



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

March 25, 2014

Arthur Holmes, Jr.
Director

Ms. Mary Bradford, Director of Parks
9500 Brunett Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20901

RE: Platt Ridge Drive Extension Project

Dear Ms. Bradford:

Thank you for your March 17, 2014, letter regarding the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project. Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) appreciates your interest in the design and construction of this project and your concerns over the impacts the project will have on park property. MCDOT does not take lightly the impacts to park properties from any of our projects. In this case, we believe that construction of the proposed Platt Ridge Drive Extension project will improve the safety of the traveling public in general and for the residents of the Chevy Chase Valley community in particular; it will provide important operational enhancements over the existing temporary traffic signal at Spring Valley Road and minimize impacts to the park.

The October 2010 Spring Valley Road Traffic Study investigated ingress and egress alternatives for the Spring Valley community. Of the alternatives studied in the report, MCDOT decided on a temporary traffic signal at Jones Bridge and Spring Valley Roads as an interim solution, and the construction of Platt Ridge Drive Alternative 3B) as the ultimate solution. The ultimate solution provided the best access for the community, and had the least impact to overall traffic operations along Jones Bridge Road. It should also be noted that of the four western access roads analyzed in the study (3A, 3B, 4A and 4B), the proposed alignment results in the least impact to park property.

MCDOT will continue to work with the Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) staff to minimize the impacts of the proposed alignment as much as possible. And, as is consistent with past practice, MCDOT will work with M-NCPPC staff to provide fair and appropriate compensation or mitigation for the ultimate impacts.

Our responses to your specific questions are provided below:

- 1) *What are the primary reasons that the traffic signal at Spring Valley Road is deemed not adequate to remain in place permanently to provide safe ingress and egress for the Chevy Chase Valley community?*

Office of the Director

As noted above, there are two primary reasons why the existing median opening and temporary traffic signal are not adequate to provide primary access for the Chevy Chase Valley community:

- a) Safety of the traveling public in general and the residents of the Chevy Chase Valley community in particular, and
- b) important operational enhancements along Jones Bridge Road.

It is important to note that these issues are interrelated, as operational problems lead to driver frustration and increased risk taking, leading to unsafe behavior.

Safety

The State Highway Administration (SHA) Traffic Engineering Delay and Queuing Analysis indicates that during evening peak hours, the backups on eastbound Jones Bridge Road will extend back beyond the intersection with Spring Valley, but will stop short of the proposed location of the Platt Ridge Drive Extension intersection. Queuing through signalized intersections, particularly when the queues involve multiple lanes, including separate through and turn lanes, typically increases the potential for crashes at the intersection. This is due to:

- At present, residents turning left from Spring Valley onto Jones Bridge Road traverse four lanes of traffic, two in each direction. Eastbound Jones Bridge Road widens east of the intersection.
- After completion of the State's improvements this same traffic, turning left onto the main road, will have to traverse two westbound lanes and weave through four eastbound traffic lanes without any separate lane to pull into, in order to make a right turn onto Connecticut Avenue from a fifth eastbound lane at the intersection. If traffic is queued from Connecticut Avenue, it is very likely that some left turning traffic from the community will be caught stopped in the main line through lanes thus creating a potential for collisions that needs to be avoided.
- Crosswalks are often blocked forcing pedestrians to either walk between queued vehicles or in the travel lanes.
- Motorists tend to take unwise and aggressive chances when attempting to squeeze through the intersection (in this case at Spring Valley) when a queue is blocking them.
- Closely spaced signalized intersections increase the potential for some types of collisions. Because the signals at Spring Valley Road and Connecticut Avenue are so close, motorists often focus on the far signal's indications instead of the nearer one sometimes running the near signal's red indication. Anecdotal reports from the neighborhood indicate this is occurring in the EB direction as motorists try to "make" the signal at Connecticut.
- Preliminary crash data transmitted with the mandatory referral package indicates that there has been an increase in crashes along this section of roadway since the temporary signal was installed. While the data is not yet conclusive, it can logically be inferred that there will be an even higher rate of crashes at Spring Valley Road if

the signal remains at the current location and there are more conflict points (i.e., more lanes through the intersection in the proposed SHA intersection improvements).

- Motorists coming from the north and from I-495 and turning west onto Jones Bridge Road now have their own lane to facilitate this movement and may not be anticipating having to stop almost immediately at Spring Valley after they turn at a red signal increasing a potential for rear-end collisions.

Finally, I am enclosing a copy of the March 17, 2014, letter from Ms. Melinda B. Peters, SHA Administrator regarding this project. As noted in that letter, "SHA agrees that the Platt Ridge Drive Extension project being funded by the County would provide a safer and more convenient ingress and egress to the Chevy Chase Valley community and businesses that now rely on Spring Valley Road."

Operations

The primary objective of the phased SHA improvements along Connecticut Avenue and Jones Bridge Road is to improve failing traffic operations at the intersection. SHA modeling indicates operations will be improved as a result of the SHA project whether the median at Spring Valley Road is open or closed. Leaving the existing signal at Spring Valley Road would degrade traffic flow through the corridor due to the proximity to the signal at Connecticut Avenue. Storage capacity for the eastbound three left turn lanes at Connecticut Avenue would be reduced and queuing through intersections would restrict traffic movements.

As noted above, operational difficulties tend to encourage drivers to make risky maneuvers, increasing the potential for traffic accidents and unsafe behavior.

- 2) *What funding for parkland mitigation or compensation is included within the approved project budget for Platt Ridge Drive?*

Funding for compensation or mitigation is expected to be provided through the Advanced Land Acquisition Revolving Fund (ALARF). The PDF for this project notes that "Right-of-way for this project will be dedicated to the public by the M-NCPPC or purchased through ALARF funding."

- 3) *What assumptions were made about parkland mitigation or compensation at the time the budget was submitted to the County Council?*

At the time the budget was prepared and submitted to Council, it was anticipated that MCDOT would work with M-NCPPC to minimize the footprint of the roadway and the necessary right-of-way, and would negotiate with M-NCPPC regarding the value of the impact to park land, with the funding for mitigation or compensation to be provided through ALARF.

- 4) *Is it anticipated that funding for mitigation or compensation would come from another funding source other than the Platt Ridge Drive project? If so, from what source and what amount is estimated?*

Yes, it is anticipated that funding for mitigation or compensation would come from the ALARF CIP. The amount of funding necessary for mitigation or compensation has not been determined and is subject to negotiations with M-NCPPC regarding the value of the impact to the park property.

- 5) *As the primary access to both the Chevy Chase Valley community and the Chevy Chase Recreational Association, why was this project not designed to meet the standards of a primary street, other than to reduce park impacts?*

The sole purpose in not meeting the standards of a primary street in the design of the roadway was to reduce the road footprint and minimize the impact to park land.

I hope this addresses your concerns and provides you the information you need to finalize your recommendation to the Planning Board. We look forward to the discussion with the Board at the Mandatory Referral meeting on April 3rd.

Sincerely,



Arthur Holmes, Jr.
Director

Cc: Bruce Johnston.
Edgar Gonzalez
Robert Gonzales
Emil Wolanin
Councilmember Roger Berliner
Cindy Gibson
Francois Carrier
Mike Riley
Larry Cole

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Enclosure