

# DESIGN - FACILITIES and AMENITIES



*A*lthough the Westbard area is primarily a business and industrial center, it does contain a sizable multi-family residential component. The Plan calls for adding to the residential element and, for that reason, must be concerned that the area become a more pleasant place in which to move about, visit and reside. As things now stand, Westbard suffers from a lack of area identity. The clutter of business and traffic signs, overhead utility wires and poles, and neglected or indifferent buildings all contribute to visual "noise." The lack of protection for pedestrians is a serious shortcoming, particularly along River Road.

#### EDGE TREATMENT

The area already has some strong positive amenities. The Little Falls Stream Valley Park forms a pleasant landscaped edge to the eastern side of Westbard. The Westland Intermediate school, County library and the church/school complex to the south constitute another positive fringe element. The Kenwood Place garden apartment development on the west side contains its own pleasant internally landscaped and pedestrian features. Other fringe housing developments contain similar self-contained amenities: Kenwood House, Westbard Mews and the Kenwood Condominiums.

The foregoing examples are located at or near the edges of the area. They perform a very useful and necessary function, that of buffering surrounding single-family neighborhoods from the activity center. The Plan can go several steps further to strengthen and enhance such buffers as recommended below.

#### Springfield Urban Park

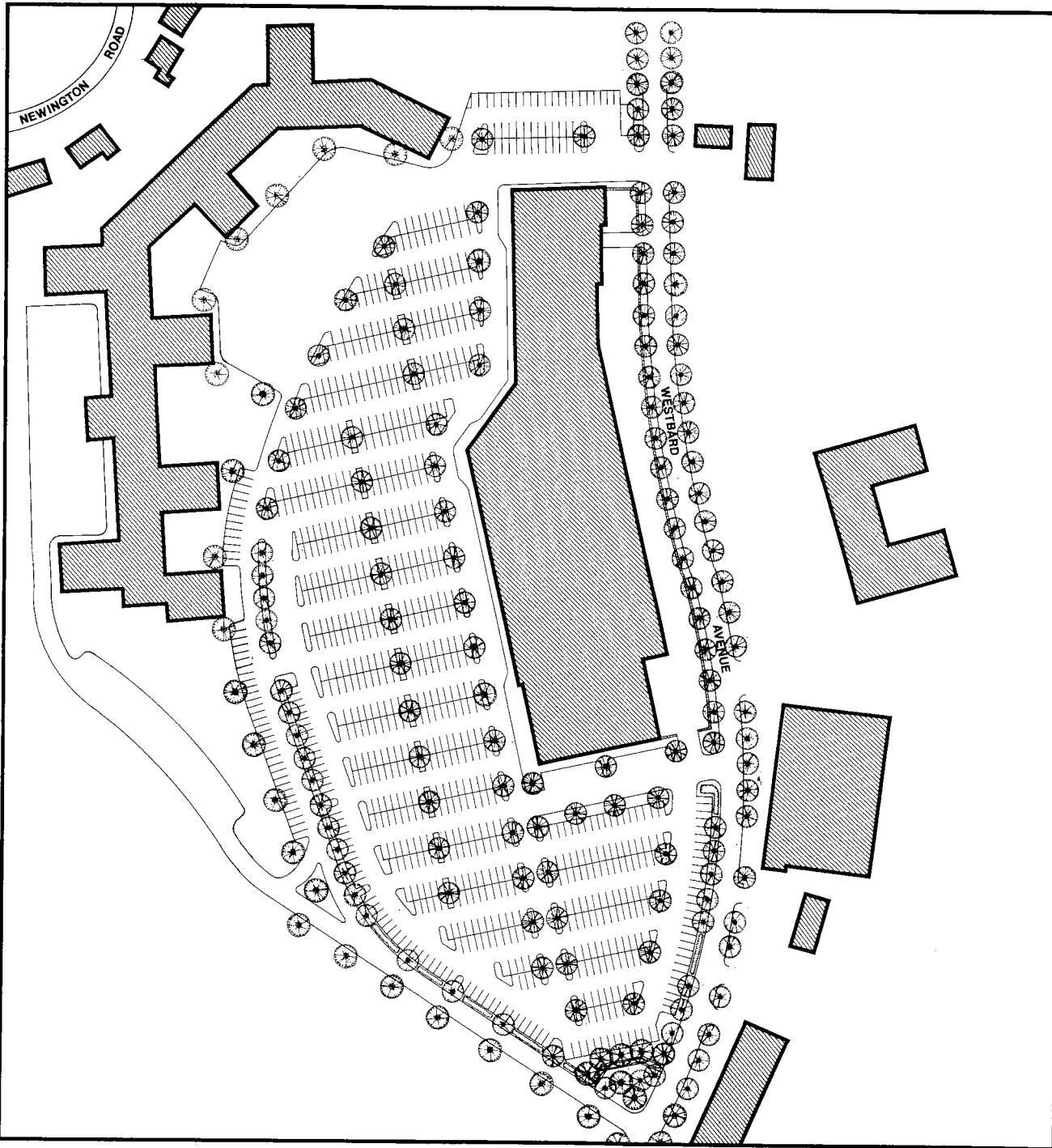
A small urban park could be established on the four vacant residential lots at the north end of the Westwood Shopping Center. This area is now pleasantly landscaped and maintained by the shopping center owners and is an attractive visual element adjoining the Springfield neighborhood. There is no certainty that this area will continue in its present circumstance. The recorded lots can be developed in four single-family homes or else may qualify for one of the special exception uses permitted in the R-60 Zone. An existing covenant precludes any commercial development.

The Plan recommends that the Planning Board acquire this half-acre site, subject to considerations of cost and inclusion in the County's Capital Improvements Program. Some of the present landscape elements can probably be retained but should be enhanced by improvements such as walkways and sitting areas. The development of active and passive recreation elements, seating areas and the like, should be considered with the advice of the Springfield community.

#### Screening at BETCO

The concrete block manufacturing plant is highly visible from the Little Falls Park and some adjoining residential areas. It is a jarring element in an otherwise scenic experience for the motorist or cyclist along the Parkway. The plant has clearly encroached upon the Willett Branch Stream, as evidenced by the concrete block debris on the banks and in the bed of the stream, and may be a source of noise to nearby residents.

The obvious remedy is to achieve the clean-up of the stream banks and to remove encroachments. This should then be followed up by an appropriate planting program to



# RECOMMENDED WESTWOOD SHOPPING CENTER PEDESTRIAN PROTECTION

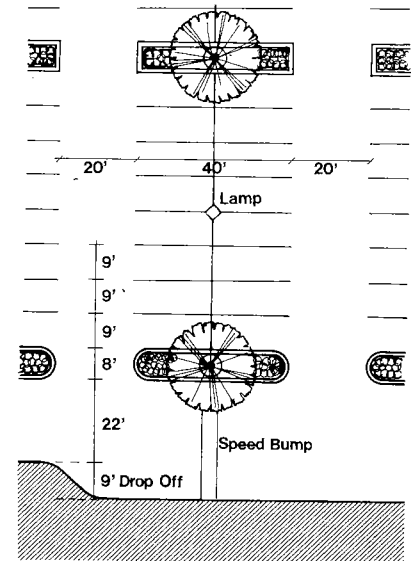
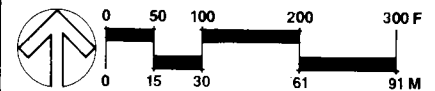


Figure 19

## WESTBARD SECTOR PLAN

Montgomery County, Maryland



September 1982

restore the stream to as natural a condition as possible. A companion program should be to provide an acoustical screen between the plant and the park. This could be rustic fencing such as that behind the Butler Road properties.

#### Screening at Kenwood

The parking lot, behind the Microbiological Laboratory in the northwest quadrant, extends up to the Willett Branch. This parking lot is somewhat exposed to view of the adjoining homes in Kenwood. The residential lots are sufficiently deep so that the existing planting elements could be augmented by the owners should they wish to achieve more of a visual screen. On the industrial property, it would also be desirable to consider evergreen planting along the stream to screen parked cars from view from the residential area.

#### PEDESTRIAN ELEMENT

Much of the access into and within the area is by private automobile for shopping and for employment. Most of the time, a large fraction of the visitors may not feel deprived with respect to pedestrian amenities. Even so, at some point in his trip, the motorist becomes a pedestrian and must cope with the hazards of crossing streets, traversing large open and unrelieved parking areas and negotiating unpaved walkways. These conditions seriously detract from the liveability and enjoyment of the area. Following are recommended approaches toward overcoming some of the more apparent shortcomings.

#### Westwood Shopping Center

In common with most typical freestanding shop-

ping centers, the one in Westbard does have a continuous roadway between the shops and the parking area. Functionally, this is a convenience for shoppers to be able to stop and load bundles into their cars. However, it provides a clear and unimpeded avenue for drivers impatiently traversing the area. Speeding is a natural consequence and a considerable hazard to pedestrians moving between the parking lot and the stores.

A possible remedy for this situation would be to construct one or even two peninsular walkways out from the present sidewalk on the west side of the center. The walkway would interrupt the traffic stream next to the building and through trips would be forced out to the perimeter roadway west of the parking lot. The walkways would provide a pleasant and protected pathway between the parking lot and the stores. If sufficient width is devoted to these walkways, trees can be planted to soften the otherwise barren expanse of parking lot.

Speed bumps would be an alternate but the peninsular walkways are preferred. Good access to the storefronts would be retained, but somewhat less direct than at present. It would be more costly to the owners but the attractiveness and appeal of the center would be greatly enhanced. Some parking spaces would be displaced and thus may violate the Zoning Ordinance if a deficit occurs.

A further change could improve internal circulation and ease traffic flow. As it operates now, the only way to pass through the lot is to use the roadway in front of the shops. An optional through-roadway running along the rear of the lot should be provided. It should be noted that the lot is privately owned and implementation of these suggested improvements would be the responsibility of the owners.

#### RIVER ROAD PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

River Road is probably the most hostile environment

for pedestrians in the entire Westbard area. The lack of suitable sidewalks, the frequent interruption by driveways and side streets, the proliferation of signs and utility poles, noise and air pollution all make for a very unpleasant and hazardous experience for the pedestrian attempting to negotiate that road.

In view of the predominant role of the motor vehicle on River Road, it has been easy in the past to overlook the needs of the pedestrian. Part of the problem is that River Road is a State highway and the State Highway Administration does not undertake to provide sidewalks, leaving that responsibility to the County. The County Department of Transportation has now programmed sidewalk improvements to be made during 1982 along the north side of River Road from Brookside Drive to Willard Avenue. The Planning Board has recommended that County DOT provide an eight-foot wide pavement and include street trees and bus shelters where appropriate.

The Plan recommends that the County undertake an Urban Boulevard program on River Road to provide sidewalks and street trees as a minimum. Other enhancements could be sitting areas, trash receptacles and supplementary landscaping where opportunity affords. Low screening walls or fencing could be installed along the fronts of some businesses, particularly the gas stations, to shield much of the exposed parking areas from passersby without diminishing the visibility of the businesses.

A part of the Urban Boulevard program should be the enhancement of the entrances to the Westbard area at Ridgefield Road and Little Falls Parkway. The traffic signals and directional signs should be grouped onto distinctive architectural structures to provide a strong gateway element. Prototypical gateway structures are shortly to be installed at the entrances to the Silver Spring CBD; a similar treatment at the Westbard River Road entrances should be considered. The

Planning Board has previously recommended that the County include Westbard for improvement through the Federal Community Development Block Grant program.

A word should be said about the problem of unsightly utility wires and poles. Whatever improvements can be achieved under an Urban Boulevard program will be diminished unless something can be done about the unsightly network of poles and wires. The obvious solution is to place these utilities underground. This is said in the knowledge that this is a costly undertaking, one that utility companies are prone to resist strenuously.

The benefits of undergrounding utilities are hard to demonstrate in dollars and cents. The benefits are improved appearance, reduction of the visual clutter and enhancement of the few good architectural features in the streetscape. It will impart a sense of pride to the business community and assure that private efforts to improve appearance will be noticeable. Therefore, whenever improvements are undertaken to River Road, the County and State governments, and the Planning Board should join forces to bring about the undergrounding of utilities.

## MISCELLANEOUS

Freedom of movement and protection from traffic are general objectives for pedestrians that should be pursued whenever opportunities present themselves. At the scale of a sector plan, it is not possible to identify all the possibilities for creating pedestrian pathways. In some cases, the initiative may rest with the private developer. New connections from neighborhoods to the hiker/biker system in Little Falls Park are desirable and should be explored with the civic groups.

Many informal pathway systems already exist. The presence of these is a good indication of the way people want to travel by foot. Some are through parkland; others traverse private property and pose problems of liability

for the owners who, therefore, may not be sympathetic about granting easements for pedestrian use. Whenever new development requires site plan approval or special exception permits, it may then be possible to include appropriate pedestrian facilities.

### Suggested Pedestrian Pathways

The following are suggested pathway improvements that should be considered by the communities, businesses and public agencies:

1. Path from the Greenacres/Glen Cove and Westmoreland communities across the Little Falls Park, the railroad and private property to reach Westland Intermediate School and the Little Falls Library. Informal pathways negotiable by agile youngsters do exist but they pose hazards for others, particularly in crossing the creek and the railroad and in negotiating steep slopes.
2. Access to the Westwood Shopping Center from the Springfield community through the Kenwood Place apartment property is desired by some but not all. The covenant, signed some years ago by the developers with the community, does place some restrictions on such pedestrian access. The need to reduce the amount of driving in the interest of gasoline conservation and the growing impetus for walking and jogging for health purposes, plus the fact that single car households do not always have a car on hand to run errands, tends to suggest that the matter of access may need to be reconsidered by the

community at this time.

3. As outlined under the Land Use chapter, the recommended planned development of the Abensohn property requires the submission of a development plan which should include an internal pathway system. Such pathways should connect to adjoining residential/commercial/industrial areas and the Little Falls hiker/biker system.
4. A pathway from River Road to the Westwood Shopping Center is recommended. Many pedestrians have been observed crossing through the Roy Rogers parking lot, over the foot bridge on the Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries site and through the Westwood Towers parking lot to Westbard Avenue. (See Figure 15.)

### Pedestrian Protection

If warranted by pedestrian volume, the County DOT should consider including walk/don't walk cycles for the two signalized intersections on River Road. If the railroad roadways are improved and signals installed, that intersection should also be studied with reference to a pedestrian cycle.

Recently, the County determined that a bus shelter is not justified on River Road, based upon the relatively low patronage at this time. However, with the coming of Metrorail service, increased Metrobus service, the addition of the County Ride-on system, and the proposed multi-family residential development on a part of the Abensohn property, the circumstances may change. Shelters should then be considered at the two present River Road intersections.