

**Friendship Heights
Transportation Management District
Advisory Committee
January 9, 2024**

Voting Members

Bob Banach	Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights
Shannon Rovak	Town of Somerset

Non-Voting Members

Sandra L. Brecher	MCDOT/Transportation Policy-Commuter Services
Peter Fosselman	B-CC Services Center
Larissa Klevan	M-NCPPC

TMD Staff

Jim Carlson	MCDOT/Transportation Policy-Commuter Services
Nakengi Byrd	MCDOT/Transportation Policy-Commuter Services

Absent

Elizabeth Demetra Harris	Friendship Heights Village
Ahkeia Payne	GEICO

Guests

Rachel Davis	Friendship Heights Alliance
Samuel Damesa	MCDOT
Gary Erenrich	MCDOT
Shelley Monique Mann	TMD Outreach
Atara Margolies	M-NCPPC
Kevin Obike	MCDOT
Tom Quinn	ANC-3
Ronetta Zack-Williams	M-NCPPC

Items 1 & 2 – Introductions/Minutes: **Jim Carlson** opened the meeting and members & guest introduced themselves. Commuter Services Travel Smart Ambassador **Kevin Obike** and TDM Administration & Compliance Coordinator **Sam Damesa**, introduced themselves as new additions to the Commuter Services team.

November’s minutes were submitted for review.

Item 3 – Presentation, Friendship Heights Urban Design Study: **Atara Margolies** provided a summary of the Friendship Heights Urban Design study explaining that the study does not cover items for a Sector Plan such as providing recommendations. The study looks at how the public interacts with urban design and public space infrastructure in Friendship Heights. **Ms. Margolies** reported:

- Worked with the Friendship Heights Alliance for Community outreach and engaging businesses
- Observing how urban design provides open accessibility to the public realm
- The study offers no future changes as this is the purpose of the Sector plan

- Community engagement for the study was directed inside the 1998 sector plan boundary and included 2 open houses, pop – ups, survey questionnaire and worked with Brick & Story consulting
- The community was asked what they liked about Friendship Heights most respondents said walkability and transit was good.
- Respondents were asked to describe FH in 3 words - 40% said both positive and negative experiences
- The study schedule started July 2023 to final report by Winter 2024
- The sample size of the study consisted of a combination of responses from community outreach crossed referenced with demographics of the survey area
- The design analysis compared aerial view diagrams of activity & street patterns of Wheaton, Bethesda, Silver Spring to Friendship Heights and observed that Friendship Heights is not as integrated.

Analysis of the urban design network showed that the pedestrian network is strong with tree canopies, high visibility crosswalks however the brick paved crosswalks in some areas pose a hazard due to slippery conditions in inclement weather. Other analysis revealed:

- Walking connections to adjacent neighborhoods were not good due to high walls and hard to find open spaces like parks – nonvisible areas included the wall @ Sachs, park @ GEICO, the Sommerset trail and Western Grove
- Street activation viewed the ground level activity which was highest on Wisconsin Avenue with its plazas and storefronts, even with some empty
- Some of the design architecture was shown to be an impedance to activation such as large isolating walls at The Hills Plaza and the high-rise buildings in the area were designed for cars with driveways that interrupt walking
- Although walkability was a strong feature some felt unsafe, other pluses were access to Metro and a good transit network
- No separated bike lanes- biking not comfortable

When surveying how participants get around Friendship Heights, some did not live in the area. Results showed that walking was the most used mode inside Friendship Heights. Also reported:

- Few use rideshare to & from FH
- Open spaces analyzed how people interacted with parks in the area, who reported that although plentiful, it was hard to find greenspace - ample usage of the GEICO lawn
- Some community amenities include Whole Foods, medical offices & pharmacies and rec. center
- Most reported that they visit FH for the restaurants; however, leave for movies, music, dog parks and other entertainment.

Ms. Margolies discussed some of the lessons learned highlighted transit access, a good pedestrian network, large plazas although somewhat not activated as its positive attributes. Some of the negatives included limited recreation, safety concerns and car friendly building design impeding pedestrians.

Ms. Margolies can be contacted via email at Atara.Margolies@montgomeryplanning.org

The Q&A discussion included:

- Ideal location is measured by the equal amount of people getting on and off the Metro.

- The topic of housing and jobs was not discussed as they are considered when looking at the Sector Plan.
- Employer outreach yielded a low participation due to waiting to weigh in on the sector plan-Friendship Heights Alliance assisted.
- Responses regarding parking were low as it is not difficult to find.

Tom Quinn reported:

- Work with neighboring DC is needed for accurate responses.
- Too many cars, wide streets, lack of ped connection as FH is a segregated neighborhood – 48% within FH walk – however, some did not understand the survey question.
- The need to rethink transit to include buses.
- Need more bike racks and infrastructure-MCDOT a roadblock to building infrastructure – **Ms. Margolies** explained that his concerns are addressed in the 2025 Sector Plan, not the Study.

Also discussed:

- Friendship Heights, as a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community NORC, have senior residents with mobility issues making walking and carrying groceries difficult; combined with ample parking, the leads to increased driving although one loses the ability to drive 10 years before losing the ability to walk
- A 2-hour outreach effort at Whole Foods obtained many responses from 45 and younger commuters who make up most bike riders in the area.

Item 4 – Metro Update: **Gary Erenrich** explained that Metro has the perception as always being available, but the pending budget cuts leans toward an uncertain operating future. November Metro’s General Manager presented his proposed budget that will be placed on a docket of service cuts for public comment. The Maryland Legislator is working to find more funding. Also discussed:

- For jurisdictions to contribute more funds to Metro, each entity must contribute the same amount equally, called least common denominator funding.
- The \$350 million deficit will see a third in service cuts, route elimination, layoffs of 2,000 employees and early closings till 10p.
- No stations have been identified yet that will be closed; however, the T2 bus route will likely be eliminated even though Ride-On operates service on weekends.
- Metro’s \$17 billion construction budget over the next six years only has \$11 billion in funds which could negatively affect transportation projects in the County such as EV buses, unkept subway stations and delays in Western Garage relocation.
- Public hearings will be conducted on-line and in person in each of the jurisdictions for budget approval in April which is in time to apply for grant funding.

Mr. Erenrich explained that if Maryland contributed \$150 million more to WMATA, then further Statewide cuts to Transit will be more likely; however, Ride-On bus service is facing \$17 million in cuts, making the system unable to pick up slack for Metro’s missed routes. This will have residual effects on Metro Access possibly closing early that will hit Prince Georges County the most. DC’s 24 hr. bus routes will revert to midnight closures as well. Also reported:

- **Gov. Younkin** may provide subsidy funding due to his States need for transit access particularly States staff.

Item 5 – Marketing Outreach Update: Shelly Mann reported:

- The Walk & Ride Challenge was a success with many prizes were given to participants.
- Commuter Information Day (CID) outreach at several area employer sites
- The Cool Commute Contest- participants take photos of their winter commute.
- The upcoming Employer Recognition awards

Item 6 - Updates: Sande Brecher reported:

- The Commuter Survey was conducted for the first time since the pandemic and results will be posted on website – telework counts as an alternative mode of transit.
- WMATA has eliminated the \$2 charge for Senior Smartrip Cards.

Adjourn- Next meeting: TBA