For the record, Maren Hill, Senior Planner with Area 2 Division. Tonight, I’m here to present a draft of the Aspen Hill Vision Zero Study.
I want to acknowledge the origins of this study. This study came about because people in the Aspen Hill community expressed concerned about traffic safety. They were worried that they or their family members or friends could be killed or seriously injured in a crash. The study area has seen far too many of these severe and fatal crashes—23 since 2015.

It is an unacceptable tragedy every time someone dies or is severely injured in a traffic collision. These tragedies affect more than the victims of the crashes, they impact entire communities, altering the fabric of our social networks. People lose friends or a family members, or have to care for a loved ones who will never be able to care for themselves again, bystanders are devastated, family economies are damaged. There is a whole network of trauma, loss and burden that comes with each of these deaths and injuries. Many of the community members who have assisted with this study have witnessed horrendous crashes or lost someone important in their lives. It is a powerful and all too common occurrence.

In addition to these losses, crashes create barriers to achieving physically healthy communities. People opt out of walking and biking for recreation or transportation if they perceive them as unsafe.
The purpose of this study is to evaluate and set forth potential strategies to improve safety for all people walking, biking, rolling, driving, and taking transit in Aspen Hill.
We relied on the Vision Zero approach. The County adopted a Vision Commitment in 2017 to eliminate severe injuries and fatalities from crashes. Vision Zero:

- Prize human life above all else.
- Account for human error in the design of the road network.
- Reduce the severity of collisions. Emphasize a systems approach.
- Identify equitable solutions.
The study focuses on a sliver of the greater Aspen Hill area which is anchored by a strong commercial core, with several shopping centers. The low-density development, auto-centric shopping centers are accompanied by high-speed roads that carry heavy vehicular traffic and have wide crossings of multiple lanes, often more than 125 feet in width. These roads limit access to the commercial core and create a safety hazard for people traveling within Aspen Hill.
Although vehicle trips represent most person trips in the study area, people walking and biking were involved in 56 percent of the area’s severe and fatal crashes. Despite the auto-centric development pattern of the study area, the crash pattern is more representative of areas of the county within a quarter mile of a Metrorail station, where people traditionally walk and bike at higher rates. This suggests that there infrastructure needs for those who walk, bike, and take transit, that the county is failing to meet.
Through the study process, we have applied an equity lens. We begin with the premise that all people have the right to move around their communities safely, but that certain populations are disproportionately affected by crashes. In the study area, several of the characteristics that distinguish Aspen Hill from other parts of the county correlate with higher incidence of severe and fatal crashes. County statistics show that communities with higher rates of poverty, people of color, people who speak English as a second language and young residents have higher than average collision rates, compared to the rest of the county. We also know that certain populations are more vulnerable to crashes and aimed to address their needs.
Planning staff embarked on a robust community engagement process. The voices, opinions and experiences of Montgomery County residents are central to the development of this study. To reach a broad audience, Montgomery Planning staff used a variety of engagement strategies. We held events during the day, at night, on weekends and weekdays in different locations throughout Aspen Hill. We always provided a space for children and Spanish translation at all our events, as we are tonight. This allowed us to reach a wider audience who might not normally attend a traditional night meeting.
The Study also benefitted from the knowledge of a 12 member advisory group that volunteered their time starting in January. These community members represented a diverse set of interests and experiences. They advised staff on community outreach, identified key challenges and assisted with recommendations.
The product of this process is a study and safety tool kit which Aspen Hill as a community where residents and visitors can travel to their homes and destinations safely and comfortably.
What We Heard

“It is very dangerous to walk to the nearby commercial establishments such as the Aspen Hill Shopping Center because of the narrow sidewalks and high-speed limits. When I walk to these establishments with my children, we have to walk single file in order to walk safely and hope that nobody is coming in the opposite direction. It appears that more affluent neighborhoods in the county have more pedestrian-friendly options.”

In the study we included what we heard throughout the engagement process.
The last time we came before the Planning board we highlighted a few of the potential improvements from the safety toolkit. Tonight, I’d like to highlight the structure of the tool kit and the supporting components.

In addition to recommending a set of potential safety improvements, the study is intended as an educational document that can be used in other areas of the county.

Each area wide improvement in the tool kit included:

- Improvement description
- Location
- Priority characteristics
- Considerations
- Design
- Equity and accessibility
- Resources
- Safety benefits
Throughout the study we include examples and data that are meant to inform and educate decision makers and community members alike public. For example, we’ve come across a lot of misunderstanding about the regulations on pedestrian crossings. So, on page 19 of the study, we highlight pedestrian right of way regulations. Pedestrians have the right of way when crossing at a crosswalk, which is formed any time two roads meet. The intersection does not have to be marked to be considered a crosswalk.
We also employed mini case studies to support and explain the safety improvements in the tool kit. This little case study from the District Department of Transportation illustrates the effectiveness of automated speed enforcement in reducing injuries in traffic collisions.
We used local data to focus on the critical needs, like this example from page 34 supporting Left Turn Protection Measures, that states that 5 out of 9 of the fatal and severe crashes that occurred at Hewitt Avenue and Georgia Avenue involved turning vehicles.
We also relied on national and regional best practices, to support the tool kit improvements. This table from the American Association for State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) illustrates the acceptable range of lane widths. Showing that our recommendation to narrow interior lanes to 10 feet and curb lanes to 12 feet on Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue will accommodate vehicles of all sizes. We hope the educational call outs throughout the study, like the examples I shared, can educate community members and decision makers alike and can be used to support safety recommendations in other areas of the county as well.
I wanted to acknowledge that over the course of the study process, several safety improvements have been installed in the study area, some long planned and others the direct result of tragic events and community pressure. I highlight this because it demonstrates that when there is consensus that there is an issue, change can occur relatively rapidly. It also shows that initiatives, like this study, have the power to bring attention to safety issues in our County and advocate for change.
Next Steps

• Implementation requires proactive coordination with MCDOT and SHA
• Frontages are improved through private development, but redevelopment opportunities in Aspen Hill are limited
• Capital Improvements Program and Bicycle Pedestrian Priority Areas are the county’s primary funding mechanisms for Vision Zero projects
• Small-scale funding for bike/ped improvements is available through multiple MDOT-administered programs

MCDOT has been a great partner throughout the study and the development of the safety tool kit. The future of the study and the toolkit contained within will require continued collaboration with MCDOT as well as proactive coordination between MCDOT and the Maryland State Highway Administration. Aspen Hill is a stable area with few short-term redevelopment opportunities, implementation will require public investment to bring about improved safety for all road users. We have outlined some next steps in the study and will include additional information about funding sources in the Appendix.
Safety Toolkit – Short term

- Relocate school bus stops from high-volume, high-speed roads.
- Reduce speed limits.
- Employ right turn on red restrictions.
- Narrow interior travel lanes to 10 feet and curb lanes to 11 feet on Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue.

We’re often asked what can we do now we wanted to highlight some changes that can be implemented through low cost interventions:
Relocate school bus stops from high-volume, high-speed roads.
Reduce speed limits.
Employ right turn on red restrictions.
Narrow interior travel lanes to 10 feet and curb lanes to 11 feet on Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue.
Safety Toolkit – Long term

- Implement left turn protection measures.
- Install intersection lighting to enhance visibility at crosswalks.
- Reconfigure or remove channelized right turn lanes to improve safety at Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue.
- Install permanent buffers along the sidewalk by moving the curb on Georgia Avenue and Connecticut Avenue.
Staff will make a few formatting changes and grammatical edits to the study, and then as a next step we ask for the Board to approve the study and submit it to the County Council for a briefing on the work the Planning Department has completed. Thank you.