

PHED COMMITTEE #1A
March 18, 2013

MEMORANDUM

March 14, 2013

TO: Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee
FROM: Glenn Orlin, ^{GO}Deputy Council Staff Director
SUBJECT: Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan—transportation issues for further study

Councilmembers: Please bring your copy of the Draft Sector Plan to this worksession.

This memorandum summarizes transportation-related issues posed by the Chevy Chase Sector Plan and identifies further work to be done prior to the PHED Committee's decision-making worksessions this June.

A theme running through much of the hearing testimony is that traffic in Chevy Chase Lake is too heavy, and that the proposed development will only make it worse. This is one of the key issues in this plan, because any master plan should have a balance between its proposed land use and its proposed transportation network and services. For more than two decades this "balance" has been defined as what would be needed to meet the current adequate public facilities (APF) requirements as described in the Subdivision Staging Policy (formerly the Growth Policy). Achieving this balance in a plan is not an academic exercise: if a plan is not balanced, then at some point in the future a proposed master-planned development will be unable to proceed because it will have no means to meet the APF requirements.

The 2012-2016 Subdivision Staging Policy (SSP) revised the policy area and local area transportation tests, effective January 1, 2013. Late last fall the Council agreed that the revised methodology would apply to any draft plan brought forward subsequent to January 1; the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan is the first such plan. The Final Draft, however, was developed under the prior set of requirements, so its "balance" calculations were based on Policy Area Mobility Review (PAMR) and the prior Local Area Transportation Review (LATR) methodology. Planning staff has been asked to re-measure the results of the Final Draft according to the Transportation Policy Area Review (TPAR) and the new Highway Capacity Manual (HCM) methodologies in time for the PHED Committee's worksessions in June. Meeting the TPAR requirements is not likely to be an issue, as TPAR is measured over the entirety of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Policy Area (the area south of the Beltway and west of Rock Creek, north of the District of Columbia, and east of the Potomac River) and the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan is but a small portion of it.

Meeting the LATR requirements, however, is another matter entirely. Planning staff calculates that all four of the major intersections in the Sector Plan area—Connecticut Avenue/Jones Bridge Road, Connecticut Avenue/Manor Road, Connecticut Avenue/East-West Highway, and East-West Highway/Jones Mill Road—will exceed 1,600 Critical Lane Volume (CLV) by wide margins in one or both peak hours. Significantly, *three of the four intersections are forecast to fail even with the completion of the intersection improvements at Connecticut Avenue/Jones Bridge Road, the opening of the Purple Line, and no additional development approved in Chevy Chase Lake.* (The Connecticut Avenue/Manor Road intersection would not fail under this “no development” scenario.) Likely they will also fail according to the HCM method, but the degree to which they will fail is important to understand before attempting to devise solutions.¹

Theoretically there are four ways—singly, or in some combination—that the Sector Plan can be brought into balance:

1. *Assume a higher non-auto-driver mode share (NADMS).* Currently about 21% of those commuting to Chevy Chase Lake are arriving by means other than driving (i.e., riding in public transit, riding in carpools, biking, walking, or telecommuting); at buildout—with the Purple Line—the Planning Board anticipates the NADMS to rise to 36%. Currently about 18% of those commuting from Chevy Chase Lake are traveling by non-auto means; at buildout the NADMS is anticipated to rise to 49%. All these percentages refer to the area within the portion of the Sector Plan close in to the proposed Purple Line station, the only part of the area planned for more development.

These assumptions are very ambitious, especially for an area surrounding a transit hub that is not a Metro Station. For example, the anticipated 36% NADMS to Chevy Chase Lake is in the same range as the current NADMS for Bethesda CBD (35%), to White Flint (39%), Friendship Heights (37%), and Silver Spring CBD (42%), all of which have Metro stations. On the other hand, the Purple Line station would be only 3 and 6 minutes away, respectively, from the Bethesda and Silver Spring Metro Stations, with easy transfers at each. Furthermore, the upgraded Capital Crescent Trail will provide an even better commuter route for bikers to and from Chevy Chase Lake than it does today. In this context, the Planning Board’s NADMS assumptions for Chevy Chase Lake are plausible. However, the Council should not look to increase this assumption any higher. In any event, since development-generated traffic is only a small part of the overall traffic in Chevy Chase Lake, the NADMS would have to be raised substantially higher to make a dent in problem.

2. *Reduce the level of proposed development.* Because of the mixed-use nature of most of the proposed development, the traffic generated by it is substantially less than if the proposals were unitary uses. Nevertheless more development means more traffic, on top of the existing and background traffic that causes the major intersections to exceed capacity. Therefore, downscaling the proposed development is an option. However, like assuming a higher non-auto-driver mode share, reducing the

¹ There are at least three different sets of forecasts for these intersections; most of the difference is explained by the difference in traffic counts. One set is based on counts compiled by M-NCPPC staff over the last decade (the highest); one set is based on 2011 counts taken by M-NCPPC’s consultant (generally in the mid-range); and one set by the Chevy Chase Land Company’s consultant (generally the lowest). For this analysis, Council staff is relying on the set based on the 2011 counts by M-NCPPC’s consultant, which is more recent than the first set. While Chevy Chase Land’s counts are also more recent, for planning purposes it would be prudent to use the somewhat more conservative (i.e., higher) 2011 counts.

proposed development will also have relatively little impact on bringing the plan in balance, because new development's contribution to the traffic problems in Chevy Chase Lake is so little in the first place.

3. *Increasing traffic capacity.* The most direct way of addressing the LATR problem is to add traffic lanes at the problem intersections. The only improvements planned are those presently under construction at Connecticut Avenue/Jones Bridge Road. These improvements have their impacts, as would improvements at the other problem intersections. However, it is conceivable that one or more turn lanes could be added at the other intersections without requiring the loss of homes.

4. *Loosening the LATR standard for intersections.* For nearly two decades the Growth Policy and SSP have featured Metro Station Policy Areas (MSPAs), which are areas of roughly a half-mile radius around most Metro stations. The Council has set the LATR standard for MSPAs at 1,800 CLV (now, under the most recent SSP, a volume/capacity ratio of 1.13), allowing more traffic congestion than the larger policy areas surrounding them. The rationale is that the faster and more reliable transit service afforded by Metrorail provides a superior travel option to commuting in mixed traffic, so lesser accommodations need to be made for drivers.

The same rationale can be applied to areas around light rail and bus rapid transit (BRT) stations, so establishing a "Transitway Station Policy Area" around Chevy Chase Lake in the area around its light rail station is a logical extension of the MSPA construct. However, neither the Purple Line nor any of the master-planned or yet-to-be-master-planned BRT lines would provide the capacity of Metrorail, so any loosening of the standard should be less than for an MSPA.

The SSP would not create a TSPA around a transitway station until the Purple Line or BRT line were programmed for completion. So, for the time being, the LATR standard for the Chevy Chase Lake area would remain at 1,600 CLV or 1.13 volume/capacity (V/C). However, for measuring land use/transportation balance for Chevy Chase Lake, it may be appropriate to assume a future TSPA there with a looser standard.

The decision whether or not to assume an eventual TSPA for Chevy Chase Lake must be considered in a countywide context. The same issue is being faced currently in the Lyttonsville and Long Branch Sector Plans, and it has implications for areas surrounding Corridor Cities Transitway stations in the Great Seneca Science Center, as well as other planned nodes of development around transitway stops. If the Council decides to employ this TSPA construct, it would only make sense that it be incorporated into the SSP once one of these lines is programmed.

Two questions immediately are evident. What should be standard for TSPAs? And how broad an area around a transitway station would a TSPA extend? For example, if there were to be a Chevy Chase Lake TSPA with a standard of 1,700 CLV (1.06 V/C), and if it were to extend a half-mile around the Purple Line station, then the eventual standard for the three Connecticut Avenue intersections would be loosened, as they are within a half-mile. The East-West Highway/Jones Mill Road intersection, however, is beyond a half-mile from the station, so the standard applied to it would not be loosened.

In summary, Council staff anticipates the following work to be accomplished in time for the June worksessions:

- Planning staff would recalculate the land use/transportation balance under Policy Area and Local Area Review based on the methodologies approved in the 2012-2016 SSP.
- Council staff, consulting with Planning staff and the State Highway Administration, would develop options to increase the roadway capacity to relieve the forecasted congestion that will occur with or without additional development.
- Council staff, consulting with Planning staff, would develop a proposal for a Transitway Station Policy Area for Chevy Chase Lake and a construct that would allow this concept to be applied around other Purple Line and BRT stations.

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MEMORANDUM

March 15, 2013

TO: Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee

FROM: Marlene Michaelson, Senior Legislative Analyst

SUBJECT: Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan

This is the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee's first worksession on the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan. A separate memorandum from Glenn Orlin addresses the transportation issues in the Plan. This meeting will provide the Committee with background information on the Plan and will provide the opportunity to identify questions that require further work on the part of Planning Board staff (or others). Committee discussion of specific properties and votes will occur after the budget.

Councilmembers should bring their copy of the Plan to the meeting.

Background

The Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan covers an area of about 380 acres between Rock Creek Park to the east, the Columbia Country Club to the west, Jones Bridge Road to the north, and East-West Highway to the South. It includes a relatively concentrated area of local shopping, offices, and institutional and civic uses surrounded by suburban residential housing. Its purpose is described on page 7 of the Plan:

“The purpose of this Plan is to build on community assets to create a better ‘town center’, in a way that fits with the community’s character. The Plan also recommends replacing outdated commercial zoning with new mixed-use zones that encourage more housing, including affordable housing. This will help bolster local businesses and add new public open spaces, with gathering areas and

playgrounds. The Plan also introduces new alternatives for getting around in Chevy Chase Lake, including the planned light rail system, the Purple Line.”

The Plan’s principles are listed on page 17 and expand upon the purposes described earlier. They emphasize the key elements over which there is agreement in this plan: the need to preserve existing housing, expand housing and retail opportunities, and redevelop the existing shopping center as a mixed-use center with public use space, while still maintaining its local character, rather than creating a regional destination.

The primary areas of disagreement relate to the height and/or density on certain key properties and the amount of development that should be allowed in the first phase of staging. While all appear to agree that compatibility with the surrounding low-density residential neighborhoods is important, there are varying opinions regarding how to achieve compatibility.

Two Sectional Map Amendments

The Plan recommends that only some of the properties be rezoned at this time via a Sectional Map Amendment (SMA), with a second SMA to be timed with Purple Line funding. The Council has frequently staged development in a master plan to ensure that major transportation facilities are funded before allowing new development to proceed, but it typically rezones all of the property immediately after the master plan is completed. The underlying assumption is that the facilities will be funded at some future point, although timing may be uncertain. One rationale for delaying part of the zoning would be if the Council was not certain that a facility will one day be funded. If the zoning has already occurred and a decision is later made to not build the facility, the Council would need to downzone a property, a difficult and typically controversial endeavor. While one could apply this rationale for two SMAs to master plans recommending development based on the Purple Line, the Planning Board did not recommend two SMAs for the Takoma Langley Sector Plan and instead used the more traditional staging approach.

The Council received strong support in public testimony for the zoning approach recommended by the Planning Board and received no testimony in opposition. Page 20 of the Plan shows a map of the properties that would be rezoned immediately, and page 21 shows a map of the properties that would be rezoned after funding of the Purple Line.

Land Use Recommendations

The Plan uses the terms “preserve”, “enhance”, and “create” to describe 3 development goals: to **preserve** the existing residential neighborhoods and restore Coquelin Run, to **enhance** the quality of life and connectivity by promoting pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development in the Town Center, and to **create** new choices in the Chevy Chase Lake Town Center with new opportunities for local shopping, housing, public spaces, and transit. The creation of new opportunities would occur with the second SMA.

DEVELOPMENT LEVELS IN CHEVY CHASE LAKE			
		Proposed	
	Existing and Approved Development	“Enhance”	“Create”
Commercial (sf)	470,859	372,487	826,273
Residential, Single-Family (DU)	603	603	618
Residential, Multifamily (du)	716	956	2,017
Civic and Institutional	336,537	851,537	851,537
TOTAL (sf)	2,126,396	2,283,024	4,312,810

Several of the key recommendations in the Sector Plan resulted in split 3-2 Planning Board votes, and Council received testimony supporting Planning staff recommendations on certain issues. As a result, Staff has asked Planning Department staff to prepare a chart comparing the recommendations of the Planning Department staff, Planning Board majority, and Planning Board minority for each recommendation.

FURTHER ANALYSIS

The Committee will begin its review of property specific recommendations after it completes its work on the FY14 budget. At this time, Committee members may want to identify any issues or questions they believe Planning Department staff or others should address over the next two months so that they are fully prepared for the Committee worksessions in June. Some of the questions Staff believes need to be addressed are as follows:

Chevy Chase Lake Shopping Center

1. Is there a way to accommodate the same level of development on the Chevy Chase Lake Shopping Center property while restricting the height to less than a 150 foot maximum? Would this compromise public use space?
2. Does limiting height (or height and density) jeopardize the economic viability of redevelopment on this property?

8401 Connecticut Avenue

3. Does limiting the height under a redevelopment option to less than the existing height discourage any possibility of redevelopment?

HOC Property

4. What is the impact of increasing the density on the HOC property from a 1.5 FAR to a 3.5 FAR (as requested by HOC) while keeping the same height limits recommended in the Sector Plan?

Loughborough Place Parking Lot

5. What is the impact of zoning this property CRN instead of RT-15 (as requested by the property owner) if height is capped at the same height allowed in RT-15 and uses must be residential or have a residential appearance (e.g., professional offices in townhomes)?

Newdale Mews

6. What is the physical status of buildings at Newdale Mews? Will their physical condition likely require that they be redeveloped in advance of the purple line?
7. Is it possible to require a 50 foot setback from the adjoining residential neighborhood? Is there a way to allow them to build in the right-of-way to maximize the distance of new buildings from the existing single-family homes?
8. Is there a way to ensure that sufficient foliage will either be retained or newly planted to act as a buffer to the existing neighborhoods?
9. Are the uses non-conforming? What limitations would exist if the property owner needed to rebuild?

8500 Connecticut Avenue (Arman's Chevy Chase Service Station)

10. Is the gas station property large enough to allow a step down in height to the adjacent home?
11. Can the impact on existing homes be addressed through the development review process?

Miscellaneous

12. The Plan does not include a community facilities section and it should include an assessment of the need for new community facilities, even if the existing ones are sufficient to meet the needs of the future community. This should be prepared before the Committee continues work on the Plan in June.