



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB
ITEM NO. 2
3-14-02

March 8, 2002

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Richard C. Hawthorne, Chief *RH*
Transportation Planning

John Carter, Chief *JAC*
Community-Based Planning Division

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

PROJECT: Wilson Lane (MD188) From River Road (MD190) to Moorland Lane
Contract No. MO8655177

REVIEW TYPE: Mandatory Referral No. 01812-SHA-1

APPLICANT: Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA)

APPLYING FOR: Plan Approval

COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING TEAM AREA: Bethesda/North Bethesda-Garrett
Park

**RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL WITH COMMENTS TO THE MARYLAND STATE
HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION (SHA)**

The following comments are recommended on the proposed project (see Attachment 1: Location Map):

1. Modify the intersection of Wilson Lane and Aberdeen Road to improve pedestrian and traffic safety and provide a striped crosswalk at this intersection.

2. Improve the curve at Maryknoll Avenue and shift the alignment of Wilson Lane between Arnett Lane and Maryknoll Avenue to allow future sidewalk construction on the south side of Wilson Lane.
3. Construct the proposed four-foot shoulder adjacent to the westbound lanes of Wilson Lane for use by westbound bicyclists.
4. Retain all four crosswalks at the intersection of Wilson Lane and Whittier Boulevard.
5. All handicap ramps must be ADA-compliant and dual, directional ramps should be used wherever possible to provide better guidance to handicapped users and provide the shortest crossing for all pedestrians.
6. Stop bars and centerlines should not intrude on legal pedestrian crosswalks whether they are striped or not. All intersections must be made handicapped-accessible whether or not there are striped crosswalks proposed.
7. Consider using an alternative sign to inform drivers that they must stop for pedestrians.
8. Provide a median traffic island with pedestrian refuge in front of the Thomas Pyle Middle School.
9. Coordinate with the Thomas Pyle Middle School and with the Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) to address circulation issues in the vicinity of the school and to ensure that all pedestrian crossings of both Wilson Lane and the service road are safe.
10. Consider providing a median refuge island at Springer Road.
11. Provide sufficient lighting for pedestrians to safely cross at all intersections.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project would construct a sidewalk along the north side of Wilson Lane between River Road and Aberdeen Road/Merrick Road/Rayburn Road, and along the south side between Aberdeen and Moorland Lane. The project would also construct left-turn lanes at Whittier Boulevard and at the Landon School entrance/Marbury Road intersection. This project was originally conceived as a resurfacing project but was expanded to include the above work.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Traffic and Safety

This project would provide safety and capacity improvements for vehicular traffic by constructing left-turn lanes at Whittier Boulevard and at the Landon School entrance/Marbury Road intersection. Wilson Lane within the project limits has one through lane in each direction and the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan recommends that it remain so.

Safety would be improved by providing storage space for left turning vehicles outside the travel lanes, thereby reducing the problem of rear-end collisions. Removing turning vehicles from the through travel lanes would also improve capacity by reducing delays for through and right-turning traffic.

At a public meeting on this project in September 2000, several citizens made comments about an existing speeding problem on Wilson Lane. They were concerned that providing the left-turn lanes would exacerbate the problem and that gaps in traffic that now exist for pedestrians to cross the road would be eliminated. Staff believes that SHA has not adequately addressed these concerns, and recommends that SHA make modifications to alleviate the existing speeding problem and improve the safety and accessibility of pedestrians crossing the street.

While the posted speed for this road is 30 mph, the proposed design speed is 35 mph. Staff is concerned about the higher design speed for two reasons. Our first concern is that a higher design speed could worsen the existing speeding problem where modifications to design elements to the higher speed are possible. Our second concern is that there are some very substandard horizontal curves within the project limits that are not proposed to be changed. By having part of the road at a 35 mph design speed or higher and several locations with a 20 mph design speed or lower, we run the risk of creating inconsistent expectations for drivers.

Staff is particularly concerned that the design of the Aberdeen Road/Merrick Road/Rayburn Road intersection will worsen an already substandard condition. The roadway has a centerline radius that is far below the minimum recommended by AASHTO. In addition, the taper to create the left-turn bay at the entrance to the Landon School ends immediately west of the curve, making the curve seem sharper than it already is. The north side of the intersection is also wider than it needs to be to accommodate movements to and from the intersecting roads.

Staff recommends that this intersection be modified to improve pedestrian and traffic safety. The throat of the north side of this intersection could be narrowed to better control traffic movements and shorten the pedestrian crossing distance across Aberdeen Road, and a median constructed west of the intersection to separate opposing travel lanes and shift the eastbound lane south. This would eliminate the

increase in curvature caused by the taper noted above and create the opportunity to construct a pedestrian refuge in the median (see Attachment 2).

Staff notes that this curve and others will be slightly banked to improve safety. These locations will also be tested for skid resistance after construction and the pavement grooved if needed. Curve warning signs are proposed where needed. Staff supports these additional safety measures.

While less sharp than the curve noted above, staff is also concerned with the substandard horizontal curve between Arnett Lane and Maryknoll Avenue (see Attachment 3). Improving this curve by flattening it and moving the roadway to the north would have another benefit: easing construction of a sidewalk on the south side in the future. There is almost one hundred feet between the proposed curb line and the northern right-of-way line through most of the area between Honesty Way and Maryknoll Avenue, whereas the southern right-of-way line is only two feet from the edge of pavement in one location. It will be very difficult or impossible to get additional right-of-way for a future sidewalk on the south side since the houses here are so close to the right-of-way line, only twelve feet at one location. Also, SHA proposes to plant a significant row of trees here that would need to be removed if the road is widened in this direction in the future. **Staff recommends that the sharpness of the curve between Arnett Lane and Maryknoll Avenue be reduced and that the straight section of roadway Honesty Way and Maryknoll Avenue be constructed farther north to allow for future sidewalk construction on the south side of Wilson Lane.**

Thomas Pyle Middle School Issues

At a public meeting on February 28, 2002, citizens expressed concern with traffic circulation issues concerning the Thomas Pyle Middle School. Part of their concern was focused on the circulation of Wilson Lane itself, including turning movements in and out of the school. Staff believes that the subject project should relieve those problems. Another issue was the citizens' concerns with parents using the service road across from the school to drop their children off. Since SHA proposes to eliminate the drop-off lane immediately in front of the school, there was concern that this activity would increase. A traffic island would also be constructed at the east entrance to the school that would prohibit left-turn movements (see Attachment 4). Staff agrees that the safer traffic solution is to have the drop-offs take place on the service road, but is concerned with the safety of the increased number of students who are expected to cross Wilson Lane. Those concerns are discussed further below.

While SHA staff said at the public meeting that school circulation issues are not their responsibility, staff believes that the proposed elimination of the drop-off lane on Wilson Lane and the proposed traffic island at the east entrance have made further coordination with the school and the citizens on this issue impossible to avoid. SHA staff have also said that they are not responsible for the traffic operations or pedestrian crossings on the service road because it is a County facility. Staff believes that good design requires that Wilson Lane and the service road be looked at in tandem. **Staff**

recommends that SHA coordinate with the Thomas Pyle Middle School and with DPWT to address circulation issues in the vicinity of the school and to ensure that all pedestrian crossings of both Wilson Lane and the service road are safe.

Staff is concerned about the crosswalk locations in the vicinity of the Thomas Pyle Middle School. This project proposes to eliminate the crosswalk on the east leg of Wilson Lane at Whittier Boulevard, the leg closest to the school. **Staff believes that all four crosswalks should be retained at this intersection.**

Staff also believes that the potential loss of crossing opportunities for pedestrians caused by the addition of left-turn lanes should be mitigated by providing median refuge islands in select locations. In particular, **staff believes that a median traffic island with a pedestrian refuge is very desirable in front of the school** (see Attachment 4). While there will be a crossing guard on duty during the normal crossing time for students, a pedestrian refuge on a traffic island would provide an extra measure of safety, a benefit that is needed for the increased number of students who are expected to cross to and from the drop-off on the service road, and a benefit that becomes more important if the east crosswalk at Whittier noted above is not retained. **The construction of median refuge islands should also be considered at Springer Road.**

Additional Pedestrian Accommodation Issues

A five-foot sidewalk is proposed along the north side of Wilson Lane between River Road and the Aberdeen Road/Merrick Road/Rayburn Road intersection. Another segment would be constructed along the south side of Wilson Lane between Aberdeen and Moorland Lane. A continuous sidewalk would be provided on at least one side of Wilson Lane through the project limits.

Since the Aberdeen Road intersection would be the crossing point between the two sections of sidewalk, and since the intersection itself has an unusual configuration, staff believes that additional measures should be taken to ensure a safe crossing here, including the changes in the configuration noted above. In addition, **staff believes that a striped crosswalk should be provided at this intersection** (see Attachment 2).

All handicap ramps must be perpendicular to the curb to be ADA-compliant. Dual, directional ramps should be used wherever possible to provide better guidance to handicapped users and provide the shortest crossing for all pedestrians. Some of the handicap ramps that are shown on the current plans do not meet one or both of these goals.

A legal crosswalk exists as the extension of all sidewalks, paved or not, at all intersections, whether they are four-way intersections or tee intersections. These crosswalks need to be accommodated whether they are striped or not. The current plans show stop bars and centerline striping extending into the legal, unstriped crosswalks and should be pulled back.

In addition, consideration should be given to using an alternative sign to the standard that says "Notice - Stop for Pedestrians at all Crosswalks - State Law". Staff has two concerns about this sign. First, there are a lot of words to read while driving and second, that the words are likely to be misunderstood. A driver reading this sign may make the logically incorrect conclusion that he is not required to stop where there is no striped crosswalk.

Staff recommends that another pedestrian law sign be considered. There is a sign that is used in the Seattle area and perhaps others whose legend is "Stop for Me, It's the Law" with a stick figure of a pedestrian (see Attachment 5). This sign avoids the confusion of whether the pedestrian is or isn't in the crosswalk and is more in line with the trend toward graphics over text.

Bicycle Accommodation

The 1978 Master Plan of Bikeways has recommendations for Wilson Lane that are more specific than those shown in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan. The segment between Elmore Lane and Aberdeen/Merrick/Rayburn Roads is listed as having on-road/Class III bike accommodation. The rest of the project, from River Road to Elmore and from Aberdeen/Merrick/Rayburn to Moorland Lane, is listed as having proposed on-road/Class II bike lanes. The Master Plan-recommended bike accommodation would generally not be provided.

Between River Road and Aberdeen Road, this project would provide a varying roadway width that would generally provide 11' travel lanes, with a 4' shoulder in the eastbound direction. **Staff recommends that the 4' shoulder be striped adjacent to the westbound lanes. On-road bicyclists will have the option of using the frontage road between Elmore Lane and Aberdeen Road.** This accommodation is similar to what will be done as part of SHA's project on Carroll Avenue in Takoma Park.

The segment from Aberdeen to Moorland would stripe the existing twenty-four foot curb-to-curb width as eleven-foot travel lanes with one-foot offsets to the curb. Very little new curb is proposed to be installed. Given the tight right-of-way constraints and the concern about the existing speeding problems on this road, staff believes that the proposed travel lane widths are acceptable until the roadway is reconstructed.

Lighting

There is a general lack of sufficient lighting along Wilson Road within the project limits despite having substandard roadway geometry, the presence of schools along and near the roadway, a transit route on the road with pedestrians crossing back and forth, no sidewalk on the south side which means that pedestrians are required to cross more than they normally would, and in general a fairly densely populated area. **Good lighting for all intersections on this project, including unsignalized and tee intersections, is a necessity for pedestrian safety.** As this road is repaved and

widened, it is likely that vehicle speeds will increase. ***Ensuring that pedestrians can safely cross the road is a critical issue that must be addressed by this project.***

Other Issues

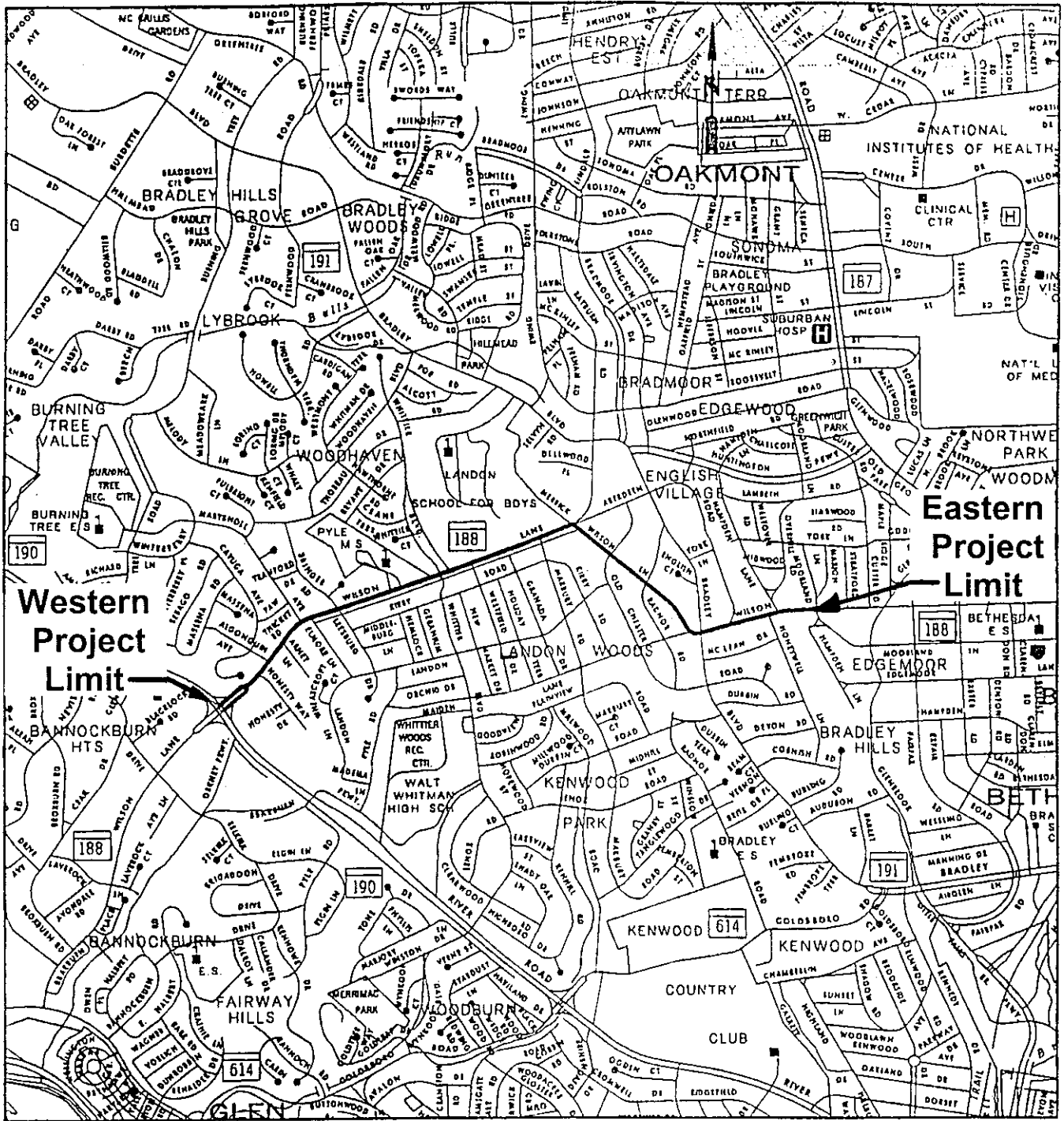
At the 2/28/02 meeting, citizens also brought up several issues outside the limits of this project, including improving the crossing of River Road, which is at the eastern limit of the project. They also requested an enhanced level of streetscaping, similar to what was done on Wilson Lane east of Moorland Lane as a Neighborhood Conservation project. SHA has agreed to meet with these citizens and try to work on coming up with a future project to address these concerns.

LC:cmd

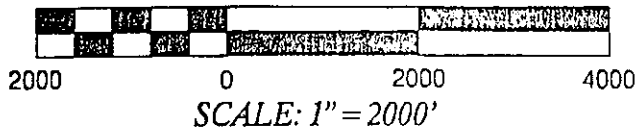
Attachments

cc: Delegate William Bronrott

MR Wilson Lane.doc



MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PROJECT LENGTH: 1.70 MILES



RAYBURN ROAD

ABERDEEN ROAD

NORTH

PT 154+39.61

Staff-recommended
Narrowing of
Intersecting Street Width

MERRICK ROAD

WILSON LANE

PCC 152+32.13

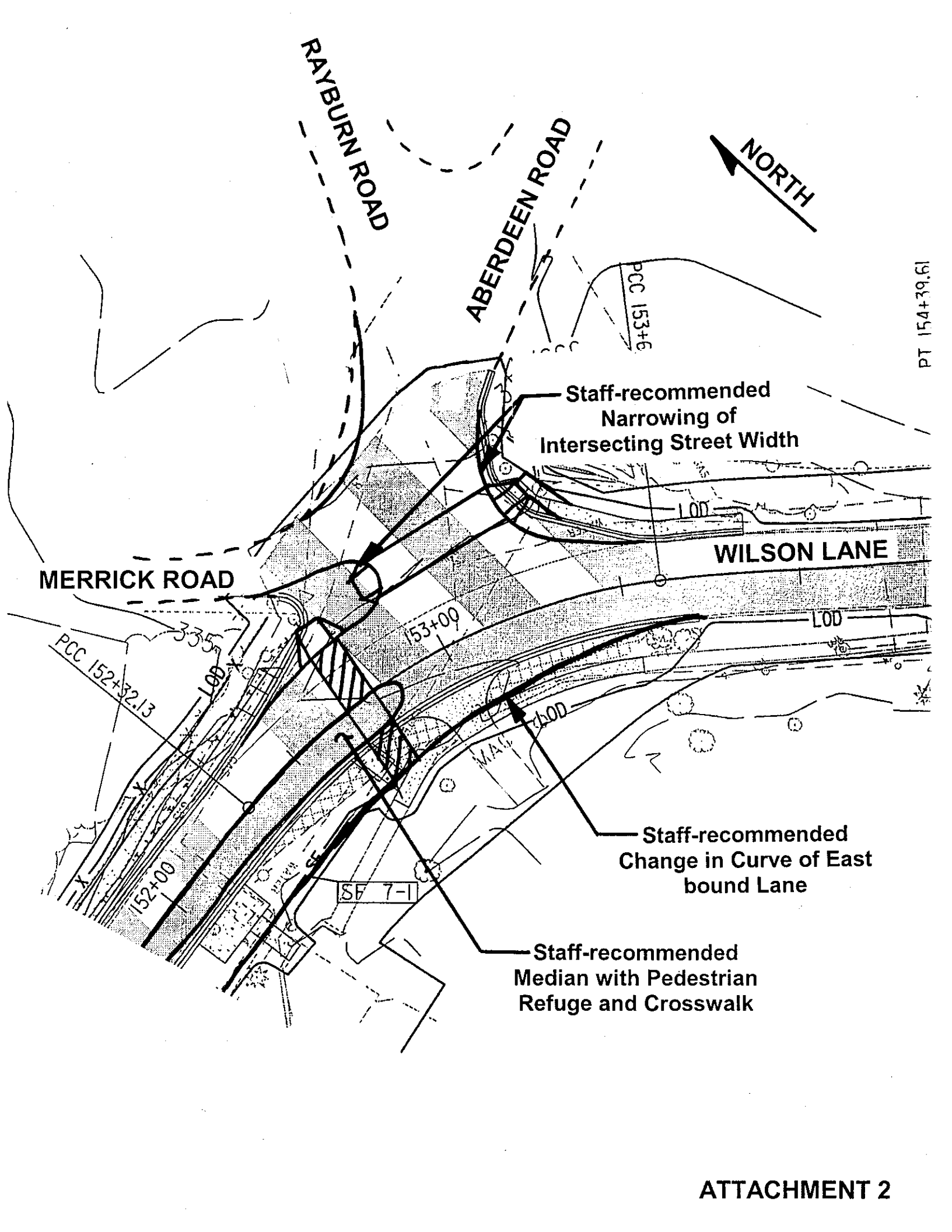
153+00

152+00

SF 7-1

Staff-recommended
Change in Curve of East
bound Lane

Staff-recommended
Median with Pedestrian
Refuge and Crosswalk

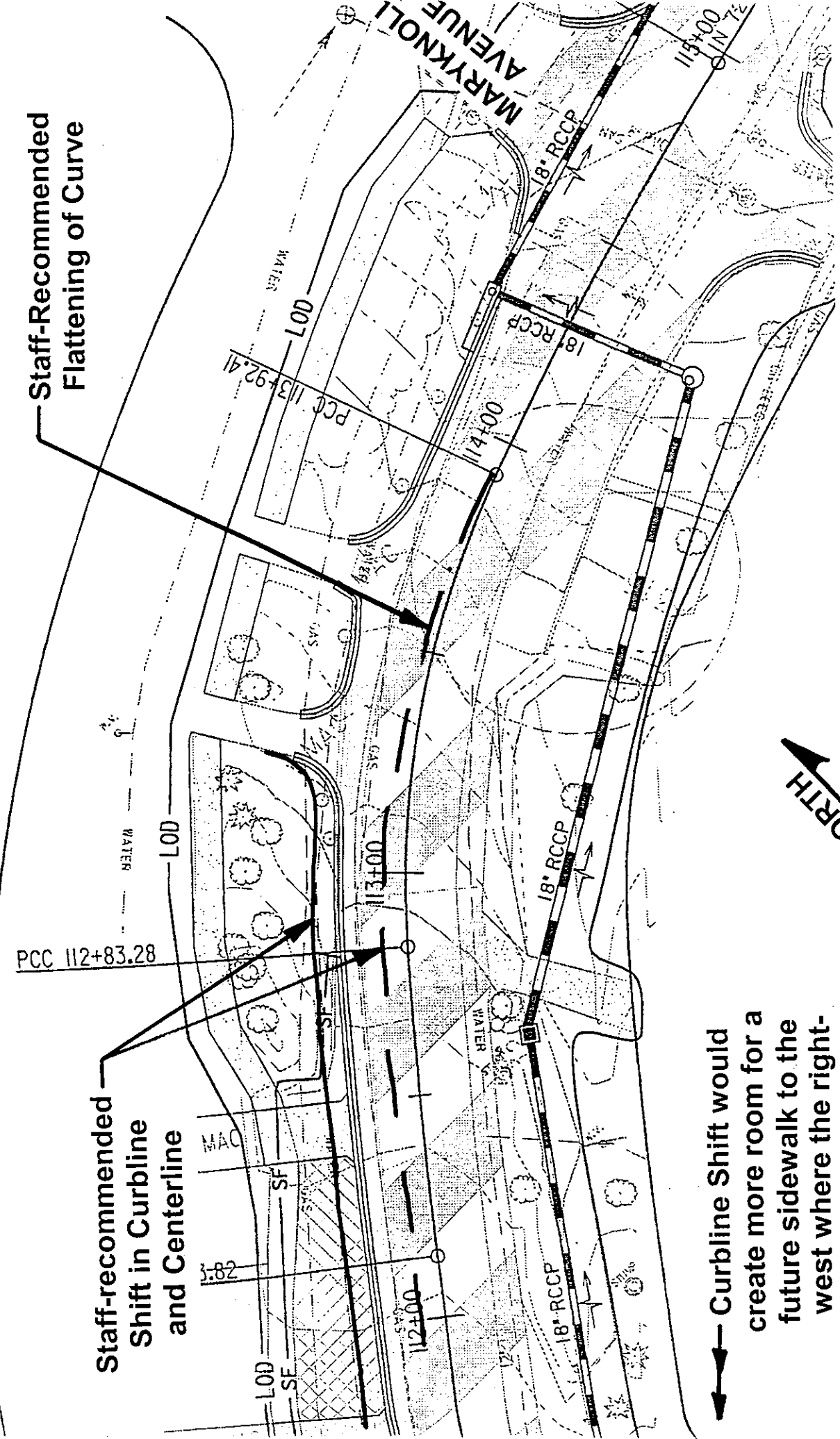


RIGHT-OF-WAY LINE

Staff-Recommended
Flattening of Curve

Staff-recommended
Shift in Curbline
and Centerline

Curbline Shift would
create more room for a
future sidewalk to the
west where the right-
of-way is constrained



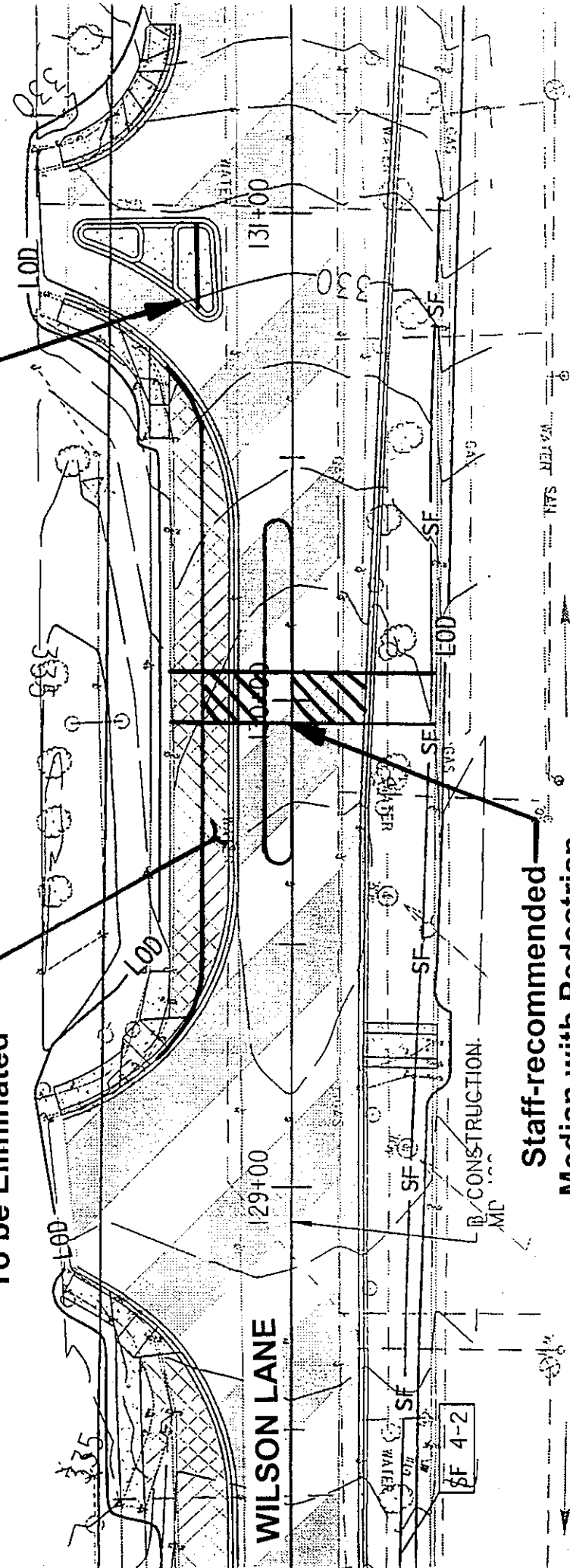


Proposed Traffic Island
at East Entrance to
Prohibit Left-Turns

Thomas Pyle Middle
School

Drop-Off Lane
To be Eliminated

Staff-recommended
Median with Pedestrian
Refuge and Crosswalk



WILSON LANE

SF 4-2

