May 28, 2019

RE: The Capital Crescent Trail/Little Falls Parkway Traffic Study

Dear Community Member,

Thank you for your interest in the safety improvements project at the Capital Crescent Trail Crossing of Little Falls Parkway.

The safety of park patrons is of the utmost importance to Montgomery Parks (Parks). Montgomery County is the first suburban County in the United States to adopt Vision Zero: a strategy to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, and equitable mobility for all modes of transportation.

The Capital Crescent Trail is the most popular trail in Montgomery County, and the crossing at Little Falls Parkway has been the site of frequent motorist and trail user conflicts. Following a cyclist fatality in Winter 2016, Parks coordinated with Montgomery County Department of Transportation (DOT) and Park Police to implement interim Vision Zero based safety improvements in the form of a “road diet”: reducing the roadway from four lanes to two lanes at the crossing to minimize confusion between trail users and drivers. Additionally, we reduced the posted speed limit to 25 mph, safety signage was installed, and Park Police conducted an educational outreach program. Core tenets of Vision Zero include reducing conflict frequency and severity by reducing vehicle speeds. These interim improvements have proven successful and conflicts between trail users and motorists have been significantly reduced.

Traffic studies and visual observations show with the interim road diet in place, Little Falls Parkway is processing approximately the same amount of vehicular traffic as before. Vehicular travel time along Little Falls Parkway has slightly increased, by an average of 7 seconds. Parks studied several nearby residential roads for cut-through traffic increases and have not found significant impacts except on Hillandale Road, which is experiencing an increase in traffic volumes during rush hours. As a result, Parks and DOT are coordinating with residents on traffic calming improvements along Hillandale Road.

After the interim improvements were installed, Parks began to develop a Facility Plan for permanent safety improvements, to be presented before and approved by the Montgomery County Planning Board. Parks partnered with the traffic engineering firm Sabra and Associates and County DOT to study the post-road diet traffic and safety conditions. We held two public community meetings and studied over a dozen potential alternatives. At the October 2018 public meeting, we presented the top three
alternatives, all of which included a permanent reduction in vehicle lanes from four to two along Little Falls Parkway between the intersections of Hillandale and Arlington Road:

- **Alternative A** converts the existing at-grade crossing to a raised crosswalk and maintains the reduction in vehicle lanes to eliminate the multiple-lane threat and reduce vehicle speeds;
- **Alternative B** diverts the Capital Crescent Trail to the Arlington Road intersection traffic signal, with signal modifications to include an all-stop phase, and maintains the reduction in vehicle lanes to reduce pedestrian exposure time, vehicle speeds, and signal delays;
- **Alternative C** creates a pedestrian overpass bridge and maintains the reduction in vehicle lanes to minimize the bridge span and impacts to adjacent environmental features.

Shifting the trail to the Arlington Road traffic signal in **Alternative B** provides a controlled pedestrian crossing, but results in additional delays for motorists and trail users. Traffic modeling shows these delays will result in increased cut-through traffic on nearby residential roads. In addition, some trail users may attempt to cross against the signal, resulting in more dangerous situations.

A pedestrian bridge as presented in **Alternative C** has the advantage of completely separating trail users and vehicles and was the most desirable alternate based on public feedback. However, a bridge results in major environmental impacts to nearby forests and stream buffers and is exponentially more expensive to design, construct, and maintain than other alternatives.

Based upon the measured success of the interim road diet in increasing safety while balancing traffic flow, costs, and environmental impacts, the recommended facility plan is based upon **Alternative A**. Little Falls Parkway will be reduced from four lanes to two lanes at the crossing. The crossing will be converted to a raised crosswalk, which will increase awareness between trail users and motorists. Additional measures include new street lights at the crossing, connectivity to adjacent trails, additional traffic calming on Hillandale Road, stormwater management, infrastructure and accessibility improvements, and expanded green space.

The project will be presented to the Montgomery County Planning Board on June 13, 2019. The full Facility Plan report and supporting data has been posted to the Montgomery Parks project webpage (www.montgomeryparks.org and search for “Capital Crescent Trail Crossing Little Falls Parkway”). Montgomery Parks welcomes all public input and testimony. If the project is approved by the Planning Board, Parks intends to request design funds in fiscal year 2021 and construction funds in fiscal year 2022.

Thank you again for your interest and support of Montgomery Parks and the Capital Crescent Trail Crossing at Little Falls Parkway project.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Riley, Director
Montgomery Parks