

## Safety Issues on MD State Highway RT. 261 in Holland Point

**Walnut Avenue (the 1.6 mile section of MD 261 that runs through Holland Point) is unsafe for motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, mail and newspaper delivery personnel, and emergency vehicles due to the following:**

**Sub-Standard Width:** Walnut Avenue is narrower than anywhere else along the 12.86 miles of MD 261 and three-five feet narrower than currently required by national and state standards. The road varies between 18 ½ feet and 19 ½ feet wide. Current National and State standards call for roads that are 24 feet wide or, at minimum, 22 feet with adequate shoulders. (See [http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/geometric/pubs/mitigationstrategies/chapter3/3\\_lanewidth.cfm](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/geometric/pubs/mitigationstrategies/chapter3/3_lanewidth.cfm) and <http://www.roads.maryland.gov/Index.aspx?PageId=453>)

While Walnut does not meet width standards, the segments of MD 261 at each end of the Holland Point Community (in North Beach and Rosehaven) meet or exceed minimums. In Rosehaven, MD 261 is 24 feet wide plus a 1-2 foot shoulder on each side. At the North Beach end of the road, it becomes 22 feet wide plus shoulders. MD 261 south beyond Chesapeake Beach is 24 feet plus 1-2 foot shoulders.

In addition, Walnut fails to meet minimum fire safety standards. NFPA 1, Fire Code-Chapter 18.2.3 states: **“Fire Department access roads shall have an unobstructed width of not less than 20 feet (6.1 meters).”** (<http://www.nfpa.org/codes-and-standards/all-codes-and-standards/list-of-codes-and-standards>)

**Insufficient Maintenance:** Walnut Avenue was constructed in 1956, extending from Rosehaven to its present terminus at the Anne Arundel/Calvert County line. It is the only means of access in and out of our community. Since construction, surface maintenance has been performed approximately once a decade until 1997, the last year in which the road had “Minor Rehabilitation” work. Another surface rehabilitation is apparently now scheduled for some time in 2017.

**Increasing Rate of Deterioration:** The edges of Walnut are crumbling in many places due to age, water damage, motor accidents, and the burden of increasing traffic. As this area of Anne Arundel and neighboring Calvert Counties experience increased home development and tourist traffic, there has been an increase both in passenger vehicles on the road and in heavy trucks used in construction. These trucks contribute greatly to the erosion of the roadway edges and, because they are sometimes wider than the lane, are dangerous to motorists, pedestrians, and bikers.

**Drainage Issues:** There are three “outfalls” (large-diameter pipes) in the community of Holland Point, installed by Anne Arundel County to carry storm water run-off from drainage ditches into the Bay to prevent water accumulation and flooding on the roadway. In the past when leaves, tree limbs, and other debris create clogs that restrict proper flow of storm water, the HPCA notified the AA County Southern Road District Supervisor, who

arranged for a crew to clean drainage ditches, flush clogged outfalls, and replace damaged pipes as necessary.

This maintenance is no longer happening. In 2015 when the HPCA notified the County of the need for maintenance, Superintendent Kevin Brown responded to the request by saying AA County has no obligation to maintain any of the outfalls because they are on private property off of MD 261 and therefore part of the State storm water infrastructure. This despite an easement executed in 1996 among the HPCA; County Executive, John Gary; and Chief of the ROW Division of the Department of Public Works, Richard Hall. The purpose of the easement, written by the County, was to give County officials access to property on which the outfalls are located. The State claims this is a County issue.

As the result of this unclear division of responsibility, Holland Point is unable to get the outfalls maintained, and resulting water accumulation further undermines the roadbed. Should the road flood, this situation will pose a significant liability to State and County officials who ignored the problem.

**Heavy Vehicular Traffic:** Vehicular traffic was always heavy in summer. Chesapeake and North Beaches are popular vacation spots, and Herrington Harbor continues to grow in popularity among boaters. Now, however, traffic on Walnut is increasingly heavy throughout the year for several reasons:

1. At our north end, Herrington Harbor is a popular year-round destination resort with boat slips, restaurants, shopping, a beach, a pool, and hotel accommodations. It undergoes regular improvement and expansion projects bringing in heavy construction vehicles along with heavy regular tourist traffic.
2. At our southern end, North Beach is engaged in an extensive effort, including real estate development, infrastructure improvements, and small business incentives, to improve tourism. Currently North Beach is involved with the SHA in a road alteration that includes a boardwalk type structure for pedestrians and bikes. (*Note: FMIS ID No.: CA148A21; Project: MD 261 from 7th St. to Birch Ave.*)
3. The town of Chesapeake Beach is in the midst of raising the MD 261 bridge by four feet over Fishing Creek and increasing the number of lanes to five to accommodate traffic for a \$30 million expansion to the Rod and Reel complex, an expansion that is likely to greatly increase traffic in Holland Point.
4. The Holland Point community is experiencing a small real estate boom with the construction of many new homes and the renovation of older ones.
5. MD 261 is a designated "Roots and Tides Scenic Byway." As such, it is frequently used for events such as the End Hunger Century Ride on April 30 of this year, during which 733 bike riders shared our narrow roadway with vehicles and pedestrians from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Maryland Law states that motorists and bicyclists have equal right to use of public roadways and that a motorist must allow a three-foot buffer when passing a bicyclist. On Walnut this law causes the motorist to enter the oncoming traffic lane.

**Pedestrians Must Also Share the Road:** Throughout the summer months, tourists (including families with small children and even babies in strollers) travel on foot and by bicycle through Holland Point between the Herrington Harbor Marina and the towns of North Beach and Chesapeake Beach. They must do so on curves that prevent both vehicle

drivers and pedestrians/bikers from seeing oncoming traffic. Because the road width cannot accommodate two vehicles simultaneously passing a bicycle or pedestrian, one vehicle must come to a complete stop to avoid striking the bike or pedestrian. This presumes that the conflict does not occur at one of the blind curves in the road that would prevent vehicles from anticipating the hazard. Even when they can see each other, the lack of any shoulder and the presence of three-foot deep drainage ditches at road edge on both sides means there is absolutely no margin of error.

## **What does the community of Holland Point want?**

### **Immediately:**

1. We want State of Maryland traffic engineers to evaluate the roadway to determine the exact nature of long-term changes that can be implemented to bring Walnut up to safe standards.
2. We want Anne Arundel County and State of Maryland officials to settle the dispute over what office is responsible for maintaining the drainage ditches, outfalls, and other aspects of the storm water management system in Holland Point. Then we want long-delayed maintenance to take place, and an MOU put in place assigning responsibility for future maintenance.
3. We want the Scenic Roots and Tides Byway designation re-evaluated for safety by State of Maryland traffic engineers.
4. We want heavy trucks restricted from using Walnut as a throughway until it is deemed safe by State of Maryland traffic engineers.

### **Short Term:**

1. We want Walnut Avenue repaved as soon as possible and new lane markers painted with reflective paint so they are visible at night and in inclement weather.

### **Longer Term:**

1. We want the County and the State to expedite a plan for making changes needed to make the Holland point section of MD 261 safe for everyone who travels on it.