



Client

None. An independent study of an actual place.

Dates

2012-2017

Program

Neighborhood character
Town centers
Street design

Relevance

New Urbanism
Transportation planning

Services

Urban Design
Project Graphics

Team

URBAN STREET DESIGN
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Project Background

In the late 1890s, Roland Park's founders envisaged a place that offered a respite from the noise, hustle and grit of downtown Baltimore. This new, Olmsted Bros.-designed neighborhood would offer fresh air, and a garden-like environment in which "cottages" are arranged on beautiful streets. Roland Park became admired as one of the earliest streetcar suburbs to embrace the landscape, and today is admired for its community dedication to preserving these characteristics.

Roland Avenue, the "spine" of Roland Park, was designed first to be beautiful and impressive; to show off wonderful homes in a verdant, calm setting. Prominent buildings such as schools, library, places of worship, and shops are located on Roland Avenue at street trolley stops, and are accessed comfortably via wide sidewalks.

One characteristic not foreseen by Roland Park's founders was the automobile and its impact on towns and cities. In 1890 the automobile was a novelty. They shared streets with horses and with people walking and riding bikes. Roland Avenue contained a slow-moving street trolley that stopped every ¼-mile. Users of Roland Avenue moved at a pace that was safe for everyone because the need to travel at a speed greater than that of a street trolley was not needed. Advances in engineering and the need for expansion after World War Two introduced the ability to travel great distances. In coming decades the creation of the highway engineering profession, that believed in efficiency of speed and movement, would remove the street trolley and transform Roland Park's streets into high-speed automobile corridors. The speed and noise of city traffic now occurred in Roland Park.

Advances in automobile technology permitted an expanding and busy middle class lifestyle to move about quickly from greater distances. Roland Avenue's purpose today as a Minor Arterial is to move cut-through traffic quickly and efficiently, a purpose that Roland Park's founders would surely disapprove. Its existence as a beautiful street adding safety and value to the neighborhood is lost on the City's department of transportation.

Roland Avenue

Baltimore, Maryland

Project Description

The intent of this study is to synthesize transportation and urban design. Work shown on these pages is from the urban design aspect of creating places for people within a transportation plan.

In 2010, a community-wide gathering set out to document characteristics of Roland Park and concerns of residents. Traffic speed was first on the list of priorities. Roland Avenue was known to be a dangerous street due to its speed and 15,000 daily vehicles. Obviously, residents wanted this to change when they asked for traffic calming. The resulting Traffic Calming and Resurfacing Project, administered by the Baltimore City of Transportation, did little public outreach, showing highly-polished renderings of a beautiful avenue. That the street would continue being a speedway was unknown to all but the DOT. Says Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company, "Most people don't think about the built environment; they're just victims of it, and they take it the way it comes."

Construction completed in 2016.

Roland Avenue looks better in 2016 despite street signage and markings prioritizing motorists. The potholes, ruts, and patchy surface are now smooth with new asphalt. Lanes are clearly striped, many street lamps have been replaced with a type appropriate to the neighborhood, and sidewalks repaired. Despite requests from the community Roland Avenue continues to unfortunately function as a high speed street, counter to what City officials said their plan's traffic calming measures would do. In fact, the frequency and severity of automobile crashes have increased since resurfacing. City DOT and the community did not seek -- nor were they interested in -- a design approach that prioritized non-motorists and neighborhood context, despite lip service paid to preservation of characteristics, values, etc.



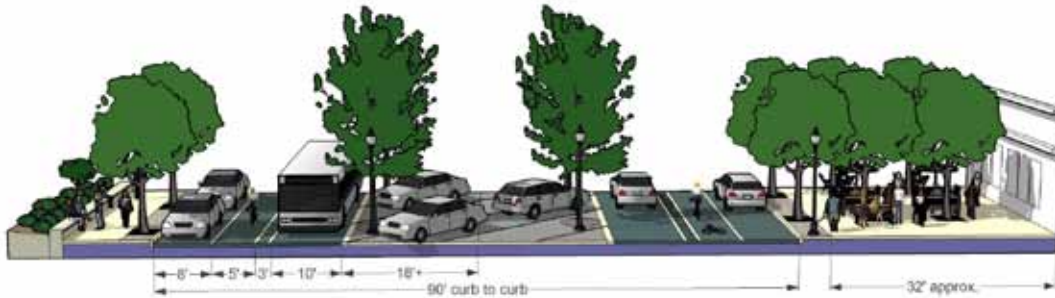
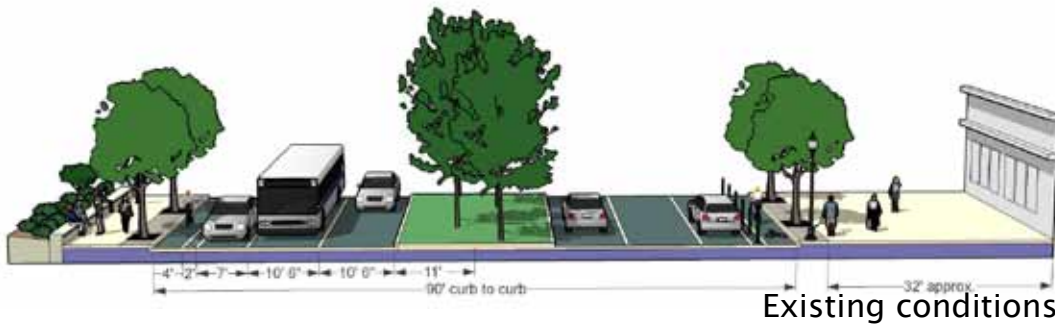
Figure ground diagram of Roland Park.

Roland Avenue

Baltimore, Maryland

Study Rationale

Roland Park was designed to be a respite from urban life. The convenience of the automobile has taken a toll on walkable neighborhoods—it has been given priority over other modes which result in places made for cars. Roland Park has not escaped the effects automobiles have on places. Residents seek safer parking on side streets; Roland Avenue home owners realize lower property values than owners of similar homes located on nearby side streets with calm traffic; Roland Avenue children walk or bike to school on adjacent lanes; and the prettiest street in the neighborhood is perceived as unsafe, noisy and dirty.



Recognizing that the heart of Roland Park is dominated by automobiles, and can be transformed into an inviting place for people not driving.

This study examined design strategies that walkable places can employ to slow traffic speed and to strengthen their unique characteristics, such as the heart of the community, and enhance the experience for people not driving. This study demonstrates that more thorough design efforts made early in the process ignites valuable discussion, and can reveal placemaking opportunities that departments of transportation are not fluent in, but can consider and evaluate.

The design of streets is incredibly complex. They are not simply built, taking much input and time to engineer. Striving to create streets that are places, rather than just traffic sewers, presents greater challenges. The art of designing streets is not lost, and in cases of beautiful streets, the art is best not ignored.

