



Little Falls Watershed Alliance

4920 Dorset Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD 20815

www.lfwa.org

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Ms. Lisa Choplin
Office of Highway Development
Maryland State Highway Administration
707 N. Calvert Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Ms. Choplin,

Beverly Swaim-Staley gave me your name to contact with questions regarding the proposed sidewalk for the east side of Wisconsin Avenue between Grafton Street and Bradley Lane in Chevy Chase. I am the co-president of the Little Falls Watershed Alliance (LFWA), a stewardship group for the Little Falls watershed which is located in lower Montgomery County. We have about 700 members and have been active since 2008. In 2010, we were named one of seven "Green Giants" by the **Bethesda Magazine** for our work in protecting this fragile environment and in 2011, we were honored with a "Community Hero" award by the Montgomery County Civic Association. The sidewalk is in our watershed and borders the Chevy Chase Club where the Little Falls creek starts so we have been watching this project with interest since the first public meeting in the fall of 2011. The Little Falls Watershed Alliance is opposed to building the sidewalk as proposed. The current design calls for removing all the trees (53 in total) along the three-quarter mile stretch without replacing any. We feel that the environmental impact of removing all the trees will cause serious damage to our fragile watershed.

Board@lfwa.org

Ms. Swaim-Staley's letter contains some reassuring points about the State's commitment to the environment on this project and we have a Bay Friendly suggestion for the project below that we hope you will seriously consider in keeping with the State's commitment to this area. However, there are also some misunderstandings about pedestrian safety and the bus stops that need to be addressed as well as her assertion that some trees will be saved with the proposed design.

Bus Stop and Pedestrian Access:

The State maintains that the sidewalk is necessary for pedestrians to safely access the north bound mid-block bus stops located on the east side of Wisconsin Avenue. I'm not sure if everyone has seen a map of the area, but these bus stops are located alongside the golf course and everyone who uses them is going to or coming from the west side of Wisconsin Avenue. The only pedestrians who will use these bus stops, with or without sidewalks, are those who are willing to cross six lanes of traffic without a crossing light. If people want to ride the north bound bus and safely cross Wisconsin Avenue, they must walk to the lights at Dorset Avenue or Bradley Lane. They can board a bus at these intersections. There is no need for a sidewalk to take them to a stop that is located mid-block on Wisconsin Avenue as all the stops service the same bus routes.

Replanting or Saving Trees:

The SHA letter suggested that every precaution will be taken to save as many trees as possible. However, Dorey Uong, the project engineer, has been clear from the very first meeting that there is no room to save any trees or to replant along Wisconsin Avenue. The State owns a very narrow right-of-way and with the eight foot hiker/biker requirement, there is only two feet left for planting. Mr. Uong explained that six feet is needed for tree planting. The most recent design can

be found on our website at LFWA.org/Sidewalk-plan You will note that it calls for the removal of 53 trees and many more shrubs. Unless the State is willing to purchase or seize by eminent domain land from the Chevy Chase Club, I do not see how any trees can be saved on the State ROW.

A Bay Friendly Solution:

We propose that the State build larger bus pads and install a sidewalk for the section of Wisconsin between Hesketh and Grafton as a Bay Friendly alternative to the proposed 3/4 mile sidewalk. This design would allow for safer mid-block bus stops and access to the Grafton Street bus stop by the residents of Hesketh Street. A short five foot wide sidewalk between Hesketh and Grafton would necessitate removal of only three trees and greatly benefit the residents of Hesketh who now have only a dirt path to the bus stop and controlled intersection at Grafton. We recommend that people use the crosswalks at the controlled intersections at Grafton or Bradley as the safest way to board or disembark from the northbound buses, but suggest that upgrading the current bus stops will make it safer for those who are brave enough to cross Wisconsin Avenue mid-block to use them. The mid-block bus stops need larger pads as the current pads are too small to wait safely and do not extend far enough back from the highway. We suggest that the State install 10' x 8' pads with benches much like there are on River Road and many other State highways where there are no sidewalks. This could be done with no or minimum loss of trees. Finally, it is not necessary to connect these bus stops with sidewalks as everyone using the bus stops must cross mid-block to and from the west side of Wisconsin Avenue. There are no houses on the east side, only the Chevy Chase Club golf course. Bus riders can use the bus stops at the controlled intersections if they do not wish to cross mid-block. By not connecting the bus stops, dozens of trees will be saved greatly benefiting the environment.

The Little Falls creek is one of the most impaired streams in Montgomery County. LFWA has been working with the County to educate people on the need for rain gardens, trees and conservation landscaping to save the Bay and to meet the requirements of the MS4 permit. We have installed bay friendly landscaping on public and private lands. We see cutting down these trees and paving over this area as a step in the wrong direction for the Bay revival and not necessary for pedestrian safety.

It is not just "unfortunate" that the trees will be cut down; it is an environmental catastrophe. Stormwater run-off will increase, as well as the urban heat index. The State of Maryland has made trees a priority. It is our hope that the State will continue to make trees a priority and consider our Bay friendly solution. Please help us save the beautiful "Green Mile" that we are fortunate to have welcoming us into Montgomery County.

Sincerely,
Sarah Morse
Co-President