



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB  
ITEM # 4  
09/26/02

September 20, 2002

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Jeff Zyontz, Chief  
County-wide Planning Division

Jorge A. Valladares, P.E. Chief  
Environmental Planning/County-wide Planning Division

FROM: Joe Anderson for Department of Park and Planning  
(301) 650-4373

SUBJECT: **Mandatory Referral No. 02002-SHA-1—State Highway Administration (SHA) Congestion Relief Study—Intersection Improvements—Clopper Road (MD 117) from Firstfield Road to I-270**

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## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Board approve the project with the following comments:

1. Prepare final landscape plans in coordination with staff with attention to these specific concerns:
  - a. Provide landscape panels with street trees between proposed sidewalks and the roadway wherever possible.
  - b. Landscape medians which are 6 feet in width or greater with trees.
2. Coordinate transit stop locations, crosswalks, and curb ramp locations in final design with the county to assure they are ADA-compliant, provide adequate median refuge areas, and that there are sufficient pedestrian crossings.
3. Protect the 30 inch Maple tree at Bureau Drive from incidental construction activity.
4. The Forest Conservation Plan should be approved by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources prior to construction.

5. Explore aesthetic modification or landscape screening of the highly-visible stormwater management facility.

## **DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT**

The State Highway Administration (SHA) is proposing to improve Clopper Road (MD 117) between Firstfield Road and I-270, in Gaithersburg. The project will add an additional or third lane eastbound on Clopper Road beginning at Firstfield and ending as a second lane on the ramp to I-270 southbound. A second left turn lane will also be added on MD 117 at Quince Orchard (eastbound to northbound).

The existing bike path on the south side of MD 117 will be extended from Bureau Drive to Firstfield. The existing sidewalk will be extended on the north side of MD 117 from Quince Orchard to Firstfield road.

The project will also include the closing of the left turn median cut on MD 117 at the north entrance to Quince Orchard Plaza, in order to improve safety. This access will be replaced by taking a U-turn at Firstfield Road and then a right turn into the Plaza.

The project is at the semi-final design stage and the construction is scheduled to begin in the summer of 2003. The project is depicted on the attached aerial photograph.

## **BACKGROUND**

The proposed project has been developed by SHA under their ongoing Congestion Relief Study program. This program has identified major congested intersections throughout the county in order to plan, design, and implement feasible improvements. County and M-NCPPC staff have worked directly with SHA through this process, developing and reviewing design proposals.

This project is closely linked to two other transportation projects, the I-270/US 15 Multimodal Study and the extension of Watkins Mill Road. All of these projects have been coordinated within the larger SHA MD 117 Corridor project planning study, which has been described to the Planning Board in a memo transmitted under separate cover from Transportation Planning.

Staff also convened a special public meeting in the community, inviting residents and civic groups to review the proposals. The meeting was held on September 5, 2002. A copy of the meeting invitation is attached. Aside from some negotiations between SHA and NIST over their perimeter fencing, staff is not aware of any other issues with adjacent land owners or area residents.

## **STAFF EVALUATION**

There have been numerous modifications to the proposed project during the course of the planning and design process. There are only a few remaining areas of concern to address.

The project is consistent with the Gaithersburg and Vicinity Master Plan and provides a significant extension to the existing master planned bikeway along MD 117. SHA has asserted that all intersections will be ADA-compliant for pedestrian cross traffic.

Traffic operations at the MD 117 and MD 124 intersection would significantly improve under the proposal, taking the current Level of Service (LOS) E conditions in the peak hours to LOS C in the AM peak hour and LOS D in the PM peak hour.

One feature of particular concern to staff is the stormwater management facility on the north side of MD 117 between MD 124 and Firstfield. The design is functional but not aesthetic. Given its prominent, highly-visible setting, it should be redesigned and landscaped to provide a pleasant view from the road, or it should be sufficiently screened to hide it from view.

Landscape plans have not yet been prepared or made available to staff for review. In that regard staff suggests that the redesigned median area on MD 117 be landscaped with trees where it is 6 feet or more wide. Also street trees should be provided along MD 117 between the curb and each sidewalk or bikeway.

A Forest Conservation Plan is being prepared by SHA for approval by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, therefore, there is no additional local requirement. However, steps should be taken to protect a 30 inch diameter Maple tree at Bureau Drive from damage during construction.

cc: Dan Hardy  
Mary Dolan  
Nancy Sturgeon  
Larry Cole  
Bob Simpson, DPWT  
Ken Briggs, SHA

Attachments

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THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

August 23, 2002

RE: Intersection Improvements for  
MD 117 (Clopper Road) between  
Firstfield Road and I-270

Dear Community Member:

The State Highway Administration (SHA) is planning a project to improve conditions on MD 117 (Clopper Road) between I-270 and Firstfield Road. SHA would like public comments on this proposal and for this purpose, you are invited to a public open house to view the design concept for the improvements. The meeting will be held:

Thursday, September 5, 2002, 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM  
Gaithersburg Branch, Meeting Room A  
Montgomery County Library  
18330 Montgomery Village Avenue  
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20879

The session will be informal and designed to show attendees the proposal and to take comments. Staff from the SHA and the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT), along with M-NCPPC will be on hand.

For your further information, the Planning Board is tentatively scheduled to review the proposals during its regular meeting of Thursday, September 26, 2002. The public may direct comments to the Planning Board. If you are interested in attending or testifying, as always, please double check on the Board's date and time prior to attending, at 301-495-4600, during the week of their meeting. Submit any formal comments on the project to Derick P. Berlage, Chairman, Montgomery County Planning Board, 8787 Georgia Ave, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3760.

Sincerely,

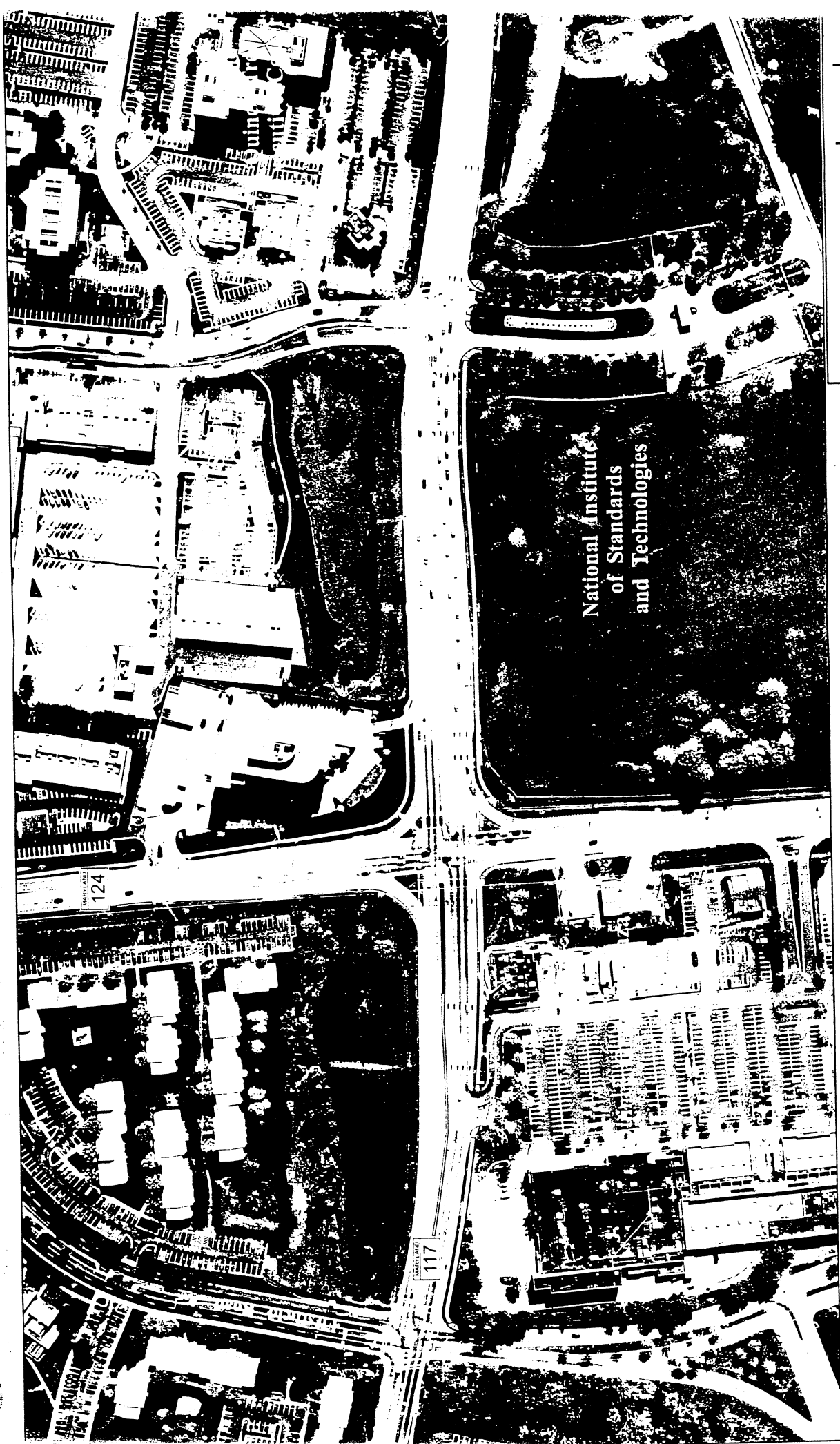
*Sheila Simpson*  
for Joe Anderson, Planner  
County-wide Planning Division  
Telephone: 301-650-4373

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CC: Ken Briggs, SHA  
Bob Simpson, DPWT  
Nancy Sturgeon, M-NCPPC  
Larry Cole, M-NCPPC  
Dan Janousek, City of Gaithersburg



# MD 117 (Clopper Road) at MD 124 (Quince Orchard Road)



## Legend

- Historic Properties
- Parklands and Recreational Areas
- Welllands
- Community Resources
- Streams/Open Water

New Roadway  
New Sidewalk and/or

Scale 1" = 50.0'