

NOTES ON BETHESDA DOWNTOWN IMPLEMENTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
JUNE 4, 2021

Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC)

Agenda

Friday, June 4, 2021, 8AM (Virtual Meeting)

Notes to be taken by Naomi Spinrad

I. PRESENTATION –HAMPDEN EAST PROJECT (4703 to 4717 HAMPDEN LANE AND 4714 TO 4720 MONTGOMERY LANE; JOINT VENTURE OF WASHINGTON PROPERTY COMPANY AND DOUGLAS DEVELOPMENT) (Janel Kausner, Vice President of Development, Washington Property Company) (20 minutes)

II. PRESENTATION – BIKEWAYS IN DOWNTOWN BETHESDA, PLANS AND STATUS (Matt Johnson, Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Areas (BiPPA) Project Manager, Department of Transportation (30 minutes)

III. PRESENTATION – THE BETHESDA DOWNTOWN PLAN ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT FOR 2021, OVERVIEW AND DISCUSSION, INCLUDING DENSITY CAP, WHERE WE ARE AND CURRENT THINKING (Leslye Howerton, Master Planning Supervisor, Downcounty Planning) (30 minutes)

IV. NEW BUSINESS

The presentation by Park Planning and Stewardship on the status and an update on the Eastern Greenway has been postponed to the September meeting.

V. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Summer Break: There will be no meeting on Friday, July 2, or on Friday, August 6. The next meeting will be on Friday, September 3, 2021.

NOTES:

I. Hampden East, presentation by Janel Kausner, VP Development, Washington Property Company.

The site plan for this Shalom Baranes-designed project has been submitted and a Planning Board hearing is expected July 22. This location at Hampden Lane and Montgomery Avenue is an opportunity to create a gateway to Metro. They are requesting 510,000 square feet (sf) – 170,000 residential and 340,000 commercial, with retail on the ground floor, residential in the middle, and commercial space on top. This is a unique configuration in this market.

There are 3 frontages, on Montgomery Avenue, East Lane, and Hampden Lane. The project creates a connection from The Elm, The Wilson, and Woodmont Plaza up to Metro and to the secondary Bethesda Metro entrance. It's focused on reinforcing the public realm by enhancing connections and public space. Its SW corner connects

existing public spaces and continues the path to Metro Center. The design principles Baranes focused on include the vertical mix of uses, biophilic design (energy efficiencies, sustainability, and creating seamless transition from outside to inside). The 27 MPDU units at 17.6% allow additional height and density: the building will be 262' tall.

Retail on the ground floor creates outdoor seating zones and connections on the streetscape. Public open space is 10%. The residential podium of 7 levels cantilevers over the ground floor retail. The 16-floor office component is above that and includes a series of intersecting volumes which allow setbacks and shoulders in the massing on each of the three frontages. There are 4.5 levels of below grade parking, 300 spaces here and 140 across the street.

The ground floor retail will have a "great hall" with a hospitality feel, like walking into a hotel and seeing a bar, people mingling. It will include a "market hall" and opportunities for outdoor seating on Montgomery and Hampden. A lot of glass on the corner will help activate space. The office terrace above the residential component will be open to offices.

They are looking at different materials and colors. The stepbacks on East Lane are 10' and Hampden 5' but the Design Advisory Panel (DAP) requested alternate treatments so it will feel like more than 5' because of other design features. Montgomery is 4'. Developer will provide heights of the stepbacks for us. The DAP gave the project 25 exceptional design points.

An IAC member asked whether the commercial block might toggle back and forth between hotel and office. Janel Kausner responded, no, it's office. The ground floor is 15,000 sf of the 340,000 commercial sf, so 325,000 is office. Could this office space be easily converted? That would be a site plan amendment, not something the developer is anticipating – despite changes in the market and more teleworking, companies still need home bases and there still seems to be demand for trophy office space.

Regarding setbacks from the property to the east, at some points it's 45', at others 22.5', on average it's 30' across the two properties.

Construction will start in the 4th quarter of 2022. Construction will overlap with the BF Saul project but because that's been hung up by the Purple Line delay, with no one at the Purple Line to talk to for several months, the dialog with them is just starting. There's nothing definitive yet, but staging could be tricky with the two projects. The initial plan was for staggering work so the pedestrian walkway could be on this project's side of Hampden Lane while the BF Saul project was going forward – recent legislation requires access so they all will have to work with DPS and figure something out. A question came up about the former Exxon property project, which has been on hold and is apparently being rethought.

II. Bikeways in Downtown Bethesda - Matt Johnson, DOT. Bethesda Loop Projects. Slides from this presentation are available at https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/BDPIAC_BikewaysPresentation_20210604.pdf

The Capital Crescent Surface Trail (CCST) on Bethesda Avenue/Willow Lane to 47th St is in phase 1, and phase 2 goes north along Elm St Park to the Capital Crescent Trail (CCT). This is a two-way bikeway. Phase 1 began November 2020, and will end early summer 2021. Design for Phase 2 is underway. It's not a substitute for the tunnel. The 2-way cycle track on the north side of Bethesda Avenue switches to the south side of Willow Lane. There was a utility issue at the end of February with Pepco, which stopped work; they are back at work and hope to have streets resurfaced by the end of June.

The Bethesda/Woodmont intersection – bike and pedestrian facilities leave the intersection in 6 directions; all intersect here. DOT increased the radius on the NW corner to increase pedestrian space, and also moved crosswalks closer to intersections and narrowed the roadway. There will be signal rephasing, including a pedestrian phase for all crossings but no pedestrian diagonals – there is one diagonal crossing for bikes only from the SW to NE corner. There are no diagonals for pedestrians because they would have to cross over the bike lane given the siting of bike and pedestrian lanes. Within the next week or two lights will be rephased for pedestrians. DOT hopes to enable a long enough single-phase pedestrian crossing of Bethesda and Woodmont. One reason for the rephasing is that drivers turning left onto Bethesda from Woodmont don't always realize pedestrians have a walk signal on Bethesda.

The Woodmont Avenue bikeway is currently under construction. Woodmont Avenue - Miller Avenue to Montgomery, then extensions to Wisconsin and Norfolk. Phase 1 is at 30% Miller to Montgomery. Phase 2 is at 30% design but funding is tight so it is not advancing this year, but may be able to go forward next year. Challenges include parking, 9 intersections, and business access. At Woodmont just south of Montgomery, there's a double left onto Montgomery, and there will be a diagonal crossing as the bike lane flips sides on Woodmont.

Montgomery Lane is not under construction yet but is at 100% for plans for phase 1, 90% phase 2A, and 2B is also approved. Phase 1 construction will start late summer and open late fall, with 2A right after, and 2B toward the end of 2021. Phase 2C is at 30% design but there's no funding for further work yet. This is 2-way separated bike lanes. There's a floating bus stop at Montgomery and East Lane, the first in the county co-located with a signal. There's a red signal for bikes so pedestrians can cross Montgomery Avenue.

CCT tunnel and Cheltenham and Pearl bike lanes are not as far advanced. The CCT tunnel is in design process; design will be completed in 2022, but there is no funding for construction in the CIP right now. There will be a bike storage facility in the old Apex building with keycard access, no fee required. There is no direct connection to the Purple Line platform because of smoke evacuation requirements in that building.

Cheltenham and Pearl are both in design. There's no alternative selected yet for Cheltenham; design will be completed in 2022, construction in 2023.

These routes are defined by the 2018 Bike Master Plan and 2017 Bethesda Plan. Not all bikeways are funded through the CIP yet. There are also aspects addressed in the Bethesda design guidelines and streetscape standards.

There are a number of treatment options for bikeway barriers and DOT hopes to update some older barriers. Barriers include flex posts and paint, raised concrete medians, modular raised curbs, curb stops, planter boxes, and landscaped and curbed barriers. DOT tries to keep cars out of bike spaces so more robust barriers are preferred, and these are also easier to maintain. Flex posts eventually deform or pop out of their brackets, and get destroyed by snow plows. Precast concrete barriers are doweled into the roadway. Curb stops can help protect flex posts. DOT hopes to use planter boxes in the future but they are not yet fully approved. Landscaped/curbed dividers can separate sidewalk/bikeways and road/bikeways.

A number of concerns were raised in the Q&A by IAC members and Parks about the pedestrian/bicycle/vehicle interfaces and the effects on retail and restaurants. Of particular concern: the Bethesda/Woodmont intersection (the intersection itself and the need for pedestrians to cross bike lanes to cross the streets), and 2-way bikeways, especially on one-way streets.

The pedestrian sidewalk there has a 6" vertical curb and will be separated vertically from the bike lanes. The bike crossings have green markings with bike signals. DOT is not very concerned about confusion but there is always a learning curve. In regard to concerns about nimbler, speedier bikes vs cars and pedestrians, DOT responded that it is not introducing a new vehicle – bikes are here already and there are probably more cyclists than drivers right now. Now cyclists come out of the trail onto the sidewalk, weaving and bobbing. By reducing space for cars, DOT has given cyclists a separate space. Yes, there are places where pedestrians have to cross bike lanes. But the space for bike lanes came from space for vehicles. Nobody lost anything on Woodmont. On the east leg of Bethesda Avenue DOT removed a parking lane. The only place where pedestrians lost space is by the Flats of Bethesda, where DOT narrowed the roadway. DOT expects pedestrians to cross the bike lane and wait near the street.

DOT sees the bikeways as a big advantage to retail in Bethesda. They allow people to feel stress-free and safe when biking to Bethesda. People can't shop from cars; it's a lot easier to stop a bike, get off, and go into a shop or restaurant. Bikes will always have to yield at crosswalks, as pedestrians always have the right of way. DOT is confident that getting bikes off the sidewalk is positive.

It was commented that a lot of bikers walk across the Bethesda/Woodmont intersection because there is so much pedestrian interaction, but that bike separated lanes take away the psychic need for that and increase the potential for conflict, and bikes will

have increased speeds. DOT responded that it expects biking to increase in Montgomery County. In regard to complaints about bad behavior by cyclists, DOT's view is that as the number of cyclists increases compliance with regulations goes up. In a 4' bike lane, more cyclists will help control speed. "We're confident we'll manage this interaction well."

Concern was expressed that 2-way bike lanes, especially on 1-way streets, present greater challenges to drivers who need to look in multiple directions for cars and bikes, and bikes may be moving too quickly to be perceived in time. DOT believes that the installed raised crossings on Bethesda Avenue by the JBG buildings for both bikes and drivers should help. The average bike speed is 12 mph, the average pedestrian speed is 3mph, and both are slower than cars. At intersections DOT installed things to reduce turning speed. Drivers have to be very cognizant, as do cyclists - DOT is using green conflict zone markings. DOT can't always manage conflict because there will always be driveways across bike lanes. Woodmont has a 2-way bike lane because of demand – without it cyclists must go to Wisconsin Avenue or Arlington Road. DOT needs to provide direct access in both directions on one-way streets.

In follow-up, the point was made that cyclists need to understand the limits of what drivers can react to. DOT will observe behaviors, but says the bigger problem is that drivers tend not to realize they have these limited reactions. People think they can handle something and they can't. Vision Zero assumes humans are fallible and make mistakes, so DOT needs to use treatments that minimize the risks of fatality or serious injury from mistakes. If a driver is going 20 mph, a pedestrian has a 90% chance of survival, at 30mph, 50%, and at 40mph 10%. A driver comes out of a driveway not going very fast, bikes are not going very fast, and DOT wants to minimize risk. There's a limit to how much behavior DOT can modify but DOT is happy to look at signage.

The issue of 2-way cycle tracks for pedestrians with visual impairments was raised, especially in sloped places like Bethesda Avenue where speed is likely to be greater. The type of facility – 1- or 2-way - is contingent on many local circumstances. In the case of Bethesda Ave, 2-way is because of the offset intersection of Bethesda/Wisconsin/Willow, and because it's connecting to shared facilities on both ends. The 2-way on Woodmont was needed to preserve parking. The heavy left turn from Woodmont to Bethesda means the signal is on for long time. DOT understands the blind community prefers 1-way but in some places 2-way makes most sense.

Regarding opportunities to provide input, DOT always has public engagement. There have been community meetings for Woodmont. January 2020 was the most recent before designs were finalized and DOT made tweaks as a result. More than 150 people were at that event. If people don't come to the meeting it's hard for them to be engaged. There were meetings on Cheltenham and Pearl. The CCTST went through the master plan process and was in the 1994 plan. The more people involved, the better it is.

A hope was shared that these improvements will "tame the daredevil elements" and encourage new and/or nervous cyclists, and that planters and greenery to separate

lanes can sometimes be implemented more quickly because of stormwater management efforts. DOT notes that planters are an approved separator but have to be maintained, and BUP has agreed to do this. The brick median on Bethesda Avenue is designed to have planters on it in the future.

Hyojung Garland of Parks mentioned a concern that there will be cyclist/pedestrian conflict on the planned civic green on the NE corner of Bethesda and Woodmont, especially depending on the speed of the bikes. She suggested that DOT consider having the intersection artistically treated like Chinatown, to help slow down cyclists to make it encouraging for pedestrians. DOT noted the concern but said that intersection painting treatments are not approved in the federal manual and could result in the suspension of federal transportation funding to the state if DOT doesn't follow the manual. DC got slapped pretty hard about Gallery Place crosswalks, and so resisted Pride crosswalks at Dupont circle. Regarding the civic green, people want to be in these places, and for those too far to walk or without transit, biking is a great way to get there. Bikes are going to be integral to that public space. The bike lane will not be a barrier in comparison to Wisconsin Avenue. The bike lane will bring people to Bethesda to shop, recreate, and relax. Streeteries will probably have to go away, but having had this experience of streeteries, it will be easier to close for special events in the future. DOT agrees that it does need to think about how this space will operate with bikes, which are a complement rather than obstacle.

If you have further comments or seek more information contact

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III. THE BETHESDA DOWNTOWN PLAN ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT FOR 2021, OVERVIEW AND DISCUSSION, INCLUDING DENSITY CAP, WHERE WE ARE AND CURRENT THINKING, Leslye Howerton. This presentation was truncated due to time pressure. Leslye Howerton sent out the draft, and the IAC has until next Friday, June 11, to send her its collated comments. Past reports are on the monitoring and tracking web page and IAC members can see past comments there. Comments should be recommendations about things IAC wants to continue monitoring. The draft report should not be shared outside this meeting. It is helpful to list the paragraph, page, and line with each comment.

Since 2020 the DAP has reviewed 6 new projects. The remaining BOZ density is 2,778,654 sf; total development is 29,621,346 sf. The density cap is 32.4 million sf. Once total development is at 30.4 million sf planning staff notifies the Planning Board and provides recommended actions for consideration that will be transmitted to the Council. Language in the sector plan states this is a check-in point. When a project takes density to that point the regulatory staff will let the Planning Board know, and Planning will take that to a hearing. Planning will do analysis regarding the NADMS, PIP, parks implementation, and transportation district, to provide analysis and probably some recommendations that may have actions for the Planning Board and Council to consider. The plan language says the Council may require action but that is not

definitive direction. Bethesda will be getting to 30.4 million sf soon. It could be this year – and planning staff will bring those updates back to the IAC.

The Planning Board date for the monitoring report is 6/24.

Leslye was asked if there was a table to show the 29 projects underway in Bethesda. There is not. Last year, 7 were under construction; of those 4 are still under construction. Planners can put a table in for next year's report as projects approach the BOZ requirement of "use it or lose it" (the time limit to pull permits and break ground on site-plan approved projects). Staff will review which ones haven't moved forward, and if they don't meet that requirement their site plan would be voided. In the second year of the plan a project fell out and its density went back into the pot. Planning will contact at-risk projects with a warning that they risk losing site plan approval. Planning will have a better sense next year of the level of starts and completions, the effects on traffic, schools, etc.

There was general agreement that the comments should include the request to include a chart of the status of all projects. Members should send their comments to their respective residential/commercial co-chairs, Joyce Gwadz and Jack Alexander, for transmission to Leslye by Friday noon.

V. Announcements

The next meeting will be on September 10 to avoid having it on the Labor Day weekend. The plan is to meet in person but we will reconsider if necessary.