

September 4, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Mary Dolan, Acting Chief, CountyWide Planning
Jorge Valladares, Chief, Environmental Planning, Countywide Planning
Stephen Federline, Supervisor, Environmental Planning, Countywide Planning

FROM: Candy Bunnag, Planner Coordinator, Environmental Planning, Countywide
Planning Division

SUBJECT: Final Forest Conservation Plan for Parks Facility Plan for a Pedestrian Bridge for
the Rock Creek Hiker – Biker Trail Over Veirs Mill Road at Aspen Hill Road,
FCP No. P-04002

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of the final Forest Conservation Plan with the following conditions:

1. A planting detail must be added to the final Forest Conservation Plan.
2. Configuration of 1.50 acres of required forest planting, including the location and size of the strip of land to be set aside for a future trail, will be reviewed and approved in the field by the M-NCPPC Planning Department inspector, in coordination with M-NCPPC Parks Department Forest Ecologist and Parks Department Trails Planner.
3. Forest planting must occur no later than the first planting season following completion of project construction.

BACKGROUND

Department of Parks staff presented the facility plan for the pedestrian bridge carrying the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail over Veirs Mill Road to the Planning Board on September 11, 2003. The Department of Parks staff report is found in Attachment A. The Planning Board reviewed five alternative alignments and adopted the Department of Parks staff's recommendation to approve Alternate 5 (see Attachment B). The agenda item for the facility plan did not include a Forest Conservation Plan for the project.

This Planning Board item covers the final Forest Conservation Plan (FCP) for this project. The FCP uses the Alternate 5 trail alignment which the Planning Board approved on September 11, 2003. A copy of the final FCP is shown in Attachment C.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would provide a grade-separated crossing over Veirs Mill Road for the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail, removing the need for the on-roadway crossing which currently exists. It would also provide the opportunity for local residents of the Aspen Hill community to cross Veirs Mill Road on the bridge to access bus transit or other destinations without crossing the busy Veirs Mill Road and Aspen Hill Road intersection at grade. The project includes not only the bridge crossing over Veirs Mill Road, but also trail connections on either side of the bridge, sidewalk connections to the adjacent community and bus stops, and public artwork. Detailed information on the project's description, background, justification, and need may be found in the Department of Parks staff report dated September 5, 2003 (Attachment A).

The project involves 1.55 acres of forest clearing and 1.50 acres of reforestation. The proposed reforestation amount is slightly greater than the minimum required reforestation of 1.19 acres. Reforestation is proposed in parkland within a currently unforested area of the 100-year floodplain of the mainstem of Rock Creek on the south side of Veirs Mill Road (near the project site). The FCP proposes a planting configuration which sets aside a 20-foot wide, non-forested strip of land for a future Parks trail that has not been approved or designed. Environmental Planning staff recommends that the specific configuration of the forest planting area is set in the field by the M-NCPPC Planning Department inspector (who has the authority to oversee the implementation of Forest Conservation Plans under the County Forest Conservation Law), with input from the Department of Parks Forest Ecologist and Department of Parks Trails Planner. The strip of land within the forest planting area that is set aside for the future trail should be as narrow as possible (no more than 10 to 12 feet wide), be located as far away from the stream as possible, and be configured so that the trail's extensions into existing forest on either side of the planted area minimize environmental impacts.

The final Forest Conservation Plan, in conjunction with staff's recommended conditions, meets the requirements of the County Forest Conservation Law.