

# **Veirs Mill Corridor**

**2016 – 2017 ULI Washington Regional Land Use Leadership Institute**

***mini Technical Assistance Panel (mTAP)***

**Bill Eger | Sarah Goss | Jill Griffin | Walter Ploskon | Joyce Tsepas**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Overview**

The Montgomery County Planning Department (MCPD) recently initiated the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan at the direction of the Montgomery County Council. The Veirs Mill Corridor extends approximately four miles between the City of Rockville and the Wheaton Central Business District. The Metropolitan Washington Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) Metrorail Red Line serves the Rockville and Wheaton stations located at either end of the corridor. However, these stations are not contiguous along the Red Line's route. Instead, the Veirs Mill Corridor is served by extensive WMATA Metrobus and Montgomery County Ride On bus service. Moreover, the Veirs Mill Corridor serves a significant volume of automobile traffic resulting in congestion along the length of the corridor causing delays and unpredictability among the existing bus service. To reduce congestion and enhance bus service, a proposal for bus rapid transit (BRT) service along the corridor is under consideration. This proposal includes operating six stations along the BRT's route in the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan area.

The physical characteristics of the Veirs Mill Corridor result in significant challenges to the community, including safety concerns and lack of community connectivity. These physical characteristics include a wide range of inconsistent frontage conditions and setbacks, varying and non-contiguous sidewalk lengths and widths, periodic service roads, variations in roadway widths, rolling and varying topographies, limitations in transit access, and non-uniformity of residential housing stock.

The Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan considers opportunities to address and strengthen many of the community's priorities, including pedestrian and bicycle safety, maintaining existing housing affordability and expanding affordable housing options, emphasizing community connectivity, and access to a diversity of retail and commercial establishments. These community priorities exist absent the introduction of a BRT service. Accordingly, MCPD is interested in understanding how the introduction of BRT service may further impact the Veirs Mill Corridor and influence community priorities. As a result, this ULI Regional Land-Use Leadership Institute mTAP team was asked to answer five questions to support MCPD's efforts in drafting the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan considering the introduction of a BRT service:

- How will BRT influence market affordability, property values, and development pressure adjacent to the transit corridor?
- Can BRT and the associated stations catalyze reinvestment or redevelopment?
- What are the most appropriate uses of the single-family residential homes immediately adjacent to Veirs Mill Road?

- What are potential land use and station area typologies? What improvements should be considered to provide safe and convenient access to the corridor's BRT stations?
- Should the current station locations be changed? How can the stations be designed and/or located to serve as an instrument for placemaking?

## **Research**

The mTAP team conducted various research efforts to support answers to MCPD's questions. These research efforts included site visits and physical observation of the Veirs Mill Corridor; participation in community planning meetings and community member engagement; demographic, housing, and land-use analysis; real estate valuation and transaction analysis; and literature and case-study review of the land-use and economic development impacts of bus rapid transit and similar transportation systems. Moreover, the mTAP team researched best practices in topics of safety, security, and access; community cohesiveness; and economic and land-use development.

## **Results**

After analyzing the BRT's potential impacts on the transportation service and adjacent properties, the mTAP team proposed recommendations in three categories that have the ability to address and strengthen the community's priorities with or without the introduction of BRT service. These categories of recommendations include:

- Improve Safety, Security, and Access
- Strengthen Community Cohesiveness
- Leverage Development Opportunities

Each category also features tools and implementation strategies MCPD may wish to consider.

### Potential Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Impacts

Evidence from literature and case-study review of BRT and light-transportation systems suggests possible outcomes to the Veirs Mill Corridor include modest commercial and residential property land value appreciation within  $\sim\frac{1}{4}$  mile radius of BRT stops. Beyond  $\sim\frac{1}{4}$  mile, land values may appreciate but to a lesser extent. In addition, BRT service will not likely increase development pressures or change market conditions for redevelopment of the existing housing stock. However, there may be opportunity to leverage BRT service as a benefit for future infill or development opportunities in select locations. Additionally, there may be opportunity for the community's existing conditions to maximize benefit and ridership of BRT service in the future, strengthening the community.

### Improve Safety, Security, and Accessibility

Given the physical characteristics and condition of the Veirs Mill Corridor, the mTAP team provides the following recommendations to address the community's priority to improve safety, security, and accessibility. These recommendations include establishing a consistent sidewalk system, introducing street edge beautification, providing consistent and sufficient street and right-of-way maintenance, improving connections to existing bus stops, and

implementing strategies for parking management. To accomplish these recommendations, implementation tools MCPD may wish to consider include executing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the State of Maryland and Montgomery County to delineate and accept responsibility for street and streetscape maintenance, and to dedicate a portion of the Veirs Mill Corridor's property tax revenues to the capitalization of funds for improvements and for ongoing maintenance needs.

### Strengthen Community Cohesiveness

A noted priority to the Veirs Mill Corridor community is the improvement of the community's connectivity and cohesiveness. The mTAP team recommends a variety of opportunities that emphasize priorities of affordability and enhancing sense of place. These recommendations include initially maintaining existing zoning and density, preserving home values through incentivizing value-added improvements, placemaking opportunities, and offering enhancements to pedestrian and bicycle facilities along the extent of the Rock Creek Park portion of the corridor. The mTAP team proposes numerous implementation tools MCPD may wish to consider to strengthen community cohesiveness. These tools include leveraging home improvement opportunities available to Montgomery County residents; enhancing permitting processes; improving compatibility of land uses; introducing pop-up programming, public art as placemaking, and markets on service roads and larger land areas; partnering with churches and community organizations; and considering neighborhood conservation districts.

### Leverage Development Opportunities

While the introduction of BRT service may not induce or catalyze development opportunities, there are development opportunities along the Veirs Mill Corridor which may be attractive to leverage. These include infill opportunities for mixed-use, mid-rise and Missing Middle Housing typologies at the Stoney Mill Square Shopping Center and a mixed-use recreation center at the Parklawn Local Park. In addition, consideration should be given to mixed-use development opportunities at the Twinbrook Shopping Center and in the distant future, the Rock Creek Terrace development area. To leverage these development opportunities, implementation tools MCPD may wish to consider include: rezoning and specification of Missing Middle typologies; land dispositions with developers; partnership with churches and community organizations for land development opportunities; and public-private partnerships. To increase the potential and attractiveness of these aforementioned development opportunities, consideration should be given to shift BRT stops for the Twinbrook Parkway and Parkland Drive BRT stops to adjusted locations.

### **Summary**

Through the extensive research, observations, community engagement and analysis, the mTap team recommendations support improvement of the Veirs Mill Corridor that would provide increased safety and security; create community cohesiveness and connectivity; preserve the neighborhood character and strengthen the opportunities for near-term and long-term development to allow the unique character of the Corridor to celebrate its place in the region.