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Students' suggestions are part of study that began in October

by Maya T. Prabhu | Staff Writer

Students from the University of Maryland, College Park, presented to residents on May 1 possible upgrades to Kenilworth Avenue, including redeveloping Riverdale Plaza to include a proposed Purple Line stop.

While all of the designs are still concepts, the ideas will provide a starting point for the revitalization of the central part of Kenilworth Avenue, which lies between River and Edmonston roads and mostly within the borders of Riverdale Park.

In a partnership with the Neighborhood Design Center and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, senior landscape architecture students in the community design class recently each took a piece of the central Kenilworth Avenue and designed improvements for those areas.

“Everything you see here is conceptual,” said Jan Townshend, program manager for the Prince George’s County office of the **Neighborhood Design Center**. The Neighborhood Design Center is a nonprofit organization that helps community members improve, revitalize and sustain their neighborhoods by providing pro-bono design and planning services.

“This is just to get you talking about what you would like to see ... and get people excited about possible revitalization,” she said.

“This is just background research,” said Dennis Nola, co-professor of the community design class. “You couldn’t possibly implement all of these ideas.”

Students approached their projects in three different ways: Immediate implementation, environmental restoration or “no-holds barred” possibilities, where students did a complete overhaul of their sections of Kenilworth Avenue.

Senior Lauren Kovach focused on ways to develop around the proposed Purple Line transit station at the intersection of Kenilworth Avenue and East West Highway by bringing the stop into the second level of Riverdale Plaza and having retail and restaurants on both levels of the building. The Purple Line is a proposed mass transit route that will take the form of either bus or light rail and run from Bethesda to New Carrollton.

Jerry Johnson, who attended the presentation and has lived in Riverdale for 36 years, said he was impressed with Jones’ proposed plan.

(cont.)

“The stop on the upper level of a [station] would address transportation, parking and shopping,” he said. “Plus, it wouldn’t congest that intersection by having it up on the hill and away from all of the traffic that’s already at that intersection.”

Dineene O’Connor, a senior planner with M-NCPPC who oversees the Riverdale area, said she was interested in presenting Jones’ idea to the stakeholders, including the Maryland Transit Administration and the owners of Riverdale Plaza, to see what they think about developing the transit stop.

“It’s not directly implementable ... but I’d like to get their input and have an understanding of what those implementations would cost. It could have an effect on what we do with a sector plan,” she said.

The presentations are part of a revitalization study of the road that launched in October. Since then, county planners have held community forums and interviews to prioritize their issues. There is no time frame for redevelopment at this point.

“The highest priority was to redevelop Riverdale Plaza,” O’Connor said of the focus group that looked at economic development.

Nola said the landscape architecture program will compile all the students’ proposals and research and give them to M-NCPPC and Riverdale Park, enabling them to show what the revitalization would look like as they seek funding.

“This just creates a dialogue,” he said. “Maybe the Purple Line will never be built into the second story of a building, but this gives residents the ability to show [developers] their ideas in drawing and text form.”

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