

# Montgomery Hills Proposed Concept

*This Plan seeks to improve the visual appearance, the pedestrian environment, and the business viability of the commercial center along Georgia Avenue in Montgomery Hills by redesigning the highway into a landscaped urban boulevard.*

## Montgomery Hills Commercial Center

The Montgomery Hills Commercial Center, located on roughly 18 acres along both sides of Georgia Avenue between the Capital Beltway and 16<sup>th</sup> Street, is an older commercial area providing shopping and limited office activities to the local and, to a lesser extent, regional market. Retail tenants include CVS, Staples, and Sniders Superfoods Market, which is a grocery anchor that has a loyal customer base due to its marketing, customer service, and quality products.

The commercial area is surrounded by residential neighborhoods. The Forest Glen Metrorail station is located just north of the Beltway on the west side of Georgia Avenue. Downtown Silver Spring and Washington, DC are located just to the south of Montgomery Hills along Georgia Avenue and 16<sup>th</sup> Street. To the west of Montgomery Hills, across the CSX railroad tracks, is the Brookville Road Industrial Area and the Walter Reed Army Medical Center Annex. The Brookville Road traffic includes large trucks that must move between the industrial area and the Beltway. Primary access to these areas is along Seminary Road/Seminary Place to Brookville Road and/or Linden Lane, which takes traffic through the

Montgomery Hills commercial area and the adjacent residential neighborhoods of Linden and North Woodside-Montgomery Hills.

While the Montgomery Hills portion of Georgia Avenue (MD 97) is only 5 blocks long, the road serves as a regional transportation artery that stretches 25 miles from its southern urban origins in Washington, D.C. to its northern rural terminus at the Montgomery County–Howard County line. Outside of Montgomery County, Route 97 continues all the way to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

Through Montgomery Hills, Georgia Avenue is a seven lane highway that carries more traffic than any non-Interstate road in Montgomery County (85,000 cars per day). The center “reversible” lane changes direction depending on the morning or evening peak travel period and left turns from Georgia Avenue are prohibited during these times. The adjacent Capital Beltway/Georgia Avenue interchange is one of the busiest in the State. The overall character of the road favors the vehicular domain: seven lanes of pavement and an assortment of highway signs, signals, billboards, and gas stations. The visual clutter dominates and the driving experience can be confusing and unsettling, even for those who are familiar with the reversible lane.

Equally problematic, the pedestrian domain has been relegated to an inadequate, uncomfortable, and uninviting sidewalk space with no separation from the highway. Sidewalks along Georgia Avenue are typically about 5 feet in width and are generally located next to the curb, with no buffer between the pedestrian and the travel lane. Often, the sidewalk area is consumed by utility and sign poles, which further reduces the available space for pedestrians.

In January 1998, the Department of Park and Planning prepared a report, the *Montgomery Hills Commercial Center Economic Health Analysis*, to evaluate this area. Development of this analysis included interviews with property owners, tenants, and real estate brokers. According to the report, strong local neighborhood demographics and regional access are positive factors contributing to the economic health of the area.

Factors that limit retailing success in Montgomery Hills include the need to refurbish older buildings if they are to remain competitive and attractive to quality tenants. Some of the buildings in the area were built in the 1920s and the area as a whole appears run down. The limited success of the area is not due to a lack of market support, but rather, characteristics of the area's physical environment.

In addition, development and growth throughout the region have contributed to significant traffic congestion, which often turns the convenience of the Montgomery Hills location into a drawback for local residents and merchants. The issue of pedestrian (and vehicular) access, circulation, and safety emerged repeatedly during the master planning process. It can be difficult, if not dangerous, for residents to walk from their neighborhoods to the local shops, services and transit. For local merchants, the high volume of traffic appears to be both a blessing and a curse. The Georgia Avenue location offers excellent business visibility to a large number of motorists. However, traffic congestion and turn restrictions on Georgia Avenue make local circulation difficult

during peak traffic periods, limiting access to retailers.

## Vision

Montgomery Hills—and the residential neighborhoods which surround it—should be a place where people are encouraged to walk, rather than drive. With all the convenience that this location offers, Montgomery Hills should be an attractive, accessible neighborhood center that serves the local community.

This Plan proposes redesigning Georgia Avenue in Montgomery Hills as a landscaped urban boulevard with a center median and wide, unobstructed, tree-lined sidewalks. The design should transform the highway into a pedestrian-friendly urban boulevard with improved local circulation that supports both residents and merchants. The Plan recognizes that Georgia Avenue in Montgomery Hills will not only continue to service regional vehicular traffic, but it is an important neighborhood center as well as a gateway to the revitalized Silver Spring CBD. The Proposed Concept for Montgomery Hills seeks to achieve this vision by balancing the needs of motorists and pedestrians as well as those of merchants and local residents. (See Map 19.)

## Proposed Concept

The Proposed Concept recommended by this Plan for Georgia Avenue in Montgomery Hills provides an appropriate balance between the pedestrian and vehicular environment. The Plan seeks to improve pedestrian safety while maintaining the same vehicular levels of service that would be provided by a “do nothing” alternative. Several inter-related road improvements are recommended that would function together to improve vehicular and pedestrian circulation in Montgomery Hills.

The Proposed Concept is expected to have a negligible effect on the levels of traffic service in

# Georgia Avenue Proposed Concept Plan Illustrative

Map 19



- Pedestrian Edges (12-13.5 ft.)
  - Street Trees in Groundcover Panels (30 ft. O.C.)
  - Brick Sidewalks
  - Ornamental Pedestrian Lighting
  - Street Furniture (Benches, Bollards, Trash Receptacles)
- Potential Signalized Intersection at Flora Lane
- Remove Reversible Lane
- Median with Landscaping (6-16 ft.)
- Screen Parking Areas with Low Walls or Hedges
- Remove Billboards
- Improve Building Facades
  - Install Awnings
  - Coordinate Sign Treatments
- Maintain Selway Lane for Two-Way Traffic and Add Sidewalks
- Reconfigure Parking Lot #48
- Realign Seminary Road with a Landscaped Median
- Special Crosswalk Treatment
- Provide Left Turn Bay
- Reconfigure Parking Lot #2
- Narrow Existing Curbscutes Where Possible
- Relocate Overhead Utility Lines Underground

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Montgomery Hills. The existing and forecast levels of service at principal intersections throughout the North and West Silver Spring Planning Areas is documented in the *Silver Spring/Takoma Park Transportation and Circulation Report*, included as Appendix E. The 2020 forecast levels of service are expected to be substandard with either the existing configuration or the Proposed Concept. The Proposed Concept, however, improves safety, vehicular accessibility, and the pedestrian environment without degrading the overall level of traffic service in Montgomery Hills.

SHA has jurisdiction over the section of Georgia Avenue in Montgomery Hills. Although the Proposed Concept appears feasible, the State will have to conduct its own in-depth study of this alternative as well as others that may achieve the same goals of making Montgomery Hills more pedestrian and vehicular friendly.

The design details for implementing this Plan's recommendations and addressing the other desired elements of the Proposed Concept will be determined during the State's engineering and design process.

SHA's study should include the section of Georgia Avenue between 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Dennis Avenue and should address:

- Montgomery Hills;
- the intersection of Georgia Avenue and 16<sup>th</sup> Street, including access to Hanover Street and Grace Church Road;
- the Capital Beltway interchange;
- the Forest Glen Road intersection.

## Recommendations

- **Remove the reversible lane and install a center median on Georgia Avenue in Montgomery Hills between 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Forest Glen Road.**
- **Maintain the 120-foot Master Plan right-of-way for Georgia Avenue.**
- **Provide seven or eight travel lanes.**
- **Provide for evening peak period left turns from northbound Georgia Avenue at one or more intersections within Montgomery Hills.**
- **Review the 16<sup>th</sup> Street/Georgia Avenue intersection when the State Highway Administration (SHA) studies the Georgia Avenue corridor.**

The projected traffic volume on Georgia Avenue will result in a substandard level of service at this intersection. Reconstruction of the intersection can provide the necessary capacity to accommodate future traffic demands. Objectives the State should consider in studying design alternatives for this intersection include: creating a more attractive gateway location for both the Silver Spring CBD and Montgomery Hills; improving traffic efficiency; and enhancing pedestrian safety and circulation. One alternative that should be reviewed is a modified, signalized traffic circle.

- **Study the access to local streets such as Hanover Street and Grace Church Road at the time the State studies the Georgia Avenue/16<sup>th</sup> Street intersection.**
- **Conduct a State Highway Administration project planning study with detailed engineering of the Proposed Concept and seek funding for its implementation.**

The Proposed Concept includes a number of transportation and urban design elements that collectively create a safer and more aesthetically pleasing environment for both pedestrians and motorists.

The following are elements of the Proposed Concept that the State should include in its study of Georgia Avenue in Montgomery Hills.

- Maintain the current 11-foot lane widths for through travel lanes.
- Provide 4 lanes southbound between the Capital Beltway and 16<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Provide 4 lanes northbound between Seminary Place and the Capital Beltway.
- Provide 3 lanes northbound between 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Seminary Place.
- Permit left turns from northbound Georgia Avenue onto westbound Seminary Road during the evening peak period (these turns would continue to be prohibited during the morning peak period unless the State determines that the turns can be provided without significantly degrading traffic capacity).
- Prohibit left turns from Georgia Avenue at all other intersections during morning and evening peak periods.
- Prohibit left turns from eastbound Seminary Road onto northbound Georgia Avenue during the evening peak period to relieve congestion and improve pedestrian crossings; left turns would be permitted from Seminary Place.
- Provide a new signalized intersection at Flora Lane and Georgia Avenue with pedestrian crosswalks.
- Provide pedestrian edges of at least 12 feet with street trees in groundcover panels, brick sidewalks, ornamental pedestrian lighting and street furnishings.
- Provide a landscaped center median (varying in width between 6 and 16 feet) between Forest Glen Road and 16<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Screen parking areas.
- Provide special crosswalk treatments.
- Improve building facades with coordinated awnings and signs.
- Reconfigure public parking lots.
- Relocate utility lines underground.
- Narrow and consolidate curb cuts, where possible.
- Remove billboards.

### ***Related Montgomery Hills Issues***

The Proposed Concept will have some impacts on the commercial properties and businesses along Georgia Avenue. Possible solutions to mitigate these impacts and improve the business environment in Montgomery Hills are discussed below. These mitigation measures should be negotiated during the design and construction phase by the State and/or the County.

- **Consider consolidation of two separate parcels (the Montgomery Hills Car Wash and the Beltway Shell) into one if the Proposed Concept for Georgia Avenue is implemented.**

These two businesses, located in front of Staples/CVS on the west side of Georgia Avenue, are on fairly small lots and it would not be possible for both to remain as separate

entities if the Proposed Concept were implemented. Several options were discussed with the property owners. The best solution is for the two sites to be consolidated into one parcel and redeveloped. (See Map 20.) This issue would be negotiated among the parties when the Proposed Concept is implemented.

- **Redesign all or a part of the Beltway Amoco if the Proposed Concept for Georgia Avenue is implemented.**

This site, located on the east side of Georgia Avenue at White Oak Drive, would be slightly impacted if the Proposed Concept for Georgia Avenue is implemented. Specifically, the canopy and gasoline pumps adjacent to Georgia Avenue would have to be relocated. There are several options to relocate or reorient all or part of the pumps that are closest to Georgia Avenue. These have been discussed with the business owner and should be negotiated when the Proposed Concept is implemented. (See Map 20.)

- **Reconstruct Seminary Road between Sutton Place and Georgia Avenue to improve traffic flow and pedestrian circulation.**

Seminary Road west of Georgia Avenue should be modified to provide safe vehicular access between shopping and parking areas. The road could be relocated to the south, using the current southern sidewalk as a median. Such relocation would allow for improvements to parking lots, a tree-lined median, tree-lined sidewalks, and the addition of a right turn lane onto southbound Georgia Avenue.

This improvement would require a reconfiguration of Public Parking Lot #12, located on the south side of Seminary Road across from Sniders Superfoods Market, and could result in additional parking in front of the shops along the north side of Seminary Road (in front of Armand's Pizza).

The following measures should be considered to reduce multiple pedestrian and vehicular conflicts on Seminary Road.

- Modify Public Parking Lot #12.
  - Construct a median on Seminary Road between Georgia Avenue and Selway Lane.
  - Add an eastbound approach lane to Seminary Road at Georgia Avenue.
  - Consider closing Sutton Place between Stratton Road and Seminary Road and construct a green buffer/open space next to the parking lot. This measure will also help to reduce cut-through traffic in the adjacent residential neighborhood.
  - Review access to Columbia Boulevard when the Seminary Road improvement is analyzed.
- **Reconfigure Public Parking Lot #12 to allow improvements along Seminary Road, relocate the entrance from Sutton Place to opposite Selway Lane.**

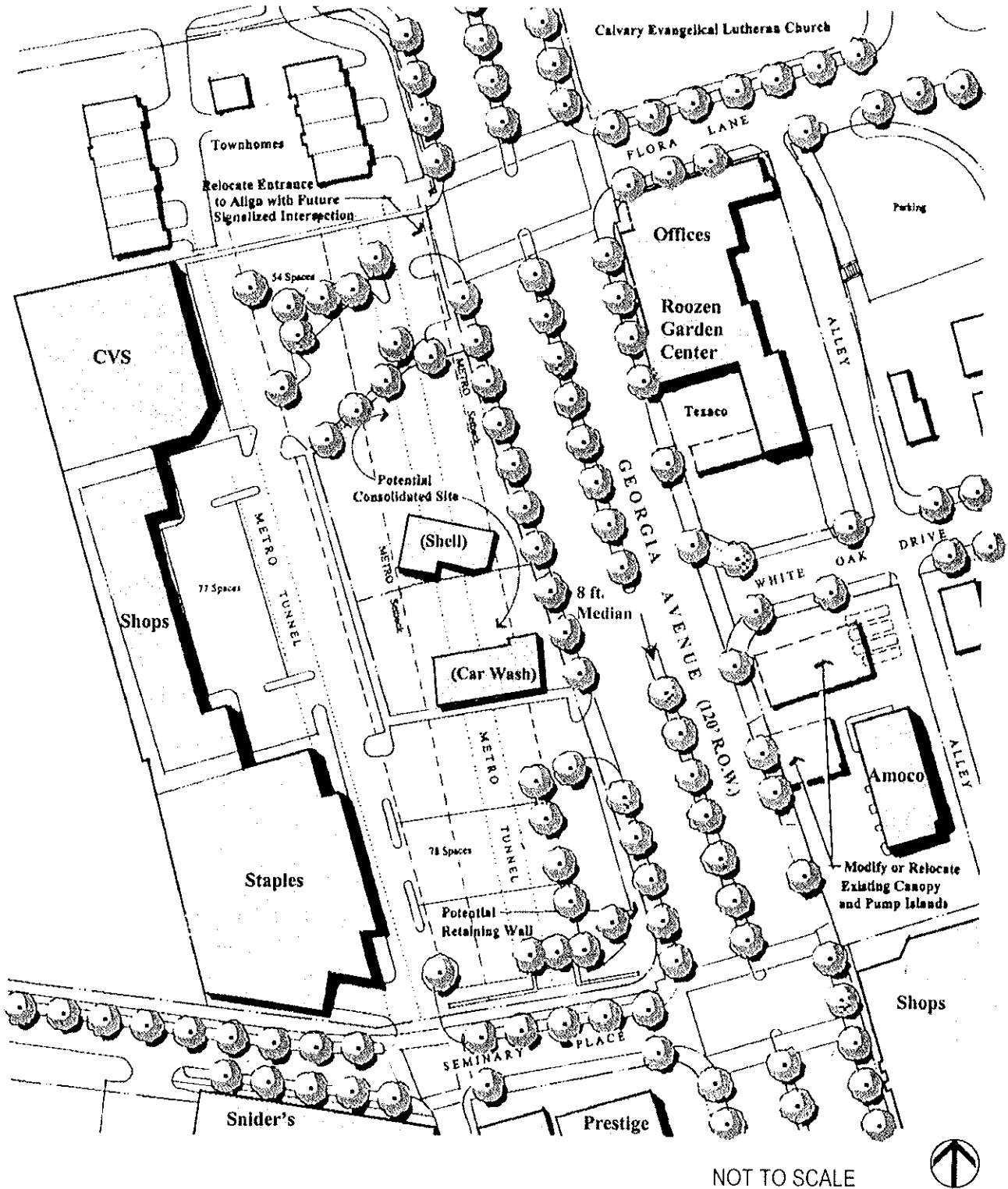
Public access to 9305 Columbia Boulevard and the parking lot at 9241 Columbia Boulevard must be maintained.

- **Maintain Selway Lane for two-way traffic and consider reconstructing Selway Lane as a mixed street.**

Selway Lane is an important internal two-way connector road in Montgomery Hills. The objectives for Selway Lane include: maintain it for two-way traffic circulation; maintain low traffic volumes and low traffic speed; accommodate pedestrians; maintain existing businesses; and use locations other than Selway Lane for parking cars associated with the automotive business. Parked cars along

# Seminary Place Shopping Center/Amoco Illustrative Concept

Map 20



Selway Lane restrict both vehicular and pedestrian circulation on this connector street. Selway Lane is appropriate for the mixed street concept, which accommodates pedestrians, bicyclists, and cars traveling at low speeds. Design elements that are characteristic of attractive pedestrian spaces, including special pavers and streetscape, should be considered for Selway Lane, if improvements are made in the future.

- **Reconstruct the intersection of Seminary Road, Seminary Place, and Second Avenue.** (See Map 21.)

This intersection should be improved to eliminate potentially hazardous traffic and pedestrian conditions and ease traffic flow along Seminary Road. This Plan recommends closing Seminary Road between Seminary Place and Linden Lane (except for driveway access) and modifying Brookville Road between Seminary Road and Linden Lane to allow only right turns to and from Brookville Road. The modifications support reconstruction of the Seminary Place/Second Avenue intersection as a T-type intersection. If changes to the current one-way southbound restrictions on Brookville Road are desired, they can be achieved outside the master plan process through existing DPWT programs, with appropriate changes to this recommendation.

The closure of Brookville Road to through traffic between Seminary Road and Linden Lane, and the closure of Seminary Road between Seminary Place and Linden Lane, will require a total of two lanes with turn lanes on Second Avenue between Seminary Road/Seminary Place and Linden Lane to accommodate the diverted traffic.

## Parking

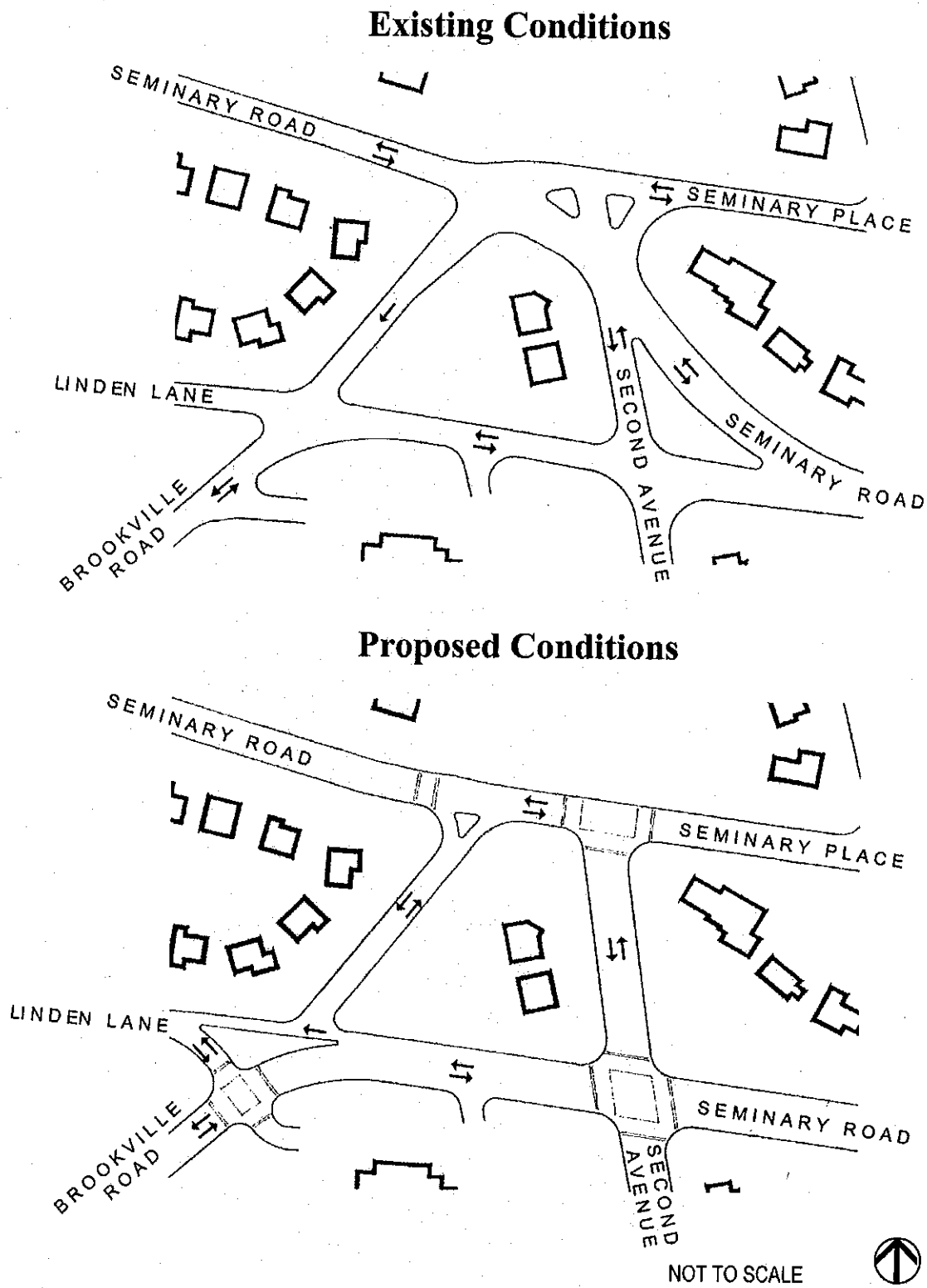
Among retailers interviewed for the *Montgomery Hills Commercial Center Economic Health Analysis*, lack of parking was viewed second only to local circulation/traffic as the most critical problem facing the area. The Georgia Avenue improvements will result in some loss of existing parking spaces. To alleviate these impacts, the Plan recommends the following possible mitigation measures.

- **Consider alternative parking arrangements for the Dale Center.**

The parking needs for both the Parking Lot District and the retail businesses should be reviewed at the time of the State study to determine the appropriate conceptual design and means for constructing and operating any new parking. This will be particularly important if it appears that the addition of the median will significantly reduce the number of spaces in front of the Dale Center. If a parking need exists, the following options should be considered:

1. Determine whether it would be possible to narrow the width of the lanes and/or the median in the area in front of the Dale Center so that it will not be necessary to eliminate the first row of parking (or to at least replace it with some parallel parking);
2. Consider closing off Columbia Boulevard just north of its intersection with Rookwood Road and locate new parking in this area, where it will minimize impact on nearby residences; and
3. As a last resort it may become necessary to add parking directly behind the Dale Center on lots 8, 9, and 10 with a green buffer or open space along the western edge of these properties. If this is





necessary, every effort should be made to minimize the size of the parking lot and/or maximize the buffer for adjoining residences (e.g., changing the grading to place the parking at a lower level that would be less visible to adjacent residents). A vehicular and pedestrian connection between the front and rear lots could be made along the south side of the building.

The additional parking with open space could be achieved through private development (as a special exception), by the Parking District, or through a public/private partnership.

The three existing single-family detached residences along the east side of Columbia Boulevard are recommended to remain in residential use. The two vacant lots and the existing parking lot are also recommended to retain their R-60 zoning. The residentially zoned lots behind the Dale Center should only be used for parking if the Proposed Concept for Georgia Avenue is implemented and there is a loss of parking in front of the center, and the other options for making up the parking loss, outlined above, are not feasible.

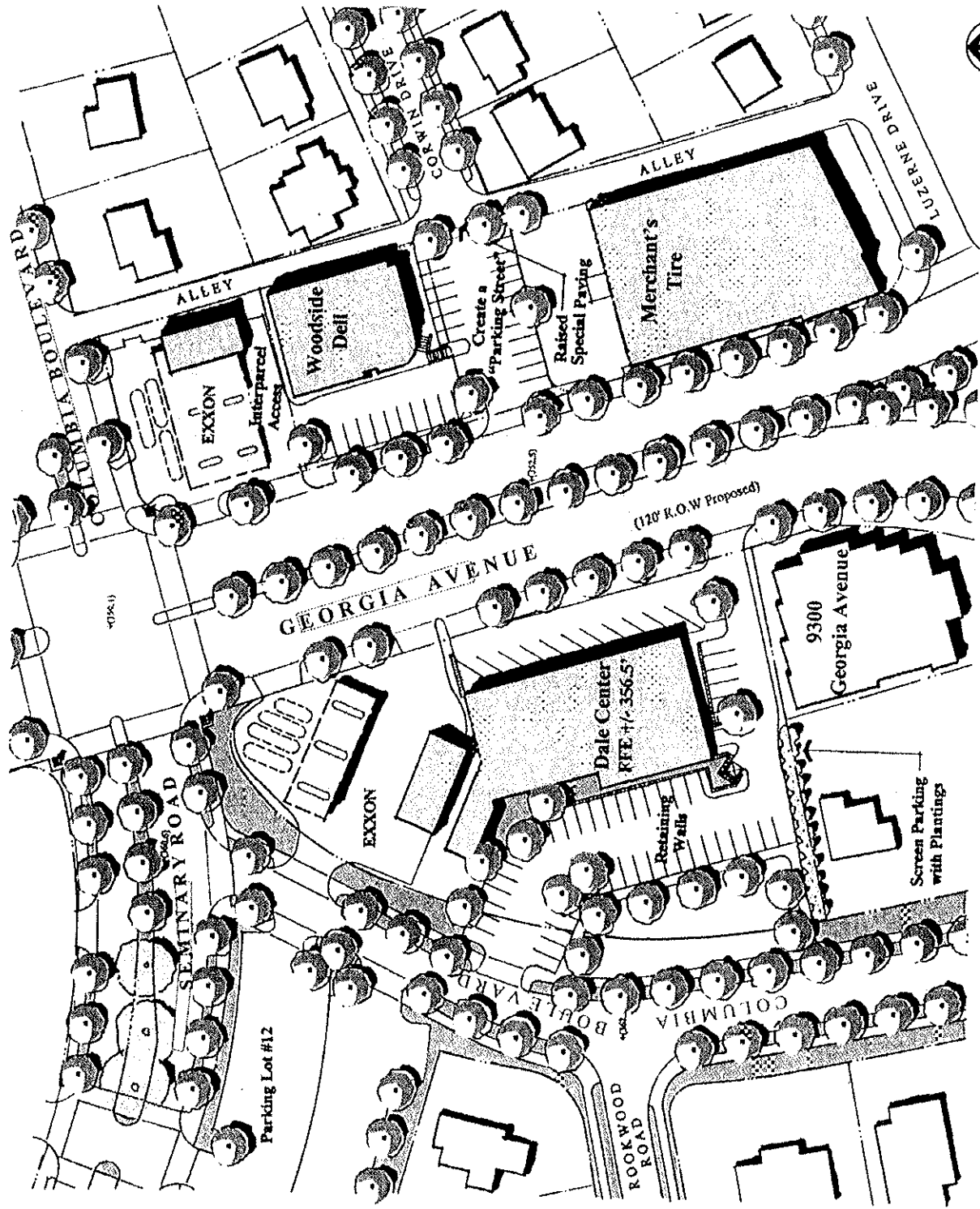
If the Proposed Concept for Georgia Avenue is implemented and these lots are constructed for parking, it is critical that the green buffer between the parking lot and Columbia Boulevard be implemented to provide separation between the residential and business areas. The buffer should be landscaped, perhaps with seating areas and could be designed to include a pedestrian connection between the residential and business communities. In addition, a landscaped buffer between the potential rear parking lot and the residence to the south (9219 Columbia Boulevard) is recommended. The community should be involved in the review of changes to the use of these lots and in the design of the open space.

- **Access to Columbia Boulevard should be analyzed when the Seminary Road improvement is implemented.**

On the west side of Georgia Avenue, Columbia Boulevard is located between Seminary Road and 16<sup>th</sup> Street. Many Columbia Boulevard residents would like the street to be closed at its northern terminus with Seminary Road to eliminate cut-through traffic in the neighborhood. To maintain adequate circulation, either the Sutton Place or Columbia Boulevard access points to Seminary Road should be maintained. This Plan recommends the closure of Sutton Place (between Seminary Road and Stratton Road) when the Seminary Road improvement is made and the public parking lot (#12) on Seminary Road is reconstructed. The treatment of Columbia Boulevard should be considered during design of the Seminary Road and public parking lot improvements.

- **Analyze traffic management options for the North Woodside-Montgomery Hills neighborhood when the Proposed Concept for Georgia Avenue is implemented.**

It is the intent of this Plan to create a more clearly defined boundary between the residential and commercial areas in this section of Montgomery Hills. This Plan recognizes that commercial and non-local cut-through traffic in residential neighborhoods is inappropriate. DPWT should work with this neighborhood to minimize non-local traffic on residential streets through the Residential Traffic Management Program. The neighborhood should be reviewed as a network of interconnected streets with traffic control measures that are coordinated accordingly.



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- **Consider making Corwin Drive between Georgia Avenue and the public alley into a parking street.**

After improvements to Georgia Avenue are completed, the shops on Georgia Avenue north of Corwin Drive (Woodside Deli, Impressions Hair Salon, Etc.) will lose one row of parking spaces in front of the buildings. To mitigate this impact to the businesses, the County should consider providing perpendicular parking spaces on both sides of Corwin Drive between Georgia Avenue and the alley. (See Map 22.) Some type of barrier, either permanent or temporary, should be considered west of the alley to eliminate cut-through traffic on the residential section of Corwin Drive east of the alley. Corwin Drive residents would like the residential portion of the street to be closed near the public alley, with adequate landscaping and emergency vehicle access.

- **Eliminate the nine County-owned, metered, parallel parking spaces in the service road on the east side of Georgia Avenue in front of the strip of stores between Columbia Boulevard/Seminary Road and Seminary Place.**

Without utilizing the service road and parking spaces in this section, there would not be adequate dimension to implement the Proposed Concept for Georgia Avenue. (See Map 23.) It is difficult to make up the nine spaces that would be lost in front of the stores. One possibility may be to remove a portion of the stores at either the north or south end of the strip and replace it with parking. Another possibility may be to use the alley on the north end of the building strip for some additional parking spaces. The County-owned public parking lot (Lot #48) adjacent to these stores at the northeast corner of Georgia Avenue and Columbia Boulevard would remain and the entrance to the lot could be reoriented from

Columbia Boulevard to Georgia Avenue so that the stores continue to have direct and convenient access to parking from the main road. The long term spaces in this lot could be reassigned to Parking Lot #12 on Seminary Road so that Lot 48 is available for short-term, patron parking.

## **Commercial Revitalization/Urban Design**

- **Initiate a Commercial Revitalization project in Montgomery Hills after the Georgia Avenue improvements have been completed.**

The Department of Housing and Community Affairs has attempted revitalization projects in Montgomery Hills in the past with limited success. However, the reconstruction of Georgia Avenue will have some impacts on local businesses, especially during the construction phase. There may be renewed interest among business and property owners at this time to coordinate with other owners and the County to upgrade the physical appearance and to improve the overall business environment in the commercial area.

- **Establish a working group of representatives from the County, State, M-NCPPC, residents and business owners to develop solutions to improve Montgomery Hills.**
- **Encourage the business community to establish a merchant's association to coordinate advertising and informational mailings to the community.**

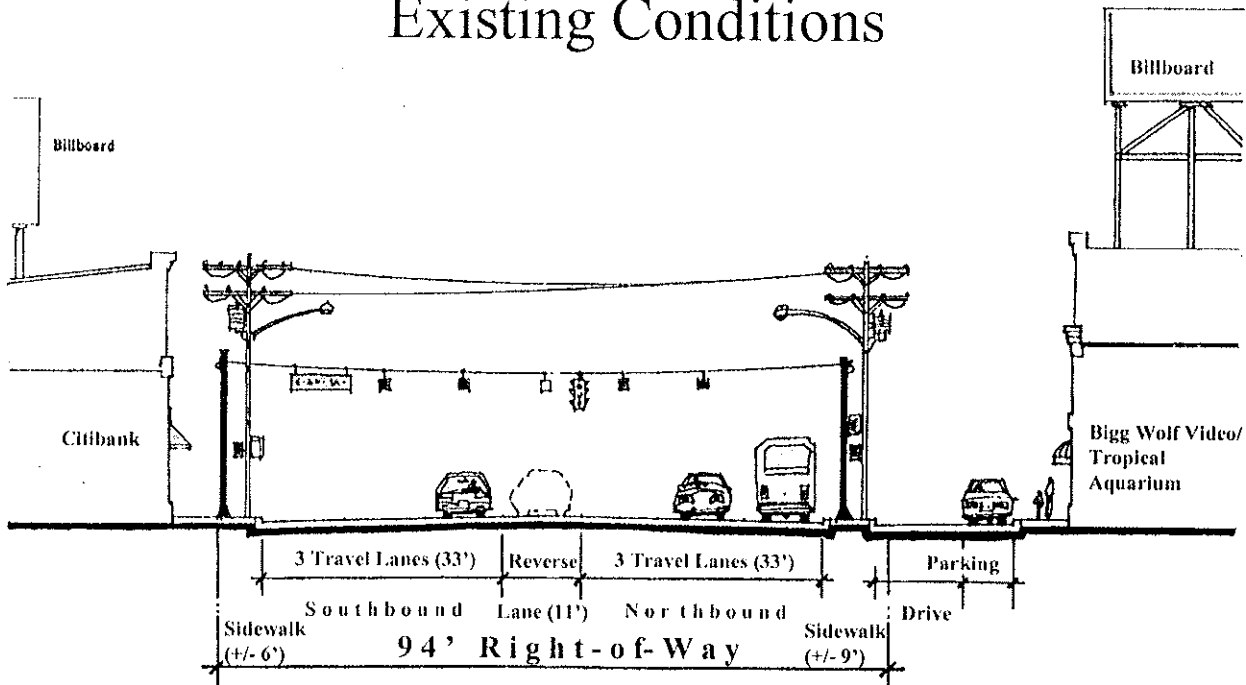
During the master planning process for the 1978 *North Silver Spring Sector Plan*, there was an active Montgomery Hills Businessman's Association. Over the ensuing years, the organization has become defunct. However, during development of the Proposed Concept for Georgia Avenue in Montgomery Hills,

many of the business and property owners started working together to voice their opinions of the project. This renewed cooperative spirit should be fostered and channeled into new projects aimed at improving the business environment in Montgomery Hills.

- **Remove billboards in the Montgomery Hills Commercial Center**

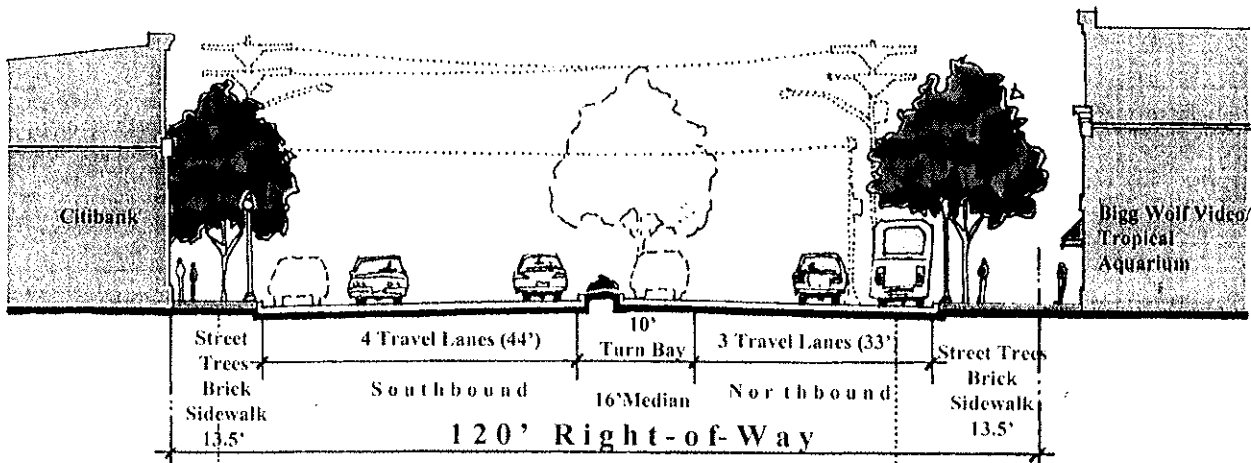
The Montgomery Hills Commercial Center contains two billboards. They contribute to the visual clutter in the area and should be removed as part of a comprehensive urban design concept for the area. The County is currently pursuing litigation to have the signs permanently removed. This Plan supports the County's efforts toward this end.

## Existing Conditions



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## Proposed Conditions



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