

## Item 4- Correspondence

**From:** [Michelle Foster](#)  
**To:** [MCP-Chair](#)  
**Subject:** Ga Ave Testimony.docx  
**Date:** Wednesday, September 22, 2021 12:37:54 PM  
**Attachments:** [Ga Ave Testimony.pdf](#)

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Thank you for your patience – attached are my comments on Item 4 Montgomery Hills MD 97 Design Project Mandatory Referral for the hearing tomorrow.

Best,  
Michelle

September 22, 2021

Good Morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Planning Board.

My name is Michelle Foster. I live on Luzerne Ave on the east side of Georgia Ave which is right between the Woodside Park and Woodside Forest Neighborhoods. I have lived here for 27 years.

I also serve as President of Friends of Forest Glen and Montgomery Hills.

Thank you for listening to my comments this morning on the SHA Mandatory Referral for the proposed Georgia Ave improvements.

As you know, this project has been a long time in the making, and so it is exciting to finally arrive at this important milestone. Before I get into my specific comments on the mandatory referral, I want to provide the five principals that guided my comments.

First, I appreciate SHA and the County's commitment to advance Georgia Ave improvements, albeit slower that we would prefer. From the beginning, the project has enjoyed widespread and enthusiastic support from the residential neighborhoods that surround the project area and the local businesses within the Montgomery Hills commercial area. This is a testament to SHA and their willingness to work with the numerous stakeholders to further a plan that isn't your typical road improvement.

Second, over the past few years working with SHA's staff and leadership I have strongly believe SHA is largely aligned with the neighborhoods' objectives and the Planning Department's goals. I especially want to commend the Planning staff for attentively working with the community to help put the community's vision into a workable plan.

In drafting my comments for today, I kept coming back to my mantra of progress, not perfection.

I wanted to be sure that if I was going to recommend anything *different from what SHA submitted in their proposed plans*, that my recommendation was really important to the needs of the community and critical to further the vision we have for the entire corridor. Now was not the time to suggest changes that were minor in import. That would merely serve to potentially delay the project.

However, as I reviewed SHA's plans, along with the Planning staff's recommendations, I concluded that after waiting all this time for the Georgia Ave improvements for so many years, it was important to get them right. In the end, I agree with nearly all the Planning staff's recommendation for how SHA should proceed. While there is no need for me to belabor every recommendation of the Planning staff, I want to highlight a few that I believe are most important. I realize that my comments today are as much for the Planning Board to hear my affirmation of staff recommendation, as for SHA staff to hear that the community supports the recommendation proposed by Planning staff.

I understand that the Planning Board's recommendations are advisory only, and that SHA could potentially decide to proceed with their original plans and not incorporate any changes that we discuss today. I hope that will not be the case. Further, I hope that should any of the proposed recommendations require additional funds for design, that the **State and the County** will work expeditiously, and with urgency to keep this project moving on a fast track toward construction. I suppose that comment is largely for the Office of the County Executive, MC DOT, and the County Council.

I have five specific comments on the SHA Mandatory Referral.

### **1. Recommend against bike lane to follow north side of 16th Street.**

Locating bike lanes on the northside of 16th Street is contrary to what was previously proposed and discussed with surrounding community. The bike lanes offer incredible value in creating new and safe connections to the Purple Line from neighborhoods on both east and west sides of Georgia Ave. SHA's plan for a bike lane on the north side of 16th Street forces a more dangerous and inconvenient crossing on 16th Street to access Woodside Purple Line Station. This would also effectively reduce land available for new park, and specifically for a playing field for active recreation which is what is most needed in this location.

Consequently, I support the Planning staff recommendation to shift bike lanes to south side. Bike lanes on 16th Street on the south side is supported by three previously adopted plans, (1) 2018 Bicycle Master Plan, (2) 2017 Greater Lyttonsville Sector Plan, and (3) 2020 Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan. Therefore, SHA should not be surprised at the recommendation to relocate the bike lanes, and frankly I was very surprised to see them in the Mandatory Referral on the north side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street. Southside bike lanes offer direct bike lane connections to the Woodside Purple Line Station and facilitates pedestrian and bike connections from the Linden, Woodside Forest, Forest Glen, and Woodside Park neighborhoods.

### **2. Oppose: Slip Lane Geometry at 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Georgia**

SHA's proposed design for 16th Street doesn't "square off" the intersection. Slip lane geometry encourages unsafe speeds for pedestrians, bikes, and even other cars. SHA has been removing slip lanes in other areas of the County because they encourage vehicles to speed. The map from the NEPA Categorical Exclusion documents dated September 2019 shows more squared intersection. These documents are still available on the SHA project website. The **most important design objective** with this intersection is to vehicular slow speed. And this is especially important with the proposed park and the bus stop on Georgia Ave in front of the park, both of which will hopefully draw more people to cross Georgia Ave at this intersection.

### **3. Support Consolidation of Curb Cuts/Access to Seminary Place Shopping Center**

In my opinion, the Georgia Ave section in front of the Seminary Place Shopping Center presents the most dangerous conditions for pedestrians and bikers. Presently, there is only a narrow sidewalk, interrupted by utility poles and there are far too many curb cuts for vehicles turning into and out of the shopping center. With the complete chaos on Georgia Ave in that section, drivers are solely focused on other vehicles and oblivious to pedestrian and bike users. The SHA proposal addresses three of the four issues – it eliminates the Car Wash and gas station, it provides a safer sidewalk, and it creates the bike lane. The remaining issue is to reduce the number of entrances and exits into the shopping center.

### **4. Support Lower Speed Limit on Georgia Ave**

Over the past year or so, SHA has reduced the speed limit to 25 mph on Georgia Ave north of Beltway for pedestrian safety. The 25-mph limit should also be instituted from downtown Silver Spring to the Beltway. The Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board has discussed the need for a lower speed limit on Georgia Ave many times and supports reduced speed limit on Georgia Ave. More than ever, the lower speed limit is critical, as lower traffic volumes from COVID has significantly increased speeding on Georgia Ave. Once vehicles pass the speed camera on the corner of Woodside Parkway far too many cars accelerate considerably in a dash to the Beltway. All other safety conditions aside, speed alone is significant factor in dangerous conditions on Georgia Ave for vehicles, pedestrians, and bikers, and reducing the speed limit would have an immediate impact to improve safety. While the proposed design should certainly plan for a reduced speed limit, I want to emphasize that this is an improvement that could be effectuated today with little cost and immediate benefit.

## 5. Support Planning Departments Bike Lane Design

This was the most difficult recommendation for me to support. To be clear, I wholeheartedly believe that the Planning staff's recommended design for the bike lanes is the most desirable for many reasons. At the same time, my fear is that proposing a re-design of the bike lanes and roadway at this stage will cause additional delays and funding needs.

Nevertheless, I support the re-design for two reasons. The community has waited so long for these improvements, we should get it built right the first time. As the report states, this is not a retrofit project, the Georgia Ave improvements will necessitate a complete and total reconstruction of the road. The construction phase will be long and hard, but we should only do it once. It makes no sense to me why we would design and build the bike lanes to a substandard design and then require any future development along Georgia Ave to reconstruct the bike lanes to the desired design standard.

I don't understand why SHA submitted the bike lane plans without making the proposed revisions and I urge SHA to quickly go back to the design team to make accommodate the Planning staff's proposed revisions.

That concludes my comments.

I appreciate the time afforded to me today and am happy to answer any questions.

