

Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC)

Notes

Friday, July 14, 2023, at 8:15 am
Virtual Meeting (Microsoft Teams)

Notes Taken by Joyce Gwadz

1) FRIT Update on Landscaping Improvements at Bethesda Row

John Tschiderer (FRIT)

FRIT's Bethesda Row is in its 30th year (1993-2023), with a new focus, new restaurants, new retail tenants, and new tenant types. Bethesda Row and surrounding properties are commonly referred to collectively as the "Bethesda Row District."

The corner at Anthropologie, now under construction, will have a reconstituted fountain, seating areas, a trellis / canopy, and additional trees (a total of six trees for more shade and green). At the trellis there will be vegetation on the ground and planters.

At Bethesda Lane there will be bicycle racks, pots for plants, edging around the planters, and changes and upgrades to the existing improvements on the Lane. The upgrades will include replacement of approximately 50% of the cobblestone pavers, new overhead lights, new lighting under the bridges, and new furniture, fixtures, and amenities (FFA).

On Elm Street, a "parklet" is proposed from the office building to the dumpster area (from Jenny's Ice Cream to the loading docks), with wider sidewalks to provide space for tables and chairs, retaining the existing trees. The intent is to enhance the sidewalk experience here.

At the Nike store corner of Arlington Road and Bethesda Avenue the fountain has been removed and replaced by new art, a sculpture on sloped granite. There is now bench seating against the building (which seems to be frequently used) and new planters. Across the street, at the Uncle Julio's corner, is a re-done sign. At the Giant corner, the niche open space is being re-done, with a new sign, improved landscaping, and cat-tail lights.

On Bethesda Avenue, Woodmont Avenue, and Elm Street, the entrances to the office buildings will be improved with new directories, clearer addresses, and canopies.

Public Art is envisioned for Bethesda Row, including on the garages (with the support of the County). Art is being considered at Upstairs at Bethesda Row, at the loading dock, and on the back of the pizza building on Elm Street. This art is intended to be “large, gentle, and generally visually pleasing.” FRIT is working to understand evolving brands and consumer interests and to create a new identity in color, graphics, and tenants, developing its strategy for marketing the more than one million square feet of commercial real estate in Bethesda Row.

In response to questions, John Tschiderer stated that (i) on timing, FRIT intends to complete the work at Bethesda Row by the end of October; (ii) on tree location, the trees will be on the edge of the sidewalk adjacent to the street, with a trellis in the middle and trees accentuating the trellis; the trees will likely be installed in November and December (and are expected to be larger than those generally put in by Bethesda Urban Partnership, but he doesn’t know what kind); and (iii) on travel paths, the intent is to have organized travel patterns through the area (straight when possible), in coordination with DOT and the Capital Crescent Trail bike paths. It was noted that planters may be blocking the pathway at Arlington Road and Bethesda Avenue, and FRIT will take a look.

There being no further questions, the discussion was closed.

2) **Update from Parks Department**

Darren Flusche, Brenda Sandberg, M-NCPPC

As an introductory matter Darren Flusche showed a map of County parks in the Bethesda Downtown Plan, including Caroline Freeland Park, the Veterans Park Civic Green, the B-CC East Neighborhood Green, the Capital Crescent Trail (CCT), the Capital Crescent Civic Green, Bethesda-Chevy Chase East, The Eastern Greenway North, and the Eastern Greenway South.

The renovation of Caroline Freeland Park began this week (the week of July 10) and is expected to be completed by summer 2024. Funds from the Amenity Fund are being used for the streetscape. Miti Figueredo of Parks noted that in December 2022, the amount of \$300,000 was allocated to Parks from the Amenity Fund. DOT had advised Parks that DOT would not maintain areas that contained pavers, and in response Parks will update the streetscape in a manner that DOT will maintain. Because DOT will be responsible for maintenance, Parks plans to return \$100,000 to the Amenity Fund,

principally representing the savings from constructing in a way DOT will maintain but also including additional amounts.

For the Veterans Park Civic Green, Parks is pursuing acquisitions to expand the park on-site, and will reach out to the IAC and its members when it could be helpful. Parks looks forward to accomplishing the larger civic green on that site.

The Capital Crescent Civic Green is viewed as an extension of the park near Ourisman Honda. The property was purchased in 2017, and is now used as a staging location for Purple Line construction. As everyone knows, the Purple Line has had continuing scheduling issues. Parks will try to align work on the Civic Green with the Purple Line construction schedule. The goal is to be ready to go with a design once the Purple Line work is completed, and it is expected that Park Impact Payment (PIP) funds will be used.

The B-CC East Neighborhood Green is between East-West Highway and Montgomery, east of Pearl Street. It is being planned and constructed in conjunction with area development. Parks has also had discussions with the church regarding its parking lot and adjacent properties.

Parks is working on what it calls the “Capital Crescent Trail 2.0”, a “facilities plan” for the re-do of the trail. The CCT is one of the most used trails in the county and in the overall general area. Parks will be looking at the trail widths, intersections, connections to neighborhoods, how best to manage different user groups, and related matters.

The Eastern Capital Crescent Trail Urban Recreational Park is more difficult, with multiple owners and nine different parcels. Current ideas contemplate active amenities, such as a dog park, skate park, fitness equipment, playground, and the like.

The Eastern Greenway North is in the area of Tillbury and Maple, 8001 Wisconsin, and West Virginia and Chase Avenues, and would encompass the Chase Avenue Urban Park. Concepts contemplate an active recreation park at Maple and Tillbury.

The Eastern Greenway South includes the Elm Street Urban Park, and is affected by the Capital Crescent Trail and Purple Line construction. The park presently includes a surface trail for the CCT. It is contemplated that the reconstructed park will include a playground area, but this is uncertain because the future of the proposed CCT tunnel under Wisconsin is uncertain. If the tunnel is constructed, the plan would be to rebuild the playground and use the topography and slope of the tunnel as a feature of the playground.

The Eastern Greenway South also includes the planned Bethesda Market Parks, where Parking Lots 10 and 24 are now. Parks has had its first public meeting, and continues to work through the design and funding arrangements. It is contemplated that the park areas will include seating areas, unprogrammed space, and possibly in lot 10 a dog park and / or a play area. The site plan is expected to be completed in late 2023 or early 2024.

Darren Flusche's presentation was then completed, and he turned the presentation over to Brenda Sandberg to report on Park Impact Payment (PIP) funds.

Brenda Sandberg reported that a total of \$21.7 million in PIPs has been approved, with 14.6 million received to date and \$7.1 million pending (but the \$7.1 million amount may change). She noted that some developments approved have provided 25% MPDUs, with no PIP required. PIP funds expenditures to date have been: Veterans Park Civic Green (Goldberg Parcels) - \$9.74 million; Bethesda Market Parks, Lots 10 and 24 (FY 24-28) - \$2.50 million; Capital Crescent Civic Green, Facility Planning (FY 24-28) - 0.50 million; Miscellaneous Expenses (appraisals, consultants - \$0.06 million; Total Expenditures / Allocations to date - \$12.8 million. The current PIP fund cash balance is \$1.8 million ($\$14.6 \text{ M} - 12.8 \text{ M} = \1.8M). Pending proceeds from the proposed land sale of previously-purchased properties near Veterans Park are approximately \$10.3 million, and pending PIPs are estimated at \$7.1 million, which, when added to the current \$1.8 million cash balance, indicate a potential PIP funds balance of \$19.2 million for future projects.

A question-and-answer period followed.

Regarding the work on the Capital Crescent Trail, Darren Flusche indicated that the area of the work would be the trail portion from the Ourisman location to the County line, which is the portion of the trail under County control. For the Elm Street Park, the sources of funds are uncertain.

Regarding public input for the Capital Crescent Trail renovations, Darren Flusche stated that the process would include public listening sessions, with the first, pre-design, expected to be in the fall. The comment was made that the trail from the DC line to downtown Bethesda covers a large area with different groups with different interests, with the result that a general meeting would be good for an overview but the concerns of the different areas are likely to differ. Parks will work to get a range of views through meetings and surveys, and through a meeting process in which everyone can participate, and Parks representatives would be happy to do a presentation at HOA or neighborhood association meetings.

The Veterans Park Civic Green properties were discussed, with questions on timing and cost of properties to replace those being sold. Brenda Sandberg stated that legally she cannot share the details of any discussions, but that IAC members should “rest assured” that care is being taken, and noted that she is spending several hours per week on the purchase project. It is not expected that anything will be presented to the Planning Board over the summer, and when something goes to the Planning Board it will most likely be the purchase. The proposed expansion involves four properties, and Parks is talking with the owners of two of them, but not the two others (who seem not ready to talk yet). Parks would “love to have assistance” in the discussions where appropriate. Some skepticism was expressed in the questioning, as it could be difficult to acquire all four properties, and there is a need to set priorities. Parks acknowledged that there are a number of “big recommendations” in the plan and that the PIP funds are oversubscribed for what Parks would like to do.

Brenda Sandberg explained that the land acquisition plan of Parks is a 50- to 100-year plan, and needs to be viewed over the long term. In response to questions regarding the proposed recreational park on Montgomery Avenue, she noted that nine lots have been recommended, with two of those lots purchased by the Maryland Transportation Authority for use during Purple Line construction. One of these will be retained as a maintenance location, but the eastern one will not be retained. Another of the nine properties now has a for sale or lease sign displayed, but any acquisition of that property will take some time. Parks recognizes, however, the need to act when properties targeted for a park become available. In response to a question whether Parks has taken a proactive approach and contacted owners of the other nine properties, Parks stated that staff has an “open position” but must focus on the projects currently in process, mindful of limited funds. On the suggestion that the Bethesda East Neighborhood Green might go along Pearl Street with the 4405 East-West Highway project, acquisition of the church parking lot is likely to be difficult, and it is not now in the plan to go along Pearl Street.

In response to a question about the Capital Crescent Trail Civic Green and amounts owed by the State to the County for use of the property, Parks explained that the funds, when delivered to the County, will become part of the Advance Land Acquisition Revolving Fund (ALARF), funds meant to serve the entire county, not limited to the Bethesda Plan area.

In response to a request, Parks will send its slides to one of the IAC Co-Chairs for distribution to IAC members.

The renovation of Caroline Freeland Park has begun, and there were questions regarding whether it could be done in stages to permit at least some use over the summer. Parks advised that unfortunately that is not possible. The entire park area is

a construction site where members of the public are not permitted, and it is not feasible to do construction in phases on a parcel the size of the park.

3) Bethesda Annual Monitoring Report Update

Larissa Klevan, M-NCPPC

Of importance, Larissa Klevan stated that comments will be due on Monday, July 17. Comments should be sent to the IAC Co-Chairs to be forwarded to Larissa Klevan.

The Monitoring Report takes a look-back approach, and matters related to the density cap will be considered in the next report.

The Report includes a new section, "Greening the Downtown," which takes a look at the tree canopy and green cover in Downtown Bethesda. Because a new technology was used to measure the tree canopy, it is not possible accurately to compare the most recent date to data from past years. The new technology picks up smaller trees and elements that were not picked up in prior years. The green cover measures a total of 288,973 square feet, with compliance by project ranging from 15.7% to 44%. Properties at 15.7% have had no new construction. The average compliance by project is 34%.

Transportation updates are not in the report at this time. The data is not yet available because of a malware issue. Transportation updates are on the Planning Board agenda for July 27.

4) New Business

- a. Stonebridge will present on its 7749 Old Georgetown Road Sketch Plan application at the September 8 IAC meeting.
- b. M-NCPPC Development Review Work Group update
IAC Co-Chair Amanda Farber reported that she is participating in the Development Review Work Group, put together to look at the development review process from start to finish, from planning to permitting.
- c. Meetings
Pete Fosselman reported that he has a new system for virtual participation which the IAC may want to consider using. Co-Chair Amanda Farber stated that the IAC goal should be to have at least one in-person meeting each quarter.

There being no further business to be conducted, the meeting was adjourned at 9:45 am.

Attendees:

Members [Please ask Cashielle to confirm]

Jack Alexander
Amanda Farber
Michael Fetchko
Matt Gordon
Joyce Gwadz
Dedun Ingram
Andy O'Hare
Patrick O'Neill
Christopher Smith
Naomi Spinrad
Stacey Wolf

Others

Jeff Burton
Henry Coppola
Stephanie Dickel
Miti Figueredo
Darren Flusche
Pete Fosselman
Hyojung Garland
Cindy Gibson
Larissa Klevan
Rachel Newhouse
Brenda Sandberg