

Town of Port Deposit

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Robert Kuhs
Mayor

Vicky Rinkerman
Town Administrator

April 14, 2021



Stephen J. O'Conner, AICP
Acting Director
Chief, Planning and Zoning
Department of Land Use and Development Services
200 Chesapeake Blvd., Suite 1200
Elkton, MD 21921

RE: FY2022 Port Deposit Transportation Priorities

Dear Mr. O'Conner:

On behalf of the Council, I would like to take this opportunity to provide Cecil County information relative to transportation priorities for the Town of Port Deposit.

The opening of the Tome Visitor Center and Research and Education Center for Towson University students to study the endangered Northern Map Turtle and completion of the waterfront promenade has helped the town become the western "Gateway" to Cecil County and a "day destination" spot for visitors. As you are aware, Route 222 through Port Deposit is a traffic route for travelers and visitors from Route 1 to the Interstate 95 exits, Hollywood Casino, and Route 40. Our historic industrial town has unique characteristics and having MD 222 serve as our Main Street has created challenges as we try to reduce flooding and meet the growing demand for safer vehicle transportation, as well as provide safe bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. The Town is seeking innovative solutions to our challenges.

As you are aware, Port Deposit sits at the bottom of a 250' granite cliff next to the Susquehanna River, and has experienced numerous flood disasters over the years. There are existing natural springs and streams that carry stormwater run-off from the cliff, through the Town, to the Susquehanna River.

As part of the Town's initiative to improve economic conditions and support development, the State Highway Administration (SHA) started a two-year storm drain improvement project in February 2017 on MD Route 222/Main Street. SHA spent over five years planning and developing this project. In August 2018, the storm drain project was terminated for convenience due to issues encountered during the first phase of construction on North Main Street. It is our understanding that the project will require additional right-of-way acquisitions and plats, field borings, test pits, and coordination with Norfolk Southern Railroad officials and the project is now under review and being re-designed. Due to the initial work that was started and not completed on the first outfall and associated drain lines on North Main Street in 2017, the Town has experienced an increase in water drainage issues and flooding in this area.

The funding for this project was re-allocated and in order to proceed, it will need to go through the funding allocation process again. The State of Maryland has spent well over \$1 million in engineering fees, initial construction, and the purchase of right-of-way acquisitions and easements.

Another project that is contributing to the urgency in replacing the existing deteriorating terra cotta storm drain pipes, catch basins and outfalls on Route 222 is the potential Granite Cliffs development on property owned by the Arundel Corporation to build over 500 single-family homes on the granite cliff above North Main Street and Granite Avenue. The approved concept plan indicates development will be within Cecil County, and there is no development on the 25 +/- acres of the property within town limits. The Town has no control over the development; however, this does not alleviate the concerns that the development of this property will increase stormwater run-off that will have a detrimental impact for property owners on North Main Street and Granite Avenue.

Stormwater management strategies and design address water quality, and the Town of Port Deposit may face a “water quantity” issue from the proposed development. Town officials fear this development may put residents at risk of experiencing the same “top down” flood disaster that happened in Ellicott City in 2016 and 2018. “But the intense flooding that twice ravaged the historic district in two years is not unique to Ellicott City. It’s part of a larger, national trend where urban development not paired with adequate stormwater management drainage results in calamitous floods,” according to Ed Link, a researcher at the A. James Clark School of Engineering at the University of Maryland, College Park. (Logan, 2019)¹

The Town has witnessed an increase in flash flooding on North Main Street and the Rock Run stream that flows behind the houses on Granite Avenue from heavy rain storms. Any water runoff increase would intensify the risk of more flooding on Main Street and Granite Avenue. Storm drain improvements to Route 222/Main Street need to be completed to avoid a similar “Ellicott City disaster” by reducing the flood risk and potential damage to properties. We respectfully request assistance to ensure that this project is fully funded and completed in phases if necessary over several years.

The completion of the storm drain project would provide a perfect opportunity for the State and Town to develop a supporting streetscape plan. The streetscape plan would identify innovative traffic control measures to reduce speeding and tractor trailer traffic on Main Street, as well as provide safe bicycle, pedestrian and historically sensitive accommodations and infrastructure to meet the growing needs of our community. The residential and economic development boost from these projects would be strengthened by innovative, safe vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian connections in our community for residents and visitors to enjoy our historic culture, restaurants, shops, and waterfront amenities.

Another issue we struggle with is finding a solution to the tractor trailer traffic that persistently use weight restricted Route 222 as the thoroughfare from Route 1 to the I95 exits and Route 40. Route 222 is **NOT** a designated tractor trailer ruck route. The majority of our historic homes along Main Street are literally located directly behind the sidewalk and several homes have been struck and damaged by these tractor trailers. Additionally, the town has experienced fatal tractor trailer accidents from brake failure coming down the hill into Town at the entrance to Marina Park and Center Street. One accident was a propane tanker that failed to stop at the intersection of Center Street and Main Street that became lodged under the condominium building on the waterfront. This negligence of truck drivers to obey the law endangers

¹ Logan, Erin B. (2019 May 22), Experts weigh in on development’s impact on Ellicott City flooding. *Baltimore Sun*. Retrieved from <https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/howard/ph-ho-cf-flood-development-0523-story.html>

our residents, visitors and children. Any assistance you could provide to enhance traffic control measures and ensure transportation companies and drivers obey the weight restriction regulations to reduce the impact from tractor trailers on Main Street would be appreciated.

The economic development boost and re-development potential from the storm drain, highway, and streetscape projects must be supported by our State and MDOT/SHA officials. These projects will improve roadway conditions, strengthen our ability to address pedestrian and bicycle connections in our community, and provide residents and visitors a safe environment to enjoy our historic culture, restaurants, shops, and waterfront amenities.

Thank you for your consideration of supporting and including our transportation priorities, and I am available to discuss this further at your convenience. We look forward to continuing our successful partnership on future projects in the Town of Port Deposit.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Kuhs', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert Kuhs
Mayor
Town of Port Deposit

cc: Cecil County State Delegation
Cecil County Executive Danielle Hornberger
Cecil County Administrator Dan Schneckenburger
Secretary Gregory Slater, Maryland Department of Transportation