

FOREST CONSERVATION EASEMENT MODIFICATION NARRATIVE

Prepared for:

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Forest Conservation Easement Modification Narrative

A Forest Conservation (FC) Easement Modification is being requested for the Maryland School for the Blind (MSB). In order to create a safer and more secure school grounds for staff, visitors and students with unique needs, the expansion of the MSB main campus entrance, the addition of a security gatehouse and the addition of a pedestrian walkway leading to the right-of-way is being proposed.

Of the campus's five vehicular entrance routes, only the main entrance, located at the northwestern side of campus, is utilized for general traffic into the campus, including the movement of the general student body, staff and visitors. The other campus entryways, discussed below, are not utilized for general campus traffic due to a variety of restrictions for each entrance.

Per Baltimore City Code, Article 7, § 44-8 (Forest Conservation Plan - Modification of a forest conservation easement), an easement modification of 5,000 square feet or greater to an easement of at least 15,000 square feet in size must be mitigated for and approved by the Planning Commission. The entrance expansion encroaches into the existing 5.088-acre FC easement, disturbing 0.14 acres, or 6,170 square feet, of forest easement, thereby requiring mitigation to be implemented elsewhere on campus. See the Existing Forest Conservation Easement Modification section of this document below.

This document provides information focusing on how the easement modification addresses a public safety issue and accomplishes public benefit. Submitted with the FC easement modification request and in addition to this narrative is an Intermediate Forest Stand Delineation (FSD) Plan update for the Campus's main entrance development, a full FSD Plan for the proposed area of mitigation, and a previously approved and modified FC Plan for the proposed easement amendment.

Campus Entry Security

MSB is a multi-level school which is dedicated to teaching and training school-aged children with unique needs. The MSB campus is located at 3501 Taylor Ave, Nottingham, MD 21236 with a main entrance off Taylor Ave. For the past several years, MSB has been redeveloping portions of its campus to provide updated and new facilities, including educational buildings, living spaces and athletic facilities, all of which are ADA compliant and welcoming to individuals of all abilities. These improvements are located throughout campus. The most recent campus improvements are located within the western half of the campus.

The main entrance redevelopment, discussed in this narrative, includes plans for providing a more secure entrance which in turn leads to a more secure campus overall. The entrance redevelopment includes widening the drive to a three-lane entry / exit road, a new pedestrian walkway along the exit drive and a new manned guardhouse. A new vehicular entrance gate will also be installed to allow for the campus to be gated during off-school hours and times of high alert.

The entrance widening aims to enhance security measures while streamlining the process of quick background checks for all visitors. The main gate and guardhouse serve as the first line

of security for all visitors to MSB's campus, designed to streamline access while ensuring a safe and secure on-campus experience. The bolstered entrance security also acts as a visible deterrent against unauthorized, potentially harmful individuals. In this way, the security upgrades at the main entrance serve both practical and symbolic roles, fortifying the campus while simultaneously elevating MSB's public image as an institution deeply committed to safety. To further improve the efficiency of the entry process, there will be separate lanes for staff and visitors, as well as a dedicated turnaround lane for unapproved visitors, facilitating their easy redirection to Taylor Avenue.

Of the five individual campus entrances, shown below in Image 1, the existing main entrance is the only existing campus entry way which can be enhanced in order to prove a secure campus entryway. This is due to several reasons, including the entrance tying into a main roadway, Taylor Avenue, an amicable slope of the main entrance drive allowing for large vehicles, such as buses and trucks, to easily travel, and containing enough space for the construction of a three-lane drive with a guardhouse and a dedicated vehicular turnaround. This entrance also allows for vehicular queuing to occur within the associated drive, therefore not blocking traffic within Taylor Ave. The other four entryways, as shown in Image 1 below, contain one or more disadvantages, making it difficult to use as a secure campus entrance.

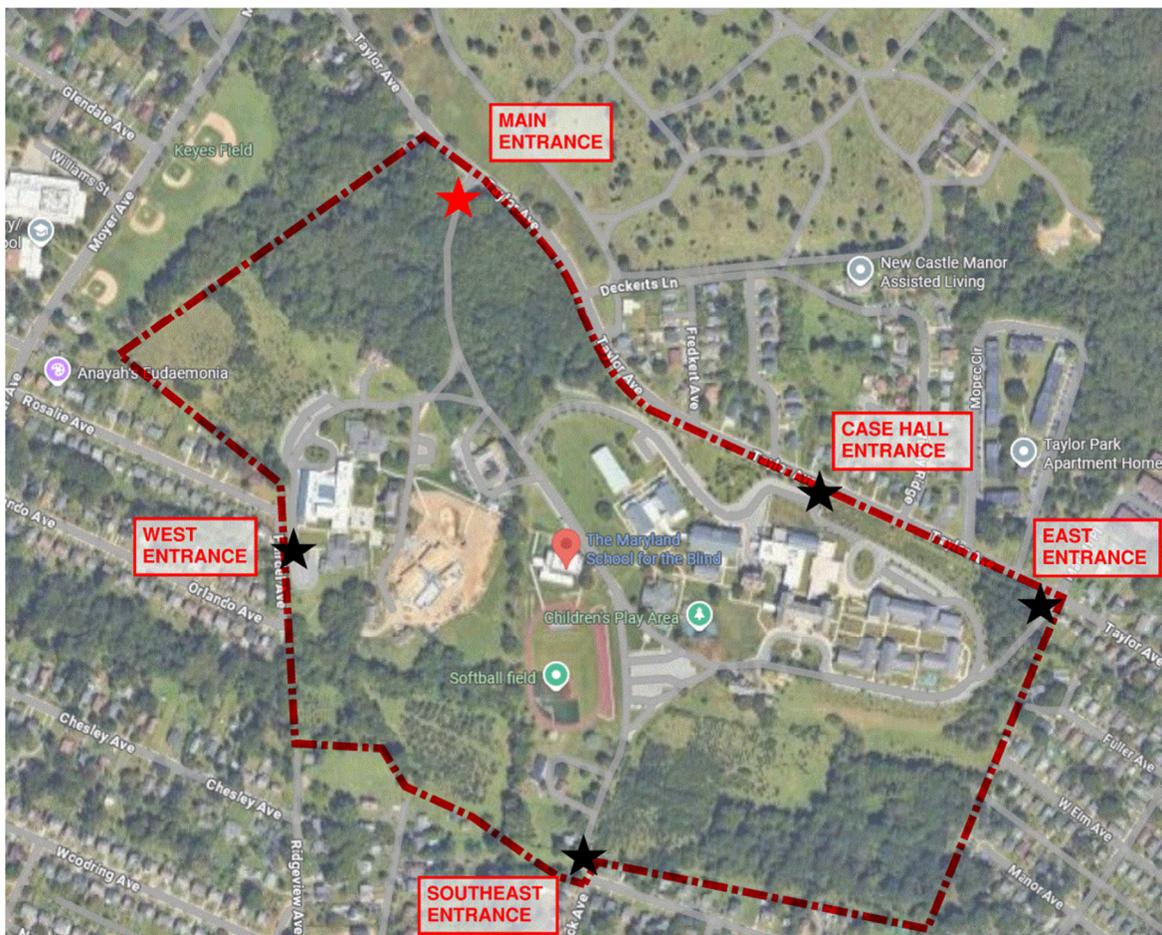


Image 1: Entrance Map

The Case Hall campus entrance is primarily used as an exit to allow for student buses to egress directly onto Taylor Ave. This campus entrance does not include enough on-site development space to allow for a proposed three-lane drive with a turnabout and a guardhouse to be installed. This entrance also provides no on-campus vehicle queuing space, therefore causing vehicles to wait to gain entry to campus directly in the adjoining roadway and potentially blocking Taylor Ave traffic. It is for the above stated reasons that the proposed secured entrance was not proposed at the Case Hall campus entrance.

The east campus entrance is located at the eastern-most corner of the campus. This entry drive is steeply sloped, which is difficult for buses and large trucks to travel, and is located immediately adjacent to a residential lot. There is also no very little queueing area which may lead to blocking traffic on Taylor Ave during periods of high incoming traffic. It is for the above stated reasons that the proposed secured entrance was not proposed at the east campus entrance.

The southeast and the west campus entrances tie into Walnut Ave. and Fairdel Ave., respectively. Both of these entrances are short and narrow in size and are surrounded by residential development. These entrances do not include enough on-site development area for a proposed three-lane drive with a turnabout and a guardhouse to be installed. These entrances also provide no on-campus vehicle queuing space, therefore potentially causing vehicles to wait in line in the neighboring residential neighborhood. Utilizing either of these entrances would also increase traffic in the surrounding communities, therefore causing discontent in the adjoining neighborhoods. It is for the above stated reasons that the proposed secured entrance was not proposed at the southeast or west campus entrances.

Vulnerable Population

The safety and security of the MSB campus goes beyond guests associated with school events. One of the primary vulnerabilities of the existing security infrastructure is the inability to effectively stop potential intruders at the main entrance before they can inflict harm on the students or staff.

MSB is a learning environment for students with unique needs, including those who are blind, have low vision, or have multiple disabilities such as cognitive, behavioral, or autism. The main entrance of the campus requires careful consideration, not just as a point of entry for staff, parents, and visitors but also as the first line of defense in protecting MSB and its vulnerable population.

Without an effective way to rapidly assess and manage individuals entering the campus premises, MSB lacks a vital layer of security that is essential for the well-being of the students, staff, and visitors. A gap in security measures makes MSB susceptible to risks that could potentially escalate into dire situations, such as an active shooter situation. In the unfortunate, but necessary context of preparing for such emergencies, conventional wisdom advises a "Run, Hide, Fight" strategy. While effective for many, this approach poses specific challenges for the student body at MSB, most of whom have physical and/or intellectual disabilities. Given these unique challenges, bolstering the security infrastructure on the campus becomes not just a priority but a necessity. The entrance upgrade mitigates these risks before they can escalate to life-threatening situations.

By enhancing the campus security measures, MSB aims to create an environment where the students, staff, parents, and visitors can feel safer and more secure at all times, thereby allowing the focus to remain where it should be: on educational and personal development.

MSB's Need for Enhanced Campus Security

The main goal of the Campus's main entrance renovation is to improve the overall campus security and the safety of the students, especially considering that many students live on the premises. MSB is currently in the process of integrating their pool and gymnasium into a single facility that will provide the students with an athletic training facility as well as host various events and sports competitions such as wrestling tournaments, theatrical presentations and choral & band performances. These events are anticipated to have many visitors to the MSB campus, drawing a mixed crowd that can include families, friends, and community supporters, not just from local areas, but also from other states. The renovated main entrance would facilitate rapid background checks for visiting staff, students, visitors and other personnel during tournaments and performances, when more visitors are expected and when traffic is significantly higher.

With the introduction of the new athletics facility building and future on-campus developments, and the expected increase in visitors, the redesigned entrance becomes even more crucial, as MSB anticipates more public traffic coming onto the campus. This main entrance expansion project aims to create a system where the public can be efficiently vetted before entering the campus to provide a safer and more secure school grounds.

Existing Forest Conservation Easement Modification

In 2012 / 2013, MSB completed a full campus FSD and implemented the required FC easements onsite in order to provide the appropriate mitigation for future development within the MSB campus. See the attached existing Forest Conservation Easement Plat (FCE EASEMENT PLAT_sealed.pdf). In total, three individual forest conservation easements were created within the campus boundaries, including a 5.088 ac. easement (Easement B), a 7.352 ac. easement (Easement C) and a 7.393 ac. easement (Easement E), totaling 19.833 acres. Easement B and C are located on either side of the current main entrance drive, with Easement B located on the east side of the drive, and Easement C located on the west side of the drive. Easement E is located in the southernmost corner of the campus.

Within the area of proposed disturbance, the average distance between Easement B and Easement C is approximately 45'. There is an approximately 10' offset between the existing edge of pavement and each easement boundary. In order to expand and improve upon the entrance, either one or both easements must be encroached upon. In order to reduce the amount of environmental disturbance of the existing land, it has been decided to keep the disturbance located solely to the east of the drive therefore encroaching into Easement B, which contains less environmentally sensitive areas within the proposed LOD.

To update and expand the main campus entrance and add a manned guardhouse, encroachment into Easement B by approximately 27' is required. The existing forest within Easement B is a mature forest, with the canopy trees averaging approximately 16-30 inches diameter breast height (DBH). The species are comprised of sweetgum, red maple, tulip poplar, and oaks (white, red, & chestnut) in varying composition. The overall canopy closure of the stand is approximately 80 percent and the overall shrub layer is sparse, with only 40 percent closure due to both low light and heavy deer browsing. Some evidence of past farm roads is

present, however there does not appear to be continued management of the forest. Three specimen trees (ST-16, ST-17 and ST-21 – see attached FSD) will be removed during construction. On-campus, mitigation for the removal of these specimen trees will be provided on an inch-per-inch basis. Wetlands have also been located throughout Easement B. *A Joint Federal/State Permit for the Alteration of any Floodplain, Waterway, Tidal or Nontidal Wetland in Maryland* is being procured through MDE for any wetland disturbance associated with the main campus entrance disturbance.

A perennial and ephemeral stream exist within the forest conservation easements on either side of the existing entrance drive. Easement B contains a perennial stream, known as Moore's Run, which is situated over 200' to the east of the entrance drive. Because of the distance between the Moore's Run and the entrance drive, no disturbance will affect the stream or stream buffer during construction. Easement C contains an ephemeral stream. This waterway is situated approximately 18' to the west of the main entrance drive and therefore is more likely to be disrupted should any disturbance expand past the existing pavement and into Easement C. It is for these reasons that the redevelopment of the entrance drive expands only to the east of the drive and into Easement B.

The main campus entrance expansion will require removing 6,170 sf, or 0.14 acres of forest from Easement B. The proposed mitigation and new FC easement will be provided in an existing forested area within the western portion of the MSB campus. The forest to be used for the proposed mitigation was planted in 2015 and contains a mix of northern red oak, slippery elm, eastern redbud, and white mulberry. Because the forest within the existing easement to be removed is a different age, structure and quality than the forest to be used for the easement mitigation, a mitigation rate of 2:1 will be utilized, therefore requiring a minimum mitigation of 0.28 acres.

A Forest Stand Delineation of 0.64 acres of the healthiest and most well-established forest planted in 2015 was performed in April of 2025. MSB has chosen to provide an easement for the full 0.64 acres and will move forward with a FCE Easement Plat amendment once a tentative approval of the proposed mitigation is received. As only 0.28 acres of forest conservation mitigation is required for proposed disturbance, the additional 0.36 acres of the proposed easement will be banked for future use by MSB. All future disturbance of any forest conservation easements shall require approval by Baltimore City Office of Sustainability.

Please see the attached Forest Stand Delineation and Forest Conservation Easement Addendum for the proposed mitigation easement establishment.

Conclusion

In summary, the enhanced entrance security measures are aimed at fostering a safer, more efficient, and inclusive environment at The Maryland School for the Blind (MSB). The enhancements in entrance security are an urgent and integral need, given the unique vulnerabilities of the student population and the increase in campus traffic due to expanded athletic and cultural events held on the campus.