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HPC Part III

The Town of Washington Grove *Historic Preservation Commission*

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Impacts of the Multi-use Path on the Town

The Town's relationship with the natural environment and the important role played by recreation have been consistent themes throughout its history. Although perspectives have changed over time, the importance of these two elements remain primary features of the Town's social fabric. As a "Town within a Forest" Washington Grove is defined by its mature canopy of trees and its shared respect for and appreciation of the natural environment. Similarly, both passive and active recreation are important cultural traditions. A newspaper account from the summer of 1890 relates, "The amusements at the grove are base-ball, lawn tennis, croquet, quoits, bicycle riding, horseback riding, paying calls, and last but not least, jolly straw rides about the surrounding country." (Cultural Landscape Analysis, Town of Washington Grove, page 31, Robinson & Associates, Inc. December 2019)

The surrounding countryside is no longer amenable to straw rides, but otherwise this quote will sound mostly familiar to current residents. Access to Metro through a shared use path harks back to these earlier

years, when Washington Grove was more open to the wider community. Today Washington Grove consists of quiet residential neighborhoods that are relatively isolated. This is in sharp contrast to its origins, when the Town served as a summer destination for DC's Methodist community. During the Camp Meeting Era a small summer population swelled to the many thousands for a short period of about 2 weeks. The Town was reinvigorated as a destination during its Chautauqua period. "The arrival of Chautauqua brought new energy to the Grove and meant that its streets were busy throughout the summer" (Historic Context Report, Town of Washington Grove, page 43, Robinson and Associates). The Town continued to be a summer destination well into the 1900's, but with a declining number of events, until the demolition of the auditorium in 1963, which marked a conclusive end to this period.

The introduction of a bike path connection to the Metro will mark a change in the Town's relationship to the wider community. Although the changes will be slow at first, it would be short sighted to downplay its impacts 10 years or further into the future. With its rich recreational resources, including the Conservation Meadow, forests, playgrounds, and historic district, the Town has the opportunity to become a destination that attracts visitors once again. Use of the multi-use path for recreation by residents and the community-at-large is consistent with current usages as well as to historic uses dating from the Town's inception.

But access to Metro could also bring bicycle commuter traffic through Town. Such pass-through traffic is novel for the Town and so should be

considered with care. Clearly, there will be little consequence, if the path is primarily to be used by Town residents. However, as a commuter by-pass or a recreational resource for use by the wider community, the impacts should first be understood and assessed, and if necessary mitigated. The Town should first determine what is in its interest and select the route(s) that best incorporate those choices. Such a process was missing from the decision in March of the Town Council to accept the recommendation by the County of Brown St as the preferred route. The Task Force has been charged with restoring that process. In selecting a route, the Town should consider the impacts of both increased recreational uses, which are compatible with current usages, but may become more intensive, and the novel usage of the Town's road as a commuter route for bicycles. The impacts that are in the purview of the HPC are discussed below. The 3 alternate routes: 1) Salt Barn, 2) Meadow, 3) Brown St are considered.

I. Access to Metro and adjacent communities

There is a consensus within Town today, although perhaps not unanimously, that access to the Metro is a benefit both to the Town and to the wider community.. Promoting commuter traffic to Metro is consistent with the Town's sense of environmental responsibility. Providing easy access to Metro promotes sustainable practices in response to climate change and resonates with the Town's environmental values. Further, access to Metro through a multi-use path is a positive benefit consistent with Town's historic relationship with both nature and recreation, as described above. All three proposed paths will equally provide that access

In terms of time traveled, all 3 routes will provide equivalent ease of access to Metro for Town residents. From McCathran Hall, all 3 routes are the same distance, approximately 0.8 miles to the men's shelter at 16911 Crabbs Branch Way. For commuters from Gaithersburg, Brown St. and the Salt Barn routes are equivalent with the meadow route being slightly longer. For commuters from Amity or McCauley the meadow route will be slightly shorter. Any differences between the 3 routes are matters of a minute or two at best and are not significant.

II. Impacts on specific neighborhoods

An assessment of compatibility and impacts of the pathway through Town depends on the volume and type of use, and whether the path is essentially a terminus or destination or whether it is a major link in a larger system. The latter assessment must focus on whether the volume is mainly commuter pass through and whether that volume is large. Any path through Town on roads or walkways could disrupt the normal recreational traffic, or it could add to the current and relatively balanced mix.

If the pathway is a terminus or destination, then the traffic will all be at the scale of the Town, be it residents traveling to the Metro, shopping or recreation points south, or be it visitors traveling to the Grove to take advantage of our many amenities. This would essentially be an extension of the current uses and would have little negative impact and known positive impacts.

If it is a pass through, then the routes through town can become a way for us to integrate with and present ourselves to our neighbors. There are three main linkage points: from Gaithersburg, from the Amity

neighborhood, and from the Towne Crest/Emory Grove community. The routes through Town offer differing interactions with our historic resources and neighborhoods.

From Gaithersburg

The path from Gaithersburg presents entry points either at the Commercial Corner, or further along Washington Grove Lane at the intersections with Oak or Center Street. The Commercial Corner property can become a transition from the commercial area adjacent but would need to overcome the physical challenges of the crossing, parking lot and narrow passage to get to the Brown Street entrance. Once there, this signed and traditional entry to the residential area of the Grove is a welcoming element. The path along the older sections of Brown afford a canopied route with houses on one side and Morgan Park on the other. It passes all five of our cottage district avenues including our main street, Grove Avenue, the train station, and glimpses of Hersheys and the athletic fields of Woodward Park. There are a few views of the original cottages. There is a modest amount of foot traffic on this section of the roadway as this is a primary connection to the Post Office.

At the intersection of Ridge and Brown, the 3 options offer completely different exit experiences. Turning right, the exit point is at a traditional entry point to the Town, then immediately into the space between the Salt Barn and the rear of the newer Brown Street residences, which is a transition to the industrial landscape of the Crabbs Branch development. Continuing straight down Brown Street enters a modern neighborhood developed as a unified assembly ending in a cul de sac.

There are no other neighborhoods like it in Washington Grove, with a common orientation to the road, similar details, and sense of arrival. The path would exit at the cul de sac and connect and open it to the industrial development of Crabbs Branch. This connection would diminish the sense of arrival and terminus the neighborhood was built around. The other option turns left along Ridge Road and along a neighborhood whose commonality is modest houses and their view over the Conservation Meadow. It then turns right into the Meadow presenting a path through the original rural context of the Grove, open meadows, hedgerows and forest before linking to Crabbs Branch. None of these paths offer the more prototypical experience of seeing historic cottages on walking paths or our other historic structures and views.

The other possible route from Gaithersburg would still have to cross Washington Grove Lane, but could continue along the town side of the Lane to either the Oak or Center Street intersections, gaining a view of the West Woods. The intersections are non-vehicular and are under redesign to become more welcoming. They both have only a couple short blocks of roadway before becoming a mix of local vehicles and foot/bike traffic. Each crosses all five pedestrian avenues with bi-directional views along each. The Center Street route offers connection to historic Chapel Park, the Town Hall in Howard Park, the gazebo in Zoe Wadsworth Park, a glimpse of the tennis courts, the maintenance building and full views of the East Woods. Oak Street offers the most characteristic views of Chestnut, Grove, Maple and Cherry Avenues, and direct connection to the athletic facilities in Woodward Park, the former site of the Auditorium. When these

intersect with Ridge Road, they transition to the experiences described above.

From Amity

Two connecting points have been proposed along Ridge Road, one at the end and one at the first turn. Neither are current entrances to Town but are not infrequently used by both bikes and pedestrians. Lower Ridge was not intended to function as a cul de sac, but originally extended further to an older farmhouse off Bounding Bend. Cutting off this extension for the development of the Amity neighborhood left an unresolved terminus to the road. It thus implies a natural entry point for a path, and would provide an easy transition between the character of Amity and that of this part of town. However, one of the character-defining aspects of the Lower Ridge neighborhood has been that dead end and any through connection at this point would diminish that character. A portion of the neighborhood is within the National Historic District and about half the houses along the road are contributing resources sharing the other common aspect of their orientation toward the linear buffer separating the Grove from Shady Grove Crossing. None of the historic houses are the original cottages. The other proposed connecting point is at the first turn in Ridge Road and provides a link with the new Shady Grove Crossing development, a link endorsed by the Town for more reasons than a bike path. This point has not been a traditional entrance to town.

The common route to the Salt Barn and Brown Street options continues along Ridge Road past contributing houses on the right and the

Meadow on the left. The Meadow Option could follow a portion of this route or it could not enter the Town at all, instead entering the Meadow from the Picea Court cul de sac. This route would not offer any experience of the Town, but would offer experience of a meandering natural path through its original context.

From Towne Crest/Emory Grove

This route is the least direct but can offer the most intimate experience of the Grove because of the many routes possible through Town. Access would likely be from the sidewalk along Washington Gove Lane or the 4th Avenue pathway. Entrance could happen at the current McCauley/Washington Grove Lane vehicular entrance and use the roadways or even the avenues to pass through. The easy route would be on McCauley and Grove Road with views down some of the oldest avenues and some original cottages, a full view of the East Woods, the gazebo in Zoe Wadsworth Park, and the athletic facilities in Woodward Park and the backsides of the houses that face Grove Avenue. This route may encourage curiosity to further explore the Town. The Chestnut Road route would offer a connection to the church, the Women's Club and Town Hall in Howard Park, and Chapel Park. The experience further along Chestnut has a distinct character of a vacation community defined by the backsides of closely spaced homes. A meandering route using roads, streets and avenues could easily provide connections to all of our historic resources and views not readily available on the other routes. The links to the 3 options for connecting to Crabbs Branch are described above. Obviously, the route chosen would depend on how much interest the traveler had in experiencing the Town.

Considering these also allows the Town the opportunity to define the nature of our relationship with our neighbors and how we want to participate in the larger community.

III. Recreational impact and value

There is acknowledgement that any path will augment the historic recreational value of the Grove itself. The additional value of experiencing the Town landscape is described in detail above.

Assessment of the route options to/from the Grove yields differing values. The route behind the Salt Barn has limited value depending on the quality of the plantings provided and their upkeep, but will remain a constructed semi-industrial landscape. The option from the end of Brown Street offers no added recreational value. The Meadow option clearly adds recreational value by traversing the two meadows and the section of forest and wetland. The Meadow is considered a contributing landscape resource to the National Historic District. Its value is tied to how it helps demonstrate the agricultural context in which the Camp Meeting grounds were established. Providing more access to this part of our history can illustrate how it is linked to the Grove and its eventual development into the current municipality. This informs how the path should be constructed, with limited earthwork, a porous stone dust surface, and minimal signage and lighting. It must be considered a natural path rather than an urban, hard surface, high speed path.