

Testimony of Melanie White, Mayor, Village of Friendship Heights

County Bicycle Master Plan Public Hearing

January 25, 2018

Good evening, I am Melanie White, Mayor of the Village of Friendship Heights. I am testifying on behalf of the Friendship Heights Village Council, the elected governing body of the Village. Our community is an urban oasis of nearly 4,700 residents, all of whom live in high-rise buildings. While our population spans all age groups, according to the latest Census the Village houses the second largest concentration of people older than 65 in Montgomery County. Although we take pride in being a walkable community, the fact that we have a lot of elderly pedestrians creates constant safety challenges.

We have had several discussions about the draft Bicycle Master Plan during our monthly Village Council meetings, including a presentation from Project Manager David Anspacher last summer.

As a special tax district, the Village maintains control of the rights-of-way on our streets. We have several public safety concerns with regard to the bicycle plan recommendations:

- Separated bikeways are proposed for South Park Avenue and Friendship Boulevard, both roads within the Village's jurisdiction. With the proliferation of garbage trucks, delivery and other commercial vehicles occupying the curb lane on a daily basis to serve our high-rise buildings, and with the number of elderly pedestrians trying to cross our streets, separated bikeways would be unsafe and impractical.

- The proposed bikeway on Willard Avenue is problematic. While Willard is a County road, many of our residents live in high-rise buildings on the north side of Willard, with garage entrances and exits on the street. We had sent photos to Mr. Anspacher showing the frequent trucks and commercial vehicles on this side of Willard, which, combined with the steady flow of vehicular traffic, would make a bike lane particularly dangerous. It is not clear from the map if the bike lane would be on the north or south side of Willard, or on both sides.
- There is a proposed separated bikeway on Somerset Terrace connecting to Friendship Boulevard through a gated entrance, which we had objected to previously. Somerset Terrace is a private road under the control of the Somerset House Management Association. The intersection of Somerset Terrace and Friendship Boulevard has been closed to through traffic for many years under a longstanding agreement between the County, the Village and the Somerset House properties. Allowing bicycles through the closed intersection could provide a rationale for opening up the intersection to vehicular traffic in the future, thereby jeopardizing an arrangement that has worked very well in practice. I'd also note that all three Somerset House Condominium Associations are on record as opposing any bikeway through this gated entrance.

Thank you very much for your consideration of our position.