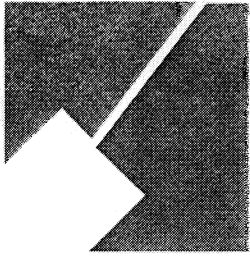


M-NCPPC



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK & PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760

MCPB
ITEM NO. 4
6-19-2003

June 13, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Jeffrey Zyontz, Chief
County-wide Planning Division

Richard C. Hawthorne, Chief
Transportation Planning

John Carter, Chief
Community-Based Planning

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

PROJECT: North Bethesda Trail
From West Cedar Lane to Old Georgetown Road
CIP No. 509922

REVIEW TYPE: Mandatory Referral No. MR#03809-DPW&T-1

APPLICANT: Montgomery County Department of
Public Works and Transportation

APPLYING FOR: Plan Approval

COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING TEAM AREA: North Bethesda-Garrett Park

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL WITH COMMENTS TO DPWT

Staff recommends that the Board approve the proposed project (see Attachment 1: Vicinity Map) with the following comments to the Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT). Where a comment is applicable to a specific segment of the project, the segment is noted in parentheses.

1. Handicap ramps constructed under this project should have an eight-foot minimum width to accommodate bicyclists. The entire length of the North Bethesda Trail should be checked to ensure that all proposed ramps are bike-accessible and comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and that all necessary crosswalk striping is provided and in good condition.
2. Plant shade trees between the trail and the curb wherever possible.
3. Extend the proposed trail to West Cedar Lane at Old Georgetown Road and reconstruct the handicap ramp. (Section A South)
4. Provide additional safety measures for trail users immediately north of Alta Vista where the proposed trail is adjacent to the curb line of Old Georgetown Road. (southern half of Section A North)
5. Angle the trail away from Old Georgetown Road south of Charles Street. (northern half of Section A North)
6. Modify the existing handicap ramp at Beech Avenue to better align with the proposed trail. (Section B)
7. Evaluate the potential impact to the large shade trees along Montgomery Drive. If the trees' health would be endangered, relocate the utility poles to both save the trees and retain a good trail alignment. In addition to shifting the trail away from affected trees where practicable, other trail construction techniques such as the use of boardwalks to protect sensitive root zones should be considered where the trail cannot be shifted. (Section B)
8. Relocate the proposed trail crossing of Montgomery Drive to just south of the cul-de-sac and construct the trail on the east side of Montgomery Drive to be behind the utility poles. (Section B)
9. Coordinate with staff to achieve a mutually-acceptable alignment of the trail at the Fleming Park parking lot. A park permit is required and must be obtained prior to the start of work in Fleming Park. All trees removed from park property must be replaced by an equal number of trees two inches or greater in caliper and be planted in Fleming Park. (Section C)
10. Provide an ADA-compliant crossing of Fleming Avenue at Lone Oak Drive. (Section C)
11. Modify the proposed ramp at Grosvenor Lane so that it is ADA-compliant and promotes both a safe crossing of Grosvenor Lane and a smooth transition from the proposed off-road bike facility to the existing on-road facility. Provide sufficient signage noting the change from an off-road to on-road bikeway. (Section C)

12. Ensure that proposed guardrail meets AASHTO recommendations. (Section E)
13. North of the White Flint Metro Station, consider eliminating the existing four-foot sidewalk at the curb line in favor of using the section similar to that used for the Silver Spring Green Trail – a five-foot brick sidewalk beside a ten-foot asphalt trail. Eliminate the separate crosswalks for pedestrians and bicyclists at Old Georgetown Road. (Section E)
14. Submit a Tree Save Plan to M-NCPPC Environmental Planning staff prior to issuance of an erosion and sediment control permit. The Tree Save plan must be coordinated with the expansion plan of the French School.

PREVIOUS BOARD ACTION: None

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project would construct five segments of a ten-foot wide off-road bike trail, eliminating the present gaps in the planned North Bethesda Trail (see Attachment 2). The five segments are:

- **Section A South:** along the east side of Old Georgetown Road from West Cedar Lane to Johnson Avenue
- **Section A North:** along the east side of Old Georgetown Road from Alta Vista Road to Charles Street
- **Section B:** along the west side of Montgomery Drive from Beech Avenue to south of the Capital Beltway (I-495)
- **Section C:** along the east side of Fleming Avenue from north of the Capital Beltway (I-495) to Grosvenor Lane
- **Section E:** along the east side of Rockville Pike (MD 355) from north of Marinelli Road to Old Georgetown Road

Section D is referenced by DPWT as the existing trail segment between Sections C and E.

STAFF ANALYSIS

This project would substantially complete an important regional transportation facility, easing pedestrian and bicycle access between the Bethesda and North Bethesda areas. In addition to other segments of the trail that were constructed some time ago, two important pieces of the trail, the bridges over I-495 and I-270 are now in place. The former was completed a few months ago and the latter is expected to be completed at the end of this month.

Bicyclist Accommodation

Staff's comments on the proposed trail construction begin at the southern end and continue to the northern end.

General: Handicap ramps constructed under this project should have an eight-foot minimum width to accommodate bicyclists. Since several existing segments of trail/sidewalk will be used for the North Bethesda Trail, the entire length of the trail should be checked to ensure that this goal is met.

DPWT should ensure that all necessary crosswalk striping is provided and in good condition for the length of the trail and that the crosswalks are well coordinated with the handicap ramps.

Where landscape panels of adequate width exist between the trail and the curb, shade trees should be planted as part of this project. Along Old Georgetown Road, the minimum width is five feet per State Highway Administration guidelines. Along the County roads, the minimum width is six feet. In addition to providing an aesthetic benefit for the surrounding area, street trees would provide shade for trail users and a greater sense of safety and separation from the roadway.

Section A South: The proposed trail begins just short of the West Cedar Lane intersection, forcing trail users to use a narrow segment of sidewalk at the curb line to access the trail (see Attachment 3). The trail should be extended to West Cedar Lane and a new handicap ramp constructed.

Section A North: Immediately north of Alta Vista Road, the trail would be 12-feet wide but would be adjacent to the curb (see Attachment 4). A strip of right-of-way approximately four-feet wide would be acquired from the adjacent homeowner to accommodate the trail. Although the trail is proposed to be two feet wider than normal to compensate for the trail being directly adjacent to the curb, staff is concerned that the proposed design will place trail users in too close proximity to fast-moving traffic. Old Georgetown Road is a high volume road (about 50,000 ADT) and vehicles often drive in excess of the 40 mph speed limit in narrower-than-standard lanes.

The design originally included a safety rail between the trail and road but this was later deleted. **Staff recommends that the use of a safety rail be reconsidered as well as other measures** such as acquiring additional right-of-way and/or reducing the width of the trail to eight feet to provide a landscaped safety buffer between the trail and Old Georgetown Road. Plant materials other than grass should be used to help provide a better psychological buffer.

While the trail is proposed against the curb for the whole length of this block, which is just over 300 feet long, the northern half of the block has additional right-of-way as the original trolley alignment curves to go more directly north. **Staff recommends that north of the driveway in this segment, the trail should be**

angled away from the roadway to improve the comfort and safety of trail users and to better align with the existing trail north of Charles Street.

Section B: At Beech Avenue, the existing handicap ramp should be modified to better align with the proposed trail and should be widened to accommodate bikes (see Attachment 5).

This segment is the most problematic in terms of determining what the best trail alignment is (see Attachment 6). There are existing utility poles along the west side of Montgomery Drive about 13 feet to 14 feet off the curblin. There is a line of large shade trees about 30 feet to 40 feet off the curblin. Along the property of the French International School, which is most of the segment length, there is a row of dogwoods about ten feet from the curb.

The proposed trail would be constructed between the utility poles and the shade trees, providing the best location for trail users, well offset from the roadway (see Attachment 7). This alignment, however, could potentially adversely impact the shade trees. If the trail were instead constructed between the utility poles and the curb, as preferred by Environmental Planning staff, there could only be a narrow two-foot grass strip between the trail and the road, providing a less desirable accommodation for trail users.

A better alternative would be to relocate the utility poles closer to the street, allowing the trail to be built farther away from the shade trees but still having an adequate offset from the curb. This would be the most expensive option. ***Staff believes that DPWT should have their arborist evaluate the potential impact to the shade trees and if the trees' health would be endangered, the utility poles should be relocated*** to allow a shift in the trail alignment, reducing the impact to the trees' critical root zones but maintaining a good offset from the roadway.

In the current plan, all of the existing dogwoods along Montgomery Drive would be relocated, but the Maplewood Citizens Association would like to see them retained. Staff recommends that the dogwoods be retained where possible, but this would likely be only three or four trees out of the fifteen that now exist. DPWT has indicated that they will work with the citizens to find an appropriate place to replant the dogwoods. Typically, trees that are relocated are not replanted in the right-of-way because it is difficult for the contractor to guarantee that they will live. Staff believes that if they are replanted in the right-of-way, they should be in addition to the standard arrangement of shade trees between the trail and curb.

As noted above, the French School is located along the east side of Montgomery Drive north of Beech Drive. The school recently received approval for an expansion of their facilities. As part of the amended Special Exception approval (Case No. S-411-C), the school was required to grant an easement for the construction of the North Bethesda Trail along their frontage. The expansion will impact some large trees on their property near the proposed trail. DPWT should coordinate their project plan with

the school's expansion plan to ensure that trees intended to be removed under one project are not unnecessarily called out to be protected by the other project.

The proposed alignment at the northern end of Montgomery Drive should be modified to improve safety for trail users. As one approaches the cul-de-sac from the south, the ten-foot trail turns, narrows to eight feet and starts running adjacent to the curb all at the same time. This could make it very likely that some users will spill over the curb into the roadway. The trail continues for a short length before another 90-degree turn is required to cross Montgomery Drive.

On the east side of Montgomery Drive, the eight-foot wide trail continues along the curb and makes a sharp turn to head toward the bridge over the Capital Beltway, after which the trail widens back to its normal ten feet. Southbound trail users will hit this sharp curve after coming down a 6.2 percent grade and would have a similar chance of spilling into the roadway.

Staff recommends that the trail cross Montgomery Drive at the start of the cul-de-sac on Montgomery Drive (see Attachment 8). The trail on the east side should be constructed as close as possible to the property line, behind the utility poles at Station 52+55 LT and at Station 53+00 LT. These changes would create a safer alignment of the trail. If necessary, an eight-foot wide trail is acceptable, but not if it is located at the curb.

Section C: Between the two driveways to Fleming Park, there is a hillock that has a large number of trees, both large and small (see Attachment 9). A fairly short segment of the current trail alignment (about 150 feet) would cut through the hillock and require the removal of several trees. Parks staff recommends that the trail instead be built at the eastern edge of the parking lot to avoid the tree removal. This would create a less direct trail alignment that DPWT would like to avoid. Transportation staff is concerned that an alignment that extends too far into the park would be one that cyclists might avoid by riding in the street for a short distance, possibly against traffic, and could complicate maintenance responsibilities since it would then be outside the public right-of-way. One alternative that DPWT should consider is narrowing Fleming Avenue between the two driveways to allow for the construction of the trail closer to the curb on this low-volume, low-speed road. More time is needed to resolve these issues, therefore ***staff recommends that DPWT continue to coordinate with our staff to achieve a mutually acceptable alignment at the park.***

An ADA-compliant crossing of Fleming Avenue at Lone Oak Drive is needed to be able to access the trail and the park.

The handicap ramp at Grosvenor Lane does not meet ADA and is not aligned with the existing curb line (see Attachment 10). Staff recommends that the ramp be modified to allow a better crosswalk location on Grosvenor Lane. The curb line of Grosvenor could also be extended so that the handicap ramp problem can be resolved and so the trail and northbound on-road bike lane north of Grosvenor can be aligned.

This intersection is a sensitive point on the trail since the North Bethesda Trail changes from an off-road trail south of Grosvenor Lane to an on-road trail north of Grosvenor Lane. Good signage is needed both to inform northbound trail users that the segment across Grosvenor Lane is on-road and to inform southbound users that they must cross Fleming Avenue to stay on the bikeway.

Section E: The separate crosswalks for pedestrians and bicyclists proposed at the Old Georgetown Road intersection (see Attachment 11) would likely prove hazardous because drivers would expect to see only one crosswalk. One combined crosswalk should be used.

The proposed changes to the guardrail in this segment should to be reviewed to ensure that they are safe and meet AASHTO recommendations. The new segment of guardrail would be placed immediately behind a PEPCO pole, possibly increasing the likelihood that the pole would be hit and that the guardrail would be a contributing factor. There is an existing light pole just to the south that is immediately behind the existing guardrail that also creates the same condition. The remaining existing guardrail also needs a safe end treatment.

Park Impacts

A park permit is required and must be obtained prior to commencement of work in Fleming Park. All trees removed from park property must be replaced by an equal number of trees two inches or greater in caliper and be planted in Fleming Park. Special tree protection measures and construction techniques will be required for approval of park permits and must be indicated on the plans submitted for approval.

Staff believes that the completion of this segment of the North Bethesda Trail will complement the use of and greatly improve access to the park.

In the current plan, all of the proposed trail would be in public right-of-way, achieved by taking a 35-foot to 70-foot strip from Park property at the Fleming Park parking lot. As noted above, the alignment of the trail requires more coordination between M-NCPPC and DPWT staff to achieve a mutually acceptable alignment that minimizes tree loss in the park.

Environmental

Staff recommends that DPWT submit a Tree Save Plan to M-NCPPC Environmental Planning staff prior to issuance of an erosion and sediment control permit.

Forest Conservation

The project has a Natural Resource Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation (NRI/FSD) and is exempt from Forest Conservation Plan requirements because it is a

Government Mandatory Referral for a project on a tract of land less than 40,000 square feet in area. A Tree Save Plan must be approved because several specimen trees will be affected. The specimen trees along the bikeway alignment are all in good condition and tree protection measures will be needed to protect them.

Tree protection measures should be indicated for the bikeway on Old Georgetown Road and Montgomery Drive, as well as between Beech Avenue and Spruce Tree Avenue (if this part of the bikeway is improved as part of the current project). Measures should include, but not be limited to, shifting the trail away from affected trees where practicable, and the use of boardwalks. Additionally, project design along Montgomery Drive should be coordinated with tree removals proposed as part of the French International School's development plans.

Environmental Guidelines

The site is not located within a Special Protection Area, and the limits of disturbance do not extend into any streams or stream valley buffers. Part of the project will affect Fleming Park and this will require park permitting and prior approval from the M-NCPPC Park Planning and Resource Analysis Unit.

Watershed Protection

The project area lies within the Luxmanor Branch and the Lower Mainstem Bethesda sub-watersheds of the Lower Rock Creek Watershed. Habitat conditions are fair but stream conditions in both sub-watersheds are poor and have been highly affected by very high density with little runoff control, in the headwaters. Fish and macro-invertebrate communities are both poor, there are problems with riparian buffers and bank vegetation protection, and there are unstable stream banks with little in-stream cover for fish. The *Countywide Stream Protection Strategy* (CSPS) has designated the sub-watersheds as Watershed Restoration Areas. Water quality and quantity controls are expected to prevent nutrients, sediment, fuel and other contaminants from entering the water system via wastewater or uncontrolled storm runoff.

RELATED PROJECTS

The bridges over I-495 and I-270 are now in place. The former was completed a few months ago and the latter is expected to be completed at the end of this month. Each of these projects was partially funded as a TEA-21 enhancement.

One segment of existing trail between Beech Avenue and Spruce Tree Avenue is substandard in width and prone to intermittent flooding. DPWT is currently working on a separate project to improve this segment in connection with improving the stormwater management of this area. The project is anticipated to be constructed in two to three years.

Phase I of Facility Planning for the extension of Woodglen Drive from Nicholson Lane to Marinelli Road was recently completed and was reviewed by the County Council's Transportation and Environment Committee, which voted not to proceed with the project. In addition to providing a local circulation benefit for drivers in the North Bethesda area, the project would also have provided a one-block link in the North Bethesda Trail. Once the Montgomery County Conference Center opens and changed traffic patterns are established, the need for this project can be re-evaluated.

The White Flint Place (LCOR) development is anticipated to take place in the block bounded on the west by Section E of the subject project. A new intersection on Rockville Pike in the middle of Section E is anticipated. Some modifications to the trail may be necessary in the future, however, DPWT staff has coordinated the subject project with the developer.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

DPWT held public meetings in May 1997, attended by 75 people, and April 1998, attended by 25 people. They have also met individually with the affected property owners.