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## Introduction

**A**S I WAS WORKING ON THIS BOOK, I took a break to make a presentation at a pedestrian safety meeting held at a branch of the Montgomery County Public Library in Germantown, Maryland, just north of Washington, DC. Two girls, children of one of the organizers, were eagerly passing around “pedestrian” gingerbread cookies, as about fifty people gathered on the cold winter afternoon. But despite the refreshments, attendees found little to celebrate. The meeting had been called soon after two residents, one a high school student, had been killed while walking in what is known as the “upcounty,” the northern section of Montgomery County where decades of agriculture are giving way to spread-out, automobile-oriented development.

Much of the afternoon was spent discussing design solutions for an unmarked crosswalk on Stringtown Road, a new four-lane road designed to funnel interstate traffic to the new development in Clarksburg. A father begged for a marked crosswalk to help his children and other kids living in new homes reach Clarksburg Elementary School, which backed up to the new road. He brought photographs of women and children crossing at a T-intersection, marked only by curb cuts and a narrow median the county had installed when the road was built. County officials said a signal and a crosswalk must wait years, until completion of the cross street brings more traffic. They fear that simply painting a crosswalk will give the kids a false sense of security. One county official said she had good news for attendees: in the future, the County will stop installing curb cuts that raise expectations prematurely.

As attendees debated potential solutions, I couldn't help thinking that the issue was one of priorities. The school has been in this location since 1909. Planners should have been aware that children would move into the new homes built within sight of the school. If their safety had been given priority in the planning phase, the County could have left the traffic heading to Interstate 270 on its original route, on Clarksburg Road on













