

Talking Points for July 17 Walking Tour with Commerce Secretary Kelly Schulz

THE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF FOREST GLEN & MONTGOMERY HILLS

- The Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills section of Montgomery county has enormous untapped economic potential.
- The median household income in the surrounding neighborhoods is \$100,000 and tens of thousands of people travel through the area every day.
- The area is served by numerous transportation assets, including the Capital Beltway (east-west), Georgia Avenue (north-south), Forest Glen Metro station, and will soon have two Purple Line stations nearby (Lyttonsville and Spring Street).
- The Forest Glen Metro station has an undeveloped eight acre surface parking lot and work is about to start on a second entrance.
- Holy Cross Hospital, a major regional health care provider and employer is located steps away from Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills.

THE AREA IS STRUGGLING ECONOMICALLY

- Montgomery Hills was once a thriving retail area that served both the local community and those traveling through it on Georgia Avenue.
- Today, other than Holy Cross, the area's office, retail and commercial spaces are outdated and often functionally obsolete. Most were built in the 1950s, 60s and 70s and haven't been updated since.
- Many small businesses along Georgia Avenue have either gone out of business or relocated to other parts of the county.
- Tax assessments and commercial rents are well below comparable properties in Montgomery County.

THE PROBLEM IS GEORGIA AVE

- The three-quarter mile section of Georgia Avenue (MD 97) that runs between 16th Street and Forest Glen Road is the busiest non-interstate roadway in the state of Maryland. On average, it carries around 85,000 vehicles per day.
- The corridor is an automobile dominated environment that is inhospitable for all users:
 - The reversible middle lane is confusing to drivers and contributes to above average accident rates.
 - Turn restrictions at rush hour make it difficult for drivers to access businesses located along Georgia Ave.
 - In order to get from one side of Georgia Avenue to the other, pedestrians must cross seven lanes of traffic with no median or refuge.
 - Sidewalks are narrow, offer pedestrians no protection from Georgia Ave, and are not ADA compliant.
 - There is virtually no bicycle traffic in Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills.
- Because vehicle and pedestrian accessibility is so difficult, and streetscape so unattractive, many small businesses struggle to survive and developers have been unwilling to invest in the area.

THERE IS A SOLUTION: FIX GEORGIA AVENUE

- Montgomery County Planning Board is developing a plan that proposes to “leverage existing and future infrastructure improvements... [to] facilitate the creation of safe, interconnected Georgia Avenue.”
 - Upzone key retail and commercial locations, including WMATA station site.
 - Encourage mixed use development and new community gathering spaces throughout the corridor.
 - Improve mobility throughout the area, enhance transportation safety, and beautify the streetscape.
 - The Planning Board recognizes that few of these improvements will become a reality unless conditions along Georgia Avenue are improved.
- Maryland’s State Highway Administration has developed a plan to “establish a balanced approach to transportation within the Georgia Ave corridor” by improving mobility for all users.
 - Reconfigure Georgia Ave and key intersection to improve traffic flow, safety, and vehicle access to local businesses.
 - Widen sidewalks and make it easier for pedestrians to walk to and between local businesses and gain access to public transportation like Metro and the Purple Line.
 - Establish a dedicated bike lane to improve connectivity between surrounding neighborhoods and regional assets like the Capital Crescent Trail.
 - Accommodate future transit enhancements like Bus Rapid Transit.
- Plans like these have been proposed since the late 1970s, but nothing has happened because of lack of funding for improvements on Georgia Avenue.
 - SHA’s current improvement plan would cost estimated \$43 million.
- Fixing Georgia Ave would trigger economic development and redevelopment, leading to higher property values and tax revenues for both the state and county.
- As the “Gateway to Silver Spring,” improving this stretch of road is critical to economic growth in the area.