



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB  
ITEM NO. 2  
4-14-05

April 8, 2005

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Jeffrey Zyontz, Chief  
Countywide Planning Division

Daniel Hardy, Supervisor *DKH*  
Transportation Planning

**FROM:** Alex Hekimian: 301-495-4525, for the Department of Park and Planning *AA*

**SUBJECT:** Mandatory Referral No. 05801-DPW&T-1: White Oak Transit Center Lockwood Drive at New Hampshire Avenue (CIP No. 509337)

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

Approve transmittal of the following recommendations to the Montgomery County Council and the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT):

1. Move the eastern set of bus shelters to an area east of the shopping center driveway and adjacent to the residential development.
2. Increase the width of the sidewalks to eight feet by eliminating the proposed four-foot-wide median islands and reducing the roadway width by the same amount.
3. Construct the sidewalk for a distance of about 100 feet west of the shopping center driveway at the east end of the project, so that it is offset a minimum of six feet from the curb and reconstruct the sidewalk immediately east of the driveway to match it, moving the crossing point away from the gutter line. On the opposite side of the street, at the driveway to a townhouse development, reconstruct the sidewalk to have a similar offset from the curb.
4. Implement the following related improvements.
  - a) Ensure that the light levels along Lockwood Drive will meet the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America standards.

- b) Provide advance signing to alert drivers that they are entering the transit center.
- c) Provide a surface treatment for the proposed retaining walls that matches those recently constructed by SHA for the New Hampshire Avenue highway improvement project. Provide a similar treatment for the median islands if they are kept in the plan. Use conifers and other plantings on the reconstructed slope to screen the back of the shopping center from view.
- d) Where possible, consider building the retaining walls at a somewhat lower height that would be suitable for sitting.
- e) If the eastern set of bus shelters is not relocated, provide a sidewalk connection from Lockwood Drive to the shopping center along the western edge of the driveway that leads into the eastern end of the shopping center.

## **BACKGROUND**

One of the recommendations in the 1997 White Oak Master Plan is to investigate the feasibility of a transit center at the White Oak Shopping Center, which is located at the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue (MD 650) and Lockwood Drive. In response to that recommendation, DPWT performed a planning study, which was completed in August 2002. With assistance from a transportation consultant, the DPWT staff met periodically during the course of the study with an interagency Project Review Team, which provided technical input and advice, and a Citizens Advisory Committee, which provided community feedback. That study identified the purpose and need for a transit center in the White Oak area, evaluated various potential sites inside as well as outside the shopping center, analyzed bus operations needs, and eventually selected a preferred site located adjacent to the shopping center, although the scope of the improvements is much less than originally anticipated.

Staff recognizes that the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) is located about one-third of a mile from this Transit Center. DPWT indicates that FDA employees would make only incidental use of this Transit Center due to the somewhat lengthy walking distance to the FDA site and to separate bus stop enhancements anticipated within the FDA site.

The planning study produced concept designs that DPWT subsequently utilized to advance the project to the current 30% preliminary design level. At this stage, the proposed project would be a candidate for County funding as an FY 2006 Capital Improvement Project. Therefore, comments from the Planning Board to the County Council regarding this project would be timely in terms of the upcoming County FY 2006 budget discussions.

## **DISCUSSION**

Staff agrees that an improved center for bus passengers is needed in the vicinity of the intersection of Lockwood Drive and New Hampshire Avenue in the White Oak area. Staff of the Community-Based Planning Division supports this project, which is consistent with the recommendations in the 1997 White Oak Master Plan. Environmental Planning staff also supports this project and has approved this project's Natural Resource Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation application. A Forest Conservation Plan exemption has been issued for this site.

because the proposal modifies an existing developed property. This property is not subject to a Tree Save Plan because no specimen or significant trees are affected by the proposal, and the proposal satisfies environmental guidelines and water quality considerations.

Buses are heavily used in the area, which contains a large shopping center and many multi-family residential buildings. A recommendation on page 40 of the White Oak Master Plan recognized the importance of a new transit center for the area:

“Investigate the feasibility of a transit center in the White Oak Shopping Center. A transit center provides convenient access to bus routes and other transit for nearby residents, employees, and shoppers, thus forming part of Montgomery County’s strategy to provide opportunities to use transit. The White Oak Shopping Center offers substantial potential for such a facility, as it would provide convenient transfers between routes on US 29 and New Hampshire Avenue. Use of the center would also increase with major transit improvements along US 29. Waiting areas, commuter parking, and other amenities could be included, depending on the scale of the project. Special design treatments such as special paving and lighting, increased landscaping, benches, and other amenities to encourage use should also be considered.”

DPWT did study the feasibility of a transit center in the White Oak area, as recommended in the Master Plan. While DPWT found in its planning study that it would not be feasible to place the transit center within the White Oak Shopping Center, the proposed site along Lockwood Drive is a good alternative. DPWT proposes to provide enhancements to bus stops at two current bus stop locations on Lockwood Drive. DPWT’s description of the project is shown in Exhibit 1, and a plan view is shown in Exhibit 2. In essence, DPWT proposes to construct new bus shelters at the eastern and western ends of the project on Lockwood Drive, with some street furniture, landscaping and three-inch raised roadway sections where the bus pads are located to help slow vehicular traffic. In Exhibit 3, the location of the western set of shelters is shown as red square “A” and the eastern set of shelters as red square “B.”

In the spirit of improving the proposed plan for the center, staff is making a number of recommendations. These recommendations are described in additional detail below.

**1. Move the eastern set of bus shelters to an area east of the shopping center entrance.**

The most substantial staff recommendation is to move the eastern set of bus shelters and associated raised bus pads in the project about 400 feet, from just west of the driveway entrance to the shopping center to just east of that driveway, shown as red square “C” in Exhibit 3. DPWT’s current proposal locates the eastern set of shelters only about a half-block away from the western set of shelters on Lockwood Drive. Since all buses would stop at both sets of shelters, it appears to be inefficient and unnecessary for buses to stop at locations so close to each other. More important, though, is that the proposed eastern bus shelter location is adjacent to the back side of the shopping center -- an inconvenient location for people who want access to the shops in the center and an invitation for pedestrians to cross mid-block to the businesses that are most accessible -- those that are on the opposite side of Lockwood Drive. Having bus shelters adjacent to the backside of the shopping center also means that passengers waiting for buses will be subjected to a very unattractive view, noise, and possible odors from the many dumpsters that

are used near the loading areas of the shopping center (see Exhibit 4). The back side of the shopping center property also suffers from pools of stagnant, standing water, a narrow sidewalk that is at the curb line with no buffer from the road, and multiple worn paths from the bus stop area to the east end of the shopping center.

Staff believes that moving the eastern set of shelters closer to the nearby residential complexes would place the bus stop at a much more convenient location for the residents as well as for shoppers. As seen in Exhibit 5, this area is much more attractive and the sidewalk is well offset from the road. There is a landscape panel that could easily accept more street trees, and there is a green area behind the sidewalk that could accept additional landscaping to screen the bus stops from the adjacent apartments and screen the apartment parking lot from the road. Also, moving the bus stop to this location could make it easier to channel people to a crosswalk at the shopping center entrance, rather than have them filter across Lockwood Drive. An added benefit is that moving the bus stop would avoid the cost of two of the three proposed retaining walls in the plan.

**2. Eliminate the proposed four-foot-wide median islands in favor of reducing the roadway width by the same amount and increasing the width of the sidewalks to eight feet.**

The proposal's minor widening of the sidewalks to six feet and attaching them to the curb barely meet AASHTO minimums for any type of roadway. Given that Lockwood Drive is classified as an arterial, however, the recommended pedestrian accommodation is greater. While landscaped buffers to separate the sidewalk from the roadway are preferred, the AASHTO Guide for the Planning, Design, and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities (2004) recommends that eight- to ten-foot sidewalks be provided along arterials where they must be flush against the curb.

Since much of the existing curbing in this area appears to be in poor condition and require replacement, widening the sidewalks to eight feet and replacing the curbs would be a welcome improvement. By so doing, Lockwood Drive would be about four feet narrower and easier for people to cross at one time. In staff's judgment, narrowing Lockwood Drive by four feet rather than installing a four-foot median would best serve pedestrian safety at this location.

**3. For a distance of about 100 feet west of the driveway, DPWT should construct the sidewalk so that it is offset a minimum of six feet from the curb and reconstruct the sidewalk immediately east of the driveway to match it, moving the crossing point away from the gutter line. On the opposite side of the street, at the driveway to a townhouse development, DPWT should reconstruct the sidewalk to have a similar offset from the curb.**

The AASHTO Guide referenced above recommends that five- to six-foot buffers be provided between the sidewalks and the street along an arterial. Because of the space constraints in this area, this is difficult to meet for much of the project length, but this can be accomplished at the eastern shopping center driveway, taking advantage of the opportunity to improve the safety and comfort of pedestrians by offsetting the sidewalks from the street.

Offsetting the sidewalk from the curb would allow the sidewalk to meet ADA Best Practices since it would allow wheelchair users to travel outside the driveway slope. A striped crosswalk or concrete apron should be provided between the sidewalks on either side of Lockwood Drive to

channel pedestrian movements and give drivers the best notice as to where they can expect to see pedestrians crossing the roadway.

#### **4. Implement related improvements.**

Staff's additional recommended improvements are meant to assure that the project's design elements provide proper lighting and signing, safe and convenient pedestrian access, and an attractive facility for bus customers and the surrounding neighborhood.

As of the writing of this memorandum, DPWT staff was open to making changes to the plan along the lines of our staff's recommendations, except for moving the location for the eastern set of shelters. DPWT's current position on the bus shelter locations follows:

The Department of Public Works and Transportation, Transit Division, would like the two designated bus shelters to remain at the specified location. The common (Routes Z6, Z8, K6, Ride On 10) transit focal point should be in close proximity to the commercial activity. We acknowledge that the existing location has aesthetic deficiencies; however, rather than relocate the bus shelter, we see an opportunity to improve this location. We would, however, recommend an additional stop/shelter placed in front of the apartments on Lockwood for the Z6, Z8 and Route 10. Our existing contractor, Clear Channel, would install the additional shelter.

We understand that the MNCPPC alternative proposal does not address the aesthetic deficiencies and does not provide transferring between all routes. To relocate the bus shelters in front of the apartments located on Lockwood Drive would change travel patterns and force passengers using the Metrobus K6 to create an undesirable bus stop location at the rear entrance of the White Oak Shopping Center. This would involve significant improvements to private property.

Our staff appreciates DPWT's willingness to add a third set of bus shelters closer to the apartments at the east end of the project; however, DPWT's preference of keeping the project's proposed eastern set of bus shelters directly behind the shopping center does not solve the previously cited problems associated with that location. We do not see a perceived problem with transfers among bus routes because the bus stop at the western set of bus shelters could easily serve that purpose. As for residents who ride on the Metrobus K6 route, the existing bus stop within the shopping center is the same distance away and just as accessible by bus customers from the residential complexes as is the eastern bus stop on the back side of the shopping center on Lockwood Drive. Everything considered, our staff feels that the advantages of moving the eastern set of bus shelters away from the back side of the shopping center far outweigh any perceived disadvantages.

AH:kcw  
Attachments