

June 17, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Richard Hawthorne, Chief *RCH*
Transportation Planning
Countywide Planning Division

Glenn Kreger, Silver Spring/Takoma Park Team Leader *GK*
Community-Based Planning Division

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Transportation Planning
Countywide Planning Division

FROM: David Paine, Senior Planner (301) 495-2191 *DP*
Transportation Planning
Countywide Planning Division

SUBJECT: Ripley District Phase I Transportation Facility Planning Study
Project Prospectus Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION: Transmit the following comments to the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT):

1. The Ripley District Facility Planning Study should proceed to Phase II of the Facility Planning process to develop a detailed design for the completion of the Recommended Alternative for the entire length of Ripley Street (Georgia Avenue to Bonifant Street).
2. M-NCPPC will retain and apply the Recommended Alternative design elements for the Dixon Avenue and Silver Spring Avenue elements of the Facility Planning Study for subsequent development application requests. These elements of the Phase I Study should not proceed to Phase II.

3. At the beginning of the Phase II Facility Planning Study, DPWT should obtain staff approval for a Natural Resource Inventory and Forest Stand Delineation (NRI/FSD) and a Forest Conservation Plan (FCP). It is expected that these documents will demonstrate no impacts that need to be mitigated.

PURPOSE OF THIS BRIEFING

The Purpose of this briefing is to present findings of the Draft Project Prospectus of the Ripley District Phase I Facility Plan Study to the Montgomery County Planning Board and to solicit comments. These comments will be considered by DPWT in preparation of the Final Project Prospectus. The Ripley District study area is shown in Figure 1.

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

The Recommended Alternative for infrastructure and roadway improvement in the Ripley District of Silver Spring Central Business District (CBD) was developed based on the Sector Plan vision and objectives, public comment, and study team review. The recommendations take into consideration existing and planned development, as well as current public agency transportation projects in the study area.

The Recommended Alternative, shown in Figure 2, completes the roadway network for the Ripley District as described in the *February 2000 Approved and Adopted Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan*:

- Dixon Avenue is extended as a four-lane north-south roadway including a shared-use path within an 80-foot right-of-way between Bonifant Street and an extension of Silver Spring Avenue.
- Silver Spring Avenue connects Dixon Avenue to Georgia Avenue as a four-lane east-west roadway including continuation of the shared-use path within an 80-foot right-of-way.
- Ripley Street is to be improved to meet design standards for a two-lane east-west roadway connecting the Silver Spring Transit Center to Georgia Avenue within a 70-foot right-of-way.
- All three roadways described above are classified as Business Streets and would incorporate streetscape improvements in accordance with the Silver Spring Streetscape technical manual (April 1992).

Further background and context is included in Attachment A, the June 2, 2005, memo from Glenn Kreger in the Community-Based Planning Division.

SECTOR PLAN CONSISTENCY

The Ripley District Facility Plan proposed by DPWT is consistent with the recommendations in the *February 2000 Approved and Adopted Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan*, including the specific recommendations on pages 106, 107 and 110, of the Sector Plan. The project would provide a "new interconnected street system" per the Sector Plan to:

- Provide the circulation system needed to support intense redevelopment in the designated Ripley Revitalization Area,
- Create an urban street grid that is configured to encourage assembly of properties with optimum development potential,
- Provide connectivity between the new projects in the Ripley District and the Silver Spring Transit Center, and
- Provide a secondary access to the Silver Spring Transit Center and its associated joint development.

The Ripley District is zoned CBD-2 with the Ripley/South Silver Spring Overlay Zone to encourage redevelopment.

Staff finds that the Recommended Alternative for the Ripley District is consistent with the intent of the Sector Plan.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT PROSPECTUS STUDY FINDINGS

Benefits

The Recommended Alternative addresses the transportation, pedestrian, and bicycle disconnects within the Ripley District by providing improved roads with on-street parking, bicycle facilities, wide sidewalks, and streetscape befitting a CBD area adjacent to Metro. Infrastructure improvements will support redevelopment identified in the Sector Plan. The roadway improvements will enhance circulation and increase access within the Ripley District, and improve existing and future traffic operations to support economic development. The extension of Ripley Street to Bonifant Street will facilitate access to and from the future Silver Spring Transit Center; while the extension of Dixon Avenue and the improvement of Silver Spring Avenue will help support approved private development.

Impacts

The Project Prospectus identifies socioeconomic impacts of the Recommended Alternative, including impacts to eight buildings and right of way or easement impacts to a total of twelve properties. Businesses to be affected include three auto body shops, a law office, a restaurant, and shoe repair shop. Community facilities that would be affected include:

- the Bethel World Outreach Fellowship Hall,
- County facilities located at Progress Place (Shepherd's Table, Visions and Community Clinic, Inc.),
- Pyramid Atlantic, a non-profit arts center that relocated to their current site in 2003,
- Public parking Garage #55 and Lot #20

A more thorough evaluation of impacts and mitigation strategies will be conducted during the Phase II study.

The Recommended Alternative does not preclude future incorporation of either the Bi-county Transitway or the Metropolitan Branch Trail. One option for the Bi-County Transitway would include a light-rail alignment depressed beneath the extension of Silver Spring Avenue. The selected alternative for the Bi-County Transitway may affect the feasibility of the Metropolitan Branch Trail in its planned alignment. Should the Metropolitan Branch Trail not be incorporated adjacent to the CSX tracks for whatever reason, the shared-use path incorporated in the Dixon Avenue design would serve functionally as the Metropolitan Branch Trail.

No wetlands, forests, rare, threatened or endangered species are located within the study area. DPWT will still need to document this finding through submission of a NRI/FSD and a FCP during Phase II activities.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Accommodations

The Recommended Alternative includes location and orientation of a shared-use path along Dixon Avenue and Silver Spring Avenue described in the Sector Plan that will provide bicycle access to the core of Ripley District when implemented by developers. The approved project plan for the KSI project on Ripley Street provides for a segment of this path.

The sidewalks proposed in the Ripley District will provide access to adjacent properties, but also provide good alternatives to the more heavily traveled roads of Bonifant Street and Georgia Avenue. The crosswalk across Georgia Avenue at Silver Spring Avenue would be realigned to be perpendicular to the flow of traffic, reducing the length of the crosswalk and improving safety for pedestrians. Connecting Ripley Street to Bonifant Street and the Silver Spring Transit Center will also increase pedestrian access to and from Ripley District.

Coordination Regarding Potential Historic Resources

Two sites in the study area that are on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation, the Silver Spring Train Station Complex Site [#36/15 (1945)] and the Silver Spring Post Office Site [#36/11 (1936)], are not impacted by proposed improvements.

The vacant building at 8222-26 Georgia Avenue, currently owned by Carlos Scandiffio, would be impacted by the Recommended Alternative for Ripley Street. This building is not currently identified as National Register Eligible (NRE) by the County or the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT). The Silver Spring Historical Society, however, has stated its intent to nominate the building as a historic resource, as indicated in Attachment B. A letter supporting the consideration from the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission is also included as Attachment C, which asks that design of the improvements to Ripley Street be studied to see if the building can be retained.

Montgomery Preservation, Incorporated (MPI) supports preserving both the buildings at 8222-26 Georgia Avenue, and the Pyramid Atlantic site at 8230 Georgia Avenue to reflect the historic backdrop of Silver Spring. MPI suggests that these buildings have the potential to be part of a commercial historic district, and that a one-way street network proposal might facilitate building preservation, as indicated in Attachment D.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Recognizing concerns regarding existing development, the Phase I study evaluated several alternatives, generally focused on the objective of minimizing impacts on existing development. The DPWT study team presented three alternatives to the public:

- Concept A included maintenance of the existing centerline for the portion of Silver Spring Avenue west of Georgia Avenue.
- Concept B included a southerly shift of both Ripley Street and Silver Spring Avenue to avoid impacts to properties along the north side of both streets, including Pyramid Atlantic north of Ripley Street and Yang's Café north of Silver Spring Avenue.
- Concept C included a northerly shift of Silver Spring Avenue extended to match the roadway centerline on the east side of Georgia Avenue and minimize impacts to the Dor-Ne Corset Shop on the south side of the roadway. In Concept C, the Ripley Street typical section was developed to match the Ripley Street section established by the KSI project plan approved by the Planning Board in July 2004.

The Recommended Alternative is most consistent with Concept C, but locates the master planned shared-use path on the south side of Silver Spring Avenue to maximize proposed open space use in the northeast quadrant of the Silver Spring Avenue intersection with Dixon Avenue as well as to facilitate opportunities for Dixon Avenue bike path connections to the Metropolitan Branch Trail.

The DPWT study team considered but dropped other alternatives prior to the public meeting, including:

- Connecting the extensions of Dixon Avenue and Silver Spring Avenue with a curvilinear, or "continuous curve" alignment rather than a right-angle intersection, and
- Developing a one-way street network
- Developing Ripley Street as a pedestrian promenade

The continuous curve alignment was dropped because it was inconsistent with the Sector Plan recommendations to develop a grid street pattern in the Ripley District to support orderly assembly of properties with maximum redevelopment potential. Similarly, the one-way street network and pedestrian promenade options were not pursued further because they do not support the Sector Plan goals of enhancing property accessibility and redevelopment potential in the Ripley District, and they would limit transit route options. The one-way street network would not be able to avoid property impacts.

Recent public interest has been focused on the 300-foot long block of Ripley Street between Dixon Avenue and Georgia Avenue. The distance between the Pyramid Atlantic building on the north side of the street and 8222-26 Georgia Avenue on the south side of the street is approximately 30 feet, less than half of the 70-foot wide right-of-way recommended in the 1993 and 2000 Sector Plans.

DPWT is currently investigating a reduced cross-section for this block of Ripley Street (55 feet versus 70 feet) that could avoid one, but not both, of the buildings on either side of the street. Such a section could potentially be implemented in phases so that limited roadway and sidewalk improvements could be implemented in the near term (perhaps called "Phase A") with the ultimate cross-section (or "Phase B") postponed until redevelopment occurs. Staff understands that the Phase A cross-section would include a four-foot wide sidewalk directly adjacent to the curb and therefore no landscaping or buffer area from moving traffic, which would be a substandard and undesirable solution.

Staff recognizes the interest in preserving the characteristics of the Ripley District described in the attached testimony. The approved and adopted Sector Plan, however, supports redevelopment of the Ripley District to maximize smart-growth opportunities near the Silver Spring Transit Center; a multi-modal hub that provides the greatest level of transit accessibility in Montgomery County.

Staff finds that the land use and transportation objectives in the Ripley District are inextricably linked, and the network of roadways, bike paths, and sidewalks are developed to serve the orderly redevelopment of the Ripley District. Staff has identified two alternative approaches for consideration by the Planning Board:

- Reevaluation of the overall Sector Plan concept for the Ripley District, converting the emphasis from redevelopment to preservation, as suggested by MPI, or
- Confirmation of the Sector Plan guidance to support Ripley District redevelopment through both the approval of private developments and continuing public sector investment

Staff recommends that the Planning Board pursue the second alternative approach and continue to support the redevelopment of the Ripley District as recommended in the Sector Plan.

PHASING

The Draft Project Prospectus recommends that only the 300-foot long section of Ripley Street from Dixon Avenue to Georgia Avenue proceed forward to Phase II and development of 35% design plans. The remaining portions of the Ripley District Recommended Alternative would be designed and constructed by the private sector as development proposals are submitted for approval.

Staff recommends the entire length of Ripley Street, between the Silver Spring Transit Center and Georgia Avenue, proceed to Phase II at this time. Developing the Phase II design for the entire length of Ripley Street would facilitate:

- Control of design schedule for coordination with the Silver Spring Transit Center.
- Establishment of horizontal and vertical alignment.
- Construction phasing decisions to be made at the completion of Phase II design.

During Phase II DPWT will develop additional details regarding the Ripley Street implementation schedule, including coordination with the Silver Spring Transit Center and any necessary right-of-way acquisition. Phased implementation opportunities can be considered at the end of Phase II.

Staff concurs with DPWT that the remaining Dixon Avenue and Silver Spring Avenue improvements do not need to proceed to Phase II facility planning. These improvements south of Ripley Street are more likely to be implemented as part of as-yet undefined development proposals and are less important for Silver Spring Transit Center access. The Phase I recommendations for Dixon and Silver Spring Avenues would stand as guidance for developers as they then come in for required improvements.

RELATED PLANNING BOARD ACTIONS

The Ripley District study is designed to facilitate access to several ongoing private and public investments in the Silver Spring CBD as noted on Figure 2. Prior Planning Board actions include the following:

- Silver Spring Transit Center (Mandatory Referral No. 04106-MC-1, March 10, 2005; Mandatory Referral No. 99105-F&S-1 - Silver Spring Transit Center, Phase II, Jan 6, 2000; and 02110-DPWT-1).
- Silver Spring Fire Station and Police Substation (Mandatory Referral No. 02110-DPW&T-1, March 6, 2003).
- Ripley Street Condominiums, KSI (Project Plan Review No. 9-04006, Ripley Street, 1.7 ac; 336 du with 42 MPDUs). Approved July 29, 2004.
- Purple Line (Bi-County Transitway Study): Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study (ARDS), September 30, 2004.
- Metropolitan Branch Trail. DPWT Phase I Study, Project 509337. Shared use trail along the CSX RR corridor from Silver Spring Transit Center to Montgomery County College campus in Takoma Park. Planning Board Hearing projected for September 2005.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

A public meeting was held for the project at Montgomery Regional Office on October 26, 2004, to introduce the project alternatives, process, schedule, background, and receive community input and answer questions. A second public meeting was held for potentially impacted property owners on February 18, 2005, at the Silver Spring Regional Center.

DP/gw
Attachments

mno to mcpcb re Ripley District Phase I

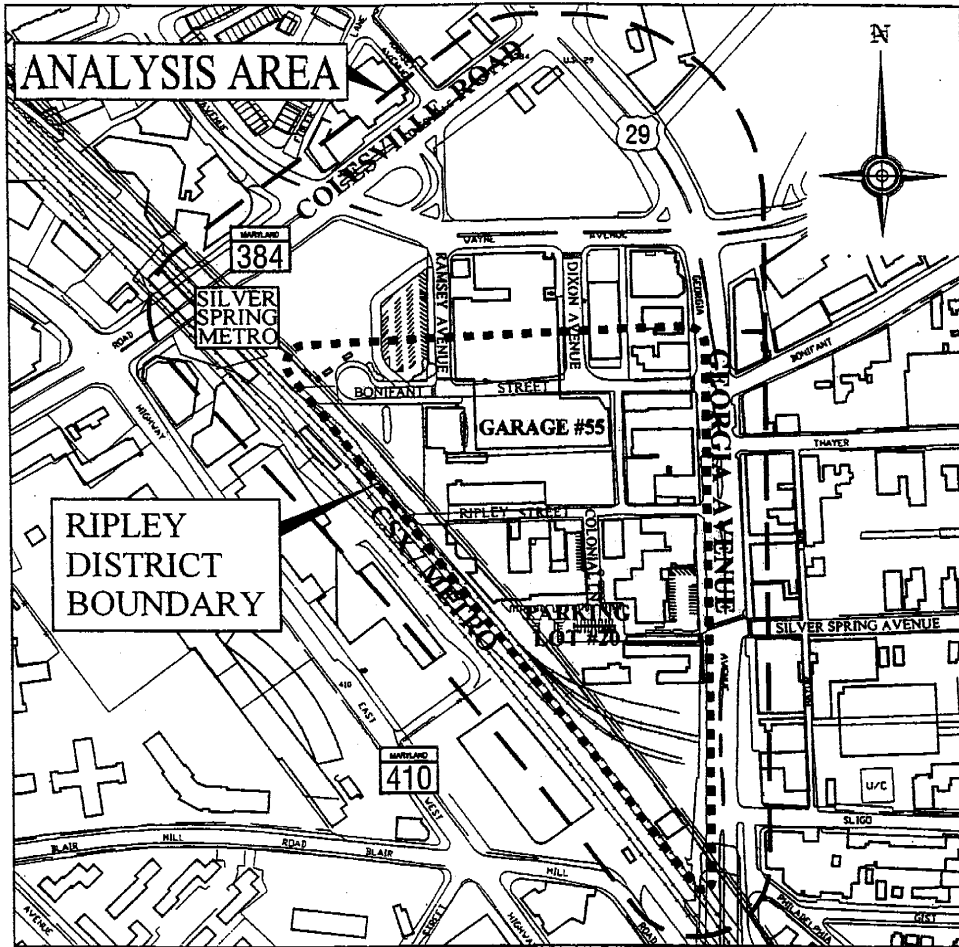
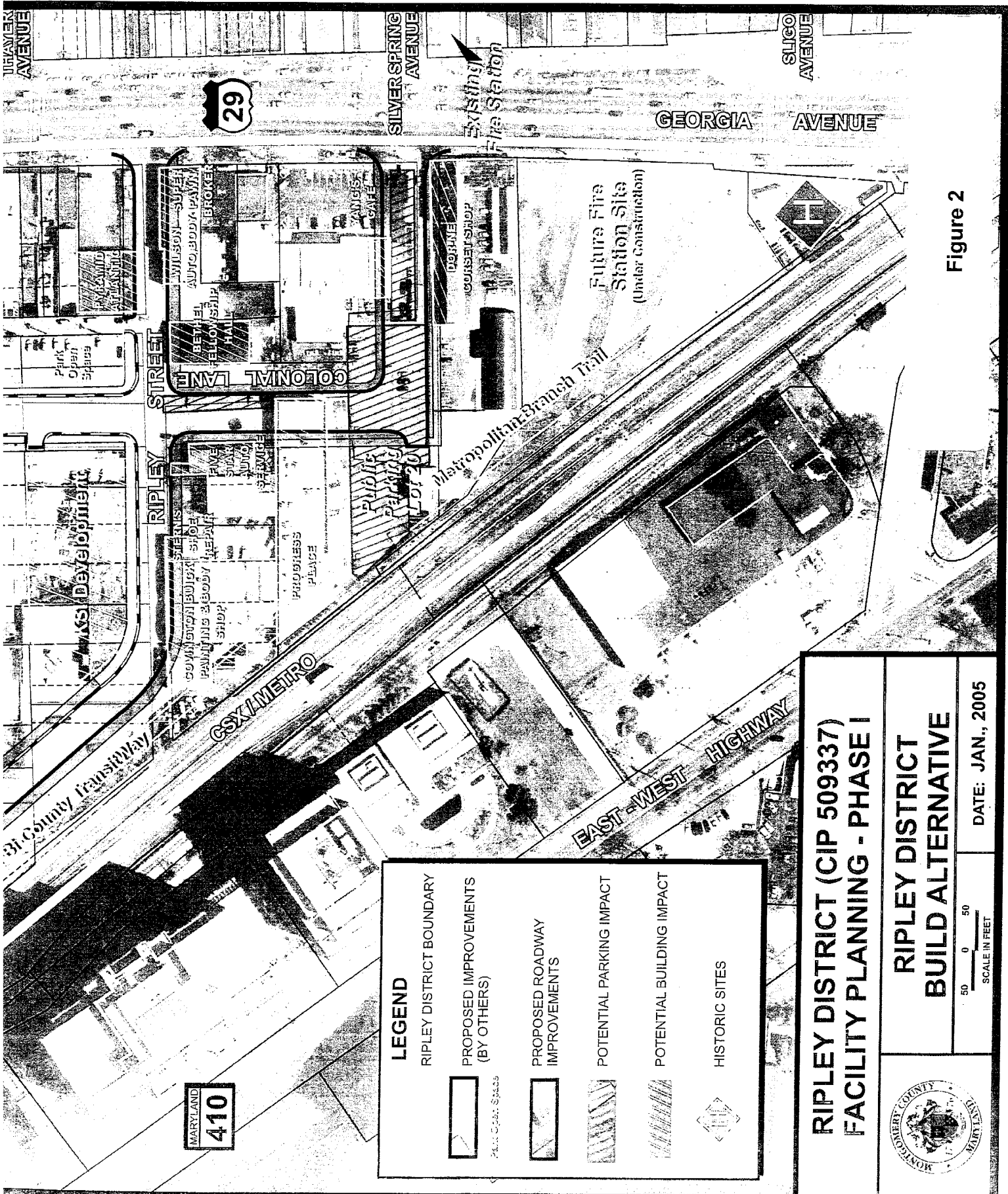


Figure 1

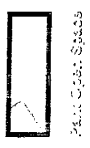


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MARYLAND
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LEGEND

RIPLEY DISTRICT BOUNDARY



PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS
(BY OTHERS)



PROPOSED ROADWAY
IMPROVEMENTS



POTENTIAL PARKING IMPACT

POTENTIAL BUILDING IMPACT



HISTORIC SITES

**RIPLEY DISTRICT (CIP 509337)
FACILITY PLANNING - PHASE I
BUILD ALTERNATIVE**



50 0 50
SCALE IN FEET

DATE: JAN., 2005

Figure 2

TYPICAL SECTIONS

