

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
Prince George's County Planning Department

Northern Gateway

Wayfinding & Signage

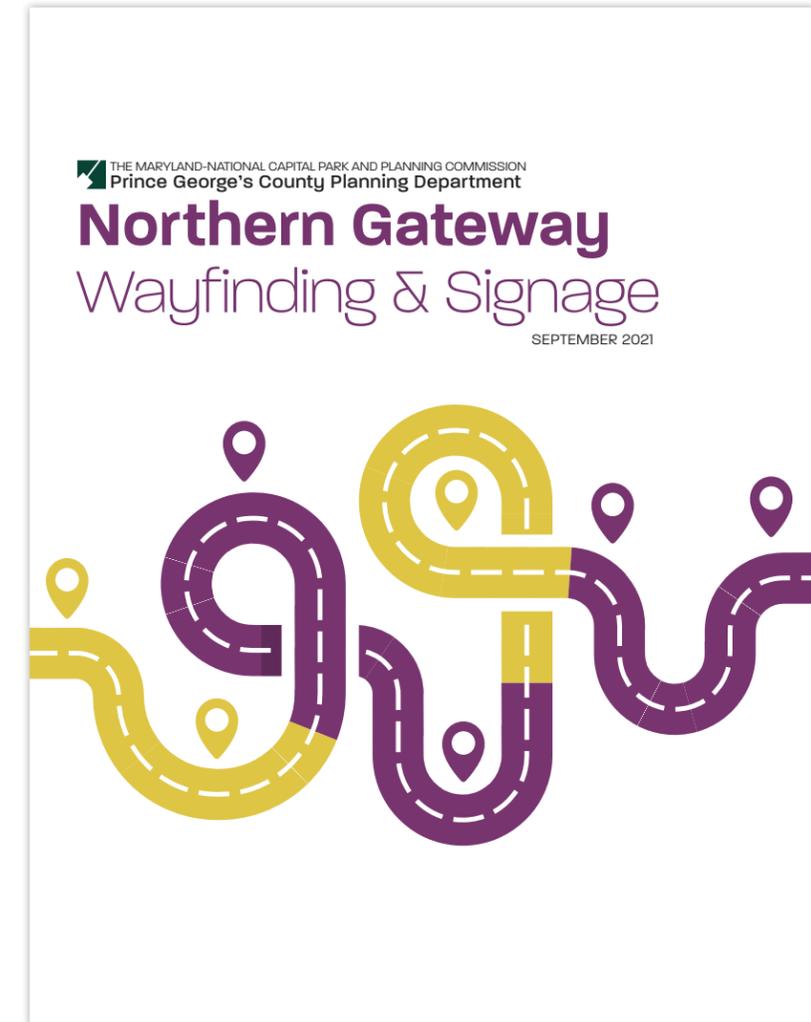
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Abstract

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The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the Northern Gateway Community Development Corporation developed a Wayfinding and Signage Plan to identify opportunities for residents and visitors to navigate the Northern Gateway area. These opportunities include the implementation of a wayfinding program, which comprises a series of signs to direct travelers to destinations throughout the Northern Gateway. Such signage is already in place or in development in several communities across the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, including neighboring Hyattsville and Takoma Park, as well as on the Rhode Island Avenue Trolley Trail.



September 2021

Prepared by VHB and Toole Design Group for
The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Prince George's County Planning Department
14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

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The Commission has three major functions:

- The preparation, adoption, and, from time to time, amendment or extension of the General Plan for the physical development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District.
- The acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of a public park system.
- In Prince George's County only, the operation of the entire county public recreation program.

The Commission operates in each county through a Planning Board appointed by and responsible to the County government. All local plans, recommendations on zoning amendments, administration of subdivision regulations, and general administration of parks are responsibilities of the Planning Boards.

The Prince George's County Planning Department:

- Our mission is to help preserve, protect and manage the County's resources by providing the highest quality planning services and growth management guidance and by facilitating effective intergovernmental and citizen involvement through education and technical assistance.
- Our vision is to be a model planning department of responsive and respected staff who provide superior planning and technical services and work cooperatively with decision makers, citizens, and other agencies to continuously improve development quality and the environment and act as a catalyst for positive change

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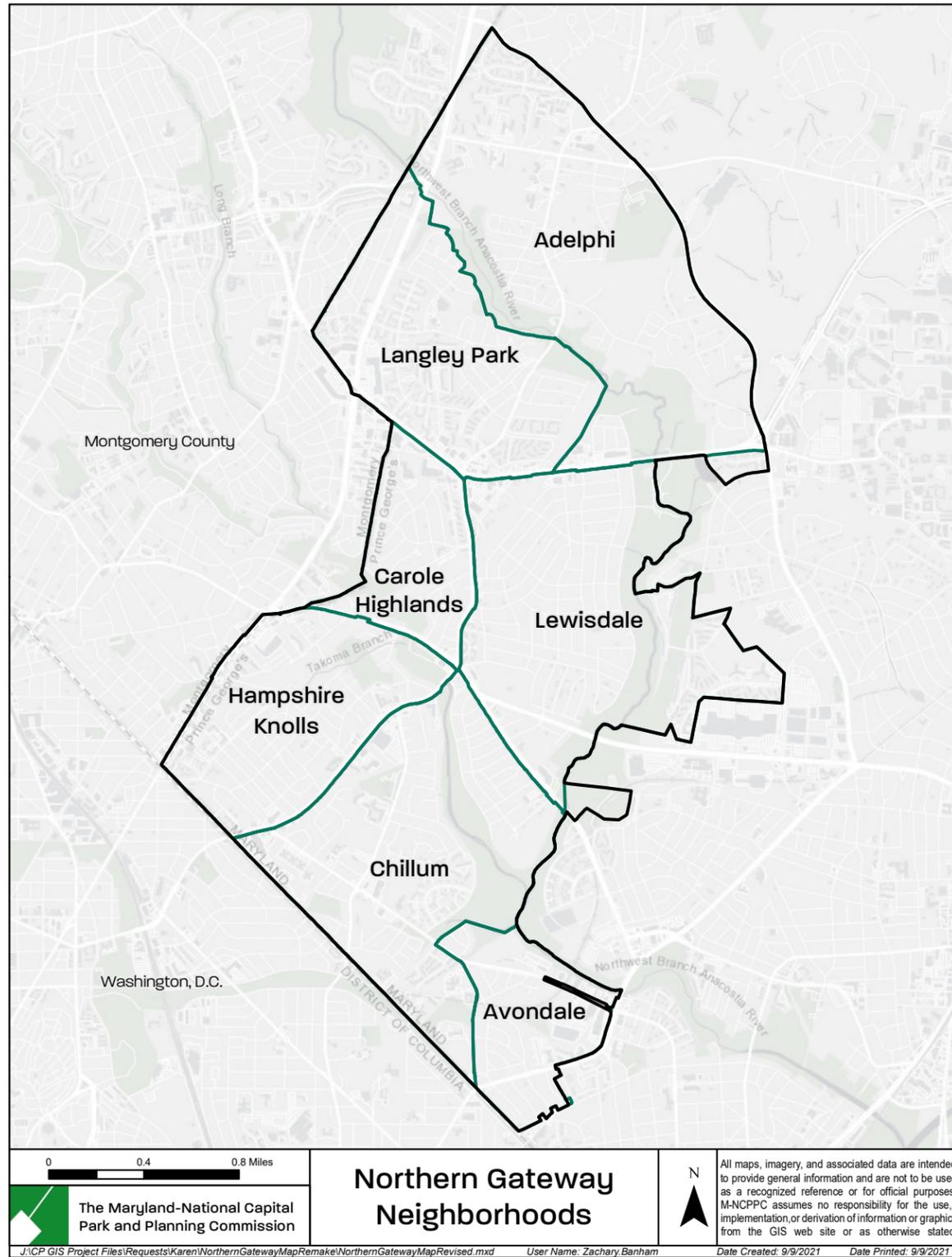
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Community collaboration at the January 30, 2020 community meeting.

Map 1. Map of the Northern Gateway Study Area



Introduction

The Northern Gateway comprises seven unincorporated communities inside the Beltway in Prince George’s County Councilmanic District 2: Adelphi, Avondale, Carole Highlands, Chillum, Hampshire Knolls, Langley Park, and Lewisdale.¹

The Northern Gateway Community Development Corporation (NGCDC) was established to increase the quality of life and spur economic development in these diverse neighborhoods. The Northern Gateway will include three future Purple Line light rail stations and sixteen bus lines. Regional amenities include the University of Maryland, College Park, the Prince George’s Plaza Metro Station at the Mall at Prince George’s, and the trail system maintained by The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC).

Several surrounding incorporated communities, such as Hyattsville within the County and Takoma Park in Montgomery County, already have or are considering wayfinding and signage programs or systems. As an unincorporated area, the Northern Gateway does not have the advantages municipalities do to pursue such programs, which typically provide directional signage for travelers (pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and motorists) to access destinations in the area and bolster community identity. To reach these goals, the NGCDC requested assistance from the Prince George’s Planning Department. The Northern Gateway has a high rate of public transit use and a high percentage of car-free households. Providing wayfinding signage for pedestrians and bicyclists will help orient these users both within the community and to their other destinations.

In 2020-2021, residents and business leaders were engaged to provide their thoughts and recommendations on signage plan elements that would be beneficial and resonate with the local communities. The result of the engagement is this report, which includes a template of signage designs that can be implemented across the Northern Gateway.

The subsequent sections of this report provide documentation of the community meetings, background information on the key elements of wayfinding system design, illustrative concepts of the final recommended designs, and a discussion of potential funding sources and next steps.



Wayfinding Signage in Hyattsville, Maryland

¹ For a description of these communities and how they evolved, see the 2013 Greater Chillum Community Study at <https://www.mncppc.org/498/Greater-Chillum-Community-Study>. Zip codes do not align exactly with the boundaries of the Northern Gateway communities. The United States Postal Service (USPS) assigns the Northern Gateway area to Hyattsville or Adelphi. The USPS recommends avoiding the use of the neighborhood names of Langley Park, Avondale, and Lewisdale.

GOALS OF WAYFINDING FOR THE NORTHERN GATEWAY

- Help connect travelers to the variety of destinations in the area
- Provide consistent names for the constituent neighborhoods
- Keep information on signs simple and easy to understand
- Maintain efficient movement so users get to their destinations
- Provide predictable direction, meaning that users expect to see these signs at key junctions and at destinations
- Disclose information progressively with signage indicating the proximity of destinations at consistent intervals



Directional signage in Alexandria, Virginia

Wayfinding Principles and Benefits

The basic purpose of wayfinding is to provide information that helps guide travelers to their destinations and can augment community identity and spur economic development. Community members reported that they identified more strongly with surrounding incorporated areas, such as Hyattsville, than their own neighborhood in the Northern Gateway. (Other nearby incorporated communities include University Park, College Park, Riverdale Park, Mount Rainier, Takoma Park in Montgomery County, and adjacent neighborhoods in the District of Columbia).

The following are key benefits of a wayfinding program and how they apply in the Northern Gateway:

 **Enhances the value of a transportation network**

Wayfinding signage acknowledges the use of the transportation network by all users, pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders.

 **Helps people identify and navigate desirable routes between destinations**

The Northern Gateway comprises many winding streets that can be confusing for travelers. Wayfinding signage can direct travelers to routes for key destinations.

 **Reinforces the local sense of place and overall area identity**

Wayfinding signage has the potential to add visual identity to an area. For example, the Rhode Island Trolley Trail features a kiosk with a decorative element that reinforces the history of the trail, in this case, the trolley system that once ran along the alignment of the current multiuse path.

 **Bicyclist- and pedestrian-scale wayfinding signs promote active travel**

Signage that delineates paths for pedestrians and bicyclists, such as the existing signs on the Sligo Creek Trail that help provide users a better sense of how to get from one place to another within the

neighborhood. In an area with limited pedestrian facilities, the signage can direct pedestrians to routes with sidewalks.

 **Low Costs and Easy Implementation**

Basic wayfinding signage is straightforward to implement; a metal sign and a mounting post/bracket are the necessary elements for a wayfinding sign. However, signs need to be well-designed and strategically placed so that users are directed on a predictable and logical path through a neighborhood. Wayfinding signage can become complex and costly based on the materials used and the addition of decorative elements. For example, the wayfinding sign (at left) in Alexandria, Virginia with a large and more decorative supporting frame.



Kiosk on Rhode Island Trolley Trail

Design Principles

Standards used by transportation planners and engineers dictate the design of wayfinding signage. Maryland's 2011 edition of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MDMUTCD) provides regulatory standards and guidelines for the design and placement of community guide signs in Prince George's County. For bicycle wayfinding signs, in addition to the MDMUTCD "D Series" guide signs, the MDMUTCD manual allows the development of unique community wayfinding signs and provides guidance for their development and placement. Community-specific identity wayfinding signs should be uniformly applied to ensure an easily identifiable route. The MDMUTCD does not provide guidance or standards for pedestrian guide signs, allowing flexibility in their development and implementation. Community wayfinding signs are not intended to be used to provide direction to primary destinations.

Wayfinding signage can also reflect the needs of the community. Residents expressed a desire to enhance the profile of the seven communities that comprise the Northern Gateway. The Northern Gateway CDC has a branded identity that uses a polychrome palette intended to convey the area's diversity. However, care must be taken to avoid certain colors. The use of colors from this palette must not conflict with the MDMUTCD Standards.

Considering the MDMUTCD standards and community input, the project team developed the recommended wayfinding signage template. The template addresses motorized and non-motorized users of the transportation network.

The MDMUTCD also limits the number of destinations on vehicular wayfinding signs to three. (Travelers operating motorized vehicles at speed must not be presented with too much information.) Recommending what should be listed on wayfinding

COLORS PROHIBITED ON COMMUNITY WAYFINDING SIGNAGE

- Red
- Orange
- Yellow
- Fluorescent Yellow-Green
- Fluorescent Pink
- Purple

TYPES OF DESTINATIONS ON WAYFINDING SIGNAGE

- Neighborhoods or districts
- Schools
- Colleges and universities
- Community centers
- Libraries
- Parks
- Transit stations
- Shopping
- Hospitals

signage in the Northern Gateway required a strategic approach. Figure 1 describes a hierarchy of what would be shown on wayfinding signage with the fundamental principle that users do not need to see a local destination on a sign until they are near it. When users are far away, they are more interested in knowing the direction of a district or neighborhood (Level 1). As they enter the district or neighborhood, Level 2, popular regional landmarks or destinations, begin to appear on signage. Once users are well within a neighborhood, Level 3, local destinations, would appear on signage as these places are most relevant within this smaller geographic area.

Figure 1. Levels of destinations on wayfinding signage

What Destinations Can I Expect to See on a Sign?



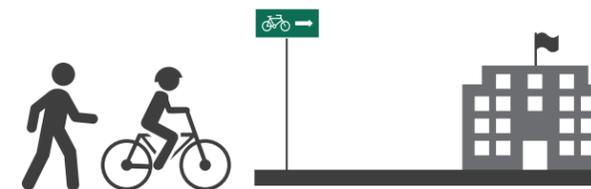
Level 1: Districts and Neighborhoods

Examples: Washington, D.C., Downtown Silver Spring



Level 2: Specific Landmarks and Attractions

Examples: Transit Stations, Regional Parks



Level 3: Local Destinations

Examples: Parks, Schools

Community Engagement

The Prince George’s County Planning Department held two community meetings to gather input on the designs. The first community meeting was held in person on January 30, 2020, at the Langley Park Community Center, where attendees had the opportunity to learn about wayfinding principles and interact with project team members. Real-time Spanish-language translation was available. During the meeting, stakeholders expressed a strong interest in strengthening the identity of the Northern Gateway and its constituent communities. The attendees also indicated that wayfinding signage is poor in the Northern Gateway area and were interested in improvements that would make it easier for pedestrians and bicyclists to navigate the community. Residents also indicated they use mobile and online tools for their navigation needs.

To capture additional community collaboration from those who were not able to attend the meeting, the Planning Department administered a survey in English and in Spanish on the project website during February and March 2020. Respondents expressed similar opinions as those from the in-person meeting in January.

The project team developed initial wayfinding signage concepts based on input from the community meeting and the survey. The team consulted with the Prince George’s County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPW &T) and the Maryland State Highway Administration (MD SHA) to confirm proposed concepts are consistent with County and State policies and meet the MDMUTCD guidelines.

At the second community meeting held in a virtual format on January 30, 2021, the project team presented three alternatives for the wayfinding signage. Each alternative included concepts for pedestrian and bicycle wayfinding signage, kiosks to display information, mile markers, and points-of-interest signage.

The project team incorporated the responses from these community meetings into a final recommended wayfinding signage concept presented in the following section.

KEY FINDINGS FROM COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community respondents placed great importance on the following concepts to guide the development of wayfinding signage for the Northern Gateway:

Neighborhood Identity

- Incorporate the Northern Gateway area name on the signage to build the community brand
- Prominently display the seven area neighborhoods of the area
- Visual Acuity
- Provide easy-to-read signage with color distinction that accommodates a variety of visual abilities

Distance versus Time

- As users have varying physical abilities, distance markers are more useful than travel time on signage

Multilingual Signage

- Support Spanish as a second language on signage

Recognizing History

- Incorporate markers and interpretive signage to recognize and commemorate the history of the area

Illumination

- Provide illumination for signage as needed

Recommended Wayfinding Design Concept

The recommended wayfinding design concept includes a series of signs for pedestrians and bicyclists, kiosks at key locations to orient users, mile marker signs for use on designated routes, and point-of-interest signs that highlight key destinations and cultural amenities. These designs incorporate, where feasible, community recommendations that stressed neighborhood identity, visual acuity, distance metrics for wayfinding guidance, the use of both English and Spanish, recognition of historical points of interest, and illumination as needed. The concepts also conform to Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) and Maryland Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MDMUTCD) requirements.

Among the wayfinding elements is the incorporation of the Northern Gateway logo and the name of the neighborhood in which the sign is located. The logo’s multicolored design, as shown in Figure 2, suggests the diversity of the community and serves

Figure 2. Northern Gateway CDC logo



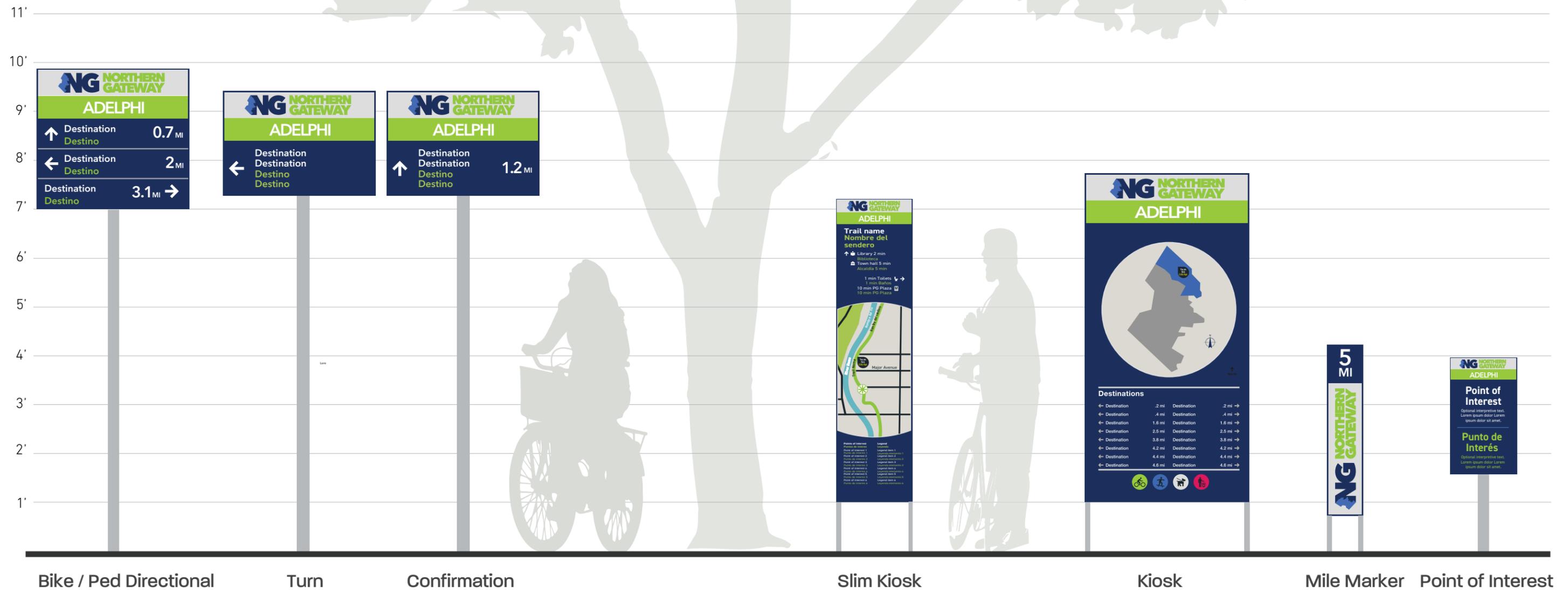
as a unifying foundational element of the wayfinding signage concept.

Figure 3 shows the family of recommended signs, with the pedestrian and bicycle directional wayfinding signs on the left, the kiosks in the middle, and the mile marker and point-of-interest signs on the right. Each sign includes the Northern Gateway logo or uses its color palette, but excludes colors that do not meet MDMUTCD standards. The following section describes the various wayfinding elements in greater detail.

Figure 3. Recommended Design Overview

NORTHERN GATEWAY

WAYFINDING SYSTEM: DRAFT CONCEPT 2



Pedestrian And Bicyclist Directional Signage

The signage for pedestrians and bicyclists (Figure 4) is sized appropriately and designed not to overwhelm users. As with other roadway signs, these would be made of aluminum or stainless steel, secured to a metal post, mounted approximately 10 feet above grade and retroreflective: reflecting light back to its source, helping to make them visible in the dark. The top of the sign features the Northern Gateway logo and the name of one of the seven neighborhoods in which the sign is located, addressing stakeholder wishes to increase awareness of the area and strengthen community identity.

Below the decorative element is the directional element of the pedestrian and bicycle signage. Although the MDMUTCD does not provide guidance or standards for pedestrian signs, the standards limit the number of destinations on such signage to three, and this recommended design reflects this limitation. Large arrows point users in the direction of the destination. The MDMUTCD guide arrow hierarchy places straight-ahead destinations at the top of multi-

destination signs, left-turn destinations are placed below straight-ahead destinations, and right-turn destinations placed below this. Straight-ahead and left-turn arrows are placed to the left of destination text, but right-turn arrows are placed to the right of destination text. English and Spanish names for destinations are provided in different colors. Next to the destination are distances shown in miles. Fractional distances are shown in tenths of a mile.

The pedestrian and bicyclist signage will be strategically placed throughout the Northern Gateway, not on every roadway. These signs will work best on key routes. A key pedestrian or bicycle route is defined as such based on the number of existing or planned facilities and trails. These include off-street trails and designated pedestrian and bicyclist routes listed in the draft 2016 Prince George's County Strategic Trails Plan, and/or from community input that identified routes popular with neighborhood residents.



Figure 4. Closeup of Pedestrian and Bicyclist Wayfinding Signage

Kiosks

Kiosks are designed to provide centrally located resources for information about the immediate area and help users orient themselves. Northern Gateway kiosks are proposed for areas busy with pedestrians and bicyclists, such as the Purple Line Stations, community centers, and key retail clusters. Kiosks are designed so that information can be read at various levels—for example, standing or at wheelchair height. The recommended kiosk design for the Northern Gateway is shown in Figure 5. A slimmer version is designed for tighter spaces. Like that of the directional signage, both include a decorative element at the top. In addition to the neighborhood name on the sign, the name of the location where the kiosk is located, such as a community center or a transit station, would be included to help orient users. The kiosk can be supported by metal posts or a concrete base; the choice will depend on cost and grade conditions.

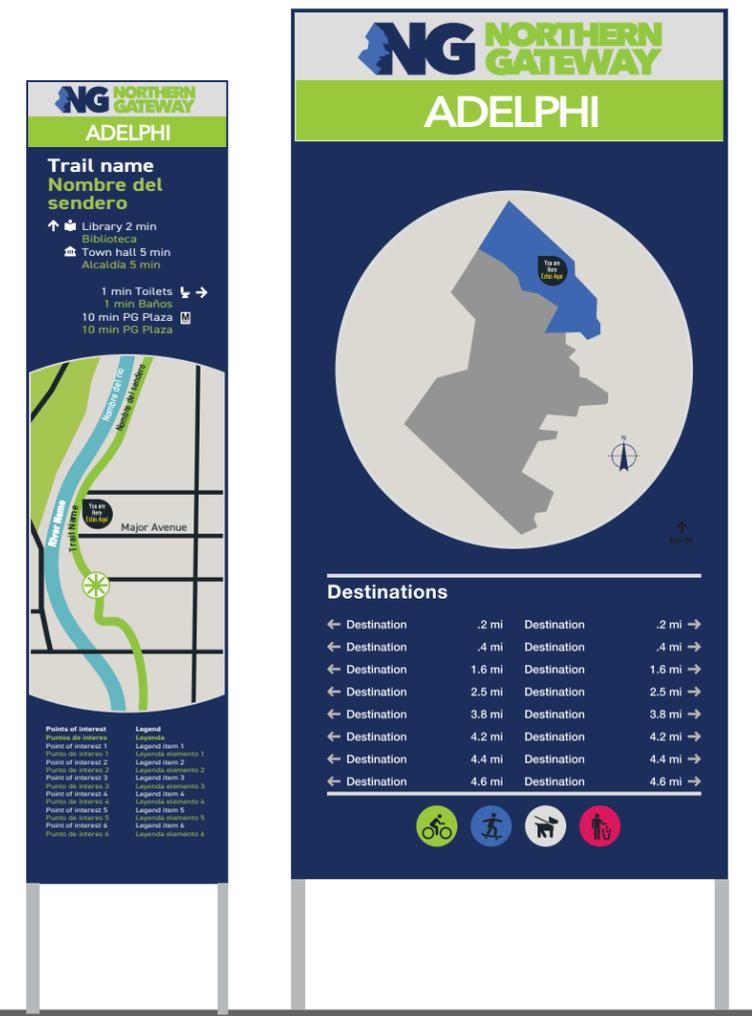
A main component of the kiosk is a map of the immediate area that indicates where the user is located. The map will also use icons to indicate the locations of neighborhood destinations such as schools, parks, churches, and shopping. The use of icons rather than text helps and listing locations and distances in English and Spanish accommodates a range of multilingual users. The map includes concentric circles showing quarter- and half-mile radiuses. The map can also be complemented by interpretive signage to educate users about the immediate area.

Kiosks are located off the roadway and are not intended to be read by a user in motion; retroreflection is not needed. However, community comments indicated there is a need for the kiosks to be easily seen. If there is no light source, such as that provided by a shopping center or transit station, the kiosks can be

fitted with lighting elements above the sign and can be powered by connection solar panels.

Options to enhance the interactivity of the kiosks include installing real-time transit wait time information and touch screens. Touch screens provide the flexibility to include additional languages and can easily accommodate changes in information, while a static information sign could obsolete rapidly. Additionally, an interactive kiosk can incorporate supplemental interpretive information about the neighborhood. Self-powering the kiosks will increase their costs.

Figure 5. Closeup of kiosk, right, and slim kiosk, left



Mile Markers And Point-Of-Interest Signage

Mile markers, shown in Figure 6, indicate where on a specific route the user is located.

Mile marker signage requires a network of routes with designated start and end points for each route. If the Northern Gateway CDC establishes a network of community routes for pedestrians and bicyclists, mile markers will be helpful to orient these users.

Additional opportunities to install mile marker signage would be on park trails including the Northwest Branch Trail and Sligo Creek Trail; however, as these trails are part of a larger trail network maintained by the Prince George's County Department of Parks and Recreation, Northern Gateway distance markers on these trails must not conflict with any established signage and distance markings. The recommended mile marker is a slim profiled metal sign that uses the same color palette as the directional signs and kiosks, incorporates Northern Gateway iconography, and is supported by metal posts. The sign also features the use of larger numbers more easily read by fast-traveling bicyclists.

A point-of-interest sign announces to the user that they have arrived at a community destination. The sign features an easy-to-read point-of-interest name and space to include interpretive information to educate users on the significance of the location.

The neighborhood name and Northern Gateway iconography are included on the signage to help reinforce community identity and the same color palette is used as the other signs in the wayfinding family. Preferably these signs would be mounted at typical pedestrian eye levels for visibility. Kiosks are designed so that information can be read at various heights, by both pedestrians and wheelchair users alike.

Figure 6. Closeup of Mile Marker, left and Point of Interest, right, Signage



Funding

Because the Northern Gateway is an unincorporated area, funding for the installation and maintenance of wayfinding signage will need to be provided by the County. Wayfinding signage on Maryland State Highway Administration roadway rights-of-way will also require state approval. The cost of a wayfinding signage program will depend on its scope and complexity. Complexity will depend on whether signs are installed on existing poles and structures or on new posts or structures; the use of landmark gateway signage; the quantity of kiosks and if they are static or electronic; and the materials used for these signs. For an area the size of the Northern Gateway, it is possible a full wayfinding program could cost between \$250,000 and \$500,000.

Because the County's budget for wayfinding is limited to standard signage, installing specialized signage for the Northern Gateway will require securing additional funds through one or more of the following ways:

- Dedicated funding for this program in the County's budget;
- Northern Gateway CDC use of funds from grants; and/or
- Local businesses and/or residents fundraising efforts.

Potential funding programs for wayfinding signage include:

- Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Sustainable Communities National Capitol Economic Development Funds;
- Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) Maryland Bikeways grants; and
- Prince George's County Revenue Authority Community Impact Grants.

Any wayfinding signage located on private property would require a maintenance easement; the County would be responsible for maintenance. Alternatively, if a private property owner is willing to fund the installation and maintenance of Northern Gateway wayfinding signage, perhaps through a sponsorship program, the signs need to be consistent with the final design adopted.

Wayfinding signage in downtown Bethesda, top right, is an example of a program that uses funds generated



Downtown Bethesda Signage



National Harbor Signage

within the local area. Revenues from parking lots and portions of property taxes from within the Bethesda Urban District are directed to the wayfinding program, marketing, and street maintenance and beautification. The formation of a BID (Business Improvement District) in the Northern Gateway could achieve similar results. (See Appendix for information on BIDs).

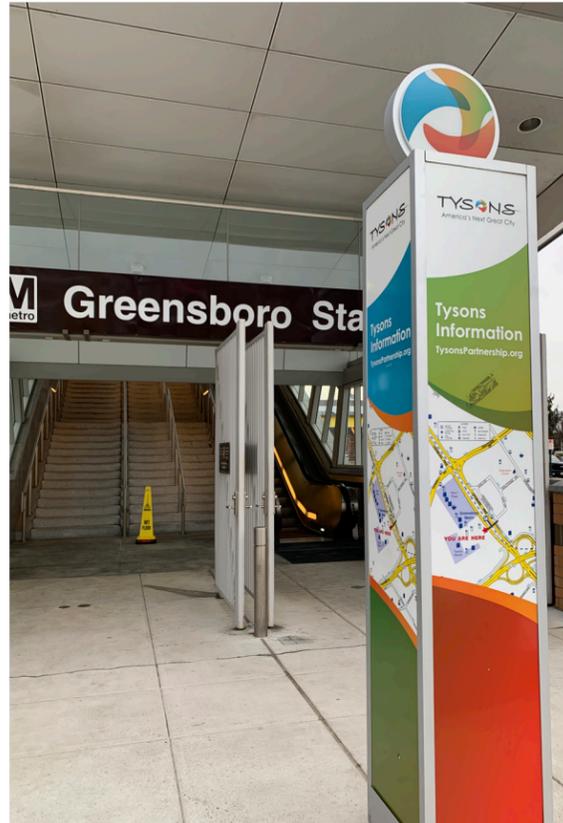
The developer-funded wayfinding signage on private property at National Harbor, above, is attractive, but cannot serve as not a realistic example for wayfinding solutions in the public realm.

Next Steps And Implementation

Given current budget limitations for the County and the Northern Gateway CDC, and the uncertainty of potential federal, state and County grants, an incremental approach to implementation of the wayfinding program is reasonable. A phased approach can prioritize the signs at locations in tiers, starting with the highest vehicular or pedestrian traffic activity areas and ending is the least active locations, or by the importance of the attraction/point of interest. Because of the importance of building an identity for the seven neighborhoods within the Northern Gateway, each neighborhood should receive a wayfinding signage treatment. An initial prioritization of wayfinding signage locations may include the following:

- Purple Line stations
- Key entry points into the Northern Gateway and the seven neighborhoods (see Map 1 on page 8)
- Key retail clusters
- Main travel paths within a half-mile radius of the above destinations.

If initial signage is only located at key points of interest and not on any main travel paths, kiosks that provide information about the surrounding area should be installed first. This includes an overall neighborhood map, like that outside Greensboro Metro Station on the Washington Metro Silver Line in Tysons, Virginia.



Signage at Greensboro Station on the Washington Metro Silver Line

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