

MANDATORY REFERRAL NO. MR2025023

METROPOLITAN BRANCH TRAIL UPGRADES



Description

Mandatory Referral review for the design of upgrades to the Metropolitan Branch Trail within the City of Takoma Park.

COMPLETED: 08/27/2025

PLANNING BOARD HEARING DATE: 09/04/2025

MCPB ITEM NO. 05

Planning Staff

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LOCATION

Metropolitan Branch Trail from 165 feet south of the Fenton Street/New York Avenue intersection to the DC Line

MASTER PLAN

2024 Pedestrian Master Plan
2018 Bicycle Master Plan
2001 Takoma Park Master Plan

COMPLETE STREETS AREA TYPE

Downtown and Suburban

APPLICANT

City of Takoma Park

ACCEPTANCE DATE

June 5, 2025

REVIEW BASIS

Md. Land Use Article, Section 20-301, et seq.
Chapter 22A

Summary:

- Staff recommends approval and transmittal of comments to the City of Takoma Park.
- Applicant has received a Forest Conservation Exemption.
- The Applicant agreed to a 41-day extension of the Application review period.

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SECTION 1 – COMMENTS

Planning Staff recommends approval and the transmittal of the following comments to the City of Takoma Park (“the City”):

1. Consider upgrading the pavement quality of the trail to meet public road standards.
2. All crosswalks within the project limits should be designed as raised crosswalks consistent with Pedestrian Master Plan Key Action B-3c.
3. Revise design to ensure that vehicular stop bars are located at least four feet behind all crosswalks.
4. Use ladder-style crosswalk striping rather than continental striping.
5. Every curb ramp along Fenton Street and Takoma Avenue within the project limits should be made ADA compliant. This includes both the use of directional ramps and appropriate design requirements.
6. Modify the northeast corner at the intersection of Fenton Street with Takoma Avenue to provide directional curb ramps to each crosswalk.
7. Provide an additional sidewalk connection to direct pedestrians arriving from the south to the Takoma Avenue Ride On bus stop south of Buffalo Avenue.

SECTION 2 – INTRODUCTION

The City of Takoma Park submitted a Mandatory Referral for upgrades to Metropolitan Branch Trail within the City of Takoma Park, Maryland. The project extents include Fenton Street between the city boundary and Takoma Avenue, and Takoma Avenue between Fenton Street and the DC Line.

The proposed project represents important upgrades to the existing Metropolitan Branch Trail within the City of Takoma Park, and includes the following:

- Slightly wider trail where feasible,
- Addition of trail lighting on Takoma Avenue between Fenton Street and the DC Line,
- Improved trail connections on Takoma Avenue at Buffalo Avenue and Fenton Street,
- Removal of existing raised crosswalk south of Buffalo Avenue and construction of raised crosswalk on north leg of Takoma Avenue intersection with Buffalo Avenue, and
- Relocation of bus stops.

SECTION 3 – PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project Description

The City of Takoma Park has completed the preliminary (30%) design phase of the Metropolitan Branch Trail (MBT) Upgrade Improvements project. The project limits are the 0.44-mile segment of the existing Metropolitan Branch Trail maintained by the City of Takoma Park and runs adjacent to the west side of Takoma Avenue and Fenton Street from the DC Line to 165 feet south of the intersection of Fenton Street at New York Avenue. The project is in Takoma Park, Maryland and runs adjacent to the existing WMATA Metrorail Red Line. The City's section of the MBT is designated as part of the "Breezeway Network" in the Montgomery County Bicycle Master Plan. The proposed improvements include upgrading the trail to meet current trail guidelines and standards and improving safety, comfort and connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists. Opportunities to implement stormwater best management practices were also identified with the preliminary design. Other improvements include safety improvements at adjacent intersections, including proposed traffic calming. This project will improve bicycle and pedestrian safety along the City of Takoma Park-maintained segment of the Metropolitan Branch Trail by providing a wider, newly paved surface and continuous lighting. The project will also provide Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant bus stops and safer intersection crossings with signing and pavement marking enhancements.

There is currently no trail lighting from the south limits of work (Sta. 50+00) to the path's alignment with Fenton Street (Sta. 64+00). Along Fenton Street, existing Bethesda high pressure sodium (HPS) Globe luminaires on decorative Bethesda poles are present in a staggered spacing on each side of Fenton Street.

To be consistent with the street and pedestrian-oriented lighting installed for the City's Ethan Allen Gateway and Flower Avenue Green Street Improvement projects, the applicant selected to install Eurotique Munich style post top luminaires staggered along each side of the trail on Takoma Avenue at 75-foot spacing. The spacing is based on guidance from Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) Streetlighting Design Requirements, Installation Guidelines, and Specifications. In total, 32 light poles are proposed.

Project plans are included with this Staff Report as Attachment A.

Project Location

The City of Takoma Park proposes to construct improvements to the existing Metropolitan Branch Trail within the City limits along Fenton Street and Takoma Avenue (0.44 miles) from 165 feet south of the intersection of Fenton Street at New York Avenue to the DC Line. Figure 1 below shows a project location map with the project limits identified in green.

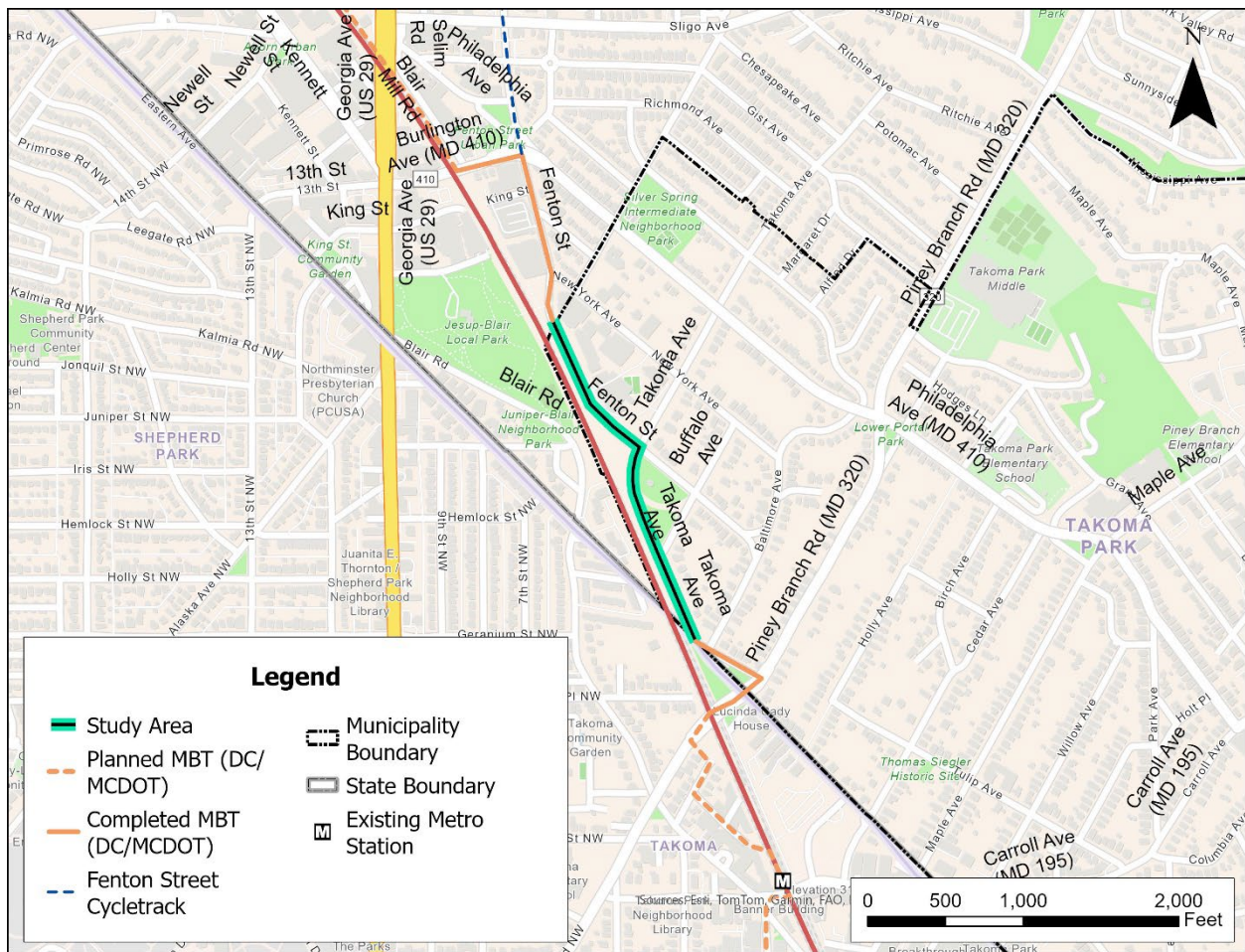


Figure 1: Project Location

The Project's surrounding land use is predominantly community facilities (Montgomery College) along Fenton Street and residential and the Belle Zeigler Municipal Park along Takoma Avenue as shown below in Figure 2. Single unit houses are located south and east of Takoma Avenue. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) rail right-of-way runs along the west side of the Metropolitan Branch Trail. Takoma Avenue and Fenton Streets have posted speed limits of 25 mph.

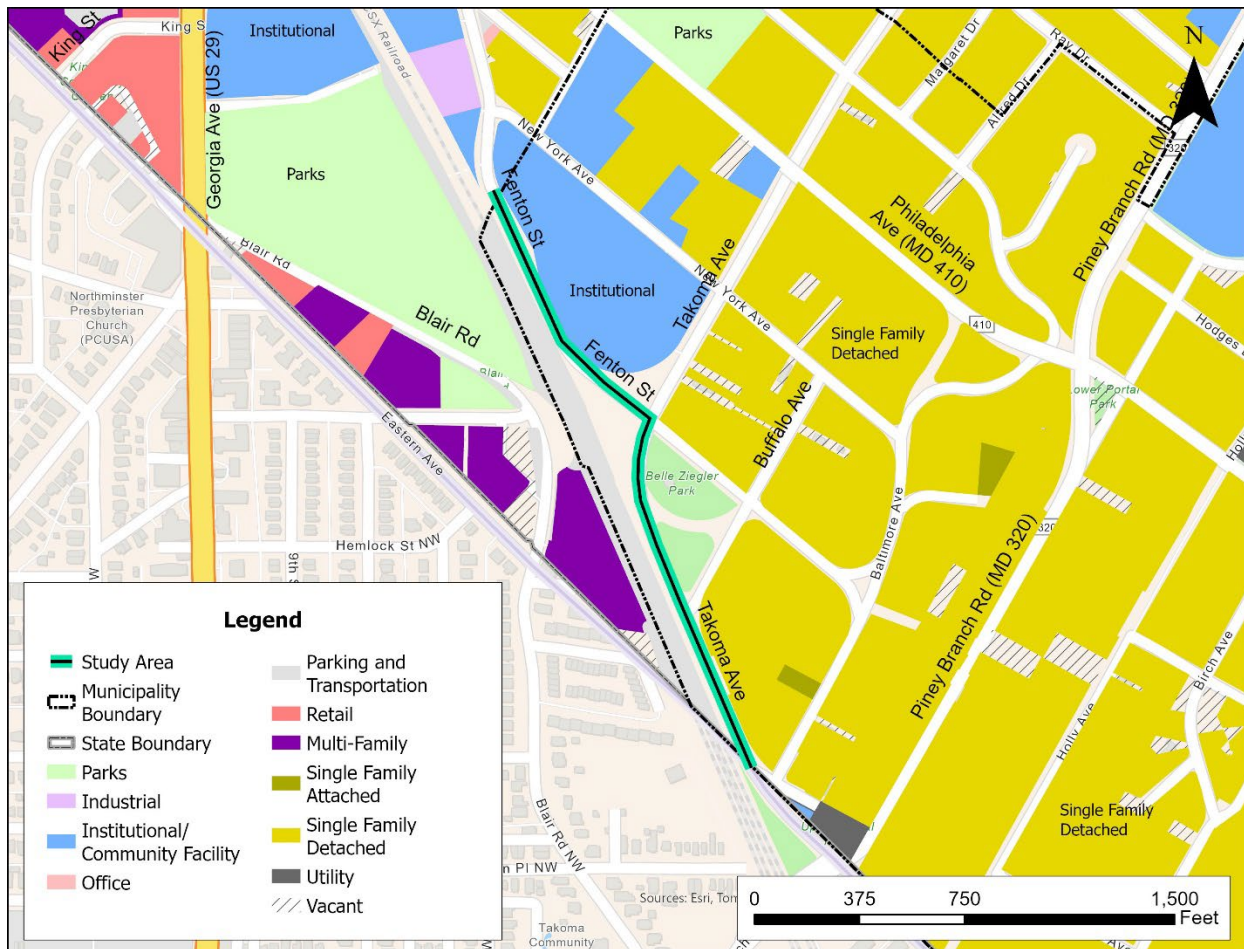


Figure 2: Surrounding Land Use

Existing Street/Trail Corridor

The following photographs display the street and neighborhood character for Fenton Street and Takoma Avenue. The photos are organized sequentially, from north to south. Figure 3 shows a photo taken on the Metropolitan Branch Trail midway between the Takoma Park city line and Takoma Avenue.



Figure 3: Fenton Street - Looking North

The Metropolitan Branch Trails borders the WMATA right-of-way. Figure 4 shows a photo of the trail on Fenton Street approaching Takoma Avenue where the trail bends to follow Takoma Avenue to the south. The existing retaining wall on the west side is a design constraint. Currently, this section of the trail has a 10-foot-wide trail surface with a 6-foot-wide grass buffer.



Figure 4: Fenton Street at Retaining Wall (Station 64+50) - Looking South

At the intersection of Fenton Street with Takoma Avenue, the trail has a stub 5-foot-wide sidewalk connection to the intersection, as shown in Figure 5 on the right side of the photo.



Figure 5: Fenton Street Approaching Takoma Avenue - Looking Southeast

Figure 6 shows the north crosswalk of Fenton Street at its intersection with Takoma Avenue. The curb ramp at the northeast corner of the intersection serves both the north and west crosswalks. The other three corners have directional curb ramps, which is the County standard.



Figure 6: Fenton Street at Takoma Avenue - Looking East

Figure 7 shows the existing sidewalk between the intersection of Takoma Avenue and Fenton Street and the Metropolitan Branch Trail.

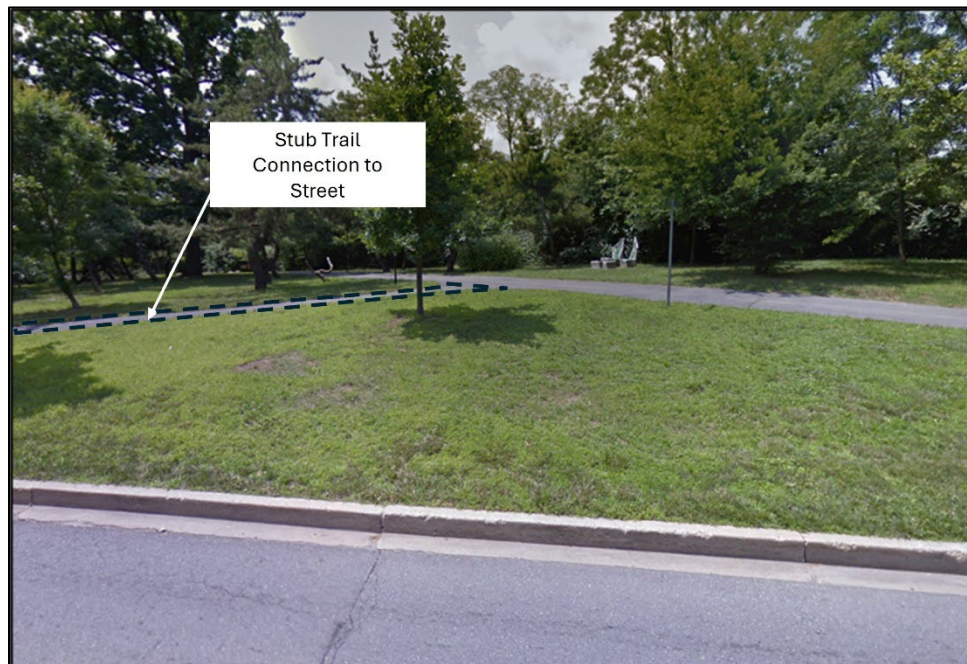


Figure 7: Metropolitan Branch Trail at Connection to Takoma Avenue/Fenton Street Intersection

Figure 8 shows a photo taken on Takoma Avenue looking north as it approaches Fenton Street. Note the trail on the left which veers away from Takoma Avenue.



Figure 8: Takoma Avenue Approaching Fenton Street - Looking North

Figure 9 shows the trail along Takoma Avenue across the street from Belle Zeigler Municipal Park.



Figure 9: Takoma Avenue Adjacent to Park (Station 59+50) - Looking South

Figure 10 shows a photo from the trail approaching the Takoma Avenue intersection with Buffalo Avenue which intersects at a skew.



Figure 10: Takoma Avenue at Buffalo Avenue - Looking Southeast

Figure 11 shows a photo of a raised crosswalk which is located at Station 54+40 to the south of Buffalo Avenue.



Figure 11: Existing Raised Crosswalk - Takoma Avenue South of Buffalo Avenue

Figure 12 shows a typical photo of the trail along Takoma Avenue between Buffalo Avenue and the DC Line.



Figure 12: Takoma Avenue (Station 53+00) - Looking South

Existing Right-of-Way

Fenton Street and Takoma Avenue have existing rights-of-way with irregular widths within the project area. Both streets are bordered by the WMATA right-of-way. Figure 13 shows a property map of the corridor with right-of-way distances noted.



Figure 13: Existing Street Rights-of-Way

Existing Street cross sections are shown below for three locations: two along Fenton Street and one on Takoma Avenue.

The first Fenton Street location is near the north end of the project, close to the municipal boundary, where the cross section has a 72-foot-wide existing right-of-way width. This starts at the WMATA right-of-way and ends approximately near the outside edge of the existing sidewalk. The Montgomery College Student Services Center building is located to the east of the right-of-way line. A photo of this location is shown below in Figure 14, and a cross section is shown in Figure 15.



Figure 14: Fenton Street Near the City of Takoma Park Municipal Boundary (Station 72+00) - Looking North

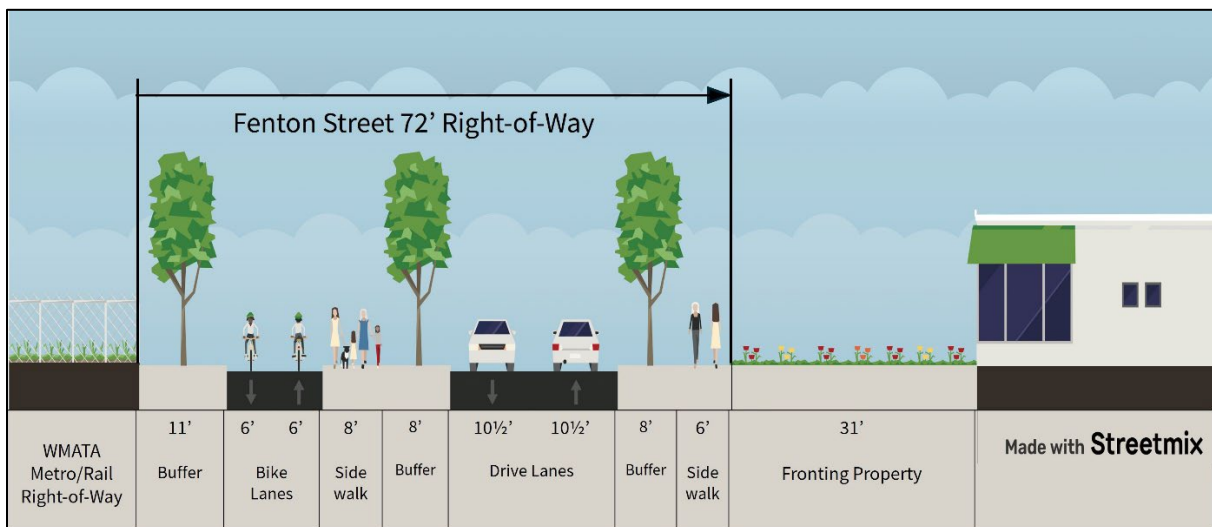


Figure 15: Existing Cross Section - Fenton Street (Station 72+00) - Looking North

The narrowest right-of-way width on Fenton Street occurs near the Catherine and Isiah Leggett Math and Science Building where only 50 feet of existing right-of-way is provided. Here the trail is offset from the WMATA right-of-way by only three feet. The existing trail is also narrow, providing only a 10-foot-wide trail surface. The trail is separated from Fenton Street by a six-foot-wide buffer with small trees. At this location Fenton Street is 20 feet wide. It appears that the sidewalk is located outside the right-of-way. A photo of this location is shown below in Figure 16, and a cross section is shown in Figure 17.



Figure 16: Fenton Street Near Station 67+00 - Looking North

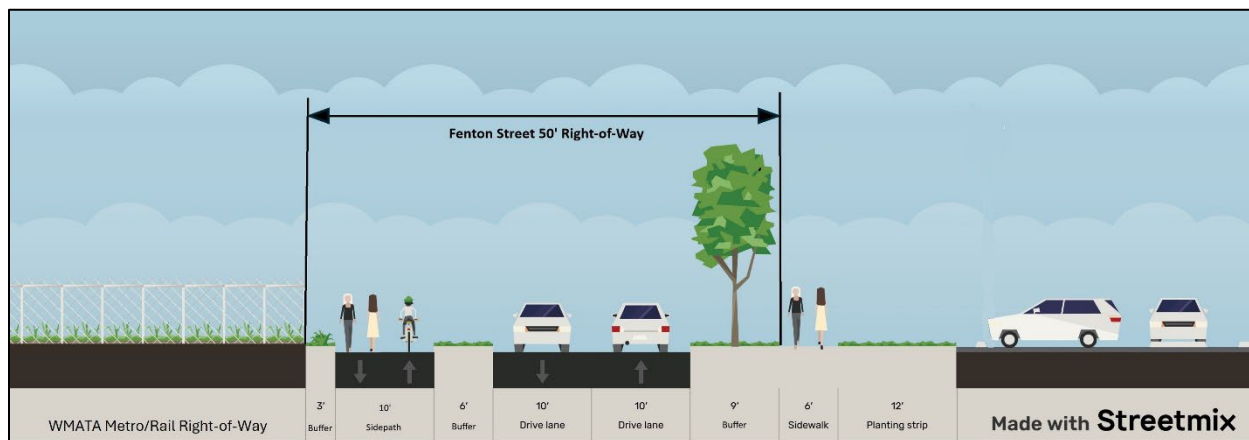


Figure 17: Existing Cross Section - Fenton Street (Station 67+00) - Looking North

Takoma Avenue between Buffalo Avenue and the DC Line typically has a 79-foot-wide right-of-way. The WMATA right-of-way borders Takoma Avenue to the west, beyond the trees on the left side of the photo of this location in Figure 18. This wooded buffer is 19 feet wide and the existing trail is only 10 feet wide with a 3-foot-wide buffer between the trail and the street. There are two 10- to 11-foot-wide travel lanes, an 8-foot-wide parking bay, a 9-foot-wide buffer with established trees, a narrow 4-foot-wide sidewalk, and a 5-foot-wide grass buffer to the back of the right-of-way. A cross section is shown in Figure 19.



Figure 18: Takoma Avenue between Buffalo Avenue and DC Line (Station 53+00) – Looking North

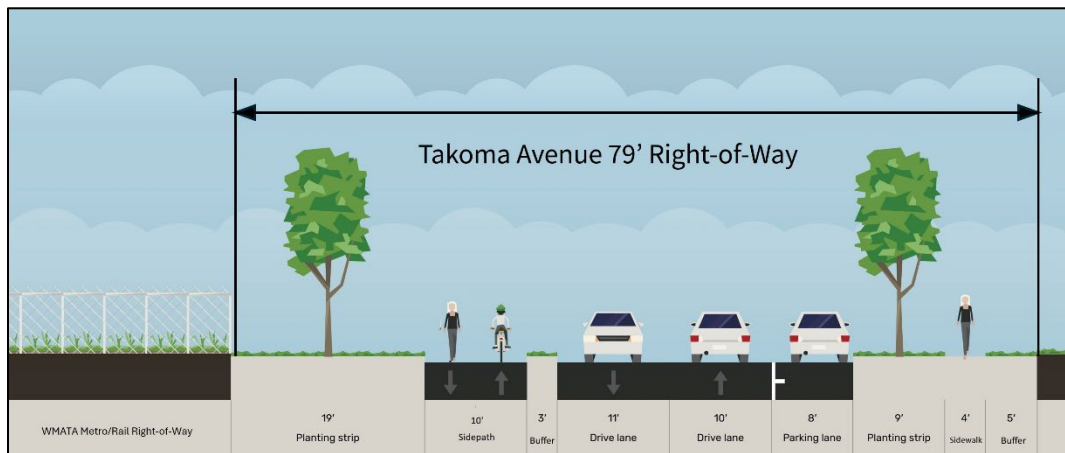


Figure 19: Existing Cross Section - Takoma Avenue from Buffalo Avenue to DC Line (Station 53+00)

Cross-Section Elements

The proposed MBT Upgrades will increase the existing variable 8- to 10-foot-wide trail to 11 feet (typical) while maintaining a 2-foot-wide street buffer space (minimum) separated by a continuous barrier (curb) between the eastern side of the trail and the road. Figure 20 shows the typical cross section proposed for the trail.

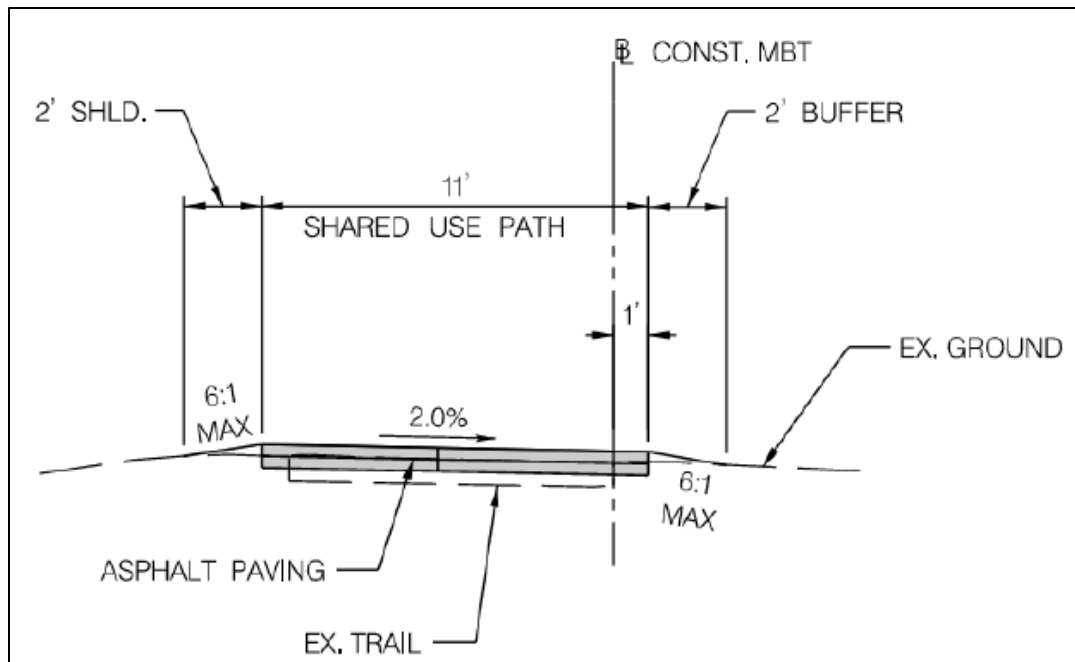


Figure 20: Typical Section - Proposed Trail Looking North

In the vicinity of Buffalo Avenue along Takoma Avenue where the street buffer is narrow (Stations 54+50 to 58+50), a bikeway barrier will be provided between the trail and the curb as shown in Figure 21. This will replace the wooden fence that was previously located at this location.

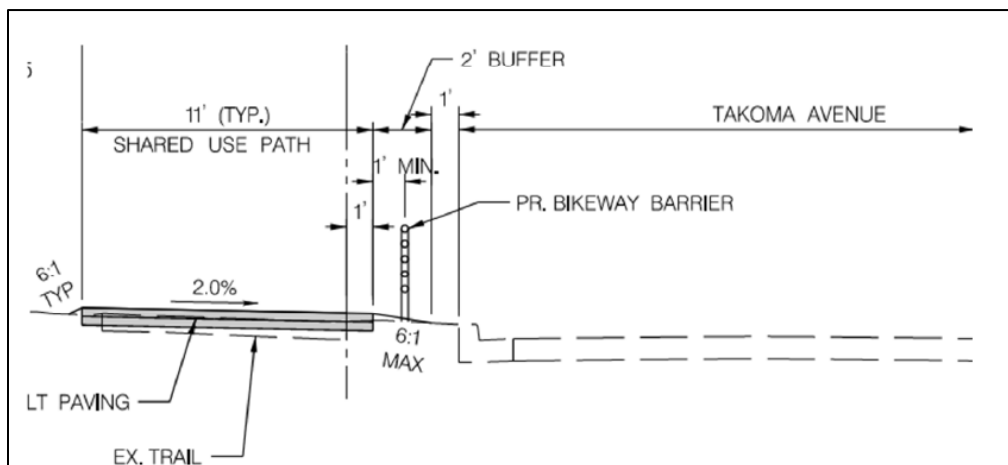


Figure 21: Proposed Cross Section - Station 54+50 to 58+50 Looking North

There is also an existing retaining wall that will remain as shown in Figure 22.

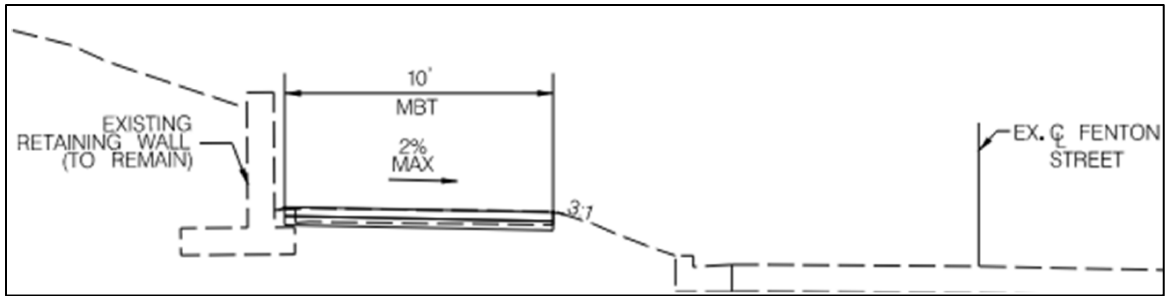


Figure 22: Proposed Cross Section - Trail at Station 65+50 Looking North

Due to steep slopes between the trail and the WMATA right-of-way, a bikeway barrier is also proposed along portions of the Fenton Street right-of-way on the west side of the trail between Stations 65+30 and 67+00. This is shown below in Figure 23.

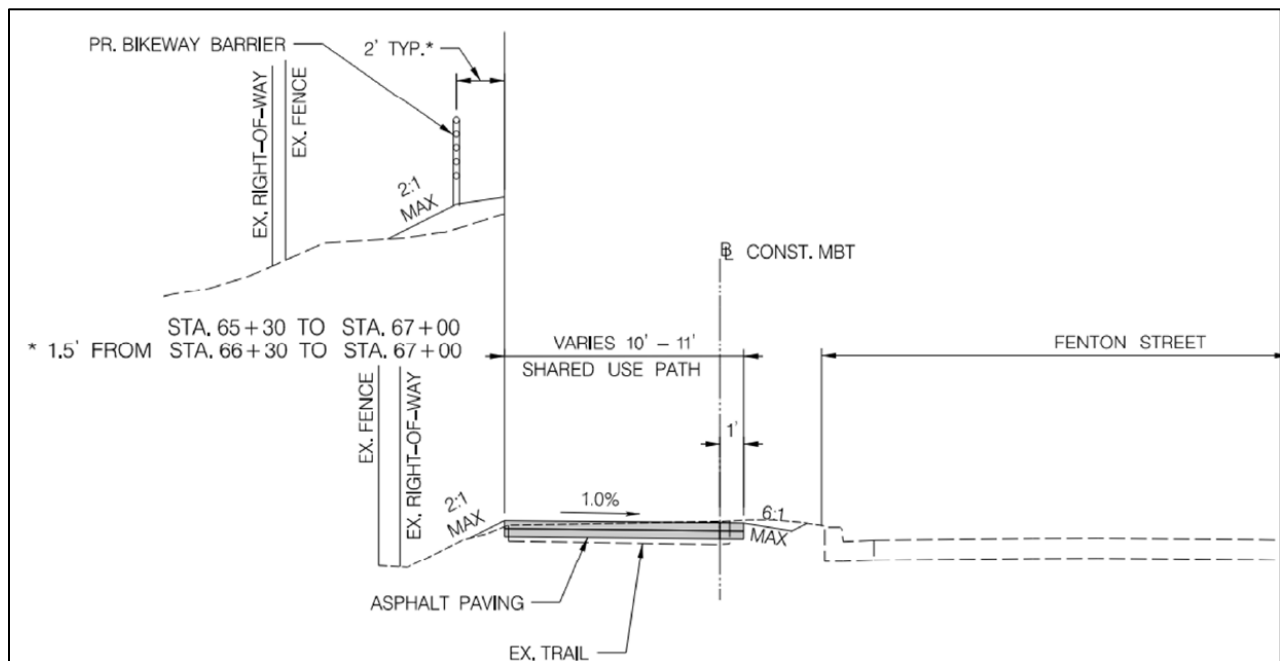


Figure 23: Proposed Cross Section - Station 65+30 to 67+00 Looking North

The last cross section is the trail spur that connects the trail to the northwest corner of the Fenton Street/Takoma Avenue intersection. This 5-foot-wide trail will be widened to 10 feet as shown below in Figure 24.

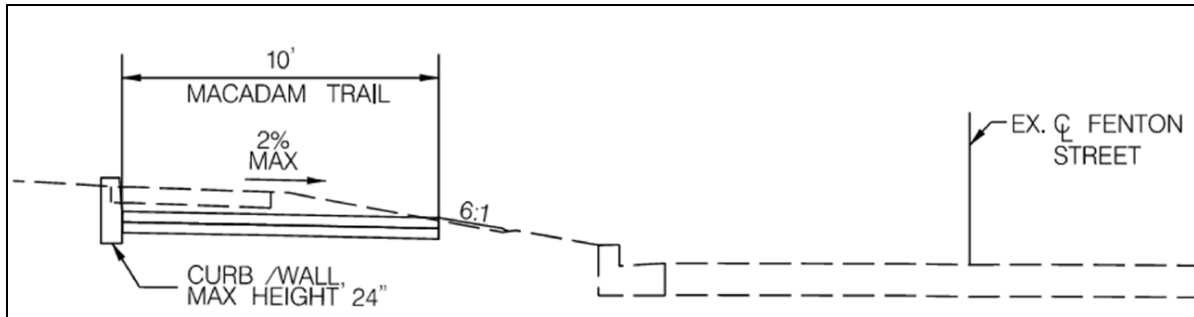


Figure 24: Proposed Cross Section of Trail Spur – Looking North

Figure 25 shows this same intersection with the trail spur on the upper right side of the image. Proposed improvements at this intersection include improved accessible ramps at three of the four intersection corners, new crosswalk striping, and a relocation of the existing Ride On bus stop on southbound Fenton Street.

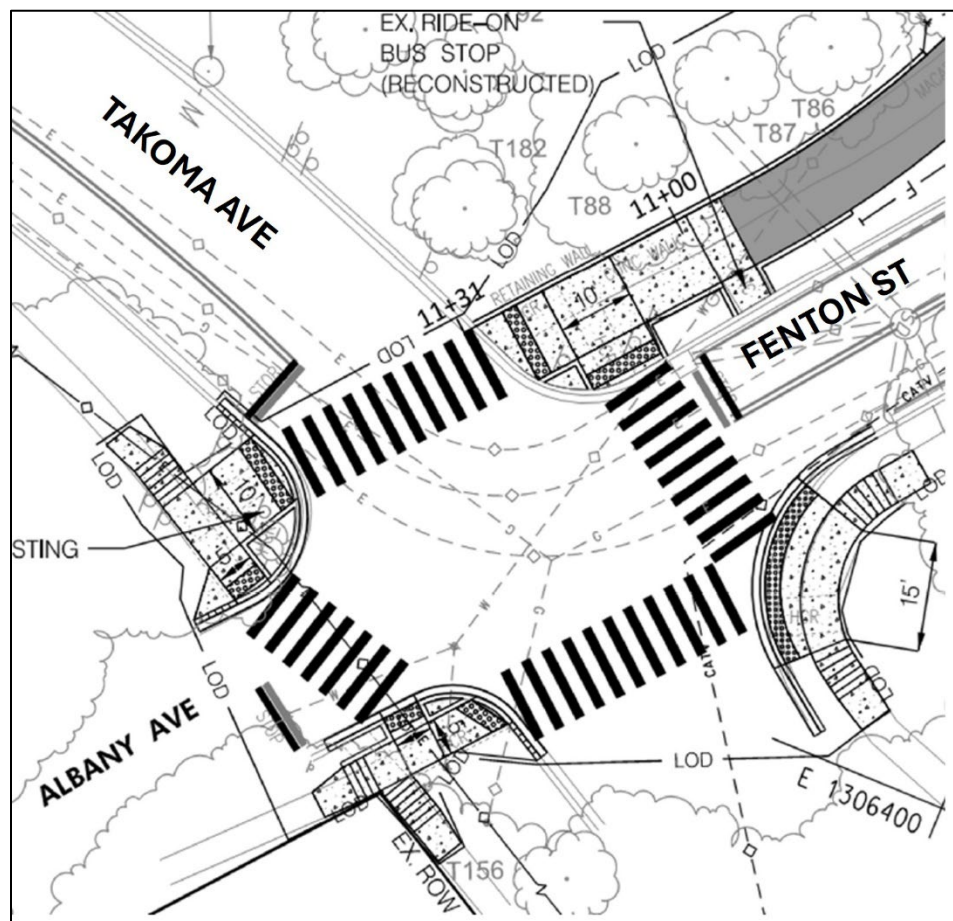


Figure 25: Plan View Proposed Improvements - Fenton Street/Takoma Avenue Intersection

Figure 26 shows a plan view of the proposed improvements at the intersection of Takoma Avenue and Buffalo Avenue. The improvements include:

- Removal of existing speed table/raised crosswalk to the south of Buffalo Avenue,
- Construction of a new raised crosswalk on the north side of this intersection,
- Addition of bikeway barrier shown in red,
- Relocation of a northbound Ride On bus stop and new sidewalk to connect to the new bus stop, and
- New striped crosswalks.

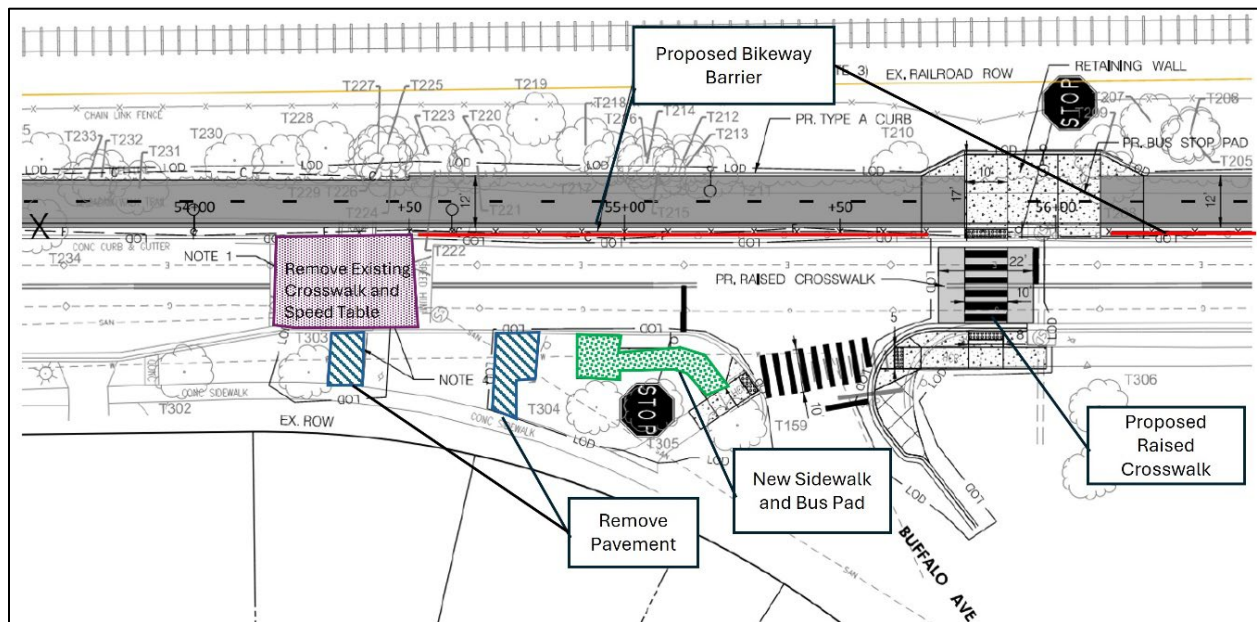


Figure 26: Proposed Plan View - Takoma Avenue/Buffalo Avenue Intersection

SECTION 4 – MANDATORY REFERRAL CONSIDERATIONS

Mandatory Referral review is guided by Montgomery Planning’s Uniform Standards for Mandatory Referral Review (December 2022), and the authority granted to the Planning Board in Section 20-301 of the Land Use Article of the Maryland Code. In order to ensure comprehensive review of public projects, the Planning Board has jurisdiction over applications filed by the State, Federal, and County governments, including MCPS, as well as municipalities located within the Montgomery County portion of the Regional District. This includes the following activities: (i) acquiring or selling land; (ii) locating, constructing or authorizing a road, park, public way or ground, public building or structure, or publicly owned or privately owned public utility; or (iii) changing the use of or widening, narrowing, extending, relocating, vacating or abandoning any of the previously mentioned facilities. The Planning Board, or its Staff, must review such projects pursuant to the Uniform Standards and transmit comments to the applicant within the prescribed timeframe.

As described in the Uniform Standards, the Planning Board, or its Staff, considers all relevant land use and planning aspects of the proposal including, but not limited to, the following:

1. ***whether the proposal is consistent with the County’s General Plan, functional plans such as the master plan of highways, environmental guidelines, the approved and adopted area master plan or sector plan, and other public plans, guidance documents, or programs for the area;***

See Section 5.

2. ***whether the proposal is consistent with the intent and the requirements of the zone in which it is located;***

Not applicable.

3. ***whether the nature of the proposed site and development, including but not limited to its size, shape, scale, height, arrangement, design of structure(s), massing, setback(s), site layout, and location(s) of parking is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood and properties;***

Not applicable.

4. ***whether the locations of buildings and structures, open spaces, landscaping, recreation facilities, and pedestrian and vehicular circulation systems are adequate, safe, and efficient;***

The proposed project—which improves the pavement condition, safety, and security for users of this section of the Metropolitan Branch Trail with an improved pavement surface, lighting,

and improved connections—is adequate as an interim improvement that efficiently utilizes existing right-of-way and infrastructure.

Additional analysis is provided in Section 5.

5. ***whether the proposal has an approved NRI/FSD and a preliminary SWM Concept Plan, and meets the requirements of the Forest Conservation Law (Chapter 22A of the County Code). Forest Conservation Plan, if applicable, must be approved by the Planning Board, either before or at the time of the Board’s mandatory referral review and action on the project. Unlike the mandatory referral review by the Board, the conditions of the Forest Conservation Plan are binding on all county projects and require a Resolution of Approval.***

The proposed project has a Forest Conservation Exemption No. 42025101E, an approved Stormwater Concept Plan, and meets the requirements of the Forest Conservation Law (Chapter 22A of the County Code).

Additional analysis is provided in Section 5.

6. ***whether a Preliminary or a Final Water Quality Plan has been reviewed by the Planning Board if the project is located in a Special Protection Area. In addition, for a Water Quality Plan for a project on public property, the Board must determine if the plan meets any additional applicable standards for Special Protection areas, including the standards of Article V. WATER QUALITY REVIEW IN SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS, of the County Code (pursuant to Section 19-65(d)(4));***

Not Applicable. This project is not located within a Special Protection Area.

7. ***whether or not the site would be needed for park use if the proposal is for disposition of a surplus school or other publicly-owned property.***

Not applicable.

8. ***whether alternatives or mitigation measures have been considered for the project if the proposal is inconsistent with the General Plan or other plans and policies for the area, or has discernible negative impacts on the surrounding neighborhood, the transportation network, the environment, historic resources (including burial sites) or other resources.***

Not applicable.

SECTION 5 – MANDATORY REFERRAL ANALYSIS

Master Plan Consistency

The Planning Board considers whether the proposal is consistent with the County’s General Plan, functional plans, area master plans, and any associated design guidelines.

2001 Takoma Park Master Plan

The 2001 *Takoma Park Master Plan* “accommodates local and regional traffic and recommends a system which provides for safe, pleasant, and convenient pedestrian and bicycle access. The vision of this Master Plan provides adequate roads for vehicular traffic, while emphasizing pleasant pedestrian and bicycle access as an important improvement to the character of communities. Residents of Takoma Park should be able to walk or bike to nearby shops and public services, as well as to more distant regional parks and facilities. Pursuant to this vision, the Plan recommends improvements to the Metropolitan Branch Trail as an addition to County-wide Trails located in both Sligo Creek and Long Branch Stream Valley Parks.” The proposed project is consistent with the broad transportation vision of this master plan.

2018 Bicycle Master Plan

The 2018 *Bicycle Master Plan*, as shown below in Figure 27, recommends a bicycle Breezeway on Fenton Street between the Takoma Park municipal boundary and Takoma Avenue, and on Takoma Avenue between Fenton Street and the DC Line.

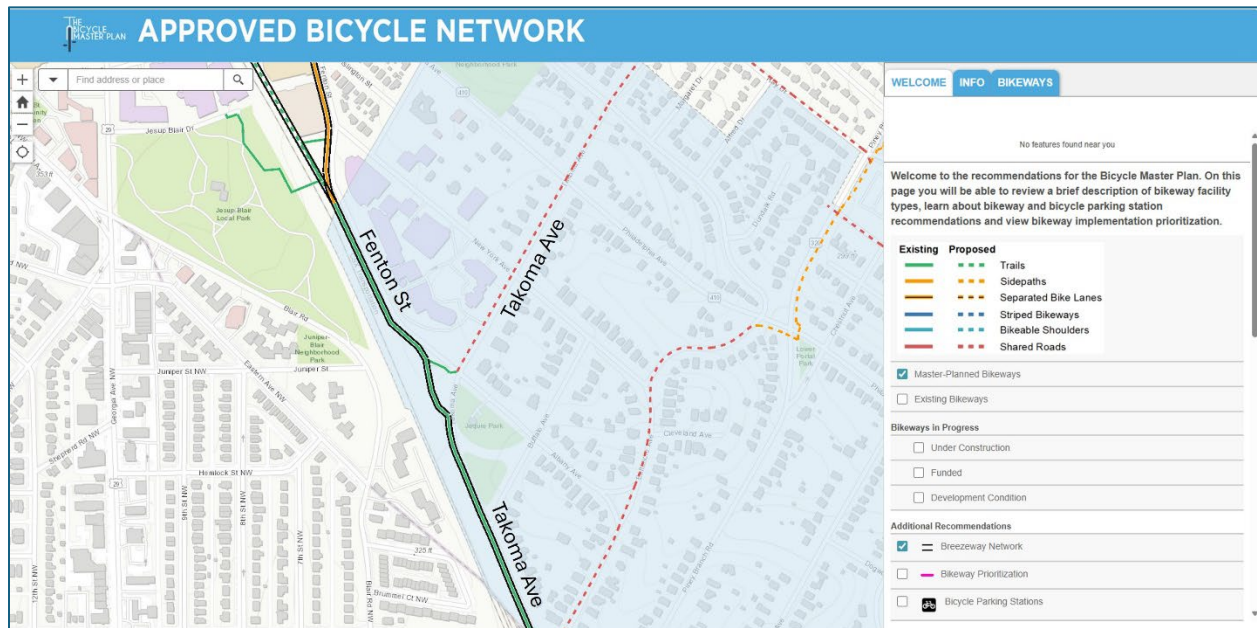


Figure 27: Bikeway Recommendations from Bicycle Master Plan

Per the 2018 *Bicycle Master Plan*, the Breezeway Network is “a high-capacity network of arterial bikeways between major activity centers, enabling bicyclists to travel with fewer delays, and where all users – including slower moving bicyclists and pedestrians – can safely and comfortably coexist.”

The Project makes substantial improvements to the trail but is not fully consistent with the *Bicycle Master Plan* recommendations for Breezeways. The bullets below identify the extent to which the project advances the characteristics of a Breezeway as described in the *Bicycle Master Plan*:

- Providing fixed, continuous separation from traffic, such as curbs or concrete barriers, will increase the comfort of bicycling on the Breezeway Network. Sidepaths or trails that run parallel to a roadway will be separated from the roadway by at least 5 feet. ***(While this project does not achieve a five-foot-wide street buffer along the full project extent, it provides a vertical bike barrier in some sections where the street buffer is less than five feet wide.)***
- Separation between pedestrians and bicyclists or between fast and slower users will increase comfort for users and allow faster users to travel with minimal delay, especially in areas with higher use. On trails and sidepaths in suburban areas, separate spaces for pedestrians and bicyclists can be adjacent to each other, although a buffer between them is preferred. In urban areas where separation is provided using sidewalks and separated bike lanes, busy areas will need to provide more pedestrian space with widened waiting areas and pedestrian refuge islands at intersections, wider sidewalks and dedicated space for those waiting at bus stops. ***(As this project cannot expand to the west due to the presence of the Metrorail Red Line, the proposed design has no separation between bicycles and pedestrians)***.
- Breezeways will feature adequate widths for side-by-side bicycle travel and passing, as well as adequate buffers from motor vehicle traffic. ***(Proposed trail will be wide enough for side-by-side travel)***.
- Trails and sidepaths: The minimum bikeway width is 11 feet and the minimum pedestrian width is 5 feet. In areas with high pedestrian demand, the pedestrian width is 8 feet or more. ***(As this project cannot expand to the west due to the presence of the Metrorail Red Line, the proposed trail will be 11 to 12 feet wide and will not provide pedestrian-only space)***.
- Breezeways will be constructed to meet requirements of public road design. They will feature high-quality construction, surface materials and maintenance practices that maximize surface smoothness and pavement life, minimizing potential for pavement cracking and buckling. ***(Proposed trail does not meet public road design standards)***.
- Breezeways will be free of obstructions, such as utility poles, trees or sign posts. Breezeways will also have corridor-long pedestrian-scale lighting. Lighting will provide continuous illumination along the travelway and immediate wayside areas. In residential areas or sensitive habitat areas, specialized lighting or screens may be required to avoid adverse impacts on the surroundings. ***(Proposed trail has lighting proposed along its length at 75-foot intervals)***.

In summary, while the City should be commended for proposing substantial improvements to the Metropolitan Branch Trail, the proposed design is unable to meet all of the design requirements of a bicycle Breezeway, due to insufficient right-of-way due to the presence of the Metrorail Red Line. However, an additional improvement that the City could consider is to upgrade the trail's pavement quality to Breezeway standards:

Recommendation: Consider upgrading the pavement quality of the trail to meet public road standards.

2024 Pedestrian Master Plan

Recommendations from the Pedestrian Master Plan relevant to this project include the following:

- Key Action B-3c - Construct raised crossings across all driveways and at intersections between residential street types and higher classification streets through capital projects...,
- Key Action P-7b - Ensure vehicular stop bars are located at least four feet behind the crosswalk

Raised crossings or intersections can be used to reduce motor vehicle operating speeds and encourage stopping at locations where pedestrians and/or bicyclists regularly cross the road. Raised crossings may reduce fatal and injury crashes by up to 45 percent.¹

The crosswalks at the intersection of Fenton Street with Takoma Avenue are flush, not raised, crosswalks. The north leg of Takoma Avenue is classified as an Area Connector, formerly classified as a residential street, while Fenton Street is a higher-classification Downtown Street.

The proposed crosswalk on Buffalo Avenue at Takoma Avenue is a flush, not raised, crosswalk. Buffalo Avenue is a Neighborhood Street, formerly classified as a residential street, and the intersecting portion of Takoma Avenue is a higher-classification Area Connector.

Recommendation: All crosswalks within the project limits should be designed as raised crosswalks consistent with Pedestrian Master Plan Key Action B-3c.

The location of stop bars in advance of crosswalks do not appear to be consistently applied to the county default distance of four feet as recommended in the Pedestrian Master Plan and in the Complete Streets Design Guide.

Recommendation: Revise design to ensure that vehicular stop bars are located at least four feet behind all crosswalks.

¹ https://pedbikesafe.org/PEDSAFE/documents/STEP_Guide.pdf#page=39

Master Plan of Highways and Transitways

The street classification recommendations from the 2025 Approved Master Plan of Highways and Transitways (MPOHT) are shown below in Figure 28. Fenton Street is classified as a Downtown Street, while Takoma Avenue between Fenton Street and the DC Line is classified as an Area Connector.

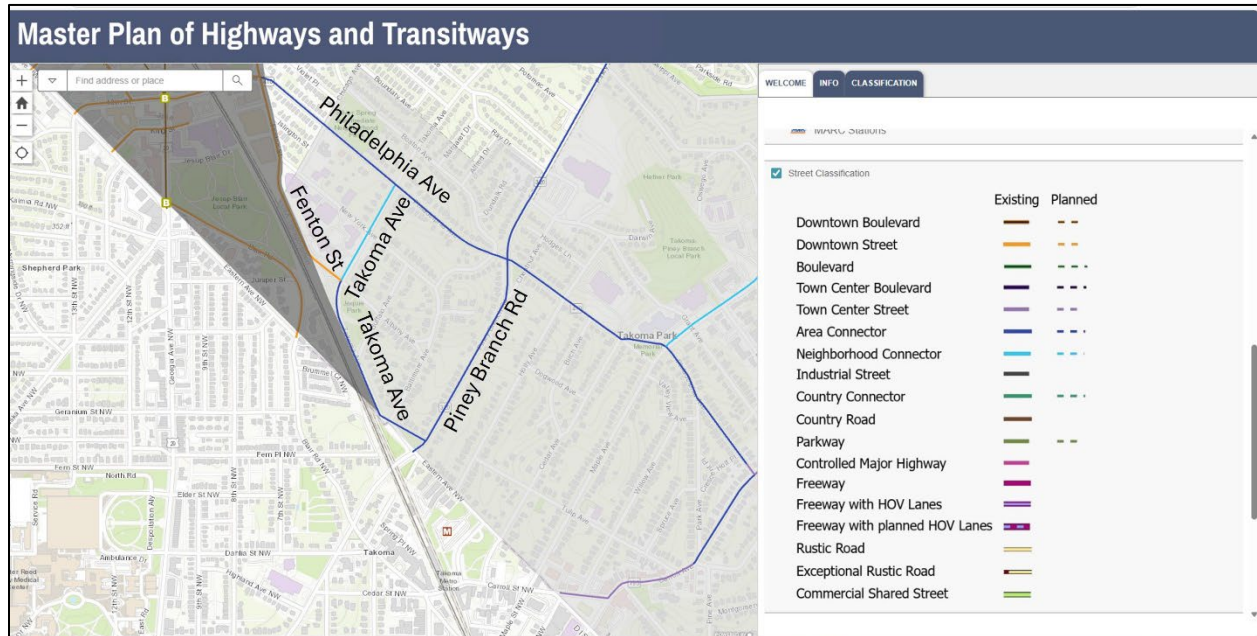


Figure 28: Street Classification from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways

Table 1 below shows the MPOHT recommendations for each street segment. Both street segments are recommended to have two planned through travel lanes (i.e., existing conditions), target speeds of 20 mph, and rights-of-way of 80 feet (note that both streets have less existing right-of-way as discussed previously on pages 12 through 15).

Table 1: Master Plan of Highways and Transitways Street Recommendations

Street	From	To	Street Classification	Planned Lanes	Target Speed (mph)	Right-of-Way (feet)
Fenton Street	Takoma Park Municipal Boundary	Takoma Avenue/Silver Spring Downtown Area Boundary	Downtown Street	2	20	80
Takoma Avenue	Fenton Street	DC Line	Area Connector	2	20	80

Transportation Best Practices

Complete Streets Design Guide

The proposed project is generally consistent with the *Complete Streets Design Guide*. Table 2 provides a summary of how the proposed street design compares with the CSDG requirements.

Table 2: CSDG Compliance for Metropolitan Branch Trail

CSDG Street Element	Proposed Project	Meets CSDG Requirements
Sidepath	10- to 12-foot-wide sidepath	Yes for width (Meets the minimum of 10 ft)
Street Buffer	8-foot-wide buffer on northern section of Fenton Street 6-foot-wide buffer on southern section of Fenton Street 3-foot-wide buffer on most of Takoma Avenue	Yes for Fenton Street portion of project (project does meet the Minimum of 6 ft) No for Takoma Avenue portion of project (project does not meet the minimum of 6 ft)
Travel Lane	10 1/2 -foot-wide travel lanes on northern section of Fenton Street 10-foot-wide travel lanes on southern section of Fenton Street 10- to 11-foot-wide travel lanes on Takoma Avenue	Partly, sections of Fenton Street have 10-foot-wide travel lanes (project does not meet the default of 10½ ft)
Sidewalk	5-foot-wide sidewalk	Project does not include reconstruction of existing sidewalks
On-street Parking	8-foot-wide parking lanes	Yes, on portions of Fenton Street and Takoma Avenue
Target Speed	Existing posted speed is 25 mph	Generally consistent, with raised crosswalks

Montgomery County Accessible Design Guide

The Project needs to ensure that its design elements are compliant with the Montgomery County Accessible Design Guide and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Following are some comments about elements that are not compliant:

Crosswalk Striping

All crosswalks in the proposed design propose the use of continental crosswalk striping.

Recommendation: Use ladder-style crosswalk striping rather than continental striping.

Accessible Curb Ramps

The Project is focused on improvements between the curbs, however, improvements or compatibility with ADA will be required for all curb ramps.

Recommendation: Every curb ramp along Fenton Street and Takoma Avenue within the project limits should be made ADA compliant. This includes both the use of directional ramps and appropriate design requirements. There is only one existing curb ramp that currently does not meet ADA requirements (the northeast corner of the intersection of Fenton Street with Takoma Avenue), and the proposed design does not propose changes to this ramp. The preferred intersection curb ramp standard is two perpendicular curb ramps per corner, each aligning with desired paths of travel. This helps to direct people with visual disabilities to cross the street in the crosswalk. The project retains a single curb ramp at the northeast corner of the intersection of Fenton Street with Takoma Avenue (see Figure 29).

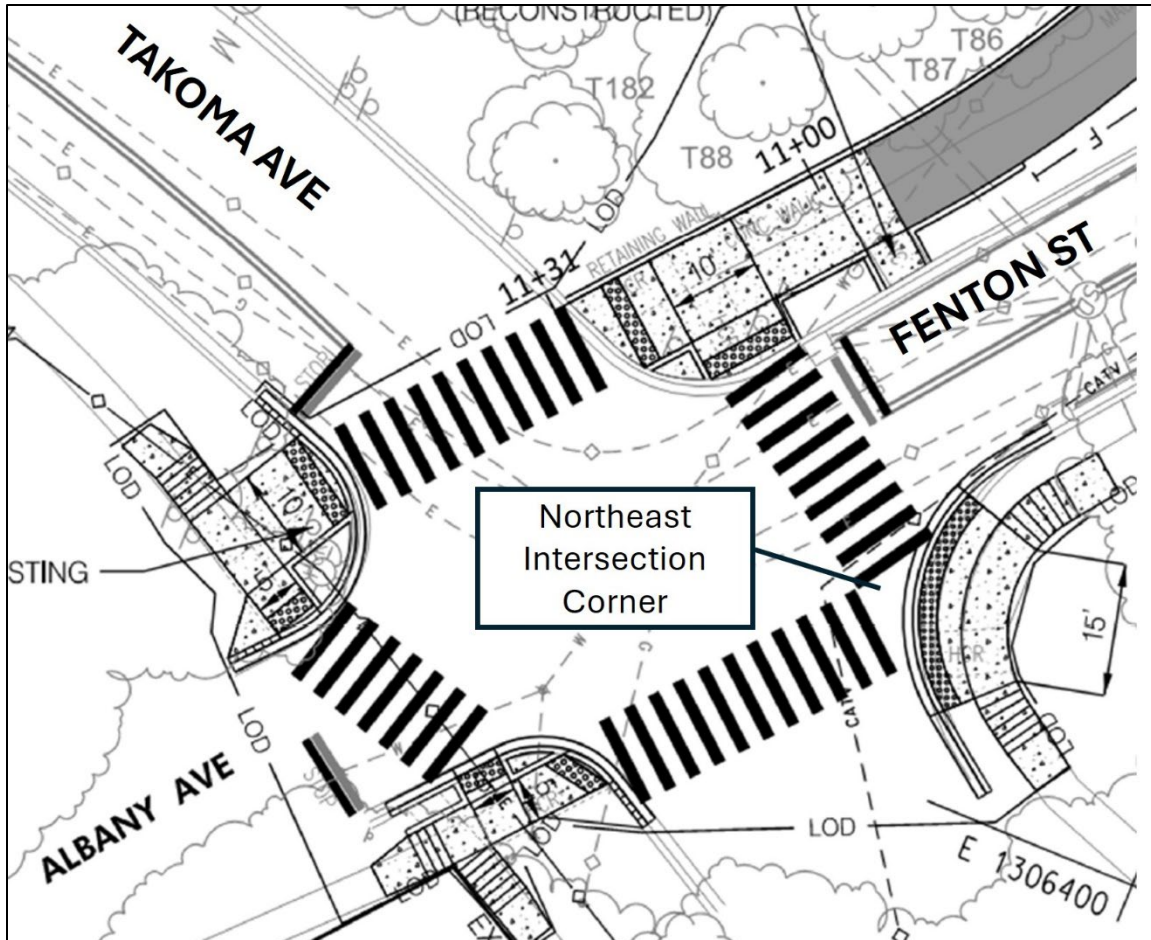


Figure 29: Northwest Intersection Corner with Shared Curb Ramp - Fenton Street/Takoma Avenue

Recommendation: Modify the northeast corner at the intersection of Fenton Street with Takoma Avenue to provide directional curb ramps to each crosswalk. This might require shifting the proposed crosswalk on the north Fenton Street leg to the north in order to fit these two directional ramps into the corner. It might also allow for a tighter corner radius to be constructed here.

Clear Travel Paths for Pedestrians

Pedestrian access to the proposed northbound Ride On bus stop at Buffalo Avenue will not provide an intuitive path for individuals with visual impairments.

Recommendation: Provide an additional sidewalk connection (shown in purple in Figure 30) to direct pedestrians arriving from the south to the Takoma Avenue Ride On bus stop south of Buffalo Avenue.

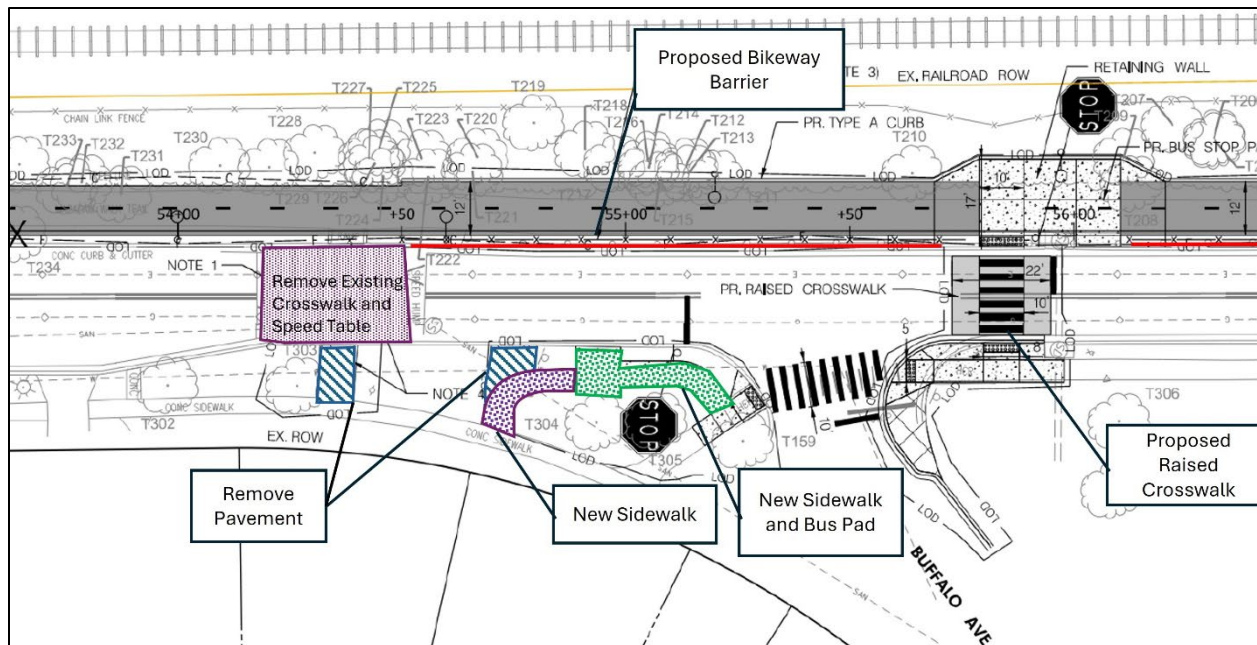


Figure 30: Proposed Sidewalk Connection to Buffalo Avenue Bus Stop

Pedestrian Level of Comfort and Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress

The Pedestrian Level of Comfort (PLOC) methodology captures how comfortable it is to walk and roll in different conditions in Montgomery County. A variety of pathway and crossing factors are considered to determine a comfort score for each crossing and pathway segment. The four main scores are: undesirable (score = 4), uncomfortable (score = 3), somewhat comfortable (score = 2), and very comfortable (score = 1). The trail within the City of Takoma Park provides very comfortable PLOC scores currently, so the proposed improvements will not affect the PLOC score. Many of the upgrades proposed relate to other factors including security, consistency, pavement durability and connectivity.



Figure 31: Existing Pedestrian Level of Comfort

Similarly, the Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress (BLTS) methodology captures how comfortable it is to bicycle in different conditions in Montgomery County. The LTS methodology assigns a numeric stress level to streets and trails based on attributes such as traffic speed, traffic volume, number of lanes, frequency of parking turnover, ease of intersection crossings and others. The main scores are: Very Low Stress (appropriate for most children), Low Stress (appropriate for most adults) and High & Moderate Stress (inappropriate for children and most adults). The trail within the City of Takoma Park has BLTS scores of very low as shown below in Figure 32. The addition of the proposed improvements will not change these scores.

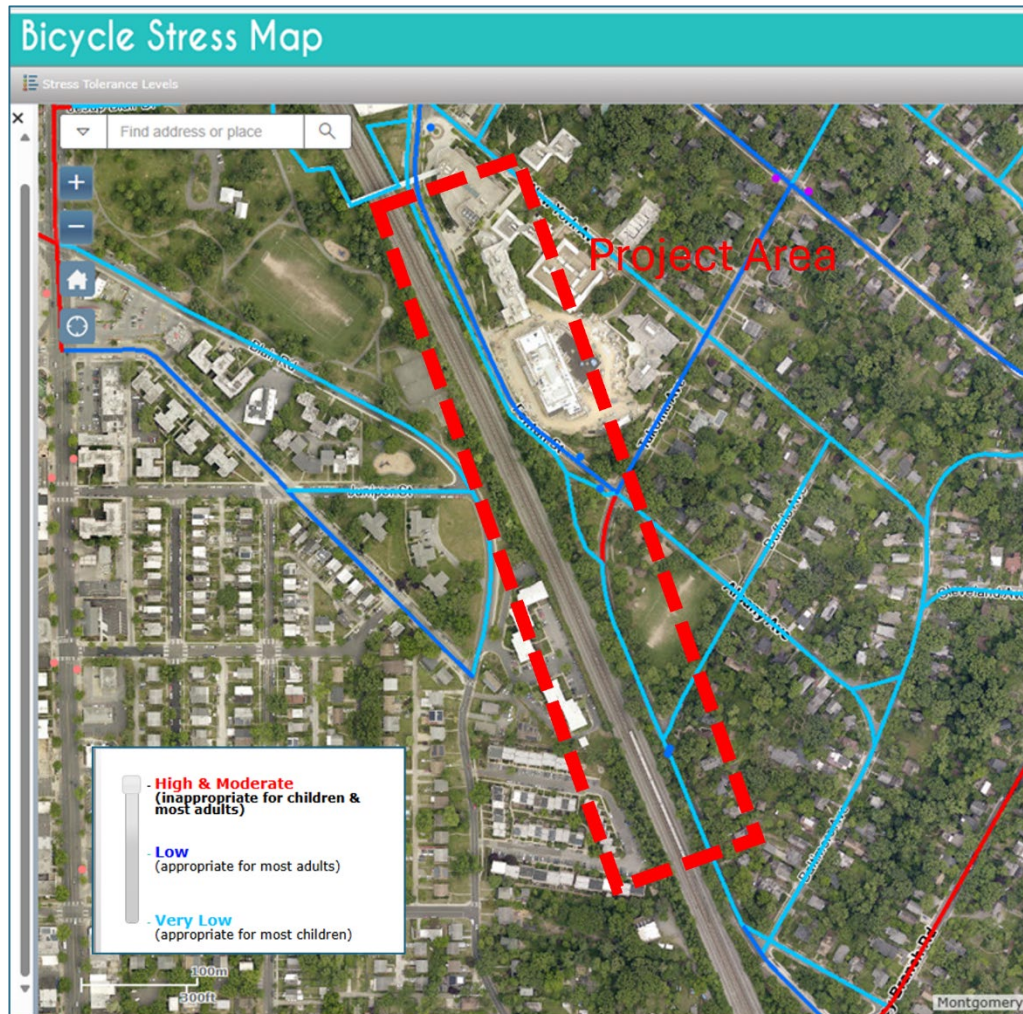


Figure 32: Existing Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress

Montgomery County Streetlighting Design Standards

All trail lighting should follow the Montgomery County Department of Transportation's new streetlight requirements identified in the *Streetlighting Design Requirements, Installation Procedures, and Specifications* document².

² Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) Streetlighting Design Requirements, Installation Guidelines, and Specifications, December 2024.

Environment

Environmental Guidelines

The project conforms to the Planning Board's Guidelines for Environmental Management of Development in Montgomery County.

The property is located within the Rock Creek Watershed, which is a Use I watershed.³ There are no stream buffers, wetlands, or 100-year floodplains on-site. The soils on the Property are classified as urban land and are not considered highly erodible or sensitive. There are no known rare, threatened, or endangered species on the Property.

Forest Conservation

The project is subject to Chapter 22A, the Montgomery County Forest Conservation Law, but exempt from Article II and from the submission of a forest conservation plan under Section 22A-5(e) as a "county and municipal highway project." Therefore, a Forest Conservation Exemption request (Plan No. 42025101E) was granted under Section 22A-5(e) on March 16, 2025. This document is provided with the Staff Report as Attachment B. While the project is exempt from Article II of the Forest Conservation Law, the Applicant is still required under section 22A-11(a)(1) and section 22A-9 of Chapter 22A of the County Code to prepare a plan that demonstrates:

- a) "General.
 - a. This Section applies to construction of a highway by the County or a municipality as part of an approved Capital Improvements Program project.
 - b. The construction should minimize forest removal, land disturbance, and loss of significant, specimen, or champion trees to the extent possible while balancing other design, construction, and environmental standards. The constructing agency must make a reasonable effort to minimize land disturbance to avoid the cutting or clearing of trees and other woody plants.
- b) If the forest to be cut or cleared for a County highway project equals or exceeds 20,000 square feet, the constructing agency must reforest a suitable area at the rate of one acre of protected reforestation for each acre of forest cleared.
- c) Reforestation for County highway projects must meet the standards in subsections 22A-12(e), (g) and (h).
- d) Any mitigation requirement for loss of significant, specimen, or champion trees must be based on the size and character of the tree."

³ Use I: WATER CONTACT RECREATION, AND PROTECTION OF NONTIDAL WARMWATER AQUATIC LIFE

Waters that are suitable for: water contact sports: play and leisure time activities where the human body may come in direct contact with the surface water; fishing; the growth and propagation of fish (other than trout); other aquatic life, and wildlife; agricultural water supply, and industrial water supply.

The exemption includes a required Tree Save Plan. Because the project under review is only at the 30% design stage, the Tree Save Plan is preliminary. The City of Takoma Park will submit a Final Tree Save Plan to Planning Staff for review and approval during the final (100%) design phase of the project. A final Tree Save Plan must be submitted and approved by Planning Staff prior to issuance of a Sediment Control Permit.

Stormwater Management

The City of Takoma Park Department of Public Works approved a Stormwater Concept Management Plan on November 8, 2024. This approval is included as Attachment C.

Historic Preservation

The Maryland Historical Trust confirmed on November 17, 2024 that the proposed improvements will have no adverse effect on historic properties. The project will not impact the adjacent Takoma Park Master Plan Historic District and Historic Preservation Staff has determined that a Historic Area Work Permit is not required.

Parks Department

There are no M-NCPPC parks located within the project area's Limits of Disturbance.

SECTION 6 – COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The City of Takoma Park has a website outlining the project scope, schedule, and available documents: <https://library.takomaparkmd.gov/1523/Metropolitan-Branch-Trail-Upgrade>. The Preliminary (30%) Designs for the Metropolitan Branch Trail Upgrade were presented during the City Council meeting on Wednesday, July 12, 2023. The designs were created by the firm Rummel, Klepper, and Kahl (RK&K), with input from community members, and city and county staff. To get to the construction phase, the City is looking into funding options to complete semi-final (60%) and final (100%) designs. Additional community engagement will occur during those stages. Key milestones for this project are shown below:

- **September 2022:** Project Kick-off
- **Fall to Winter 2023:** Site Analysis and Community Engagement Process
- **December 10, 2022:** Community route walk and ride for preliminary input
- **March 2, 2023:** Virtual Community Meeting to Review Initial Concept Designs
- **July 12, 2023:** City Council presentation on finalized preliminary (30%) designs

After Planning Staff accepted the Mandatory Referral for review, Montgomery Planning notified local civic and homeowners' associations and other interested parties of this proposal. As of the date of this report, Planning staff have received no comments on this project from the public.

SECTION 7 – CONCLUSION

Staff recommend approval and the transmittal of comments to the City of Takoma Park.

SECTION 8 – ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Proposed Project Plans

Attachment B: Forest Conservation Exemption Approval Letter

Attachment C: Stormwater Concept Approval Letter