

TRAFFIC TRAFFIC TRAFFIC

Route 3 congestion to get county, state attention

By Mark R. Smith
Senior Writer

Stuart Pittman remembers the day that he got in a helicopter and was flown above the median strip along Route 3. When he looked down, most of what he

saw was the development, failing intersections and traffic, traffic, traffic.

"I was surprised by the sprawl," said the Anne Arundel County executive. "There wasn't much green space there."

That point has long been a concern of Crofton and Gambrills area residents who are now working on Anne Arundel County's Plan2040.

After decades of development along what's grown into a retail Miracle Mile that grew out of control, the county is now addressing what's officially known in the hallways of the Arundel Center as a "critical corridor" – meaning it's time to halt development and update the infrastructure.

'Honey Pot'

Among the concerned observers is Marsha Perry, a long-time Crofton resident and community activist, as well as former state delegate.

"For the past 40 years, Route 3 has relieved the pressure on south and east county, and has been the honey pot for developers," Perry said. "Our facilities, from school to roads to the natural environment, have all been over utilized and, in the case of the natural environment, irrevocably destroyed."

In Plan2040, we don't see Route 3 as a development area and I've proposed a moratorium until we can get improvements.

– Stuart Pittman

Growth, she said, should be where the infrastructure already exists. "No land use upgrades," she said, "and maintain the current zoning. People who talk to me about this issue oppose all land use changes that would lead to an increase in density development along the Route 3 Corridor." Development today, she said, should be targeted to town centers and transit-oriented areas. "That's smart growth," she said, adding, "What we need is strict adherence to the Anne Arundel County code and no more mitigations."

Damage Done

Echoing Perry's observations was Sharon Wanamaker, chair of Crofton First. "We're pleased that the county no longer designates the Route 3 Corridor as a targeted development area," said Wanamaker. "However, so much damage has been done that we strongly feel Adequate Public Facilities need to be in place before it can handle any more development, including what is already in progress."

The Crofton First Board of Directors "is concerned by so many of the LUCAs (Local Update of Census Addresses) in Plan2040 setting the area up for upzoning along Route 3," she said.

As for the current lessened flow of traffic, she rang the bell of caution. "People need to be reminded that any decrease in Route 3 traffic is temporary, due to the pandemic and many people still working from home."

It's easy to get the general sense of relief from community leaders given that they have an ally in Pittman.

"I applaud the county executive's team for listening to the community and revising the targeted development designations for Route 3, as well as at Staple's Corner [which is a few miles east of Route 3, at the intersection of routes 450 and 424, in

Gambrills] in their draft Plan2040," said Martin Simon, chairman of the Crofton Civic Association board of directors.

Simon is also encouraged by the investment planned for unclogging the bottleneck on Route 3 North off of St. Stephen's Church Road. "Without infrastructure enhancements, our area just can't handle any more upzoned development. Otherwise," he said, "they may just as well call that section of Route 3 a 'critical corridor.'"

Aid on the Table

Pittman is not as one with the locals, he's anticipating working with the State Highway Administration (SHA) to correct those infrastructure issues that plague the Route 3 Corridor.

"The SHA has said they'll do something about the several failing intersections that span from Route 50 all the way up to Route 175. It's just gotten worse and worse," he said, adding that Two Rivers "was supposed to be age restricted and then it wasn't," which has resulted in still more traffic on Route 3 as well as the new Crofton High School opening at capacity, but that's another story.

"It's bad planning when you put a considerable amount of commercial development into a road that was designed to be a highway thoroughfare. It's not safe. So, in Plan2040," Pittman said, "We don't see Route 3 as a development area and I've proposed a moratorium until we can get improvements made," pointing to the county's plan with the SHA to negotiate a memorandum of understanding (MOU).

"The SHA has not agreed to put money in yet, but we have \$19.8 million in funding from the Permanent Public Improvements Fund," he said, "and that's how you get the SHA's attention; you invest in their road. We still want them to manage the project and we hope to have an MOU by the end of the year. I'm told we're close."

The Route 3 and Route 2 (which has \$9.8 million in funding) corridors are the county's main traffic issues and Pittman is ready to address both. "If we can make improvements along both highways, that hopefully would make Route 97 easier to negotiate during rush hours," said Pittman. "It gets clogged up by people jumping off both roads."

For now, said Perry, citizens who get stuck in the sprawl along Route 3 "are living with the sins of the past."

"The overdevelopment of Route 3 started in the late 1960s," she said. "It's overdeveloped and an environmental nightmare. The answer is a moratorium on building permits until all adequate facilities are in place."



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