



St. John's Community Association

Serving the Dunloggin Neighborhood for 50 Years

Miller Library Access and Footpath

Background

Howard County is home to one of the most modern, diverse, and architecturally pristine libraries ever created in Maryland and well beyond. The Charles E. Miller Library located at 9421 Frederick Road, Ellicott City, Maryland has won multiple national awards for its architectural design, comprehensive programs, classroom space, its Enchanted Garden which focuses on health, nutrition and environmental educational and its partnership with the Howard County Historical Society. It is truly a blessing to all things Howard having access to such an incredible asset and facilitator of continued learning.

Please see the attached link for more detail.

<http://hclibrary.org/locations/miller-branch/>

Challenge

Having the most advanced library in Maryland is a blessing, but only if you can access it. Oh, I do not mean handicap accessible because it is all that. The handicap parking, electric push doors and elevators make it a joy when you are not up to speed physically. Like me... 😊 However, if you live east of Plumtree Drive on either side of Frederick Road traversing on foot or bicycle to this 21st century landmark is fraught with hazard. I kid you not. Please see pictures and a video I took weeks ago prior to covid 19. There is no sidewalk, no path and only a traffic line delineating the traveled portion of the roadway. Plainly speaking, it's dangerous if you are not using a motorized vehicle.

In this day and age, when parents are attempting to get their kids OFF the electronics, read a book and maybe corroborate information they find on the internet (which only reports accurate information... 😞, right?) not being able to access this eighth wonder of the world unless you possess a driver's license is a problem. What happened to the days you rode your bicycle to the library?

I learned the SJCA has been communicating with the County to resolve this issue for years. Initially we focused on creating a footpath/sidewalk to the rear of the Library that would connect Dunloggin in the vicinity of Plummeadow Dr and Plumspring Lane. But there were several residents that opposed this

solution and the county has so many proposals on the table they are not given to chase one that has any opposition. So, what to do?

So, What's Next.....

As Stephen Covey would say, "First Things First." Months ago, we invited Ms. Kimberly Pruim, formerly Special Assistant to Councilman Ball and now Director, of Constituent Services and Community Partnerships, to our quarterly meeting and discussed a library footpath. This is where we discovered the many communities seeking county support for various projects. So much so, projects without opposition get the first green light on the roadway, so to speak.

The next step, literally, was to contact Public Works. I emailed my concerns to the Bureau of Highways and received a response from Kris Singleton. Nice man. Kris is assigned to the Bureau of Highways/Special Projects and we agreed to meet and walk the area.

A few days later I met him at Miller, and we examined the area together. He agreed wholeheartedly that the "Jewel" of the county cannot be accessed by foot safely if you live east of Plumtree Drive.

So, we walked/talked for almost an hour in the drizzle one morning and here are some of the high points:

- * Building a sidewalk adjacent to that intersection for pedestrians is problematic as it hosts a traffic control device and has underground cable. I agreed with him.
- * There is an embankment adjacent to the traffic control device which is supported by wire that keeps the wall in place. It would be problematic tampering with that. I Agreed.
- * Many trees would have to be trimmed to install a sidewalk to support such an improvement....to some degree, yes.

Dave's solution:

Forget about building a sidewalk immediately adjacent to the road east of Plumtree Drive. Even an amateur engineer can see the number of challenges that would have to be overcome to make any solution viable. Translation: Expensive. In lieu of a sidewalk, though, focus on building a footpath from where the guardrail begins closer to the library and build away from the roadway and through all the dead trees and over the creek (several yards from the roadway). Once you pass the creek reconnect where the guardrail ends just west of Underoak. The county owns that property.

Currently, the wooded scrub is a serious eyesore and can only be improved with a historic looking foot path/bridge. This would leave the traffic control device in place and untouched, leave the wired embankment unaltered and add to the scenery and historic nature of Dunloggin. And best of all, keep our kids safe while encouraging critical thinking and continued learning at their local, public library.

I do not know if Kris Singleton is an engineer. BUT, to his great credit he had his "Engineer's" hat on. He wanted to explore the "other" side of Frederick Road to see if that could accomplish our goal as well.

We walked across the street to the north side of Frederick Road and worked our way toward Plumtree. That might create fewer obstacles, e.g., traffic control devices and cabling, but would also require one neighbor's consent to move his mailbox. Kris was of the opinion the neighbor's landscaping was on the county easement, however, the county prefers to work with its residents to meet the common goal. Isn't that a pleasant change?

Having said that, and while we are walking west on Frederick Road toward Plumtree Drive, you cannot help but "feel" the speed of traffic as it whizzes past you. Literally. Obviously, Sir Isaac Newton's Theory is adding to the speed of these travelers. Clearly, the proximity of the vehicles and their accompanying speed would necessitate a substantial barrier to protect our youngsters either on foot or bike. Although doable, it may require more effort and \$\$.

Kris and I then returned to the wooded lot where we started and walked through some of the scrub until we got to the creek. Kris mentioned the one word that requires more investigation "WETLANDS." We both came away with the feeling that the entire area was too dry to be considered wetlands, but we (the county) would have to review that and have the state concur.

Candidly, there is nothing Kris and I discovered that cannot be overcome. After much discussion Kris is going to report favorably to his boss to add it to the queue of projects to be investigated. When I initially began this journey the department budgets had been submitted, but not yet approved. Additionally, I had registered and planned on attending the County Executive's Resident Budget Meeting to lobby for this improvement. At that moment in time, the budget had already been submitted by department heads for tentative approval but was awaiting the final go ahead by County Executive Ball to submit to the County Council.

Nevertheless, I know from my government career budgets can be amended in county government with the right support. Things (\$\$) were still in play. Then along came COVID 19 and those resident budget meetings were canceled. Although, my written testimony was submitted prior to my scheduled testimony nothing carries the day like oral testimony. And yes, I have heard they give oral and written testimony equal weight, but I am here to tell you that is far from accurate. He who shows up, often wins.

We are still going to chase this fox, but it may take your hound (Association) a little longer. It can run, but it cannot hide forever. Will keep you posted and thanks for your support and understanding. Cheers!!