



Howard County Office of Transportation

3430 Court House Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■ 410-313-0702

Bruce Gartner, Administrator

bgartner@howardcountymd.gov

FAX 410-313-1655

TDD 410-313-2323

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To: Members of the Howard County Council

From: Bruce Gartner, Administrator, Howard County Office of Transportation

Subject: Staff Testimony for CR 14-2020, WalkHoward

WalkHoward is an updated Pedestrian Master Plan for Howard County that provides a vision, framework, and guidance for improving walkability and pedestrian access to transit within the county.

Improving pedestrian safety and access within Howard County can lead to substantial community benefits including improved public health, safety and social interaction, as well as lower carbon emissions by permitting short trips to be made on foot rather than by automobile. PlanHoward 2030 includes dozens of references regarding the importance of improving pedestrian facilities in Howard County, as well as these recommendations:

Policy 7.6b - Pedestrian Master Plan. *Assess progress and refine priorities of the existing Pedestrian Master Plan.*

Policy 7.7e - Alternative Modes of Transportation. *Make pedestrian, bicycle, and transit modes of transportation attractive and viable options.*

In accordance with these policies, this update to the County's existing 2007 Pedestrian Master Plan states that Howard County should have "a connected pedestrian network that safely and conveniently accommodates people of all ages and abilities," and includes physical infrastructure recommendations, ideas for policy changes, and proposed programs in support of that vision.

Development of the plan has spanned several years, and has included the following steps:

- Field assessments of existing conditions
- Extensive public input, with four public meetings and over 2,500 online comments
- Guidance from a Pedestrian Advisory Team
- Support from a nationally renowned consultant in pedestrian planning and design
- Project prioritization using a quantitative process
- Public review of a draft plan at several stages

The Howard County Multimodal Transportation Board and Planning Board have both reviewed this plan and provided helpful input and favorable appraisals.

As compared to the 2007 Pedestrian Master Plan, which *WalkHoward* is proposed to supplant, this plan has an increased focus on the integration of pedestrian facilities with transit service and

schools, a greater emphasis on safety and accommodation for people with disabilities, and a new focus on the health and wellness benefits of walking. The plan also complements the recently adopted Complete Streets Policy for Howard County and is coordinated with the Howard County Bicycle Master Plan.

Recommended improvements were rated using a prioritization methodology that considered access to destinations such as schools, libraries, and retail locations, as well as equity considerations including income, unemployment, and educational attainment. The recommended improvements with the highest 15 percent priority scores were geographically categorized into 43 structured projects. In addition, the plan includes 17 “priority connections” selected from locations identified by the public where a short direct pathway could facilitate walking to a popular destination such as a school, library, shopping center or park. The total estimated cost of the structured projects is \$11.77 million. An estimated cost cannot be computed for the priority connections because important information—such as facility type—are not currently known.

If adopted, *WalkHoward* will become the definitive reference for proposed pedestrian improvements within the County that all agencies and stakeholders can reference for guidance. This will coordinate developer and County efforts in pursuit of the same goal: improving walkability and creating a safe and convenient pedestrian network in Howard County. The Office of Transportation strongly supports *WalkHoward* and recommends adoption of Council Resolution 14-2020.