



July 8, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Jeffrey Zyontz, Chief *JZ*
County-wide Planning Division

Richard C. Hawthorne, Chief *RGH*
Transportation Planning

John Carter, Chief *JXC*
Community-Based Planning

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

PROJECT: Bethesda Bikeway and Pedestrian Facilities
CIP No. 500119

REVIEW TYPE: Mandatory Referral No. MR#05807-DPW&T-1

APPLICANT: Montgomery County Department of
Public Works and Transportation

APPLYING FOR: Plan Approval

COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING TEAM AREA: Bethesda-Chevy Chase/North Bethesda

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staff recommends that the Board approve the proposed project (see Attachment 1: Vicinity Map) with the following comments to Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT):

1. Provide a pattern in the proposed brick paving that clearly delineates the route of the Capital Crescent Trail (CCT) through the northwest corner of the Woodmont/Bethesda intersection and continue to work with Federal Realty and our staff on the design of streetscaping improvements on this corner.
2. Provide wider ramps to accommodate bicyclists at the Woodmont/Bethesda intersection.
3. Provide a better orientation of the crosswalk on the west leg of Bethesda Avenue.
4. Align the proposed crosswalk on the north leg of Woodmont Avenue with the trail easement to the east.
5. Consider designating an on-street parking space on Woodmont Avenue just north of Bethesda Avenue as a drop-off/loading area.
6. Consider providing additional on-street parking spaces on Bethesda Avenue.
7. During the development of Parking Lots 31 and 31-A, study the feasibility of providing a signalized diagonal crosswalk from the southwest to the northeast quadrants of the Woodmont Avenue/Bethesda Avenue.

PREVIOUS BOARD ACTION: None.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project would construct roadway neckdowns and install pedestrian countdown signals at the intersections along Norfolk Avenue between Rugby Avenue and Woodmont Avenue. Eleven-foot-wide travel lanes and five-foot-wide bike lanes would be provided along Norfolk Avenue.

This project would also eliminate the existing free-right-turn lane in the northwest quadrant of the Woodmont Avenue/Bethesda Avenue intersection and extend the sidewalk paving into the existing roadway area. The crosswalks to and from the northwest quadrant would be modified and widened from twelve feet to sixteen feet, and the curblines on the east side of Woodmont Avenue in the northeast quadrant would be bumped out and the roadway width reduced to shorten the pedestrian crossing distance.

STAFF ANALYSIS

This project would implement two specific recommendations of the 1994 Bethesda Central Business District Sector Plan to improve bicyclist and pedestrian accommodation at two highly important locations:

- Norfolk Avenue, which is the spine of the Woodmont Triangle and connects National Institute of Health (NIH) with the Bethesda Metro Station and the CCT.
- The intersection of Woodmont Avenue and Bethesda Avenue, which is the focal point of the Bethesda Row development, the terminus of the proposed Bi-County Transitway and the trailhead of the CCT, which also has one of the highest pedestrian volumes in the county.

Norfolk Avenue

The proposed neckdowns would improve the pedestrian environment by shortening the crossing distance and by slowing turning traffic at the intersections. The additional space that would be created at the corners would also allow pedestrians waiting to cross the street to be out of the sidewalk traffic flow and would accommodate the items that are normally found around intersections, such as traffic signal poles, newspaper boxes, and traffic and parking signs. One on-street parking space would be removed as part of the proposed improvements.

The proposed neckdowns would have a five-foot curb radius at the corner (see Attachment 2). The small radius would allow these intersections to meet the preferred treatment in the Americans for Disabilities Act Best Practices guide by having two handicap ramps at each corner that are on tangent sections of curb and that are directly in line with the proposed crosswalks.

Bicyclist accommodation would be improved by the provision of five-foot-wide bike lanes through the project length along Norfolk Avenue. The bike lanes would be offset from the curb by three feet so that single unit trucks can make right turns at the intersections around the small radius curb noted above without swinging widely into the opposite lane. Access would be improved between NIH and Battery Lane Urban Park, which is immediately north of the northern project limit, to the Bethesda Metro Station and the CCT.

While the project was initially expected to provide a greater level of streetscaping, the only landscaping items that are now included would be movable planters at the intersections along Norfolk Avenue. No additional trees would be planted, but no existing trees would be removed. The proposed sidewalks would be concrete.

Staff expects that developers would be required to underground utilities and to provide brick sidewalks and ornamental lighting as part of future development, consistent with the Woodmont Triangle Sector Plan Amendment that was recently approved by the Board. This project would provide the basic framework for future streetscaping, however, in that the final curblines would be set by this project, eliminating the possibility of multiple disturbances in the roadway by individual developers as their projects are approved. As such, this project would provide good functional improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists and would set the stage for higher-level streetscape improvements in the future.

Woodmont Avenue/Bethesda Avenue

The Woodmont Avenue/Bethesda Avenue intersection has very high pedestrian and bicycle traffic volumes. The weekday pedestrian volumes during mid-day and during the evening peak are about one-half of the vehicular volumes. January 2005 observations were 457 pedestrians vs. 987 vehicles during a one-hour period for the former, and 1707 pedestrians vs. 3875 vehicles for the three-hour period between 4:00 pm and 7:00pm.

Park staff's traffic counts for the CCT have shown in excess of 500 trail users per hour on the weekend and Parking Lot 31 is one of the main trailheads for the CCT. Many or most of the riders use the paved trail south of the intersection and do not actually cross the intersection to use the unpaved segment north of the air rights tunnel. Once the trail is paved to Silver Spring however, bicyclist usage of the intersection will likely greatly increase and the number of bicyclists using the intersection will increase.

The free-right-turn lane and one southbound lane of Woodmont Avenue would be eliminated in the northwest quadrant of the intersection in front of Barnes and Noble (see Attachment 3). A northbound lane would be eliminated in the southeast and northeast quadrants, but because this lane ends immediately north of the intersection, it provides little capacity. The crosswalks would also be reoriented to shorten the pedestrian crossing distance.

The most significant change would be on the north leg of Woodmont Avenue where the distance between the island and the east curb would be cut to half of what it is right now (from 90 feet to 44 feet), and the total crossing distance on the north leg of Woodmont Avenue would be cut by more than two-thirds, from 152 feet to 44 feet. The number of lanes to be crossed on this leg would drop from six to three. While the number of lanes would be reduced, staff's traffic analysis shows that the intersection would continue to operate very well with present traffic volumes and would still operate within acceptable congestion levels with a Bethesda CBD Stage II buildout scenario.

While the crosswalk on the north leg would be greatly improved, staff believes that a minor adjustment is needed to provide continuity with the ultimate alignment of the CCT north of the intersection. An easement exists to accommodate this alignment but the proposed crosswalk does not quite line up with it. DPWT Traffic staff has stated that they do not want to push the stop bar back from the intersection any farther than it is right now, but the crosswalk can be angled slightly so that the stop bar remains as proposed while the crosswalk can be aligned with the easement.

While the length of the crosswalk on the west leg of Bethesda Avenue would be shortened, staff believes that it needs to be improved further than proposed by DPWT. Many of the pedestrians and bicyclists crossing Bethesda Avenue between the CCT and Barnes and Noble now cross mid-block because it is the shortest distance between two points. The proposed design shows a crosswalk that is at less than a ninety-degree angle to the sidewalk, creating an awkward movement and perhaps making it more likely that people will cross outside the crosswalk. Staff believes that the crosswalk should either be perpendicular to the south curb or angled toward the CCT so that more pedestrians and trail users would be encouraged to cross the street legally in the safest location.

Because the curb along Bethesda Avenue at the northwest corner would be extended farther east, closer to the center of the intersection, there is an opportunity to create one or two more on-street parking spaces, which staff believes that DPWT should consider.

Staff and DPWT have met with a representative of Federal Realty, which owns much of the property in this immediate area including the building housing Barnes and Noble. While the proposed paving at the neckdown would be brick to match the pattern used in the rest of the Bethesda Row development, Federal Realty has expressed a desire for additional streetscaping items such as planters, seating, and bike racks that would match the existing treatment at the northwest corner. Both DPWT and Federal Realty would need to come to an agreement on the construction and maintenance of these items. (Federal Realty currently has an agreement with DPWT to maintain the existing streetscaping at this corner.) ***Staff recommends that DPWT continue to work with Federal Realty and our staff on the design of these improvements. Staff also recommends that the brick paving include a pattern that clearly delineates the route of the CCT through this corner so that conflicts between bicyclists and pedestrians will be minimized.***

Federal Realty has expressed some concern that the proposed neckdown on the east side of Woodmont Avenue would eliminate an area that is now used as a drop-off for the movie theaters. Staff agrees that this drop-off should be accommodated but believes that the safe accommodation of the high volume of pedestrians and bicyclists at this intersection is a higher public priority. ***Staff recommends that DPWT consider designating a drop-off area along the east side of Woodmont Avenue north of the intersection and possibly providing some special paving treatment to ensure good compliance.***

This project originally included improvements on the south side of the intersection, but was scaled back once a RFP was created for County parking lots 31 and 31-A. The selection of a developer was made late last month and the developer's proposal accommodates the proposed curblines to be implemented by DPWT (see Attachment 4). While the final operation of this intersection cannot be determined until a final design of the development is approved, it is anticipated that the intersection will be narrowed further, bringing the northeast and southwest corners much closer together. Staff believes that this would entice some pedestrians to make a diagonal crossing of the intersection, against running vehicular traffic, and that physical barriers would likely be needed to prevent such crossings. ***Staff recommends that the Board encourage DPWT to work with the developer of the parking lots to study the feasibility of providing a signalized diagonal crossing from the southwest to the northeast quadrants of this intersection to accommodate this desire line. The design of the development project should either accommodate such an operation or include physical barriers preventing a diagonal crossing.*** In addition to accommodating pedestrians in the commercial area, such a crossing might better accommodate users of the CCT traveling between Bethesda Avenue and the tunnel since it would only require one crossing instead of two.

CONSTRUCTION SCHEDULE

The improvements at the Woodmont/Bethesda intersection are scheduled to be constructed in August 2005. The improvements along Norfolk Avenue are scheduled to be constructed in October or November 2005.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

A newsletter describing the project was sent to the public in October 2004. A public meeting was held for this project in January 2005 to discuss the concepts for Bethesda Avenue/Woodmont Avenue intersection improvements and Norfolk Avenue between Rugby/Glenbrook Avenues to Woodmont Avenue. A newsletter was mailed out to the community in May 2005 to update them on the design decisions DPWT had made, and on the Recommended Alternatives. Two members of the Bethesda Urban Partnership serve as team members on the Bethesda Bikeways and Pedestrian Facilities project.

BACKGROUND

The proposed improvements are specifically recommended in the 1994 Bethesda CBD Sector Plan as part of the requirements to move from Stage I to Stage II of development. The improvements being reviewed by the Board comprise two parts of the proposed project. The other three parts are:

- Woodmont Avenue/Montgomery Lane: Construction of an intersection neckdown to minimize crossing distance for pedestrians has already been completed.
- Woodmont Avenue from North Lane to Bethesda Avenue: The design of on-road bike lanes in this segment has just begun.
- Wilson Lane from Clarendon Road to Cordell Avenue: The design of a shared-use path in this segment has not yet begun.

The neckdowns proposed along Norfolk Avenue are specifically recommended in the Woodmont Triangle Amendment to the Bethesda CBD Sector Plan.

LC:gw
Attachments

mmo to MCPB re 05807-DPWT-1 Bethesda ped-bike