



**MD355 Crossing (BRAC) Project, CIP Project 501209, Mandatory Referral No. MR2014024**

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**Completed: 12/19/13**

**Description**

This Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) project includes construction of a deep tunnel connection to the Medical Center Metro Station with access provided via three elevators on the east side of MD355, and of a pedestrian and bike underpass of MD355 with access provided to and from both sides of the road via stairs, escalators, and elevators.

The project is located within the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan area. See Project Vicinity Map below.



**Summary**

This project is the final project to be submitted for Mandatory Referral review that is associated with the Base Relocation and Closure (BRAC) move of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center from Washington, DC to the former National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, now renamed the National Military

Medical Center (NMMC). The project would provide a grade-separated pedestrian and bicyclist crossing at the very busy intersection of MD355/South Drive/South Wood Road and would provide direct access to the Medical Center Metro Station from the east side of MD355 in front of NMMC. While the project is intended to improve accommodation for bicyclists and pedestrians, including transit users, conditions for drivers would also improve because of the fewer potential conflicts that are currently the source of travel delays.

We recommend that the Board **approve** this project with the following comments to MCDOT.

### **Recommended Board Comments**

1. Expand the plaza area on the west side of MD355 to the north to eliminate the need for users of the crosswalk on the south leg of the intersection to make two right turns to access the Metro station or enter the National Institutes of Health (NIH).
2. Increase the width of the bike path adjacent to the tunnel portal on the west side of MD355 to twelve feet if possible to provide a “shy distance” from the portal wall.
3. Expand the plaza area on the east side to the north to facilitate a smooth movement for users of the crosswalk on the south leg of the intersection headed toward NMMC.
4. Remove the existing short and narrow sidewalk segment that runs along South Wood Road to improve pedestrian movement in this area and to allow a better landscaped buffer between the plaza and the road.
5. Provide lighting of the tunnel, portals, elevators areas, and the MD355/South Drive/South Wood Road intersection that meets the standards of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO).
6. Provide adequate directional signage to avoid confusion for first time visitors
7. Submit a new Forest Conservation Exemption application if there is any significant change to the limit of disturbance (LOD) shown in the approved exemption plan 42014012E.

### **Previous Board action**

On December 6, 2010, staff briefed the Planning Board on this project. The Board’s follow-up letter to MCDOT is shown as Attachment 1. The design reflected in the Mandatory Referral is consistent with the Board’s recommendations.

The subject project abuts the Rockville Pike (MD355)/Center Drive/Jones Bridge Road BRAC intersection project, which was reviewed by the Board as a Mandatory Referral and approved with comments on July 22, 2010.

### **Site context**

This project is located at the signalized intersection of Rockville Pike (MD 355) and South Drive/ South Wood Road. NIH is located on the west side of MD 355/Rockville Pike and the NMMC is located on the

east side of Rockville Pike/ MD 355. The Medical Center Metrorail Station access point, a kiss-and-ride lot, and a bus station with six bus bays are all located on the NIH side of the intersection. The bus station serves Metrobus, RideOn and NIH and NMMC shuttle buses. Pedestrians traveling to NMMC cross the intersection at grade.

### **Project Description**

This project would construct a shallow pedestrian tunnel beneath Rockville Pike and deep elevators on the east side of Rockville Pike connecting the Medical Center Metrorail Station mezzanine to street level, complementing the existing Metro elevators on the west side of Rockville Pike (see Attachment 2 for the overall plan with landscaping, and Attachment 3 for the street level floor plan showing the arrangement of stairs escalators, and elevators). Metrorail users would benefit from direct access between the Metrorail station mezzanine and South Wood Road without crossing Rockville Pike at grade. Bus patrons, pedestrians, and bicyclists would benefit by having the ability to travel between the NIH and NMMC without crossing Rockville Pike at grade. Drivers would benefit by the relocation of some pedestrian and bicyclist movements from the surface to below the grade of the road.

The project would:

- Enhance/improve access to mass transit facilities
- Improve the mobility and safety of pedestrians and bicyclists crossing MD 355/Rockville Pike
- Improve traffic operations at the existing intersection of South Wood Road/South Drive/MD 355

Safety for transit patrons would also be improved by means of the proposed emergency stairs adjacent to the Metro elevators on the east side of MD355 that would facilitate the evacuation of the Metro station in the event of an emergency.

### **Master Plan Consistency**

The 1990 Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan does not provide specific recommendations for improving the MD355/ South Drive/South Wood Road intersection or a new Metrorail station entrance. However, the Master Plan emphasizes the importance of transit, rather than roadways, to meet the needs of the Plan area. The Plan recommends that additional transportation service in Bethesda-Chevy Chase “should be based primarily on an expanded and vigorous program of transit and other mobility services. Use of these services is necessary because of the difficulty of expanding the capacity of many B-CC highways and due to the need to accommodate increased through traffic and the recommended level of development in B-CC.” (p.97)

The proposed new Medical Center Metrorail Station entrance on the Navy property supports the Plan’s recommendations. The Master Plan notes that the NMMC property’s “critical location necessitated the development and implementation of such alleviation measures as the use of carpools, vanpools, employee-owned buses, and public transportation” (p.93). It further notes that “any future expansion of jobs or parking at Federal facilities be considered only in conjunction with an effective ridesharing/transit incentive program...” (p.92). The new Metrorail station entrance with elevators will further improve non-auto access to the NMMC campus.

## **Additional analysis**

### **Transit Accommodation in the Roadway**

The Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan (CTCFMP) includes MD355 South as one of the recommended transit corridors. In the subject project area, a recommendation is made for dedicated transit lanes. A specific type of treatment is not recommended, but because of the CTCFMP's high forecast ridership, a two-lane median busway or dedicated curb lanes are likely potential treatments.

Based on MCDOT's preliminary evaluation, a BRT station and transit lanes is not precluded by this project. The proposed BRT typical section can be accommodated within the proposed roadway section of the MD 355 Crossing (BRAC), which is the same as the existing condition.

### **Pedestrian and Bicyclist Accommodation**

The shallow tunnel would provide a grade-separated crossing for pedestrians and bicyclists, who would access the tunnel on each side via stairs, escalators in the UP direction, and two elevators. The at-grade intersection would remain open however and would be made fully compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA)-.

On the west side of MD355, improvements should be made to facilitate pedestrian and bicyclist movement (see Attachment 4):

- The plaza area should be expanded in the area of the handicap ramp to eliminate the need for users of the crosswalk on the south leg of the intersection to make two right turns to access the Metro station or enter NIH.
- The bike path width on the east side of the tunnel portal should be increased to ten feet.

On the east side of MD355, the following improvements should be made (see Attachment 5):

- The plaza area should be expanded on the north side to facilitate a smooth movement for users of the crosswalk on the south leg of the intersection headed toward NMMC. The existing short and narrow sidewalk segment that runs along South Wood Road should be deleted for clarity of movement in this area and to allow a better landscaped buffer between the plaza and the road

A bikeshare station will be provided at this Metro station. MCDOT is currently discussing with WMATA and NIH a location in the existing Metro parking lot, outside the immediate area of the subject project.

The lighting plans that have been prepared for this project are intended to ensure adequate lighting of the tunnel portals and elevators but do not address any deficiencies at the MD355/South Drive/South Wood Road intersection where some pedestrians and bicyclists will still be crossing at grade and where they will be most exposed to potential traffic hazards. We recommend that that lighting at this intersection be provided at AASHTO-recommended levels recommended to ensure that pedestrian and bicyclist safety is comprehensively addressed.

### **Environmental Review, Forest Conservation and Tree Save**

No forests, streams or other environmentally sensitive features exist on the subject property area. Some areas of steep slopes are located nearby along Route 355, however the slopes are man-made areas that

were graded for the construction of 355 and are maintained with a cover of manicured lawn. A number of individual trees and hedgerows occur along Route 355 within the project area. A grove of existing trees is located at the of east side of the proposed crossing. The grove contains a variety of tree types and sizes, including a notable 46" Red Oak. The site is located within the Rock Creek Watershed, which is a Use I watershed\*.

A forest conservation exemption # 42014012E was confirmed for the MD355 Crossing on July 29, 2013. The project qualifies for the exemption under 22A-5(t) as a modification to an existing developed property. The project meets the criteria of the exemption by:

- (1) not removing more than 5,000 square feet of forest (no forest removal is proposed),
- (2) not affecting any forest in a stream valley buffer or forest located on a property in a special protection area (no stream valleys or special protection areas are in the project vicinity), and
- (3) the modification does not require the approval of a new subdivision plan.

The proposed project has a limited number of tree removals including the 46"red Oak and other specimen trees. Since the work qualifies for an exemption and is not subject to forest conservation plan, no variance for removal or impacts of trees is required\*\*. The project is not subject to a tree save plan, however the plans are only conceptual at this stage and the final designs potentially may include LOD beyond the areas shown on the 355 crossing exemption plan (42014012E). Due to the design-build nature of the project which has not been awarded yet, the ultimate design and associated LOD will not be known for some time. Therefore a new exemption may be required to reflect the ultimately proposed LOD if there are substantial changes from the LOD as shown on the existing exemption plans.

*\*Use I: WATER CONTACT RECREATION & PROTECTION OF 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.*

\*\* Removal or impacts to trees that measure 30 inches DBH or greater; are part of a historic site or designated with a historic structure; are designated as national, state, or county champion trees; are at least 75 percent of the diameter of the current State champion tree of that species; or trees, shrubs, or plants that are designated as Federal or State rare, threatened, or endangered species, are subject to a variance under applications that are subject to a forest conservation plan.

**Landscaping/Streetscaping**

Shade and ornamental are proposed around the immediate area of the plaza on the east side of MD355 to screen the area from the NMMC campus. The plaza on the west side would be an expansion of the already existing Metro station plaza.

Seating would be provided at each tunnel portal.

The proposed design of the tunnel portals, canopies and elevator enclosures is attractive and is currently under review by the National Capitol Planning Commission; renderings of these structures will be shown at the Board's meeting. One comment has been made by the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) in regard to an east side elevator enclosure (see below).

Signage that identifies the underpass and helps distinguish it from the deep metro elevators on the east side is not shown, except for the large Metro logo on the proposed elevators. We recommend that adequate directional signage be provided to avoid confusion for first time visitors.

### **Historic Preservation**

In the area of the project, there are two historic properties listed on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation:

- #35-8, the Bethesda Naval Hospital on the east side of MD355, and
- #35-9, the Peter Estate on the west side of MD355.

The subject project would not impact the historic setting of either property, including the protected viewshed of the hospital. However, MHT has commented that the height of the elevator enclosure at the shallow tunnel portal on the east side of MD355 should be reduced.

### **Park Impacts**

No parks exist within the project limits.

### **Outreach**

A public notice of this Planning Board meeting was sent by staff to area community associations. Prior to the Mandatory Referral submission of this project, MCDOT held several public meetings and workshops.

### **Conclusion**

The proposed project should be approved with the recommended Board comments.



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD**  
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

**OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN**

December 14, 2010

Mr. Arthur Holmes, Jr., Director  
Montgomery County Department of Transportation  
101 Monroe Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Re: MD 355 / Rockville Pike Crossing Study

Dear Mr. Holmes:

At our regularly scheduled meeting on December 6, 2010, the Planning Board reviewed the MD 355 / Rockville Pike Crossing Study. We endorsed the detailed comments in our staff memorandum:

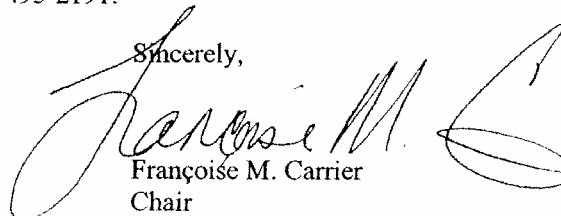
1. We support the selection of Alternative 2B as the Locally Preferred Alternative for the MD 355/Rockville Pike Crossing Study among the four presented for consideration.
2. Alternative 2B includes both deep elevator and shallow pedestrian tunnel elements. It appears that the deep elevator is the more effective of the two elements at reducing pedestrian travel times and at enhancing Metrorail evacuation, while reducing nearly as many pedestrian conflicts.

We support designing the shallow pedestrian tunnel to accommodate all pedestrians, including persons with disabilities, by including elevators to the shallow tunnel as part of the project. However, if the project is phased to construct the deep elevators first, consider whether additional at grade improvements are necessary to facilitate pedestrian movements across MD 355 for those not traveling to or from Metrorail.

During the meeting residents from adjacent communities spoke about the need to enhance the mobility and safety of residents who cross MD 355 and the need for a kiss & ride lane on the east side of MD 355. We believe that the BRAC projects, including this one, need to accommodate the community as well as the federal agencies and recommend that you consider these comments in the pursuit of these projects. As this project advances to facility planning and final design, please continue to keep the community involved.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions or comments concerning our review, please call David Anspacher at (301) 495-2191.

Sincerely,



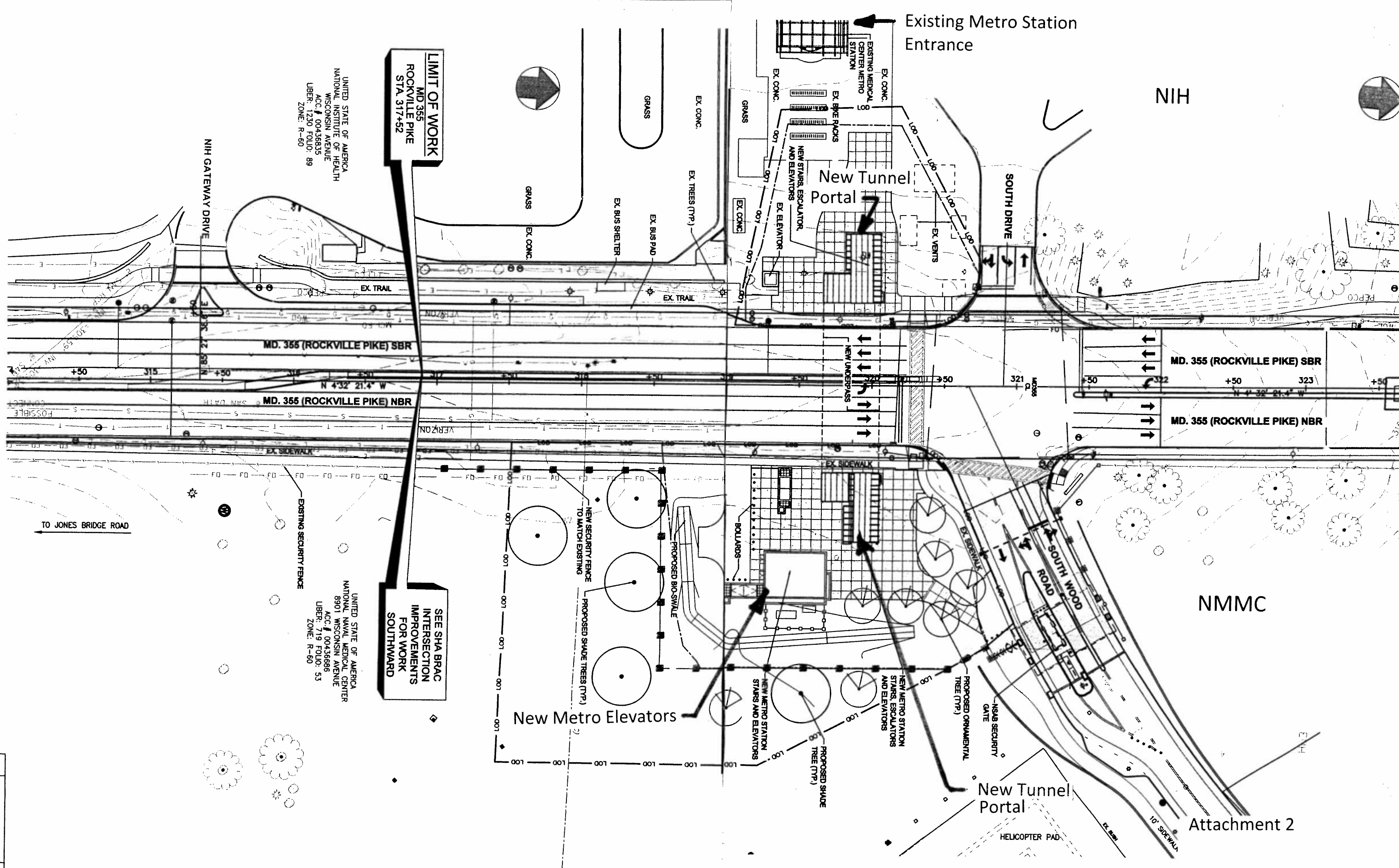
Françoise M. Carrier  
Chair

cc: Susan Hinton, NIH  
Jeff Miller, NNMC  
Christina Minkler, SHA  
John Carmen, BIC  
Robin McElhenny-Smith, WMATA  
Phil Alperson, Office of County Executive

8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910 Phone: 301.495.4605 Fax: 301.495.1320

[www.MCParkandPlanning.org](http://www.MCParkandPlanning.org) E-Mail: [mcp-chairman@mncppc.org](mailto:mcp-chairman@mncppc.org)

Attachment 1



**LIMIT OF WORK**  
 MD 355  
 ROCKVILLE PIKE  
 STA. 317+452

UNITED STATE OF AMERICA  
 NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH  
 WISCONSIN AVENUE  
 ACC # 00435835  
 LIBER: 1230 FOLD: 89  
 ZONE: R-60

**SEE SHA BRAC  
 INTERSECTION  
 IMPROVEMENTS  
 FOR WORK  
 SOUTHWARD**

UNITED STATE OF AMERICA  
 NATIONAL NAVAL MEDICAL CENTER  
 WISCONSIN AVENUE  
 ACC # 00436886  
 LIBER: 719 FOLD: 53  
 ZONE: R-60

NIH

NMMC

Existing Metro Station  
 Entrance

New Tunnel  
 Portal

SOUTH DRIVE

MD. 355 (ROCKVILLE PIKE) SBR

MD. 355 (ROCKVILLE PIKE) NBR

MD. 355 (ROCKVILLE PIKE) SBR

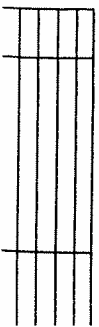
MD. 355 (ROCKVILLE PIKE) NBR

New Metro Elevators

New Tunnel  
 Portal

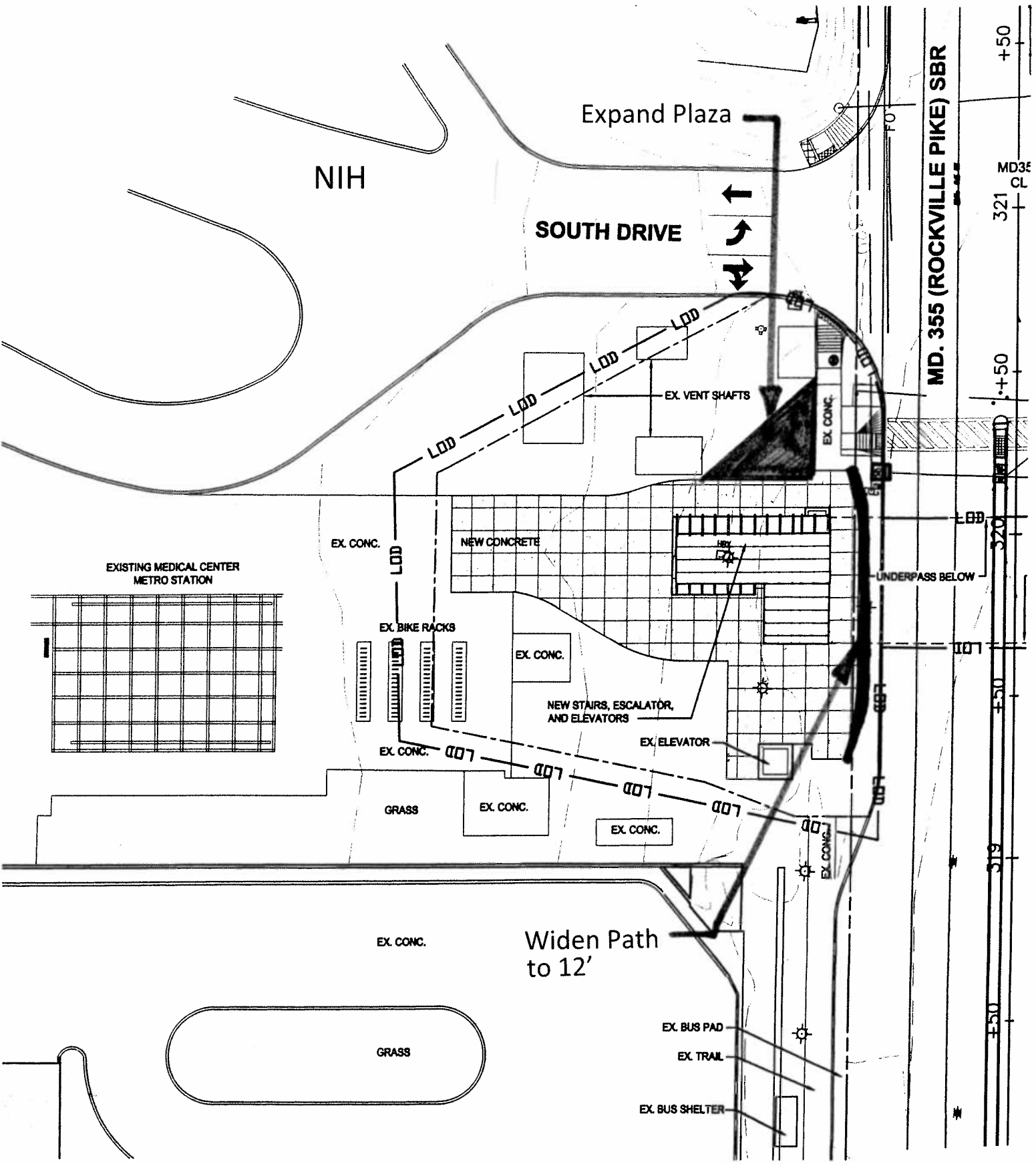
Attachment 2

TO JONES BRIDGE ROAD

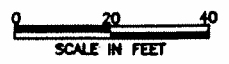


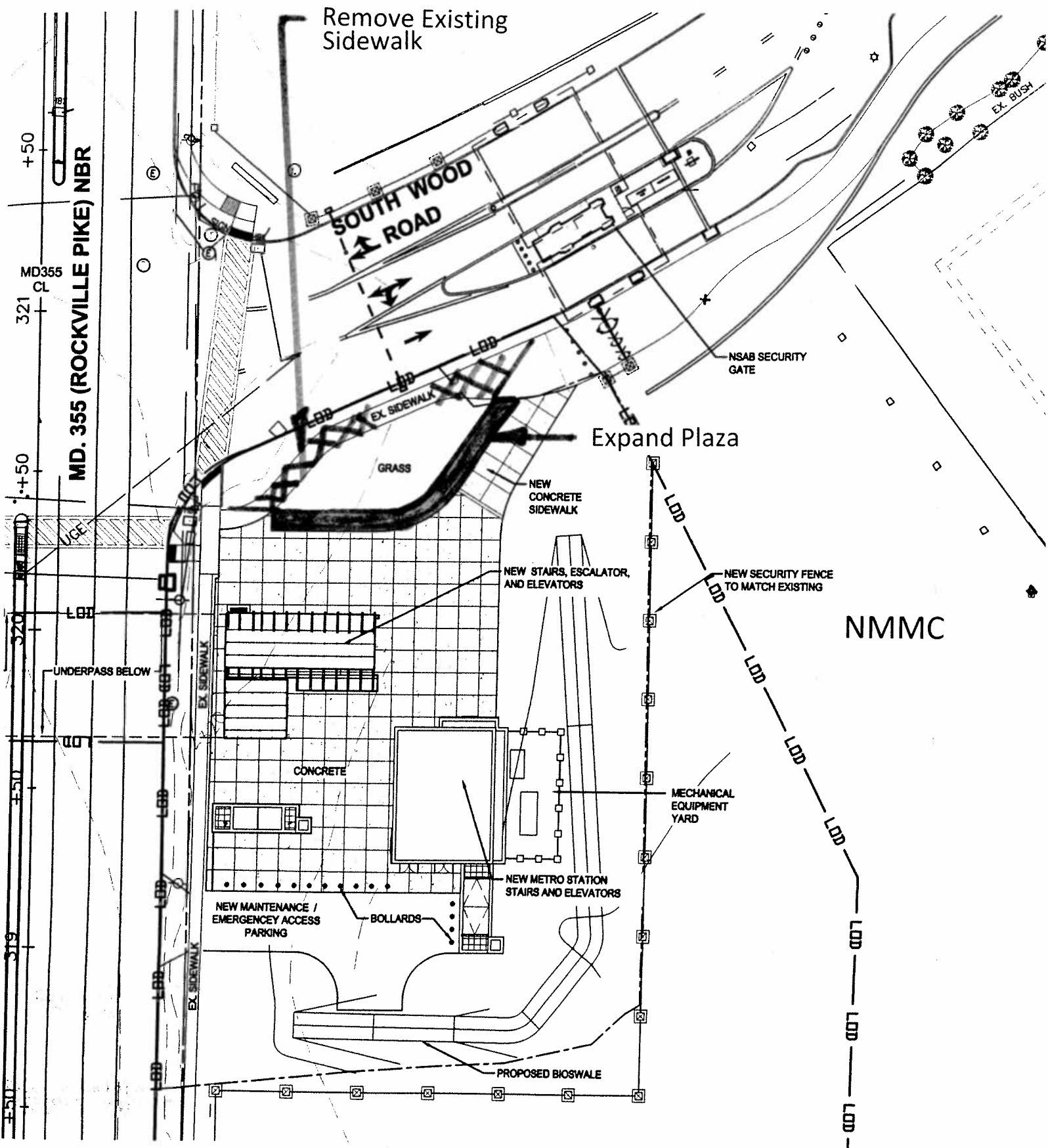






Attachment 4





Attachment 5

