

Docket Item #8 & 9
TEXT AMENDMENT # 2005- 0007 (8)
TEXT AMENDMENT # 2005- 0008 (9)
Potomac Yard

Planning Commission Meeting
February 7, 2006

ISSUE: Consideration of a request for (1) an amendment to the City of Alexandria Zoning Ordinance to revise the CDD Zone regulations, Section 5-600, to eliminate the requirement for a pedestrian connection for the Monroe Avenue Bridge (TA2005-0007); (2) an amendment to the City of Alexandria Zoning Ordinance to revise the CDD Zone regulations, Section 5-600, to allow for a revised Monroe Avenue connection for the Monroe Avenue Bridge (TA2005-0008).

APPLICANT: Department of Transportation and Environmental Services
Department of Planning & Zoning

LOCATION: For the properties bounded by Four Mile Run, Jefferson Davis Highway, Braddock Road, Slater's Lane and the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

SITE GRAPHIC
AVAILABLE IN THE PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICE

I. SUMMARY:

The two applications related to Potomac Yard consist of the following:

- An amendment to the CDD zoning to eliminate a requirement for a pedestrian connection for the Monroe Avenue bridge. (TA #2005-0007); and
- An amendment to the CDD zoning to allow for a revised Monroe Avenue connection for the Monroe Avenue Bridge. (TA #2005-0008)

The first application is to eliminate a pedestrian connection from the Monroe Avenue bridge. The goal was to provide enhanced pedestrian connectivity from the bridge to Monroe Avenue and the future Potomac Yard open space and parks. However, because of the height of the bridge (approximately 30 ft.) above the open space and the fact that staff believes the pedestrian access should be ADA accessible, the ramps become long and circuitous and provide little benefit for pedestrians as discussed in more detail below.

Some in the community have raised the question of providing an elevator to meet accessibility. This option of an elevator raises concerns for T&ES, P&Z and the Police regarding safety and maintenance. An elevator on the side of the bridge would be exposed to the elements and subject to frequent maintenance needs. In addition, it would be a desirable location for graffiti and other undesirable activities. Staff is concerned about the safety of users. The elevator option is not being further considered.

After the Planning Commission work session and public hearing held on December 7, 2005 on this issue, staff held a community workshop on January 11, 2006, on the questions relating to the direct pedestrian connection from the bridge. About 100 people attended this community workshop as is discussed in more detail below. Based on staff's further analysis and input from the community, staff is still recommending eliminating the direct pedestrian connection from the bridge and providing pedestrian enhancements and connections along Slaters Lane as discussed in more detail below.

The second application is to allow for the modification of the alignment of Monroe Avenue in the vicinity of the straightened bridge. At a community meeting held on the construction of the bridge on December 12, 2005, several citizens expressed concern about the approved alignment for Monroe Avenue once the bridge was straightened. Residents who live along Howell and Bellefonte Avenues were particularly concerned that the longer distance from Monroe Avenue to Route 1 under the approved plan would cause vehicles to travel down Howell and Bellefonte Avenues to reach Route

1 instead of using Monroe Avenue. As a result of the concerns raised at the December 12th meeting, staff evaluated other options for Monroe Avenue to connect with Route 1.

Three options were developed in addition to the approved option. All four of these options were presented and discussed at the community workshop on January 11th. These options, as well as the feedback from the community workshop are discussed in detail below. There was also a January 24th joint work session with the Planning Commission and Council to discuss the Monroe Avenue alignment and the pedestrian connection.

II. CDD ZONING AMENDMENTS:

The first amendment to the Zoning Ordinance allows the elimination of the pedestrian connection from the Monroe Avenue bridge.

The second amendment to the Zoning Ordinance allows the modification of the alignment of Monroe Avenue in the vicinity of the straightened Monroe Avenue Bridge.

5-605 Preliminary development plan approval.

* * * *

[The following is all new language]

Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (J) of this section and of any approved conceptual design plan, the following required and permitted changes from an approved conceptual design plan shall be required or permitted, as the case may be, for the subsequent approval of a preliminary development plan or site plan subject to such conceptual design plan:

1. Within CDD No. 10 (Potomac Yard/Greens), the approved Monroe Avenue Bridge shall be constructed without a direct pedestrian connection for the realigned Monroe Avenue Bridge.
2. Within CDD No. 10 (Potomac Yard/Potomac Greens), the City may revise the vehicular and pedestrian Monroe Avenue connection to Route 1-Jefferson Davis Highway. The final design shall be approved by the Planning Commission and City Council, in consultation with the Potomac Yard Design Advisory Committee (PYDAC), the Community and the School Board, to conform to the design as generally depicted in Option 2 (two way slip ramp), as prepared by Christopher

Consultants, dated December 19th, 2005. Any street reservations shall not affect the open space required to be provided by the property owner.

III. PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION:

As part of the approval for the straightened Monroe Avenue bridge, a condition was included that required a direct pedestrian connection from the bridge to Monroe Avenue.

This condition required a more direct connection for pedestrians from the bridge to Del Ray as well as the future Potomac Yard open space and parks. The condition was added to enhance pedestrian connectivity for residents and communities on both the east and west sides of the realigned bridge. Staff strongly encourages pedestrian connections wherever possible, however, there are several challenges associated with providing this direct pedestrian connection.

The first challenge is safety. Staff has been working with the Police department to ensure that any direct pedestrian connection provided would not create a safety concern for pedestrians. If a pedestrian connection were provided, it should be designed in such a way as to provide adequate visibility and lighting.

The second challenge is ADA accessibility. Technically, ADA access is provided along the sidewalks of the straightened bridge as it is designed. While an auxiliary pedestrian facility may not be legally required to meet ADA, staff cannot recommend construction of a facility of this nature that is not accessible.

The third challenge is aesthetics. Because of the height of the bridge and the desire for handicap accessibility, a pedestrian connection from the bridge will consist of a large ramp that will have significant visual impacts on the bridge without significantly reducing the distance for pedestrians.

In preparation for the final design and construction documents for the bridge, staff and the applicant evaluated the feasibility of constructing a direct pedestrian connection from the bridge to Monroe Avenue. In addition to the option of using the sidewalks along the straightened bridge for pedestrian access (no direct connection), staff evaluated two ramp options. During the Planning Commission work session in December, the Commission asked staff to evaluate a stairway option as well. These options were discussed in the work session with Planning Commission in December. They were also presented and discussed at the community workshop on January 11th. The four options are discussed below.

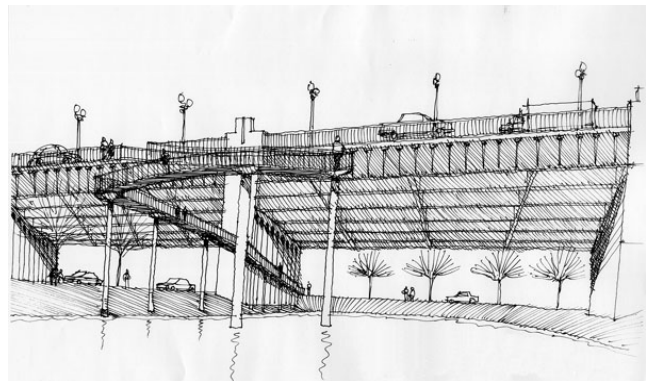
A. OPTION # 1 -Sidewalk on the Bridge:

The first option evaluated by staff and presented at the community workshop is the use of the sidewalks on the existing bridge. This option does not include a direct pedestrian connection from the bridge to Monroe Avenue. While this option provides a longer route for pedestrians than a direct pedestrian connection to Monroe Avenue, the pedestrian is highly visible walking along Route 1. In addition, this option would allow the pedestrian to walk on the wider 11 ft. sidewalk, rather than the more narrow 5 ft. wide sidewalk on the western portion of the bridge. The experience of walking along the straightened bridge as a pedestrian will be greatly improved over the experience today. The straightened bridge has been designed to incorporate attractive, pedestrian friendly features.



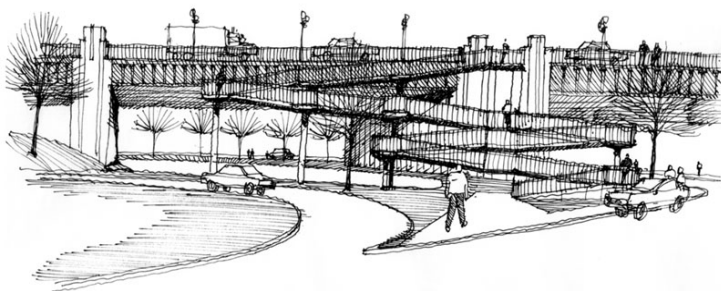
B. OPTION # 2 - Ramp Under Bridge:

Option 2 includes a ramp connection from the east side of Route 1 that runs beneath the bridge and lands near Monroe Avenue on the west side of the bridge. This option is ADA accessible. The pedestrian route utilizing Option 2 saves about two minutes of walking time over Option 1. The Police have expressed concerns about the safety of a ramp that is partially under the bridge. In addition, because the ramp would be quite long and due to the height of the bridge, the ramp would appear as an appendage to the bridge that has been designed to be open. The ramps would also be prominently visible from Monroe Avenue.



C. OPTION #3 - Ramp on Monroe Avenue Side of Bridge:

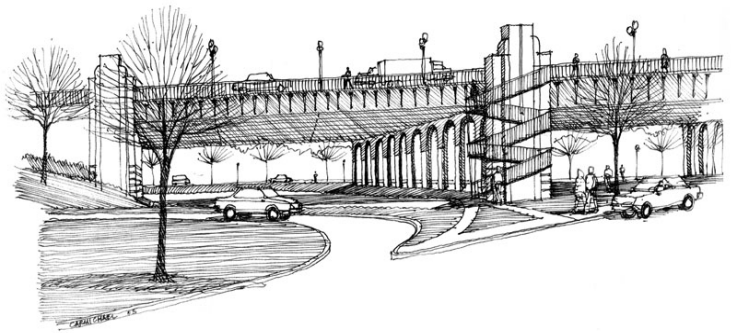
Option 3 includes a ramp connection from the west side of Route 1 that switches back and forth and lands near Monroe Avenue on the west side of the bridge. This option is ADA accessible.



The pedestrian route utilizing Option 3 also saves about two minutes of walking time over Option 1. Similar to Option 2, this ramp would appear as an appendage to the openness of the bridge design and would be even more visible from Monroe Avenue than Option 2.

D. OPTION # 4 - Stairway:

Option 4 includes a stairway connection from the west side of Route 1 and lands near Monroe Avenue. This option is not ADA accessible. The pedestrian route utilizing Option 4 saves about five minutes of walking time over Option 1.



IV. Community Workshop Feedback on Pedestrian Connection:

At the January 11th community workshop, the participants were asked whether there should be a direct pedestrian connection from the straightened bridge to Monroe Avenue. There were approximately 100 participants at the meeting. Out of eleven tables participating, six tables indicated “yes”, a pedestrian connection should be provided. Four tables indicated “no”, a direct pedestrian connection should be provided. One table was undecided. The participants were then asked whether a direct pedestrian connection should be ADA accessible. Five tables indicated “yes”, and four tables indicated “no”. Two tables did not respond to this question. When asked which option was preferred by the table, five tables supported Option 1, and one table each supported Options 2, 3 and 4. Three tables did not express support for any of the options.

A list of the comments on each of the options and the responses from each of the tables is attached to this memo.

V. STAFF RECOMMENDATION OF PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION:

Staff is very supportive of pedestrian connectivity in this area, as well as the City as a whole. The Potomac Yard development plan was designed to have a pedestrian focus. The straightened Monroe Avenue bridge, as designed, incorporates many pedestrian amenities, including walkways on both sides of the bridge, pedestrian scale lighting, decorative lighting and railings. These amenities were included specifically to encourage pedestrians to use the Route 1/Potomac Yard corridor.

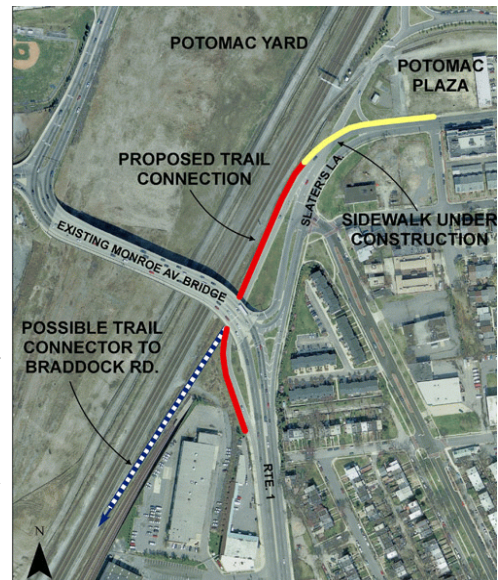
Staff recognizes that the distance between the NorthEast neighborhood and the Del Ray neighborhood will increase with the construction of the straightened bridge. This is due to the alignment of Route 1 and the need to cross an active rail corridor. However, based on our analysis of the options for a direct pedestrian connection, the staff recommendation is to eliminate the requirement for the direct connection. Staff believes strongly that any pedestrian connection constructed as part of this bridge project should meet ADA requirements. In order to do this, the direct connection would only save pedestrians about two minutes of walking time. With the cost of the pedestrian connection estimated to be around \$350,000 for a stairway to over \$1 million for a ramp, staff does not believe the cost for a ramp to be justified given the savings in time. In addition, staff is concerned about the size of the ramp detracting from the overall aesthetics and openness of the straightened bridge.

VI. SLATERS LANE SIDEWALK CONNECTION:

Staff is also supportive of the proposal from Potomac Yard Development to add a sidewalk connection under the bridge between Slaters Lane and Route 1. While this does not meet the same goal as the direct pedestrian connection from the bridge to Monroe Avenue, it does increase the overall pedestrian connectivity in the area.

Potomac Yard Development has agreed to extend the sidewalk from Slaters Lane under the bridge (adjacent to the roadway) which will connect to the sidewalk on the south side of the bridge. This sidewalk is not required by the approved Potomac Yard Plan or bridge plan.

When the Potomac Plaza retail development was approved (now under construction), the sidewalk on Slaters Lane was extended as far west as possible to enable a possible extension of the Slaters Lane sidewalk. In addition, the Braddock Metro study currently underway anticipates a sidewalk-trail connection to Braddock metro. These two connections would eventually provide a continual sidewalk connection from the King Street metro to the George Washington Memorial trail.



While the sidewalk connection as proposed by staff does not provide a more direct connection to the Potomac Yard open space for the neighborhoods to the east of the bridge, the connection will significantly increase pedestrian connectivity for the neighborhoods to the east of the bridge. The

connection will also result in the connection of existing trails and neighborhoods a primary goal of the City.

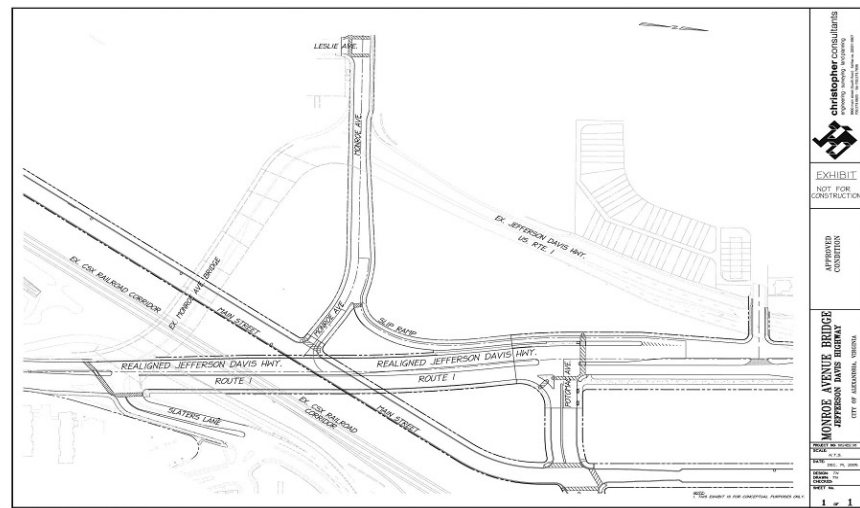
VII. MONROE AVENUE ACCESS TO ROUTE 1:

As mentioned above, staff has evaluated alternative alignments for Monroe Avenue following feedback from the community. There are several challenges associated with modifying the alignment of Monroe Avenue from the approved alignment. One challenge is preserving the connectivity between the neighborhoods, including Del Ray, NorthEast and the new Potomac Yard neighborhood, a primary goal of the Potomac Yard proposal. A second challenge is limiting the potential for cut-through traffic on neighborhood streets such as Bellefonte and Howell Avenues. The third challenge is preserving the expanded open space at Simpson Field, which is also designated as a future school site.

The following options were presented and discussed at the January 11, 2006 community workshop. The comments on each of these options from the workshop are attached to this memo.

A. OPTION # 1- Approved Monroe Alignment:

The first option consists of the approved Monroe Avenue Alignment. This is the alignment that was presented at the time of the 1999 Potomac Yard CDD approval. This alignment was also presented at all of the community meetings held between 1999 and the 2003 City Council approval. This alignment provides connectivity from Del Ray into the network of framework streets for Potomac Yard. At the time

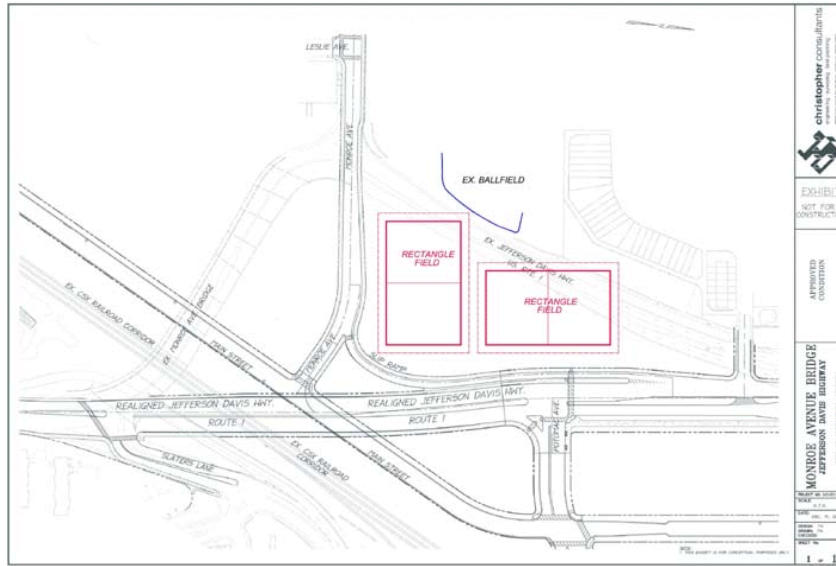


Option 1

the alignment was approved, this was seen as desirable to keep through traffic from Potomac Yard in Alexandria and Crystal City from cutting through Del Ray on Monroe Avenue. This option also

eliminates the embankment that currently exists along Simpson Field and the Goldcrust Bakery, which creates a barrier between parts of the neighborhood.

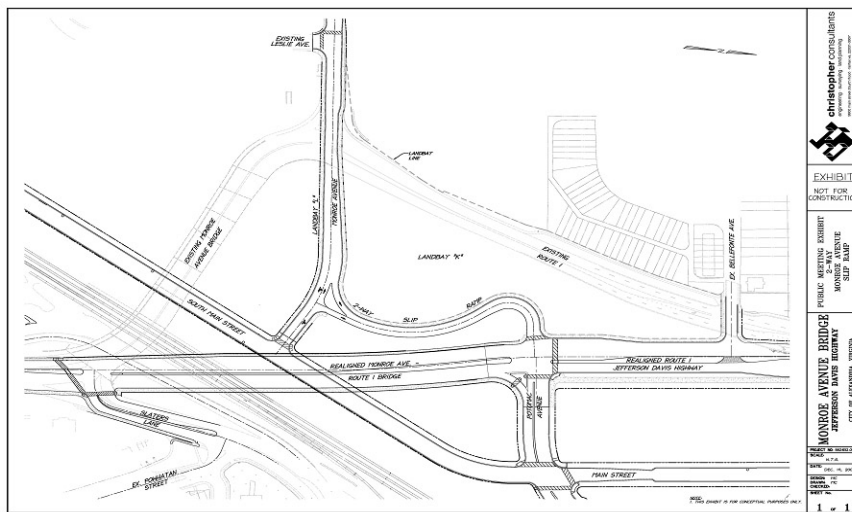
Some of the concerns expressed by the community at the meetings held in December and January regarding the approved alignment are primarily that the additional distance and time required to access Route 1 from Monroe Avenue, compared to the access today, will encourage vehicles to use the neighborhood streets such as Bellefonte and Howell Avenues instead of Monroe Avenue.



Option 1 with athletic fields

B. OPTION # 2 - Two-Way Slip Ramp:

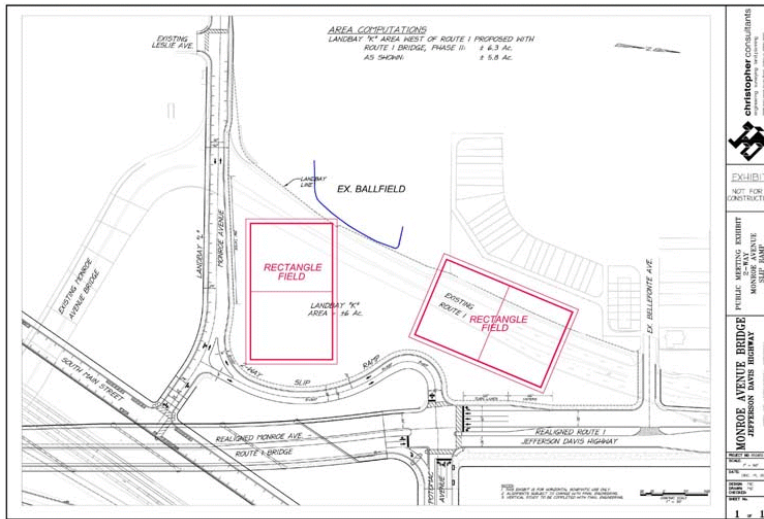
This option consists of changing the slip ramp from southbound Route 1 to Monroe Avenue, that is currently designed as one-way in the approved plan, to accommodate two-way traffic. This option makes the access from Monroe Avenue to Route 1 more direct, but eliminates one half acre of open space from the expanded Simpson Field and future school site.



Option 2

This option would impact the ability to place two full size multi-use recreational fields in the expanded Simpson Field without moving a field very close to the existing homes on Duncan Avenue.

It also eliminates half an acre that could be otherwise programmed as park land. This option also severely limits the ability to construct a school on this site.



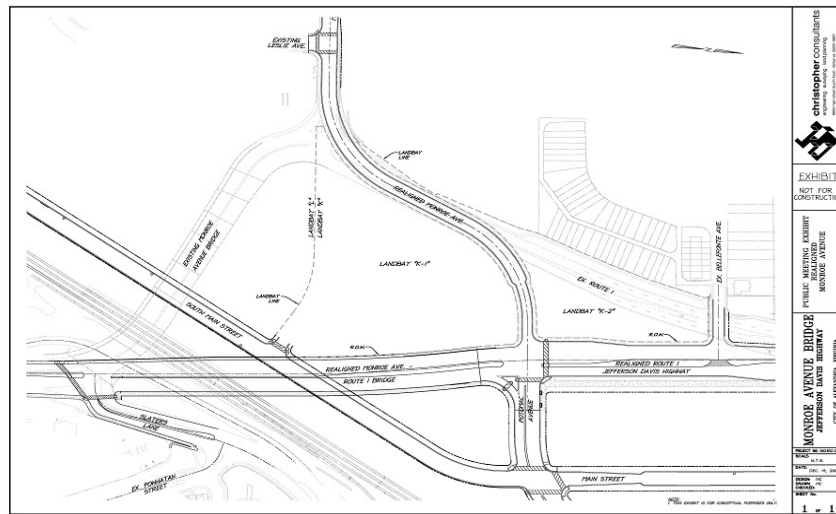
Option 2 with athletic fields

Some of the comments expressed by the community at the recent community meetings indicated that this option may minimize the concern about cut-through traffic. But many attendees also expressed concern about the loss of area in the park and school site.

This option will not have a negative impact on the construction schedule for the straightened bridge, as the construction of Monroe Avenue is not scheduled to begin until spring of 2007. This option will add an additional cost of approximately \$250,000.

C. OPTION # 3 - Realigned Monroe Avenue:

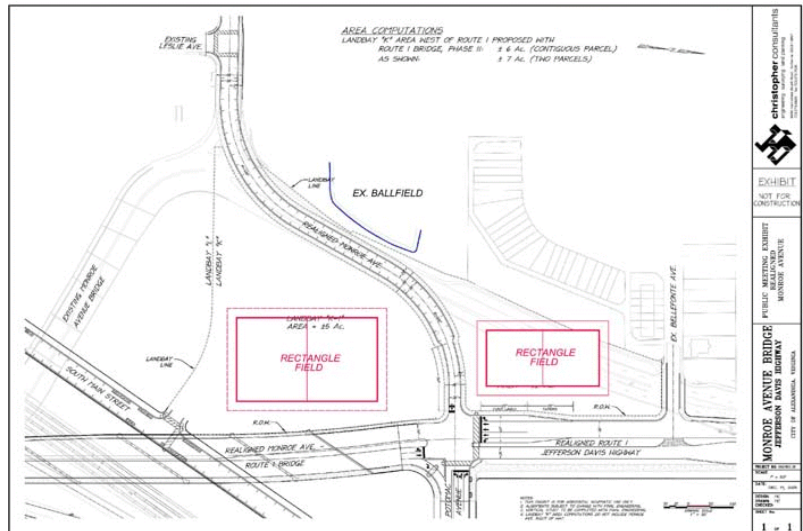
This option consists of realigning Monroe Avenue to run through the expanded Simpson Field area, along the existing right of way for Route 1. This option provides the most direct access from Monroe Avenue to Route 1, but bisects the park and future school site. There is no net loss of open space with this option, Monroe Avenue is shifted and no longer connects



Option 3

directly to South Main Street. The area occupied by South Main Street in the approved alignment would become open space.

With this option, two full size multi-purpose recreational fields will not fit in the expanded park area. One field would have to be converted to a smaller size, youth-only field. The two fields would also be bisected by Monroe Avenue, requiring park users to cross the street to access the other elements of the park. This option also limits the ability to construct a school on this site.



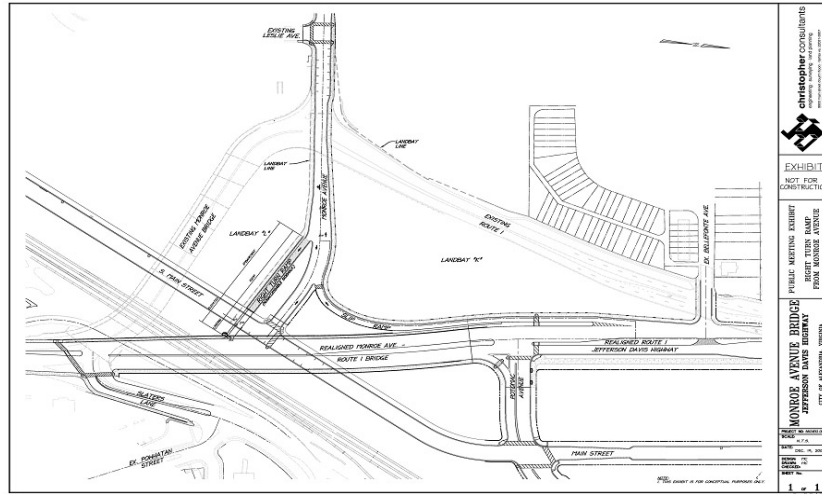
Option 3 with athletic fields

Some of the comments expressed by the community expressed concern that this connection would encourage additional traffic from Potomac Avenue, the spine road through Potomac Yard in Alexandria and Arlington, to use Monroe Avenue to cut through the Del Ray neighborhood. Meeting attendees also expressed concern at bisecting the open space. Attendees did see this option as a way to minimize cut-through traffic on other neighborhood streets.

This option will also not have a negative impact on the construction schedule for the straightened bridge. Because the extension of Monroe Avenue to South Main Street is being eliminated, there will not be a significant net increase in the construction cost for the bridge.

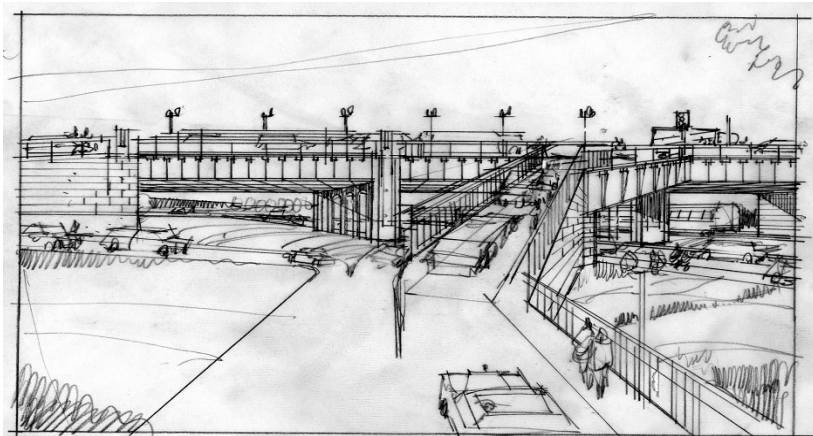
D. OPTION # 4 - Elevated Monroe Embankment Ramp:

Option 4 consists of constructing an elevated ramp from Monroe Avenue to connect to the southbound lanes of Route 1 on the new bridge. This option provides a direct connection to southbound Route 1, but does not provide access to northbound Route 1. Because traffic from this ramp would have to cross in the middle of the left-turn lane for southbound Route 1 turning onto Slaters Lane, this access cannot be safely provided. This option also has significant visual and aesthetic impacts to the bridge and the future Main Street within Potomac Yard.



Option 4

This option does not impact the expanded Simpson Field and future school site, but it does create a large embankment and structure connecting to the bridge at the end of Monroe Avenue. This ramp would negatively impact the openness of the straightened bridge, which were developed to provide this bridge with a sense of openness and character because the bridge will be a visually prominent element within Potomac Yard and Monroe Avenue.



View of Option 4 from Monroe Avenue

This option does not provide any benefit for traffic heading from Monroe Avenue to northbound Route 1.

Most of the comments expressed by the community were in opposition to this option. The community expressed concern about the aesthetics, as well as constructing an embankment that would separate the neighborhood from the proposed development in the adjacent Landbay L.

Concerns were also expressed about the significant cost and redesign that would be necessary to accommodate this option.

This option will require the straightened bridge to be redesigned to accommodate this ramp. It will add approximately 8 to 12 months to the construction schedule, currently scheduled to last 30 months. The additional construction cost estimated for this option is about \$10 million.

VIII. STAFF RECOMMENDATION ON THE MONROE AVENUE ACCESS:

Staff is sensitive to the concerns of the residents of Bellefonte, Howell and other neighborhood streets about vehicles cutting through to reach Route 1. Staff recognizes that the approved alignment for Monroe Avenue adds some distance to Route 1 compared to the current alignment. Staff is also very concerned about any option that would negatively impact the open space planned for this area. The expansion and consolidation of Simpson Field was one of the major reasons for replacing the existing bridge.

Staff is recommending the construction of Option 1, the approved Monroe Avenue alignment. Staff is also recommending the reservation of appropriate right of way to construct Option 2, the two-way slip ramp, if that option is deemed necessary once the straightened bridge is constructed. The City will work with the affected communities to develop benchmarks to evaluate the impact of cut-through traffic once the bridge and surrounding roadways are open to traffic. During that time, the City will also be able to further evaluate the design for the expanded Simpson Field as well as the need for a school at this site.

IX. CONCLUSION:

Staff is recommending the elimination of the direct pedestrian connection for the Monroe Avenue Bridge. In addition, Staff is recommending the reservation of an area for street purposes as generally depicted in Option 2 (two way slip ramp). The design of any future revision to the Monroe Avenue connection would also require subsequent approval by City Council in consultation with the Community and the School Board.

Attachment:

January 11, 2006 Community Workshop comments