



G3 GRANT

CAPITOL HEIGHTS MASTER PLAN

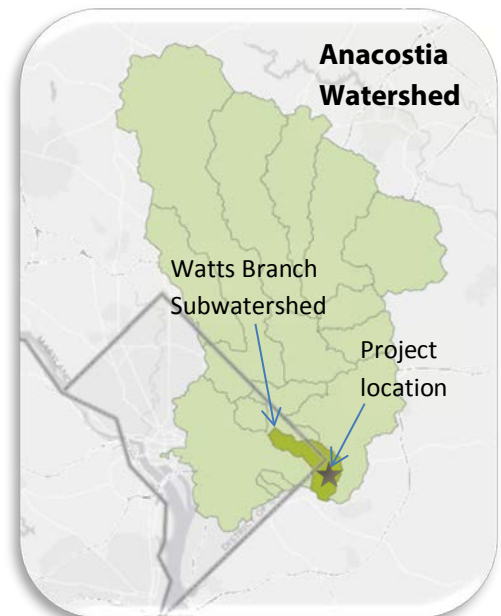
GREEN STREETS ● GREEN JOBS ● GREEN TOWNS

PROJECT INFORMATION:

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| Location: | Capitol Heights, MD |
| Project Type: | Planning Study/Preliminary Design |
| Restoration Practice: | Bioretention cells, lane diet, street trees, permeable pavement |
| Funding: | Chesapeake Bay Trust and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency |
| G3 Amount Awarded: | \$30,000 |
| Additional Funding Leveraged: | \$1,033,662 |
| Status: | G3 project complete; Construction pending |
| Key words: | Green street; community revitalization; Anacostia; Chesapeake Bay |

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Town of Capitol Heights, MD, is a residential community located on the outskirts of Washington, DC. Partnering with a local nonprofit, the Town applied for and received a Green Streets, Green Jobs, and Green Towns (G3) grant in 2011. The objective was to prepare a Green Street Master Plan to inspire small but widespread changes in the way in which streets are viewed. The planning process focused on the vital role public roads play in improving the health of the waterways, encouraging multimodal transportation, and enhancing connectivity and other factors of importance to the community. A green street concept design was also prepared for one of the Town's main roadways – Chamber Ave/Capitol Heights Blvd – which serves as an entryway to the Capitol Heights Metro. In 2012, the master plan and concept design were honored with a Maryland American Planners Association Planners Choice Award.



Project Location: Watts Branch Subwatershed (Anacostia River), Capitol Heights, Prince George's County, MD

TOWN OF CAPITOL HEIGHTS BACKGROUND

Located in Prince George's County, Capitol Heights is 1.3 square miles and has a population of 4,300. The Town is predominantly low-to-medium density residential and holds a small-town character, including a town hall along its narrow main street, a street grid, and several public parks. Its high rate of ownership (80%) and affordable housing stock are appealing. However, the median household income of \$58,000 is well below the county's

\$71,000. About 11 % of the Town’s population lives below the poverty level, compared with 7.9% countywide.

Officials have struggled with how to best provide community services, fix roads, and revitalize the area. In spite of the Capitol Heights Metro station opening in 1980, little redevelopment has occurred. Such efforts are necessary to spur the local economy and correct years of environmental damage due to urbanization and lack of stormwater management controls. The headwaters of Watts Branch, which is an important tributary stream of the Anacostia River, originate here. It suffers from polluted urban runoff, trash dumping, and leaky sewer pipes. Much of the natural stream has been converted to a concrete channel.



Watts Branch near Davey St. Much of the stream is in concrete channels/culverts.

HELPING TO CREATE A MORE SUSTAINABLE AND ECONOMICALLY VIABLE FUTURE

In recent years, Town officials have placed more concerted effort on cleaning up Watts Branch and the surrounding area. In 2005, the Town collaborated with community and environmental groups to kick-off a massive trash clean-up, which has now become an annual “Clean Up, Green Up” event. Fast forward to 2011, the



Re-envisioning the Future. Turning the Town’s natural features into an asset helps the environment and the economy.

Town produced its Capitol Heights Community Sustainability Plan to focus revitalization efforts on transforming the area into a sustainable community. It identified the need to repair and replace streets in the most environmentally responsible way and to incorporate green components—such as low impact development practices with environmentally sensitive stormwater management – into all development and redevelopment projects. Increasing the urban tree canopy and encouraging green jobs were also highlighted as needs. The G3 grant provided an opportunity for the community to further refine their green street goals, objectives, and strategies.

THE GREEN STREET MASTER PLAN

The streetscape is one of the most critical factors for building healthy, sustainable communities. Public roads are important to the well-being of any community. However, the massive amount of imperviousness associated with roads and their proximity to storm drains also make them all too good at conveying trash and other pollutants directly into local streams and waterways.

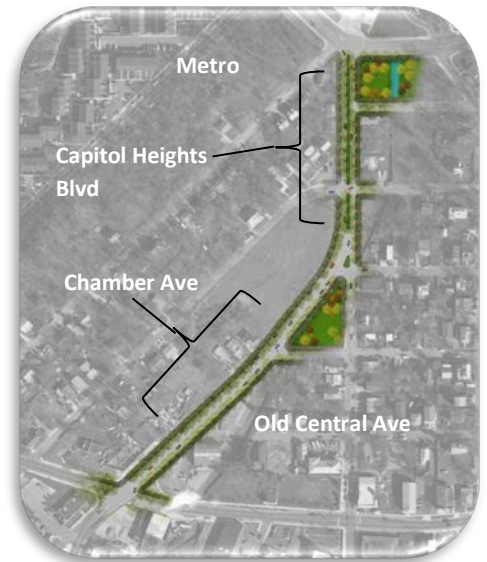
The G3-funded Green Street Master Plan provided the Town with a vehicle to facilitate community dialogue on the state of the Town's roads and to identify implementation tools for moving forward. The document consists of five parts to help community members, leaders, and policy makers realize the potential for green streets and was designed to serve as an advisory document to existing and future transportation projects in the Town of Capitol Heights.

Community input was solicited using a variety of techniques. These included providing information and soliciting feedback at community events, coordinating with the Town's Green Team, participation at Town Council meetings, and through in-person and online surveys.

GREEN STREET CONCEPT CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS

As part of the process of developing a clear and concise set of tools for redevelopment of the Town's roads, three candidate streets (one main street, one commercial, and one residential) were identified and evaluated to determine what tools and design elements fit the Town's needs. The three streets were further evaluated to determine the best candidate for preparing a green street preliminary design as part of the master plan process.

Through a three-step selection process, the commercially-oriented Chamber Ave/Capitol Heights Blvd was selected for the green street retrofit design. The roadway is a main thoroughfare through the Town, serves as an entryway to the Capitol Heights Metro, and is identified by the Town's Sustainability Plan as a revitalization area. The current road configuration is an impediment to achieving many of the Town's economic and environmental goals and currently contains no stormwater treatment or flood controls. The pedestrian access to the Metro Station is inadequate, with little shade and poor lighting along the walkway. The road is too wide whereas the sidewalks are narrow and in despair. Moreover, significant speeding of automobiles makes crossing the street a



Green Street Concept. A green street concept was prepared for the Town's main commercial street.



Capitol Heights Blvd Looking South. Left: Current conditions. Right: Rendering of intersection just south of the Capitol Heights Metro.

pedestrian safety issue. In addition, there is poor access from the road to a property on the other side of the channel that the Town is trying to redevelop. The road, in its current state, is simply an impediment to the revitalization of the Town and the restoration of the Anacostia.

The redevelopment plan spans 0.3 miles and includes basic design elements such as reduced lane widths, pavement resurfacing, curb bump-outs for traffic calming and shorter/safer pedestrian crossings, bike lanes, sidewalk replacement, lighting, site furnishings, gateway features, and plantings. Implementation of the Chamber Ave/Capitol Heights Blvd green street retrofit project will not only serve to meet the sustainable transportation and redevelopment priorities of the Town’s Community Sustainability Plan, but will also serve to satisfy portions of the 2008 Capitol Heights Transit District Development Plan. Furthermore, it will implement retrofit projects and trash reduction measures as identified in the 2010 Anacostia River Watershed Restoration Plan and the Anacostia River Trash Total Maximum Daily Load.



Metro Core Concept. The intersection of Capitol Heights Blvd and Davey St just south of the Capitol Heights Metro was identified in the Town’s Sustainability Plan as one of the Town’s most valuable assets.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the greatest challenges at the G3 grant’s start was determining how to best engage the public to gather the greatest amount of community input with limited outreach funds. Typically, the budget set aside for community input in a county-led master plan is much greater, and outreach efforts more widespread. This was overcome through the use of surveys and by engaging in other community events, such as a Public Health outreach and Healthy Heights meetings. In addition, this challenge was overcome by working through the Town’s Environmental Committee, which is led by Mayor James, in order to obtain direction and feedback from the Town’s community representatives and Town Council. Comparing feedback obtained with previous efforts – such as the feedback obtained through the Town’s Sustainability Plan – was also helpful to ensure that information and opinions collected from Town residents were consistent with what was heard at prior events.

In regards to scheduling, the original timeline proposed was too short, and it is suggested that similar efforts in the future include a longer timeline, particularly as it is important to connect outreach with planned community events that are likely to attract a larger crowd than would otherwise be possible. The greatest obstacle to the implementation of the green street will be to secure sufficient funding, either through Town residents or a series

of low-interest loans or grants. To overcome this, it was discussed that a technical advisory group should lead the final design process with representation from various agencies and other stakeholders in order to identify funding sources for various portions of the green street project.

LEVERAGING RESOURCES AND ACTION

The local nonprofit provided \$13,662 of in-kind services to complete the G3 funded green street master plan. Since the plan's establishment, the Town has continued to move forward on its redevelopment efforts. In 2013, the Town successfully applied for a \$45,000 Maryland Bikeways Program grant to focus on refining the design's bikeways concept and received \$75,000 in Community Legacy Program funds from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development for the roadway's final design and construction. And in 2014, the Town successfully secured \$900,000 in final design and construction funds from Maryland's Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund.

In an effort to holistically evaluate the area, the Town has also utilized state funding to purchase several lots along the roadway and directly across from the Capitol Heights Metro. Currently the site of several dilapidated buildings and a concrete channel stream, the Town is actively soliciting real estate development firm proposals to prepare a comprehensive, transit oriented development (TOD) master plan for the area. A \$40,000 Technical Assistance Grant recently awarded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation will help pay for a concept design for turning the 2.3 acre area into a sustainable development.

GREEN STREET FINANCING CHARRETTE

For more information, visit: <http://www.capitolheightsmd.com/>

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- P. 3, Capitol Heights Blvd looking south, Michelle Bailey-Hedgepeth, Town Administrator, Town of Capitol Heights, MD
- P. 3, rendering of intersection south of Capitol Heights Metro, Low Impact Development Center, Inc.
- P. 4, Metro core concept rendering, Low Impact Development Center, Inc.