



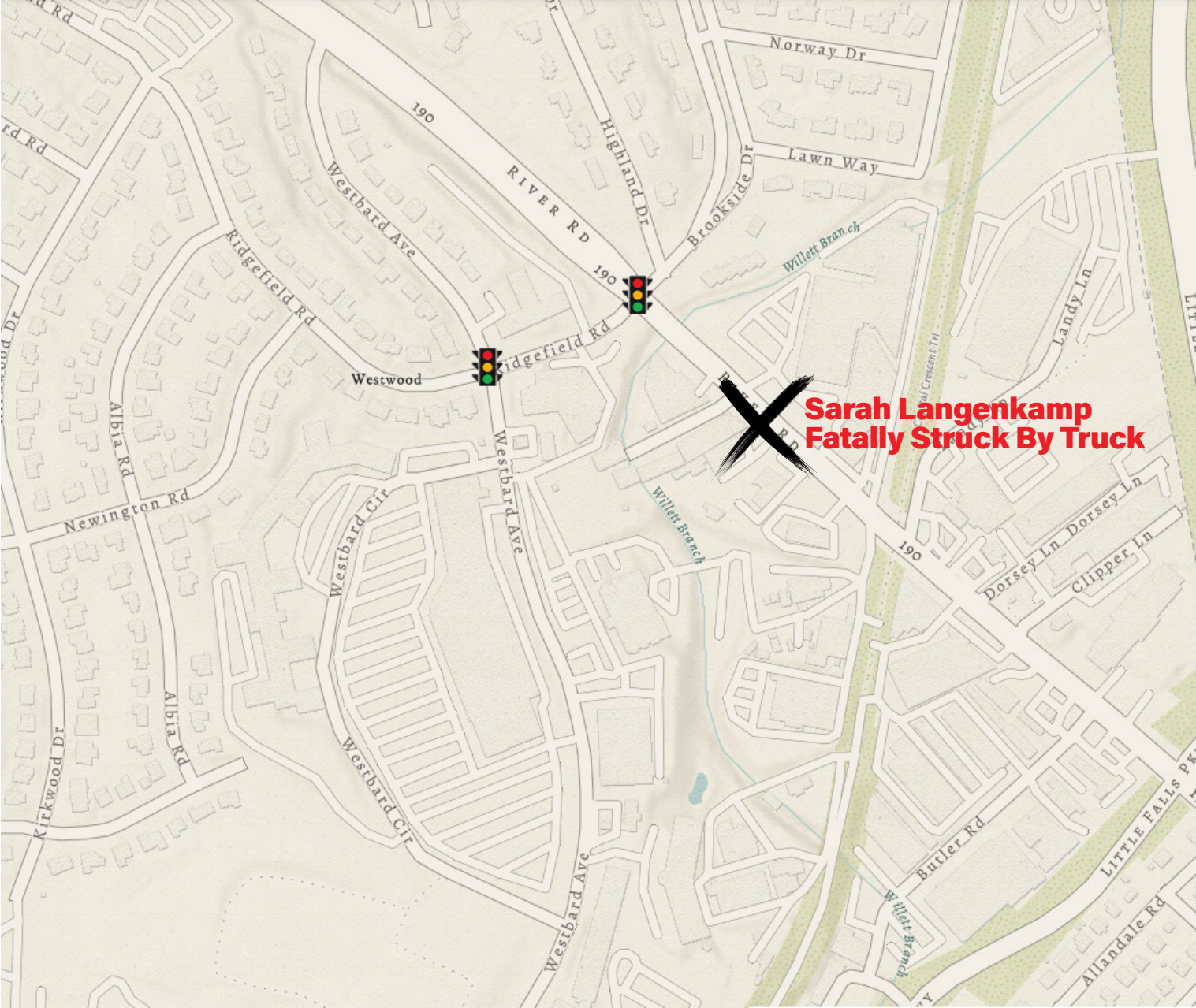
AB-786: PERMANENT CLOSURE OF WESTBARD AVENUE @ RIVER ROAD

APPLICANT'S PRESENTATION



Vision Zero

Recent Death on River Road From Uncontrolled Turning



S-5: Corridor Access Management

Action Item Details

- **Action Item Description:** Assess and remediate safety concerns created by uncontrolled turning movements to and from arterial and collector roads to neighborhoods and driveways with direct access with a specific focus on left turn safety issues.
- **Lead:** Transportation, State Highway Admin., Planning
- **Contributor:** N/A
- **Crash Reduction Factor:** 2
- **Accessibility Factor:** 3
- **Racial Equity & Social Justice Factor:** 2
- **Investment Factor:** 2
- **Why do this?:** 20% of serious and fatal crashes that occurred at or was related to an intersection or interchange had no traffic control device or person present.
- **Budget Sources:** [P507154](#) - Traffic Signals, [P507017](#) - Intersection and Spot Improvements.

Two Year Work Plan

- **FY24 Work Plan:**
 - Implement safety improvements to address identified left turn issues at 3 intersections.
 - Advance access management study by considering changes to the county code and development review procedures.
- **FY25 Work Plan:**
 - Implement safety improvements to address identified left turn issues at 3 intersections.
 - Advance access management study by considering changes to the county code and development review procedures.

The Compromise of the 2016 Westbard Sector Plan

NEIGHBORHOOD PROTECTION: WESTBARD AVENUE (RESIDENTIAL PORTION)

This Plan endorses the permanent closure of the residential portion of Westbard Avenue between River Road and Ridgefield Road at the River Road end. The closure should not occur until the existing Westbard Road/River Road intersection is realigned to intersect River Road with a right-angled turn. The closed end should have a 3-inch-high mountable curb to allow emergency vehicles to access the block from River Road. The closed end should be reconstructed to create a turnaround. Action on this closure is predicated on the submittal of a formal neighborhood application for street closure in accordance with Chapter 49 of the County Code, and its subsequent approval by the County Council.

Planning Board Staff Report, Page 9

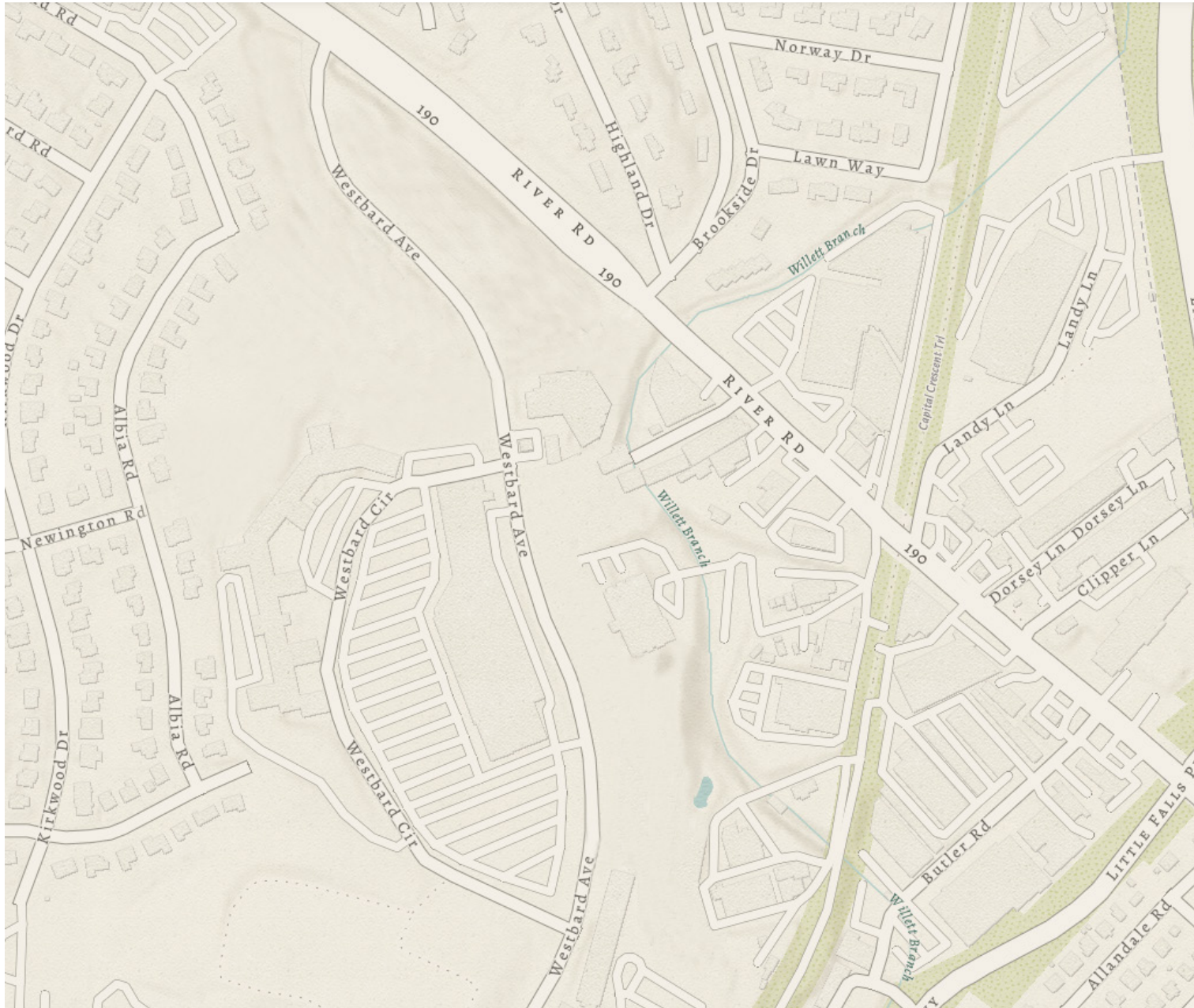
During the development of the 2016 *Westbard Sector Plan*, residents of the 5500 block of Westbard Avenue voiced concerns about trucks using their street as a way of avoiding the challenging intersection geometry at Ridgefield Road and River Road. To address these concerns, the Sector Plan included the aforementioned realignment of portions of Westbard Avenue and Ridgefield Road. The realignment would include a redesigned intersection at River Road to make it easier for trucks and through traffic to access the Westbard Shopping Center and Massachusetts Avenue. Staff worked with MCDOT, MCDPS Fire and Rescue, and Sector Plan stakeholders to reach consensus on a compromise. That compromise was recorded on page 37 of the Sector Plan, as approved by the County Council, and adopted by M-NCPPC:

This Plan endorses the permanent closure of the residential portion of Westbard Avenue between River Road and Ridgefield Road at the River Road end. The closure should not occur until the existing Westbard Avenue/River Road intersection is realigned to intersect River Road with a right-angled turn. The closed end should have a 3-inch-high mountable curb to allow emergency vehicles to access the block from River Road. The closed end should be reconstructed to create a turnaround. Action on this closure is predicated on the submittal of a formal neighborhood application for street closure in accordance with Chapter 49 of the County Code, and its subsequent approval by the County Council.

The realignment and partial abandonment of Westbard Avenue and Ridgefield Road was included as conditions of the Planning Board approval of Preliminary Plan 120170170 (Condition 18 of MCPB No. 19-032) and Site Plan 820180190 (Condition 20 of MCPB No. 19-033). Additionally, the Planning Board provided comments to MCDOT on November 19, 2020 regarding Petition AB-773, recommending approval. MCDOT held a public hearing on the case on December 15, 2020. The County Council approved the requested abandonment (Resolution No. 19-1213), and work began in June of 2022. The roadwork is being conducted by Regency Centers and their latest Public Notice estimates completion of the project in October of 2023.

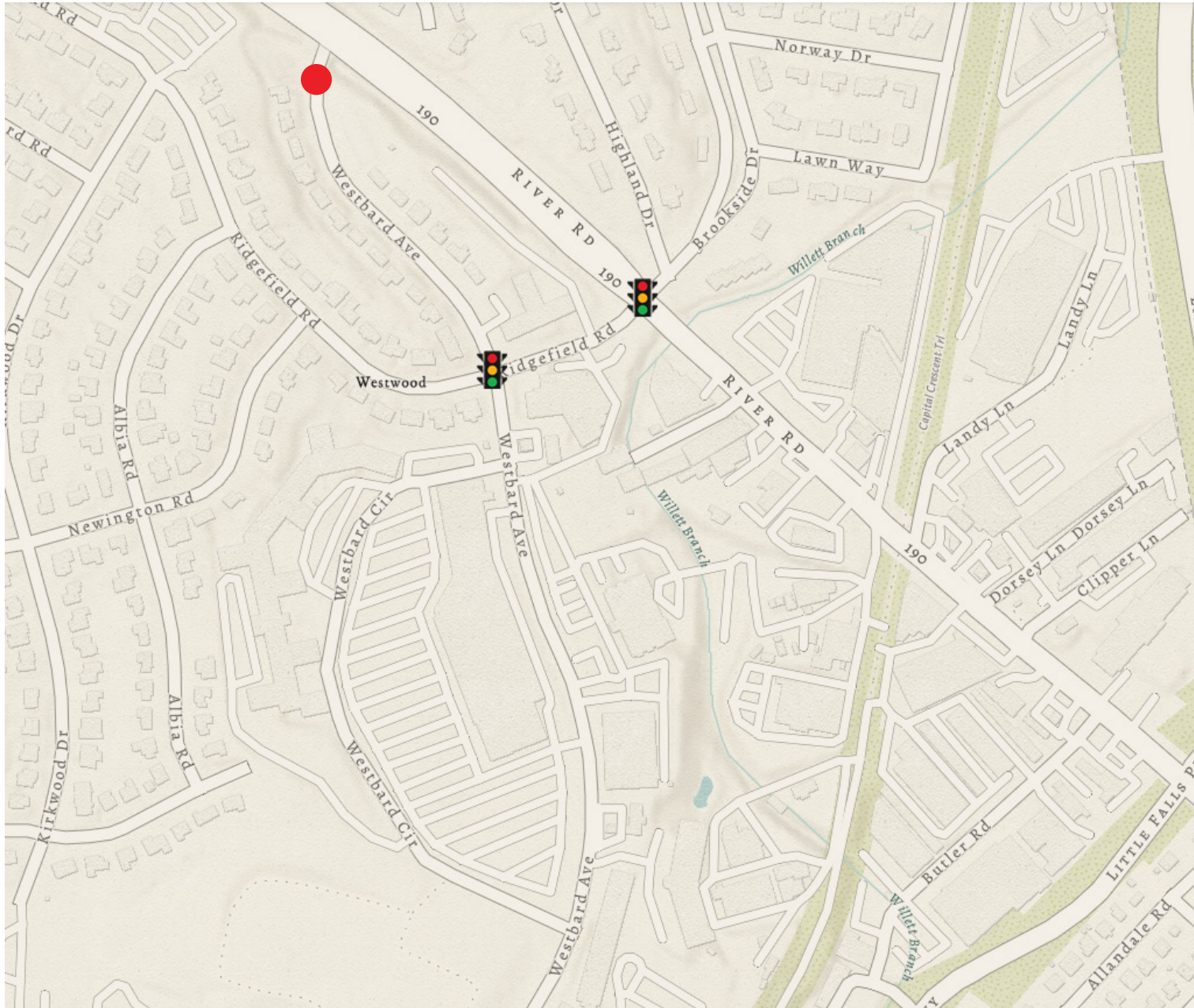
History Of The 5500 Block

February 1956: Original Dedication of the Right-of-way



History Of The 5500 Block

1962: Westbard Avenue cul-de-sac



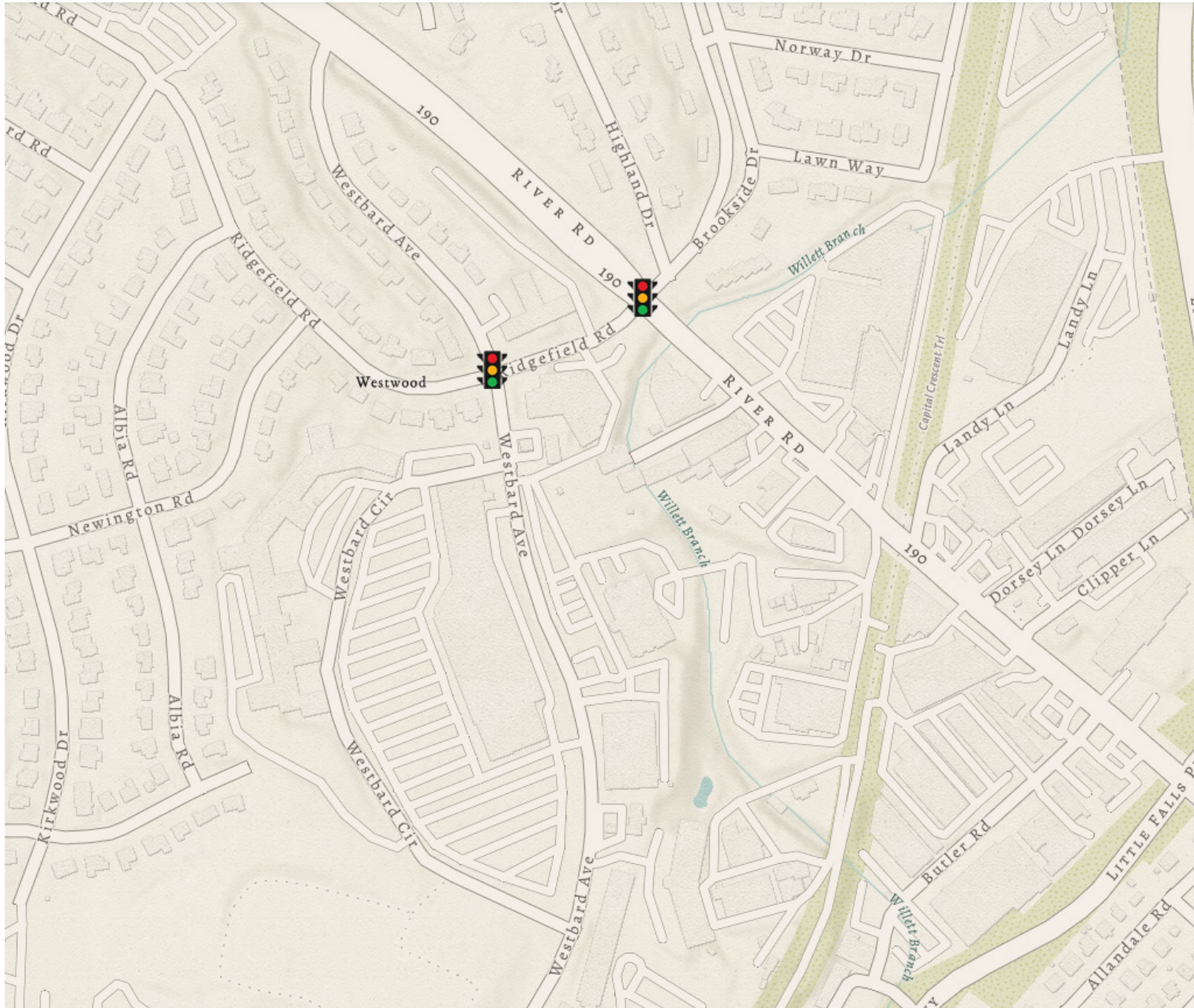
History Of The 5500 Block

Satellite photo of Westbard Cul-De-Sac, 1962



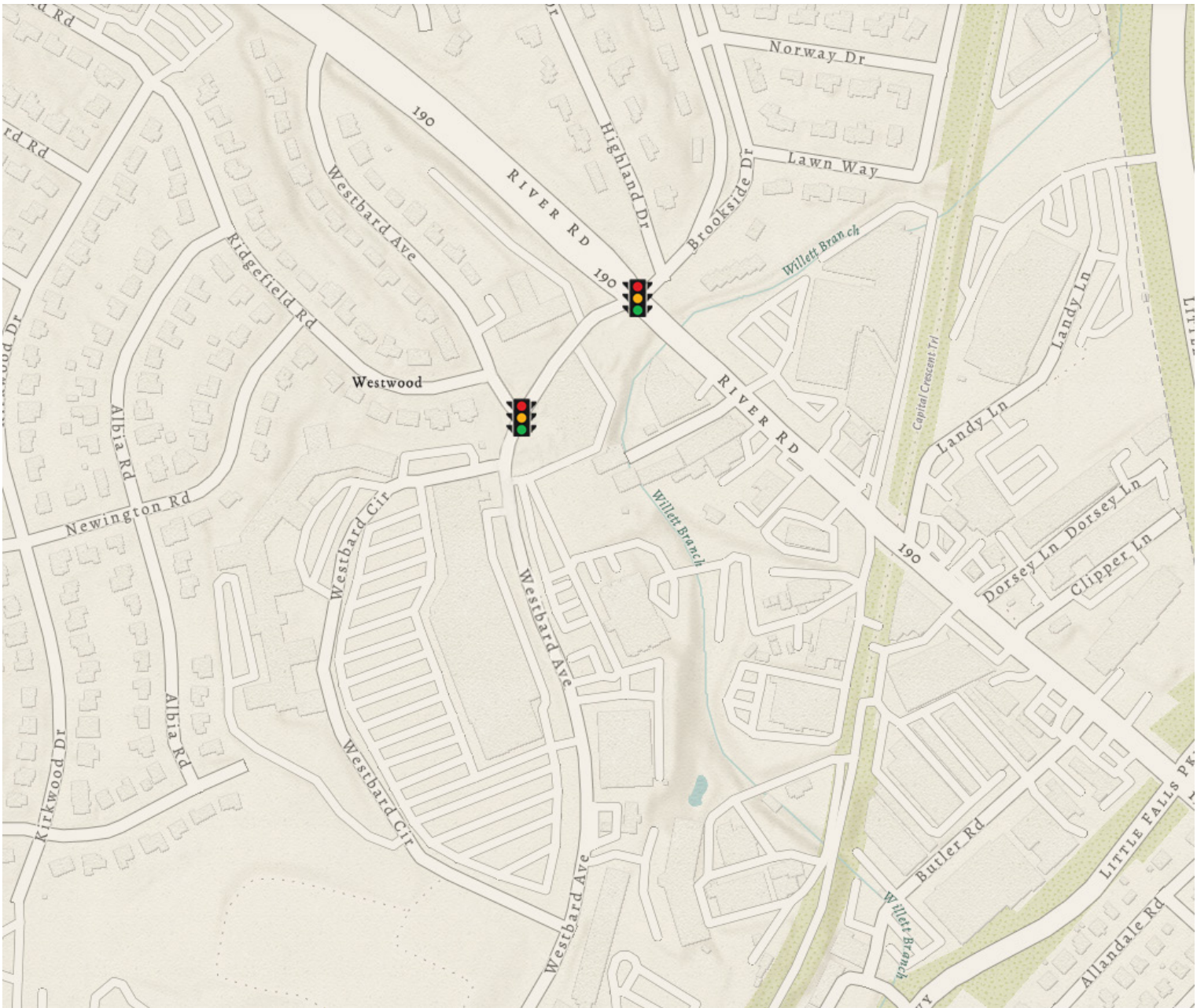
History Of The 5500 Block

Subsequent Changes to the Street Grid



History Of The 5500 Block


The 2022-2024 Road Realignment




Comments of the Planning Board



 **Montgomery County Planning Board**
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

 2425 Reedie Drive
Floor 14
Wheaton, MD 20902

 MontgomeryPlanningBoard.org

July 27, 2023

Ms. Tiara McCray
Montgomery County Department of Transportation
100 Edison Park Drive, 4th Floor
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20878

RE: Roadway Closure Request No. AB-786
Permanent Closure of Westbard Avenue at River Road
2016 Westbard Sector Plan

Dear Ms. McCray:

At the Montgomery County Planning Board's regularly scheduled meeting on July 27, 2023, the Board reviewed Roadway Closure Request No. AB-786, for permanent closure of Westbard Avenue at River Road in the Westbard area of Bethesda. After a briefing by Planning staff, the Planning Board voted 5-0 in favor of transmitting comments to the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) in support the closure of Westbard Avenue at River Road, subject to the MCDOT's analysis and design, after the realignment of Westbard Avenue and Ridgefield Road is complete. Those present at the meeting, in addition to me, were Vice Chair Mitra Pedoeem and Commissioners Shawn Bartley, James Hedrick, and Josh Linden.

In addition to the comments included in the staff report, the Board voted to include additional language in support of installing an interim closure of Westbard Avenue at River Road, when realignment of Westbard Avenue and Ridgefield Road is completed for the duration of MCDOT's analysis and study of a permanent closure, provided that the interim closure is approved by MCDOT and Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services Fire and Rescue, and adequate emergency access to the 5500 Block of Westbard Avenue can be maintained.

The Planning Board heard testimony from the Petitioner. An additional comment letter was submitted by the Springfield Civic Association after the deadline to be included in the Board's packet. Staff summarized the letter in the presentation. All submitted written testimony is included with the enclosures of this letter. Please consider this letter and its enclosures as the Planning Board's testimony for the official record.

Where We Agree With Planning Board Staff



centers of activity as an essential element of future planning efforts in the county, as modified by the staff recommendation and conditions above, the Petition is consistent with the endorsement of the 2016 *Westbard Sector Plan*.

Based on the public process and County Council approval of the Sector Plan's endorsement to close Westbard Avenue at River Road, as conditioned by this staff report, the intersection is not necessary for present or anticipated public use in the foreseeable future. This segment of Westbard Avenue was not intended for heavy truck or through traffic accessing the Westbard Shopping Center and Massachusetts Avenue.

Furthermore, the County Council added the endorsement for the closure of the 5500 block of Westbard Avenue at River Road as a response to traffic safety concerns. As discussed earlier in this report, the intent of the realignment and partial abandonment of Westbard Avenue and Ridgefield Road was to provide a more appropriate intersection for trucks and through traffic accessing the Westbard Shopping Center. Closure of the residential portion of Westbard Avenue would eliminate the practice of using it as a bypass for the intersection of Ridgefield and River Road (future Westbard Avenue and River Road). The closure therefore complements the realignment project and ensures that heavy trucks will no longer use the residential segment of the street. Reducing the number of heavy trucks on the residential portion of Westbard Avenue will improve public health and safety of the residents near the roadway closure.

Therefore, a full or partial closure of Westbard Avenue meets the necessary findings for Section 49-63 of the County Code.

SECTION 6: CITIZEN CORRESPONDENCE AND PUBLIC NOTICING

The Petitioner has complied with all submittal and noticing requirements. As stated in Section 4 of the Report, 23 of the 24 residents on the 5500 Block of Westbard Avenue have issued letters of support of the Subject Petition. As of the date of this the Report's completion no citizen correspondence been received.

SECTION 7: CONCLUSION

Staff recommends delaying closure until after the realignment of Westbard Avenue is completed for MCDOT to study potential roadway design and traffic operational alternatives at this intersection to ensure the alternatives respond to the updated traffic patterns in the vicinity of the intersection, with the recommended stipulations included in the staff report and transmit comments to MCDOT.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Right-of-way Petition AB-786

“ Therefore, a full or partial closure of Westbard Avenue meets the necessary findings for Section 49-63 of the County Code.
-Planning Board Staff

Based on the public process and County Council approval of the Sector Plan's endorsement to close Westbard Avenue at River Road, as conditioned by this staff report, the intersection is not necessary for present or anticipated public use in the foreseeable future. This segment of Westbard Avenue was not intended for heavy truck or through traffic accessing the Westbard Shopping Center and Massachusetts Avenue.
-Planning Board Staff

”

MCDOT-DTE Development Review Team Comments

• Fire Access:

• **Temporary Implementation (immediately upon road realignment completion):**

- ◆ Orange plastic barriers (all but 2 water-filled)
- ◆ Dr Marie LaBaw has confirmed to us that this would meet DPS Fire & Rescue requirements
- ◆ Can stay in place while permanent implementation is designed by MCDOT

• **Permanent Implementation:**

- ◆ Very wide right of way here
- ◆ Can accommodate 110' diameter for fire accessible turnaround
- ◆ Can accommodate 140' x 20' hammerhead fire accessible turnaround
- ◆ Fallback option: maintain emergency vehicle access to River Road via 3" mountable curb, construct a smaller diameter turnaround
- ◆ Smaller diameter turnarounds have been approved by MCDOT multiple times in identical situations where emergency vehicles were provided with alternative exit routes meeting fire code requirements
- ◆ See Rugby cul-de-sac, Plan #120160220, 8015 Old Georgetown Road
- ◆ See Apple cul-de-sac, Plan #120150030, Elizabeth Square

• Safety:

- The safe route for traffic between the core of Westbard and River Road is the newly designed intersection with the realigned road, nearing completion.
- Who can argue with a straight face that it's safer to route 10,000 cars and trucks per week down an adjacent residential street instead of the newly designed arterial road?
- There is no traffic signal at the intersection we are asking you to close. Vision Zero makes it clear that this is dangerous, and should be addressed ASAP.

• Operational Alternatives:

- MCDOT, Montgomery Planning Board, and the county council discussed this issue in 2016, and it was agreed to close this street. Reneging on this agreement would be a betrayal, and harmful of trust in government institutions.

The Springfield Civic Association (SCA)



P.O. Box 644
Glen Echo, MD 20812
January 21, 2016

The Honorable Nancy Floreen
President
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Council President Floreen and Members of the County Council:

On behalf of the Springfield Civic Association, I am writing to support the request of residents on the 5500 block of Westbard Avenue to have written into the Westbard Sector Plan that this road be closed at the existing intersection of Westbard Avenue and River Road.

We support the closure of this intersection for all of the reasons the residents have stated in their letter and in conjunction with the realignment of Westbard Avenue. With the realignment of Westbard Avenue so that it flows directly into River Road at what is now the intersection of River Road and Ridgefield Road, and with the closure of this block at the intersection of River Road, this block of 21 single-family homes and three townhouses will be shielded from the cut-through traffic it currently receives and the additional cut-through traffic that will be generated as a result of new retail and residential development expected along Westbard Avenue. Making these two changes together will preserve the quality of life and safety for the entire Springfield neighborhood including this block at the edge of the sector plan.

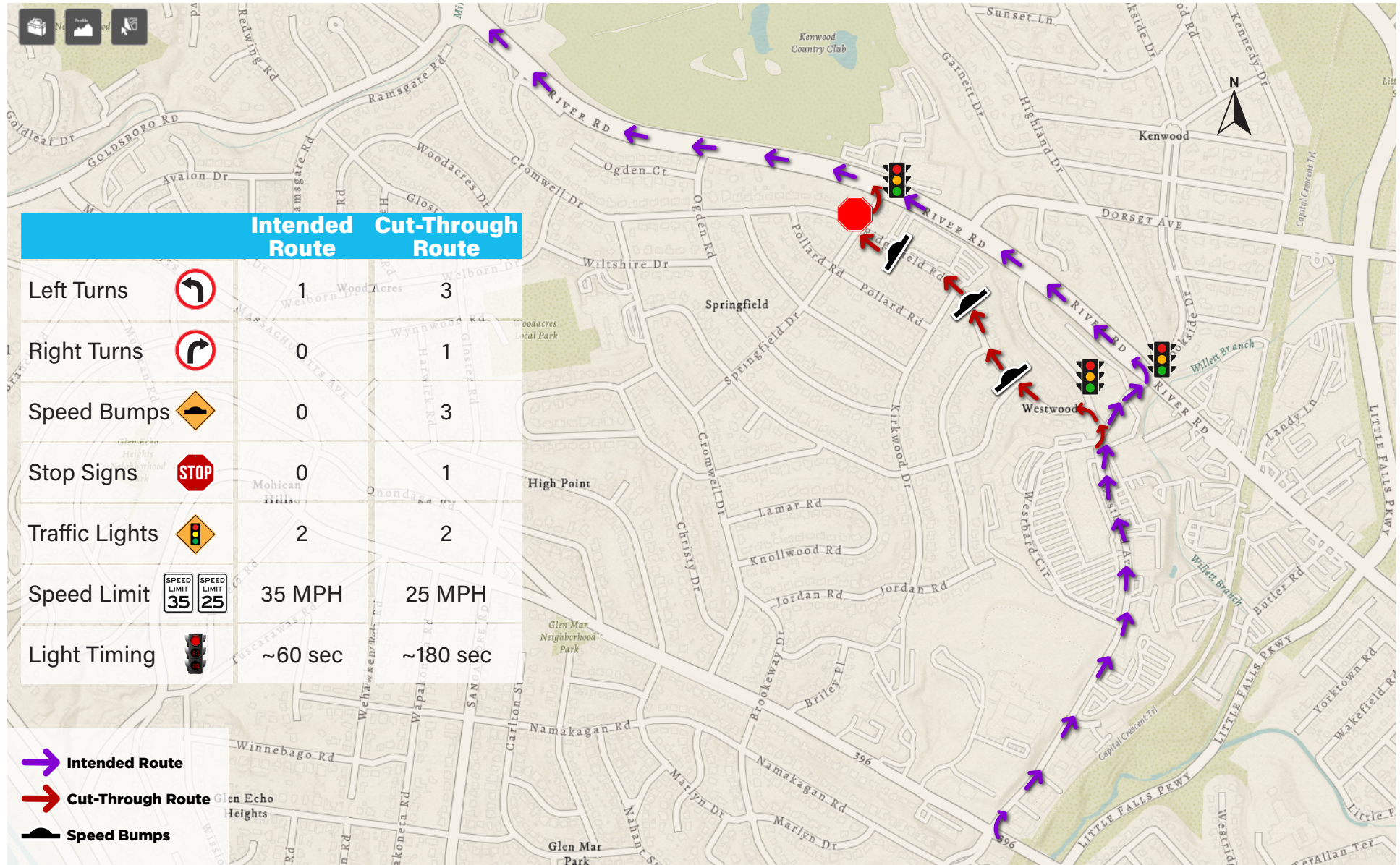
Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Best regards,

Phyllis R. Edelman
Pres., Springfield Civic Assn.

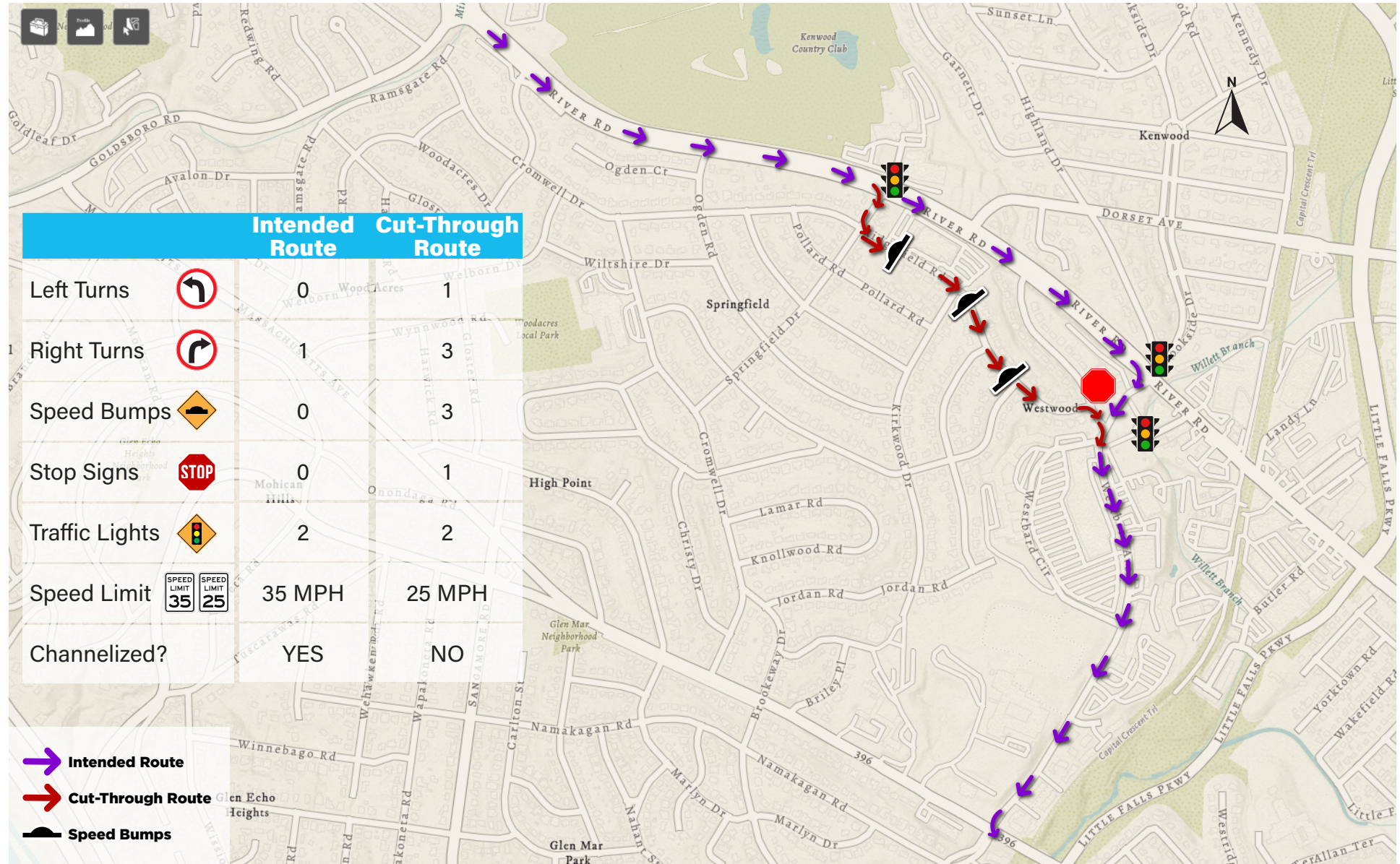
No Impact On The Remainder Of The Springfield Neighborhood

Traffic leaving Westbard headed Northbound on River Road



No Impact On The Remainder Of The Springfield Neighborhood

Traffic coming to Westbard from Southbound River Road



5500 Block Not Necessary For River-Westbard Traffic Flows

Traffic coming to Westbard from southern River Road



5500 Block Not Necessary For River-Westbard Traffic Flows

Traffic leaving Westbard headed Southbound on River Road



5500 Block Not Necessary For River-Westbound Traffic Flows

Traffic coming to Westbard from northern River Road



5500 Block Not Necessary For River-Westbard Traffic Flows

Traffic leaving Westbard headed Northbound on River Road



Closure Will Benefit Kenwood Neighborhood

Traffic attempting to circumvent Kenwood entry restrictions



Fire & Rescue Accessibility is 100% Necessary

View of concrete barriers as seen from River Road



Why We Are Asking For A Complete Closure, Including Emergency Vehicles

MC Atlas View of Intersection



Why We Are Asking For A Complete Closure, Including Emergency Vehicles



View of Intersection as seen from Westbard Ave



Why We Are Asking For A Complete Closure, Including Emergency Vehicles



View of River Rd as seen from Hillburne Way

