

November 14, 2018

Andrew Tsai, PE, Project Manager
Park Development Division
Montgomery Parks – Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission
9500 Brunett Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20901

Re: Capital Crescent Trail – Little Falls Parkway Crossing Design

Dear Mr. Tsai:

In 2017, there was a fatal accident at the mid-block crossing of the Capital Crescent Trail of the Little Falls Parkway. After the fatal accident, the Park Department acted swiftly to mitigate some of the danger by reducing Little Falls Parkway to two lanes. However, this was just a temporary solution. Trail users still cross the Parkway at mid-block, which creates a traffic bottleneck at the intersection of the Capital Crescent Trail and the Little Falls Parkway with traffic often backing up 10 or more cars deep. Furthermore, we continue to see many bikers ignoring the speed limits and stop signs on the trail and blowing right through the trail crossing with little regard to street traffic. The situation is in dire need of fixing both to ensure trail user safety and to improve traffic flow through the area. We, the undersigned residents and leaders of eight neighborhood associations in the surrounding area, believe the only safe solution to the trail crossing is to build a bridge. In addition, we strongly urge that the proposed Permanent Road Diet (reduction to two lanes) on Little Falls Parkway be eliminated altogether from any alternative so that we return to the original four lanes on Little Falls Parkway.

Recommended Solution: Alternative C with modifications to allow for safe crossing and improved traffic flow

The best and safest option for the Capital Crescent Trail Crossing at Little Falls Parkway is a modified version of Alternative C, the Pedestrian Bridge. Since the pedestrian bridge completely elevates trail traffic above the parkway, it allows trail users to avoid traffic altogether and proceed safely along the trail without having to navigate a street crossing. Furthermore, traffic on Little Falls Parkway and Arlington Road will flow under the bridge without fear of hitting a biker or pedestrian. However, we believe that Alternative C needs to be further modified to improve traffic flow and several aspects of the bridge design will need to be developed further.

1. Return Little Falls to Four Lanes and Leave Arlington Road as Is:

The key modification needed is the removal of the proposed road diets on both Little Falls Parkway and Arlington Road. Since its creation in 1962, Little Falls Parkway has had two lanes in each direction and served as a major connector between the busy shopping center at Bradley and Arlington and the residential areas off of River Road, and use of this connector will no doubt increase as development in Bethesda and at Westbard continues. More traffic is created in the summer by the well-used Bethesda Pool. With the bridge in place, we see no reason to limit traffic through the area, and in fact conclude returning Little Falls Parkway to four lanes is safest for the greater Little Falls community. Any safe and fair solution must consider the impact on neighboring communities. The current reduction to only two lanes is harmful to the safety of neighboring communities, especially Kenwood Forest II and Kenwood, because drivers cut through local streets to avoid the backed-up traffic on Little Falls Parkway.

2. Design Bridge to Limit Impact on the Local Environment:

We also request that the bridge be designed to limit its impact on tree cover and the Willett Branch. As currently proposed, the bridge will cross a tributary of the Willett Branch. When designing the bridge, this crossing needs to be done carefully to preserve the tributary and not cause any damage during construction.

3. Clarify Impacts and Access:

As the Parks Department refines Alternative C, we feel the department must clarify several aspects before doing further design work. First, a bridge that spans four lanes will likely necessitate longer ramps. We would like more information on how a longer span impacts tree cover and trail access. Second, the diagram of the bridge shown in the October 2018 documents provides limited information about access to the trail from Little Falls Parkway going North or South. As the Bethesda Pool is a favorite starting and ending point for many users, this needs to be examined further and shared with the community. Access to the trail from the sidewalks and trails along Little Falls needs to be carefully considered.

Interim Solution: Street-level detour until bridge is complete

Since it may take time to arrange sufficient funding for the bridge, we recommend that the Parks Department implement, as an interim solution, a modified version of Alternative B, Trail Reorientation to Traffic Signal at Arlington Road. Diverting the trail traffic to the light at Arlington Road will significantly improve trail user safety, while also improving automobile traffic flow. Pedestrians and bicyclists will be forced to cross at a controlled intersection—the best way to prevent another fatal accident. However, the following modifications need to be made to Alternative B—which we also note will reduce its cost:

1. North of Little Falls Parkway - Do not divert the trail over to Arlington Road prior to the Parkway. As currently designed, the proposed diversion to Arlington Road provides Southbound bicyclists a straight shot at the intersection, which will do little to reduce bicycle speeds and will encourage bicyclists to ignore any traffic signals at the intersection. Instead, maintain the current trail pathway heading south toward Little Falls Parkway and add a turn closer to the Parkway Westward towards the signal at Arlington Road. By sending trail users to a controlled intersection at a slower speed, the crossing becomes much safer.
2. Remove the trail connection proposed between Little Falls Trail and the Capital Crescent Trail behind the Bethesda Pool. This connection essentially trades the unsafe road crossing at Little Falls Parkway for an unsafe crossing of Hillandale Road. It is imperative that the solution to the unsafe crossing to Little Falls does not create another dangerous crossing mid-block at Hillandale Road. Furthermore, due to concerns about safety and impact on the Willett Branch, this trail connection concept was already rejected unanimously by the Planning Board in 2016.
3. As noted above, remove the road diet and restore Little Falls Parkway to four lanes. With a safe crossing at the Arlington Road traffic light, the road diet is not needed to further improve trail safety and will continue to create a bottleneck on Little Falls Parkway that will decrease safety in nearby neighborhoods.

Thank you for your attention. Please contact any of the undersigned individuals and their communities if you would like to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

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