

I am writing to share my thoughts about the University Boulevard Corridor Plan.

For several years now I have been attending meetings about this plan and I'm excited by a lot of what is proposed. I think there's a huge opportunity here to increase housing near transit and near existing amenities and I'm glad to see that detailed here. There are some fantastic places for multi-use housing in this community, and mixed use design.

Transit is already strong here, and is slated to become even stronger as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) expands. This is a good thing, but needs to be supported by safe walking and biking. Right now it is deadly to cross the roads, and they are a confusing, high-speed mess of spaghetti. I'm not sure that this plan goes far enough in its recommendations for making the corridor safer for all users.

Bike/Pedestrian Issues

The bicycle/pedestrian proposals in this plan are good, but not enough. They need to consider the things people actually want to walk and bike to in this area – schools, churches and shops. This is not an area you just ride through, this should be a destination. Too much of the focus on conversation has been on getting people through this area at very high speeds. It should instead be on making it possible to get around without a car because that will reduce a good deal of small trip-traffic.

Street Grid

I support the expansion of the street grid in downtowns, town centers, transit corridors, and suburban centers of activity to create shorter blocks. The plan calls for converting existing traffic lanes and on-street parking to create space for walkways, bikeways, and street buffers with landscaping and street trees, in a manner consistent with other county policies.

A focus on Four Corners:

I am glad to say yes to increasing housing, and especially making better use of the Safeway lot and the US Post Office site within this corridor. These would make a fantastic place for mixed use development, and if they were redesigned to include housing could also be redesigned to serve the entire community better, with better parking options. Right now the post office is almost unusable due to a crazy small parking lot that is ill designed and parking lots that will get you towed immediately if you try to do more than use the grocery store.

The report calls for concentrating maximum development intensity along University Boulevard and ensuring building heights transition to residential properties along Timberwood Avenue. That's very good!

I feel very strongly that Woodmoor should be mixed use! I have no idea what is happening on the second floor of that building complex now, but it could and should be housing.

Make it walkable, and bike-able. This area becomes an island in a sea of cars, but need not be that way. If people in surrounding neighborhoods could walk to amenities like shops, the huge Montgomery Blair High School and its wonderful athletic fields and numerous churches in the vicinity we could GREATLY reduce car traffic here. I assume, based completely on my own experience as a resident of a nearby neighborhood, that most of the cars here are actually doing small trips of less than a mile to get to those things.

Specifics on bikes/peds:

Page 68 shows a 'bypass' for bikes in 4 Corners. I like that a lot. But the plan seems to ignore/miss the need to connect bikes and pedestrians safely to RT29/Colesville going north and south. People should be able to do that!

I like that there's a recommendation to consider a mid-block pedestrian connection or linear open space from Colesville Road (U.S. 29) to Sutherland Road between University Boulevard West (MD 193) and Timberwood Avenue, to expand pedestrian activity and improve alternative access to BRT. (page 98) This would be a HUGE improvement and would create a much more human-scale roadway. **But this should also be part of a new sidepath on RT29/Colesville.** A sidepath should go from University all the way to Tech Road, and should be wide enough for shared use of both bikes and pedestrians, and should be on BOTH sides of that road. This plan MUST support that!

I also like that the report calls for consolidating or relocating driveways along University Boulevard West (MD 193) in the event of redevelopment, in order to improve the public realm for those walking, biking and rolling and to facilitate access for transit users.

Much of the report clearly shows 29 as a boulevard or town center boulevard, so speed limits should be lowered! This plan will only succeed if we slow cars down to a safer speed, especially in the off hours/non-rush hours, when cars can be seen going 70-80 miles an hour on very empty lanes on 29.

Parking:

I support the plan to locate structured parking, either above or below grade, that minimizes street exposures. (see page 65) More parking is needed, but should not be in the form of open lots.

Bike Parking is also needed, and should be MANDATED for all new development in this area. There is currently NO PLACE TO PARK A BIKE. This could be a great business opportunity for this shopping center – and could bring significant economic benefits to all.

Thanks for your time and attention to this important part of my community.

Alison Gillespie