



The Town of Washington Grove
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July 17, 2023

Montgomery County Planning Board
The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
8787 Georgia Ave.
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3760

Re: Item 8 on the Agenda for July 20, 2023: Crabbs Branch Way Extension and Washington Grove Connector Trail – Study Update.

Dear Members of the Montgomery County Planning Board:

As the Mayor of Washington Grove and at the direction of the Town Council, I am asking for your support for the following recommendations MCDOT regarding this study update:

- 1) That the Washington Grove Connector shared use pathway (“*Connector*”), already funded and advanced as a stand-alone project in 2021, be completed independently of other unfunded and unapproved road or trail projects and not be further delayed.
- 2) That the Washington Grove Connector, which has fallen behind the timeline for completion in 2024, be fast-tracked through the final engineering design, plan review and construction phases.
- 3) That the final route for the Washington Grove Connector be selected from two favored alternatives developed cooperatively by MCDOT and Washington Grove, and
- 4) That construction of the Crabbs Branch Way Extension road to Amity Drive (“*Extension*”) be decoupled from the Connector. In contrast to the planning staff recommendation, we believe the most recent MCDOT traffic study presented to you projects minimal benefit to traffic circulation in the area, and do not understand how it supports the master planned road extension.

As previously communicated to the Planning Board, Washington Grove strongly supports the Connector, and has done so for over three decades. Implementing an effective shared use path will allow Town residents, and our neighbors in surrounding communities, to walk, roll, run,

and bike to and from the Shady Grove Metro and nearby businesses and residences. If prudently and successfully implemented, the Connector will reduce our community's carbon footprint; alleviate traffic congestion; promote the development of businesses catering to increased foot traffic; and improve the health and welfare of the citizens in this area. The County Bikeways Master Plan recognizes the value of completing this missing pathway and has prioritized its completion.

Because the Connector will traverse a bucolic wooded wetland area that has historically contributed to the tranquil character of Washington Grove, the route and design features of the pathway should be chosen to reflect its connection to the Town. The original three concept routes studied by MCDOT in 2020-21 incorporated this idea, and one of these with a meandering route and entering the Town at the end of Brown Street (*shown in the appended figure*) was favored by the Town and was also recommended by the Planning Board to MCDOT in April 2021 for advancement to the current engineering study. However, in addition to the Washington Grove Connector, the Board asked MCDOT to return with preliminary route information for the road Extension and for a trail extension to Amity Drive.

Washington Grove established a Liaison Committee to work with MCDOT during the 15% engineering design phase. While communication was maintained, unfortunately MCDOT provided little concrete information on study details. Two full years passed, until in April 2023 MCDOT made a public presentation of a proposed route for the Washington Grove Connector that deviated significantly from the approved 2021 concept route in alignment and design features. The alignment presented was a surprise to our Liaison Committee and the Town. It was a largely unimaginative straight downhill path that would require significant earthworks and environmental disturbance.

Equally alarming was that the Connector was shown intersecting a *hypothetical future* Crabbs Branch - Amity Drive road or trail, rather than the existing roadway. Tying the completion of the Connector to building the Extension, as the consolidated plan appears to contemplate, will unnecessarily delay and hinder the completion of the Connector, given that the Extension undoubtedly would require a far greater planning, logistics, funding and construction effort.

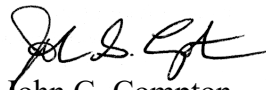
At the April meeting the Liaison group, residents, the Town Council and I reacted with dismay and communicated our reservations to MCDOT. To their great credit, MCDOT acknowledged our concerns as reasonable and agreed to create Connector alignments that were consistent with 2021 expectations: with more attractive design features and independent construction of the pathway. MCDOT shared three such alternative Connector alignments with us in late June, and based on these we suggested several 'hybrid' routes. Subsequently we had a joint site visit with the MCDOT study contractors, **from which there was broad consensus that one of two alternative alignments merited selection for the final route.** These may have been presented to the Planning Board by MCDOT (perhaps as Options 4 and 6), but I can provide the consensus alignment alternatives upon request.

Finally, we think MCDOT's new traffic study raises significant doubts about the benefit of the master planned road Extension. The impact of the road Extension on key intersections has been projected to be small to minimal, calling into question this as a justification for undertaking an

expensive, environmentally disruptive road construction project. Moreover, if MCDOT’s study proves to not be accurate and there is significant traffic on the completed Extension, then our neighbors in the surrounding community, Town residents, and shared use pathway users will have to contend with an influx of car traffic (and attendant accident risks and exhaust pollution harm) where the path would connect to Crabbs Branch Way.

Accordingly, reiterating the recommendations above, the Town urges the Planning Board to prioritize the creation of the Connector and decouple it from building the Extension. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Very Truly Yours,



John G. Compton,
Mayor, Town of Washington Grove, Maryland

Brown Street entry and concept route for the Washington Grove Connector (February 2021)

