M-NCPPC

MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

9500 Brunett Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20901

MCPB Date September 11, 2003
MCPB Agenda Item No. 5

September 5, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Lester L. Straw, Superintendent of Parks
Michael F. Riley, Chief, Park Development Division (PDD)

FROM: Dilip Pandya, Project Manager, PDD

SUBJECT: Facility Plan for a Pedestrian Bridge for the Rock Creek Hiker – Biker Trail over Veirs Mill Road

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STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Board:

1) Approve "Alternate 5" as the facility plan for a pedestrian bridge for the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail over Veirs Mill Road; and

2) Submit a request to the Montgomery County Council for an amendment to the FY 03-08 CIP to add design and construction funding for the project; and

3) Submit an application to the Maryland State Highway Administration to fund 50% of the eligible project costs with Transportation Enhancement Program funds, upon Council review and approval of the project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail extends 15 miles from Beach Drive at the District of Columbia line to Lake Needwood in Rock Creek Regional Park. The trail currently crosses Veirs Mill Road at grade at its signalized intersection with Aspen Hill Road. To the north of Viers Mill Road, the trail is on street for approximately 0.2 miles traversing Aspen Hill Road, Adrian Street, Baltic Avenue, and finally the access drive to Aspen Hill Local Park before continuing northward as a trail.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would provide a grade separated crossing for the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail over Veirs Mill Road and remove the need for the on street section described above. 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 at grade at the busy intersection of Veirs Mill Road and Aspen Hill Road.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

1994 – The adopted Aspen Hill Master Plan states, "The bikeway network within Aspen Hill should be improved to provide an alternative mode of travel to and from the area, as well as within the area."

1998 – The Countywide Park Trails Plan lists the Viers Mill Road crossing of the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail under "Priorities for Safety Improvements at High Traffic Volume Trail-Road Intersections."

2000 – On November 16, 2000, the Planning Board reviewed the mandatory referral for the State Highway Administration's (SHA) project for intersection improvements at Veirs Mill Road and Aspen Hill Road. Chairman Hussmann wrote to SHA; "Provide a grade separated crossing of Veirs Mill Road for the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail."

2000 – On November 24, 2000, Mr. Donald Becker, President of the Aspen Hill Civic Association, wrote to Council President Subin; "At the Montgomery County Planning Board Public Hearing held Thursday, November 16, 2000, Chairman Hussmann expressed his concern for pedestrian safety at this intersection. It was suggested that the State procure funds for a pedestrian bridge to be built over Veirs Mill Road taking the Rock Creek Hiker Biker trail away from this extremely busy intersection. The Aspen Hill Civic Association highly encourages this proposal."

2000 – SHA replied to the Planning Board's mandatory referral on December 13, 2000, stating; "We are currently studying the impacts of this crossing. We will provide this information to your staff and the County. If at the time the County wishes to pursue the grade separation, they will need to apply for this as an enhancement project through the Executive Committee review process."

2001 – On February 13, 2001, the County Council adopted resolution 14-773 pertaining to the SHA project. Listed among the Council's recommendations is "accommodation of a potential Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail bridge over Veirs Mill Road. The Council will seek State funding for this bridge."

2001 – On February 16, 2001, County Council President, Blair Ewing wrote to Parker Williams, Administrator, SHA, that; "the County Council is committed to seeking state funding to construct a bridge over MD 586 for the Rock Creek Trail, which would allow pedestrians and bikers to avoid the thousands of vehicles that pass through this intersection daily. We think it appropriate that the State fund this bridge under the

Access 2000 program, and we hope it can be done on a schedule commensurate with construction of the intersection improvements, that is during 2003."

2001 – On March 21, 2001, John Porcari, Secretary, Maryland Department of Transportation, wrote to Council President Blair Ewing; "We are recommending that Montgomery County apply for the improvement as an Enhancement project through the Executive Committee review process... It is our intention to continue to coordinate with M-NCPPC and Montgomery County staff to develop a strategy to address the hiker-biker connection at Veirs Mill Road. We will also continue to investigate all funding sources available for this improvement."

2002 – On February 15, 2002, the Planning Board sent a request to the County Council to add $333,000 to its FY 03-08 CIP submission for the purpose of completing a facility plan for the pedestrian bridge, with the expectation that the facility plan would be complete in time to request Transportation Enhancement Program funding in the Fall of 2003.

2002 – In May 2002, the Council approved the request for facility planning funds, which became available July 1, 2002 (FY 03).

2002 & 2003 – M-NCPPC worked with the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation, consultants, and the community to complete the facility plan.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION AND NEED

The 15-mile Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail is one of the most popular trails in the Washington metropolitan area. A section of the trail near the Aspen Hill Road/Veirs Mill Road intersection is discontinuous, relying on local streets within the Aspen Hill community to access the present trail termini. Further, this route requires trail users to cross Aspen Hill Road at an unsignalized crosswalk and cross Veirs Mill Road at a signalized crosswalk. Trail users encounter high levels of vehicle traffic when using both crosswalks, which are also used by transit users accessing and transferring between adjacent WMATA and County Ride-On bus stops.

The M-NCPPC proposes an improved connection for the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail across the Veirs Mill Road (MD 586)/Aspen Hill Road intersection, including sidewalk connections to the adjacent community and bus stops (see **Figure 1**). This 1,670 linear foot section will provide a safer, continuous connection between separated segments of the popular Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail to better serve bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users in the Aspen Hill region of Montgomery County.

The Aspen Hill Master Plan calls for a bikeway network of commuter and recreational routes interrelated with a system of neighborhood routes that connect communities to many public facilities, shopping centers and employment sites. The Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail is an important element of the network of trails in the County. An improved connection of Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail in this location will in part serve to complete the bikeway network. Improving the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail with other existing

and proposed bikeways in the Aspen Hill Planning Area would provide a comprehensive network of bikeways for bicyclists and encourage more individuals to choose multi-modal transportation options. (**Figure 2** shows the existing and proposed trails in the vicinity of the Study Area).

Data reported by the Maryland State Police for this intersection between January 1, 1998 and July 11, 2001 indicate that three pedestrians and two bicyclists have been involved in accidents at the Veirs Mill Road / Aspen Hill Road intersection. Of these five accidents between vehicles and trail users, one was a fatality. There were a total of 41 accidents involving vehicles during this period, of which 24 involved injuries. The most prevalent collision types were rear end collisions (17), left turn collisions (14), and pedestrian / bicycle (5).

Trail user counts were performed in 2000 on the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail at Dewey Road Local Park, approximately one mile south of the project site. Based on this data, the average number of trail users per / hour is 35. The average was calculated from 20 separate one-hour observations. Hourly peak use on weekends and weekday evenings is significantly higher.

PRELIMINARY DESIGN

Alternative Alignments

Five alternative alignments were considered. See the attached facility plan technical report for descriptions of the alternates and rationale for selection of Alternate 5.

Environmental Impact

As part of the facility planning process, impacts to wetlands, floodplains, forest, historical and cultural features, and flora and fauna, were assessed. See the attached facility plan technical report for summary of environmental impacts.

Bridge Structure

The proposed bridge consists of a 610-foot long structure including 542 feet of curved section. The bridge will be 12 feet wide to accommodate light maintenance vehicles. The typical section of the bridge consists of a concrete deck on steel girders. The bridge will provide a minimum clearance of 17 feet and 9 inches above Veirs Mill Road as required by the State Highway Administration.

Public Arts Trust

The Public Arts Trust of the Arts and Humanities Council identified this project as an ideal project for incorporation of public art. The Trust funded $10,000 to include an artist on the design team during the facility planning phase to identify opportunities for public art.

The artist was selected through the Public Arts Trust's process. The Public Arts Trust identified a short list of several artists with experience in bridge and highway design and construction. The artists were interviewed by a panel consisting of representatives from the Public Arts Trust, Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation, and the Commission. Vicki Scuri, who has a nationwide reputation and extensive experience in this type of design, was selected for the project. Her report is attached with this memorandum and her recommendations have been included in the project.

Local Access, Transit, and Stair Tower

The project design includes sidewalks, pathways and stairs on the north and south sides of Veirs Mill Road to enable local access to the bridge for Aspen Hill residents, as an alternative to crossing Veirs Mill Road at grade at its signalized intersection with Aspen Hill Road. ADA access to the bridge is provided via a path from Adrian Street on the north side of Veirs Mill Road. ADA access on the south side of Veirs Mill Road is provided by a path and the ramped bridge structure itself. In addition, a 28-foot high stair tower is proposed on the south side of Veirs Mill Road to access the elevated bridge structure. It is envisioned that residents of Aspen Hill will use the stair tower to access relocated transit stops via the pedestrian bridge as opposed to the at-grade intersection of Aspen Hill Road and Veirs Mill Road. The frequency of use of the stair tower for transit users will depend on pedestrian's choice between three options to cross Veirs Mill Road; 1) crossing at the busy intersection Aspen Hill Road at-grade involving a fairly direct route; 2) a grade separated crossing involving a fairly circuitous route on the trail and the bridge structure; and 3) a grade separated crossing of a less circuitous route involving the stair tower and bridge structure. The Aspen Hill Civic Association felt strongly that the stair tower was an essential component of the project to enable local pedestrian traffic to avoid crossing Veirs Mill Road at Aspen Hill Road. Staff questioned the projected use of the stair tower, however, the stair tower is included in the project estimate due to the community's view that it will provide a viable alternative to crossing at grade.

Forest Conservation Plan

The project consultant recently submitted a preliminary forest conservation plan as a part of this project. Staff review and approval of the plan has not been completed at the time of this report, therefore, the preliminary forest conservation plan will be presented to the Planning Board for approval at a future date.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Staff held two meetings (on May 1, 2003 and July 2, 2003) to obtain community input in developing the facility plan for the project. In addition, staff also met with the Board of Directors of the Aspen Hill Civic Association on two separate occasions, June 3, 2003 and June 18, 2003. The comments from these meetings were considered in the development of the alternatives. Written minutes of these meetings are attached herewith

this memorandum. Staff also held a community meeting on August 12, 2003 specifically to discuss artistic opportunities for this project.

TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) is currently awaiting reauthorization of the six-year federal surface transportation legislation, currently known as TEA-21 that expires September 30, 2003. As early as Fall 2003, MDOT may invite submission of new project proposals for review and consideration for Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP) funding. Matching funds must be committed and documented in the local jurisdiction's budget prior to approval of TEP funding. The TEP application requires evidence that preliminary design has been completed and that the local jurisdiction has approved funding for the project. Projects must be advertised for construction within 18 months of the letter notifying the sponsor that funding has been awarded or the funds may be withdrawn.

PROJECT COST AND SCHEDULE

The total project cost is estimated at $5,844,000. The cost estimate for design and construction of the project is $5,551,000, exclusive of the $333,000 that was previously appropriated for facility planning. The design cost is estimated at $675,000, the construction cost is estimated at $4,486,000, and costs for construction management, inspection, and material testing are estimated at $350,000. The Transportation Enhancement Program can fund up to 50% of the cost of construction, therefore, $2,243,000 will be requested in TEP funding. The expenditure schedule for design and construction is shown in the following table:

(all costs 1,000's of dollars)

	TOTAL	FY04	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY 08
Soft Costs- Design and Construction Supervision						
Design						
Consultant Contract for Design Services	535					
SHA Review Cost	40					
Staff Chargebacks: Oversight of Design	100					
Subtotal- Design	675	0	300	250	125	
Construction Supervision						
Consultant Contract for Construction Management, Inspection, Material Testing, and Geotechnical Testing	250					
Staff Chargebacks: Oversight of Construction	100					
Subtotal- Construction Management & Inspection	350	0	0	0	200	150
Subtotal - Soft Costs	**1025**	**0**	**300**	**250**	**325**	**150**
Hard Costs- Site Improvements and Utilities						
Cost of Bridge and Trail	4486					
Subtotal- Hard Costs	**4486**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**3140**	**1346**
TOTAL Design and Construction Cost	**5511**	**0**	**300**	**250**	**3465**	**1496**

The schedule for the project is as follows:

- Begin Design — July 2004 (FY 05)
- Complete Design / Advertise for Bids — December 2005 (FY 06)
- Begin Construction — July 2006 (FY 07)
- Complete Construction — September 2007 (FY 08)

This schedule allows an eighteen-month period to design the project, obtain all regulatory approvals, and advertise the project for construction bids. A six-month period is allowed to receive bids, select a contractor, and award a contract. Fifteen months is allowed to complete construction, resulting in a project completion in September of 2007.

CONCLUSION

Staff recommends approval of the facility plan and submission of a CIP amendment for design and construction funding.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Vicinity Map
2. Recommended Alternative (Alternate No. 5)
3. Community Correspondence
4. Letters in support of the project
5. Facility Plan Technical Report
6. Public Art and Urban Design Opportunities for the bridge
7. Project Description Form (PDF)