Date: November 17, 2021

Date of Meeting: November 10, 2021

Meeting Location: Video conference

Work Order Number: 32189-005

Project: Howard County Complete Streets

Meeting Description: Complete Streets Implementation Team Meeting #26 (Part 3)

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**Introduction, roll call, agenda review**

Bryan Townsend welcomed all attendees to the Complete Streets Implementation Team (CSIT) meeting and reviewed the agenda.

**Meeting minutes from 10/6 and 10/8**

There were no comments on the meeting minutes from Wednesday October 6 or Friday, October 8, 2021. Chris Eatough made a motion to approve the minutes and Jessica Bellah seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

**Public Works Board Meeting Overview**

Chris Eatough and Bryan presented to the Public Works Board (the Board) on Tuesday, November 9. They provided the Board with a brief overview of the draft Design Manual and the public engagement process. Chris noted that the Design Manual will be on the agenda for the Board’s December 14 meeting, at which point there will be a vote to approve the document. The Department of Public Works (DPW) was also in attendance and assisted with questions from Board members. The presentation also provided an overview of the Complete Streets policy and associated mandates, as well as guidance from the policy on how the Design Manual should comply with Complete Streets concepts using best practice and established national standards. The presentation focused on the public process including the workshops, comments received, and changes made to the draft Design Manual resulting from those comments.

Chris noted that the Board members asked some questions. They asked how the County intends to conduct education and outreach to familiarize the public with the new street types. They asked whether the new road widths are sufficient for truck and large vehicle maneuvering. They suggested the distances for multimodal traffic studies in Chapter 5 be aligned with the distances that youth walk to school in Howard County, which is one mile for elementary and middle school students and one and one-half miles for high school students.

Board members also asked about the fiscal impacts of Complete Streets. One was focused on the cost to the County for developing capital project designs and maintaining new multimodal facilities. Chris noted that a fiscal impact statement will be provided to the County Council as required for the legislative process. Another Board member inquired about the financial impact to developers, since the new street types may have higher costs associated with them. Chris had noted that no comments were received about this financial impact during the public comment period.

CSIT members did not have any questions on the Board meeting.

**Volume III Discussion**

**Office of Transportation (OOT) understanding of unresolved high-level concerns**

Chris reviewed his understanding of unresolved issues, which were also reviewed at the Board meeting. On the technical side, Volume IV details are still under review by DPW, to incorporate updates to items such as the new sidewalk and right of way widths.

Members of the public and CSIT have expressed concern with the 3% growth rate referenced in Chapters 4 and 5. The data does support going lower, and team members have requested to lower that number to zero or one percent.

Members of the public and CSIT have also expressed concern with the difference between the design speed and target speed for new street types. That issue has been addressed as much as possible with edits. The target speed for the Neighborhood Connector Street, which is currently 35 mph also remains under discussion. This street type is intended to connect neighborhoods, not be used within neighborhoods, which is the reason for a target speed that is higher than other neighborhood street types.
Lastly, the distance for which a developer study is required is also under discussion based on feedback from members of the public, the CSIT, and the Board. The most recent proposal is to correlate the study distances to the Howard County Public School System walk catchment areas, which are one mile for elementary schools and middle schools and one and a half miles for high schools. Studying a connection to County parks and libraries is triggered if the development is within one half mile. Text incorporating these new distances is currently under development.

Bruce Gartner asked each member of the CSIT to provide an overview of their remaining one to three top priorities.

**Top (1-3) remaining priorities of each member**

Carl Gutschick raised a concern with how the Design manual handles private roads. The current Design manual says that private roads shall be designed to public road standards, however there is very little guidance as to what constitutes a private road in different circumstances. He pointed out the development at the northeast corner of the intersection of 175 and Snowden River Parkway (Dried Earth Boulevard) as an example. He noted that there are three developments comprised of apartments, condominiums, and townhomes. The streets within the developments were designed in the early 2000’s and are privately owned. However, there is nothing in the Design Manual that encompasses this type of street since they are not driveways or roads. They provide a way to access parking and residential units. They do not meet any kind of public road standards other than paving thicknesses, curb, and gutter. The alignment and geometry of the roads do not meet Design Manual standards as evidenced by the tightness of the turns and intersection spacing. Right now, reviewing this type of development requires the good judgement of Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) staff under Chad Edmondson. Carl requested that the Design Manual designate this type of private street that allows people to travel from roads to parking spaces and garages as a “travel way.” This type of street works well, and they are all over Howard County. This is not a Complete Streets issue, but it is a Design Manual issue; Carl expressed concern that it could be some time before another opportunity to revise Volume III for this concern.

Bruce thanked Carl for the feedback and noted that staff would follow up on the issue.

Chad Edmondson noted that it would be helpful to work through some old development proposals using the new Design Manual standards. The goal would be to take a submitted plan and review how the new street types would be applied. The DPZ team will be implementing this document, and it is important they have a good sense of how to do so. Different staff should land on the same decisions. Bruce agreed that type of exercise would be an educational training exercise to go through before the Design Manual is adopted.

Christiana Rigby shared that the biggest outstanding issue is the background growth rate and the implication around it. The background growth rate issue relates to the timing of updates to the subdivision regulations and Chapter 4 and 5. She noted Chad’s suggestion would be very helpful.

Chris noted his outstanding issue is regarding the marking of crosswalks and providing safe street crossings. The draft Design Manual includes language that adequately addresses this issue but there are still outstanding concerns with implementation. Through Design Manual updates and staff collaboration, the County should be able to make improvements so that it is safer and easier to cross streets in more locations in Howard County.

Bruce noted that David Nitkin is absent. Doug Kampe noted he has no questions or concerns at this time.

Jennifer White identified the County’s use of Level of Service (LOS) in evaluating transportation improvements as a major issue since it has resulted in wide, fast roads and intersection and auto-centric development. She encouraged the County to adopt a Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) standard to reduce traffic and encourage other modes of travel. Background traffic growth projections should be lowered and thanked the County for acknowledging that as an outstanding issue at the beginning of the meeting. Parts of the Design Manual provide detail on how to design roadway features that are auto centric, but less detail is provided for Complete Streets improvements. The draft Design Manual is an auto centric document with Complete Streets layered on top. It is important that Complete Streets is not layered on as a thin veneer, but instead is centered at the core of the Design Manual to drive and inform the remaining documents that will be updated including the subdivision regulations and the Adequate Public Facility Ordinance (APFO).
Jessica Bellah agreed with Carl's issue, noting the Design Manual does a great job of addressing public roads but does less to address the private realm which includes many of the places where the public travels. Once the subdivision regulations are updated it would be good to focus on parking lots, especially large lots that function with their own internal circulation. Parking lot design should consider how cars move through them as well as how they accommodate bikes and pedestrians. This issue goes hand in hand with the private street or "travel ways" issue Carl raised.

Jessica noted her other priority as "green streets," or techniques to manage stormwater management within the right of way using vegetation and engineered systems. Although the County has decided to not focus on green streets at this time, as focus changes over the next few decades it would be better if the County does not rely on stormwater systems outside of the right of way.

Larry Schoen acknowledged all the work done by staff to address concerns from the CSIT and public regarding intersections. He noted that he is more comfortable with where the Design Manual stands after the recent round of revisions. Larry identified his largest concern as all the infrastructure that is already built that is not accessible to bicyclists and pedestrians. There is still some concern about how these issues will be addressed by developer projects and capital projects. Given the number of state roads within the County, this will also be impacted by how the County interfaces with the State, and whether they also make multimodal improvements. Traveling east to west it is hard to get anywhere without traveling on a state road.

Larry noted another issue is the use of language such as "not practical" or "not feasible" within the Design Manual. There is an exceptions process established, but there may need to be an "exceptions lite" process that can be used to determine when a certain improvement is not practical or feasible. Currently there is too much latitude for Designers and not enough public input to the process.

Larry requested the FHWA Bikeway Selection Guide be adopted as a minimum standard, and strongly objected to the County using fewer progressive design tools than the federal government. This extends to the elimination of an experimental treatment (advisory bike lanes) that may make it easier to deal with issues of limited right of way.

Larry noted that the multimodal traffic studies section gives the authority to determine which studies are required to DPW and asked that OOT be given more authority. The Multimodal Transportation Board could also be added to provide public input to the process.

Larry's commented that often water utility improvements are made and an opportunity to include a multimodal transportation improvement is missed. There is not any text in the Design Manual to address this issue.

Larry’s last concern revolved around navigating the transportation improvement process. Despite working on these issues for the past two years, it is difficult to understand how the process works and the relationship between all the different standards and processes including the Design Manual, APFO, the subdivision regulations, and the bicycle and pedestrian master plans. There needs to be a better way to explain all the requirements to laymen.

Kris Jagarapu observed that the last two years have been spent developing a Design Manual document that works for everyone. He noted he has spent time doing design manual revisions with other jurisdictions and has worked in this field for over 20 years, including in the private sector and transitioning to the public sector with management responsibilities. A lot of ideas were raised throughout this process, however, maintaining exiting and new infrastructure is a key aspect of being a good community. Howard County has always been open to trying and implementing new things. Hopefully the County will be successful in implementing these changes. He noted change will be incremental, and there may be a period during which things are refined. County staff who are responsible for design or maintenance will have to adjust and accommodate different ideas. That process of refinement is important. The Design Manual retains some flexibility, but Kris noted that ideally there would be more. Once there is stricter guidance in place it may limit the County’s ability to make an improvement. For example, the provision of a ten foot wide shared use path may compete with retaining mature street trees, but flexibility to include an 8 foot wide path may allow trees to be saved.
Kris noted the Public Works Board questioned the financial impact of Design Manual revisions to capital projects and developer projects. Some of those costs may also be incremental costs which are not as bad as thought. As someone in the position of maintaining all these features in addition to the current transportation network, there will be some challenges moving forward. Approaches may need to change to meet the expectations of the community. He concluded that the next five years will be interesting, and he is excited to see how implementation progresses.

Tom Auyeung agreed with Kris, noting that implementing new design concepts will be a learning process. It is important to establish a good balance between the interests of all users, not just motorists, but also pedestrians and bicyclists. It will require an open mind, and to change if things don’t work. He noted when the County implemented Australian standards in the 1990s which featured sharper curves and traffic calming, it did not work, and the County had to change the criteria. If this current effort does not work, it will have to be revised to make it better and balance the interest of all users.

Outstanding Revisions

Bruce shared that Sam Sidh was unable to attend today’s meeting, but he shared earlier this week that it is a priority of the administration to keep to the current schedule. Advancing the design manual will be in consideration of input from Councilmember Rigby. The legislative calendar and fiscal implications must also be considered. The goal is to get the Design Manual to County Council before they are overwhelmed with other issues. It is important to Sam and the Executive to address as many comments as possible. There are some simple comments that can be addressed now. Issues like background growth rate can be considered and debated by County Council. Bruce noted that some of the issues raised by Jennifer White are difficult to address at this point because there isn’t sufficient time, budget, or consultant resources available. If there are any other specific outstanding edits those could be addressed. For example, better referencing the FHWA Bikeway Selection Guide as a minimum and the thresholds for multimodal traffic studies. It may be necessary to circle back to the issue of private and public streets.

Bryan shared revised language for the developer multimodal traffic study thresholds, which reads as follows:

- Study connections to county parks and libraries within a 0.5 mile radius of the development and include recommendations / concept level design for improvements for a connection to each identified park and library.
- Study connections to each elementary and middle school within a 1 mile radius of the development and include recommendations / concept level design for a connection to each identified school which would result in a route of 1 mile or less from the development.
- Study connections to each high school within a 1.5 mile radius of the development and include recommendations / concept level design for a connection to each identified school which would result in a route of 1.5 mile or less from the development.

Chris explained the current draft language uses one half mile as a threshold from schools, libraries, and parks. The purpose of the study is to highlight what the connection would be. The County cannot require the developer to provide the connection at this point. During the initial analysis, anything larger than one half mile resulted in very broad coverage of the eastern part of the county. A mile radius from each school covers the entire eastern portion of the county. A lot of comments were received that noted one half mile is not in line with how Howard County Public School Systems (HCPSS) determines which students walk or bus to school. Elementary and middle school students walk up to one mile to school and high school students walk up to one and one half miles. The language requires routes within this distance be safe for an elementary school student to walk and a LTS 1 bicycle facility. A shared use path would meet the needs of those walking and biking. The revision would include the bulleted list Bryan shared, which accommodates comments received from the Public Works Board, CSIT, and public.

Jessica asked why parks and libraries were included in the list of destinations. Chris replied that the goal was to select destinations that are easy to define that children and less experienced road users may need to access. Jessica recommended adding public pools to the list since children are more likely to walk or bike to a pool than to a library. Chris asked if the County has many public pools. Jessica clarified that Columbia Association pools are private. David Cookson noted there is only one public pool in the Roger Carter Community Center and a new pool is planned in the future in North Laurel.
Larry asked whether the studies were expanded to include walking and biking instead of just biking. Chris clarified that it already included walking and biking. The biking facility must be LTS 1 and the walking facility must be a continuous pedestrian connection. Larry expressed support for the revised language. Bryan clarified that the revised text is housed within the bicycle study section of Chapter 5.

Kris noted that the CSIT had discussed this issue before, recalling that using a one-mile radius would overlap the entire eastern part of the county. He also noted that some schools may overlap since there are multiple schools in one area. If there is an elementary, middle, and high school would the HCPSS formula be used? Chris replied that there is a difference between a radius and a potential proposed walking route. Bryan clarified that drawing a radius from a school is not the walk zone criteria. The half mile radius will be used for parks and libraries, while a one mile radius will be used for elementary and middle schools and a one and one half mile radius will be used for high schools. Since part of the intent is to look at new connections, you cannot just look at available routes. The study needs to include potential connections within the radius. These are the elements that would be included for a concept level design.

Kris noted that he lives in a community within a one and one half mile radius to a school but that is not where he goes. He noted he would not benefit from the study if he does not even attend the school. Bryan replied that is a policy question. Does the County want to look at walk zones for schools as they are today, or should the potential for redistricting also be considered? Christiana noted that this policy could eliminate hazard bussing, potentially a group could be removed from a bus and added to the walk list. It would also be beneficial to provide opportunities for community school events. Doug replied that he would not confine the analysis area to current school boundaries since they are subject to change. The distance at which a child can walk is also subject to change. Carrol and Montgomery County each have 2 mile walk zones, and there may be an opportunity to expand HCPSS walk zones moving forward. He suggested keeping the language around distance vaguer if possible. HCPSS will do studies around redistricting and the walk zone in the future that may impact school boundaries and the size of walk zones.

Bryan noted the current text is not specific to the current districting and asked for clarification about not being as prescriptive with distances. Doug noted the distance used for both elementary and middle school students are a mile, but they are calculated at different points. For elementary schools it is measured door to door and for middle school it is property line to property line. This results in a larger capture area for middle schools. The methodology by which measurements are made is also subject to change. Chris replied that there was discussion around not including distances and cross referencing the HCPSS policy, so that if HCPSS changes their policy the Design Manual would still be consistent. There is a concern that the external reference would rely on the developer to interpret the HCPSS policy correctly. For example, a developer could see they are not located in a school walk zone and assume the study requirement does not apply. Doug noted that Howard County has been prescriptive in how walk zones are measured. Recent policy revisions were intended to give some flexibility beyond the 1-1.5 miles. If there is a contiguous neighborhood, HCPSS can extend beyond one and one half miles for high school students so long as the extension is “within reason.” Bryan noted that new neighborhoods will have pedestrian and bicycle connectivity within them, so that if a connection is made from the edge of a neighborhood to a local school, residents can use the neighborhood transportation network to access the connection.

Christiana noted that originally, there had been the discussions around including village centers, commercial centers, and other governmental buildings in the list of destinations. Bruce replied that was discussed, but the analysis looked at how much of the County was covered depending on which destinations were included. In addition, master plans and existing studies also address gaps in the network. Christiana replied that she wanted to ensure those items were not overlooked. Jessica asked whether the subdivision regulations still need to be updated to implement the findings of the connectivity analysis. Bruce replied that will be the next step of the process. Chris directed attention to the bottom of the paragraph, which notes that the results of these studies will be incorporated in updates to the bike and pedestrian master plans. The question is who will make connections in the future and whether developers can be compelled to provide more off-site improvements. That issue will be addressed during the update to the subdivision regulations.

Bruce asked Bryan to provide an update on Volume IV before continuing the discussion on outstanding comments.
**Volume IV Detail Update Overview**

Bryan shared that the Volume IV details are undergoing final review by DPW. The latest round of revisions includes changes to the R-series of details to be consistent with the Design Manual Revisions. There were not many changes to the new details that were posted on October 8.

Bryan noted the chart Neighborhood Yield Street detail was updated to information on average daily traffic (ADT) and housing density to be consistent with the on-street residential parking chart in Volume III. The Neighborhood Connector Street has a note that the median should support vehicular traffic to address concerns from the Fire Department.

The new typical sections have been assigned new numbers. The truck apron details were added to the R-1 series, and cross references have been added. There were no changes to the paving section charts that were posted on October 8. There were a series of revisions to make Volume IV consistent with Volume III, especially regarding sidewalk widths and buffer sizes. There were not many changes made to the traffic calming measures except assigning numbers and referencing the exceptions process as appropriate. Adjustments were made to the cul-de-sac details to put in a five foot sidewalk. The Industrial Street detail was changed to allow for a wider right of way. No revisions were necessary for the permanent tee turnaround, but the temporary tee detail was revised to be consistent. A new detail was added for a driveway apron flair that better accommodates larger vehicles backing out onto a 24' Yield Street.

The Volume IV details will be released to members of the CSIT review once DPW has completed their review.

**Volume III Discussion (continued)**

Bruce asked the group if there were any outstanding questions or comments on Volume III. Christiana asked where HAWK signals are referenced, since she did not see them in Chapter 2. Bryan replied that studies for pedestrian signals including HAWKs are addressed in Chapter 5, section 5.2.C. Although the term “HAWK” does not appear in Chapter 2, there is a cross-reference to the FHWA Guide for Improving Pedestrian Safety at Uncontrolled Crossing Locations which includes detailed guidance on HAWK signals.

Larry requested the FHWA Bikeway Selection Guide be used as a starting place for Designers. Chris replied that adopting one document as a standard is not in line with the general approach to Design Manual revisions, which includes references to multiple documents. Larry replied that Designers must follow a lot of external documents, including MUTCD and resources for design capacity. Leah noted that substantial guidance from the Bikeway Selection Guide have been incorporated to the Design Manual, including the retrofit section in Chapter 1 and the bikeway selection section in Chapter 2. It is also listed as a core document to reference at the start of the bicycle facility section.

Bruce asked for more feedback on Carl’s comment about private streets received earlier. Bryan replied that the private street issue shares a lot in common with Jessica’s comment on how parking lots operated and how guidance around parking lot layout could be improved. There are some elements of private roads that are similar, especially as private roads relate to parking for apartments and condos. The private street and parking lot issues could be looked at during the update to the subdivision regulation process, although additional adjustments to Volume III may also be necessary. Bruce asked Christiana to consider this request since it is significant. A commitment to address theses issues could be incorporated in the whereas clauses. Larry and Jessica both mentioned parking lots as an outstanding concern.

Kris noted that when brand new streets are being built there is clear guidance to select cross sections. However, if a developer is making frontage improvements, some additional guidance may still be necessary to guide staff review so various departments reviewing the plans are consistent. It does not have to be a Design Manual document but could be a policy for County staff. Bruce noted this request is like the exercise Chad requested around selecting street types.
Bruce returned to the issue of background growth rate, noting there is an argument that a two percent growth rate could be more appropriate. In discussions with Sam Sidh, there has been some consensus around going to two percent in this version of the Design Manual, but the question could also be referred to County Council. The other option is not touching Chapter 4 at all and leaving the language as it is. Christiana replied that so long as the expectations are clear around when revisions to the background growth rate and Chapter 4 will be made, she is comfortable with including returning to the question of growth rate in the future. Bruce noted that there have been calls to lower the growth rate to zero, which was a difficult conclusion to reach based on the data, but there may be room to move to two percent instead of three percent. Christiana replied that if the data supports two percent, she would prefer it be amended and submitted to Council that way.

Chad noted the current draft says three percent, but if a developer believes that a lower growth rate will allow them to avoid an expensive improvement, they will submit data to support that request. The current draft Design Manual puts the onus on the Developer to make that request. Kris noted that this issue has been extensively debated by the CSIT. Everyone agreed that six percent was too high, and there was consensus around reducing it to three percent. The group considered rates below three but did not reach consensus. The current language allows the developer to make a case for a lower rate. If an improvement is required from the County, there will be a chance to have a conversation about whether it is necessary. If it is eliminated entirely, future improvements will have to be paid by the County not the developer.

Christiana replied that is a difficult issue to assess right now since it is unknown which improvements will be required of developers in the future. Kris replied that going to the other extreme of a zero percent growth rate will mean developers do not have to do any improvements at all. Bruce replied that conversations on this issue can continue through County Council. A position statement can be prepared for use by Council. The growth rate issue also relates to Chapter 4. A decision on Chapter 4 will require more analysis and scenario planning. The issue of moving from an LOS to a VMT approach could also be considered at that time.

Bruce noted that six or seven issues from the group led to specific edits. He asked whether anyone has specific language the team can consider. The draft needs to be finalized to meet County Council meeting requirements.

Larry noted one issue is how a decision is made around which of the six studies are required. Chris replied the current language stipulates DPW makes that decision in consultation with the Office of Transportation (OOT). Larry asked whether OOT should have more authority that consultation. Bruce recommended that issue be considered by Council.

**Schedule review/Next Steps**

Bruce noted the next CSIT meeting is scheduled for December 1. Conversations with internal staff and CSIT members will continue to resolve outstanding issues. High level statements and a work plan need to be developed so that CSIT members should be comfortable with the Council process. OOT will meet with Christiana and Sam to work out some of these issues, and the results of that conversation will be shared at the next CSIT meeting.

Larry noted that over the past months, there has been discussion around which items will be considered when looking at the subdivision regulations. He asked whether someone is maintaining that list. Bruce noted the CSIT comment matrix is sortable by “parked” issues. DPZ is also maintaining a list of subdivision regulation revisions. Larry asked if the list could be shared. Leah clarified that the CSIT already has the detailed version of the list since everyone has the CSIT comment log. The team will work to consolidate that list into a more user-friendly categorized version for the December meeting.
**Next Steps**

Bruce thanked everyone for their service and the time they have spent on this project. The CSIT did a great job working through a log of complicated issues. Moving forward, training will be needed which will take a lot of work. OOT will work on a list of next steps for the December meeting so that everyone is on the same page. For the next round of revisions, it will be important to have a more comprehensive idea of our goals, as well as how the public will be involved in the process. A much broader segment of the public will be interested in changes to the subdivision regulations and APFO than the details of the Design Manual. Chris thanked Bryan and Leah for their hard work on the Design Manual.

The next CSIT meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 1 at 3:00 pm.

Action items from this meeting include:

- Staff to prepare list of next steps after the legislative process is complete
- WRA to categorize parked comments into a list of things to be addressed during subdivision regulation revisions

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Leah Kacanda, AICP