



MCPB

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Aspen Hill Vision Zero Scope of Work



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Description

Scope of Work for the Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the proposed Scope of Work.

Summary

The Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study area includes the commercial developments near Georgia Avenue, Connecticut Avenue and Aspen Hill Road. It also includes the area south of Bel Pre Road, between Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue and the area south of Aspen Hill Road, between Georgia Avenue and Parkland Drive, north of Matthew Henson State Park.

This memorandum presents the Scope of Work for the Study, including the proposed Study boundaries and purpose; the context and background of the planning area; issues to evaluate; an outreach strategy and the Study schedule.

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Study Area

The Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study area encompasses approximately 450 acres surrounding the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue as shown in Figure 1. The Study area includes the commercial developments near Georgia Avenue, Connecticut Avenue and Aspen Hill Road, including Northgate Shopping Center, Aspen Hill Shopping Center, Aspen Manor Shopping Center and Home Depot and Kmart. It also includes the area south of Bel Pre Road between Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue and the area south of Aspen Hill Road between Georgia Avenue and Parkland Drive and north of Matthew Henson State Park.

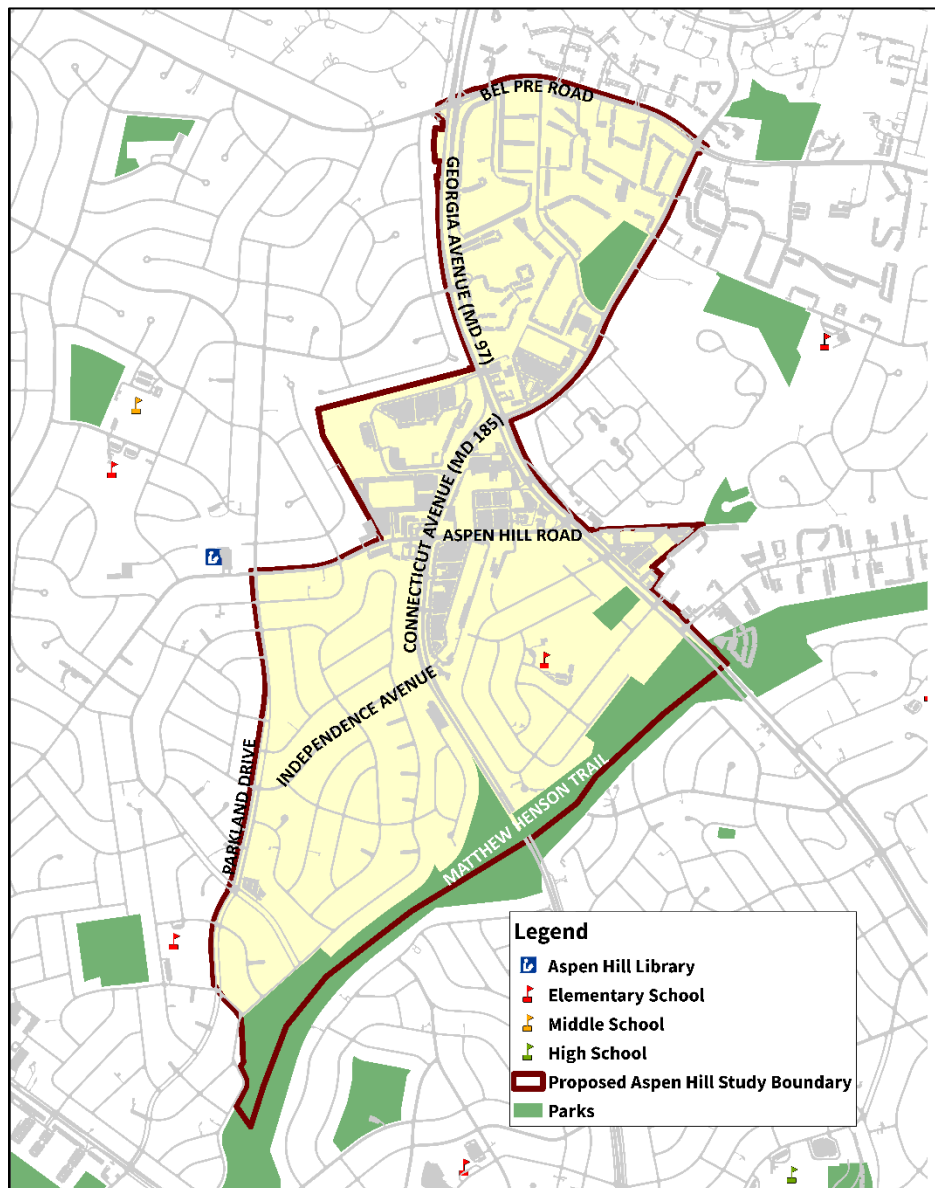


Figure 1: Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study - Proposed Study Area

History

In the mid-1860s, a post office and general store opened on what was then known as the Washington-Brookeville Pike—which is now the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue. This area became known as Aspen Hill, named for the grove of Aspen trees near the post office. During the 1920s and 1930s, the area was known as the location of the Aspen Hill Memorial Park, the second oldest pet cemetery in the United States. Very little development occurred in the area during the Great Depression and World War II.

Following the war, a growing federal workforce and housing demands of returning veterans spurred the development of affordable, single-family homes in the area. A surge of development occurred on Aspen Hill Road in the early 1950s and then along Georgia Avenue in the late 1950s. In 1957, Vitro Laboratories opened and a year later, the Aspen Hill Shopping Center and, what is now Northgate Plaza, opened.

Between the Connecticut Avenue and Georgia Avenue intersection and Bel Pre Road, garden-style apartments were built through the late 1960s and mid-1970s. During this period, commercial development expanded around the intersections of Aspen Hill Road, Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue. The character of the area has remained relatively constant over the past several decades. It includes single-family detached homes, garden-style apartments and large suburban-style shopping centers.

Previous Planning Initiatives

1994 Aspen Hill Master Plan

The Study area is located within the boundaries of the 8,448 acre area of the 1994 Aspen Hill Master Plan expanse (see Figure 2).

Most of the commercial properties located in the Study area are highlighted in the 1994 *Aspen Hill Master Plan*. The parcels surrounding the intersections of Georgia Avenue, Connecticut Avenue and Aspen Hill Road were recommended for zoning changes and, therefore, the 1994 Plan included guidance detail about preferred land uses.

The 1994 Plan recommended limits on retail expansion west of Connecticut Avenue. Its recommendations supported continued retail at the Northgate Shopping Center, Aspen Hill Shopping Center and Aspen Manor Shopping Center, but did not encourage intensified retail uses in these shopping centers. The 1994 Plan recommended reexamining the Home Depot and former Vitro building sites (the future Lindsay Ford site) for office use, should market conditions support it.

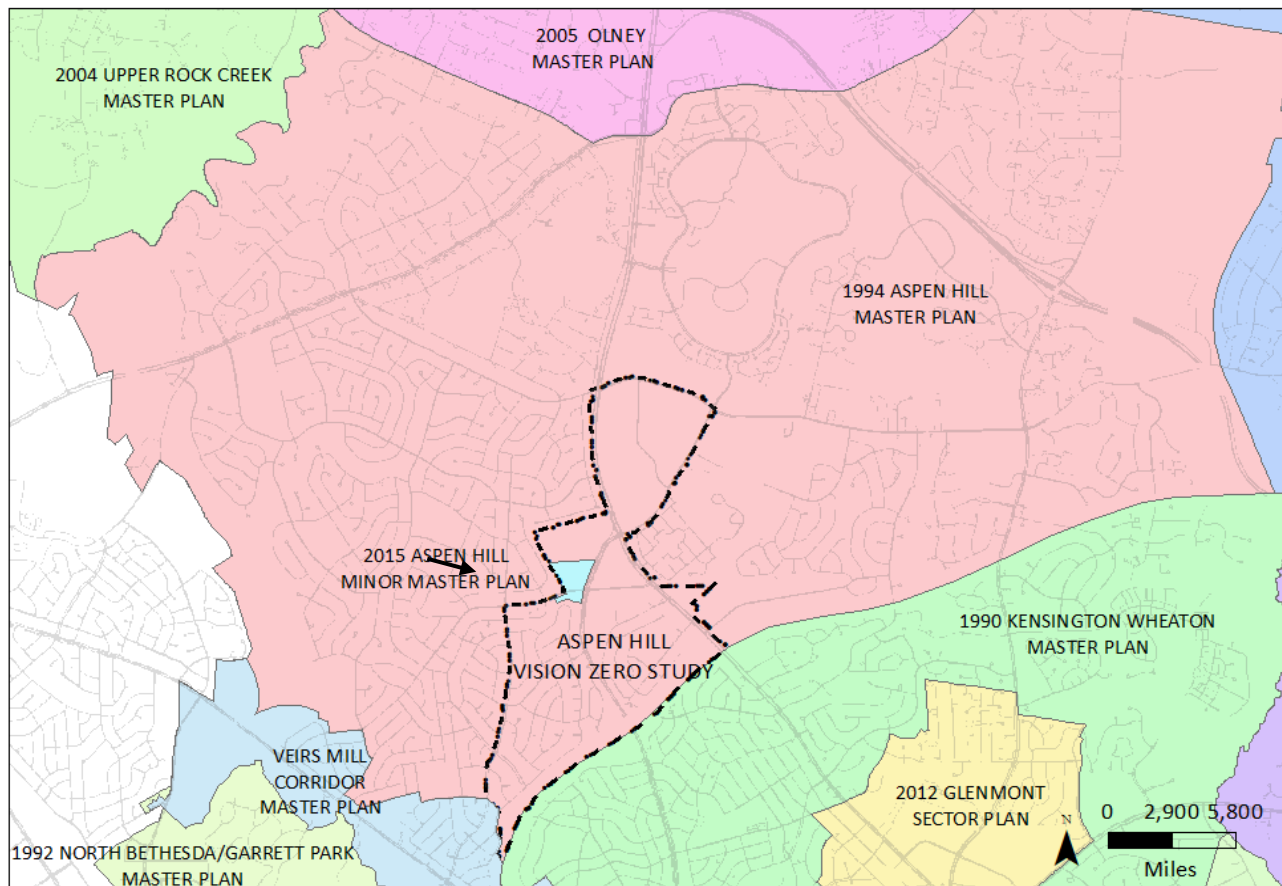


Figure 2: Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study – Master Plan Context

The 1994 Plan envisioned Georgia Avenue as a scenic “green corridor” that allows for bicyclists and pedestrians as well as vehicle drivers. The green corridor would have attractive landscaping, bike lanes, adequate sidewalks and frequent transit stops: “Well-marked pedestrian crosswalks should be provided as road widenings or turning lanes are constructed. Medians are needed as safety refuges for pedestrians crossing wide roads. Crosswalks may be of materials other than asphalt.” (1994 Plan, page 117). Additionally, the Plan recommends improved pedestrian connections from the neighborhoods to the shopping centers.

2015 Aspen Hill Minor Master Plan

The 2015 *Aspen Hill Minor Master Plan* (see Figure 2) addresses approximately 14 acres of land west of the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Aspen Hill Road, all of which are located within the proposed Study boundaries. The 2015 Plan focused on the vacant Vitro office building—which has been approved as the new Lindsay Ford site—new open space and improved community connections. The 2015 Plan provided recommendations to improve safety as well as the pedestrian experience.

The 2015 Plan envisioned the commercial centers along Connecticut Avenue with more intense uses “with the goal of making new development as accessible to pedestrians as it is to drivers” (2015 Plan, page 13).

2008 Georgia Avenue Study

The 2008 Georgia Avenue Study was primarily an urban design analysis of the Georgia Avenue corridor from Silver Spring to north of Olney. The 2008 Study confirmed the *Aspen Hill Master Plan's* previous vision of Georgia Avenue as a green boulevard and transportation corridor for people who walk, bicycle, and drive.

The 2008 Study suggested a series of mixed-use, walkable centers where future growth would occur. Aspen Hill is envisioned as a smaller center, providing convenience retail and services for surrounding communities. The study recommended requiring green panels along sidewalks, improved accessibility to parks and recreation facilities, and allowing more crossing time for pedestrians at intersections.

2013 Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan

The 2013 *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan* recommended expanding Montgomery County's transportation network with Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), one of which is North Georgia Avenue, to facilitate service that will move people to and from jobs, homes, shopping and entertainment areas in urbanizing parts of the county. The 2013 Functional Master Plan proposed future BRT stations at Georgia Avenue's intersection with Hewitt Avenue, Connecticut Avenue and Bel Pre Road all within the Study area.

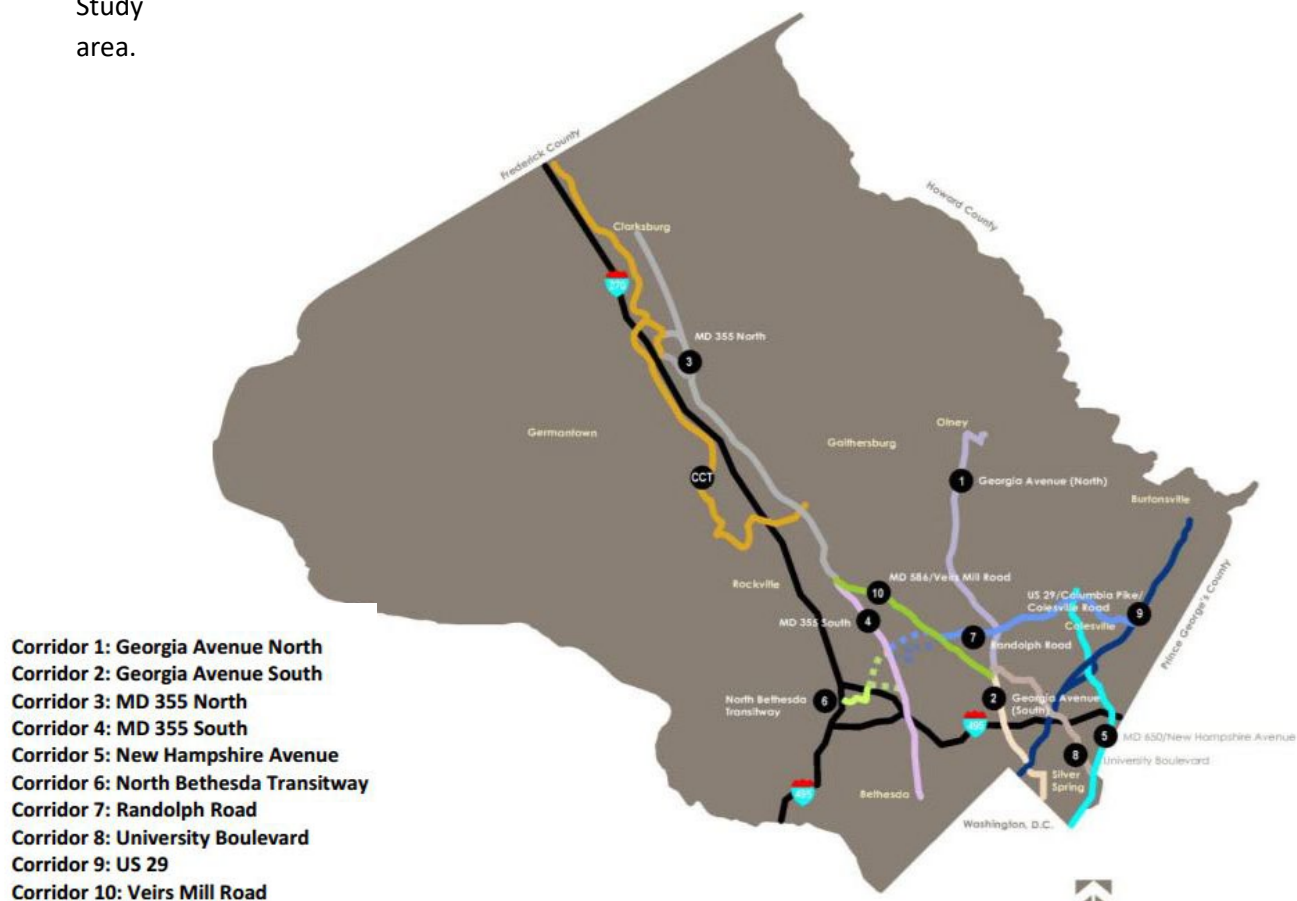


Figure 3: 2013 Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan – BRT Corridors

Although Georgia Avenue has been selected as a BRT corridor, which has the potential to vastly improve transit service in Aspen Hill, the Georgia North Corridor is not currently under Study for future implementation.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of the Study is to examine potential strategies to improve safety for all road users and set forth recommendations. During the planning process for the 2015 *Aspen Hill Minor Master Plan* and the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan, community members expressed interest in an update to the larger 1994 *Aspen Hill Master Plan*.

Traffic safety, and particularly pedestrian safety at major intersections, was a common concern. The Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study seeks to build on the principles established in the *Aspen Hill Master Plan* and Georgia Avenue Study, as well as the Vision Zero strategies being considered in the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan and the Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan.

The Study will examine neighborhood access to local destinations, including transit stops, barriers to walkability and severe and fatal crash trends. Staff will develop recommendations to improve accessibility and connectivity for the bicycle, pedestrian and transit facilities, and reduce crash frequency and severity.

While the primary focus of the Study will be Vision Zero, staff will also analyze whether existing zoning of the commercial properties (including Northgate Shopping Center, Aspen Hill Shopping Center, Aspen Manor Shopping Center and Home Depot and Kmart) should be modified by a future master plan update.

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

In 2016, the Montgomery County Council passed a Resolution adopting a Vision Zero policy with the goals of eliminating traffic fatalities and severe injuries by 2030. According to the Vision Zero Network, “Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all.”

The concept was created in Sweden in 1997 and is widely credited with significant reductions in fatal and severe collisions on Sweden’s roads. Cities all over the world have adopted Vision Zero policies, although Montgomery County is one of the first suburban jurisdictions to do so, the Vision Zero approach to traffic safety includes the following:

- Prize human life over mobility. Traffic deaths are preventable.
- Account for human error in the design of the road network.
- Reduce the severity of collisions.
- Emphasize a systems approach.
- Identify equitable solutions.

The commitment to Vision Zero represents a fundamental change in the approach to planning and design priorities for road networks. Traditional approaches to evaluating intersections have relied on level of service for motor vehicles, but this method may be replaced by measures that focus on safety of all users.

The Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan, currently under review by the Planning Board, is the first master plan following the county's adoption of Vision Zero policy. The Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan is currently underway and is also applying Vision Zero strategies.

The Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study will build on the principles and strategies developed in these master plans to reduce conflicts between people who walk, bike, drive and take transit through street design and slow vehicle speeds through urban design and engineering solutions, creating a safe, equitable environment for all road users.

STUDY BOUNDARIES

Staff proposes the Study boundaries shown in Figure 1 because this area has been identified as a high priority in the Montgomery County Vision Zero Two-Year Action Plan (Action Plan) and because it includes the commercial center of Aspen Hill. The proposed Study boundaries include census tract 7032.13¹ and 7033.02, which are the area north of the Matthew Henson Trail, between Parkland Drive and Georgia Avenue, and the area between Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue, from Aspen Hill Road to Bel Pre Road. Additionally, the Study area includes the commercial developments surrounding Georgia Avenue, Connecticut Avenue and Aspen Hill Road.

The two census tracts that comprise the Study area are identified as having high numbers of collisions per square mile and as "Equity Emphasis Areas" that contain higher concentrations of people earning lower incomes in Montgomery County and higher percentages of minority groups.² The Action Plan prioritizes these Equity Emphasis Areas with high crash rates for improvement (see Figure 4).

¹ A portion of census tract 7032.13 is included in the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan; this portion is excluded from the Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study.

² Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments defines Equity Emphasis Areas as locations that have a *concentration of low-income population and concentration of two or more minority groups greater than 1.5 times the regional average. Low-income is defined as a household income less than 1.5 times the Federal poverty level, depending on size.*

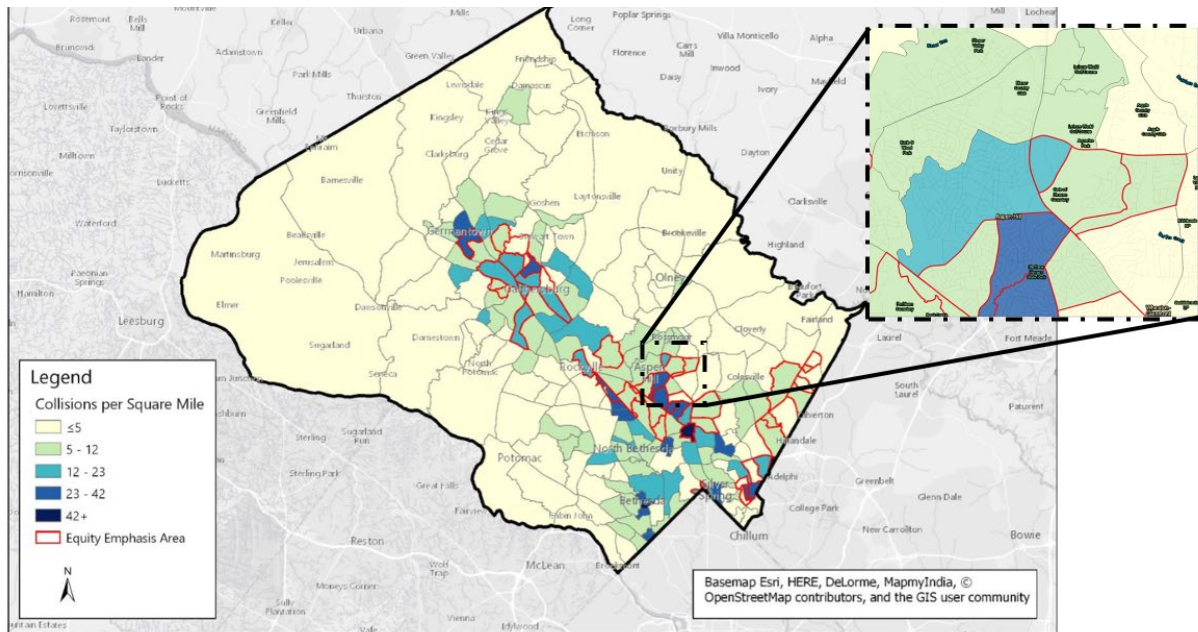


Figure 4: Montgomery County Vision Zero Action Plan – High Crash Equity Emphasis Areas

The Study boundaries include two of the 20 high injury road segments identified in the Action Plan (see Figure 5 and Table 1)³—Bel Pre Road and Connecticut Avenue segments. Other high injury segments are being addressed in the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan, the Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Master Plan and the Shady Grove Minor Master Plan Amendment.

As mentioned, the Study boundaries include the commercial areas surrounding Georgia Avenue, Connecticut Avenue and Aspen Hill Road, including Northgate Shopping Center, Aspen Hill Shopping Center, Aspen Manor Shopping Center and Home Depot and Kmart.

³ Montgomery County, as part of its Two-Year Vision Zero Action Plan, identified a high injury network as comprising 20 road segments with 5 or more severe or fatal collisions and one or more collisions per mile per year.

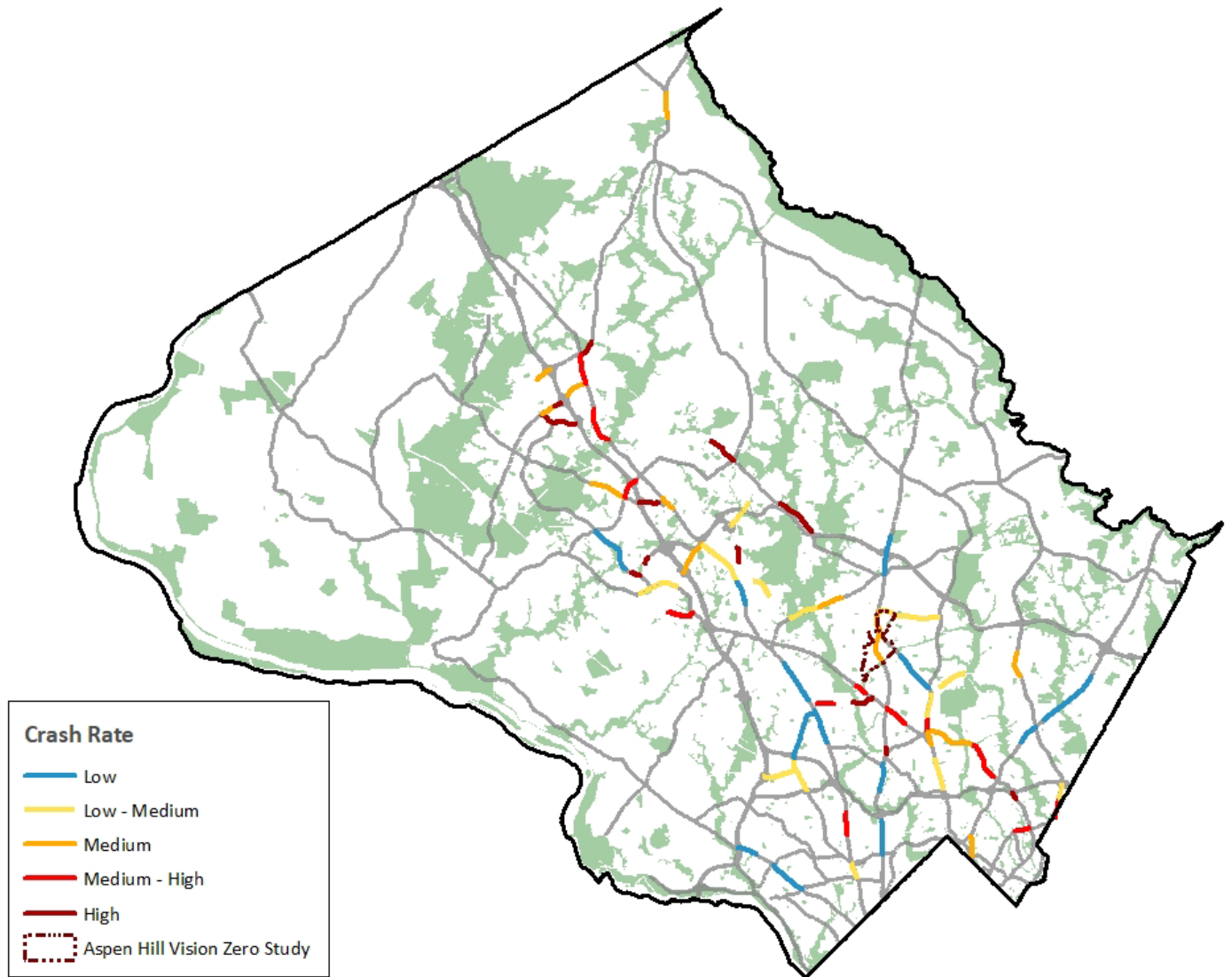


Figure 5: Montgomery County Vision Zero Action Plan - High Injury Network

State-Owned Roads				County-Owned Roads			
Roadway	Total Collisions	Collisions per Mile per Year	Collisions per 100M VMT**	Roadway	Total Collisions	Collisions per Mile per Year	Collisions per 100M VMT**
Crabb's Branch Way From Redland Rd to Indianola Dr	9	3.8	51.9	University Blvd W From Georgia Ave to Colesville Rd	30	2.2	18.5
Middlebrook Rd From Germantown Rd to I-270	15	2.6	33.1	Veirs Mill Rd From Connecticut Ave to Newport Mill Rd	12	3.3	24.5
Shady Grove Rd From Frederick Rd to I-270	14	2.7	18.3	Rockville Pike From Jones Bridge Rd to Cedar Ln	12	3.6	22.1
Sam Eig Hwy From Fields Rd to Diamondback Dr	5	4.9	42.8	W Diamond Ave From I-270 to Water St	5	1.6	44.4
Randolph Rd From Veirs Mill Rd to Rock Creek Park	9	2.6	30.7	Frederick Rd From Middlebrook Rd to Wheatfield Dr	13	2.3	18.8
Snouffer School Rd From Woodfield Rd to Flower Hill Way	9	2	25.4	Frederick Rd From Gude Dr to Shady Grove Rd	15	1.9	11.9
Shady Grove Rd From Metro Access Rd to Midcounty Hwy	11	2.3	12.9	Ridge Rd From Frederick Rd to Brink Rd	9	3.3	28.6
Bel Pre Rd* From Layhill Rd to Georgia Ave	10	1	12.5	Muncaster Mill Rd From ICC (MD-200) to Olde Mill Run	10	1.5	24.7
Randolph Rd From Kemp Mill Rd to Glenallan Ave	9	2	13.6	Georgia Ave From Forest Glen Rd to Pliers Mill Rd	14	2.7	12.5
Darnestown Rd From W Montgomery Ave to Shady Grove Rd	6	1.5	20.4	Connecticut Ave* From Matthew Henson Trail to Georgia Ave	11	2.4	18

Table 1: Countywide High Injury Network Road Segments (road segments within the Study area are in red)

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The Planning Board approved a development application to redevelop the former Vitro Corporation office building with a Lindsay Ford car dealership on July 12, 2018 (Site Plan No. 820180070). The structure for the auto dealership will be lower in height and less density than the existing building. There is no other approved or pending development in the pipeline for the Study area.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study area is home to 11,300 people who comprise 3,400 households. Several unique demographic characteristics of the population in the Study area present opportunities and challenges for the Study.

The majority of the population in the study area is Latino—50 percent in the Study area versus 19 percent countywide. Spanish is the most common language spoken other than English and approximately one third of residents are not fluid English speakers.

The percentage of family households is higher than other parts of Montgomery County. Household size is larger than is typical in the county and there are a significant proportion of single-parent homes, which translates into a larger youth population. The area has a younger median age, 32 years versus 39 years countywide, and approximately one-third of residents are under the age of 19 and more than half are under the age of 34.

More than 85 percent of households earn less than the county median income. There is a higher proportion of renters at 52 percent versus 31 percent countywide.

Approximately 20 percent of those living in the Study area commute to work by public transit, which is higher than the countywide average of 16 percent. There is no Metro station in the area, therefore many commuters are walking to bus stops and crossing major roads to get to or from a stop. Bus ridership is much higher in this area than in the county (15 percent versus 5.5 percent countywide), and higher still among black and Latino populations in the county.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE STUDY

Access and Connectivity

The Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study will consider the accessibility of residential neighborhoods to the existing transit stops, community facilities and commercial centers by alternative means of transportation, such as biking and walking. Barriers to walkability, including missing or inadequate sidewalks, cul-de-sacs and natural buffers will be evaluated to assist in the development of recommendations for improved connectivity.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure

Travel by motor vehicle represents the majority of person trips in the Study area; however, pedestrians and bicyclists accounted for 53 percent of the severe and fatal crashes between 2015 and 2017.⁴ The

⁴ Between 2015-2017, 17 severe or fatal crashes occurred. Of the victims, 47% were motor vehicle occupants, 47% were pedestrians, and 6% were bicyclists. Statistics based on Montgomery Planning Department analysis of crash data from CountyStat <https://stat.montgomerycountymd.gov/>.

rate of bicycle and pedestrian crashes is much higher than other suburban areas where the rate is 25 percent; it is more akin to urban areas, where people walk and bike more frequently. The Study will examine the high speed, high volume suburban arterials and highways in the area and develop recommendations to improve safety for all road users, particularly vulnerable roadway users, such as those that walk, bike and take transit.

A bicycle pedestrian priority area (BiPPA) is located within the area surrounding the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue, within the Study area boundaries. The BiPPA primarily includes the commercial developments surrounding the intersection as well as the Aspen Hill Manor Shopping Center and parts of the Ridgewood Apartments and Aspen Hill Apartments.

A BiPPA is “a geographical area in Montgomery County where the enhancement of bicycle and pedestrian traffic and safety is a priority.” The county has designated 30 BiPPAs and five have been evaluated and considered for construction. The 2018 Bicycle Master Plan outlines recommendations for the Aspen Hill BiPPA area. The Study will offer additional infrastructure recommendations that respond to the specific data and analysis that is a result of the study.

The Matthew Henson Trail is located within the Study area, crossing both Connecticut and Georgia Avenues. The trail provides regional recreation and commuting opportunities. Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure will be examined comprehensively in the Study area, with emphasis on the BiPPA area and key connections to public transportation and community facilities.

Healthy and Sustainable Communities

A primary goal of the Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study is to enhance health and sustainability throughout the Study area. Each year, about 30 people are killed on average and 320 people are severely injured in crashes in Montgomery County. Over a three-year period—between 2015 and 2017—there were 17 fatalities and severe injuries from traffic-related incidents in the Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study area. The Study seeks to develop recommendations that support the county’s goal of eliminating traffic-related fatalities and severe injuries.

Transportation infrastructure determines how people travel every day to work, school, shopping and recreation. Safe, accessible infrastructure for people walking, biking and taking transit enables people to get more exercise while meeting their daily needs. The Study seeks to develop recommendations that support active transportation choices and improve access to active recreation areas, such as parks and trails.

Compared to transit, walking and biking, single-occupancy vehicles contribute more greenhouse gas emissions. The Study seeks to develop recommendations that improve access to alternative transportation modes, encourage walkability and reduce dependency on single-occupancy vehicles.

Equity

A guiding principle of Vision Zero and this Study is that all people have the right to move about their communities safely. Certain populations are disproportionately affected by crashes, often by virtue of where they live. The Study will look at equity related to traffic safety.

The Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) suggests racial disparities are pervasive throughout the county and create burdens for communities and people of color. There are historically underserved and underrepresented populations throughout the county, traditionally people of color, people with lower incomes, and immigrants.⁵ Montgomery County's Vision Zero Action Plan highlighted populations in the county who are correlated with higher crash rates and found that communities like Aspen Hill, with higher rates of poverty, people of color and younger residents, have higher collision rates.

Areas with higher populations of Hispanic/Latino people have higher crash rates as do areas with higher percentages of households that do not speak English fluently. Younger residents are more vulnerable road users. According to the Action Plan, areas with a lower median age and more young residents have higher collision rates in the county. Areas with higher proportions of households with incomes below the poverty line also suffer higher crash rates.

The OLO recommends investing in service improvements, in community partnerships, and in the people and places with the greatest needs to improve disparities in transportation and mobility. The Study aims to bring greater attention to the issues Aspen Hill residents face in their daily travel. It will examine ways to identify and prioritize high-need areas in Montgomery County.

Land Use

Single-family houses, garden-style apartments and traditional suburban commercial development characterize the Study area. The Study will focus its zoning analysis on the commercial areas, and whether there is any potential for redevelopment. Depending on the findings, the Study may recommend a minor master plan amendment to determine appropriate zoning for the commercial properties.

The Study may make urban design recommendations which support a vibrant commercial area and the goals of Vision Zero. The Study will not include traffic modeling and analysis to evaluate the capacity of the transportation network.

⁵ Office of Legislative Oversight. "Racial Equity in Government Decision-Making: Lessons from the Field." (OLO Report 28-8).

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2018%20Reports/OLOReport2018_8.pdf

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community outreach and participation are fundamental to the Study process.

Planning staff invited community members to attend a kick-off meeting on September 26, 2018 at the Aspen Hill Library. The purpose of the meeting was to notify the community of the proposed Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study, introduce the Study boundaries and initial issues, and request feedback about the traffic safety issues in Aspen Hill. Approximately 20 people attended, including residents, property owners and other interested parties.

During the meeting, staff introduced an interactive map called the ReactMap to solicit feedback about the assets, challenges and needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and motorists in Aspen Hill. The interactive map requests feedback on the elements people like the most about Aspen Hill, the features in need of improvement and suggestions for needed elements, with an emphasis on traffic safety. The interactive map, which is available on the project website, provides an opportunity for staff to learn about community concerns and preferences to inform the Study.

Staff recommends a variety of outreach strategies to engage stakeholders in the planning process, including residents, business owners, property owners, commuters, bicyclists and pedestrians. These strategies include community meetings and workshops; a walk audit and participation in community events; promotional tools, including videos, press releases and printed materials; an engaging website; social media and the ReactMap.



Aspen Hill Vision Zero Walk Audit

Staff plans to form an advisory group for the Study. The group will meet regularly from January through July 2019 to provide advice to staff planners as they develop a working draft of the Study and then present recommendations to community members, the Planning Board and the County Council.

As the majority of residents within the Study area are Spanish speakers, engagement will include translation and interpretation services, community partnerships, media outreach, events customized to specific audiences and collaboration with local religious institutions.

Outreach Events Attended or Hosted by Staff

- National Night Out
- Harmony Hills Elementary School Open House
- Aspen Hill Civic Association Board of Director Meeting (presentation)

- Aspen Hill Community Festival
- Kickoff Meeting (hosted)
- Aspen Hill Community Walk
- Wheaton Arts Festival
- Rock Creek Valley PTA meeting (presentation)
- Aspen Hill Walk Audit (hosted)
- Action Committee for Transit Meeting (presentation)
- Strathmore Bel Pre Civic Association Meeting (presentation)



Clockwise from top left: Action Committee for Transit Presentation; Bus Shelter Ad; Harmony Hills Elementary School Open House; Yard Sign Ad; Kickoff Community Meeting.

STUDY SCHEDULE

The Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study was initiated in July 2018. Upon approval of the Scope of Work, Planning Department staff will continue with varied community outreach and engagement activities through spring 2019. Staff expects to transmit a draft of the Study to the Planning Board in July 2019 and present a refined version to the County Council in fall 2019. The tentative schedule is outlined below.

- December 6, 2018 – Scope of Work presented to the Planning Board
- Spring 2019 – Planning Board Briefing
- Summer – Fall 2019 – Planning Board Review
- Fall - Winter 2019 - County Council Review

STAY CONNECTED

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