



Date: August 13, 2020

Date of Meeting: August 5, 2020

Meeting Location: Video conference

Work Order Number: 32189-005

Project: Howard County Complete Streets

Meeting Description: Complete Streets Implementation Team Meeting #8

Participants:

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Introduction

The purpose of the meeting was to provide members of the Complete Streets Implementation Team (CSIT) information on the draft Community Engagement Plan (CEP), information on the project prioritization process, the status of Design Manual revisions, and a brief update on the final draft of the sidewalk policy.

Chris Eatough and Jeff Riegner welcomed all attendees and reviewed the agenda.

Members of the CSIT were provided a copy of the draft minutes from the July 1 meeting in advance. Christiana Rigby made a motion to approve the minutes and Paul Walsky seconded the motion. David Nitkin abstained and the rest of the CSIT members unanimously approved the minutes.

Leah Kacanda, Jeff, and Chris led the group through the presentation attached to these minutes.

Community Engagement Plan

Leah provided an update on the status of the CEP. She noted that in response to feedback received from members of the CSIT, the revised document includes additional content on equity and inclusion, and guidance on how to identify project stakeholders. It also includes guidance on how a project manager can determine whether a project is major or minor as well as checklists for every phase of capital projects and developer projects.

Leah noted that equity is now included as the central guiding principle for the plan, and showed an infographic depicting the difference between equality and equity. A new graphic has been developed to aid project managers in identifying a complete list of project stakeholders by highlighting four stakeholder groups: demographic relevance, geographic relevance, issue experience, and direct engagement.

Leah went on to show the major and minor capital project flowcharts and noted that the two flow charts may be combined since the steps for project identification, prioritization, funding, and construction were shared by both processes.

Kris Jagarapu noted that resurfacing projects are not intended to be part of the prioritization process since they are evaluated and repaved based on the condition of the pavement. He asked that resurfacing projects be considered minor capital projects. Christiana Rigby asked for clarification on how outreach works currently for the repaving process. Kris responded that that all roadways that go through the resurfacing program are shared with the Office of Transportation (OOT) and traffic engineering. Those roads are reviewed to see if there are any planned bike facilities, and whether it is possible to incorporate pavement markings. OOT leads community outreach, and the process has worked well so far.

Chris E. noted that OOT will host a community meeting for road resurfacing, but Kris is correct that the prioritization for road resurfacing would not have to go through public review during the open house project. Christiana confirmed that is because the road resurfacing schedule is based on a condition assessment. Kris noted that the only other factor that influences the repaving schedule is capitalizing on the geographic proximity of adjacent projects, such as repaving an entire neighborhood at once, or focusing on multiple projects in one part of the County. This approach saves the County significant money by minimizing mobilization costs.

Leah reviewed the major capital project process and highlighted that the previously discussed process requires an in-person workshop to be supplemented by materials and a survey online to collect additional feedback. She asked the CSIT whether they would prefer to have an in-person workshop and an online workshop, or an online workshop in place of an in-person workshop. Christiana noted her preference would be both an in-person and online workshop. She said that at the beginning of COVID-19 she was apprehensive about online testimony for County Council, but it has been very successful and expanded access. She noted the issue here is whether County Departments have the budget and staff to handle both workshop types. She noted it is particularly important to have online options for people with mobility issues.



Chris asked whether Christiana was envisioning an in-person meeting that is televised and live, an either/or scenario, or two separate meetings. Jeff noted the logistics for holding an in-person meeting that is simulcast is difficult when not using a dedicated setup like in the Banneker Room, as equipment must be purchased or rented, but conducting the meetings separately is straightforward.

Jennifer White noted during a simulcast meetings it can be difficult to make sure the online community is engaged and can participate fully. She expressed a preference for doing a separate in-person and online workshop. She noted that having the fully online option encourages more members of the public to participate, which has been proven to be successful by outreach conducted during COVID-19.

Kris noted that out of respect for staff's time they may want to have one or the other, not both as a requirement. Currently they try to hold public meetings after business hours, and DPW is not equipped to hold both due to staffing levels. Tom Butler agreed that DPW is being asked to do more with less, and that it is important that they manage expectations. He agreed that one public meeting is all that is viable at this time, unless the County is going to have a revenue windfall.

Christiana noted that current restrictions on in-person meetings offer the County the opportunity to get comfortable with the online meeting option. She acknowledged the possibility that it may be impossible to have large groups in person for the foreseeable future. She noted that one way to avoid pressures on staff time is scheduling the online meeting during business hours, but acknowledged there are budgetary factors regardless. She observed that people have become more comfortable interacting and engaging during online meetings over time, and that there is a different group of people engaged.

Jeff asked the group whether something held during business hours alleviates some of the concern about staff resources. He also noted that the online meeting could be recorded and posted to the County website or YouTube so that people could participate at their convenience.

Christiana asked whether staffing and budgetary constraints are too high to overcome, noting it takes a lot of training to do online workshops well.

Chris commented that maintaining good and helpful websites is also a way to promote engagement. If a project website has all the information about a project, shows plans and alternatives, offers a recording of online meetings, and offers a feedback mechanism, then the website itself should fit the bill for a virtual engagement option. He noted the only missing piece was having the ability to have live discussion with project representatives.

Sam Sidh said whether in-person or online, it would be good to record the meeting to post and accept feedback for several weeks.

Christiana shared that County Council uses Constant Contact to allow people to text and receive project updates, which may be a good way to collect contact information from people who are interested and provide them with updates to keep them engaged throughout the process.

Leah asked whether planning money can be assigned to OOT for the scoping phase of the process. Bruce Gardner affirmed that is best practice, and that an additional funding category may be needed. OOT will review the draft to see how it may be incorporated. He observed that MTB notifications for project specific stakeholders will depend on resource availability.

Leah reviewed next steps, noting that edits from the CEP are requested by 8/19, and that the public review process is to be determined, but will happen in September.

Project Prioritization

Jeff provided an update on the status of the project prioritization process. A kickoff meeting was held on June 19, followed by small group interviews from July 13-31 with the Administration, Budget Office, Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ), Department of Public Works (DPW), Department of Recreation and Parks, and OOT. The goal of the meetings was to better understand the County's current capital budget development process to determine how to introduce prioritization in a way that effectively advances Complete Streets while avoiding unnecessary disruptions to the existing process. Jeff noted that the questions presented to the CSIT at their July meeting were used during the interviews, with the addition of a question about how measures like access, safety, or equity play a role in prioritization in consideration of Jennifer White's feedback.

Jeff described some key findings from the interviews, which included that limited capital budget is the biggest factor effecting the delivery of projects. The interviews gave a lot of insight into the existing process, but also provided interviewees the opportunity to think about the process. Kris noted that some types of projects, like repaving, already follow a quantitative process.

Jeff agreed, and noted generally projects begin at the staff level and then move through Department heads to the County Executive to be presented as a proposed budget. There are opportunities for the public to weigh in at several points during the process. During interviews, multiple staff commented it is important to retain the ability to use professional judgement and not rely solely on a quantitative process, but that guidance and criteria for selecting priority projects would allow staff to more effectively defend their decisions with internal and external stakeholders. He noted that projects will likely not be assigned numerical scores, but instead placed in low, medium, or high priority tiers for further consideration as funds become available. Jeff noted the process is not complete and thanked those who participated in the interview process so far.

Kris said it may be challenging to select between similarly ranked projects that address different needs. He provided the example of a sidewalk project and a traffic signal project, which would each have specific needs, demands, and priorities. He noted that maintaining professional judgement on where funds should be allocated will help the County make a good decision.

Bruce said that he was not envisioning getting to a point where projects are ranked by numerical ratings and acknowledged there are many high priority things the County is not able to fund. He noted that some things will be prioritized as eligible for funding as it becomes available. He also noted that the County will have to consider some factors that may not be quantifiable.

Jeff noted that some prioritization criteria have to be considered due to the Complete Streets policy, such as geographic location associated with the Vulnerable Population Index (VPI), and that all modes are addressed. Feedback so far has provided ideas on how to incorporate the ability to respond to needs in a flexible way.

Bruce responded that there is still general concern among County departments that system preservation needs are not being met, and if the County is falling short in those areas, how can enhancement be prioritized? It is important to clarify which parts of the capital program the prioritization process applies to, as there may be critical system preservation needs such as repaving.

Jeff replied that "fix it first" is a challenge, as ribbon-cuttings are better suited to new projects than to maintenance projects. Christiana replied that it is important for government to acknowledge all investments in the transportation system.

Jeff provided the CSIT with an updated schedule, noting that an initial draft prioritization process will be developed during the coming weeks. The initial draft will be presented to the core team by the August 25 meeting, and adjustments will be made as necessary before presenting it to the CSIT on September 2. The core team will approve the process at the September 16 meeting, and approved by the CSIT during their October 7 meeting, with delivery to Council in October.



Design Manual

Jeff provided a summary of updates to the Design Manual. He noted that Chapter 1: Introduction and General Information and Chapter 4: APFO were reviewed at the July CSIT meeting, and that today's meeting would focus on Chapter 2: Road and Street Design, Chapter 3: Bridge and Structure Design, and Chapter 5: Multimodal Transportation Studies and Traffic Engineering Design.

Jeff noted that bridges remain in place longer than any other element of the transportation system and need to be addressed, but Chapter 3 will not require as many edits. Larry asked whether revisions would address bridge width, so that they can handle multimodal traffic. Jeff responded that the overall structure of the chapter can remain in place, and edits will address details like width to accommodate all modes.

Jeff explained that Chapter 2 will be reorganized in 8 sections and went on to provide more detail about sections 2.1 General, 2.2 Typical Sections, 2.4 Intersection Design, 2.6 Parking, and 2.8 Detailed Design Elements. Section 2.1 deals with the design controls that are used at the start of the project, such as design speed, design vehicle, and curb radii. Chapter 2 will also reference maintaining traffic for all modes, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Jeff then described section 2.2 Typical Sections. There will be a substantially modified section on sidewalks and the addition of shared use pathways. He noted that a lot of the work that OOT is advancing is not currently addressed in the Design Manual. *BikeHoward* includes a lot of information on bicycle facilities, and some of that will be brought over into the Design Manual. This section will also include information about traffic calming and speed management as well as non-transportation needs like street trees, utilities, and stormwater management, all of which make a big difference in terms of establishing a street section.

Jeff moved on to section 2.4 Intersection Design, which will include a revised geometric design section, a revised and potentially expanded section on roundabouts, some new sections related to curb ramps and crosswalks, bicycle facilities at intersections, transit facilities at intersections, and alternative intersection types. Alternative intersection types have been advanced by the Federal Highway Administration to provide intersection treatments that work better for all modes of travel. For example, high crash left turns could be replaced with a right turn followed by a U-turn, which is a safer movement that can be designed to work well for walkers and bikers. Larry expressed interest in reading more information about alternative intersection types.

Jeff provided a brief overview of section 2.6 Parking, which would be reorganized with separate sections for on- and off-street parking. He noted that this section covers design, but not whether parking is required. Section 2.8 Detailed Design Elements will be reorganized to include specific design elements that do not fit well into other sections, such as how mailboxes and trash cans are handled. These elements generally have little to do with the Complete Streets policy.

Chris noted that OOT has a short guidance document on bicycle parking that they provide to commercial developers that includes information about the type of rack to provide, spacing, and location. OOT will provide the guidance document for inclusion in the Design Manual updates.

Jeff explained that Chapter 5 includes both traffic studies and the design of traffic control devices. Section 5.2 Transportation Studies will be reordered with additional focus on multimodal studies. Methodologies for Pedestrian Level of Service (PLOS) and Bicycle Level of Service (BLOS) have changed since the Design Manual was written, while traffic studies for cars have remained relatively unchanged. Since more emphasis will be placed on walking and biking, PLOS and BLOS will be expanded upon. Section 5.3 Signing and Pavement Markings will be reorganized and Complete Streets principles will be incorporated.

Larry commented that traffic studies currently focus on traffic at the intersections and level of service for motor vehicles. He noted his goal is for traffic studies to include the impact of increased traffic on people who walk and people who bike, especially when a development increases motor vehicle traffic. Jeff replied that subdivision and land use regulations and APFO specify the types of improvements that are required to mitigate development traffic



impacts, but this section of the Design Manual specifies how these studies are done. While related, they are two different issues. Requiring a developer to provide additional bicycle and pedestrian studies is in the subdivision regulations. Larry replied when developers are required to do a study, they are not required to consider bicycle and pedestrian traffic and safety. Although OOT reviews new developments, they can only enforce what is required in the Design Manual. Chris replied with an example, saying if a developer has to do a study on bicycle Level of Traffic Stress (LTS) it could document whether their project would cause a decrease from LTS 2 to LTS 3. The question is whether the developer could be required to mitigate that and maintain LTS 2. Larry noted, ideally, we could ask the developer to create an LTS 1 facility. Larry noted this may not be possible but would like it to be studied.

Kris noted that there is room for improvement, but that the County currently regularly requires improvements that improve conditions for all modes of travel. He noted that a minor subdivision may not result in frontage improvements, but if it is major the County may request the developer supply bicycle and pedestrian amenities and cited redevelopment in Downtown Columbia as an example. He noted improvements reflect what is in the Design Manual now; they include mid-block crosswalks and new sidewalks.

Larry responded that in 35 years of bicycling around the County it is “death by a million cuts,” as each development adds a little traffic, resulting in a road that used to be a bike route becoming almost not rideable. He noted the Design Manual section on studies does not talk about the width of a roadway to access a development or require that roadway be accessible to all modes. Downtown Columbia has specific requirements.

Kris acknowledged Larry’s experience but observed that there are challenges to some requirements. In some places there is additional right of way, but in other areas improvements would require working with an adjacent property owner. He cited a potential sidewalk on the west side of Cedar Lane, where the property owner initially refused, that finally advanced many years later when County got an easement before the property changed hands.

Larry responded that he would like to see more multimodal transportation improvements required of developers, and that starts at the study phase. Tom B replied that often developers pay a fee in lieu of an improvement that the public may not be aware of which goes into a fund to make improvements via DPW capital projects.

Jeff noted that section 5.5 Mid-Block Pathway Crossing Treatments and 5.6 Maintenance of Traffic during Construction are particularly important to implementing the Complete Streets policy. Mid-block crossings are not currently addressed in the Design Manual. The County has recently created a new process based on national guidance which will be consistently applied throughout the County. Maintenance of traffic during construction will share the specifics of what is required to maintain walking and biking traffic during construction, similar to how motor vehicle traffic is maintained now.

Jeff explained that transportation studies and traffic control device design may be put into separate chapters. This would reorganize Volume III so that traffic studies, which are currently in Chapter 5, are moved up to Chapter 2 which would more closely follow the design process. As a result, current Chapters 2-5 would move back.

Jeff noted the next step is developing content to in the framework of the proposed outline, which will incorporate internal information and national best practice. Updates will be brought to the core team for review before being brought to the CSIT for comments and discussion.

In response to Larry’s question, Jeff said that the CSIT can expect to see more details in the next month or two.

Brief Updates

Chris provided a brief update on the Sidewalk Policy. There have only been minor changes made since the last draft, which include some slight revisions around the timing of notifications which was done in cooperation with OOT, DPW, and DPZ. He noted that this document was developed with the review and feedback from the CSIT, and while it may be implemented by executive action in the short term, it will eventually be included as part of the Design Manual updates which will be reviewed and adopted by County Council. He reiterated that the goal is to implement the sidewalk policy with executive action once endorsement is received from the CSIT.



Chris walked through the revisions, noting that changed text was in red. The first four scenarios do not require homeowner approval, but edits now require additional communication with adjacent property owners earlier in the process, in order to ensure adequate awareness of county activity. For scenarios 1, 2, and 4, notification goes out 5 weeks before construction begins. For scenario 3, the timing of notification is tied to the developer submission of mylar drawings. The community voting process required for scenario 5 will include both those immediately adjacent to the new sidewalk as well as those in the general area, since they are likely users of the sidewalk.

Chris shared there were two slight changes to the notes. Note 2 clarifies that sidewalk segments “requiring a disturbance to adjacent private property for its construction” will have to go through the existing easement process. Note 3 says that sidewalk segments that are “part of capital projects” are excluded from the sidewalk policy process, since capital projects will use the community engagement process for capital projects.

Chris stated that this sidewalk policy moves the County closer to a notification process than a vote process with the County is putting sidewalks on its own property and asked for consensus from the CSIT.

Chad Edmondson asked about sidewalks that connect to a side path or to another subdivision. He asked whether a developer will have to go to an adjacent subdivision to take a vote, or whether the developer has the right to go into an HOA and tell them the path is being connected. Chris responded since this policy only applies to sidewalks on County-owned property, the process that is used now would remain.

Larry asked how frequently scenario 5 would occur. Chris responded rarely. Scenario 5 reflects requests from the community that are not included in *WalkHoward*. Larry noted it was not clear how scenario 5 would play out if the community vote did not support the installation of a sidewalk. He asked whether the public would have any recourse that would allow them to continue to seek a sidewalk. Bruce responded that it would be a rare enough instance, and that if it is a good idea then it could be included in *WalkHoward* the next time it is updated. Larry noted submitting the project for inclusion in *WalkHoward* would lead to a more public process.

Chris noted that scenario 4 gives OOT more discretion because it speaks to connections to additional uses. Larry asked for clarification on who gets to vote in favor of a sidewalk. Chris replied that the language is deliberately flexible since every circumstance is different. The goal is to identify the immediate local community and potential regular users.

Tom B replied that the current language should work well. He compared the sidewalk policy to the water/sewer master plan which specifies projects in 5-year increments. Projects do not advance unless they are in the 5-year plan. The County has to focus on the money and projects that are in the plan, and any suggestions received would be incorporated into the next plan.

Larry asked whether it was worth adding a sentence that clarifies if a sidewalk project does not garner community support it would have to advance via another scenario. Jennifer noted that people living in communities change over time, and that it may be sufficient to allow the project to be revisited at a later date.

Christiana cited an example from Hammond Village, where older homeowners who did not want the maintenance concern of a sidewalk were gradually replaced by younger families who had concerns about pedestrian safety. Based on this example, she would be uncomfortable assigning a time criterion to the process since population change can be difficult to gauge. Chris noted the way the policy is written and intended does not stop the community from trying again, and they could come back and initiate a new poll.

Kris noted that the voting process currently is not administered by County staff. The community is asked to provide a point of contact who takes the list and goes door to door to get support. A similar process is required for traffic calming. The process may fail due to lack of votes, but sometimes the traffic action committee comes back and tells the County they are going to try again in a few years. The County remains neutral. If the vote is close to 2/3 of residents in support of a project, the County will work with the community to make the project happen.

Larry suggested amending the process for scenario 5 to read "Property owner approval by the following process is required." The policy was endorsed by the CSIT with the amendment, with Larry making the motion and Christiana seconding.

Kris asked whether there would be a community engagement process for the sidewalk policy. Bruce replied that OOT will work with the County Executive and his communications team to handle community engagement.

Christiana asked for clarification that the sidewalk policy was merely an internal policy change that would not have to go to County Council and Bruce confirmed.

Larry made a motion to approve the sidewalk policy as amended and Christiana seconded the motion. The CSIT members unanimously approved the amended sidewalk policy.

Next Steps

Jeff noted one action item from this meeting:

- CSIT to provide edits and comments on CEP to WRA by 8/19

The next CSIT meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 2 at 3:00 pm. Jeff noted that the same call in phone number and link will be used for all CSIT meetings.



Leah Kacanda, AICP