



Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan Scope of Work

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Description

Scope of Work for the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the proposed Scope of Work.

Summary

The Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan extends from the City of Rockville to the *Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity Sector Plan* boundary. This memorandum presents the Scope of Work for the Master Plan, including the proposed Plan boundaries and purpose; the context and background of the planning area; issues to evaluate; an outreach strategy and the Plan schedule.

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Plan Area

The Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan area stretches approximately 4 linear miles between the City of Rockville and the 2012 *Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity Sector Plan* boundary. As shown in Figure 1, the northern and southern limits of the Plan area include: the quarter mile area around the bus rapid transit (BRT) stations identified in the 2013 *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan*; properties abutting Veirs Mill Road; and sites requiring additional analysis, including the Halpine View property adjacent to Twinbrook Parkway.

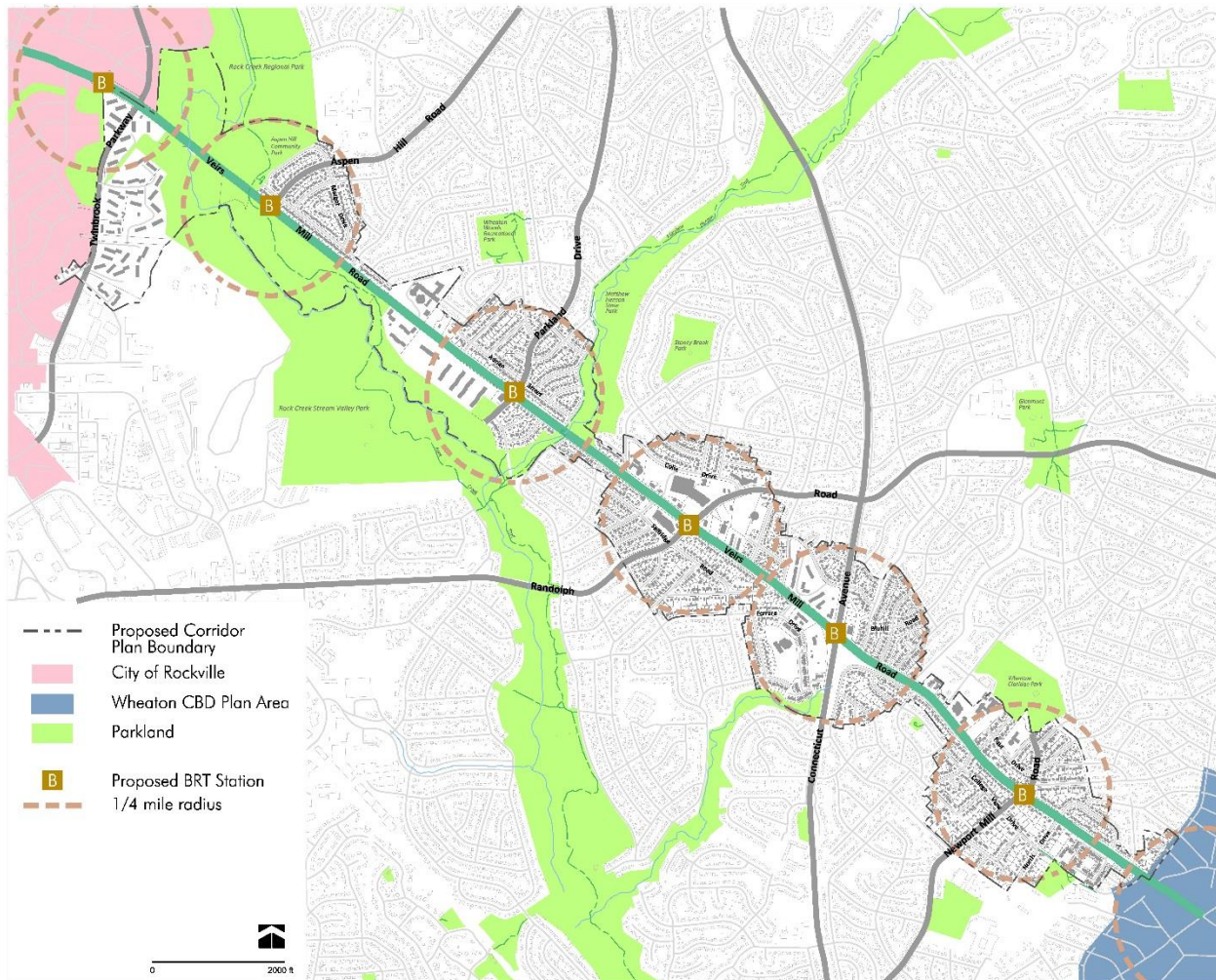


Figure 1: Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan -Proposed Plan Area

History

The Veirs Mill Corridor was predominantly agricultural until the late 1940s. Following World War II, a growing federal workforce and housing demands of returning veterans spurred the development of affordable, single-family homes in the area. Development continued during

the 1950s and the low-density residential character supported by commercial centers was largely established by 1959.

The character of the corridor has remained essentially the same over the past several decades, supported by plans and policies that sought to protect and preserve the single-family residential communities and limit commercial encroachment. While some county master plans have emphasized higher density residential development at strategic locations, including near commercial centers and Metrorail stations, other plans have recognized and supported low-density residential patterns.

Previous Planning Initiatives

Veirs Mill Road provides a direct connection between Rockville and Wheaton and accommodates several bus routes provided by Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) Metrobus and Montgomery County's Ride On service. It is a heavily traveled and congested roadway, and experiences some of the highest transit volumes in Montgomery County. Bus service is often unpredictable and has increased travel times.

For these reasons, Montgomery County and the City of Rockville have studied and supported bus rapid transit and traditional bus routes on Veirs Mill Road for nearly two decades, as demonstrated by the numerous initiatives completed since 1999, including:

- Federal Transit Administration BRT Demonstration Program Application, 1999.
- Montgomery County's Go Montgomery! Program, adopted the *Veirs Mill Road BRT Corridor Study*, resulting in its incorporation into the County Council's Transportation Plan, 2002.
- WMATA *Regional Bus Study*, 2003.
- Montgomery County Department of Transportation - *Veirs Mill Road Bus Rapid Transit Facility Planning – Phase 1 Report*, 2005.
- WMATA's *Metrobus Q Line Study*, 2009.
- Montgomery County's *Countywide Bus Rapid Transit Study*, 2011.
- *Report and Recommendations of the County Executive's Transit Task Force*, 2012.
- The *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan*, 2013.
- The Maryland Department of Transportation's *Draft Corridor Study Report, MD 586/Veirs Mill Road Bus Rapid Transit Study*, 2016.

The two most recent initiatives, the *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan* and the *Veirs Mill Road Bus Rapid Transit Study* are discussed in greater detail in the Planning Framework below.

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan

The 2013 *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan* recommends enhanced transit opportunities, including a network of eleven BRT corridors and the designation of bicycle-pedestrian priority areas. The Plan identifies Veirs Mill Road as an appropriate corridor for BRT due to the volume of existing transit ridership.

As shown in Figure 2, the Veirs Mill Road Corridor (Corridor 10) connects with several other corridors, including Georgia Avenue (Corridors 1 and 2), Rockville Pike (Corridors 3 and 4), Randolph Road (Corridor 7) and University Boulevard (Corridor 8), facilitating movement by transit to much of the eastern portion of the County.

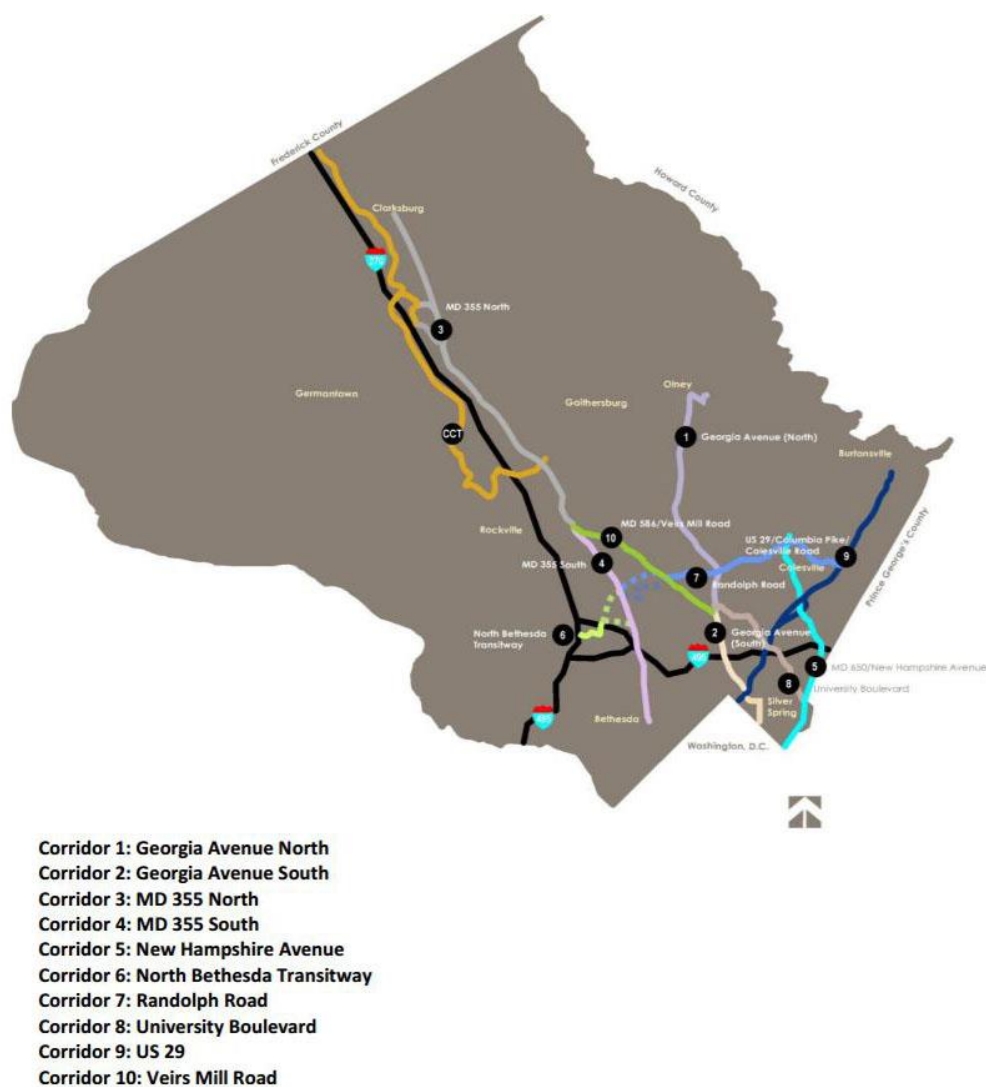


Figure 2: 2013 Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan – BRT Corridors

The Plan classifies Veirs Mill Road as a “BRT - Commuter Corridor.” The Commuter Corridor is defined as a corridor that connects moderate-density residential areas to employment centers. In addressing this commuter corridor, the Plan recommends that station areas prioritize multi-modal access for pedestrians, bicycles and transit.

Veirs Mill Road Bus Rapid Transit Study

The Maryland Department of Transportation’s (MDOT) State Highway Administration (SHA) and the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA), in cooperation with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), recently completed a draft Corridor Study Report titled the *Veirs Mill Road Bus Rapid Transit Study* to document the evaluation of alternatives for BRT along Veirs Mill Road. The draft report identifies BRT as a solution for the corridor “because it would increase transit reliability and opportunities for low-income and minority populations, as well as provide access to a larger supply of affordable housing. Enhanced transit access could also play a role in revitalizing adjacent neighborhoods, relieving congestion, supporting land conservation, and improving safety for bicyclists and pedestrians.”¹

The draft report analyzes several alternatives to improve transit on Veirs Mill Road, including a “no build” alternative (no improvements in infrastructure or service) and three “build” alternatives (a new bus rapid transit service in dedicated travel lanes). The alternatives were presented to the Planning Board on November 3, 2016, and the Board expressed support for Alternative 3, which proposes a new bus rapid transit service in dedicated curb lanes, where feasible. The draft report is currently under review by the County Council’s Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment Committee, with the next work session scheduled for March 23, 2017.

Community Plans

The Veirs Mill Corridor extends through several planning areas between the City of Rockville and the Wheaton Central Business District, including the 1992 *North Bethesda/Garrett Park Master Plan*, the 1994 *Aspen Hill Master Plan*, the 1989 *Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton* and the 2012 *Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity Sector Plan*. While these plans encourage the enhancement of transit options and transit use, they predate the concept of BRT on Veirs Mill Road as recommended in the *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan*.

The *North Bethesda/Garrett Park Master Plan* focuses primarily on areas adjacent to Metrorail stations, including Twinbrook, White Flint and Grosvenor-Strathmore as well as Rock Spring. The Plan does not identify recommendations for Veirs Mill Road or the abutting properties. While the Aspen Hill and Kensington-Wheaton plans do not identify specific recommendations for Veirs Mill Road or the abutting properties, the plans recognize the value of the road as a major arterial which connects the commercial centers of Rockville and Wheaton. Both plans encourage the protection and preservation of the low-density residential communities adjacent

¹ Maryland Department of Transportation and Montgomery County Department of Transportation. “Draft Corridor Study Report: MD 586/Veirs Mill Road Bus Rapid Transit Study.” September 2016: 1.

to the corridor and seek to limit the encroachment of commercial development. The Kensington-Wheaton Plan specifically “encourages the protection, stabilization, and continuation of current land use patterns.”²

The *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan* and the *Veirs Mill Road Bus Rapid Transit Study* demonstrate the county’s commitment to BRT on Veirs Mill Road. The commitment to enhanced transit service on Veirs Mill Road is a significant change from the previous plans. This shift, coupled with the overall changes to the County since the adoption of the applicable plans, demonstrates that now is the appropriate time to comprehensively review the corridor and develop recommendations to guide the land use and community amenities along Veirs Mill Road.

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

No new development has been proposed in the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan area in the recent past, and there is no approved development within the pipeline. In contrast, significant new development and redevelopment has taken place in the adjacent 2009 *Twinbrook Sector Plan* area and a limited amount of redevelopment in the Wheaton Central Business District area.

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

While Veirs Mill Road has been examined for several years as a thoroughfare and transit corridor, a comprehensive review of the land use, built environment and community character has not been considered in nearly two decades. The adoption of the *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan* provides an opportunity to analyze the land use impacts of the introduction of BRT and develop recommendations to guide the character of the planning area prior to BRT implementation. The Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan seeks to build on the principles established in the Aspen Hill and Kensington-Wheaton plans, while considering the recommendations of the *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan* and the *Veirs Mill Road Bus Rapid Transit Study*.

Veirs Mill Road is an important corridor in the County, as it provides a direct connection between the commercial centers of Rockville and Wheaton. This Plan will evaluate land use elements that define neighborhoods along the corridor, seek opportunities to reinforce existing community patterns, focus new uses at strategic locations and protect/enhance the environmental resources of the corridor.

The Plan will explore the land uses within a quarter mile radius of the proposed BRT stations and will examine properties abutting Veirs Mill Road, as well as specific properties with redevelopment potential to determine if alternative uses or densities are appropriate. It will also examine neighborhood access to the proposed BRT station locations, including barriers to walkability, and will develop recommendations to improve accessibility and connectivity for the

² The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. “Approved and Adopted Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton, as Amended.” May 1989, Amended April 1990.

bicycle and pedestrian facilities, including the Rock-Creek Hiker Biker Trail and Matthew Henson Trail.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

Land Use

Existing Low-Density Residential Development – Maintaining Market Affordable Units

The planning area is predominantly characterized by low-density residential development. Initial demographic data suggests that the percentage of owner-occupied units in the study area is approximately 58 percent, which is slightly less than the countywide average of 66 percent. The average household income for the study area is \$82,023 compared to a county average of more than \$133,000.

The existing housing stock within the study area provides market affordable housing in this part of the county. The Plan will consider how the introduction of BRT on the corridor will affect the aging, market affordable homes adjacent to Veirs Mill Road. Staff will complete research to evaluate comparable transit systems to understand if the introduction of bus rapid transit influences market affordability, property values and development pressure.

This research, coupled with a comprehensive review of the existing conditions in the corridor, will be used to identify appropriate land uses, which may include the preservation and protection of the existing market affordable units, redevelopment at strategic locations or a combination of recommendations.

Commercial Centers and Medium-Density Residential Development

While not as prevalent as the low-density residential development, clusters of medium-density residential development and traditional suburban commercial development are also present in the Plan area. For example, the proposed Plan area extends beyond the quarter mile radius of the Twinbrook BRT station to include the Halpine View property, located at the western end of the Plan area near the intersection with Twinbrook Parkway. Halpine View is currently developed with 564 garden-style apartments and is located within a half mile of the proposed BRT station at Twinbrook Parkway and just over a half mile from the Twinbrook Metrorail Station.

Halpine Park LLC contacted the Planning Department in 2011 to request advice and feedback on a potential rezoning to permit additional dwelling units and commercial uses. While the Planning Board provided advisory comments, the applicant did not proceed with a rezoning request. The Veirs Mill Corridor Plan will evaluate this property to determine if land use changes are appropriate.

The intersection of Veirs Mill Road and Randolph Road is the only commercial node along the corridor within the Plan boundaries. The Plan will analyze existing development and zoning of

commercial properties at this intersection, and consider opportunities to take advantage of the introduction of BRT and the potential for incorporating housing and community amenities at this strategic location.

Compatibility between Transit and Land Uses

The Plan will provide recommendations to improve compatibility between the transit corridor and the adjacent land uses. The Plan will focus on “nodes,” which are defined by the quarter mile radius around each of the proposed BRT stations. Within the nodes, the Plan will evaluate the land uses and the built character to develop recommendations to enhance design around the station locations. Likewise, streetscape and design guidelines will be developed to improve the overall character of the corridor and create a sense of place for the properties adjacent to the street.

Access and Connectivity

The Plan will consider the accessibility of the existing neighborhoods to the proposed BRT station locations by alternative means of transportation, such as biking and walking. Barriers to walkability, including missing or inadequate sidewalks, cul-de-sacs and natural buffers will be evaluated to assist in the development of recommendations for improved connectivity. Beyond access to the station locations, the Plan will evaluate access to community facilities and neighborhood serving uses within the area and identify improvements which could enhance connectivity.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure

A bicycle pedestrian priority area (BPPA) is located within the Plan area near the intersection with Randolph Road. The Maryland State Code identifies a BPPA as “a geographical area where the enhancement of bicycle and pedestrian traffic is a priority.” The Veirs Mill Road BPPA is bounded by Parkland Drive to the west, Colie Drive and Randolph Road to the north, Claridge Road to the east and Selfridge Road to the south.

The Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail and Matthew Henson Trail are located within the BPPA and provide regional access for bicyclists and pedestrians. The Plan will evaluate bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure comprehensively for the corridor, with a specific emphasis for improvements within the BPPA.

Placemaking and Streetscape Design

The implementation of BRT in this corridor provides an opportunity to evaluate the streetscape for Veirs Mill Road to create a major thoroughfare that also serves as a positive connector for the adjacent neighborhoods. The Plan will work with the community and relevant stakeholders to develop a streetscape design that captures the significance of the corridor and presents opportunities for placemaking at the station locations or alternate locations within the corridor.

Transportation

The Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan envisions Veirs Mill Road as a multi-modal corridor with a complete street for safe and efficient movement of all transportation modes, including transit vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists. The Plan will build upon the analysis completed by the State Highway Administration in the development of alternatives for the Veirs Mill Road BRT project.

A preferred alternative for the BRT is anticipated within the schedule of the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan. Therefore, staff proposes that connectivity to BRT stations, including the vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian network, be a primary focus of the transportation analysis.

The Plan will examine existing conditions and planned infrastructure, including Montrose Parkway East, the Veirs Mill Road and Randolph Road Interchange, and the Parklawn North Trail, and develop recommendations for improved accessibility and connectivity between these facilities and the Veirs Mill Road Corridor. The Plan will also study the Matthew Henson Trail Crossing, including a review of improvements implemented by the State Highway Administration to improve conditions at this intersection.

The Master Plan will analyze the impacts of redevelopment at strategic locations on the transportation network and identify improvements needed to support any proposed changes to the redevelopment potential of these locations. The analysis will include traffic modeling and analysis to evaluate the capacity of the transportation network within the Plan area, consistent with the 2016 Subdivision Staging Policy.

Healthy and Sustainable Communities

A primary goal of the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan is the enhancement of health and sustainability within the Plan area. The Plan seeks to develop recommendations that promote access to alternative transportation modes, encourage walkability and reduce dependency on single-occupancy vehicles. In addition to these transportation focused goals, the Plan seeks to develop recommendations which promote access to parks, open spaces and community facilities; enhance public safety; encourage healthy lifestyles; and offer a range of housing types to ensure livable, healthy communities. The Plan will also strive to protect, preserve and enhance the environment and natural features in the Plan area, including Rock Creek and Turkey Branch.

Community Facilities

Schools

The Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan crosses four school clusters, including the Downcounty Consortium, Richard Montgomery, Rockville and Walter Johnson (the portion of the Plan area within the Walter Johnson cluster is occupied by parkland). The FY 2017 annual school test indicates that the Albert Einstein High School Cluster remains close to a moratorium. While

part of the Albert Einstein Cluster is located within the Plan boundary, the Plan will only evaluate limited redevelopment within the Wheaton and Richard Montgomery High School clusters, and therefore will assess the impact to these clusters from any proposed residential development in the Plan area.

Parks, Open Space and Trails

The Plan area and the immediate vicinity are well served by parks, open space and trails including the Rock Creek Stream Valley Park, Matthew Henson State Park (managed by M-NCPPC), Aspen Hill Local Park, Parklawn Local Park, Wheaton Woods Local Park, Parklawn Group Picnicking Area, Winding Creek Local Park, Wheaton-Claridge Local Park, Newport Mill Local Park, College View Neighborhood Park, Stoneybrook Local Park, Veterans Urban Park and Pleasant View Local Park, as well as the Rock Creek Trail and Matthew Henson Trail. The Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan will evaluate the accessibility of these parks, explore options to enhance connectivity between park and trail facilities and BRT stations, and determine if any additional facilities are necessary to address the impact of any proposed redevelopment.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Planning staff invited community members to attend a kick-off meeting on February 22, 2017 at the Sargent Shriver Elementary School. The purpose of the meeting was to notify the community of the proposed Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan, introduce the Plan boundaries and initial issues, and request feedback on strengths and weaknesses of the Veirs Mill Road Corridor. Approximately 40 people attended, including residents, property owners and other interested parties.

During the meeting, staff introduced an interactive map to solicit feedback about the assets, challenges and needs of the Veirs Mill Road Corridor. The interactive map requested feedback on the elements people like the most about Veirs Mill Road, the features in need of improvement and suggestions for needed elements. The interactive map, which is available on the project website, provides an opportunity for staff to learn about community preferences to inform the Master Plan.

Staff recommends a variety of outreach strategies to engage stakeholders in the planning process, including residents, business owners, property owners, commuters, bicyclists and pedestrians. These strategies include community meetings and workshops; promotional tools, including videos, press releases and printed materials; an engaging website; social media and an interactive map. As stakeholders within the Plan area include a variety of ethnic backgrounds, engagement will include translation and interpretation services, community partnerships, media outreach, events customized to specific audiences and collaboration with local religious institutions.

PLAN SCHEDULE

The Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan was initiated in January 2017 and the Planning Board Draft of the Master Plan is scheduled for transmission to the County Executive and the County Council by January 2018. Significant milestones are outlined below and an overall project schedule is provided in Attachment 1.

February – September 2017: Outreach, Analysis and Plan Development
September – December 2017: Planning Board Review: Public Hearing and Work Sessions
January 2018: County Executive Review
February – June 2018: County Council Review: Public Hearing and Work Sessions
July – October 2018: Sectional Map Amendment

STAY CONNECTED

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