



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
Office of the Chairman, Montgomery County Planning Board

MCPB
Item No. 2
2-6-03

January 31, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Jeffrey Zyontz, Chief
County-wide Planning Division

Richard C. Hawthorne, Chief
Transportation Planning Unit

RC

FROM: Larry Cole: 301-495-4528, for the Park and Planning Department *LC*

SUBJECT: Review of Office of Legislative Oversight Report 2003-1
An Analysis of the Facility Planning Process for Road Construction

RECOMMENDATION: Transmit Comments to County Council

Staff recommends that the Board transmit the following comments to the Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT):

1. We support having the Council's Transportation and Environment Committee (T&E) review Facility Planning studies during Phase I.
2. The completion date of facility planning for a project should not be artificially held to the original target date. Reasonable extensions should be provided as conditions warrant.
3. Consider establishing a new Project Description Form (PDF) to provide a funding source for starting final design on projects that complete Phase II of Facility Planning when the start of the next CIP is more than six months away.
4. A review of the current County Design Standards is needed in concert with an update of the County Road Code.

STUDY DESCRIPTION

The report analyzes the Department of Public Works and Transportation's facility planning process for road construction and makes recommendations for improving this process. A copy of the OLO report is attached to this memorandum for members of the Planning Board. Other interested persons can review the report in Room 105 of the M-NCPPC offices at 8787 Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring. The report is also available on the Montgomery County Council's website at www.montgomerycountymd.gov under *Council Agendas with Background Material* for their January 21, 2003 meeting, Item #4.

STAFF ANALYSIS

OLO staff has done a good job at looking at how the facility planning process for roads has worked to date. Staff believes that while the study schedules and cost estimates determined in facility planning may not be as close to the final schedule and cost as one would wish, the process has greatly improved the knowledge base on which the Council makes a decision as to whether or not to move forward with a project.

Staff submitted comments to OLO on the draft report, which are included in the final report as pages 57-58.

Comments on OLO Report Recommendations

In the report's *Summary of Recommendations* on page 49, OLO staff has made four recommendations to improve the facility planning process. Staff has the following comments on the recommendations in the report.

OLO Recommendations #1 and #2: Staff concurs with these recommendations. Coordinating with the reviewing agencies without stopping the process to wait for formal comments to be received would eliminate our concern that the reviews might create additional potential delay.

Staff strongly supports the recommendation that DPWT request reviews by T&E of projects at the end of Phase I. On page 22, Executive Branch staff is quoted as saying that DPWT normally implements the Board's recommendations. Quantitatively, most of the Board's comments do get implemented. However, there are often disagreements on significant issues, such as design speed, pedestrian accommodation at intersections, and the location of street trees. Final resolution of these issues will, to a large degree, determine what the final project looks like and how it operates. Having the Council able to consider the Board's comments at the end of Phase I and making their recommendations to DPWT should result in a better Phase II product.

OLO Recommendation #3: ***Staff disagrees with the statement that the original target date for the completion of facility planning is the one that should be held throughout the process.*** In large part, the purpose of facility planning is discovery. It is quite possible that major issues will arise that require additional time to be sorted out. Rather than rush through the remainder of the process to make up "lost time", staff

believes that it is more important that the experience gained from each project be used to better estimate the time required to plan future similar projects.

DPWT staff believes that the abolishment of the Office of Project Development and the delegation of the whole facility planning process to the Division of Engineering Services have resulted in a streamlining of the facility planning process, but this is not yet evident. Despite the reorganization, conflicts continue to occur at times between M-NCPPC and DPWT staffs on the design of projects, due in part to the County's Design Standards not keeping pace with current design objectives. **Staff believes that a review of the current standards is needed in concert with an update of the County Road Code and that more standards should be created where necessary.** The County Council would need to approve a Road Code update, including any changes to the Design Standards.

OLO Recommendation #4: Staff believes that the County Council should also consider partially funding the design of projects when facility planning is completed, as part of their discussions on how to improve the linkage between facility planning and design and construction. If the Council reviews the 35% design and construction cost estimate and decides that the project should proceed, but the next CIP cycle is more than six months away, the funding gap could be bridged via a standing Project Description Form (PDF). This could be similar to the facility planning PDF, including design funds for several projects. When the full CIP is up for review, a final decision could then be made as to the timing of completion of final design and construction.

BACKGROUND

Planning Board Input in Facility Planning

Toward the end of Phase I of Facility Planning, a draft Project Prospectus is prepared and submitted to the Planning Board for review and comment. These comments are taken into consideration in the preparation of the final Project Prospectus. If the Director of DPWT approves the final Project Prospectus, the project proceeds to Phase II. At the end of Phase II, the project is presented to the Planning Board as a Mandatory Referral.

LC:kcw

mmo to mcpb re OLO report