

February 19, 2025

Chair Artie Harris
Montgomery Planning Board
2425 Reedie Drive, 14th Floor
Wheaton, MD 20902

Dear Chair Harris and Members of the Planning Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the draft University Boulevard Corridor Plan. We are the Kemp Mill Civic Association (KMCA), a neighborhood association serving the approximately 1,300 households in Kemp Mill.

We developed this position statement collaboratively and democratically, including through a Transportation Committee [meeting attended by over 60 of our members](#), through dozens of emails exchanged through our listserv, and through countless conversations between our nine directors and members of the community. We do not pretend this letter reflects the unanimous views of all our members (or directors), but we are proud of our process and believe these comments reflect a broad consensus. Underscoring this, our members approved this letter by a vote of **number** to **number**.

As an overview, the community is appreciative of the opportunity presented to make our community and the surrounding community a better place to live in. There are plenty of elements here that we will discuss that we feel would be of great benefit to the community and corridor if implemented in the proper way. But there is also significant concern about some elements within the plan as well as some omissions.

Our concerns are compounded by the lack of trust we have with the County right now, particularly as it relates to the process of public/community input. This is evident from the process regarding the bike lanes along University Blvd (MD 193), followed by the bus lanes along MD 193, and then the bus lanes along Georgia Ave (MD 97). While we felt that this process was somewhat better, we are still upset at the very short timeframe to provide comments after seeing the draft plan that is over 350 pages long with appendixes. We also felt that some of the results were skewed based on not getting enough representation from certain stakeholders, such as institutions just outside of the corridor and the many people who do not live adjacent to the corridor but utilize University Blvd for a variety of reasons. This lack of trust is contributing to a lot of the concerns you will see in our comments. Some of the elements could have great potential, but if the County cannot deliver the elements needed to meet the great potential, the results could significantly harm our community.

Below is an overview of our position as it relates to the University Blvd. corridor plan. Note that we are not able to provide every single point that has been articulated by the community and would encourage the County to meet with us before the Plan is finalized.

University Blvd Corridor Vision

There are many ideas presented to transform University Blvd (MD 193). But looking at the big picture of the corridor, the primary purpose of MD 193 is to be a road to connect destinations that are in defined places. KMCA does not oppose efforts to improve other modes of transportation through

the corridor, such as walking, biking, and taking transit, but KMCA is concerned that the Plan does not adequately address the needs of vehicular traffic.

MD 193 is classified as an arterial. Arterials are meant to move people from place to place. Arterials are not meant to be places within the corridor. We need slow streets in defined places such as downtown Wheaton. We need faster, efficient roads to connect places. When a corridor is transformed into a place, the road becomes a “stroad,” part street, part road ([What Is a Stroad and Why Is It Dangerous? | Streetlight Data](#)).

The plan’s current vision is to essentially convert MD 193 from a road that has some stroad elements into a complete stroad. This is bad for every mode of transportation for both operations and safety. KMCA fully supports MD 193 remaining a “road” between Wheaton and Four Corners, not a street or a stroad. We need a suburban design strategy, not an urban design strategy.

This means that KMCA does not want to see any reduction in the speed limit along MD 193 through this section of the corridor. We need moderate to higher speed corridors along MD 193 and other arterial roads to have a desirable, livable suburban community that relies on traveling longer distances than in an urban environment. Higher speeds reduce travel time not just for vehicular traffic, but for transit traffic as well. This is critical for a successful transit system. If MD 193 is planned properly, it may even be possible to raise the speed limit.

Rather than reduce speed limits, KMCA supports other aspects of the Plan that will protect the safety of drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders. These include:

- Separating pedestrian and bicycle facilities from the roadway. Greater separation of the modes allows higher speeds along the corridor to be safe.
- Better access management, by encouraging future development to reduce the number of access points that open directly onto MD 193. Removal of these access points reduces conflicts between vehicles and all the modes of transportation. Better access management allows drivers to travel at faster speeds due to only needing to be concerned with a limited number of potential conflicts that are spread out.
- Ensuring that planned BRT stations are located at or near existing traffic signals that allow controlled pedestrian crossings. This is key to pedestrian safety along a corridor with moderate speeds. The speed limit when there is a pedestrian crossing any road should be zero (0). This happens at controlled crossings when the driver must stop at a red light for the pedestrian to cross.

For this same reason, KMCA opposes the Plan’s intention to create corridor-fronting properties along MD 193 midway between existing traffic signals. Adding pedestrians between traffic signals will either force pedestrians to walk long distances for a traffic signal, or to cross at uncontrolled crossings—which presents the greatest risk of pedestrian fatalities and creates the “stroad” that needs to be avoided. The corridor needs safe “points” along the road and not “places” that make MD 193 into a stroad. In sum, we believe that with responsible safety measures, MD 193 can have safe speeds that are equivalent to the current design speed of the road.

Concerns with Effects of Thrive Montgomery 2050

KMCA is strongly opposed to the Thrive Montgomery 2050 policy that stops proposing 4+ lane roads in master plans. There is clear evidence already that this policy does not work. Old Georgetown Road (MD 185) is a prime example where the road diet to 4 lanes has created unbearable gridlock conditions not just during rush hour, but throughout a large portion of the day. The removal of thru lanes on Georgia Ave (MD 97) to make room for a bus lane, has created gridlock conditions during rush hour along the remaining 4 lanes, with many drivers ignoring the designated bus lane signs. These State Highways were meant to be the primary routes for vehicular traffic, i.e. they were meant to be roads, not streets. Essentially, the County's policy is trying to systematically convert all roads to streets. This forces traffic into the streets that were not designed for traffic. For example, many in our community for many years use Sligo Creek Pkwy as an alternative route to MD 97. Sligo Creek Pkwy, a street, was never meant as a commuter route, but it has turned into one due to the congestion issues along MD 97, a road, that are now getting much worse.

Along MD 193, the current road diet between Amherst and Dennis avenues has not produced significantly longer delays through the corridor. However, the results of this temporary road diet are skewed and do not mean that a permanent road diet will necessarily work, especially the one proposed in the corridor plan that is more extreme in length and restrictions. The current traffic conditions are still not close to traffic conditions pre-pandemic. (It was also very helpful to traffic that Northwood High School has been closed this entire academic year.) But there is a growing trend, not just in the federal government, to get workers back into the offices. This will soon get traffic beyond pre-pandemic numbers. There will continue to be a steady increase in traffic growth in general by the standard 1-2% a year. In and near designated growth areas, such as MD 193, the growth rate could be even higher, even with improved transit potentially taking many of those extra vehicle trips away.

KMCA is currently opposed to making the current MD 193 road diet permanent, let alone having a road diet in the corridor plan. Furthermore, the KMCA has great concerns with how this would affect the MD 193/Arcola Ave intersection, which is further discussed below.

To summarize the main concern with the overall corridor plan, our community is almost fully reliant on the vehicle as the only mode of transportation. So are most of the communities adjacent to us and the corridor. Improving transit in the corridor is not going to change this fact due to a combination of not being able to access transit to begin with (i.e. "last mile" problem) and that the transit lines do not go efficiently to the vast majority of destinations that residents of our surrounding communities are trying to get to anyway. In addition, certain functions like grocery shopping are difficult via transit.

"Arcola Ave District"

There are only two roads that access our community, Arcola Ave and Kemp Mill Road, with entries only from MD 193, MD 97, and Randolph Road. Arcola Ave is our community's Main Street that accesses our neighborhood shopping center and several religious institutions/schools, which are all very active. The pedestrian and bicycle activities along Arcola Ave and within our community are extremely high compared to similar looking communities. Arcola Ave is also an important part of the County roadway network. It acts as a cut-through between MD 193 with MD 97 and Randolph Road.

The Non-Profit Citizens Association Serving the Residents of Kemp Mill, Maryland
www.kempmillcivic.org

Arcola Ave is a local stroad. Arcola Ave had a road diet about 20 years ago from 4 lanes to 2 lanes after a pedestrian fatality. Our community loves that Arcola Ave is now very pedestrian friendly. But the congestion in our community has historically been very severe due to the road diet, that pre-pandemic was about 2.5 miles in length. KMCA has significant concerns that the corridor plan with the higher-density development within the proposed Arcola Ave district, as well as the proposed development along the corridor will cause congestion to significantly exceed the historic congestion issues.

The corridor plan proposes a new access point from MD 193 to the Kemp Mill Shopping Center and the Arcola Ave/Lamberton Drive intersection. This new connection, which we will call Lamberton Drive Extension, presents some opportunities, but also some concerns.

On the positive side, the KMCA sees the Lamberton Drive Extension as a potential new access point into our community that can alleviate the recurring and non-recurring (i.e. crash-related, weather-related) congestion that is experienced along Arcola Ave. The Lamberton Drive Extension also creates opportunities for the Shopping Center to get new customers, which could help the businesses survive and thrive more. Lastly, the new added traffic to the MD 193/Lamberton Drive Extension intersection could justify a traffic signal, which would be great for all modes of transport.

On the negative side, the combined increased traffic along Lamberton Drive Extension and Arcola Ave will make an already severely congested intersection into a complete nightmare. Additionally, there is concern about the effects of safety and security along this new extension. Young Israel Shomrai Emunah Synagogue, located on the corner of this intersection, has experienced anti-Semitic events in front of the synagogue entrance and would want to make sure that their security needs are met. Lastly, we would like to ensure that any plan for Lamberton Drive Extension is a street and not a road.

To address our concerns and help us decide whether we could support this extension, the KMCA would like to see more information on what Lamberton Drive Extension would look like, such as typical sections and general strategies for safety and security. We also want a commitment in the plan that the Arcola Ave/Lamberton Drive intersection will be upgraded to meet the operational and safety demands of all users. Lastly, we want a commitment from the County that it will work with the community to update the Kemp Mill Master Plan as soon as this corridor plan is complete. In that updated Kemp Mill Master Plan, we want to ensure that all the secondary effects that the University Blvd Corridor Plan will have on Kemp Mill will be addressed.

Zoning Changes

The corridor plan also has some zoning changes within the Arcola Ave district. This includes a combination of higher density and mixed-use development. Again, the KMCA sees some opportunities but also concerns.

Members of our community are open to additional housing, but our community also has concerns about traffic and overloading existing infrastructure. If additional housing is built, our members are particularly interested in owner-occupied multi-family housing (such as condos or townhouses) that could enable first-time homeowners to begin developing home equity. The Kemp Mill community is

The Non-Profit Citizens Association Serving the Residents of Kemp Mill, Maryland

www.kempmillcivic.org

a very desirable community where many multiple generations of the same family are spread out through the community. With housing prices skyrocketing and mortgage rates relatively high, it is getting harder and harder for the next generation of a family to return to the community or get younger families from outside the community to buy. Additional townhouses or condos could help meet this need. Before supporting a specific proposal for additional housing, KMCA would ask for additional information regarding the number of units and intended price points.

In terms of the proposed mixed-use development, the KMCA again sees opportunities and concerns. On the positive side, mixed-use development with higher-density housing has great potential for the current businesses within the Kemp Mill Shopping Center, as well as attract other businesses that could benefit the community. It would also be great for Kemp Mill Shopping Center to become a more pedestrian/bicycle-friendly environment.

But there are concerns that are very unique to our community. Kemp Mill has a very large Jewish community, much of which keeps kosher. Several businesses in the Kemp Mill Shopping Center cater specifically to the Jewish community such as a kosher supermarket, restaurants, and bakeries. Other businesses in the shopping center cater to non-kosher keeping patrons, or to the general public. All these businesses are a huge resource to the community and if any of them were to go out of business either temporarily due to the transition of the property or permanently due to economic factors (similar what happened to the kosher establishment in Cabin John Shopping Center as it transitioned to mixed-use development), it would take away a huge community resource that is vitally important to the Jewish community.

It was disappointing that the planning team recognized the Jewish history of the area and yet did not proactively engage the Jewish community in Kemp Mill regarding the community's unique needs. The KMCA wants to ensure that our concerns are addressed appropriately before considering whether we could support the mixed-use zoning changes proposed in the corridor plan.

The last major concern that the KMCA has regarding the Arcola Ave District relates to the MD 193/Arcola Ave signalized intersection. We simply cannot accept an intersection that has any fatal flaws in traffic operations. These fatal flaws include recurring cycle failures for any turning movement within the intersection, as well as recurring queuing of any lane that backs into another intersection or blocks an adjacent lane. The corridor plan should not reference details such as restricting right turns on red or removing the channelized right turn from Arcola to MD 193. These details should be discussed during the preliminary design phase. Instead, the corridor plan should set minimum standards of service for the intersection and require significant improvements to the intersection if needed to meet the vision of the corridor.

“Four Corners District”

KMCA has some specific concerns as it relates to the Four Corners District proposal. Four Corners is unique in that it is not only an area of business, but it is also an integral part of the I-495 interchange with both US 29 and MD 193. Both MD 193 and US 29 must remain “roads” through Four Corners and not “streets” or “stroads”. Any proposal that increases vehicle delay through Four Corners is unacceptable, as this is a key junction to connect to other places. If BRT needs to go through this intersection, BRT must be on its own alignment through Four Corners. Four Corners needs to be considered a point within the corridor and not a place.

The Non-Profit Citizens Association Serving the Residents of Kemp Mill, Maryland
www.kempmillcivic.org

Furthermore, removing the one-way pair of MD 193 will not just hurt vehicle operations, but it will also remove the whole character of Four Corners. Further analysis of various alternatives are needed to meet the functionality of MD 193 as a road while supporting the growth of Four Corners.

Secondary Effects

As stated earlier, the University Blvd Corridor Plan will have secondary effects. These secondary effects are not just for our community, but the communities that surround the corridor and the many drivers that use MD 193 as simply a road to get to other destinations. These effects are not just transportation related. There are also social and environmental effects that are beyond the corridor. The corridor plan must recognize these secondary effects and discuss a plan on how they would be addressed.

BRT

There are a wide variety of opinions as it relates to the proposed BRT through the corridor. The community recognizes that if more growth is desired in this corridor, it needs to be supported by better transportation. Whether growth should be in this corridor is debatable within the community. It is also debatable whether the only growth in the County should be transit-oriented, particularly in a County that is primarily suburban in nature, not urban. It is also debatable if a BRT system in this corridor has enough benefits to the County that it is worth the cost of developing and operating a BRT system.

There are members in our community that fully support better transit along the corridor. Some of them are upset though that we live in a community that is just out of range of being able to use it because of the “last mile” issue.

While there are a variety of opinions within the community of whether a BRT system is appropriate in this corridor, it is nearly unanimous in the community that if a BRT system is built, it cannot be to the detriment of vehicle traffic to the point of congested intersections or corridors. This is not just an operational issue, it is also a safety issue, as crashes exponentially increase in congested conditions. A detailed traffic study must be conducted to meet the operational and safety needs of all users, which include pedestrians, bicycle, transit, and vehicular traffic. KMCA is opposed to any BRT that is designed to disproportionately hurt vehicular traffic.

Conclusions

Due to the tight time crunch of responding to this plan and the limitations of getting everyone’s point across in this type of letter, these comments and positions from KMCA are not fully comprehensive. We would encourage the County to meet with KMCA and the community at the earliest opportunity possible to discuss our concerns and how they can be addressed in this Corridor Plan. As stated at the beginning of this letter, we do see many of positive elements within this corridor plan if implemented properly, some of which we noted, some of which we didn’t. But there are significant concerns related to transportation, housing, and our shopping center that need to be addressed.

Thank you for carefully going through our comments and we hope we can have a fruitful discussion that can ultimately lead to a better vision of our community and the MD 193 corridor.

Respectfully,

Jules Szanton
President, KMCA

On behalf of the Members of the Kemp Mill Civic Association

Cc: County Executive Marc Elrich
Montgomery County Council

DRAFT