



Date: December 2, 2020

Date of Meeting: November 4, 2020

Meeting Location: Video conference

Work Order Number: 32189-005

Project: Howard County Complete Streets

Meeting Description: Complete Streets Implementation Team Meeting #12

Participants:

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Introduction

The purpose of the meeting was to provide members of the Complete Streets Implementation Team (CSIT) an update on Design Manual revisions with a focus on Chapter 1 comments. An introduction to two street typology “case studies” and a revised schedule were also presented.

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 November 4 meeting in advance. Chris made a motion to approve the minutes and Christiana Rigby seconded the motion. The CSIT members unanimously approved the minutes.

Jeff and Leah Kacanda led the group through the presentation and comment log attached to these minutes.

Design Manual Updates

Jeff reviewed the comment log, explaining that each comment received was provided one of four statuses: resolved (pending review by CSIT), to discuss, in process, or parked. Members of the CSIT were provided the draft comment log a week before the meeting. The comment numbers below are based on the attached comment log.

- Comment 1: Jeff noted that the use of a comment log is partially in response to a comment received from Jennifer White, who requested a more structured process for submitting comments. He explained the team has adopted the comment log and a review schedule. Every month, the Design Manual team reviews items with the Howard County staff core team. Once endorsed by staff, the goal is to provide CSIT members with draft Design Manual materials a week in advance of each CSIT meeting.

Jennifer responded that the comment log and review schedule meets her needs. She asked whether comments can be received on a rolling basis or if the proposed schedule is concrete. Chris and Jeff responded that comments can be received on a rolling basis, but the team strongly prefers receiving comments on schedule because it is easier to incorporate them earlier in the process, especially since substantive comments can have an effect on later sections. Chris noted that the goal is to stay on schedule, and that revisiting an earlier section is possible but will likely only be accommodated if something important was missed.

Larry Schoen noted that often, introductions and executive summaries are written after the body of the text, which made it difficult to provide comments on Chapter 1. He said it may be worth revisiting the chapter once the entire document is drafted to ensure it is well integrated with the rest of the document.

- Comment 2: Jeff moved onto the next comment, which was a request from Larry to change the language from “will” to “shall” throughout the draft. Jeff noted that the change was incorporated everywhere except for where “will” was copied over from other documents.
- Comment 3: Kristin Russell had commented that the Vulnerable Population Index (VPI) Map was difficult to read. Jeff noted that the map has been enlarged and a caption added to explain the map is for illustrative purposes and staff will use an online tool that has a sufficient level of detail. Kristin replied that she is comfortable with those changes.
- Comment 4: Larry had noted that some other design manuals reference guidance documents like National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) guides. Jeff asked the group whether all guidance documents should be listed. Larry provided some clarification around his comment, sharing that he views compliance with AASHTO and MDOT as a requirement, but documents from NACTO offer guidance beyond the minimum requirement. He noted that there may be more clarity around this issue once the body of the Design Manual is complete. Jeff noted that in many places where NACTO is referenced it is used as an add-on in situations where the manual does not address the circumstances. Larry responded

that he is comfortable leaving this open pending how other guidance is referenced in the body of the Design Manual. The CSIT decided to change the status of this item to “parked.”

Carl Gutschick asked if a sentence could be added that speaks more broadly to referencing other guidance when different approaches are applicable. He explained that when engineers apply for a waiver they must cite other guidance to support their claim. He noted that it may be appropriate to include a list of relevant guidance in the section on waivers. Larry responded that he views cross referencing documents as a way to go beyond the Design Manual’s requirements. Carl responded that a waiver isn’t always submitted to avoid the Design Manual requirements, but sometimes it is pursued so that designers can design things differently. Chris concurred that the comment should be parked and considered as the CSIT works through subsequent chapters.

- Comments 5-11: Jeff shared a number of suggested edits including the addition of the language, “where differences exist this manual shall govern.” He noted that the Manual will cross reference Complete Streets policy exceptions. The benefits portion of the Complete Streets section was consolidated and included as part of the Complete Streets policy section. He noted that the VPI does not apply to developers. The Department of Public Works (DPW) is currently verifying the dates of Design Manual updates and appropriate legal language that can be used in the Manual.
- Comment 12, 16, 17, 19, 20: Larry noted that he understands that the Design Manual is not the right place to address the design of other projects such as water/sewer projects, but that those types of projects may present an opportunity to incorporate multimodal improvements. He asked that the CSIT make time at a future meeting to solicit feedback on the current process from DPW employees and discuss those opportunities for further collaboration. Chris responded that he does not know enough about the operating procedures of other County agencies to know when the appropriate point to discuss Complete Streets would occur. He agreed that additional information with DPW would be helpful.

Kris Jagarapu responded that there might be some opportunities for water/sewer projects but noted it is difficult to include multimodal improvements as part of a project because water/sewer funds are restricted. He shared that Highways frequently coordinates with other Bureaus within DPW on these issues. Larry responded that he would like to learn more about how that coordination happens. He has observed several projects where there were missed opportunities and is unsure whether improvements were considered and not pursued or never considered. He commented that the CSIT is the appropriate body to review these processes. Jeff responded that the Design Manual can note that coordination occurs internally without getting into the detail of exact procedures that are followed. Larry agreed, but reiterated his desire to discuss processes at a future meeting. The team will prepare draft text for discussion at the January CSIT meeting.

- Comment 15, 18: Jeff moved on to the next comment from Kristin, which asked whether capital projects are ever pursued outside of the capital budget process, and if so, how the scoring process is handled. Jeff asked County staff whether it is common for capital projects to be pursued outside of the annual budgeting process. Chris responded he is not aware of anything except for emergency maintenance projects which are exempt from the Transportation Improvement Prioritization System (TIPS) process anyway. Kris replied he is not aware of any unless related to school construction. Larry asked what happens if there is a bridge collapse. Kris responded that emergency protocols would be followed and funds would be identified from other projects.

Jeff asked about projects that cross multiple years. He noted the team’s assumption is that once a project enters the capital budget in a particular year, it continues in the budget through design and construction. This means that when more capital projects go to multiple years, fewer new projects can be scored and advanced. Chris responded that a project is submitted for consideration for the capital budget is scored. The budget shows the current year funding that is actually committed and the out years, which include projected funding that is not yet allocated by County.

Christiana Rigby noted that all projects show funding in the out years, but those numbers are not viable in future year budgets because if you add up all of the out years funding, it exceeds what the County can afford. Jeff clarified that projects that are currently in progress generally show funds in FY22 and beyond that exceed what is available. Christiana responded that it is a long term habit of using out years as a wish list, but the administration is working on reforming that process. Jeff asked if the current process is viable because some projects do not proceed due to delays. Christiana noted that there are often issues around land acquisition which slows down projects since construction is only funded once land acquisition is complete.

Larry commented that an old project wouldn't have to be rescored because it already has a score. A new project will get a score, and it is possible (and possibly appropriate) that a low scoring project be deferred.

Chris noted he considered the TIPS process as a way to score proposed improvements (those not yet in progress) against each other to see which are the best fit for funding and the next capital budget cycle. He noted the TIPS process does not apply to projects that are already in design and land acquisition where the County has already committed to the project.

Larry noted that it is important the County is able to respond to opportunities that may emerge because of a new development projects. Kris responded that if the County prioritizes those opportunities over projects in the pipeline, then nothing would get done.

Christiana said the point of TIPS is to get potential improvements into the capital process as projects. Eventually it may be possible to incorporate TIPS more fully into the budget process. Bruce agreed.

Jeff asked whether the conversation addressed Kristin's concern. Kristin responded that her understanding is just because something ranks high and has funding it may not be a done deal until further along in the process. Jeff replied that, based on his understanding of today's discussion, once something is in the budget, as long as progress is made it will continue to move forward unless there is some critical delay or issue. Chris added that the TIPS process does not have a way to quantify sunk costs or resources and would hesitate to imply that TIPS would impact a project already in the budget.

Larry commented that section 1.2 C of the Design Manual draft does a very good job describing the decision making process and encouraged CSIT members to read that section. Jeff noted that the phrase "when funding is available to do so" is an acknowledgement that funding is not necessarily available for projects that score highly. Many projects meet transportation goals but that does not mean that they will be funded.

- Comment 22-23: Jeff noted that Kristin and others have commented that street cross sections could be included in Section 1.3 Street Types. Currently cross sections are listed in Volume IV and are cross referenced in other parts of the Design Manual. Jeff noted that County staff is concerned that listing cross sections in multiple locations that would present a problem in maintaining consistency if one section is updated and another is not. In addition, it is unusual to directly apply a typical section to capital projects since they are usually retrofits, and typical sections only exist as guidance for the designer. For developer projects typical sections can be directly applied to the design of new streets. Jeff asked for feedback from County staff on where sections should be located within the Design Manual.

Carl noted that cross sections should be included in one place for those who need to reference the manual regularly. He shared that the Design Manual is supposed to be used as a set and agreed that sections should be included in one location and cross referenced elsewhere in the Design Manual.

Larry asked how this issue is handled in more recent manuals. Jeff responded that this is not a Complete Streets issue, but more a matter of whether typical sections are used as a requirement or general guidance. Most manuals are based on capital projects so typical sections are included where street types are discussed as a starting point for designers. However, there is precedent set in Howard County having



typical sections function as standard drawings. Since more transportation infrastructure gets built for developer projects than as part of the capital process, it makes sense to keep the sections in Volume IV. Larry asked if there are ways to craft the language so there is an example included earlier, while the actual requirements are in Volume IV. Jeff responded in the affirmative as long as it is clear that Volume IV governs. He noted he has never seen a design manual for Complete Streets where standard sections are used. However, most areas are not developing as quickly as Howard County.

Chris commented that the purpose of Chapter 1 is to provide an introduction and set the tone for the Design Manual, familiarizing the reader with the document. Typical sections are detailed content, and as such it makes sense that they are in a separate section. Jeff agreed with Larry that a reference is appropriate in the introduction or in Chapter 3 to meet the needs of the development community and DPW.

Tom Auyeung noted that Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 both cross reference Volume IV which includes all of the specifications and details. The consensus was that typical sections remain in Volume IV, but to include a reference and possibly an example in Chapter 1 and/or Chapter 3.

Jeff continued reviewing the comment log, noting that the team suggests parking a number of remaining items until Chapter 3 is drafted so that an adequate introduction can be developed.

- Comment 24-25: Jeff agreed with Kristin and Christiana's comment that land use context and any reference to the most recent version of the General Plan needs to be discussed further. The future land use map is more granular than the half dozen land use types included in the Design Manual. The team still has to do some work to correlate those categories.
- Comment 26: Jeff noted that major and minor collectors will be kept separate and that the chapter will be revised accordingly.
- Comment 27: Larry had commented that the definitions for the functional classifications based on FHWA hierarchy should acknowledge all modes. Larry noted he was reacting to the description of each classification which does not mention pedestrian, bicyclists, or transit users. Language should be included that indicates that roads now serve more purposes than moving motor vehicle traffic. Jeff responded that section can be reworded because functional class is based on longer distance mobility and access to properties, and mobility versus access is a fundamental issue for all users. For example, if biking along an arterial on a shared use pathway there will not be frequent access points. The team will reword this section to make clear it is about multimodal travel.
- Comment 28: Kristin had asked how streets will transition when passing through multiple land use types. Jeff responded that the case studies will be a useful way to explore the appropriate answer this question which remains to be determined.
- Comment 31-32: Jeff shared comments related to the scenic roadway section are parked because that section has not been drafted yet. Larry explained his concern was with the phrase "do not alter," but the scenic roadway policy currently does a fair job addressing the possible addition of a shared use pathway.

Jeff asked if anyone had any additional comments or concerns. He reminded CSIT members to provide comments on the current draft of Chapter 1 as quickly as possible. Larry shared it was valuable to review the comments and it helped to receive feedback before the meetings for review.

Case Studies

Jeff introduced the purpose of case studies as a way to see how proposed street types would compare to recent development in the County and to show examples of how transportation classifications and land use types intersect. One example is Maple Lawn Boulevard (a new street), and John Hopkins Road (an established street) in the Maple Lawn community. The other location is Resort Road in Turf Valley.



Jeff noted the purpose of today's presentation is to confirm that the content is what the CSIT is interested in and to ascertain whether any additional information is necessary to prepare for January. Larry asked whether these would be for CSIT's review or for inclusion in the Design Manual. Jeff clarified that the case studies are for the group to test proposed cross sections and make sure they work using real world examples.

After reviewing the slides, Larry confirmed that this approach would be helpful. David Nitkin asked whether this is a conversation about what should have happened or what would happen once the Design Manual is adopted. Jeff clarified that things that have already built will not be changed, and that the question is "If Maple Lawn were to be built today, how would it be different?" In other words, would the proposed new Design Manual typical section be appropriate, or should adjustments be made? David asked if the new sections would be required or whether there would be a process for exceptions. Jeff responded that as part of the Design Manual the sections would function as a requirement.

Carl asked if new cross sections are being evaluated for their carrying capacity for all modes. He noted the proposed section has only one travel lane in each direction with a center turn lane, as opposed to a four lane configuration with a median used along Maple Lawn Boulevard. He asked whether traffic carrying capacity as it relates to ADT is being considered. Jeff replied in the affirmative but noted these are the types of issues that will be discussed during this process. Carl recommended including traffic consultants in these discussions.

Kris commented that this section is just an example and that lane dimensions and right of way widths have not been discussed. Jeff noted this is the first review by the team. Chris replied that the group did see this section a year ago.

Kris asked why a 90-foot right of way was chosen instead of 100. Jeff replied that the team began with the requirements of the street and determined 100 feet was not needed if there was not a four lane section. Kris responded that a big drawback is the amount of impervious area in the proposed section as compared to the existing section. He asked that stormwater management be considered as part of the discussion. He also noted pedestrian crossing distance is greater than in the existing section. Jeff responded that the existing section does not include bicycle facilities and the sidewalks are very narrow.

Jeff noted that the design will have to strike the right balance between modes. He noted the proposed section should carry about 20,000 cars a day based on road diet studies; it also maintains sufficient space for bike infrastructure and has a shorter total crossing distance since there would be curb extensions occupying the parallel parking space at the intersections.

Larry agreed that traffic information would be useful, in addition to information on trip generators and mode shift. Jeff replied that in a suburban context like Howard County it is unlikely that mode shift will be sufficient to change how a street is designed. Larry agreed in general, but noted that Maple Lawn is adjacent to a park and ride with frequent departures to Washington, DC which creates an opportunity for mode shift.

Schedule

Jeff then shared the anticipated schedule for Design Manual revisions including dates for when a draft will be provided to the CSIT, when the draft will be discussed at the CSIT meetings, and when comments are due.

- December-January: Chapter 2 (traffic studies)
- January-February: Chapter 3 (street design) and Volume IV typical sections
- March-April: Chapter 4 (bridge design) and Chapter 5 (traffic design)

By May to June the CSIT will begin engaging outside stakeholders. Larry asked what public outreach will look like. Jeff replied that is to be determined and will depend on the key constituencies the group identifies. He noted Carl is one representative of the private development community, more of whom who will need the opportunity to review and comment. Emergency service providers will also be involved in the review process. The general public may not have as much interest in this area, but they will be engaged because the goal is still being as open and inclusive as possible.



Larry noted it will be important to educate people who are less familiar with the process and benefits of Complete Streets especially since the majority of reviewers will be responding from the perspective of an automobile driver who wants to avoid traffic congestion. Jeff agreed that the policy calls for education and training and that this may be an appropriate opportunity to offer that.

Kris commented that the intent of the Design Manual revisions is to include all modes, not to prioritize one over the other. He noted that the goal is to come up with alternatives that work for everyone, although there may be some challenges and compromises that must be made.

There were no questions about the upcoming schedule.

Next Steps

Carl noted that private sector engineering design firms may have good suggestions on the multimodal aspects of the cross sections. Larry responded that planning and engineering firms that specialize in Complete Streets could weigh in on other modes.

Jeff noted three action items from this meeting:

- WRA will distribute the current draft after the meeting for review and comment
- CSIT members who did not provide comments on Chapter 1 by the original due date of Friday, November 13 will do so as soon as possible
- WRA will provide additional content for discussion at the next meeting in advance

The next CSIT meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 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