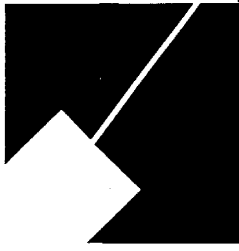


ATTACHMENT # 1

TITLE: October 25, 2004 Letter from Chairman Derick P. Berlage to SHA
Administrator Neil Pedersen, pages 1-3.

M-NCPPC



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

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Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760
301-495-4500, www.mncppc.org

October 25, 2004

Neil Pedersen, Administrator
State Highway Administration
707 North Calvert Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21203-0717

Dear Mr. Pedersen:

I appreciate your staff's participation in the four Planning Board meetings held before the Board on the Intercounty Connector ("ICC") environmental impact statement process over the past months. At each of those meetings, we have stressed the value of both master plan consistency and park resource protection. It is apparent, from your letter of October 13 that you want to have the perspective of M-NCPPC as stewards of both the park system and the planning process for Montgomery County. I hope the following clarifies my viewpoint, which is underscored by the land use processes that guide the development of Montgomery County.

One of the Commission's founding missions in 1927 was to extend the stream valley park system being developed in the District of Columbia. Over time, the Commission has established a robust system of stream valley parks throughout the County. Most streams in the County run from north to south. Any travel going east to west requires crossing stream valleys. Since the Commission's founding, an integration of parkways and highways within and across the agency's park system has always been a necessary component of land use vision for the County.

The County's master plans have, over time, been refined to maintain currency in the integration of transportation and park needs. For nearly 50 years the County's master plans have consistently retained an east-west highway to connect the I-270 and I-95 corridors and serve the suburban ring communities between those corridors. The Intercounty Connector concept has been in the adopted master plan of highways in some form since 1953. Through the master plan adoption process the Montgomery County Council and Montgomery County Planning Board both have long recognized that the ICC would cross park land, dating back to the first iteration of the roadway.

In 1964, M-NCPPC adopted the General Plan (On Wedges and Corridors) that features low density wedge areas along Montgomery County's northern boundary. The Intercounty Connector as earlier identified in the master plan of highways was largely

incorporated into the General Plan, and today's existing ICC right-of-way has been established in coordination with planned land use per the General Plan, recognizing the desire to minimize impacts to the "wedge" areas. To that end the ICC was established to serve the more developed suburban ring communities and was not located in the northern "wedge" area of the County.

The designation of land through parks as a future transportation right-of-way occurs through the process of adopting master plans. The iterative and deliberative master plan development and approval process involves many opportunities for comments and ideas from the public, including formal hearings before both the Planning Board and the County Council. The fact that the ICC crosses parkland was considered throughout the adoption process. Therefore the plans envision a future for that land as a roadway, rather than expecting it to remain as parkland. We also expect to receive compensation for any lost parkland, in a manner that is consistent with state and federal requirements and the current Memorandum of Understanding between M-NCPPC and the Maryland State Highway Administration. The Board has publicly stated its expectation that compensation will include replacement parkland that has significant natural resource value to the park system.

The designation of land through parks as a future transportation right of way has meaning to M-NCPPC. Such land is kept clear of any significant park development. M-NCPPC does not permit private development in master planned rights-of-way, nor does this agency build recreational facilities in these areas. Given that the Commission is instrumental in implementing master plans, to do otherwise would be wasteful of public funds. The master plan designation of such land as right-of-way made their current state an interim use until the construction of the planned roadway.

The fact that M-NCPPC has designated a right-of-way through parkland does not mean that it has abandoned its role as park steward. The master plans are mindful of the natural environment, which is an asset to humans, plants, animals and aquatic resources. The Board has a long track record of protecting the park system with vigor. However, the park system is exactly that – a system – and not simply a collection of parcels. The conversion of particular parkland to a transportation use, when called for in approved master plans and when accompanied by the receipt of suitable replacement parkland, is entirely consistent with this agency's stewardship mission.

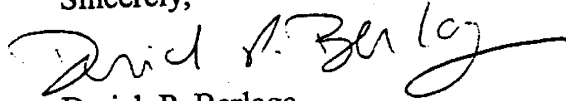
Needless to say, it is also my goal to have a roadway that avoids and minimizes its environmental impacts to the surrounding park. For example, I trust that the Section 4(f) Evaluation will recognize that it is more important to minimize environmental impacts within Northwest Branch Stream Valley Park than to adhere to the specific alignment acquired for the ICC through advanced land acquisition funding. A small deviation such as the "s" curve through Northwest Branch Park is preferable over a major deviation such as corridor 2.

The Board's success as a planning agency is measured by the consistent implementation of long-term planning goals, reflected in the County's master plans. The Commission's

slogan for its recently celebrated 75th anniversary was "Turning Visions into Reality." The use of parkland and land adjacent to parkland to construct a master-planned roadway is consistent with the County's overall land use and transportation vision. The master planned right-of-way reflects a longstanding balance between the need for a roadway and other environmental preservation efforts. The County has been aggressive in recent years in the purchase of additional parkland. As of this writing there are more than 32,200 acres of M-NCPPC parkland, in addition to 12,000 acres of state parkland and 3,100 acres of federal parkland in the County. Montgomery County has a farmland preservation zone containing 91,000 acres (excluding parkland). Since 1993, the County's forest conservation ordinance has placed conservation easements on 6,800 acres of private land. In total, some 47% of the total County land area comes under our green space umbrella. I trust that your focus on a narrow corridor will take into consideration the totality of the Planning Board's efforts in balancing transportation and parkland needs throughout the County. I believe that the County's land use vision has resulted in both a park system and a planning process that is the envy of the nation.

Because the Board and Council have planned for the ICC through a long-term master planning process, I cannot emphasize strongly enough our commitment to seeing the ICC adhere substantially to the master plan alignment. Any alternative alignment would contravene this agency's 40-year old General Plan, as updated and refined over the course of time through subsequent approved and adopted localized master plans, and violate Montgomery County's most fundamental planning principles.

Sincerely,



Derick P. Berlage