



**Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan
Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC)**

VIA EMAIL

March 13, 2018

Montgomery County Council President Hans Riemer,
District Councilmember Roger Berliner,
and Members of the Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave, Sixth Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: FY19-24 Capital Improvements Program - Comments for the Implementation of the Bethesda
Downtown Plan

From: Bethesda Downtown Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC)

Dear Council President Riemer, Councilmember Berliner, and Members of the Montgomery
County Council:

Montgomery County's new Bethesda Downtown Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) is the only group specifically charged with coordinating and monitoring the progress of development in Bethesda and addressing implementation of the recommendations in the Approved and Adopted Bethesda Downtown Plan (the "BDP"). The Implementation Advisory Committee is composed of residents and business representatives. To ensure that the new Bethesda Downtown Plan gets off to a successful start, we offer the following comments regarding schools, parks, and transportation items that we have identified as CIP priorities.

Addressing School Capacity Concerns

The IAC is pleased that the Council recognizes the urgent need to plan for school needs in Bethesda, especially at the elementary level. The Bethesda Downtown Plan area is served by Bethesda ES and Somerset ES and is projected to enter moratorium due to projected overcrowding unless school capacity solutions can be identified and implemented. Site constraints indicate that no additional capacity can be built at either Bethesda ES or Somerset ES. All stakeholders in Bethesda benefit from quality schools with adequate capacity, and school quality is a key reason families decide to live in Bethesda and the surrounding neighborhoods. We commend the Council for beginning to take steps to address the capacity problem and we ask for prompt discussion on finding and funding a real permanent solution (BDP, page 90).

In addition, attention must be directed towards the impending high school capacity limit. BCC HS is currently undergoing an addition and is projected to continue to have a growing student population. It is by far the smallest high school site in the County, it will have enrollment at the high end of what is desired for high schools, and it is projected to be overcapacity in the 2022-2023 school year. A solution will be needed to address overutilization of BCC HS in the near future (BDP, page 92).

Delivering on Park Promises in a Timely Manner

We recommend the creation of a Capital Improvements Program item specifically dedicated to Parks acquisition and improvements within Bethesda. The Bethesda Plan identified and prioritized the need for thirteen new and improved parks in Bethesda (BDP, pages 80-85). The County must step forward to “prime the pump,” and help make these long-term, quality-of-life investments as it has so wisely done in other urban areas (for example, investments in major park facilities in Silver Spring). The Park Impact Payment (PIP) fund alone cannot provide quickly enough the dollars needed to acquire new parkland. Other funds will be needed to create new parks and also update existing parks.

Following the facility planning process, the newly acquired land for the Capital Crescent Civic Green will need to have sufficient funding in place for full park development and construction. The completion of the park should coincide with the completion of the Purple Line construction in that location.

With regards to existing park projects, we welcome the pending improvements of Battery Lane Urban Park, which were first discussed as needed 10 years ago. Improvements to Elm Street Park and Caroline Freeland Park have also been delayed and it is necessary that those projects be completed in a timely manner. It will be important that the renovation of the northern portion of Elm Street Park be planned and funded to coincide with the completion of the Purple Line and Capital Crescent Trail in that location.

Such a forward-thinking investment will add to the appeal of the downtown and surrounding areas, helping to generate new tax revenues anticipated by Bethesda redevelopment.

Keeping Bethesda Moving - Bike, Pedestrian, Transit, and Transportation Needs

Finally, although we applaud the CIP funding for some of the bike routes and improvements identified in the Bethesda Downtown Plan, we note that it is essential for the safety of users and to meet the goal of increased non-auto mode share that these routes be realized. However, we are concerned that no dollars have been allocated for other transportation improvements called for in the Bethesda Downtown Plan. Specifically, we call for CIP items to plan the future conversion of Norfolk Avenue and Pearl Street into “shared streets,” (BDP, pages 114-117, 122-123) and to study how to restore one-way streets back to two-way traffic (BDP, pages 15 & 36). These projects could be advanced into facility planning (P509337) as soon as possible to begin the necessary planning work for implementation.

We also look forward to the completion of the design, cost estimate, and full funding for the Capital Crescent Trail tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue as that is a critically important component of the non-auto transportation network in the area (BDP, page 159).

We recognize the number of needs you face. While Bethesda has been and will continue to be a dependable source of revenue to support other County priorities, Bethesda itself now needs further reinvestment in order to continue to meet your vision for its future.

Sincerely,

Amanda Farber
Co-Chair, IAC

Jad Donohoe,
Co-Chair, IAC

cc: Montgomery County Councilmembers
Marlene Michaelson, Council Administrator
Glenn Orlin, Deputy Council Administrator
Casey Anderson, Planning Board Chairman
Gwen Wright, Planning Director
Robert Kronenberg, Division Chief Area 1
Leslye Howerton, Planner Coordinator Area 1, Liaison to the IAC