

Montgomery Planning


THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB

Item No. 4

Date: 10-08-20

2020 Bethesda Downtown Plan Streetscape Standards

 Leslye Howerton, Supervisor, DownCounty Planning, leslye.howerton@montgomeryplanning.org, 301 495-4566

 Elza Hisel-McCoy, Chief, DownCounty Planning, Elza.hisel-mccoy@montgomeryplanning.org, 301 495-2187

Completed: September 29, 2020

Description:

Request to approve 2020 Streetscape Standards for downtown Bethesda

Staff Summary and Recommendations

The Bethesda Streetscape Plan Standards for the Metro Core District were approved in April 1992. The streetscape standards were designed to achieve a high-quality attractive image for the Metro Core District. They provided guidance on urban design concepts in the core area including reinforcing a streetscape hierarchy, street trees and other plantings, street lighting, sidewalk paving, street furniture, traffic lights and signage, and public art in the streetscape. The standards also provided specifications for materials and installation details of paving, trees, lighting and furnishings in the core of downtown Bethesda.

Over the past 28 years these standards have resulted in a clear unified hierarchy to the Core District with pedestrian-friendly streetscapes throughout much of the downtown core. However, many of the details in the standards, which were innovative at the time, have become obsolete. In addition, the 1992 Streetscape Standards do not address streetscapes within the entire downtown, new approaches or strategies such as the integration of storm water into the public right-of-way, which is now mandated by state law.

Staff, along with a consultant, conducted a thorough existing conditions inventory and analysis of the existing streetscapes within the entire downtown Bethesda Plan boundary, and engaged in extensive outreach with, Bethesda Urban Partnership, the Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan Implementation Advisory Committee, business owners, residents and various County agencies.

Planning staff engaged with the Commission on People with Disabilities (CPWD) and the Commission on Aging (CoA) within the County's Health and Human Services Department to obtain feedback on the standards presented in the document and to better understand the issues and challenges with the county's public sidewalks for the aging and disabled community in our more urban downtown areas such as downtown Bethesda. The main concerns described to planning staff by the commission members

centered around obstacles within the public right-of-way (ROW) such as the location of bike lanes and “floating” bus stops. The Bethesda Streetscape Standards focus on the design and installation of sidewalk elements such as the frontage zone next to the face of buildings, pedestrian sidewalk surfaces and dimensions, and the planting and furnishing zones, and does not include standards for the location of bike lanes and floating bus stops. Key concerns voiced by the commission members associated with sidewalks in general throughout the county include:

- Obstacles that obstruct the clear pedestrian access along the sidewalks that are temporary or that are moveable, such as signage, large plant containers, café seating and unmanaged electric bicycles and electric scooter parking taking place on sidewalks.
- Lack of separation of uses along the sidewalk, such as outdoor dining and café seating, and wait staff crossing the pedestrian through zone of the sidewalk to wait on tables.

Planning staff recognizes the importance of having a clear separation of uses within the sidewalk zones in an active urban downtown area such as Bethesda and staff has developed a clear set of design guidelines for downtown Bethesda through the sector plan process and the following updated streetscape standards based on this input.

In addition to striving to address the various safety issues outlined above and through the study of the existing inventory, staff developed an updated set of streetscape standards beyond the core district to act as a living, companion document to the 2017 Approved and Adopted *Bethesda Downtown Plan* and the approved 2017 *Bethesda Design Guidelines* that responds to the needs of today, employing the latest streetscape techniques and best management practices. Key updates to the 2020 Bethesda Downtown Streetscape Standards include:

- Standards apply to all streets within the entire Bethesda Downton Sector Plan boundary, not just the Core District as in the 1992 standards.
- Defining a clear separation of uses within the sidewalk zones by street type with recommended dimensions for each zone as established in the Bethesda Downtown Design Guidelines.
- Best Management Practices (BMPs) integrating Environmental Site Design Strategies
- A revised roster of mostly native tree species for each street based on existing conditions findings.
- An updated selection of street furnishings including benches, trash receptacle, bike racks and lighting.

The goal of staff is to update the streetscape standards every 5 years to respond to changing technology and conditions in the downtown.

Staff recommends approval of the 2020 Bethesda Downtown Plan Streetscape Standards.

Attachments: 2020 Bethesda Downtown Streetscape Standards

From: [Luecking, Betsy](#)
To: [Howerton, Leslye](#)
Cc: [Brennan, Shawn M.](#); [Seth Morgan](#)
Subject: Commission on People with Disabilities Comments on Bethesda Streetscapes
Date: Thursday, September 17, 2020 2:49:33 PM
Attachments: [Outlook-1508437486.png](#)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Hi Leslye,

Thanks for your email regarding follow-up on your presentation. The Commission on People with Disabilities concurs with the comments of Shawn Brennan, Transportation and Mobility Planner for Aging and Disability Services.

- Sight views: I am on the County's Fatal Crash Review Team. The issue of drivers and pedestrians not being able to see around greenery has come up often.
- I didn't see a reference to para-transit or the need for space to drop people off. Bike lanes in Silver Spring have hampered the ability of Metro Access to drop off riders close to where they are going. (Sometimes people forget that all people with disabilities do not use wheelchairs; many walk, but with difficulty so they need to be dropped off as close as possible to their destinations.)
- Avoid tripping hazards/ankle injuries caused by brick pavers. Will they adhere to Bethesda street and ADA standards?
- Be sure to avoid other falls hazards. (Falls are the leading cause of fatal injury and the most common cause of nonfatal trauma-related hospital admissions among older adults.)
- Speaking of which: I notice plans for bike racks, but nothing for scooters. Scooters being left in the way of pedestrians is a worry...especially for people who are blind or have a mobility impairment.
- I see that bike racks should be at the end of blocks. Beware ADA ramps/curbcuts!
- The canopy and lighting: I love trees! Still, I am concerned about the amount of shade planned since shade can decrease visual contrast that people with low vision rely on to see.
- Lights: I hope they will be sufficiently bright that older adults and people with low vision can navigate in the evenings/nights.
- "A bicycle parking facility must have an aisle a minimum of 4 feet in width behind all occupied parking racks to allow room for bicycle maneuvering. This will also provide clear space for ADA accessibility along the sidewalk." I have read that 5 feet is preferable, so allow for people with wheelchairs who also have a service animal or escort with them, etc.

In addition, the Commission continues to be concerned about sidewalk obstructions. Some of the sample photos of sidewalks seemed a bit tight insofar as being passable by wheelchair users and certainly, two way pedestrian use would not be possible if a wheelchair user had to cope with oncoming pedestrians let alone a second wheelchair user approaching from the opposite direction.

There is also a bit of concern about the lack of continuity of the different regulatory

agencies (that they are not the entity to assist if restaurants block more than the designated sidewalk space but rather that would be deferred to Permitting Services). This is reminiscent of all the overlapping MCDOT initiatives that the Commission is dealing with with no true central all encompassing program that incorporates all the issues in one central project/program with enforcement authority.

We hope that this is helpful to you.

Warm Regards,

Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

Commission on Veterans Affairs - Commission on People with Disabilities | Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services,

Aging and Disability Services | 401 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, Maryland 20850

Direct: (240) 777-1256 | Cell: (240) 418-4865 |

Like us on Facebook: [facebook.com/MCCPWD](https://www.facebook.com/MCCPWD) and [facebook.com/MCGCVA](https://www.facebook.com/MCGCVA)

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans

"Strive for progress, not perfection."



Take 10 minutes to be counted now – visit: <https://2020census.gov/>



For COVID-19 Information and resources, visit:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COVID19