

Email from WCA Traffic Committee Chair, Meredith Imwalle to Steven Brich, VDOT's Commissioner, January 28, 2021

From: Meredith Imwalle

Date: 1/28/2021

To: Stephen Brich

Subject: National Historic Landmark District Overrun with Cut-Through Traffic

Dear Commissioner Brich,

The Waterford Citizens' Association (WCA) has been working intently with regional VDOT representatives and Loudoun County for the last six years to identify solutions to the National Historic Landmark Village's commuter traffic volume and speed problem. We're thankful for the support we've received from our County Supervisors, who most recently voted unanimously in favor of addressing these issues at a February 2020 Board meeting. However, the resulting Michael Baker International (MBI) draft study made it clear that it was time to reach out to you in an appeal for exceptions and dynamic solutions.

As you may know, Waterford Village was founded in 1733 and is one of only three communities nationwide that have been declared National Historic Landmarks. Unfortunately, MBI's study data shows that more evening commuters drive through the historic village than use Virginia State Route 287. In fact, a shocking 63 percent of evening commuters with a northern Loudoun County destination cut through the village. During an August 6 Web meeting presentation, an MBI representative said that traffic modeling data indicates travel time through the village could continue to be less than the time to travel 287 — even after the Route 9/287 roundabout is complete. Meanwhile, the numbers of cut-through commuters are increasing at an alarming rate. Daily traffic volumes rose by 33 percent on Waterford's First Street and 25 percent

on Clarkes Gap between 2016 and 2019 — a much faster growth rate than the County experienced overall.

It is unrealistic and unsafe to expect our centuries-old road network to shoulder the lion's share of this commuter traffic. At the very least, our immediate goal should be a role reversal: traffic on Waterford's minor collectors should be reduced to 37 percent and the minor arterial of 287 should take on our 63 percent (volume to be measured annually).

The WCA is proposing a phased approach to traffic reduction and calming that begins by addressing village entryways. Our hope is that appropriate calming measures at the three main entry points to the village, combined with community-funded National Historic Landmark signage, will serve to reduce volume and speeds not just at entries but also throughout the village as they create a sense of place.

Requests/Recommendations

- The community would like to see chokers at the three village entryway locations indicated in MBI's report, each combined with a speed hump or table nearby. The design of these features should take into account the 18th-century appearance of the Landmark and utilize historically-appropriate materials (we're hopeful the National Park Service will be available to consult during the design phase). We will ask the County to direct the consultants to examine what would be involved with obtaining the small sections of eased land necessary to implement chokers.
- MBI proposed two additional traffic calming measures (chokers, chicanes or splitter islands) located on Old Wheatland Road at Clover Hill Road and on Loyalty Road at Old Waterford Road. We would instead like to ask VDOT for three-way stops at those intersections.

- At the consultants' suggestion, we ask that VDOT waive its more suburban design requirements to allow our rural village to maintain its 10-foot roadway widths after calming measures are installed.
- MBI's study indicates that the significant speeding problem on Clarkes Gap Road may be due in part to the 45 mph speed limit so close to the village. The community would like to see the speed limit reduced to 30 mph in a larger buffer zone outside the village, for example one that extends to our community pool at 16158 Clarkes Gap Road.
- We also ask that VDOT revisit our request for a stop sign at the intersection of Clarkes Gap and Factory Street. We believe the reduced speed limit, combined with the newly-installed, pole-mounted speed display signs, will address VDOT's concerns about high approaching speeds and longer stopping distances.
- We ask that additional calming measures be installed on Milltown Road, within the National and/or County Historic District(s).
- Waterford's "no-thru truck" zone should be reduced in size to include only the County and/or National Historic Landmark District(s).
- The WCA has proposed alternative peak-hour solutions, including a "no right turn from 4-7 p.m." sign that would prevent cut-through commuters from turning right on Milltown Road from Old Wheatland Road; and metering/access lights similar to those used in parking lots and on highway entrance ramps, that have been rejected. We hope that VDOT will either reconsider these options or propose similarly progressive solutions in the future, especially if the solutions listed above don't have the effect of reducing Waterford's cut-through traffic to levels significantly below those of Route 287.

- Waterford has seen a dramatic increase in visitors since COVID. We expect they'll continue to enjoy our resources even after the pandemic, now that they've discovered the Landmark. As a result, the Waterford Foundation has proposed building a visitor parking lot at the intersection of Milltown and Old Wheatland Roads. We ask that VDOT and Loudoun County work with us to improve pedestrian safety and walkability so that visitors using that lot can safely walk to and enjoy the village.
- Apparently MBI was prohibited by federal environmental law from identifying possible locations for a byway in this year's study. We will ask Loudoun County to approve funding for a follow-up byway feasibility study that will further investigate this long-term option. The community is in favor of the study but remains divided on whether or not to support construction of a byway.

In Conclusion

WCA members and the Waterford Foundation have worked diligently to attract more visitors. We've introduced an anchor store, a year-round craft school, walking trails and tours and half a dozen Airbnbs, and a destination restaurant will open next year on Old Waterford Road. The Waterford Fair has attracted tens of thousands of visitors each October for more than 70 years. We're also home to approximately 200 people and an elementary school with 164 students.

Our tiny, historic village can't be expected to continue to take on more commuter traffic than Route 287 — a primary state highway classified by VDOT as a minor arterial. But if travel times through the village continue to be shorter, commuters will keep choosing Waterford.

We believe our recommendations are the measures needed to begin to make a dent in Waterford's high volume, high speed traffic problem. We hope VDOT will give them the serious consideration they deserve and move quickly to implement them. And we look forward to the upcoming February 18 public meeting, during which all of our community members will all have an opportunity to weigh in.

Please find attached a letter of support from our Loudoun County Supervisor Caleb Kershner. Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

Meredith Battle Imwalle
Board Member and Traffic Committee Chair
Waterford Citizens' Association

cc Virginia State Senator John J. Bell
Commonwealth Transportation Board Member Mary Hynes
Commonwealth Transportation Board Member Scott Kasprovicz
VDOT Northern Virginia District Engineer Helen Cuervo
Loudoun County Board of Supervisors Chair Phyllis Randall
Loudoun County Supervisor Caleb Kershner
National Park Service Historic Landmarks & National Register
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Loudoun County Department of Transportation and Capital
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