



MC 20-25 SUPPORT

December 9, 2024

The Sierra Club Montgomery County Group SUPPORTS MC 20-25 - State Highway Administration – Montgomery County Streetscapes – Design Approval and Permitting.

This bill transfers development-related streetscape approvals on state roads from the Maryland State Highway Administration to the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) - or to the relevant municipality.

Montgomery County's development review process is designed to take advantage of redevelopment opportunities to improve our streetscapes. The careful selection of developer-funded amenities such as street trees and street lighting elements can maximize opportunities to improve pedestrian safety and the tree canopy. The Montgomery County Planning Department, MCDOT and the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (DPS) and their municipal counterparts have made significant investments in designing streetscape standards and permitting processes.

This process normally works well when redevelopment projects front along a local road. However, when a project fronts along a state road, our local agencies defer to the Maryland State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) for permits for streetscape elements. MDOT SHA is not always equipped to implement our desired streetscapes. They lack standards and policies for street trees and street lighting and are not obligated to respect local standards or decisions. They are not accustomed to accepting or responding to public input or quickly resolving questions that may arise.

An example of why this bill is needed is the Chevy Chase Lake Block B project at Manor Road and Connecticut Avenue in District 18. In 2017, the Planning Board approved site plans and preliminary plans for this large mixed use development but conditioned their approval on the applicant implementing street lighting and street trees along their two roadway frontages. When it was discovered in late 2023 that the amenities were not delivered, MCDOT and DPS took steps to work with the applicant to bring the Manor Road frontage into compliance. However the Connecticut Avenue frontage remains unresolved. MDOT SHA has not responded to communications from citizens, Planning or the County.



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By unburdening MDOT SHA from street lighting and street tree approvals along state roads, we can be assured of smoother processes and better outcomes for pedestrian safety and the tree canopy.

We believe MC 20-25 can be handled with existing County and Planning (or municipal) resources because these agencies already perform this function along local roads. It will not increase costs for the County (or municipality) because the MCDOT (or municipality) already pays for energy and maintenance of street lighting installed along state roads. It might reduce long term costs by preventing the installation of non-standard lighting that might be more costly to maintain. Another benefit of MC 20-25 is that it will streamline the development review process by reducing the number of agencies involved.

We hope that one day, full ownership of state roads in Montgomery County will be transferred to MCDOT. While we acknowledge this goal will not be achieved in the near term, MC 20-25 is a sensible step in that direction.

For these reasons, we urge the Delegation to vote favorably on MC 20-25.

Respectfully,

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