



Muncaster Mill Road / Emory Lane Shared Use Path, Mandatory Referral, MR2019003

Chris Van Alstyne, Senior Planner, Chris.VanAlstyne@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-495-4629

Katherine Nelson, Planner Coordinator, Katherine.Nelson@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-495-4622

Fred Boyd, Master Planner Supervisor, Fred.Boyd@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-495-4654

Rich Weaver, Chief, Area 3, Richard.Weaver@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-495-4544

Completed: 12-07-18

Description

Construction of a ½ mile long shared use path along the east side of Emory Lane and west side of Muncaster Mill Road (MD 115) and reconstruction of the Emory Lane/ Muncaster Mill Road intersection.

- Applicant: Montgomery County Department of Transportation
- Rockville; Olney Master Plan Area
- Filing Date: October 5, 2018

Staff Recommendation: Approval to Transmit Comments



Summary

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) proposes to construct a ½ mile shared use path along Emory Lane and Muncaster Mill Road (MD 115) to fill an existing gap between the Emory Lane bike path and the greater Rock Creek hiker/biker network to coincide with MNCPPC's planned expansion of the North Branch Hiker-Biker Trail. The project is located approximately one mile west of Norbeck Road and 3.5 miles northeast of Rockville. The projects begins just south of MD-200 on Emory Lane, continues through the intersection of Emory Lane and Muncaster Mill Road (MD 115), and terminates adjacent to Rock Creek Regional Park. The path is surrounded primarily by low-density residential dwellings (RE-1) along Emory Lane, with some moderate density housing (R-200) along Muncaster Mill road, as well as M-NCPCC's Rock Creek Regional Park. The proposed link will connect the existing large ICC/Georgia Ave bikeway network with the extensive Rock Creek Park hiker/biker network, providing a safe and low stress connection that reaches well into the heart of Washington, DC.

Mandatory Referral Review

This proposal for the construction of a new public shared use path requires the Mandatory Referral review process under the Montgomery County Planning Department's Uniform Standards for Mandatory Referral Review. State law requires all federal, state, and local governments and public utilities to submit proposed projects for a Mandatory Referral review by the Commission. The law requires the Planning Board to review and approve the proposed location, character, grade and extent of any road, park, public way or ground, public (including federal) building or structure, or public utility (whether publicly or privately owned) prior to the project being located, constructed or authorized.

The applicant approved a suggested extension by Planning Department staff to the 60-day window for review and comment. The original 60-day window extended to December 4, 2018; this was increased by 16 days to December 20, 2018.

Recommendations

Staff recommends **approval** to transmit the following comments to the Montgomery County Department of Transportation:

1. Efforts should be made to extend the path along Muncaster Mill Road from the current planned termination to the existing path to the north, which terminates just beyond Meadowside Lane, in order to bridge this existing gap. Any expansion should be constructed in existing SHA right of way to limit impacts to M-NCPPC park property; MCDOT should coordinate with SHA to reconstruct the Muncaster Mill Road bridge over the Rock Creek North Branch and realign the road to accommodate this path.
2. The reconstructed crossing of the minor stream on Emory Lane should minimize environmental impacts. A bridge alternative is preferable in this location in order to maintain the stream channel as open-air. Any alternative employing a culvert, while not preferred, should reduce impacts to the stream by reducing the overall cross section to a minimum while allowing the road and path above to remain safe and effective for all users.
3. The project should mitigate all forest loss at an off-site forest mitigation bank at a 1:1 ratio.
4. Identified specimen trees should be replaced at a ratio of approximately one-inch dbh for every four inches dbh removed.

PROPOSAL

Project Description

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) is proposing to construct a ½ mile shared use path along Emory Lane and Muncaster Mill Road to fill an existing gap between the existing bike path and the greater Rock Creek hiker/biker network. The gap currently hosts no bike or pedestrian infrastructure—both sections of road are inhospitable to people walking and biking.

The project will complete a missing link in the bicycle network, providing a connection between Rock Creek Regional Park and the ICC/Georgia Avenue Trail, facilitating a significant expansion of Montgomery County's connected bicycle network. The project will also significantly improve bike and pedestrian connectivity at the intersection of Emory Lane and Muncaster Mill Road by providing a new signal with pedestrian-activated push buttons and a high-visibility crosswalk.

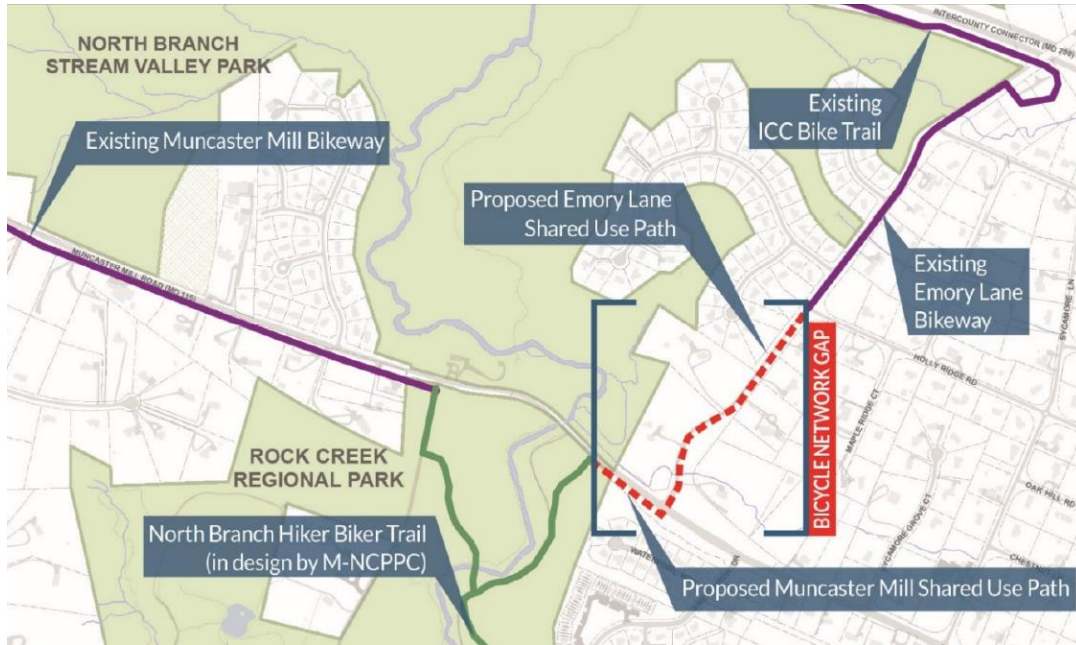


Figure 1: Vicinity Map

The proposed design extends a 10 foot wide shared use path from the existing Emory Lane path by approximately ½ mile from its current terminus at Holly Ridge Road to the proposed terminus of M-NCPPC’s future North Branch Hiker-Biker Trail access point on Muncaster Mill Road. The shared use path will be used by both people walking and biking and will be open for public use 24-hours a day. It is anticipated that it will be used by commuters as well as for recreation, and for local pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Through the design area, Emory Lane is classified as an arterial road with a 30-mph speed limit and Muncaster Mill Road is classified as an arterial road with a 40-mph speed limit. Currently, Emory Lane has two 10-foot travel lanes with no shoulders; people walking and biking in the roadway must share narrow lanes with vehicles. While Muncaster Mill Road has wide shoulders that could potentially be shared by people walking and biking, the high speed of passing vehicles and lack of separation makes this a foreboding, high-stress corridor. This project will provide an off-road separated facility to accommodate users who are not comfortable riding or walking in a shared lane on a narrow roadway; this will significantly improve bike and pedestrian travel. The design of the path will be safe, adequate and efficient for all users.

The project is currently at the 35 percent Design phase and will be funded by MCDOT with a contribution of \$200,000 from M-NCPPC. These plans were used to seek grant funding for final design through MDOT’s Bikeways Program in June 2018. There are no anticipated negative impacts to public parkland or land owned by M-NCPPC.

Path Design

Emory Lane

Currently, Emory Lane is a narrow arterial road with no shoulders. Below the terminus of the existing shared use path at Holly Ridge Road, there is no bike or pedestrian infrastructure, limiting safe movement

through the surrounding neighborhoods. The proposed project will construct a 10-foot wide shared use path on the east side of the road to include a buffered 'green panel' to separate people walking and biking from fast moving vehicles. The path will be built within existing right of way.



Figure 2: Existing Condition



Figure 3: Proposed Design



Figure 4: Proposed Cross Section

A small, unnamed stream crosses under Emory Lane just north of the intersection with Muncaster Mill Road. The current road crossing is via a deteriorating culvert, which as part of this project, will be replaced and rebuilt. Staff reviewed several alternatives for the path crossing of the stream and has expressed preference for a separate parallel bridge to carry the shared use path. The bridge option (Figure 5) would minimize the impact of the crossing to the stream’s riparian environment by keeping the channel open-air along and beneath the path. The impact of the road culvert would remain unchanged from the existing condition. If the bridge is deemed infeasible by MCDOT staff, a reduced-width option for a combined road / shared use path culvert crossing (Figure 6) is acceptable, with the reduction in width resulting from a reduced buffer separating the path from the road from the original proposed design.

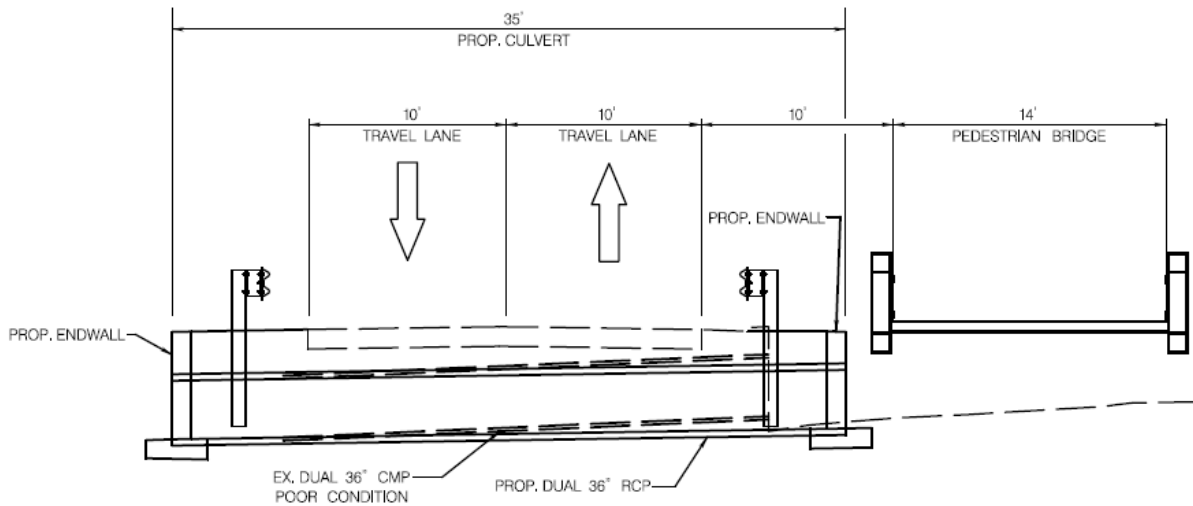


Figure 5: Proposed Bridge Option

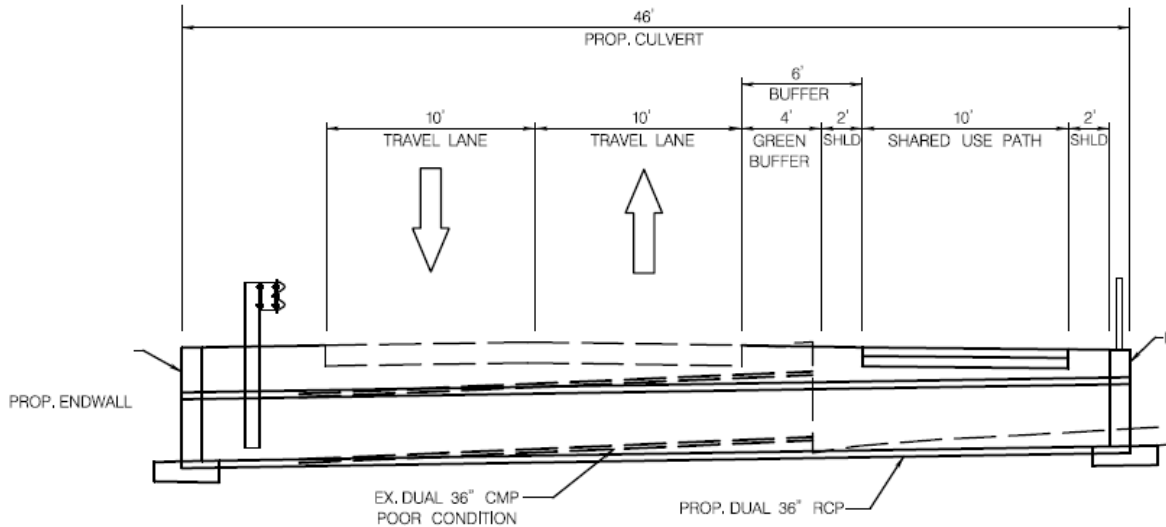


Figure 6: Proposed Reduced Width Culvert Option

Four existing driveways to private residences will be impacted by the project; these will be regraded and rebuilt by MCDOT. These impacts are planned to be minimal.

Muncaster Mill/Emory Lane Intersection

The intersection of Emory Lane and Muncaster Mill Road is currently unsignalized, with vehicular traffic along Muncaster Mill Road free-flowing with a 40-m.p.h. speed limit. There are no bike or pedestrian facilities in the intersection; crossing at this location would be difficult and dangerous, with no adequate alternative nearby.



Figure 7: Muncaster Mill/Emory Lane Intersection Current Condition

This project will rebuild and signalize the intersection. The 3-way “Maryland T” design will be replaced with a conventional controlled “T” intersection. The existing concrete median will be removed and replaced with a new median to accommodate bike and pedestrian crossings on the south side of the intersection. The crossing will be marked and signalized.

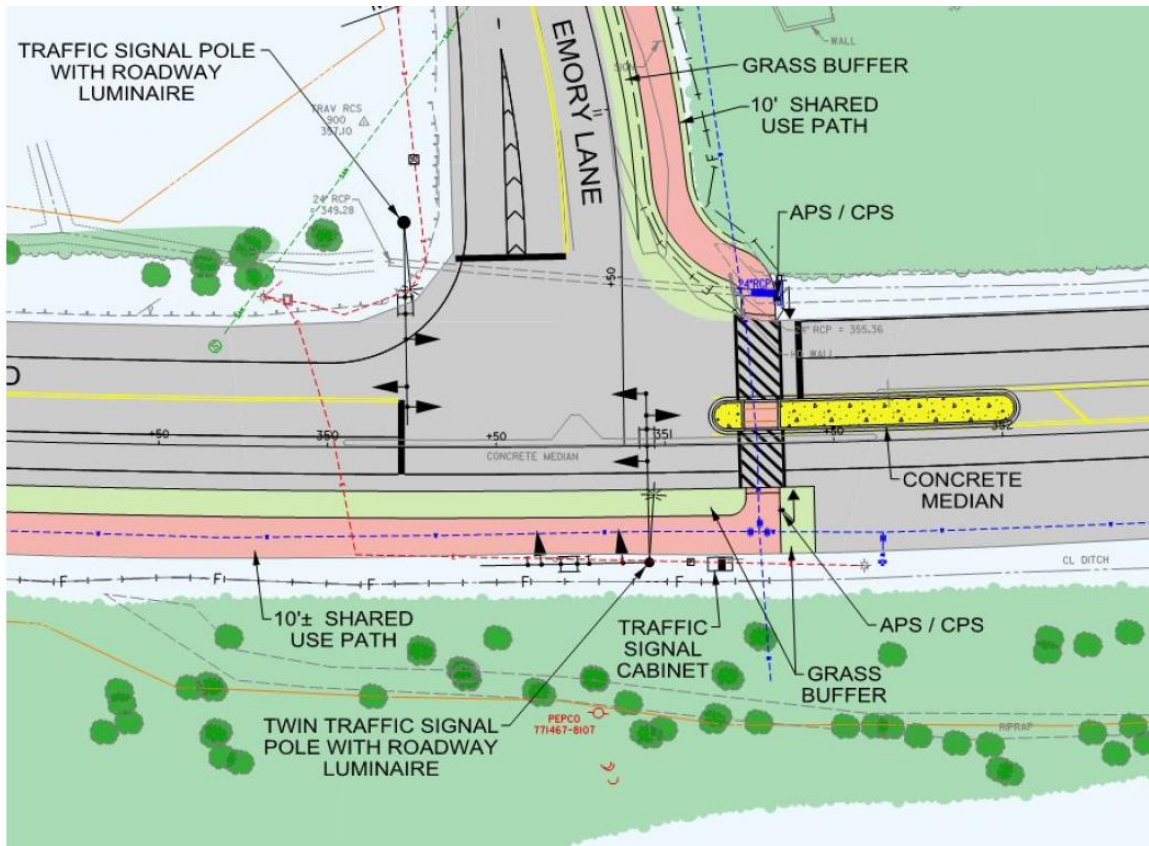


Figure 8: Muncaster Mill/Emory Lane Current Condition

Muncaster Mill Road (MD 115)

The path will continue along the west side of Muncaster Mill road from the intersection to terminate at the linkage point of the concurrently planned North Branch Trail within Rock Creek Regional Park (Figure 1). The path will be built within existing right of way and replace a paved shoulder varying between 5-20 feet in width with a 6 foot wide shoulder, 8 foot wide green buffer, and a 10 foot wide shared use path.



Figure 9: Muncaster Mill Road Cross Section

ANALYSIS

Master Plan Conformance

The project is in conformance with the 2005 Olney Master Plan, the 2018 Bicycle Master Plan, and the 2018 Master Plan of Highways and Transitways. The project is located in the 2005 Olney Master Plan; along Emory Lane, the Master Plan calls for a shared use path (SP-32) from MD 97 to Muncaster Mill Road. Along Muncaster Mill Road, the Master Plan calls for a shared use path (BL-35) specifically between Emory Lane and Rock Creek Regional Park. The 2018 Bicycle Master Plan recommends the continuation of the Emory Lane sidepath along the east side of the road. Along Muncaster Mill Road, the Master Plan recommends a sidepath along the west side of the road and bikable shoulders on the east side through the project area. The 2018 Master Plan of Highways and Transitways classifies both Emory Lan and Muncaster Mill Road as arterial roads with an 80 foot right of way and two lanes of through traffic.

Environmental Guidelines

The project area contains environmental buffers, streams, and other sensitive features. The project is within the North Branch of the Upper Rock Creek watershed, a USE III designation. The project is not located in the Upper Rock Creek Special Protection Area. The County Department of Environmental Protection has classified water quality as in “good condition”. The project proposes to address stormwater management with a waiver due to the large impacts to forest stands in good condition that would be required to construct a facility.

The project proposes 0.51 acres of forest removal, has impacts on 0.25 acres of Stream Valley Buffer (SVB) and no 100-Year-Floodplain impacts. The environmental impacts are necessary and unavoidable to achieve the design standards of creating the new pathway, and those impacts have been minimized to the greatest extent possible.

Forest Conservation

The project is exempt from the forest conservation plan requirement. A forest conservation exemption (#42018214E) was granted under the provisions of Section 22A-5(e) as “a state or county highway project”. The exemption was confirmed on July 16, 2018.

While the project is exempt, the applicant is still required under section 22A-9 of the County code to:

- a) Minimize forest cutting, clearing, and loss of specimen trees to the extent possible while balancing other design, construction, and environmental standards. The constructing agency must make a reasonable effort to minimize the cutting or clearing of trees and other woody plants.
- b) If the forest to be cut or cleared for a County highway project equals or exceeds 20,000 square feet, the constructing agency must reforest a suitable area at the rate of one acre of reforestation for each acre of forest cleared.
- c) Mitigation for loss of specimen or champion trees. Mitigation amounts are based on the size and character of the tree.

Forest loss/mitigation

Minimizing the LOD and altering some design aspects of the project did not eliminate forest and tree impact. The project proposes to remove approximately 22,215.6 square feet of forest which is above the forest clearing threshold of 20,000 square feet allowed under the exemption. Therefore, the Applicant should mitigate this loss at an off-site forest mitigation bank.

Tree Save

The applicant has submitted a tree save plan (TSP) in conjunction with the Mandatory Referral process to show how the impacts have been minimized and what stress reduction methods are being used to further minimize impacts on trees. Six (6) significant and specimen trees are being removed by this project, four (4) of which are specimen size.

Mitigation

In addition to forest loss the exemption also requires mitigation for removal of specimen trees. Three (3) specimen trees will be removed T-14 a 32” dbh Tulip Poplar, T-37 a 50” dbh White Oak and T-32, a 32” dbh Sycamore. Mitigation should be at a rate that approximates the form and function of the trees removed. Therefore, staff is recommending that replacement occur at a ratio of approximately one-inch dbh for every four inches dbh removed. This means that for the 114.0 caliper inches of trees removed, the applicant will plant with ten 3-inch caliper trees.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND NOTIFICATION

This Application was noticed in accordance with the Uniform Standards for Mandatory Referral Review. A public meeting was held on June 26, 2018. Additionally, MCDOT has continuously been seeking input from stakeholders and elected officials and will continue to incorporate ideas throughout the design/build phase of the project.

CONCLUSION

Based on information provided by the Applicant and the analysis contained in this report, Staff concludes that the proposed Mandatory Referral for the Muncaster Mill Road / Emory Lane Shared Use Path will be compatible with its site context and meets the applicable standards and guidelines for the environment. The path as proposed will be safe, adequate and efficient for all users. Staff recommends approval of the

Mandatory Referral with comments listed at the front of this report to be transmitted to the Montgomery County Revenue authority.

Attachments:

- A. Proposed Project Plans
- B. Forest Conservation Exemption Letter
- C. Stormwater Management Approval Letter