



July 7, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Gwen Wright, Historic Preservation Supervisor *GW*
Countywide Planning Division

FROM: Clare Lise Cavicchi, Historic Preservation Planner *CL*
Countywide Planning Division

SUBJECT: Public Hearing and Worksession-- **Public Hearing (Preliminary) Draft Amendment to the Master Plan For Historic Preservation: Washington Grove Humpback Bridge (#21/220)**, E. Deer Park Drive, over CSX tracks at Railroad Street

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Washington Grove Humpback Bridge (#21/220), located on East Deer Park Drive at the CSX Railroad, on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.

BACKGROUND

On April 16, 2005, the Historic Preservation Commission received a nomination to designate the Washington Grove Humpback Bridge on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. On May 25, the HPC reviewed this nomination in a public hearing and worksession. The HPC recommends that the Humpback Bridge be designated a historic site on the *Master Plan*, finding that it meets criteria 1a, 1d, 1a, and 2e.

The bridge is the subject of a facility planning study by Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT), to identify alternative concepts for handling the traffic traversing the railroad tracks in this vicinity. The study is in its preliminary stage. A Service Life Study, commissioned by DPWT in March 2004, found that the bridge was deteriorated and would need to be replaced. DPWT subsequently organized a project team and initiated a planning study to develop concepts for replacing the bridge. These concepts were presented at a public meeting in January 2005. The attached memo from Ki Kim, Transportation Planner, outlines the status of the DPWT study.

The Gaithersburg Vicinity Master Plan recommends a four-lane railroad crossing, with Oakmont Avenue being a four-lane arterial road. This 20-year old plan is in the process of being updated, with the Planning Board Staff Draft tentatively scheduled for Fall 2006. The Planning Board recently approved the Shady Grove Sector Plan, which recommends Oakmont Avenue, from Oakmont Street to Shady Grove Road, as a two-lane arterial with an 80-foot right-of-way.

Staff has received a large volume of correspondence from residents of the Deer Park neighborhood of Gaithersburg, the Town of Washington Grove, and vicinity, who support designation of this individual resource. The correspondence is attached, along with correspondence received by the Historic Preservation Commission.

HISTORY

The B & O Railroad constructed the humpback bridge in 1945, replacing a bridge of nearly identical profile the company built in the 1880s. The 1880s was a period of substantial growth in the area. In 1886, Lang was commissioned to re-subdivide the community of Washington Grove. Oakmont was platted two years later. The B&O Railroad constructed the at-grade crossing in 1883, connecting Railroad Street with what is now Oakmont Avenue. The post WWII era was another era of tremendous growth. The adjacent grain elevator at 453-459 East Diamond Ave from this time period is listed on the Gaithersburg inventory of historic sites. Many houses in the area changed hands and new houses were constructed in the vicinity.

The bridge connects the historic communities of Oakmont (platted 1888) and Washington Grove (1873). Washington Grove is a National Register Historic District. The bridge was rehabilitated in 1988 and 2000. A Maryland Historical Trust Inventory form, included in this packet, provides a detailed history of the bridge.

DISCUSSION

During the HPC review, the issue of the bridge's integrity was raised. As noted above, the bridge was rehabilitated in recent years. The profile and dimensions of the bridge are essentially unchanged. While the superstructure has been replaced, the substructure is original. The replacement of the superstructure is to be expected of bridges and does not significantly diminish the integrity of the resource. The structure retains its 1945 substructure, including the timber bents, concrete abutments, wingwalls, and slope. The issue of integrity is addressed in the memorandum by Gail Littlefield (Attachment 3).

Staff concurs with the Historic Preservation Commission that the Humpback Bridge has both historic and visual significance and should be designated on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. The distinctive round-arched bridge is a visually unique resource in Montgomery County. It also provides a direct link to the railroad origins of the Washington Grove community and vicinity. The Humpback Bridge is a local landmark and a gateway to the past.

CONCLUSION

Staff finds that the Washington Grove Humpback Bridge is eligible for designation on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*, meeting criteria 1a, 1d, 2a, and 2e. The Preliminary Draft Amendment (attached) summarizes the significance of the Humpback Bridge. The recommended environmental setting, included in the Draft Amendment, extends from property line of parcel N410 on the northwest to the waiting station platform at the southeast.

Attachments:

- 1- Preliminary Draft Amendment: Washington Grove Humpback Bridge
- 2- Letter of Nomination and Research Form
- 3- Nominator addendum
- 4- Memo from Ki Kim, Transportation Planner
- 5- Correspondence Received to Date: Planning Board
- 6- Correspondence Received: HPC