

TESTIMONY – CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL/LITTLE FALLS PARKWAY CROSSING
HAROLD PFOHL, ON BEHALF OF
THE CITIZENS COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

JUNE 13, 2019

Jenny Sue Dunner has addressed concerns regarding process involving the public, particularly motorists, and David Kathan addressed issues pertaining to safety. We all share and applaud the goals of Vision Zero. We believe that we have a better solution, one that is safer for bicyclists and better for traffic flow.

My comments relate primarily to traffic and cost issues.

Traffic:

The project design was autonomous to the Parks Department, i.e., independent of County DOT. This absence of context had consequences that are adverse to sound planning. Our understanding is that:

- The plan did not involve coordination with the county master plan for traffic. For example, the Little Falls Parkway/Arlington Road corridor is a primary route to downtown Bethesda and through Bethesda to Old Georgetown Road for many thousands residents.
- The plan did not take into account future traffic as a consequence of the huge growth now allowed (10,000,000 ft.²) in Bethesda, and very substantial growth likely to be underway this fall at Westbard with the redevelopment of the shopping center into both retail and residential usage.

The severe congestion on Wisconsin Avenue through Bethesda results in aggravation, frustration, and lost time for all of us who drive it. By contrast, the combination of Little Falls Parkway and Arlington Road has worked reasonably well. But, the planned crossing proposal imposes a permanent two lane chokepoint on a roadway that is four lanes wide from River Road through Bethesda all the way to Old Georgetown Road. This is in the name of safety when it is not the safest solution as David has pointed out. Furthermore, frustrated drivers coping with chokepoints and associated delays are not safe drivers. See Exhibit 1 below.

I've been repeatedly told by the Parks Dept. that the Parkway is properly a park and should be returned to a primarily park condition. That logic is used to justify lane removal and landscaping of that removed lane for approximately 130 ft. of roadway between the Bethesda public pool and the Arlington Rd./Little Falls Parkway intersection. That rationale is a stretch. There is nothing there whatever that can be enjoyed as a park other than a tiny amount of green space that one will pass by. To utilize the creation of 130 ft. of green space as rationale to impose a chokepoint on a major traffic corridor several miles in length defies common sense.

We recommend replanning the project as shown in Exhibit 2 below.

- The curve from the existing trail to the signalized intersection assures that there is no purpose to pedestrians or bicyclists cutting across the middle of the

road to access the trail on the northeast side. If you want to access the trail it has to be picked up at the signal.

- Right angles at the light force a cyclist to slow to a stop which is the safest maneuver in the presence of traffic. I have rarely seen a cyclist stop at the existing, current midblock crossing.

Cyclists infinitely prefer a route without such right angle impediments. I get that. When I was a lot younger I had a fine touring bike that I enjoyed immensely. But consider that between Georgetown and Bethesda Row, a distance of roughly 6 miles, the Capital Crescent Trail has only one other stop sign, where the trail has a straight through crossing of Dorset Avenue in Kenwood. I have almost never seen a bicyclist stop at that sign and have often seen bicyclists blowing through it at considerable speed. Is one inconvenience for bicyclists at Little Falls Parkway in the span of 6 miles of freewheeling an undue imposition on cyclists? Especially when it enhances bicyclist safety and helps to maintain traffic flow for motorists? Is there no room for compromise?

Costs:

With respect to costs it is a priori obvious from our Exhibit 1 that absent the removal of the two lanes of pavement that costs are considerably reduced vs the costs of Parks proposed plan. The costs involved in our recommended plan would be:

- A short reroute of the trail through the existing woods with minimal tree removal.
- Reengineering the signal.
- Creating a crosswalk at the signal.
- Creating a trail along the southwest side of Little Falls Parkway to reconnect to the Capitol Crescent Trail on that side.
- Returning the discontinued portion of the trail to green space.

By contrast, the costs associated with the proposed plan are significantly greater and at a time of severe County budget constraints. Key costs include:

- Removal and disposal of two lanes of pavement and the underlying layers of support materials.
- Restoration of the two lanes to green space with soil, landscaping and plantings.
- Ancillary costs of traffic calming measures along the considerable distance of Hillendale Road from Little Falls Parkway to Bradley Boulevard, about 2,200 ft. Since this is a direct consequence of cut through traffic in response to the Little Falls Parkway choke point, that cost is in fact a cost of the project even though it may be a DOT cost, not a Parks Dept. budget item. This has received no consideration in assessing the cost of the Parks Dept. plan but it is real.
- Intangible costs include:
 - Increased pollution due to increased traffic congestion.
 - Increased contribution of CO2 to global warming.
 - Waste of fossil fuel and of coal generated electricity.
 - Value of motorists' time lost.
 - Cost of decreased safety to the victims of cut through traffic.

EXHIBIT 1 LITTLE FALLS PARKWAY/ARLINGTON ROAD CORRIDOR TO DOWNTOWN BETHESDA, AND OLD GEORGETOWN RD.

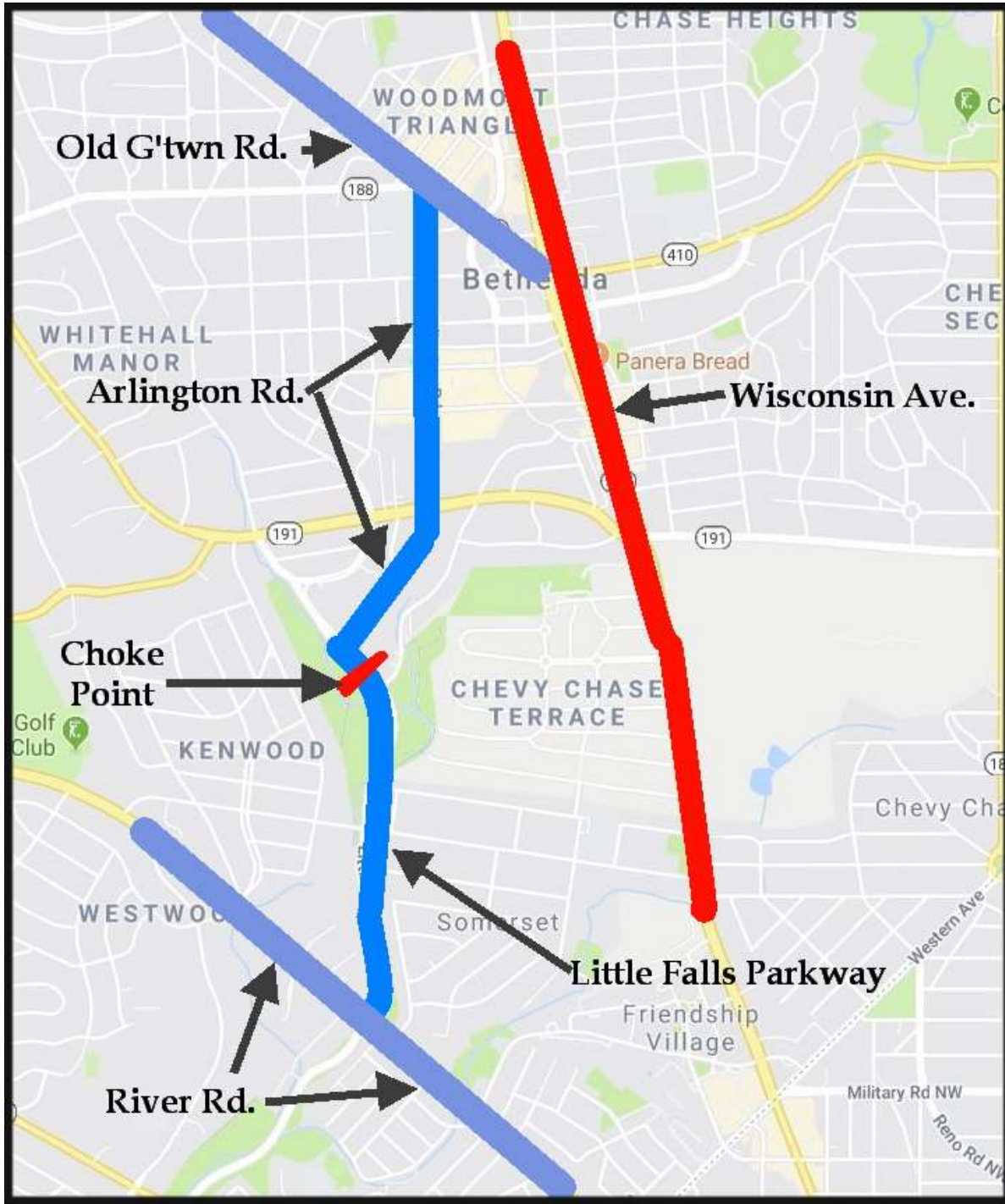


EXHIBIT 2. COMMUNITY RECOMMENDED PLAN, CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL/LITTLE FALLS PARKWAY CROSSING

