

Accessibility Assessment

Pedestrian Refuge at Baron Cameron Avenue and Village Road

Prepared by Reston Accessibility Committee (RAC)
of Reston Citizens Association
February 22, 2022

I. Introduction

Reston is blessed with valuable community facilities and programs reflecting the seven goals initially envisioned by founder Robert E. Simon (the “Res” in Reston). For its Accessibility Assessments, RAC focuses on goal 3: “That the importance and dignity of each individual be the focal point for all planning, and take precedence for large-scale concepts.”

To that end, this assessment was prepared to share with Fairfax County its observations regarding the recently redesigned pedestrian refuge at the intersection of Baron Cameron Avenue and Village Road and its suggestions for improvements that would make the site more accessible to all.

II. Overview

The pedestrian refuge is located at the southeastern corner of the intersection of Baron Cameron Avenue (Virginia Route 606) and Village Road, near the Lake Anne Village Center. The refuge separates the straight and left-turn lanes of Village Road from the dedicated right-turn lane. This refuge has existed for many years.

There are currently two pedestrian crosswalks connecting to the refuge: one 10-foot-wide crosswalk across the right-turn lane on Village Road connecting the refuge to the sidewalk on the east side of Village Road, and another 10-foot-wide crosswalk across Baron Cameron Avenue connecting the refuge to an asphalt path that connects to Browns Chapel Park and the Lake Newport tennis courts.

Prior to the reconstruction of the refuge, there was a sidewalk through the middle of the refuge that directly connected the two crosswalks (see Figure 1). The sidewalk had a ramp with detectable warnings at both ends.



Figure 1. Prior layout of the pedestrian refuge. (*Photo credit: Google Maps*)

During January 2022, the refuge was reconfigured to accommodate a crossing of the straight and left-turn lanes of Village Road from the new location of the Lake Anne Fellowship House (LAFH), currently under construction. To accomplish this, the existing sidewalk on the refuge was demolished. The existing ramps were rebuilt, albeit more narrowly than before, and a new ramp was added on the west side of the refuge. Each of the ramps is five feet wide, with curbs on either edge. The three ramps are connected by a circuitous five-foot-wide sidewalk, with curbs on either side. (See Figure 2.) There is currently no crosswalk across the straight and left-turn lanes of Village Road, but one is clearly planned; a five-foot-wide cut has been added to the lane divider, allowing a straight shot to the newly-constructed ramp on the west side of Village Road, which will connect to the new LAFH site. (See Figure 3.)



Figure 2. Redesigned sidewalk along pedestrian refuge.



Figure 3. Planned location of crosswalk from LAFH across Village Road to the pedestrian refuge.

According to a VDOT spokesperson, the existing sidewalk and ramp on the refuge “was non-compliant with ADA requirements and would no longer address pedestrian connectivity between the [LAFH] project site, Village Road and Baron Cameron Avenue.”¹

III. RAC Observations

RAC members visited the site to assess the design from an accessibility and safety perspective, and identified a number of concerns in those areas, as described below.

1. The ramps that connect to the crosswalks at Baron Cameron and the Village Drive right-turn lane are both considerably narrower than the crosswalks that feed into them. (See Figure 4.)



Figure 4. Crosswalk across the right-turn lane at Village Road.

2. The curbs on either side of the five-foot-wide ramp (as opposed to the typical graceful slope shown on the sidewalk in Figure 4) provide no margin for error for a person using a mobility device.

¹ Reston Now, “Design of circuitous crosswalk in Reston raises eyebrows,” January 27, 2022.

<https://www.restonnow.com/2022/01/27/design-of-circuitous-crosswalk-in-reston-raises-eyebrows/>

3. The ramp connecting to the Baron Cameron crosswalk is poorly aligned; there are 10 inches between the edge of the crosswalk and the curb next to the ramp (see Figure 5). There is just over 4 feet of overlap in alignment between the ramp and the crosswalk. Part of the apparent reason for this alignment is that the sidewalk ends abruptly to avoid a telephone manhole cover (see Figure 6), even though the previous sidewalk enveloped the manhole.



Figure 5. Misalignment between Baron Cameron crosswalk and ramp.



Figure 6. Manhole cover next to end of sidewalk.

4. The layout of the sidewalk poses a serious challenge for a person using a mobility device or other wheeled vehicle (including bicycles and strollers). A person attempting to cross Baron Cameron from the east side of Village Road would need to make a 90-degree left turn immediately after reaching the refuge (see Figure 7), then wheel around to the right (including a sharp right turn after the ramp to the LAFH crosswalk; see Figure 8), and then make a 90-degree left turn at the crosswalk for Baron Cameron (see Figure 9). The sidewalk remains 5 feet wide throughout (with a slight widening to 5.5 feet after the LAFH ramp) with curbs on either side, again leaving no margin for error and creating a significant risk of collision with the curb.



Figure 7. 90-degree turn from Village Road right-turn lane.



Figure 8. Sharp turn toward Baron Cameron crosswalk.



Figure 9. 90-degree turn at Baron Cameron crosswalk.

5. The planned location of the crosswalk connecting the refuge across Village Road to LAFH begins 11.5 feet behind the stop line for the traffic signal. This creates a risk of collision between pedestrians and cars pulling up to the signal; in addition, almost any

car pulling up to the stop line will block the crosswalk. (We observed this happening repeatedly during our visits to the site [see Figure 10], although in fairness, the crosswalk is not yet striped.)



Figure 10. Stopped car blocking the future Village Road crosswalk.

6. The lane divider in the middle of Village Road is wide enough for a person on foot to stand safely, but not wide enough for someone in a wheelchair, on a bike, or pushing a stroller.
7. The middle of the refuge is occupied by the aforementioned telephone manhole cover, the existing crosswalk signal for the Baron Cameron, an electrical cabinet, and what appears to be the wiring for a new crosswalk signal for the future Village Road crosswalk. Given the layout difficulties at the site, it is curious that the two crosswalk signals are not planned to share the same pole.
8. The push button for the Baron Cameron crosswalk faces away from the sidewalk (as can be seen in Figure 2). A person in a wheelchair who wishes to press the button would either need to reach around the pole as they approach the end of the sidewalk, or reach

behind their back while at the ramp facing the crosswalk. Needless to say, this is neither convenient nor safe.

9. The awkward and inconvenient design of the sidewalk and ramps encourages people not to use the refuge as designed. Bicyclists are inclined to go around the refuge, putting them in the path of oncoming traffic on Village Road. People crossing on foot are inclined to cut across the middle of the refuge, creating a potential tripping hazard with the curbs. We observed both behaviors during our visits to the site. (We also observed several pedestrians using the sidewalk as designed; we saw no bicyclists doing so.)

IV. Suggested Remedies

As presently designed, the pedestrian refuge is poor design at best and a potential safety hazard at worst. While it may technically comply with ADA requirements, it is not truly designed with accessibility in mind, either for people with or without disabilities.

RAC has the following suggestions for improving this situation:

1. Remove the right-turn slip lane on Village Road and require drivers to make a 90-degree turn onto Baron Cameron. Demolish the refuge and extend the sidewalk along Village Road to allow direct crosswalks across Baron Cameron and Village Road (in front of the stop line) with properly designed curb ramps.
2. If it is not feasible to remove the slip lane, extend the pedestrian refuge toward Baron Cameron (within the approximately 15 feet of asphalt between the current edge of the refuge and the travel lanes), thus allowing the construction of a crosswalk in front of the stop line at Village Road and better designed sidewalks with proper curb ramps.
3. If the first two suggestions are not feasible, remove the crosswalk between LAFH and the refuge, and add a second crosswalk across Baron Cameron on the western side of the intersection. (This would also require a landing on the opposite side of Baron Cameron and a crosswalk at Browns Chapel Road.) LAFH residents wishing to access Lake Anne Village Center should be directed to the crosswalks at the intersection of Village Road and North Shore Drive.
4. Widen the ramps, ideally providing sloped edges in lieu of the curbs, and provide additional turning space at either end of the sidewalk.
5. Align the Baron Cameron crosswalk with the ramp, either by restriping the crosswalk or (ideally) moving/widening the ramp.
6. Place the two crosswalk signals on a single pole if feasible.
7. Reorient the push button for the existing crosswalk signal so that it faces the sidewalk.