

M-NCPPC



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL  
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION


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February 16, 2006

MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Rose Krasnow, Chief, Development Review Division   
John Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning 

**FROM:** Joel A. Gallihue, AICP (301) 495-2119   
Development Review Division (Long Branch Task Force Designee)

**SUBJECT:** Long Branch Pedestrian Linkage Study

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**RECOMMENDATION:** Discussion with the DHCA

**PROJECT SUMMARY**

This briefing follows two years of work by the Long Branch Task Force, a group appointed the County Executive and County Council to make an in-depth examination of the unique needs of the Long Branch community and make recommendations. The Task Force was a product of the East Silver Spring Master Plan, which supported its creation to address a full range of issues, including neighborhood improvement programs like the Pedestrian Linkage Study. The Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) is the lead agency on this project. The M-NCPPC has participated throughout the process and continues to coordinate with the DHCA for implementation. While the Task Force has made many recommendations throughout the area, one pedestrian connectivity objective involves the Long Branch Local Park. The DHCA proposes to design and implement improvements to an existing link between the Community Center and the Library for better pedestrian safety and convenience. Design for the link is being studied and would come back to the Planning Board as a Mandatory Referral and a Park Development Permit. The purpose of this session is to give the Planning Board a preliminary introduction to the concept, and to identify the parties involved in implementation.

## Long Branch Task Force

County Executive Douglas M. Duncan and the County Council implemented the recommendations of the 2000 East Silver Spring Master Plan in 2003 when they appointed the Long Branch Task Force. The Task Force consisted of 26 voting members and 11 ex officio members<sup>1</sup> for a term concluding May 31, 2005. The DHCA provided primary staff support. The DHCA also engaged consultants to provide detailed information to the Task Force. The Task Force organized themselves into the following issue areas:

1. Economic and Commercial Development
2. Housing
3. Youth, Schools, Childcare and Enrichment
4. Safety (Personal Security and Pedestrian Safety)

These groups worked intensively in a process that included relevant staff and ex-officio members. The groups reported to the larger Task Force where various group recommendations were prioritized and agreed upon as overall task force recommendations. These recommendations were documented in three annual reports.

## Pedestrian Linkages Study

Monitoring the discussions of the Safety work group, the DHCA determined that technical assistance was necessary, and they engaged a consultant to evaluate pedestrian connectivity in the area. The consultant developed a vision for pedestrian linkages for the area that responded to comments from the committee and from observations made in the field. The vision identified three important pedestrian pathways in the area:

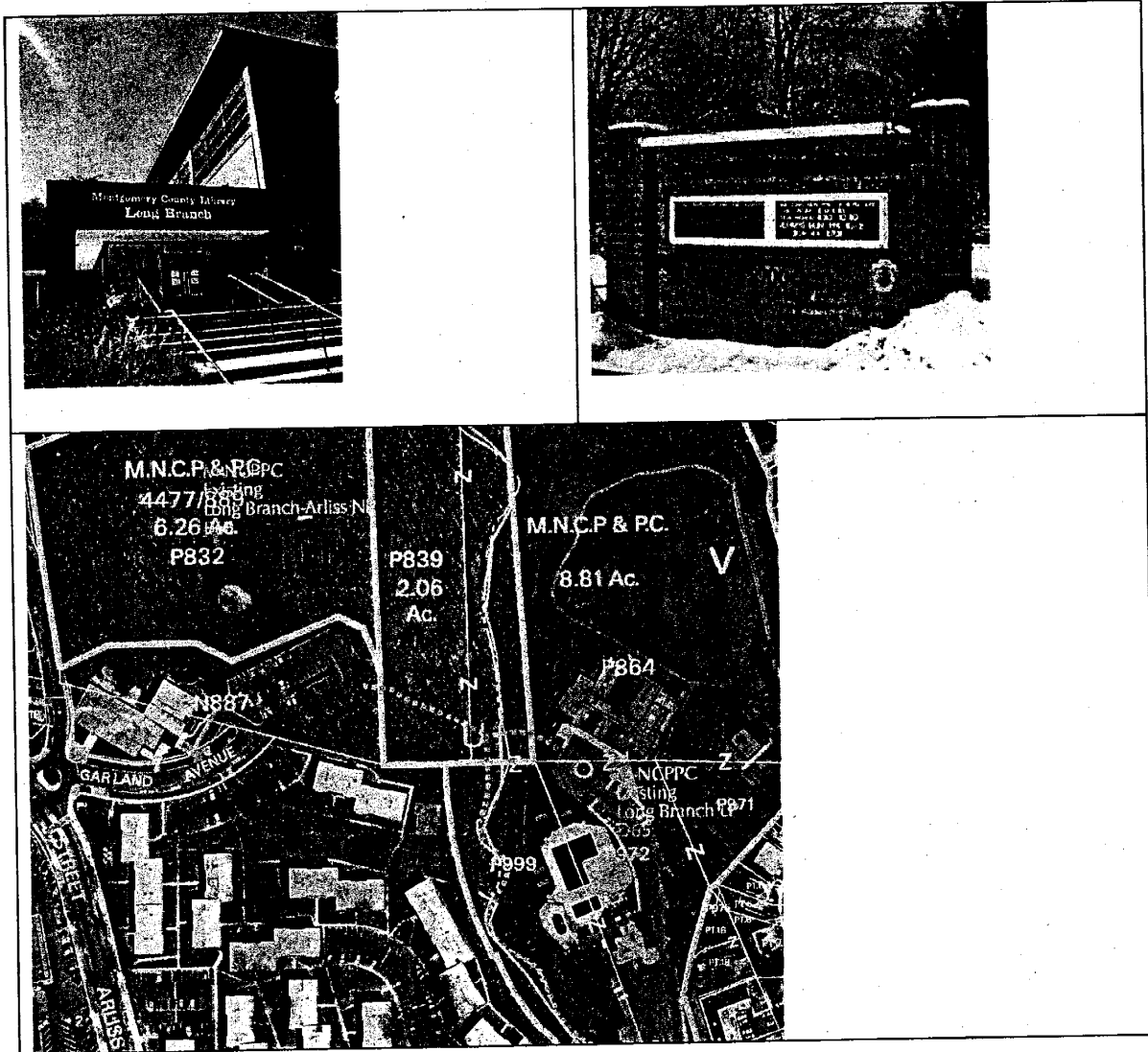
1. *Business Walk*: Improvement to Piney Branch Road (MD 320) sidewalks with streetscape designs and unifying building façades.
2. *Village Walk*: A walk that starts at Flower Avenue and continues through the parking lot of the supermarket, on to the Library plaza and parking lot, down through the Long Branch Local Park to the Long Branch Community Center's plaza.
3. *Nature Walk*: Enhancements of the current hiker-biker trail with a pedestrian crossing on Piney Branch to the Community Center, which can then connect with the Village Walk and can be extended north and west.

Many of the consultant's suggestions clearly resonate with recommendations found in the East Silver Spring Master Plan, and objectives cited even earlier in the 1998 Long Branch Bond Bill.<sup>2</sup> Staff recommended to the consultant to first start with projects that are located on property controlled by Montgomery County agencies or the M-NCPPC and then later proceed to projects that involve the Maryland State Highway Administration or private property interests. By working with agencies that had a stake in the Task Force, this strategy positions the first phase for success and provides momentum for later phases that may be more complex. This elevated the priority of the segment of the "Village Walk" that is in Long Branch Local Park.

<sup>1</sup> M-NCPPC provided both a planning and a police ex-officio staff member.

<sup>2</sup> A match of state and local funds provided \$400,000 towards improved lighting and streetscape in the Flower-Arliss Commercial Area vicinity.

The Village Walk concept seeks to reinforce the relationship between the commercial area, library, community center, and neighborhood for improved pedestrian safety and convenience. The western section between Flower Avenue and Arliss Street will occur through private development, as addressed in the Urban Land Institute study. The eastern section is on public property including the library, the park and the community center.



The DHCA has identified funding for design and construction of this section. Funding would be obtained by the DHCA and would not be a part of the regular park budget. The DHCA understands they must work through the park development permit process on a formal design. Park Design and Development has been involved in the preliminary discussions.

Staff believes that there is a good rationale for reinforcing the pedestrian spine<sup>3</sup> connecting the community facilities of the Long Branch Library, the Long Branch Recreation Center and the Long Branch Pool. The "peoples choice" trails may become less desirable if this spine offers convenience, a perception of safety, and conveys a unifying theme as the consultant's analysis concluded.

**Master Plan** – Long Branch is located within the area of the Approved and Adopted East Silver Spring Master Plan of 2000. The Master Plan gave early consideration of pedestrian linkages. The Master Plan also recommended that the task force be created where the discussion was carried forward to where it is today. Staff finds the potential improvements to be consistent with the recommendations of the East Silver Spring Master Plan and recommends continued coordination with the DHCA for a Mandatory Referral and Park Permit.

**Environment** – The location of this segment involves an existing and proposed stream crossing where mature specimen trees are present. Designs may present challenges typical of projects in a stream valley buffer. Environmental comments have been included in discussions to ensure that the best environmental options are given consideration.

**Additional Review Process** – If the DHCA obtains design funds, a Mandatory Referral and a Park Development Permit would be required.

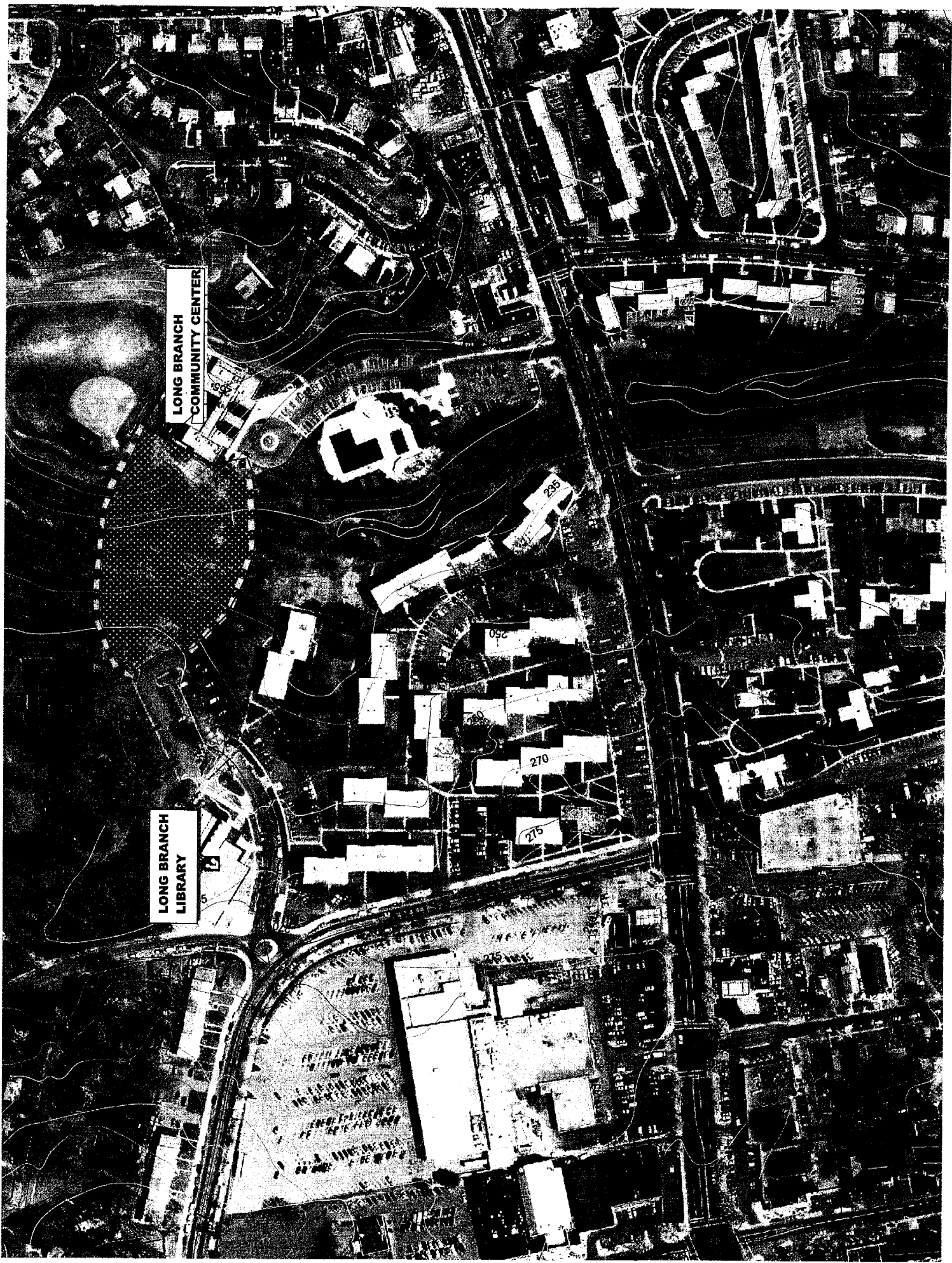
## **CONCLUSION**

Staff believes that the proposed design study is appropriate and should continue. Proceeding would help to implement recommendations made by the Long Branch Task Force. This project will result in an improved path where capital improvements are not currently programmed. Partnership with the DHCA provides resources towards a local park where community reinvestment efforts have identified park improvements out of sequence of the regular cycle of park maintenance and upgrade. The partnership may also provide experience for future opportunities where parkland is in reinvestment areas.

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Attachment

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<sup>3</sup> Staff notes that a separate study by the Urban Land Institute touched on an idea of making this link a full street with vehicular access, but this idea has obvious weaknesses and was not adopted in the Task Force recommendation. The DHCA is not pursuing funding for anything but pedestrian connections for this link.



LONG BRANCH  
COMMUNITY CENTER

LONG BRANCH  
LIBRARY

285

270

215