuing Analysis indicates that during evening peak hours, the backups on eastbound Jones Bridge Road will extend back beyond the intersection with Spring Valley, but will stop short of the proposed location of the Platt Ridge Drive Extension intersection. Queuing through signalized intersections, particularly when the queues involve multiple lanes, including separate through and turn lanes, typically increases the potential for crashes at the intersection. This is due to:

- At present, residents turning left from Spring Valley onto Jones Bridge Road traverse four lanes of traffic, two in each direction. Eastbound Jones Bridge Road widens east of the intersection.
- After completion of the State's improvements this same traffic, turning left onto the main road, will have to traverse two westbound lanes and weave through four eastbound traffic lanes without any separate lane to pull into, in order to make a right turn onto Connecticut Avenue from a fifth eastbound lane at the intersection. If traffic is queued from Connecticut Avenue, it is very likely that some left turning traffic from the community will be caught stopped in the main line through lanes thus creating a potential for collisions that needs to be avoided.
- Crosswalks are often blocked forcing pedestrians to either walk between queued vehicles or in the travel lanes.
- Motorists tend to take unwise and aggressive chances when attempting to squeeze through the intersection (in this case at Spring Valley) when a queue is blocking them.
- Closely spaced signalized intersections increase the potential for some types of collisions. Because the signals at Spring Valley Road and Connecticut Avenue are so close, motorists often focus on the far signal's indications instead of the nearer one sometimes running the near signal's red indication. Anecdotal reports from the neighborhood indicate this is occurring in the EB direction as motorists try to "make" the signal at Connecticut.
- Preliminary crash data transmitted with the mandatory referral package indicates that there has been an increase in crashes along this section of roadway since the temporary signal was installed. While the data is not yet conclusive, it can logically be inferred that there will be an even higher rate of crashes at Spring Valley Road if

the signal remains at the current location and there are more conflict points (i.e., more lanes through the intersection in the proposed SHA intersection improvements).

- Motorists coming from the north and from I-495 and turning west onto Jones Bridge Road now have their own lane to facilitate this movement and may not be anticipating having to stop almost immediately at Spring Valley after they turn at a red signal increasing a potential for rear-end collisions.

Finally, I am enclosing a copy of the March 17, 2014, letter from Ms. Melinda B. Peters, SHA Administrator regarding this project. As noted in that letter, "SHA agrees that the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project being funded by the County would provide a safer and more convenient ingress and egress to the Chevy Chase Valley community and businesses that now rely on Spring Valley Road."

Operations

The primary objective of the phased SHA improvements along Connecticut Avenue and Jones Bridge Road is to improve failing traffic operations at the intersection. SHA modeling indicates operations will be improved as a result of the SHA project whether the median at Spring Valley Road is open or closed. Leaving the existing signal at Spring Valley Road would degrade traffic flow through the corridor due to the proximity to the signal at Connecticut Avenue. Storage capacity for the eastbound three left turn lanes at Connecticut Avenue would be reduced and queuing through intersections would restrict traffic movements.

As noted above, operational difficulties tend to encourage drivers to make risky maneuvers, increasing the potential for traffic accidents and unsafe behavior.

- 2) *What funding for parkland mitigation or compensation is included within the approved project budget for Platt Ridge Drive?*

Funding for compensation or mitigation is expected to be provided through the Advanced Land Acquisition Revolving Fund (ALARF). The PDF for this project notes that "Right-of-way for this project will be dedicated to the public by the M-NCPPC or purchased through ALARF funding."

- 3) *What assumptions were made about parkland mitigation or compensation at the time the budget was submitted to the County Council?*

At the time the budget was prepared and submitted to Council, it was anticipated that MCDOT would work with M-NCPPC to minimize the footprint of the roadway and the necessary right-of-way, and would negotiate with M-NCPPC regarding the value of the impact to park land, with the funding for mitigation or compensation to be provided through ALARF.

- 4) *Is it anticipated that funding for mitigation or compensation would come from another funding source other than the Platt Ridge Drive project? If so, from what source and what amount is estimated?*

Yes, it is anticipated that funding for mitigation or compensation would come from the ALARF CIP. The amount of funding necessary for mitigation or compensation has not been determined and is subject to negotiations with M-NCPPC regarding the value of the impact to the park property.

- 5) *As the primary access to both the Chevy Chase Valley community and the Chevy Chase Recreational Association, why was this project not designed to meet the standards of a primary street, other than to reduce park impacts?*

The sole purpose in not meeting the standards of a primary street in the design of the roadway was to reduce the road footprint and minimize the impact to park land.

I hope this addresses your concerns and provides you the information you need to finalize your recommendation to the Planning Board. We look forward to the discussion with the Board at the Mandatory Referral meeting on April 3rd.

Sincerely,



Arthur Holmes, Jr.
Director

Cc: Bruce Johnston.
Edgar Gonzalez
Robert Gonzales
Emil Wolanin
Councilmember Roger Berliner
Cindy Gibson
Francois Carrier
Mike Riley
Larry Cole

BEJ/je

Enclosure

Martin O'Malley, *Governor*
Anthony G. Brown, *Lt. Governor*



James T. Smith, Jr., *Secretary*
Melinda B. Peters, *Administrator*

March 17, 2014

Mr. Michael F. Riley
Deputy Director
Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission
Montgomery County Department of Parks
9500 Brunett Avenue
Silver Spring MD 20901

Dear Mr. Riley:

Thank you for your letter regarding the State Highway Administration's (SHA) intersection improvement at MD 185 (Connecticut Avenue) and Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway Phase 3 project. SHA appreciates your interest and concern regarding this Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) project and your request for further clarification.

As part of the BRAC expansion in Bethesda, the MD 185 intersection with Jones Bridge Road has been identified for improvements. Intersection operations were failing prior to the BRAC expansion in Bethesda and are projected to substantially worsen due to increased traffic volumes from BRAC activities and related developments. SHA improvements along both MD185 and Jones Bridge Road will maintain, or improve, future traffic operations at this intersection, while minimizing the impact to the neighboring communities. In addition to the roadway improvements, the project will also provide safe pedestrian and bicycle accommodations.

In order to complete the improvements for Phase 3, fee simple right-of-way and temporary construction easements will be required from the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC)'s North Chevy Chase Recreation Area, as stated in SHA's March 28, 2012, letter to M-NCPPC. The M-NCPPC agreed with the Section 4(f) *de minimis* impact and temporary occupancy criteria for permanent and temporary impacts to the North Chevy Chase Recreation Area on May 10, 2012. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) also concurred on the Section 4(f) findings on August 10, 2012. The Platt Ridge Drive Extension project, led by Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), was not considered in the Section 4(f) coordination, as it is not part of the SHA project and not required for the SHA project to be effective. Phase 3 of the MD 185 at Jones Bridge Road project will have an independent benefit to the area, regardless of whether the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project is ever constructed, and will not restrict any alternatives studied or other reasonably foreseeable transportation projects in the area.

My telephone number/toll-free number is 410-545-0400 or 1-800-206-0770.
Maryland Relay Service for Impaired Hearing or Speech 1.800.735.2258 Statewide Toll Free

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Mr. Michael F. Riley
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It is our understanding that County elected officials included funding for the Platt Ridge Extended project as part of the deliberations of the Executive's BRAC Implementation Committee, to improve the safety of access to the community due to the increase in traffic associated with BRAC. Again, this action was totally independent of the improvements at the intersection of MD 185 and Jones Bridge Road being carried out by the State.

In response to your letter requesting clarification of whether the SHA project requires closing the median at Spring Valley Road, it does not. The SHA project will provide the expected benefit whether the median is open or closed. The SHA project focuses on the operations of the MD185 intersection and ensuring that access continues to the community to avoid land locking a large number of homes and businesses. Because we are aware of the County's Platt Ridge Drive Extension project, SHA has developed two alternative designs for the MD 185 Phase 3 project; one with the median closed at Spring Valley Road, and the other with the median still open at Spring Valley Road. Both alternatives eliminate the need for the temporary traffic signal at Spring Valley Road. However, our Traffic Engineering Delay and Queuing Analysis shows that during evening peak traffic hours the backups on eastbound Jones Bridge Road will extend beyond the intersection with Spring Valley, but short of the proposed location of the Platt Ridge Drive Extension, making ingress and egress to and from the community more difficult for left turns.

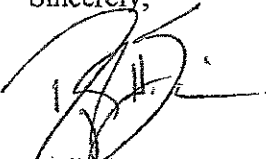
SHA agrees that the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project being funded by the County would provide a safer and more convenient ingress and egress to the Chevy Chase Valley community and businesses that now rely on Spring Valley Road. MCDOT installed a temporary traffic signal at Spring Valley Road, which will operate until the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project is completed by MCDOT. The median at Spring Valley Road is proposed to be closed by SHA's Phase 3 project at the request of MCDOT, but not until the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project is completed. It is our understanding that the MCDOT request was based on earlier coordination meetings with the community about the signal at Spring Valley Road being temporary; the leadership of the community acknowledged this understanding and reiterated their support in writing for the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project. The project, as envisioned, has the support of elected officials who included the project in the County's Capital Improvements Program.

The letter from former SHA Administrator, Mr. Neil Pedersen, emphasized that SHA would not commit to any funding for the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project without full support from MCDOT, M-NCPPC, and the planning board. There was no intent to imply the SHA intersection project is contingent with the extension of Platt Ridge Drive, or vice versa.

Mr. Michael F. Riley
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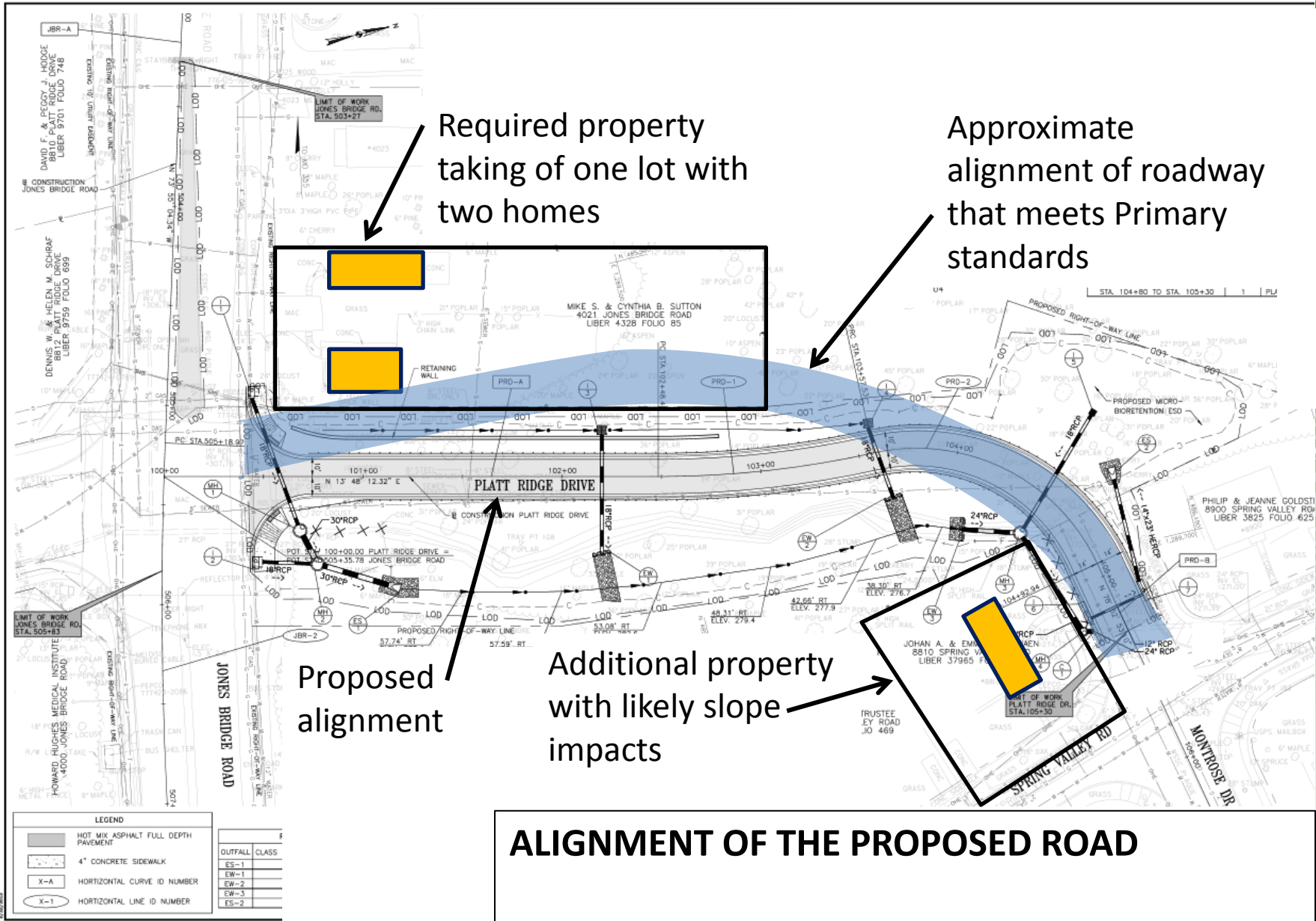
Thank you, again for your letter. If you have any additional questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Yuqiong Bai, Project Manager, Highway Design Division, SHA at 410-545-8816, toll-free 1-888-228-5003 or via email at ybai@sha.state.md.us; or Ms. Caryn G. Brookman, Environmental Manager, Environmental Planning Division, SHA at 410-545-8698 or via email at cbrookman@sha.state.md.us. Both Ms. Bai and Ms. Brookman will be happy to assist you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melinda B. Peters', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

✍ Melinda B. Peters
Administrator

cc: Ms. Yuqiong Bai, Project Engineer, Highway Design Division, SHA
Ms. Caryn G. Brookman, Environmental Manager, Environmental Planning Division,
SHA
Ms. Jeanette Mar, Environmental Program Manager, FHWA
Mr. Brian Young, District Engineer, SHA



Required property taking of one lot with two homes

Approximate alignment of roadway that meets Primary standards

Proposed alignment

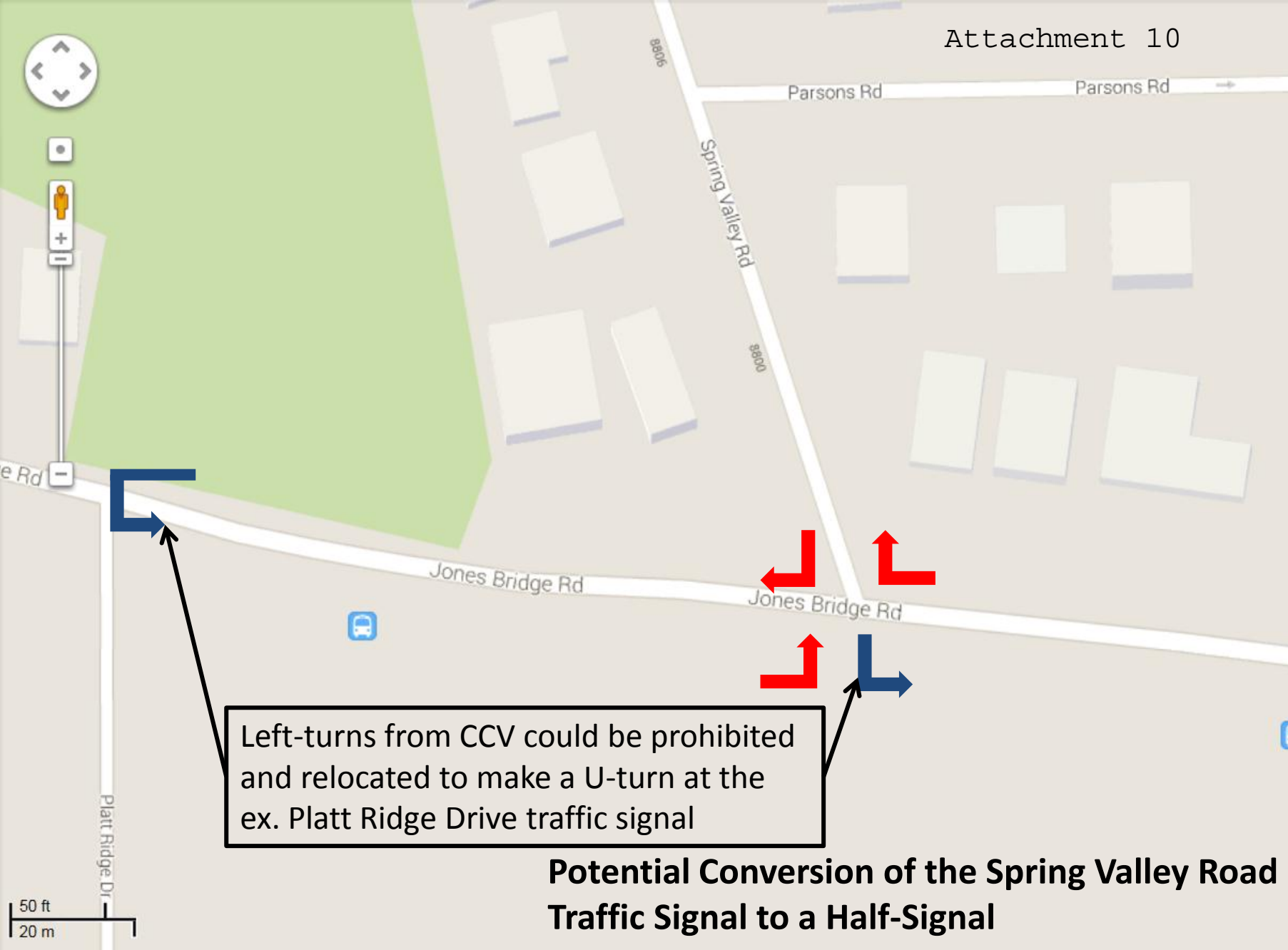
Additional property with likely slope impacts

ALIGNMENT OF THE PROPOSED ROAD

LEGEND

- HOT MIX ASPHALT FULL DEPTH PAVEMENT
- 4" CONCRETE SIDEWALK
- HORIZONTAL CURVE ID NUMBER
- HORIZONTAL LINE ID NUMBER

OUTFALL	CLASS
ES-1	
EW-1	
EW-2	
EW-3	
ES-2	



Left-turns from CCV could be prohibited and relocated to make a U-turn at the ex. Platt Ridge Drive traffic signal

Potential Conversion of the Spring Valley Road Traffic Signal to a Half-Signal



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

OFFICE OF THE CHAIR

February 7, 2014

Mr. Craig Rice, Council President
Council Office Building
100 Maryland Avenue, 5th Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

RE: County Executive's Recommended FY15 Capital Budget and FY15-20 Capital Improvements Program

Dear Mr. ~~Rice~~:
Craig

At our regularly scheduled meeting on February 6, 2014, the Planning Board discussed the County Executive's Recommended FY15 Capital Budget and FY15-20 Capital Improvements Program and voted to transmit the following comments for the County Council's consideration:

1. **CIP Schedule Changes:** Whereas the cost changes for the individual projects in the Executive's Recommended CIP are fairly well documented, the schedule changes – usually delays in the project's completion - are not. In the future, each PDF should clearly state any schedule changes from the previously approved CIP, as is done with the State's Consolidated Transportation Program.
2. **Schools:** All school clusters not meeting the school adequacy test should have projects programmed in the CIP at least for facility planning.
3. **Streetlighting (P507055):** This project should include replacing the lighting along Jackson Road from New Hampshire Avenue (MD65) to Jan Lane in FY15 or FY16.

The pedestrian sidewalks along Jackson Road provide connections from the neighborhood to White Oak Middle School, Jackson Road Elementary School, Martin Luther King Aquatic Center and Recreational Park, and the regional Paint Branch Hiker-Biker Trail. These sidewalks need to be adequately lighted to ensure the safety of children and other pedestrians. In 2009, the Department of Transportation requested that the project be turned over to them for implementation in their capital program rather than to reimburse the Department of Parks to implement the project, which runs mostly through the park, but the lighting has not been replaced.

4. **Capital Crescent Trail (P501316):** Continuous lighting should be provided on the Capital Crescent Trail between Bethesda and Silver Spring to the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA) standard while ensuring maximum protection for undesirable spillover to adjacent homes. Additional study of this issue since the Council last considered this question has shown that continuous lighting would be highly beneficial to the trail's attractiveness and safety.

If lighting is not included in the initial construction of the trail, the cost of designing and installing conduit for a future lighting project should be included. This alternative was not previously considered by the Council.

5. **Metropolitan Branch Trail (P501110):** Request that the Executive confirm that the budgeted cost reflects the current design.

The project would be delayed by two years, in part because of negotiations over the alignment of the segment of the trail on the site of the historic B&O railroad station in Silver Spring and how it would affect the planned bridge over Georgia Avenue. Despite the delay and changes in design, no change in cost is shown.

6. **Montrose Parkway East (P500717):** The PDF should be modified to include an evaluation of a fifth travel lane for BRT per the approved Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan.
7. **Piney Meetinghouse Road Bridge (P501522):** The PDF should specify that the planned shared use path along Piney Meetinghouse Road should be constructed as part of the roadway bridge.

Failure to construct the path as part of the proposed bridge would mean that the bike path would have to be constructed on a separate bridge, increasing the impacts to Watts Branch Stream Valley Park, as well as costs.

8. **Platt Ridge Drive Extended (P501200):** The construction of this project may not be needed.

This project would construct a non-master planned road through parkland and is intended to provide access to the Chevy Chase Valley neighborhood should the traffic signal installed at Spring Valley Road and Jones Bridge Road fail to operate safely. The project did not go through the Facility Planning process and therefore was submitted for approval at the concept level stage. It is anticipated to be reviewed by the Planning Board as a Mandatory Referral prior to the Council's final approval of the CIP. If the Board finds that the new road is not needed and denies the project, it should be deleted from the CIP.

9. **Rapid Transit System (P501318):** Delete the citation of the Randolph Road corridor as a future study candidate and replace with New Hampshire Avenue, which is likely to have higher ridership and will support the new MetroExtra K9 bus service.
10. **Emory Lane Bikeway:** Include in the CIP a project to construct the Emory Lane Bikeway from Muncaster Mill Road north to Holly Ridge Road.

This project would be part of the planned North Branch Trail project to provide a continuous hard surface trail from Lake Frank north to the ICC and Bowie Mill Local Park in Olney.

11. **Bethesda Bikeway and Pedestrian Facilities (P500119):** Request that the Executive confirm that the budgeted cost reflects the current design of the Capital Crescent Trail on-road alignment, and that its construction will be completed prior to the closure of the tunnel under the Apex Building.
12. **Facility Planning Transportation (P509337):** Include the Life Sciences Center Loop Trail as a candidate project for FY15-16.

Construction of this trail must be included in the six-year CIP before Stage 2 development can begin.
13. **Revolving fund for planning developer-built projects:** Include a project in the CIP for Transportation Facility Planning for developer-built projects and consider establishing a revolving fund to construct these projects in advance and accept developer contributions as they move forward in the development process. This is especially needed for projects that are, or will eventually be, combined with county or state improvements to the same facilities.
14. **Bike-Sharing:** A project similar to other public participation projects should be added to the Transportation CIP to hold developer contributions to the County's future bike-share network, as well as fully fund the system.
15. **Station Access Program:** An annual program should be added to the Transportation CIP to improve access to existing or funded Metrorail, light rail, and bus rapid transit stations in Pedestrian Bicycle Priority Areas and other station areas.
16. **Clarksburg Library (P710500):** The library is a priority for the Clarksburg Town Center and funding for its planning, design and supervision should be included in FY15-16 of the CIP instead of delaying it until FY20.
17. **Sewer Service to Clarksburg Historic District:** The PDF for the Clarksburg Fire Station notes that it includes exploring alternative approaches to providing sewer service to the Clarksburg Historic District, but the County still needs to identify a funding solution to construct the extension.
18. **Wheaton Library and Community Recreation Center (P361202):** The project should include the retention and renovation of the existing recreation center on the combined site. This is not intended to delay or compromise the provision of the new recreation center.
19. **Long Branch Town Center Redevelopment (P150700):** We support this CIP project to assist in the redevelopment in Long Branch.
20. **Wheaton Redevelopment Program (P150401):** We support this project, which includes the MNCPPC headquarters building and would address as several other Sector Plan objectives, such as a centrally located public space and increasing the daytime population in the area.

Mr. Craig Rice, Council President

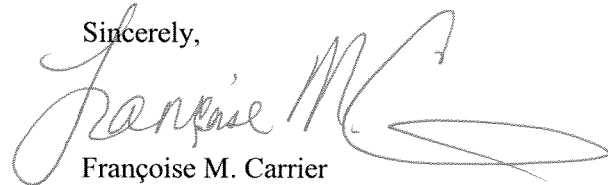
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21. **White Flint Fire Station #23** (P451502): We support the inclusion of this project in the CIP. This facility is important to the provision of public facilities in White Flint and the potential for joint residential development.
22. **Kennedy Shriver Aquatic Center Building Envelope Improvement** (P721503): We support this new project to upgrade the existing Aquatic Center building.
23. **Montgomery College, Germantown Student Services Center** (P076612): We support increased the proposed funding for this project.
24. **MCPS Bus Depot and Maintenance Relocation** (P360903): The Executive and Board of Education should develop a strategy towards moving the Bus Depot within FY15-FY20 so that the Shady Grove Station-Eastside development may proceed.
25. **MCPS & M-NCPPC Maintenance Facilities Relocation** (P361109): This project is listed as a Mass Transit Project in the Transportation Program but appears to be more appropriately listed in the General Government Program because of the multiple agencies involved.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. The staff report to the Planning Board is enclosed for further background information. If you have any questions or comments concerning our review, please feel free to contact me directly at 301-495-4605, or Larry Cole at 301-495-4528.

Sincerely,



Françoise M. Carrier
Chair

Enclosure