

TRAFFIC CONCERNS – FOREST DRIVE CORRIDOR

The Forest Drive Corridor is at a Critical Crossroads and Decisions Must Be Informed and Based on Sound Engineering and Planning.

This memo provides just a summary of the serious traffic concerns facing those who live, work and drive on the Forest Drive corridor. Please contact us through our website for more detailed information or to have a speaker come to your homeowner's association or neighborhood group to discuss this topic with you.

Forest Drive is a County owned and maintained roadway. In 2011, the Anne Arundel County Traffic Engineering Division advised the Annapolis Planning and Zoning department that the "[Forest Drive] corridor is on the edge of capacity, and we would hope that approval of new developments wouldn't be given if it is likely that they will force Forest Drive into over-capacity operations." Subsequent to this 2011 warning, the City of Annapolis has been forced by Anne Arundel County and citizen advocates to perform computer modeling of likely future Forest Drive corridor traffic conditions based on the cumulative impacts of planned growth. Despite applying very favorable and unrealistic assumptions, this computer modeling predicts a serious situation which the City of Annapolis has no plans to avoid. Many key intersections along the entire Forest Drive corridor will operate at completely unacceptable levels of service, well below those considered acceptable by traffic planners and even City of Annapolis guidelines. Deteriorating quality of life and reduced safety are a given. Although some potential road improvements might exist to avoid a permanent over-capacity situation, these road improvements have not all been identified, engineered and evaluated for effectiveness, cost estimated, allocated to developers to pay for, or even placed on a schedule of capital improvement projects by the City, County or State.

Despite this 2011 warning as confirmed by computer traffic modeling, the City of Annapolis keeps advancing new residential and commercial development that will feed into this already stressed traffic corridor. The proposed new residential units and commercial space at Crystal Spring is the largest of 18 total planned developments, which will push more than 1,270 new residential units, plus 232,000 square feet of commercial space onto the corridor. [Click here for a map showing the 18 developments planned for or under construction.](#)

The fact that the City of Annapolis is ignoring, and has no plans to address, the 2011 warning from Anne Arundel County is even more disturbing since the 2009 Annapolis Comprehensive Plan (the "2009 ACP") put Annapolis' citizens and leadership on notice of a need to develop a plan to avoid a traffic nightmare that may not be capable of being fixed. The 2009 ACP is an important document, which the lawyers for the City of Annapolis have opined has the force of law. The 2009 ACP warned that "Without a decisive course correction in transportation policy, by 2030, traffic congestion will impede the flow of goods and services, choke the quality of life in the city and its environs, and dim the ambience that attracts millions of yearly visitors." It went on to note that "...by 2030 all major radial and cross-town routes will experience severe congestion including significant sections of Forest Drive, Hilltop Lane, Bay Ridge Road, Spa Road, Taylor Avenue, West Street, and Rowe Boulevard." The Anne Arundel County General Development Plan also predicts in the future the Forest Drive corridor will operate at a Level of Service rating equal to "F." This is the worst possible rating and indicates the complete failure of the system to handle the expected traffic.

Annapolis City Government is Not Doing what it Promised to Do In Order to Avoid a Permanent Traffic Nightmare

The most disturbing aspect of the growing traffic nightmare on the Forest Drive corridor is that the City of Annapolis is not doing what it promised to do to avoid this situation. In short, there is no plan to deal with the issue. Some examples of these failings are as follows:

1. The 2009 ACP recognized that the City's methodology for assessing traffic impacts of new development was inadequate. There was a specific commitment in the 2009 ACP to develop and adopt new regulations for looking at traffic impacts of new development, and these were to be completed by 2012. The development of these new regulations has never occurred.
2. The 2009 ACP noted that in order "[t]o adequately address congestion in the Forest Drive corridor it will be necessary to update the prior studies in order to recommend a comprehensive set of improvements..." Necessary studies have not been updated or completed, and no set of improvements has been recommended.
3. The land where the Crystal Spring development is proposed is called the Forest Drive Opportunity Area in the 2009 ACP. It is one of four Opportunity Areas identified. The 2009 ACP called for each of the Opportunity Areas to have completed a detailed land use and urban design plan or sector study before the end of 2012. In addition to addressing many other critical planning factors, this study was to identify the necessary role of the City and other public entities in infrastructure improvements. No such sector study has been completed for the Forest Drive Opportunity Area.
4. The 2009 ACP acknowledges what traffic consultants have long known. A key bottleneck for the Annapolis Neck traffic is the awkward intersection at 665/ForestDrive/Chinquapin. The 2009 ACP committed to "[a]ggressively lobby the State and the County to begin and complete the study of the 665/ForestDrive/Chinquapin intersection within the next year." This study to be completed in 2010 does not exist. A fix for this critical intersection does not appear on the City, County or State capital improvement plans.
5. The 2009 ACP mandates that "[t]he City must keep a broad set of options available for dealing with this congestion in the future. If problems grow as forecasted, these options will become increasingly important in engineering an overall solution." The City has no study or report that identifies a comprehensive set of solutions for the predicted traffic gridlock on Forest Drive. The last draft study was completed in March 2014, and it predicts very dire conditions despite extremely generous assumptions on growth and other factors. No study exists to i) identify possible fixes; ii) engineer their effectiveness and ability to be built; iii) determine the costs; iv) determine how they will be paid for, that is, by developers or taxpayers; or v) determine the timing of construction in advance of development such that dangerous gridlock never occurs.
6. The City of Annapolis keeps processing new development applications, while refusing to wait for the completion of a critical traffic study by Anne Arundel County. The County's study to assess major intersections and important roadways, including MD 665 and Forest Drive, is planned for completion in Fall 2016. Among other things, this study expects to prepare detailed recommendations of potential improvements ranging from additional travel lanes, access control and/or management, system signalization, transit, pedestrian/bicycle connections, and potentially zoning and land use design overlays. It will also prioritize corridors, corridor segments, or isolated improvements within corridors for advancement into design, acquisition, and construction. Finally, the study will suggest for consideration prioritizing projects based on constructability and public safety benefits. Considering all the failings of the City of Annapolis to address the traffic issues, it seems a complete waste of taxpayer dollars for the City not to wait for the results of this Anne Arundel County study before processing new development applications along the corridor.