

Mayor Tracey Furman

**Council Member Darin Bartram
Council Member Nate Engle**



**Council Member Conor Crimmins
Council Member Ann Lichter**

July 24, 2023

Montgomery County Council
Evan Glass, President
100 Maryland Ave.
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear President Glass,

I write on behalf of the Town of Kensington to express support for the County's Pedestrian Master Plan. The document covers an impressive range of issues and offers targeted solutions for increasing walking rates and pedestrian satisfaction, creating a comfortable, convenient, and connected pedestrian network that is equitable and just, and enhancing pedestrian safety.

The Town provided favorable written and oral testimony during the Plan's hearing before the Planning Board in March – much of which is reiterated below and remains relevant feedback for your consideration. We are pleased to see that our suggestion to include municipalities as key implementation partners has been duly incorporated throughout the draft that is now before the County Council.

The process to produce the plan was data-driven and involved considerable outreach and public engagement. Eli Glazier, the lead for the Pedestrian Master Plan for Montgomery Planning, provided a briefing to our Town Council on the Plan's progress in 2022, and we worked with him on several occasions to explore synergies between the Plan and our Town's Pedestrian and Bicycling Access and Safety Working Group. Overall, we are encouraged by the collaborative spirit and approach embodied by this Plan.

There are several substantive aspects of the Plan that resonate with the Town of Kensington. In the Plan, the Town of Kensington is designated primarily as a "Town Center". The data regarding the fatality and severe injury rates is particularly striking, with "30% of crashes involving pedestrians on streets with a posted speed limit of 45-mph or higher result in a severe injury or fatality, [whereas] only 11% of crashes on streets with a 25-mph posted speed limit result in a severe injury or fatality...pedestrian crashes along a street (rather than at an intersection) are disproportionately likely to result in a severe injury or fatality". Furthermore, the Plan highlights that Town Center Boulevards are amongst the most dangerous street types and are flagged for prioritized improvements.

These data speak to two key points that the Town has pursued over the past few years. The first is lowering speed limits on all streets, and the second is improving pedestrian and bicycling safety and

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access along our Town Center Boulevards; primarily Connecticut Avenue, Knowles Avenue, Plyers Mill Road, Metropolitan Avenue, and University Boulevard. In 2022, the Town Council successfully lowered the speed limit on all Town-owned roads to 20 mph and has actively pursued grant and program opportunities to bring together our transportation partners at the state and county levels to evaluate improvements to the above-mentioned boulevards. This includes working with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) in 2021-2022 on a Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) grant to improve connectivity, safety, and access along Connecticut Avenue, and securing Maryland Department of Transportation State (MDOT) State Highway Administration (SHA) Bicycling and Pedestrian Priority Area (BPPA) designation. The BPPA plan is currently being developed, and it will match the County's BiPPA designation boundaries to improve linkages with County processes. Still, while we have seen progress over the past two years, we face considerable challenges with making the improvements we desire along the non-Town roads. This is mainly the case for the Town Center Boulevards noted earlier, which are all Maryland state roads. These state roads intersect with various Town and County roads, creating a complicated web of jurisdictional responsibilities. Moreover, coordination with MDOT SHA to prioritize improvements, while improving in recent years, remains a protracted process that often results in the deemphasis of pedestrian access and safety. For example, we are continually rebuffed by MDOT SHA in our request to lower the speed to 25 mph along Connecticut Avenue. **Thus, we foresee considerable benefit in prioritizing the recommendation to explore transferring control of these state roads in Town Centers to the County.**

We also note several other recommendations that align particularly well with the ongoing efforts of the Town to increase pedestrian and bicycling access and safety. These include, inter alia, the data-driven program to build more sidewalks faster, raised crosswalks, pedestrian recall, marked cross walks at all legs, no-turn on red limitations, leading pedestrian intervals, driver yield requirements, shading improvements along pedestrian pathways, improving education programs (including in MCPS), traffic gardens, and deemphasizing pedestrian volumes as a determining factor in deciding where to install pedestrian or connectively improvements. These and other recommendations create an excellent roadmap for the County to follow. Although the Kensington Town Center BiPPA is listed in the Tier 3 category*¹, **most of the pedestrian improvements we urgently seek are contained in the Tier 2 BiPPA list (i.e., the entire stretch of Connecticut Avenue, Knowles Avenue, and Summit Avenue), and thus we encourage the County to progress from Tier 1 implementation to Tier 2 implementation in the CIP as quickly as possible.**

Finally, the Town has conducted biennial walkability/bikeability audits, starting in 2020. **We will continue to draw the linkages with this effort and will endeavor to sync our biennial audits** with the Pedestrian Master Plan biennial monitoring report (action MO-1a) and the biennial pedestrian and bicycling survey (action MO-1b) so that the data in each are as current as possible.

* Plyers Mill Road is also a Tier 3

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Again, there is much to applaud in this Pedestrian Master Plan. We look forward to working with the County to pursue the opportunities and address the issues flagged above, and in so doing, continue partnering on pedestrian and bicycling safety and access improvements in the Town of Kensington and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nate Engle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nate Engle
Councilmember, Town of Kensington
Co-Chair, Pedestrian and Bicycling Access and Safety Group
Co-Chair, Mobility and Traffic Committee
Co-Chair, Sustainable Kensington