Date: September 16, 2021

Date of Meeting: September 10, 2021

Meeting Location: Video conference

Work Order Number: 32189-005

Project: Howard County Complete Streets

Meeting Description: Complete Streets Implementation Team Meeting #21 (Part 3)

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Introduction

The purpose of the Complete Streets Implementation Team (CSIT) meeting was to review outstanding Chapter 2 comments, outstanding Chapter 5 comments, and the schedule.

Bryan Townsend welcomed all attendees and reviewed the agenda, and then led the group through the materials attached to these minutes. Due to the volume of comments that need to be covered, discussion of Chapter 2 comments will be conducted until 2:00pm. Chapter 5 will be discussed from 2:00-2:45pm, with the remaining time allotted for discussing the schedule and next steps.

Review of comments received on Chapter 2 (street design)

Bryan provided an overview of outstanding comments on Chapter 2 and proposed resolutions. Leah Kacanda began discussing Chapter 2 items with the current Section 2.1.C, Traditional Neighborhood Design, noting that WRA had received comments from the group noting the importance of this section. Leah reviewed the current language for Section 2.1.C, which reads “The Traditional Neighborhood uses a grid system of roadways with multiple routes which residents can access,” and asked whether the intent of this section is promoting network connectivity. If so, new language could read, “The Traditional Neighborhood uses a grid system of streets with multiple routes which residents can access, supporting multimodal network connectivity and better distribution of traffic.”

Jennifer White asked whether this section was in reference to cul-de-sacs, and whether the language could specify that cul-de-sacs are allowed, but the grid system is preferred. Leah replied that cul-de-sacs are regulated in another section of the design manual. Chris Eatough added that the proposed language presents a fact about grid street networks and does not state any requirements or preference. Tom Auyeung noted that the Design Manual states that cul-de-sacs cannot be more than 1,200 feet long, and they can be proposed by developers as long as they meet all of the requirements.

Jessica Bellah mentioned that the Columbia Association is very concerned about maintaining the connectedness of open space in Columbia and that a road grid system will lead to segmented open space. She is comfortable with the proposed language which is relatively neutral.

Larry Schoen asked how the Traditional Neighborhood Design section relates to the existing built environment, and whether this section encourages connectivity. Leah replied that as written, the section does not encourage connectivity, it just highlights the value of connectivity and how it can provide better low stress connections for people walking and bicycling. This section is only 4-5 sentences long and is not intended to provide specific guidance. Carl Gutschick asked if the remainder of the paragraph will remain the same. Leah replied that no other changes were proposed. Carl noted that the standard designs in Howard County can support different types of development. The CSIT concurred with the proposed language.

Bryan Townsend introduced the next topic, Section 2.3.3.d-e, Cul-de-sacs and Tee-Turnarounds. Bryan noted that islands are characteristic features of most cul-de-sacs in Columbia and asked for the Department of Public Works (DPW) to share any concerns regarding snow removal or trash service. Bryan also noted that Volume IV of the Design Manual includes details for two sizes of cul-de-sacs with and without islands, as well as cul-de-sac bulbs and offset cul-de-sac bulbs.

Christina Rigby asked what determines whether a cul-de-sac has an island. Bryan replied that it is the designer’s choice as both options are available in the Design Manual. Kris Jagarapu added that one of the challenges with cul-de-sac islands is when residents park their cars in the cul-de-sac. This becomes problematic during snowstorms when snowplows are trying to remove snow from roadways or when delivery trucks are trying to make a delivery – it can become impossible to turn around unless the vehicle is smaller than a pickup truck.

Jessica commented that cul-de-sacs with islands are a character defining element in Columbia, and that cul-de-sacs with islands are preferred. Columbia Association is comfortable with changing the standard details to address snow removal and delivery services. She added that if the Design Manual states that cul-de-sacs without islands is the
design preference, that would be an issue for the community and Columbia Association. Bryan offered to add some clarifying new language to the address concerns with snow removal and delivery vehicles and that this would not impact existing cul-de-sac islands. Kris affirmed that there is no program in place to review and eliminate cul-de-sac islands. Kris noted it is difficult to allow on-street parking and retain islands – the only option would be to eliminate parking in cul-de-sacs. Kris stated that the County has attempted to enforce no parking restrictions, but it comes down to whether or not residents abide by signage.

Bryan introduced tee-turnarounds, which are intended to function as the terminus to temporary non-through streets. Bryan mentioned that there are concerns about people using tee-turnarounds for parking. Tee-turnarounds are also supposed to serve a short term role before the street is extended, but often, they end up remaining in place permanently. Larry asked if there was anything related to tee-turnarounds that promoted multi-modal transportation. Walking and biking connections could tie into tee-turnarounds that promoted multi-modal transportation.

Carl noted that temporary tee-turnarounds are used when the developer does not have the ability to build on the adjacent property. Carl asked for the County’s rationale for prohibiting driveways off tee-turnarounds, noting that guidance provided in Volume III, and IV is inconsistent. Tom Auyeung replied that driveways are restricted because of snow plowing would cause those driveways to be obstructed. Kris confirmed that snow creates an issue with tee-turnarounds and that trash trucks have a difficult time as well – when cars are parked on tee-turnarounds, trash trucks can’t turn around properly.

Tom stated that the language in Volumes III and IV should be consistent. Carl suggested that driveways should be prohibited from the top of the tee and agreed that Volume IV should be changed to match Volume III.

Larry asked whether this is the appropriate section of the Design Manual to encourage interconnectivity of neighborhoods, parks, and community centers. Larry provided Clydesdale Court next to Meadowbrook Park as an area with poor interconnectivity. Leah stated that the Bicycle Studies section requires opportunities for connections to be identified.

Leah provided an overview of Section 2.4, Intersections. Leah asked the group to give some thought to the appropriate level of design guidance for this section. Carl Gutschick stated that engineers use this section of the Design Manual daily, and it would be helpful if commonly used passages were included as opposed to having to cross reference other manuals. Jennifer White recommended that this section be used to illustrate new ways to design intersections and demonstrate important Complete Streets principles.

Leah introduced Sections 2.4.B.6 and 2.4.B.8 – Channelized Right Turn Lanes and Traffic Islands and mentioned the two sections may be combined. Multiple people provided feedback that channelized right turn lanes encourage high-speed turns. The new design diagram reflects a little more progressive design that increases visibility between people using the crosswalk and driving. The current language discourages the use of channelized right turn lanes. There was also a request to encourage speed tables at crosswalks where high-speed turns are a concern.

Larry Schoen asked for an explanation of why channelized right turn lanes are necessary, noting that these turns are very dangerous for people walking and bicycling. Bryan provided several different examples where channelized right turn lanes may be necessary for geometric reasons, for instance, where intersections are at acute or obtuse angles. Channelized right turn lanes also control the location of cars within the lane and allow for a pedestrian crossing island that can serve as a refuge and decrease crossing distance. Crossing islands can, in certain situations, make conditions safer for drivers and pedestrians. Sometimes higher volumes require a channelized right turn lane. Larry asked for some locations in Howard County where these channelized right turn lanes are needed. Carl mentioned the intersection of Broken Land Parkway and Guilford Road. Kris mentioned that some intersections may need a larger outside curb radius, which may work better with channelized right turn lanes.

Bryan cited Guilford Road at MD 108 as a good example of an acute intersection where a channelized right turn lane is necessary to avoid a large pavement area. Kris noted that Governor Warfield Parkway at Little Patuxent Parkway is another example where there are geometric challenges, but a channelized right turn lane was removed. The northbound lanes have a slightly higher elevation than the southbound lanes. Kris commented it is possible to make
the channelized right turn lane smaller to encourage lower speeds, and have a pedestrian crossing in the middle. Larry clarified that his comment observed that channelized right turn lanes are discouraged, but there are currently pages of guidance governing them. Larry suggested that the language be consistent with the County’s intent, and channelized right turn lanes should be considered as an exception.

Chris agreed that the language in the Design Manual could be refined. Bryan and Kris shared that sometimes channelized right turn are necessary due to geometric constraints, and they can otherwise be discouraged. Carl observed that where a County road meets a State road, the State Highway Administration (SHA) would control the design of the intersection. Jennifer agreed that channelized right turn lanes should be discouraged. Christiana mentioned that the intersection of Broken Land Parkway and Snowden River Parkway is unsafe for pedestrians and negatively impacts pedestrian connectivity. She also agreed that the use of channelized right turn lanes should be minimized.

Bryan noted that part of the reason that the channelized right turn lane at Broken Land Parkway is so problematic for pedestrians is because the large turning radius is similar to a highway ramp. He referenced the diagram of a pedestrian friendly channelized right turn lane, which requires vehicles to slow down and wait for a gap in traffic since a merge lane is not provided. This design also provides better sight lines between drivers and pedestrians. Bryan suggested adding language that requires a comprehensive evaluation establishing need, and an assessment of impact to pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.

Kris stated that one advantage to a channelized right turn lane is that if you’re trying to cross the street, the pedestrian island reduces the crossing distance. If pedestrian islands are too small, pedestrians can’t and won’t use them. Kris mentioned that one challenging location is MD 108 at Columbia Road. Because the island is positioned at the bottom of a down grade, the pedestrian sign is hit monthly.

Chris led the discussion on Section 2.4.E, Pedestrian Design Elements at Intersections. Chris explained that accessible pedestrian signals are the default for new signals that are installed in Howard County. Pedestrian recall means that the pedestrian signal is given every light cycle without pressing a button. Recall could always be used at minor road crossings when they are along a major road because the pedestrian phase does not add any extra time to the signal cycle. Chris shared Little Patuxent Parkway and Faculty Drive as an example. The pedestrian signal for crossing Faculty Drive could be on recall, which would not impact the signal timing. The pedestrian signal for crossing Little Patuxent Parkway would not be on recall, because a pedestrian signal phase there would be longer than the green light cycle, resulting in an impact to traffic even if pedestrians are not present. He argued that minor crossings in Howard County should always be set to recall.

Chris went on to discuss leading pedestrian intervals, which is when the pedestrian signal provides a walk indication a few seconds before vehicular traffic receives a green indication. He stated that leading pedestrian intervals should be used more frequently in Howard County. Chris showed Twin Rivers Road and Lynx Lane as an example. Because it is a “T” intersection, a leading pedestrian interval gives pedestrians more time to cross without any loss of time for through traffic, since drivers turning left are required to yield to pedestrians regardless. When it is a four way intersection, the safety of pedestrians must be weighed against how long drivers must wait. Larry agreed with Chris’s recommendation, and asked how a right turn onto Twin Rivers Road would work. Chris said that the leading pedestrian interval would also apply on that leg of the intersection. Larry asked why a car would have a green if a pedestrian presses the button, and Chris answered that the car wouldn’t have an immediate green if the leading pedestrian interval was there.

Larry commented that pedestrians should have the entire cycle to cross the street. Chris clarified that the button must be pressed for pedestrian crossing signal to appear at all. If the signal was set to recall for the crossing of the major street, it would be forcing vehicles to stop way more often, and overall cycle length would be unnecessarily long. Kris commented pedestrian signalization is a project specific issue, and there is not a need to revise the Design Manual. Larry respectfully disagreed, stating that leading pedestrian intervals should be the standard. Christiana agreed, commenting that forcing cars wait for a few seconds is the bare minimum that could be done for pedestrian safety.
Jennifer agreed with Larry and Christiana, stating that the County should elevate the importance of Complete Streets principals and make sure intersections work better, especially for pedestrians. The County should be using these tools and strategies to design intersections for all users, not just cars, and the Design Manual should encourage these strategies so pedestrians are better accommodated on County roadways. Chris commented that leading pedestrian intervals are inexpensive and have shown to be effective – studies have previously shown a 60% reduction in crashes due to leading pedestrian intervals. Changes can be implemented anytime, and do not have to be completed as part of a construction project.

Jessica commented that intersections with pedestrian signals installed have a lot of pedestrian traffic, and there are a lot of signalized intersections without have pedestrian signals. In urban settings, there should always be pedestrian crossing signals, and that there should be criteria at intersections for pedestrian recall and leading pedestrian intervals. Chris Eatough mentioned that if there are fewer pedestrians at intersections, the impact of leading pedestrian intervals on traffic will be lower and they are only activated when a pedestrian presses the button, so the number of pedestrians is irrelevant.

Christiana asked why the button needs to be pressed for pedestrians to cross. She asked why there isn’t technology that recognizes when pedestrians are at the intersection and ready to cross. Kris replied that most of the detection technology is set up to detect the metal in vehicles. Currently Howard County is testing passive and active pedestrian detection technology. Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons use a camera technology that detects pedestrians and automatically triggers the signal, which is more expensive. The technology has gotten better and hopefully in the future we won’t need the buttons for pedestrians to cross safely. Kris shared that the County has a goal of adding crosswalks to all approaches at signalized intersections.

Bryan Townsend noted that for time’s sake, discussion will move on to Chapter 5. Remaining Chapter 2 items will be addressed at next Friday’s CSIT meeting.

Review of comments received on Chapter 5 (traffic studies)

Leah Kacanda began Chapter 5 discussions with an overview of comments related to Level of Traffic Stress (LTS) at intersections. Leah noted that the published LTS methodology considers signalized LTS 1. Multiple comments were received expressing concern with that statement. Currently, the LTS methodology is being refined for use at intersections, and Leah suggested that reference to LTS at intersection be removed from the Design Manual. The methodology can still be used to identify caps in low-stress bicycle connectivity. Chapter 2 will provide more guidance on providing low-stress bicycle connections through intersections, including the NACTO document “Don’t Give Up at the Intersection”. Larry asked if the statement that signalized intersections are considered LTS 1 would be removed, and Leah clarified the statement and any other references to LTS at intersections would be removed. The rest of the section on LTS would be cleaned up and better cross reference the design guidance provided in Chapter 2.

Larry asked how the group would handle new LTS guidelines as they are published. Leah replied that the County has expressed interest in a regular review of external references included in the Design Manual. Chris agreed that LTS would be assessed during that regular review, although DPW and OOT are still working out the details.

Bryan introduced, Section 5.2.E. Safety Studies. He shared that there have been several comments regarding the inclusion of qualitative review of pedestrian safety in addition to an assessment of crash history. Bryan noted that not all collisions that happen with pedestrians are reported, and that situations that are “near-misses” are almost never reported. The current language in the draft reads “...a safety evaluation must consider not only crash history but also conflicts as observed in the field, as well as absence of adequate accommodations for all modes of travel. These evaluations make possible the incorporation of design features which may alleviate existing crash causation factors and promote safety for people walking, bicycling, driving, and riding transit.” Bryan asked whether more prescriptive guidance is necessary regarding field observations.

Larry commented that safety is the most important issue, but user comfort is also important since that supports walkability. He argued the Design Manual should address both safety and comfort. Christiana noted there can
always be more clarity. She shared a resident recently shared that a new traffic circle has made conditions less comfortable for pedestrians. She suggested that safety, pedestrian comfort, and connectivity should be addressed when evaluating new facilities.

Jessica noted that there is a lot of data on crashes that can be used for future projects. There are also a lot of citizens who can provide feedback about walking conditions. She asked how that information could be stored and referenced. Although the information may not be useful for Design Manual edits, it could be used to inform project design and future policy. Larry commented that there have been conversations about using TellHoCo for feedback about where improvements in the pedestrian network are needed.

Bryan noted that some more work may be necessary to clarifying the extent to which this guidance applies to developer projects.

Bryan shared that a request was made to include a reference to experimentation relative to the MUTCD in Section 5.4.A. Kris replied that County staff is familiar with FHWA's experimentation process, and that it is not necessary to provide reference to it in the Design Manual. Larry replied if the County wants to be on the cutting edge of multi-modal design, it is important to tell the development community that the County is open to experimental design.

Bryan noted a request to include temporary or exploratory traffic calming options to promote safety and encourage traffic calming. Several comments had been received on this topic. Any measures would be pursued in consultation with the Department of Public Works. Temporary traffic calming measures can be used to determine which geometries would work best before permanent installation. Bryan asked if DPW is comfortable including language to this effect in the Design Manual. Kris replied that the County has used temporary installations to see if a given measure would work. He noted that in many cases, there is not a need to temporarily experiment. The County is familiar with most traffic calming tools. If this request is for the public to install temporary traffic calming in the public right of way that would create liability issues for the County.

Jessica shared she made a number of comments about adding a new section on community led traffic calming projects. She noted other places including Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Washington D.C. have created application processes for community members to propose projects. She noted these application processes give the locality control over the projects to ensure the safety of all participants and users of the street.

Chad Edmondson asked if temporary traffic calming measures are installed by DPW or someone else. Christiana asked if it could be an idea from OOT that is implemented by DPW. Jessica commented that this could be something as simple as DPW narrowing lane width with temporary lane markings. Another option would be to have school children paint a mural on a street to signify to drivers that people live in the area and they need to slow down.

Chad replied that the County would be liable if something happens within the right of way. Chris added that temporary traffic calming measures that have been done were installed by DPW as a way to evaluate their efficacy. If necessary, the placement and geometry of the design can be changed before implementing a permanent solution. Christiana noted that DPW has tried out different traffic calming measures with cones in the past, and that the Design Manual should permit those installations to continue.

Bryan shared that one comment expressed concern over the cumulative impact of multiple developments over time, especially in the western part of the County. Bryan noted that this topic must be addressed when the subdivision regulations are updated. Chris noted that draft language in the Bicycle Studies section requires developers to show multi-modal connections within a half-mile of school, park, or library. The goal is that these connections are incorporated in the bike or pedestrian master plan process. Revisions to the subdivision regulations may require developers to provide funding to fill those gaps. Carl noted that the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) threshold is lower for traffic studies. Chad added that any development that triggers five peak hour trips requires a traffic study, but the extent of the studies vary.
Larry shared that country roads have become highly trafficked over time after a series of developments go in, making road conditions unsafe for people walking and bicycling. Chris clarified that language addressing the cumulative impact of development needs to be included in the subdivision regulation updates and cannot be addressed in the Design Manual. Larry acknowledged that approach as appropriate.

Leah shared that several comments were received regarding language used at the beginning of Section 5.2.F, Parking. There is concern about the assertion that “an insufficient supply of parking” creates congestion, since managing trip generation and mode choice can also reduce congestion. The assertion that a lack of parking can impact business sales was also questioned. Both concerns could be addressed by the following changes:

Poorly designed entrances and exits, or an insufficient supply of parking spaces, can create congestion on what would otherwise be an adequate street, and increase crash potential, and lead to reduced sales in business districts for all road users.

Leah noted that this language just alters the tone of the introductory paragraph and does not impact the content of the section.

Leah noted that this section mentions bike parking and cross references bike parking guidance. The Design Manual cannot be used to compel developers to provide bike parking. Larry asked whether there are any requirements for vehicular parking in the manual. Leah replied that those requirements are in the subdivision regulations. Carl clarified that the number of parking spaces required is provided in the zoning regulations, along with driveway lengths. Larry went on to say that parking lots often create a barrier to those attempting to get around on foot or bike. Larry asked if they would be addressing multimodal circulation in parking lots. Leah replied that Chapter 2 includes information about the design of parking lots, and issues relating to bike and pedestrian circulation will be discussed when the CSIT discusses that section of Chapter 2.

Leah reviewed the remaining outstanding comments from Chapter 5 along with suggestions on how to address them:

- Section 5.3 (Comment 361, 336): Need to better clarify how traffic studies (Chapter 5) works with design criteria (Chapter 2). Additional language will be provided in the next draft.
- Section 5.2.A.2 (Comment 345): TIS should include “analysis for additional turn lanes, acceleration, and deceleration lanes.” Request to add: “and their impact on bicycle and pedestrian safety and comfort.” The language will be revised for the next draft.
- Section 5.2.B.3 (Comment 374): Current language reads “it is desirable to provide additional walking... connections.” Request to change to “it is the goal of the County to provide additional walking... connections...” The language will be revised for the next draft.
- Section 5.2.C.1 (Comment 337): Request to specify illumination level for mid-block crossings. Will add cross reference to Section 2.7 Street lighting.

There were no proposed changes to the suggested resolutions to these comments.

Schedule

Leah provided a brief overview of the schedule, noting that every effort was made to give CSIT members adequate time to comment while allowing for revisions to continue in time for the October deadline. Leah explained that a revised version of Chapter 5 will be presented on Friday, September 17. CSIT members will have one week to review the Chapter 5. The updated draft of Chapter 2 will be presented on September 24. Leah noted that additional columns will be added to the schedule to note business days available for each review period.

Bruce Gartner said the goal has been to get consensus from the CSIT, but a vote may be necessary moving forward. Christiana asked how much time there would be to incorporate comments after public review before council review. Leah Kacanda mentioned that the draft Design Manual will be posted from October 11 through October 28 for public review and comment. Two public meetings will be held during that time period.
Amah Binde asked Bruce to expand on the role of the CSIT in approving the Design Manual. Bruce replied that is up to the administration, and the administration representative is not in attendance to share their approach.

The next CSIT meeting is scheduled for Friday, September 17 at 1:00 pm.

Leah Kacanda, AICP