

COMMUNITY SAFETY & ENHANCEMENTS FACT SHEET

MD ROUTE 924 (MAIN STREET) FROM MD 22 TO GORDON STREET BEL AIR ~ HARFORD COUNTY

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The Community Safety & Enhancement project along 0.5 miles of MD 924 (Main Street) is located in the historic heart of the Town of Bel Air in Harford County, MD. This is not only a historic area but a large commercial area which brings in high volumes of traffic during peak hours and on weekends. High traffic speeds of vehicles made it difficult for pedestrians to cross Main Street and the poor condition of the sidewalks made it hard for them to access the businesses of the Town. The area had a high rate of pedestrian related accidents which was almost four times greater than the average statewide rate for similar State highways.

The project was initiated at the request of the Town of Bel Air to upgrade and revitalize Main Street through the Town. Funding was allocated by the State Highway Administration (SHA), and an initial public meeting was held in April 2000 with local citizens, business owners, and local elected officials to present the downtown revitalization concept conceived by the Town of Bel Air, to solicit input, and to begin the formation of the local Task Force. This task force was charged with developing project goals and a concept plan for improvements to Main Street. In June 2000, the Task Force was formed consisting of numerous local business owners, citizens, Town officials, utility owners, and SHA engineers, planners and landscape architects. This group met numerous times over the next year to develop goals and how to apply these to the concept plan. The goals developed included improving vehicular and pedestrian accessibility to Town services and businesses, calming traffic flow and improving safety through the downtown district, correcting drainage problems, promoting amenities to maintain and enhance the historical look of Bel Air, and upgrading the existing 100-year old water main. Of particular concern to the task force was the very narrow and numerous bifurcated sidewalks which did not promote a walkable atmosphere in the commercial area. The project goals and concept plan were completed and presented at a public meeting in April 2001. The Town of Bel Air adopted a resolution approving the concept plan after the public meeting.

The project began design in July 2002; however, funding for the program was delayed in January 2003 due to budgetary constraints facing the State of Maryland at that time. Funding to complete the design and construction was finally allocated in January 2005. To expedite the completion of design and construction while ensuring the improvements envisioned during the concept development phase were met SHA decided this project would be delivered using the Design-Build method. The SHA, Town of Bel Air, and the local Task Force met numerous times over the next few months to update the concept based on changes in the Town. The project was advertised to contractors in November 2005 and awarded in September 2006 after both a technical evaluation of the Design-Build teams and a price proposal was submitted. The Design-Build Team of Corman Construction and Johnson, Mirmiran, & Thompson (JMT) began final design of the project after award and initiated construction in January 2007.

The project was divided into three separate construction phases for which final design and construction was completed. This Design-Build approach limited the duration of the project by allowing both design and construction to occur concurrently and it reduced construction impacts to the local business community. The Design-Build Team along with the SHA held monthly partnering meetings which included the Design-Build Team, the SHA, Town of Bel Air Officials, Baltimore Gas and Electric (BGE) and Maryland American Water Utility Companies, and representatives from the local downtown business alliance. At these meetings, issues with both the final design and construction were discussed to develop the best solution to meet the needs of all the stakeholders involved. Regular public meetings were also held to update the public on the project and to answer questions. These meetings allow residents and merchants to become familiar with the construction supervisors and SHA inspectors to quickly resolve concerns regarding construction activities in front of their store.

The final design and construction of the project accomplished the original goals established by the Town of Bel Air and Task Force from 2001. The 100-year old water main owned by Maryland American Water was upgraded and replaced by the Design-Build Team. BGE also replaced their gas facilities throughout

the Town with close coordination and assistance from the Design-Builder. The existing drainage system in the Town was upgraded with new pipes, new inlets, and curb and gutter. The existing drain spouts from the buildings were also connected into the new system to eliminate water draining onto the sidewalk.

The roadway was narrowed with bump-outs at various locations to both reduce the crossing distance for pedestrians and to calm traffic. A new median was also constructed in front of the historic courthouse to further calm traffic. The existing sidewalks consisted of a hodgepodge of brick and concrete and were not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). New concrete sidewalks with a one foot brick accent were constructed throughout Town with all brick sidewalks constructed at the locations of special significance such as the courthouse. The brick sidewalks along with the median at the courthouse now serve as the focal point for the historic Town center. The new sidewalks are fully ADA-compliant including curb ramps with brick paver detectable warning surfaces and provide access to the Town business for all persons. The four traffic signals in the Town of Bel Air were also reconstructed to provide visual and audible countdowns for crossings. The signalized crossings included the installation of synthetic red brick asphalt crosswalks to accent the pedestrian crossings. The signals were also interconnected to improve the flow of traffic through the area. The existing continuous cobra-head lighting in Bel Air was replaced with new scale pedestrian lighting. The lighting was chosen by the Town to reflect the historical character of the Town. The new traffic signal poles and mast arms along with the intersection lighting installed with the project were also painted black to match the color of pedestrian light poles selected by the Town. The roadway was reconstructed and resurfaced, the signing and marking upgraded, landscape planting areas were provided to beautify the area and enhance the urban environment.

One of the most challenging features of the project was the removal of the existing bifurcated sidewalks in the Town. The removal of these sidewalks was needed to provide additional sidewalk width for the high volume of pedestrians and to meet ADA requirements. Due to the constraints of the area to meet the existing building fronts, provide ADA accessibility, and to maintain positive drainage patterns, non-traditional roadway designs needed to be evaluated. The Design-Build team was able to remove these sidewalks by modifying the cross slope of the roadway from a crown to a one-directional slope. The proposed design also utilized a valley gutter between the parking area and the roadway where the parking lane was sloped away from the curb to reduce runoff across travel lanes.

Construction of the MD 924 Main Street Community Safety & Enhancement project was completed in September 2008. A dedication ceremony was organized jointly with the Town of Bel Air, local elected officials, local business alliance, SHA, and the Design-Build Team on September 27, 2008. The project met the goals of the original Task Force by improving vehicular and pedestrian accessibility to Town, improving the roadway infrastructure, and promoting amenities to maintain and enhance the historic look of Bel Air. The partnering team developed a slogan for the project, "Smile, it's all worthwhile." When the citizens and business owners walk down Main Street today and in the years to come, they will agree that this project was worthwhile.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:

The community of the Town of Bel Air and local government were very instrumental in the development of the concept for this project. The Town's Department of Planning and Community Development assembled a Task Force of local citizens and business owners and in conjunction with both the Town and State Highway representatives formulated a concept plan for proposed improvements. To promote public participation in the project, maximize community involvement in the process and encourage local citizens and business owners to view or offer comments on the plan, a public open house was held by the Task Force along with State Highway representatives. The concept plan was refined based on the comments from this open house. It was then taken to the Board of Town Commissioners and a resolution of a "Good Faith" Partnership was approved unanimously by the Commissioners in May 2001, to implement the proposed concept plan.