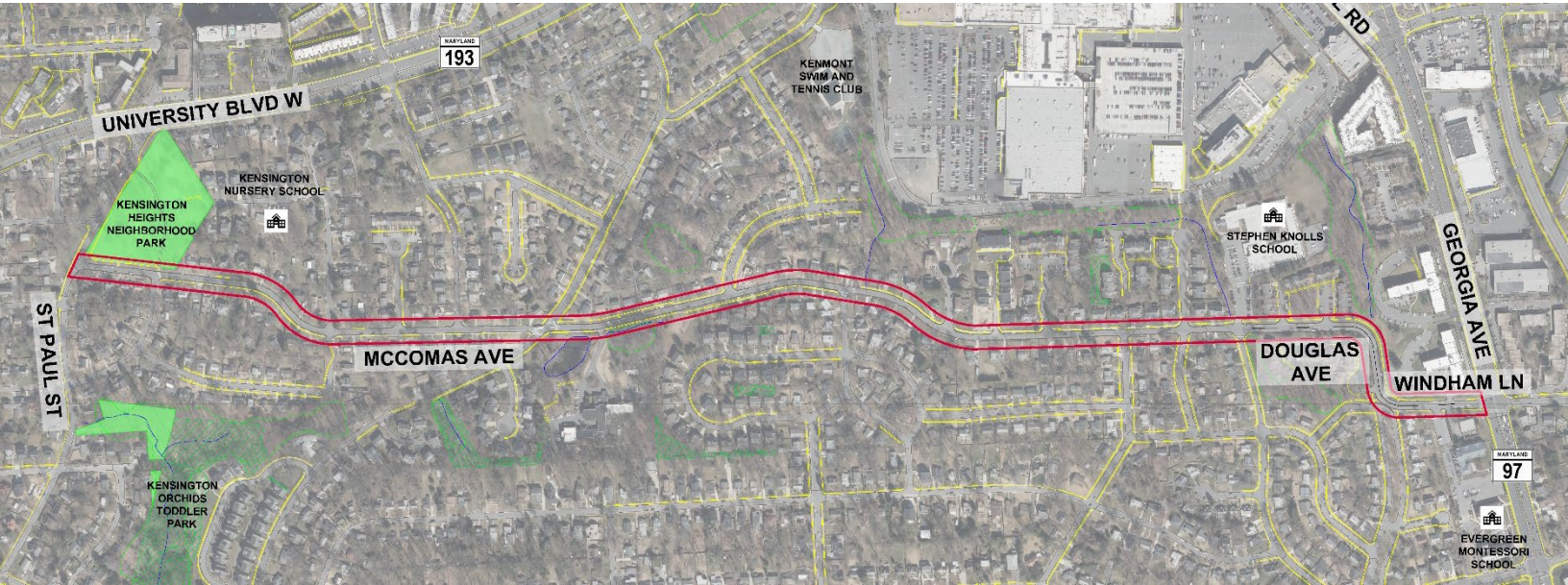


# PROJECT BRIEFING: MCCOMAS AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD GREENWAY



## Description

This is a project briefing on the McComas Avenue Neighborhood Greenway project, a bikeway identified in the 2018 *Bicycle Master Plan* and under preliminary design by the Montgomery County Department of Transportation in the Kensington / Wheaton Policy Area.

MCPB

Item No. 8

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2425 Reddie Drive

Floor 14

Wheaton, MD 20902

LM	Lily Murnen, Multimodal Planning Associate, Countywide Planning & Policy Division <a href="mailto:lily.murnen@montgomeryplanning.org">lily.murnen@montgomeryplanning.org</a> , 301-495-1337
DA	David Anspacher, Transportation Planning Supervisor, Countywide Planning & Policy Division <a href="mailto:david.anspacher@montgomeryplanning.org">david.anspacher@montgomeryplanning.org</a> , 301-495-2191
JS	Jason Sartori, Chief, Countywide Planning & Policy Division <a href="mailto:jason.sartori@montgomeryplanning.org">jason.sartori@montgomeryplanning.org</a> , 301-495-2191

**LOCATION**

McComas Avenue/Douglas Avenue/Windham Lane from St. Paul Street to Georgia Avenue in Kensington/Wheaton

**MASTER PLAN**

Bicycle Master Plan (2018), Thrive Montgomery 2050 (2022)

**AGENCY**

Montgomery County Department of Transportation

**Summary**

- Background and analysis of the McComas Avenue Neighborhood Greenway project is provided

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## SECTION 1 - PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Project Description

The McComas Avenue Neighborhood Greenway project aims to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety on McComas Avenue near Wheaton Mall. The project limit is from St. Paul Street (western limit) to Georgia Avenue (eastern limit) including portions of Douglas Avenue and Windham Lane. Image 1, below, shows the project limits, neighboring streets, and nearby points of interest. The project is part of MCDOT's sidewalk program and within the Wheaton Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Area (BiPPA). Thus, this project aims to expedite the design, review, and construction of pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements within the project limits. The project is in an early design phase, and this briefing is purely advisory.



Image 1: Project limits with neighboring streets and nearby points of interest.

### Background

#### NEIGHBORHOOD GREENWAY

Per the *Montgomery County Bicycle Master Plan (2018)*, Neighborhood Greenways are streets with low motorized traffic volumes and speeds, designed and designated to give walking and bicycling priority. They typically parallel busy streets, where safe and comfortable bicycling accommodations are not present. McComas Avenue was designated a Neighborhood Greenway in the Montgomery County Bicycle Master Plan. Neighborhood Greenways use signs, pavement markings, and speed and volume management measures to calm traffic and discourage through-trips by motor vehicles to create safe, convenient use of streets by pedestrians and bicyclists. Design elements can include traffic diverters at key intersections, traffic circles or mini-roundabouts, traffic calming, shared lane markings,

crossing improvements, and wayfinding signage to guide bicyclists along the route and to key destinations, among other things. For examples and images of these design elements, please see Attachment A: Neighborhood Greenways Overview.

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## BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PRIORITY AREAS (BiPPA)

Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Areas, or BiPPAs, are an MCDOT program to fund and expedite projects in parts of the county where the enhancement of pedestrian and bicyclist connectivity and safety is a priority. Thirty BiPPAs have been identified in the county by master plans, and the first five BiPPAs are undergoing evaluation and construction. One of these is the Wheaton BiPPA, where this project is located.

## Surrounding Neighborhood

McComas Avenue is an east-west road that runs parallel to University Boulevard and Plyers Mill Road, but it is a lower speed, lower volume street. Improving walking and biking conditions on McComas Avenue will provide a valuable, low-stress east-west connection between Kensington and the Wheaton CBD.

Within a short distance of the neighborhood greenway, there are several schools, Kensington Heights Neighborhood Park, as well as walking connections to the Westfield Wheaton Mall.

There are also nearby pedestrian and bicycle projects underway that, in combination with the McComas Avenue Greenway, will provide a better connected, low-stress network of bikeways.

- **Amherst Avenue Bikeway** (MCDOT) – This project will construct separated bike lanes from Windham Lane to Arcola Avenue. The Planning Board conducted a Mandatory Referral hearing for this project on May 4, 2023. Please refer to [Mandatory Referral No. MR2023008](#) for more information. There is currently a one-block gap between the Amherst Avenue Bikeway project and this McComas Avenue Greenway project.
- **Summit Avenue Extended** (MCDOT) – This project provides for facility planning of the extension of Summit Avenue in Kensington from Plyers Mill Road to Farragut Road, including two-way separated bike lanes, improvement of Farragut Road, and reconfiguration of the intersection of Connecticut Avenue (MD 185)/University Boulevard (MD 193)/Farragut Road.
- **Upton Drive Neighborhood Greenway** (MCDOT) – This project will construct a neighborhood greenway on Upton Drive between East Lane and near Pleasant View Local Park.

## SECTION 2 – ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### Master Plan Consistency

Planning staff has determined that the project is consistent with relevant master plans—which provide high-level guidance on roadway type and treatments for McComas Avenue. A summary is included below. However, staff does have additional recommendations related to design best practices, as outlined later in this section.

#### BICYCLE MASTER PLAN (2018): NEIGHBORHOOD GREENWAY DESIGNATION

As described earlier, McComas Avenue/Douglas Avenue/Windham Lane from St. Paul Street to Georgia Avenue was designated as a neighborhood greenway in the *Bicycle Master Plan* (2018). The design proposed by MCDOT currently aligns with the goals and elements of neighborhood greenways defined in that plan—which make roadways more attractive to wide range of bicyclists, reduce speed and volume of traffic, improve safety, and reduce delay for walking and bicycling at street crossings. More detailed guidance on preferred facilities and roadway treatments are outlined in other planning documents, such as the Bicycle Facility Design Toolkit, an appendix to the Bicycle Master Plan.

#### THRIVE MONTGOMERY 2050 (2022)

The project not only aligns with *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, but also helps implement several specific recommendations. The traffic calming features, such as curb extensions and raised crosswalks, will help “transform the road network by incorporating Complete Streets design principles with the goal of eliminating all transportation-related roadway fatalities and severe injuries and supporting the emergence of more livable communities” (p. 112). The bicycle and pedestrian priority features, like bike boxes and priority shared lane markings, will “prioritize the provision of safe, comfortable, and attractive sidewalks, bikeways, roadway crossings...to support walking, bicycling, micromobility, and transit usage in capital budgets, development approvals, and mandatory referrals” (page 112).

### Transportation Best Practices

#### BICYCLE FACILITY DESIGN TOOLKIT

The Bicycle Facility Design Toolkit was included as an appendix in the Bicycle Master Plan and provides additional guidance on the implementation of neighborhood greenways. McComas Avenue fits the qualifications for becoming a neighborhood greenway.

- 25 mph or slower
- Less than 3,000 vehicles per day (preferably closer to 1,000)
- Existing low-stress street that parallels a major corridor

Overall, the designs for the McComas Avenue Neighborhood Greenway make good use of the design features associated with neighborhood greenways.

## NEIGHBORHOOD GREENWAY DESIGN TREATMENTS

Table 1, below, outlines the *Bicycle Facility Design Toolkit* guidance on Neighborhood Greenway design treatments and how the project has implemented each design treatment. Image examples for each type of treatment are include in Appendix A: Neighborhood Greenway Overview.

Table 1: Neighborhood Greenway Design Treatments

Category	Treatment	Guidance	Project implementation
Roadway Marking	Priority Shared Lane Markings	A roadway marking that indicates bicycle priority and directs cyclists to ride outside of the door zone of parked cars – though does not improve most bicyclists’ comfort. Green background color underlay for on-road markings—should underlay the entirety of the priority shared lane marking area. Placed in the center of the travel lane. Should be spaced 100 ft apart or less.	Priority lane markings with green background are provided from St. Margaret’s Way to Georgia Avenue where double yellow lines are also provided. The roadway from St. Paul Street to St Margaret’s Way has no centerline and uses sharrows instead of priority lane markings in the center of the road.
Vertical Traffic Calming	Raised Crosswalk	Speed humps and raised crosswalks affect bicyclist comfort. The approach profile should preferably be flat-topped, but sinusoidal and circular profiles are acceptable.	Used throughout the design where there are mid-block or uncontrolled crossings. Total count (3)
Vertical Traffic Calming	Raised Intersection	Increase motorist awareness of the crossing while reducing motor vehicle speeds on the cross street.	Used throughout at high volume intersections with challenging geometry or lack of traffic control. Total count (3)
Horizontal Traffic Calming	Curb Extensions	Street segments or intersections where street width contributes to higher motor vehicle speeds. Must be designed to deflect motor vehicle traffic without forcing the bicycle path of travel to be directed into a merging motorist.	Used throughout the design at intersections and crossings.

Horizontal Traffic Calming	Neighborhood Traffic Circles	Neighborhood traffic circles should be considered at local street intersections to prioritize the through movement of bicyclists without increasing motorist speeds.	Not used. Could be considered at intersections with challenging angles where right-of-way is available.
Crossing Treatment	Bike Boxes	Primarily installed at signalized intersections. At least 50 feet of bicycle lane should connect the approach leg of the intersection to the bike box, so bicyclists do not have to weave between queueing motor vehicles to access it.	Used at Georgia Avenue. Includes a bicycle lane approach.
Crossing Treatment	Bike Forward Stop Bars	No guidance.	Used extensively throughout the design.
Traffic Diversion	Diagonal Diverter	Diversion treatments reduce through traffic by restricting motor vehicle movements. They must be designed to provide a minimum clear width of 6 feet for a bicyclist to pass through.	Already existing at the diversion of Douglas Avenue. More space is needed for bicyclists to pass through easily and safely.

**COMPLETE STREETS DESIGN GUIDE (2021)**

McComas Avenue is designated as a Neighborhood Connector street type in the Complete Streets Design Guide (CSDG). Because the project is implementing a neighborhood greenway design with traffic calming features above and beyond the requirements of the CSDG, the design generally achieves the Neighborhood Connector standards.

- Target Speed: 25 mph or slower
- Travel Lane: 10.5 feet
- Parking Lane: 8 feet
- Sidewalk Width: 6 feet
- Street Buffer: 6 feet

Exceptions include the existing sidewalks and street buffers along McComas Avenue, which do not currently meet the 6-foot standards. There are topography constraints that create challenges in widening the sidewalks to 6 feet.

**SECTION 3 – ONGOING MCDOT CORRESPONDENCE**

Planning and MCDOT staff have been in ongoing contact regarding this project. Planning staff provided comments on the current designs on August 1, 2023. MCDOT and their consultant are working to respond to those comments. This section overviews the general comments Planning staff transmitted and a rationale for each comment—related to the analysis and findings discussed in Section 2.



## Planning Comments: August 1, 2023

### **Strive to meet the recommended facility widths and buffers for pedestrian space, where feasible.**

As noted in Section 2, within the Complete Streets Design Guide (2021), not all sidewalks will be able to accommodate the 6 feet width and buffer standards. However, Planning staff recommend that MCDOT strive to meet these standards for any new sidewalks or sidewalk realignments.

### **Strive to provide sidewalks on all sides of the street and approaches to intersections, as well as crosswalks at all crossings.**

The Complete Streets Design Guide indicate it is “Montgomery County’s policy to provide crossing opportunities for pedestrians at all legs of intersections” (p 220). In addition, the Pedestrian Master Plan Planning Board Draft (transmitted June 2023), recommends to “provide marked crosswalks...at all legs of an intersection where there are connecting sidewalks or comfortable streets” (p 72). To encourage pedestrian connectivity and safety, Planning staff recommend providing sidewalks and crossings at all legs of an intersection, where feasible.

### **Use green background color underlay for all on-road priority shared lane markings.**

While the current concept plans use the green background for on-road markings where there are double yellow lines, they are not implemented in the center of the roadway without double yellow lines. Applying this consistent treatment can visually reinforce the priority that bicycles have on the roadway and provide additional treatment than standard “sharrows”—emphasizing the greenway component.

### **Provide a direct sidewalk connection to Stephen Knolls School.**

Currently, students need to walk in the school driveway or through the grass to access an on-site sidewalk at Steven Knolls School. The project could provide a short segment of sidewalk from the public sidewalk to this on-site sidewalk, and connectivity and safety would be greatly improved. This connection would be partially located in the right-of-way and partially located on the site of the Steven Knolls School. Image 2 maps the location of the existing sidewalk gap, and Image 3 shows a street view of that gap area.

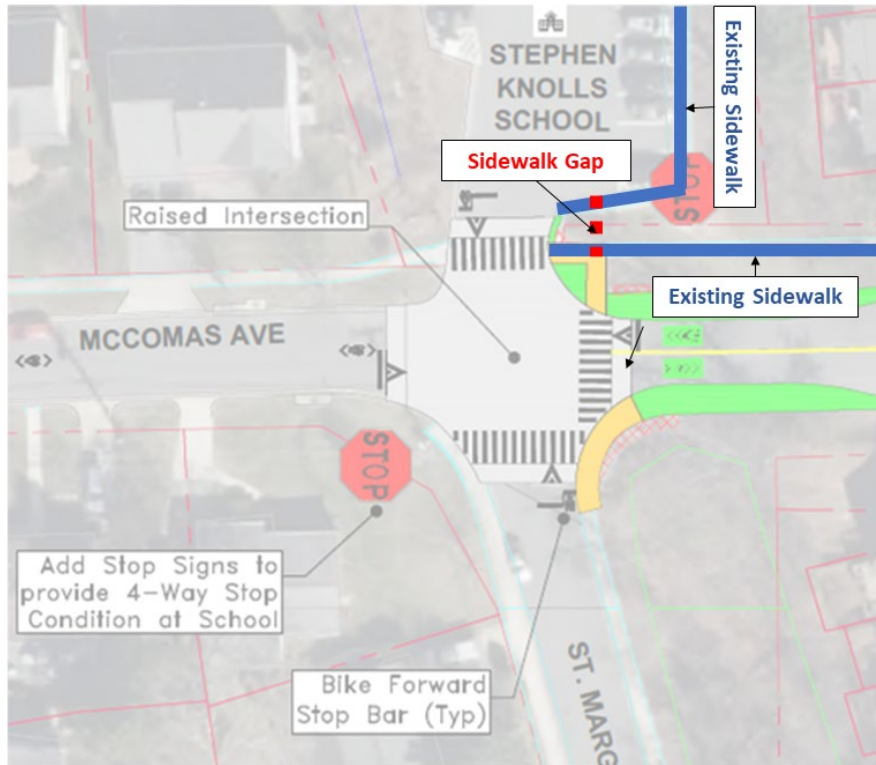


Image 2: Overlay of the location of the remaining sidewalk gap on the project concept plans.



Image 3: Street view of the sidewalk gap in front of Stephen Knolls School.

**Enhance the diagonal diverter that already exists at Douglas Avenue so bikes can pass through.**

The full road closure is already a useful traffic diversion feature that exists on the roadway. To emphasize the utility of this design feature for bicycles, Planning staff recommend that MCDOT make this a functional and safe cut-through for bicycles. The provision of the sidewalk along this road closure is a good addition, and more information will be needed to develop a design that also serves bicycles. Image 4 shows the location of the existing Douglas Avenue diagonal diversion, and Image 5 shows a street view of that location.

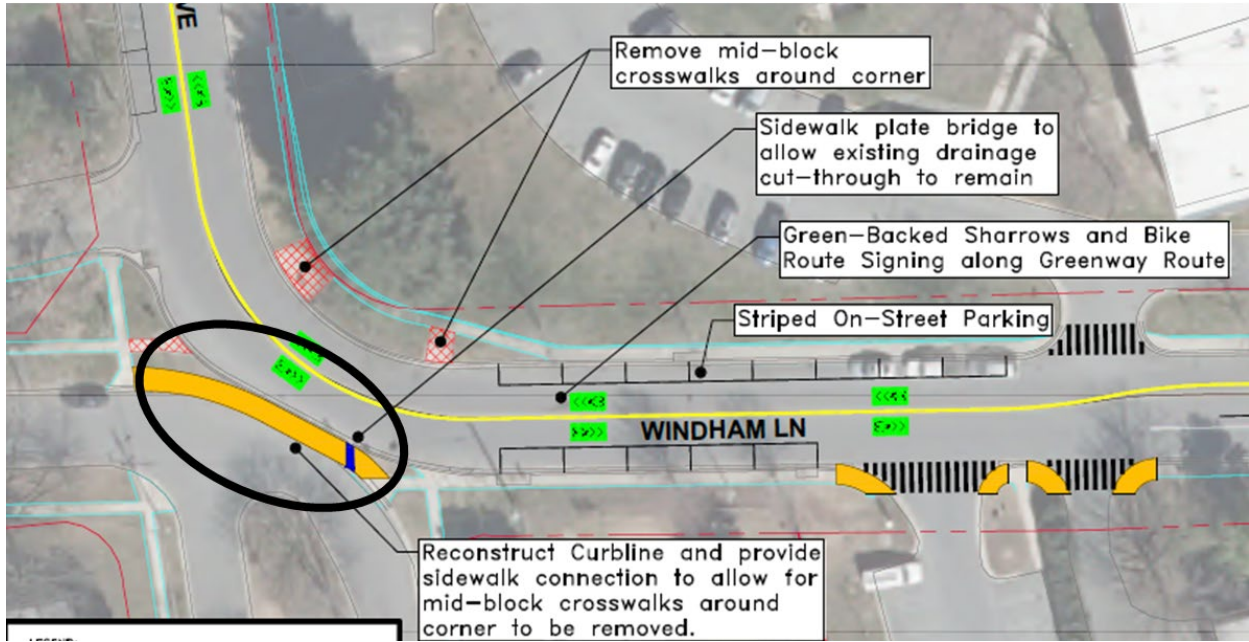


Image 4: Concept plan drawing showing proposed modification to the Douglas Avenue diagonal diversion.



Image 5: Street view of the existing Douglas Avenue diagonal diversion.

**Consider extending the project limits by one block to include Windham Lane east of Georgia Avenue and connect to ongoing Amherst Avenue Bikeway project.**

There is a one-block gap between this greenway project and the Amherst Avenue Bikeway project. If feasible, extending the Neighborhood Greenway across Georgia Avenue could significantly reduce bicyclists’ stress and increase safe connectivity. Image 6 shows the location of this one-block gap.

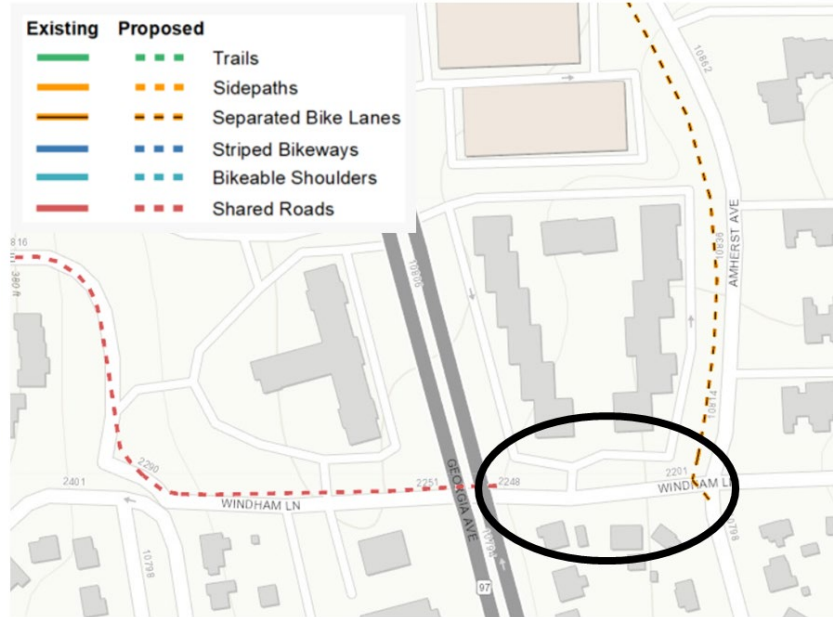


Image 6: Location of one-block gap in bicycle network between Georgia Avenue and Amherst Avenue.

**Incorporate bicycle wayfinding into the project corridor.**

Since the project will help connect existing bicycle facilities and new projects under design, providing wayfinding signage to make cyclists aware of these connections would increase their usage and encourage new ridership. Communication of bicycle facility locations will become only more important as we build out the bike network in the county.

**SECTION 4 – COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

As stated, the project is still in an early design phase. There has been one public meeting, held on April 18, 2023, and the associated public comment period was open until May 19, 2023. Additional meetings will be held during subsequent design phases.

**SECTION 5 – CONCLUSION**

Overall, the McComas Avenue Neighborhood Greenway project is consistent with all master plans and capitalizes on the prescribed neighborhood greenway design features to calm traffic and prioritize bicyclists and pedestrians on the roadway. Staff have provided comments on the current concept plans and look forward to responses and continued collaboration with MCDOT on this project.

**SECTION 6 – ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Neighborhood Greenway Overview

Attachment B: McComas Avenue Neighborhood Greenway Draft Concept Plans