



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB
ITEM NO. 5
01-16-2003

January 10, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Jeffrey Zyontz, Chief
County-wide Planning Division

Richard C. Hawthorne, Chief
Transportation Planning Unit

John Carter, Chief
Community-Based Planning Division

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

PROJECT: Strathmore Avenue (MD 547)
From Kenilworth Avenue to Weymouth Street
Contract No. MO 8335180

REVIEW TYPE: Mandatory Referral No. MR# 02811-SHA-1

APPLICANT: Maryland State Highway Administration

APPLYING FOR: Plan Approval

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

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL WITH COMMENTS TO SHA

Staff recommends that the Board approve the proposed project (see Attachment 1: Vicinity Map) with the following comments to the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA):

1. Restore the southbound left and eastbound through movements at the Rockville Pike (MD 355)/Grosvenor Lane/Beach Drive intersection to the Rockville Pike Corridor if feasible to provide an additional option for east-west traffic flow in the project area.
2. Construct the handicap ramps along Strathmore Avenue to be closer to the intersections.
3. Provide signage for the on-road bike route along Weymouth Street, Oxford Street and Kenilworth Avenue.
4. Include London Plane trees as a significant component of the landscaping design of Strathmore Avenue.
5. Minimize the size of the new paved areas associated with the proposed parking pads and turnarounds and avoid creating small, oddly-shaped landscaped areas between these areas and the sidewalk. Provide sufficient landscaping to screen the paved areas from the view from Strathmore Avenue.
6. Minimize driveway widths and avoid constructing two driveways side-by-side without intervening green space.
7. Include instructions to the contractor in the final set of construction documents to provide tree preservation and protection measures such as, but not limited to, root pruning, tree protection fencing, and pre-construction watering/fertilizing schedules for significant (24" dbh) and specimen (30" dbh) trees in healthy condition. Limit the impact on the critical root zone of trees to be saved to no more than 30%.

PREVIOUS BOARD ACTION: None

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project would construct curbing along Strathmore Avenue between Flanders Avenue and Weymouth Street (see Attachment 2). The roadway width would be reduced slightly to twenty-four feet, curb-to-curb. The roadway in the vicinity of Raleigh Avenue would have a twenty-eight-foot pavement width because of the sharp horizontal curve in that segment. Parking pads and turnarounds would be provided for the residents who wish to have them.

Five-foot sidewalks and street trees would be provided on both sides of Strathmore Avenue. Concrete paver crosswalks would be provided at Keswick Street and Kenilworth Avenue. Bicyclists would be accommodated on-road along Oxford Street, one block south of Strathmore Avenue.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The project design is the result of many months of cooperative effort and negotiation between the Town, SHA, our staff, and others. This project addresses the Town of Garrett Park's three main goals for this project: the existing speeding problem along Strathmore Avenue, the lack of continuous sidewalks, and a desire to improve the aesthetics and restore the tree canopy over the road.

Roadway Width

Strathmore Avenue would be narrowed slightly and would be given a consistent width of twenty-four feet to address residents' desire to slow traffic along Strathmore Avenue within the Town and to provide the shortest possible pedestrian crossings of Strathmore Avenue. The narrow roadway width would not provide the on-road bike lanes recommended in the North Bethesda-Garrett Park Master Plan (see Bicyclist Accommodation below).

The proposal to narrow and curb the roadway initially caused great concern among transportation planning staff. Strathmore Avenue is a high-volume road (17,850 ADT in 2002, 24,800 ADT projected for 2022) that provides an important east-west link in this area of the county, one which alternative routes cannot easily replace. In addition to requiring that the on-road bicycle accommodation be moved to another street, the narrow roadway would also severely restrict the ability of the road to accommodate disabled vehicles without halting traffic altogether in one direction.

The original design included parking spaces demarcated by bulbouts at the intersections. Staff had two concerns about this design. First, these parking spaces had been negotiated with individual adjacent property owners and would likely be perceived as being solely for their use even though they would be in the public right-of-way, possibly causing future discord. More importantly, backing into these spaces would require that all traffic in the direction of the vehicle being parked come to a halt until the maneuver was completed. Large vehicles, such as moving vans, might end up being periodically parked there, overhanging into the travel lane and disrupting traffic flow. Given the high volume of traffic on this road, the proposed improvements would constrict operations in such a way that it would be very close to the breakdown point during rush hours. In response to our staff's recommendation, SHA eliminated the proposed parking bays to minimize the potential loss of traffic-carrying capacity.

SHA agreed with the property owners that parking pads were needed to replace the existing on-street parking, rather than require that additional vehicles (beyond what are now accommodated on-site) be parked on side streets, despite fairly short block lengths. In addition, SHA would provide turnarounds adjacent to these parking pads so that no vehicles would have to be backed out into Strathmore Avenue, disrupting traffic.

Staff believes that the traffic-calming, pedestrian safety and community benefits to be gained from this project are worth the potential rush hour constraint, however, in

undertaking this project, SHA should look at the traffic impacts to this area, both permanent and during construction.

Local and Regional Circulation

One of the reasons that Strathmore Avenue is so important in serving east-west traffic is because it is one of the few crossings of Rock Creek in this area (see Attachment 3). Its importance was increased several years ago by three actions: one, by the Planning Board and Council to remove the recommendation for a new bridge over Rock Creek from Weymouth Street to Beach Drive; two, by the Town of Garrett Park to close Weymouth Street to through traffic; and three, by SHA to reconfigure the intersection of Rockville Pike, Grosvenor Lane and Beach Drive so that southbound lefts and eastbound through movements to Beach Drive would no longer be allowed. The first decision was made primarily for environmental reasons, the second for community reasons, and the third for traffic operation reasons at this particular intersection.

While any of the above reasons could be revisited as a means of relieving the traffic on Strathmore Avenue, staff believes that SHA should study ways to allow traffic from southbound Rockville Pike and eastbound Grosvenor Lane to access Beach Drive directly. In March 2002, as part of its review of the Mandatory Referral of SHA's intersection improvement project at Strathmore Avenue and Rockville Pike, the Board recommended that SHA include this work as their current Rockville Pike Corridor Study. The purpose of this study, whose limits are from the Capital Beltway to Cedar Lane, is to improve access to and from Rockville Pike. The Strathmore Avenue intersection has not yet been included in the study. ***Staff recommends that the Board reiterate its previous recommendation to study improvements to the intersection of Rockville Pike, Grosvenor Lane and Beach Drive and restore southbound left and eastbound through movements if feasible.*** SHA should work with the Town to possibly reopen Weymouth Street at the Town line during construction to provide an alternate route in case of accidents or construction mishaps.

Pedestrian Accommodation

Pedestrians would be well-provided for by this project since continuous sidewalks would be constructed on both sides of Strathmore Avenue within the project limits, separated from the roadway by landscape panels with street trees.

Crosswalks would be provided at two intersections, Keswick Street and Kenilworth Avenue. These crosswalks would be constructed with concrete unit pavers. The Town of Garrett Park has submitted comments to SHA requesting that these pavers be as light in color as possible to provide the sharpest contrast with the asphalt roadway. Staff believes that the lighter color would improve safety for pedestrians and concurs in this recommendation.

While dual handicap ramps have been proposed at the intersections along Strathmore Avenue, the ones crossing Strathmore are located a bit farther from the center of the intersection than is typical. While this has been done to shorten the crossing distance to the minimum, staff believes that safety would be improved if the ramps were moved closer to the intersection.

Bicyclist Accommodation

The North Bethesda-Garrett Park Master Plan recommends that Class II, on-road bike lanes be provided along Strathmore Avenue within the project limits, but they would not be provided by this project. The on-road bike accommodation would in fact be diminished by this project since the road would become closed-section and would be slightly narrowed to twelve-foot travel lanes, rather than providing the fourteen-foot width needed for shared travel lanes or providing four- to five-foot shoulders needed to accommodate bike lanes.

Citizens of the Town of Garrett Park want the narrower roadway to provide the maximum traffic calming possible for this arterial roadway, and, therefore, did not want SHA to construct the on-road bike lanes. While staff believed that they were desirable as being the most straightforward way to get bicyclists east-west through the town, we agreed that the bike route could be moved one block to the south because there is no major destination immediately to the west along Rockville Pike, with the exception of Georgetown Prep, most of whose students do not live in the immediate area. While the North Bethesda Trail is immediately west of Georgetown Prep, it is not accessible to the public through the school's property. The major destinations in this area are the two Metro Stations, Grosvenor to the southwest of the town and White Flint to the northwest. The proposed bike route shown in Attachment 4 would connect to other routes that serve these destinations and staff believes that bicyclists would not be severely inconvenienced.

The proposed bike route (described from east to west) would start at the western end of the existing off-road bikeway on the south side of Strathmore Avenue at Weymouth Street. It would turn south at Weymouth and west at Oxford Street to Kenilworth Avenue. Bicyclists headed to the Grosvenor Metro Station would turn south at this point. The route would turn north along Kenilworth Avenue to Strathmore Avenue. Bicyclists headed to the Garrett Park MARC Station would travel north along Kenilworth to the station. Bicyclists headed to the White Flint Metro Station would turn onto a short segment of off-road bikeway connecting to the service road on the north side of Strathmore and get to the station via Flanders Avenue.

Good signing is needed to ensure that bicyclists do not lose their way on the intended route, however, it has not yet been shown on the plans. **Staff recommends that the plans show bike route signage for the on-road bike route along Weymouth Street, Oxford Street and Kenilworth Avenue.**

Landscaping

Strathmore Avenue is considered by many users to be one of the most attractive in the down-County area as well as one of the main connections between Rockville Pike and Connecticut Avenue. It is also the connection between the communities of Garrett Park and Kensington. The trees that line the road are notable and the diverse topography adds to the interest of the drive. This Neighborhood Conservation Project aims to preserve the attractiveness of the roadway while making safety improvements.

Sycamore trees (London Planes) are very much a part of the existing landscape of this road, but have not been used in the proposed design. Since the design approach is a naturalistic one, staff believes that London Planes should constitute a substantial segment of the tree planting to help to tie the project into the rest of the road.

While preservation and enhancement of the tree canopy is a goal of this project, many trees are proposed to be removed. Some need to be removed to construct the curbs and sidewalks. Other trees are in poor health. While many trees are proposed to be planted as part of this project, the area may look barren for a while until the landscaping matures a bit.

Staff is concerned about the overall additional impact the proposed driveway aprons and parking pads would have on the look of Strathmore Avenue. The proposed parking pads and turnarounds would require paving existing landscaped areas. And while the curbing and aprons will eliminate the unsightly rutting that is now visible along the edges of the road, they will add more hard-edged urban elements to the streetscape. Since one of the major goals of this project is to improve the attractiveness of Strathmore Avenue, additional paved areas should be minimized.

Staff also recommends that the width of the driveway openings be tightened up where possible and that they not be placed directly next to each other without intervening green space. Oddly-shaped, leftover green spaces should be avoided since they would be hard to maintain and could end up being muddy parking areas themselves.

Retaining walls would be required at several locations throughout the project. SHA has proposed that the surface of these walls have a stone formwork treatment similar to what was done on several bridges recently, e.g. the Beltway Bridge over Georgia Avenue and the Sixteenth Street Bridge over CSX. The Town has requested that real stone be provided, and if that is not possible, that plain concrete be provided so that the Town could install a real stone veneer at some later date. Staff believes that the plain concrete surface could prove to be an eyesore if funds do not become available and that the concrete treatment is the better choice.

Historic Resources

The Town of Garrett Park has been designated as a National Register Historic District (see Attachment 5). With the exception of the westernmost one hundred twenty feet, the entire Strathmore Avenue project lies within this historic district.

A portion of the Town has also been designated a Montgomery County Historic District. The north side of Strathmore Avenue between Kenilworth Avenue and Montrose Avenue lies within the County's historic district.

Because this is a State project, the review authority on historical preservation issues lies with the Maryland Historic Trust. SHA has been closely coordinating this project with the Trust and has submitted a Finding of No Adverse Impact but has not yet received concurrence.

Environmental

Forest Conservation

A Forest Conservation exemption has been issued for this project because it is a State government project reviewed for forest conservation by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) under State of Maryland regulations. A Roadside Tree permit is required by DNR before construction begins.

Stormwater Management

The site is located in the Lower Mainstem Ken-Gar subwatershed of the Lower Rock Creek watershed. Identified by the County Stream Protection Strategy (CSPS) as a Watershed Restoration Area, this subwatershed has fair stream and habitat conditions. Efforts are underway to comprehensively examine and address stormwater retrofit, stream restoration and habitat improvement opportunities. Several tributaries have been channelized or piped, but many areas of natural stream channel remain that may provide opportunities for habitat improvement. All efforts should be made to address degraded conditions by improving runoff conditions with measures such as reforestation.

As a State project on State right-of-way, jurisdiction for stormwater management and erosion/sediment control requirements rests with the Maryland Department of the Environment.

RELATED PROJECTS

Improvements were recently constructed by SHA at the intersection of Rockville Pike (MD 355) and Strathmore Avenue (MD 547), adding a second westbound lane on Strathmore Avenue and lengthening the southbound left-turn lane on Rockville Pike.

SHA has been conducting a study for another neighborhood conservation project on Strathmore Avenue between the limits of the subject project and Rockville Pike within the unincorporated area of Montgomery County. A citizen task force has been meeting for several months to determine a list of recommended improvements to be made. The Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) and M-NCPPC staff have been supporting the task force's work. However, all Neighborhood Conservation Projects, of which this is one, were put on hold last week pending an assessment of the program, presumably as part of SHA's budget review.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

SHA has held several public meetings on this project, including two in the second half of last year, and has worked closely with the Town of Garrett Park during the several years this project has been in planning and design.

BACKGROUND

This project was initiated by a request of the Town of Garrett Park. The Town wanted to address three issues: a speeding problem along Strathmore Avenue, the lack of continuous sidewalks, and a desire to improve the aesthetics and restore the tree canopy over the road.

One of the issues that came up during the study phase of the project was the undergrounding of utilities. The Town wanted to underground utilities to improve aesthetics and to reduce the constraints on restoring the tree canopy. SHA determined that the high costs of undergrounding utilities were beyond the budget of the neighborhood conservation program.

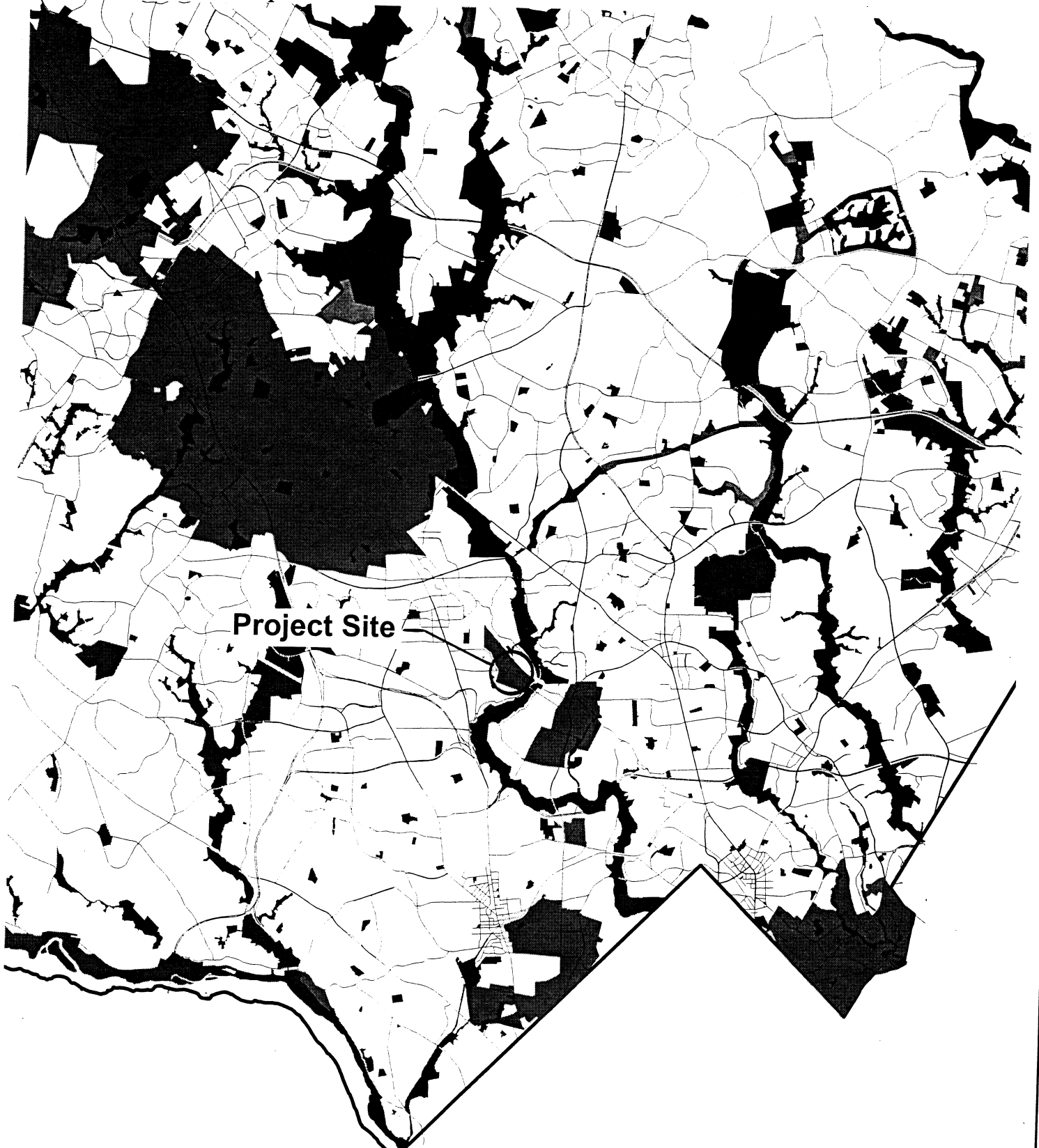
The Governor later announced a pilot program to pay half the costs of undergrounding utilities for four projects, of which the MD 547 project was one. Montgomery County later agreed to pay half the matching funds, but the Town ultimately decided that it could not afford the remaining 25% of the cost. The project was delayed for a couple of years while these utility discussions were taking place.

LC:cmd

Attachments

MR Strathmore Avenue.doc

Strathmore Avenue Improvements




Project Site







Vicinity Map

ATTACHMENT 1

Map Compiled On 01-09-2003 at 10:25 AM
 Map Scale: 1 inch = 10000 feet or 1:120000

0 10000 Feet

 The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
 Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning
 Transportation Planning Unit
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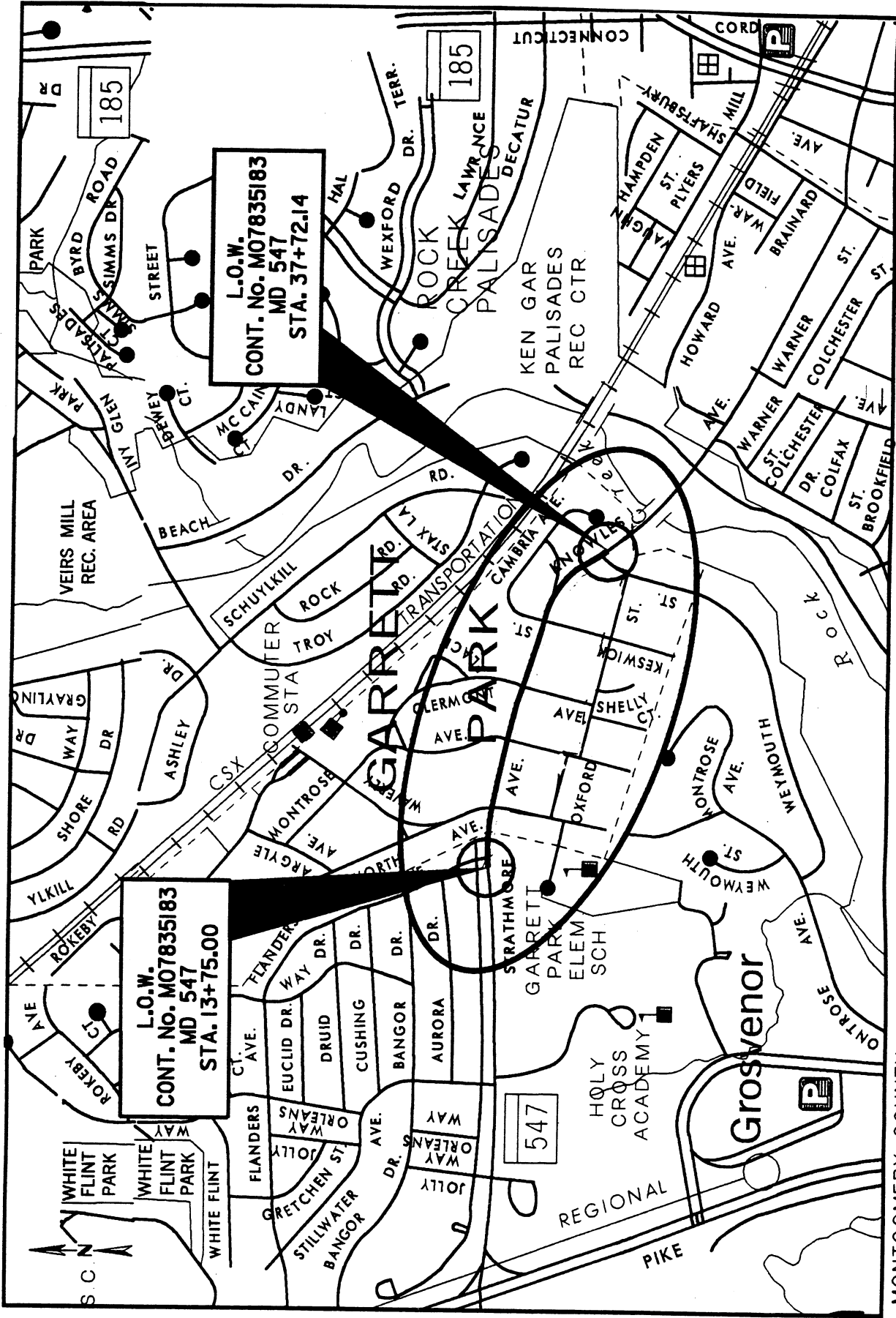
-  Master Plan of Highways Centerline 2
-  All Parks
-  Existing
-  Proposed
-  Municipalities
-  Montgomery County

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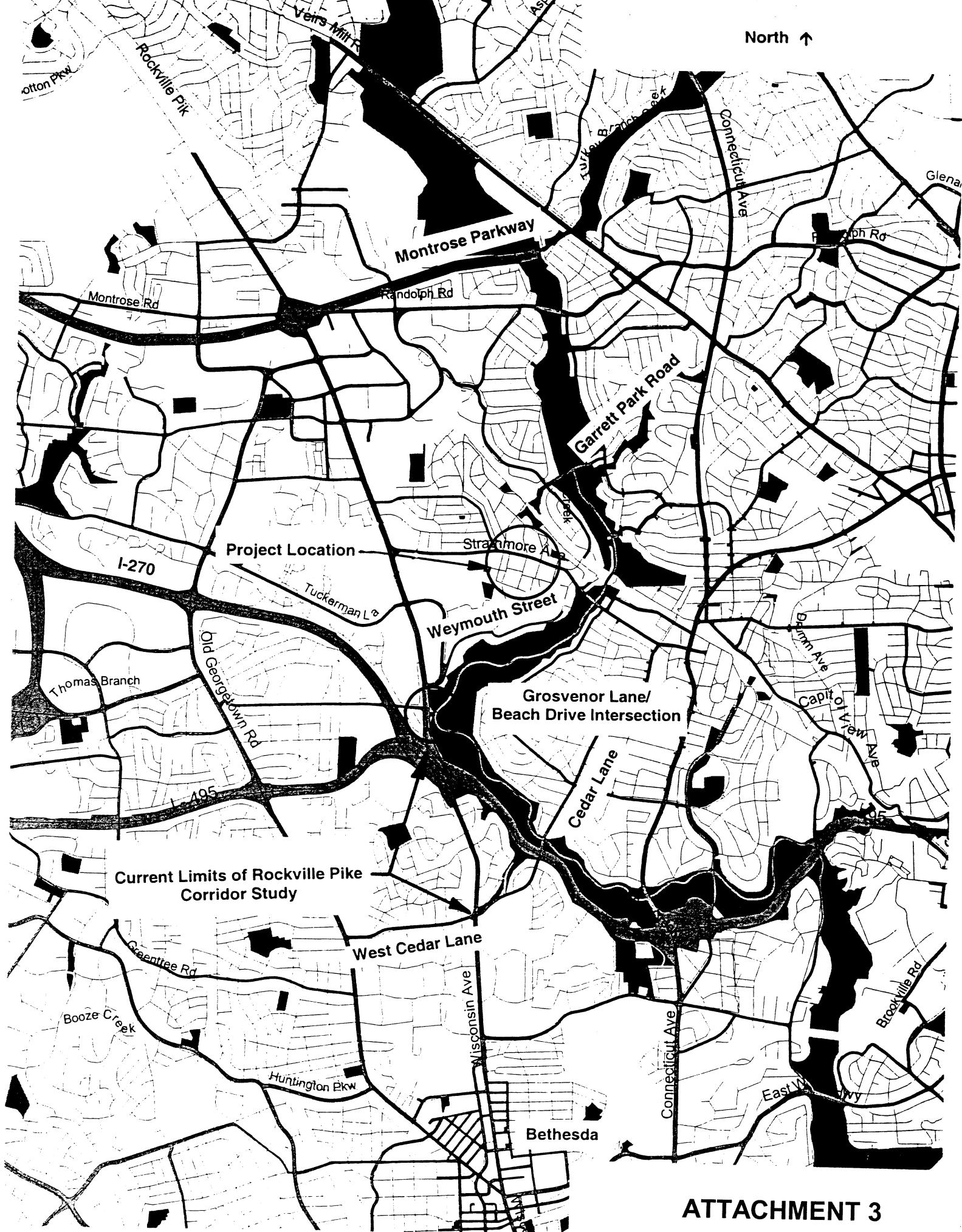
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 CONT. NO. M07835183
 MD 547
 STA. 13+75.00

L.O.W.
 CONT. NO. M07835183
 MD 547
 STA. 37+72.14

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
 PROJECT LENGTH 0.45 MILES

LOCATION MAP





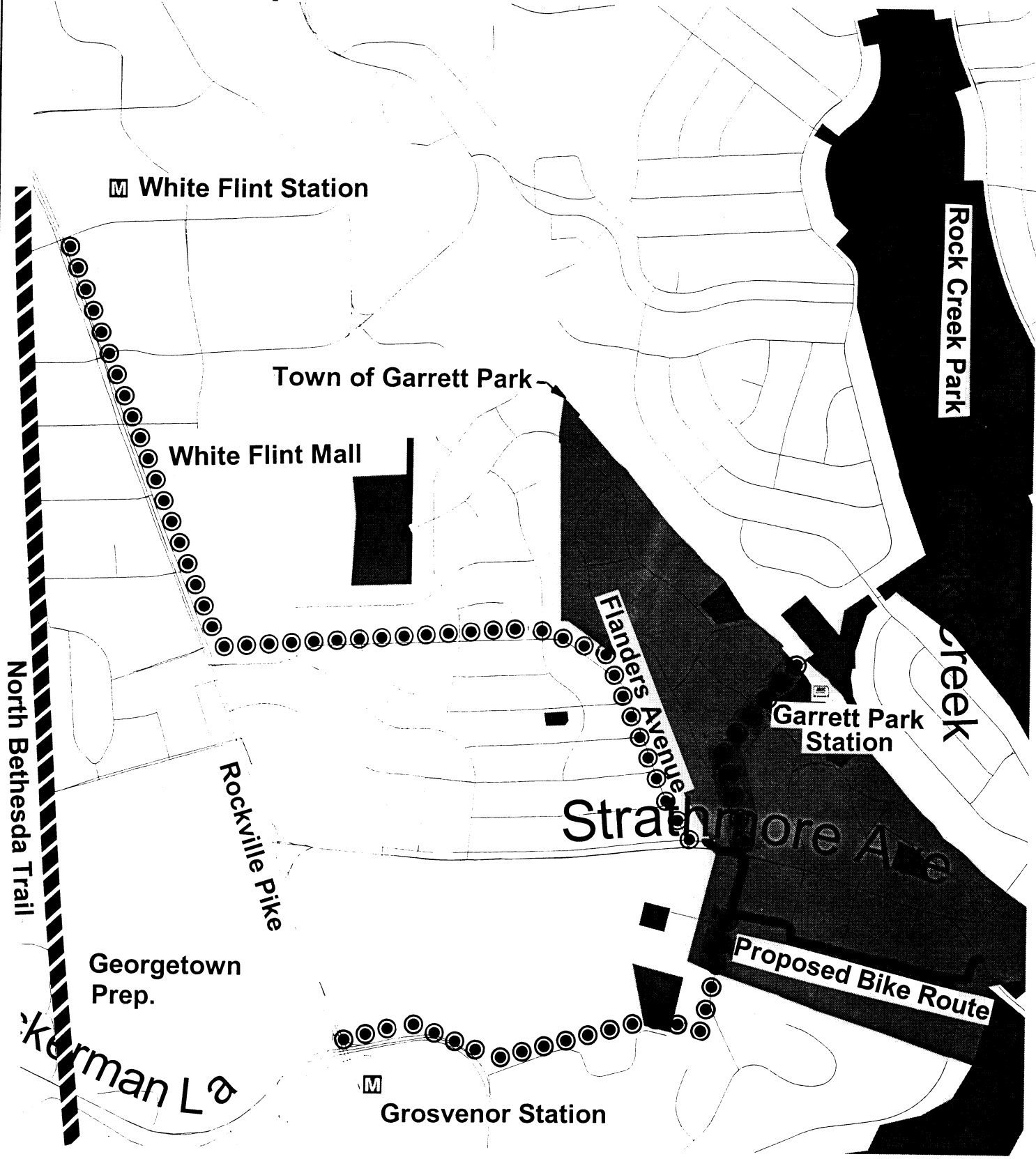
North ↑

Project Location

Current Limits of Rockville Pike Corridor Study

ATTACHMENT 3

Strathmore Avenue Improvements



Bike Routes to Major Destinations ●●●

ATTACHMENT 4

Map Compiled On 01-09-2003 at 10:47 AM
 Map Scale: 1 inch = 1000 feet or 1:12000



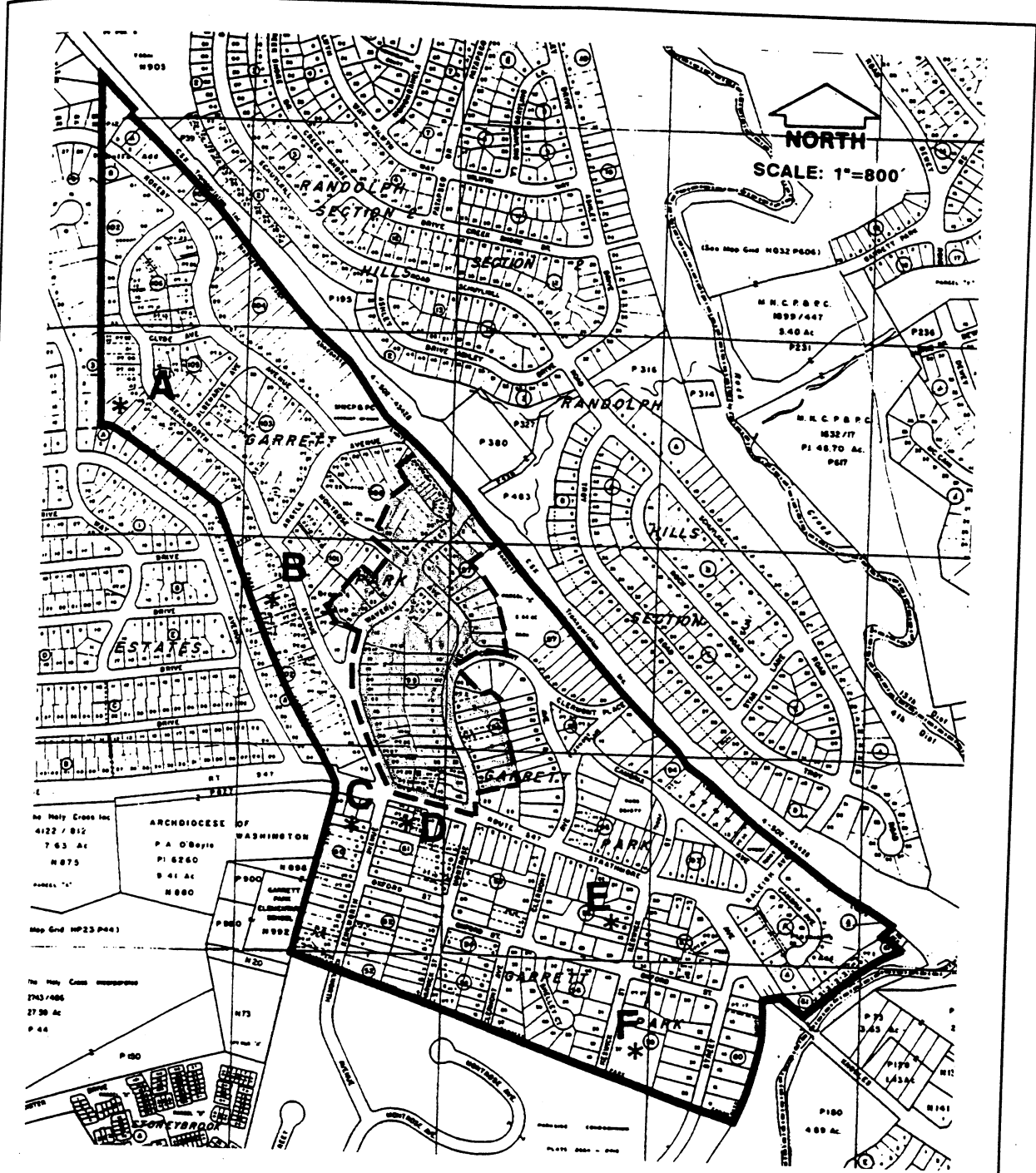
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- Text Street and Stream Names
- M** Metro Stations
- MARC** MARC Stations
- Master Plan of Highways Centerline
- DPWT DIME 2000 Street Centerlines
- MCPDP Planimetric Street Centerlines
- All Parks
 - Existing
 - Proposed
 - Municipalities
 - Montgomery County

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GARRETT PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT



- | | | | |
|------------------|---|----------|--------------------------------|
| ————— | National Historic Register Dist. | C | Garrett Park Town Hall |
| - - - - - | County Historic District | D | 10811 Kenilworth Avenue |
| * | Staff Recommended Resources | E | 10806 Keswick Street |
| A | 11210 Kenilworth Avenue | F | 10701 Keswick Street |
| B | 11018 Kenilworth Avenue | | |