

MCP-CTRACK

From: Allen Myers [almyers@starpower.net]
Sent: Monday, July 19, 2010 10:00 AM
To: MCP-Chair
Subject: Comments on Item 6 for 7/22/10 Agenda
Attachments: TESTIMONY OF THE MAPLEWOOD CITIZENS ASSOCIATION.doc; ATT08617181

RECEIVED
0626
JUL 19 2010

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
THE MARYLAND NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Dear Chair Carrier:

Attached, below are the comments of the Maplewood Citizens Association with respect to the Mandatory Referral of proposed intersection improvements at Rockville Pike and West Cedar Lane and West Cedar Lane at Old Georgetown Road. If you have any questions or concerns, I will be happy to respond.

Allen Myers, President
Maplewood Citizens Association

TESTIMONY OF THE MAPLEWOOD CITIZENS ASSOCIATION

RE: STATE HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION MANDATORY REFERAL PROPOSED INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS

The Maplewood Citizens Association ("MCA") appreciates the opportunity to present its comments regarding the above-captioned matter. Maplewood consists of 950 single-family homes located north of West Cedar Lane and south of the Capital Beltway between Rockville Pike (Route 355) and Old Georgetown Road (Route 187). As such, we are impacted by the proposed intersection improvements at West Cedar Lane and Route 355 and West Cedar Lane and Route 187.

We are appreciative of the effort of the Planning Staff in its analysis of the State Highway Administration's (SHA) proposed changes. We encouraged by the staff's recommendation for the completion of the North Bethesda Trail that will benefit both our community and people who bike and walk the trail. We also are also encouraged by the staffs desire that trees be planted where possible to lessen the impact of the additional pavement contemplated by the intersection improvements.

However, we do have concerns with some of the SHA proposals for these two intersections as well as some of the staff's analysis. Below are our comments regarding each of these intersections.

West Cedar Lane and Rockville Pike (Route 355)

First, the diagram for existing eastbound lanes of West Cedar Lane at MD 355 shows a right-turn lane where none currently exists. There are currently the following lanes: a dedicated left-turn lane, a through and left-turn lane, and a through and right-turn lane. Right turns are accomplished by the means of a "free-right turn island" (proposed for elimination) at the intersection with space to hold two average-sized vehicles waiting to make a right turn.

Additionally, the project description calls for the removal of the split-phase signal for Cedar Lane and West Cedar Lane. At the same time, an additional dedicated left-turn lane is proposed for each of these roads. These two actions appear to be a recipe for "demolition derby" as through traffic attempts to negotiate its way through turning traffic and vice versa. The solution for this situation appears to be the continuation of the existing split-phase signal. Alternatively, signalization could be installed that separates the turning movements from the through traffic. However, this is lacking from the proposed project description.

The staff analysis states:

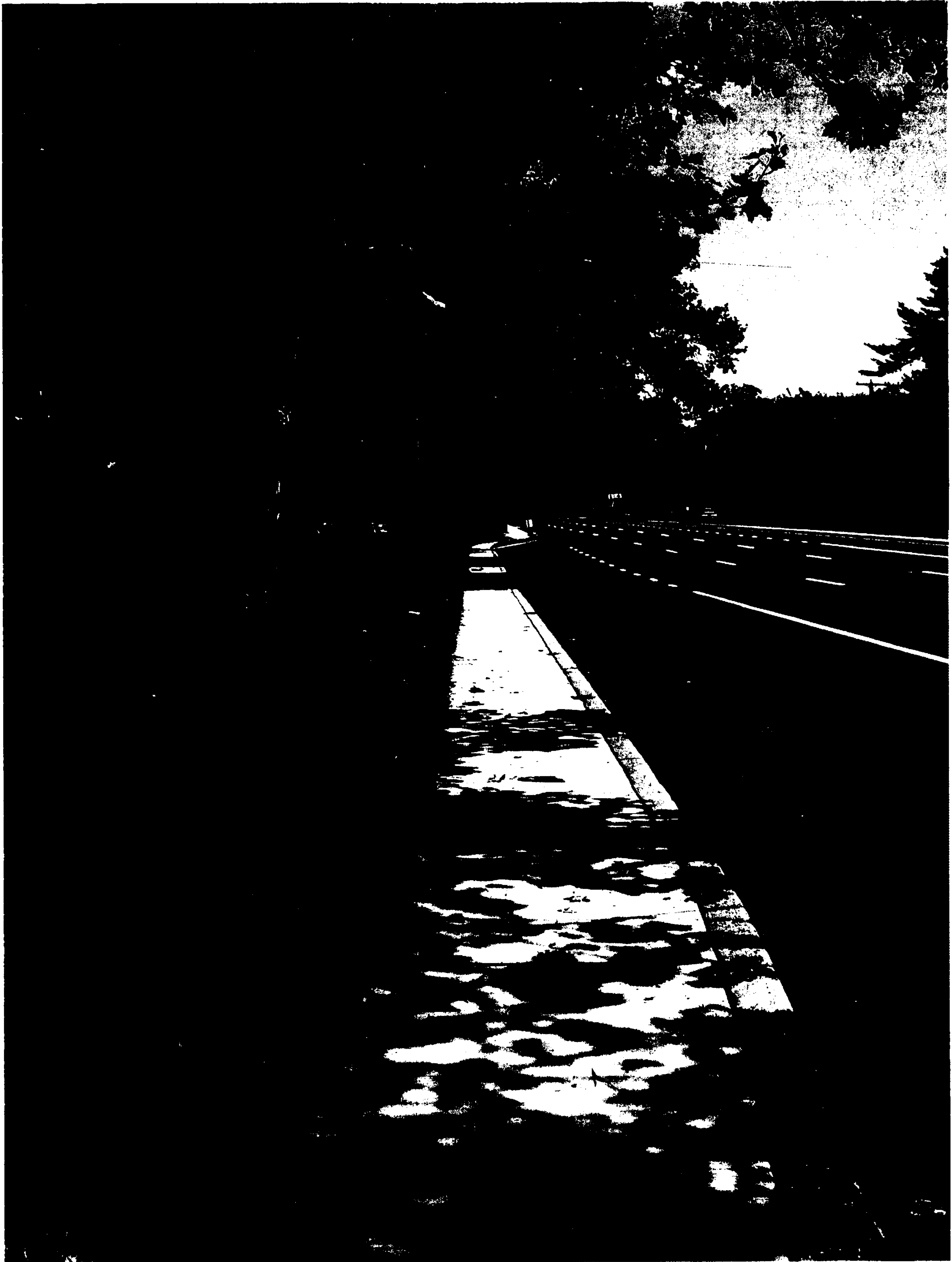
The crosswalks on the west and east legs of the intersection exceed AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) guidelines for the provision of pedestrian refuges. The Cedar Lane leg is slightly over the recommended distance at 68 feet versus the AASHTO recommended 60 feet. The West Cedar Lane crosswalk is 88 feet long. While it would be desirable to have these pedestrian refuges, accommodating them would adversely affect the design of the stormwater (sic) management pond at the northwest corner of the intersection if the alignment of the through lanes is to be maintained. Therefore, we will forego a recommendation to provide these refuges.

MCA vigorously objects to this analysis. This is clearly a case of designing an intersection for vehicles and other purposes to the detriment of pedestrian safety and directly contradicts general recommendation #1 (from the Staff Recommendations and Executive Summary) to "make additional area bicycle and pedestrian improvements needed to provide safe and convenient access to NIH and NNMCC campuses..." Moreover, the noted storm water management pond is proposed to be located on the northeast corner of the intersection and not the northwest. We urge that the design of the intersection provide for pedestrian refuge as recommend in ASHTO guidelines.

The staff also states:

The sidewalk in the northwest quadrant of the intersection along MD355 is proposed immediately adjacent to the roadway curb. AASHTO recommends that such sidewalks be two feet wider to provide a greater measure of pedestrian safety and comfort, but it would be necessary to increase the length of the two proposed retaining walls because of the adjacent tall slope. The walls in turn would trigger additional guidance that the sidewalk be widened another two feet to account for the tendency of people to shy away from lateral constraints. Given the difficulties of construction at this location, we will forego a recommendation to widen the sidewalk beyond the standard five feet.

The existing sidewalk at this location is four feet – the same width as the sidewalk to the North, except for in front of Bethesda Crest where it varies between five and six feet. It is also the same width as the current sidewalks on the North and South sides of West Cedar Lane. As can be seen from the following three photographs, widening the sidewalk an additional foot will require removal a stand of lovely sycamore trees. Additionally, you will note that there is no "tall slope" justifying the need of a retaining wall.





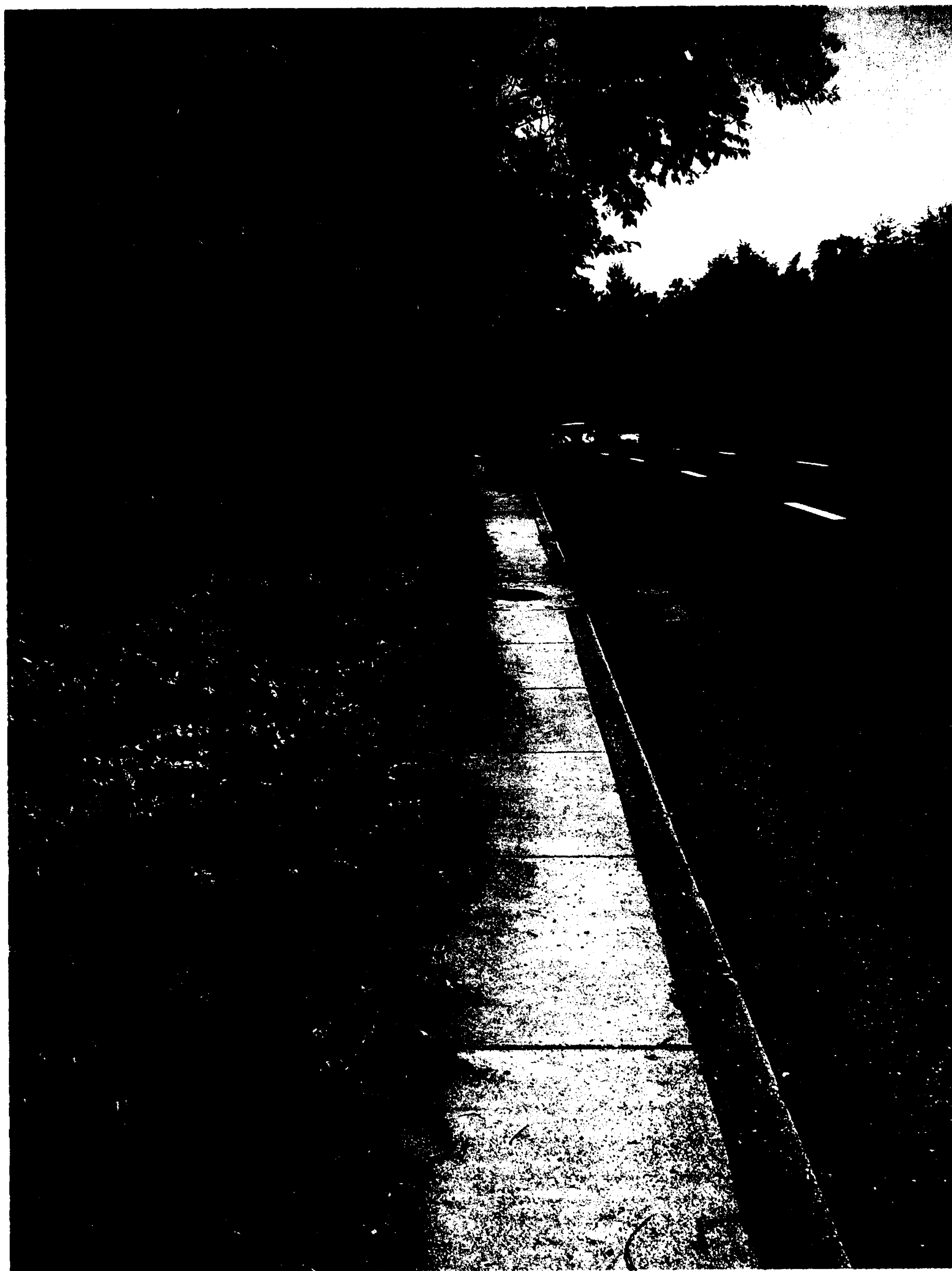


Indeed, the existing walk, grassy area, and tree canopy provide a much more pleasant experience for pedestrians than immediately to the North.

The next photograph is of the area in front of the Bethesda Crest townhouses where AASHTO guidelines were not followed and the sidewalk is along the roadway and adjacent to a retaining wall.



The last two photographs were taken in front of the Bethesda Meeting House – immediately North of Bethesda Crest. Note the narrow and meandering sidewalk and that SHA needs to do some weed trimming!





In short, MCA believes that there is no need for a retaining wall and that the existing sidewalk on the NW corner of the intersection should be maintained.

West Cedar Lane and Old Georgetown Road (Route 187)

SHA proposes to construct an additional dedicated right-turn lane at this intersection and to permit center lane traffic to either go through the intersection into Oakmont Avenue or to turn south on route 187. There is currently no split phase traffic signal at this intersection. One is needed to avoid conflicting traffic movements and to assist drivers making a left turn from West Cedar Lane on to southbound MD 187.

It is noted in the staff analysis that SHA is considering dynamic lanes for the left turn from southbound MD187 on to West Cedar Lane. This is the first that MCA has heard of this proposal, as it has not been discussed in any public forum in which MCA has been represented, nor when SHA presented its plans for this intersection to the MCA membership on January 27, 2010. MCA believes that, in contrast to the situation at Route 355 and Jones Bridge Road where in the PM southbound traffic waiting to turn left on to Jones Bridge Road routinely exceeds the storage capacity set aside for this movement, there is insufficient justification for creation of dynamic lanes at this intersection. Additionally, we believe that the width of West Cedar Lane from its centerline to the curb is too narrow to permit pairs of vehicles to safely turn simultaneously into it. This situation would be compounded when trucks and/or MetroBuses (the J-1, J-2, J-3, & J-4 routes turn left from southbound 187 on to West Cedar Lane).

A Final Request

MCA believes that bicycle and pedestrian experience to NIH and NNMC could be enhanced by the construction of a shared pathway diagonally crossing from the proposed shared pathway along the South side of West Cedar Lane and intersecting with the MD 355 shared pathway where it crosses the NIH employee entrance to Wilson Drive. This new pathway would negate the need for many pedestrians and bike riders to proceed to the MD 355 and West Cedar Lane intersection in order to reach these two destinations. Since this proposal involves the use of NIH property, it would, at the least, require the approval of this agency. MCA hopes that the Planning Board would support this proposal.

Respectfully submitted,
Allen Myers, President
Maplewood Citizens Association