

Pedestrian Safety Improvement Requests around Schools in Penn Valley, PA

Position paper prepared by the Penn Valley Civic Association and the Pedestrian Safety Improvement Committee

January 26, 2016

Summary

School-age children in Penn Valley currently walk to and from Penn Valley Elementary and Welsh Valley Middle Schools both within and beyond the designated walk-zones. Our community would like to support their efforts to walk safely especially along Hagys Ford Road from Welsh Valley Middle School to Old Gulph Road (the Hagys Ford Road corridor). To this end, we are requesting painted crosswalks to meet up with the existing footpath along this corridor. We also request consideration of other traffic calming measures, further detailed below.

Background

For over five years the Penn Valley Civic Association and individual community members have been campaigning for improved traffic/pedestrian safety measures in our neighborhood. Residents have expressed significant concern over the safety of pedestrians in the Hagys Ford Road corridor and have communicated their concerns to school officials, the Lower Merion Police Department (LMPD), and Township Commissioners.

Penn Valley as a community is in a state of transition with many older homeowners selling their homes to families with young, school-aged children. In addition, school populations are increasing dramatically. At Penn Valley Elementary, the student population has increased 40% in the last five years and has nearly doubled in the last ten years. Welsh Valley has grown 25% in the last five years, and a 12-classroom addition was recently completed. Increased school population is significantly increasing the traffic congestion in and around both schools and is having a negative impact on the ability of residents to safely walk and drive on this roadway.

Meanwhile, commuters are currently using Hagys Ford Road as a high-speed pass through between Conshohocken State Road and Montgomery Avenue. Residents have observed rampant speeding, rolling through stop-signs, ignoring school zone speed limits, and aggressive driving. Neighbors witness frequent documented and undocumented car accidents at the intersection of Hagys Ford Road and Righters Mill, a major intersection for entry and exit to Penn Valley Elementary.

Families in the designated walk-zone do not feel comfortable allowing their children to walk to school independently. Even with parental supervision, there are frequent incidents. Recently, the pedestrian placard in the middle of the crosswalk at Hagys Ford Rd and Righter's Mill Rd was run over by a vehicle. We strongly believe that it is just a matter of time before these risky driving behaviors will lead to a tragic accident. Action by all stakeholders is required to assure safety of pedestrians.

In addition to current walkers, popularity of “walk-to-school” days indicates that many households would walk to school and school-centered sporting activities (including those outside of the regular school day) if safety measures were implemented. We also believe that supporting more walkers could relieve the drop-off and pick-up congestion on Margo Lane. Some parents that live within walking distance of the school choose to drive due to a lack of safe walking infrastructure. Long term, we believe that improving walkability along the Hagys Ford Road corridor will not only benefit children walking to school but will also improve our sense of community and well-being, decrease congestion on our roads,¹ and encourage outdoor exercise and improved public health.

We believe in the importance of crosswalks--especially around schools--and in their effectiveness to alter driver behavior, particularly when used in conjunction with stop signs, pedestrian crossing signs and other traffic calming measures. Additionally, behavioral studies cited by the U.S. Department of Transportation show no evidence that pedestrians are less vigilant in marked crosswalks, contrary to arguments presented to us by some Township staff as a reason not to stripe.²

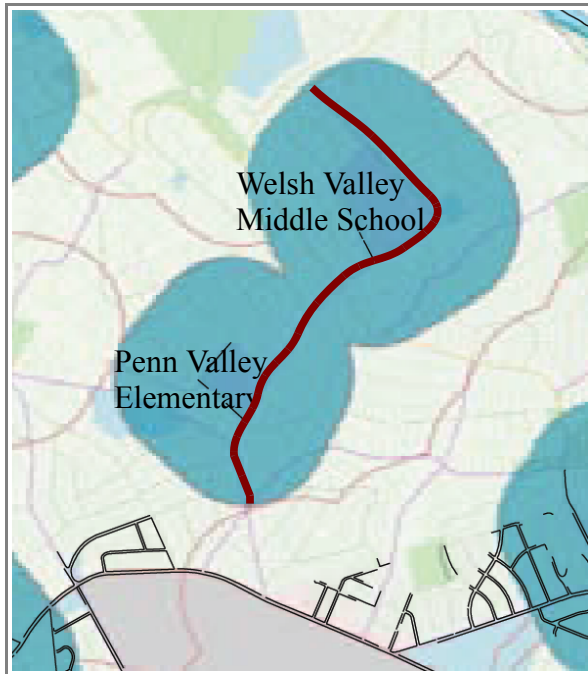
¹ According to *Safe Routes to School*, as much as 20-30% of traffic is generated by parents driving their children to school.

² Knoblauch, R.L., Nitzburg, M., and Seifert, R.F., Pedestrian Crosswalk Case Studies: Richmond, Virginia; Buffalo, New York; Stillwater, Minnesota, Report No. FHWA-RD-00-103, Federal Highway Administration, Washington, DC, August 2001.

The Comprehensive Plan

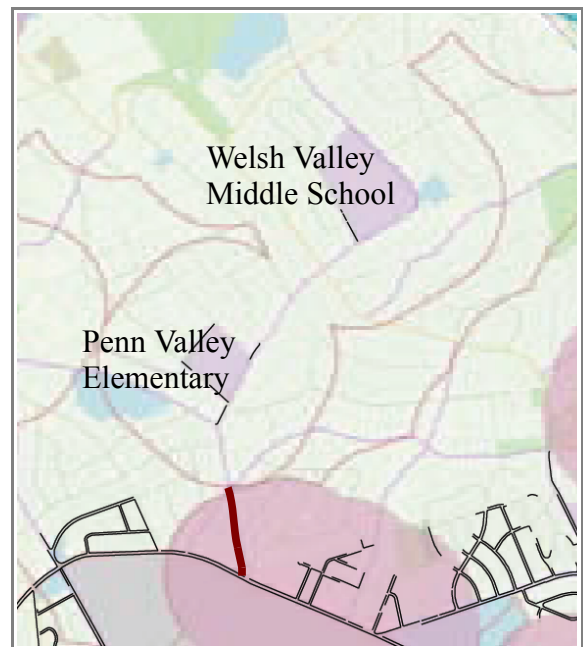
Lower Merion Township has developed a Comprehensive Plan that includes many areas of Penn Valley and focuses on improved walkability. Many proposals within the new Comp Plan align with our current requests. For example, we support prioritizing pedestrian improvements to include a ¼ mile buffer around our public schools.

Blue circles in the pedestrian improvement map below show a ¼ mile radius around Penn Valley Elementary and Welsh Valley Middle Schools. Almost the entirety of the Hagys Ford Road corridor (to Bryn Mawr Avenue) is included in these prioritized areas.



Portion of map C13 (pg 88) of the Comp Plan - Prioritized Pedestrian Improvement Map - Public Schools. The red line indicates the portion of the Hagys Ford Road corridor included in pedestrian improvement priorities.

The remaining portion of the corridor along Old Gulph Road from Bryn Mawr Avenue to Montgomery Avenue is encompassed by proposed Comp Plan pedestrian improvements around commercial areas, as seen in red in the following map.



Portion of map C15 (pg 89) of the Comp Plan, Prioritized Pedestrian Improvement Map - Commercial Areas. The red line indicates the section of Old Gulph Rd from Bryn Mawr Avenue to Montgomery Ave encompassed by this priority.

PVCA requests of Lower Merion Township

To improve pedestrian safety around our schools, PVCA requests that crosswalks be painted at all intersections in the Hagys Ford Road corridor from Hollow Road to Old Gulph Road along the **west** side of Hagys Ford Road. Middle school and elementary school students currently cross these intersections daily. We understand that curb cuts may be required and would like to work with the Township to understand costs and potential funding sources. The intersection of Hagys Ford Rd. and W. Flat Rock Rd (across from the Welsh Valley Middle School) is a **model intersection** in the corridor. It has a 3-way stop, stop bars, crosswalks and pedestrian signage. We believe this should be replicated at the even busier intersection of Hagys Ford Rd. and Righters Mill Rd. near Penn Valley Elementary. Please see pg. 12 of the Appendix for a visual of this intersection.



Hagys Ford Road Pedestrian Crossings (see Appendix for intersection close-ups)

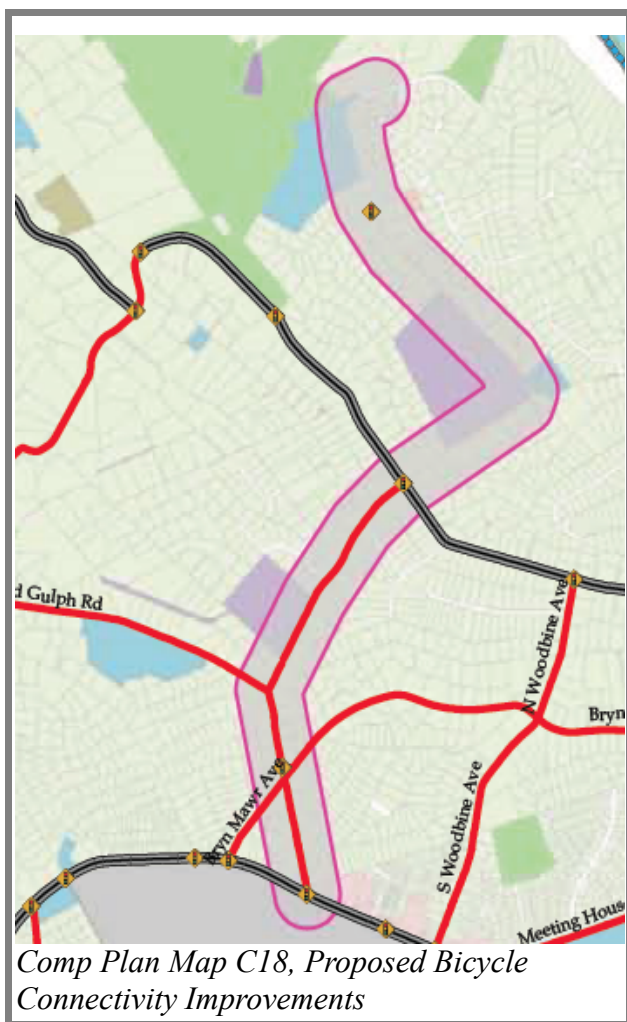
Intersections in question include:

1. Hagys Ford and Tower Lane
2. Hagys Ford and Conshohocken (Note that Conshohocken is a secondary road and therefore its intersection with Hagys Ford Rd, a tertiary artery, warrants physical safety improvements as recommended in the Comp Plan, page 86. We request adding “walk” signals and adding crosswalks on all sides. See Appendix.)
3. Hagys Ford and Fairview
4. New crosswalk across Margo Lane at Stacey Road to accommodate numerous existing walkers
5. Hagys Ford and Righters Mill (including installing a 4-way stop and widening the current crosswalk across Righters Mill to improve visibility for drivers turning onto Righters Mill from Hagys Ford Rd.)
6. Hagys Ford and Old Gulph

PVCA also makes the following traffic calming requests:

1. Reducing the the speed limit on Hagys Ford Rd. to 25 mph in accordance with Hagys Ford Road designation as a tertiary street (see Appendix map, pg 9)
2. Placement of permanent solar speed indicators in front of both schools
3. Traffic calming measures as highlighted in Table 3.10, page 75 of the Comp Plan for Hagys Ford Rd. (Map Identification #10) including where appropriate:
 - Roadway narrowing with edge lines
 - Reducing posted speed limit
 - Curb extensions/bulb outs
 - Median/refuge islands (We support exploring the possibility of a traffic island on Hagys Ford Rd. at Righters Mill Rd. and Hagys Ford Rd. at Conshohocken State Rd.)
 - Street trees
4. Speed tables

Note: We also support improving bicycle connectivity in the corridor as referenced in Map C18 (pg 97) of the Comp Plan, *Proposed Bicycle Connectivity Improvements*.



PVCA would also like to partner with the appropriate Township staff to perform a walkability audit around the schools and to be considered for a Township sponsored **traffic calming pilot** for this corridor.

School Zones

1. Expand Penn Valley Elementary School zone and adjust signage
 1. Move existing blinking light on Hagys Ford to property between Old Gulph and Righters Mill (so as not to block visibility for cars turning from Righters Mill to Hagys Ford)
 2. Add new blinking light (or move existing one on Hagys Ford Road or the one on Margo Lane near Ardleigh) at the entrance to Margo Lane off Hagys Ford where cars enter in the morning to drop students
2. Expand Welsh Valley School zone to include Hagys Ford Road and Tower Lane
3. Place center of road placards at all intersections around both schools
4. Increase police enforcement of speed limit and stop signs
5. Determine threshold for deploying crossing guards

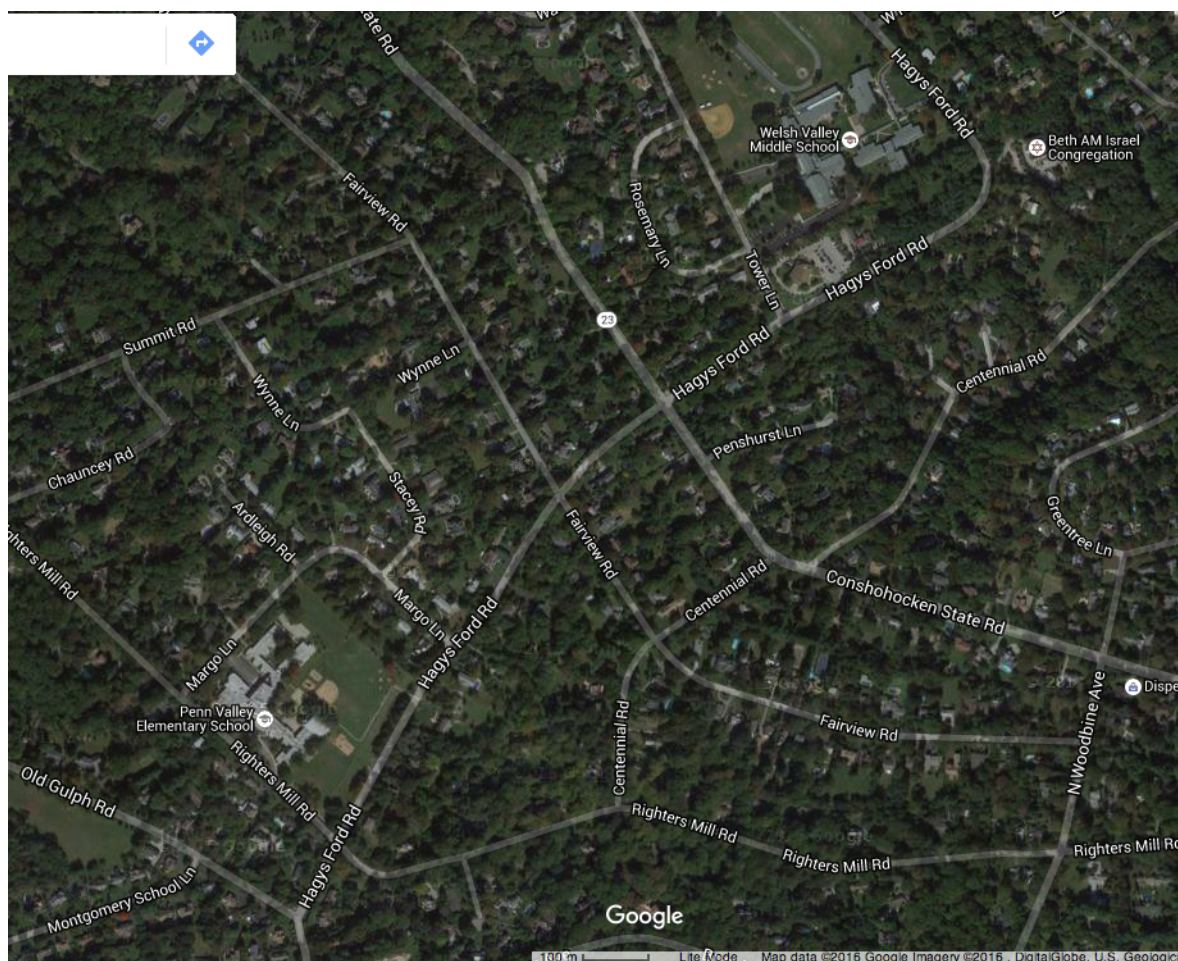
Update per a January 2016 Penn Valley Elementary HSA open forum: Mr. Scott Mitchell, Principal of Penn Valley Elementary is currently following up with Pat Guinnane of LMSD to ensure that flashing school zone signs around the school are moved to reflect common sense placement. LMSD has received approval to use its own personnel to move these signs. PVCA requests cooperation between the Township and LMSD to ensure these requests see follow through.

Civic efforts to improve community walkability and pedestrian safety

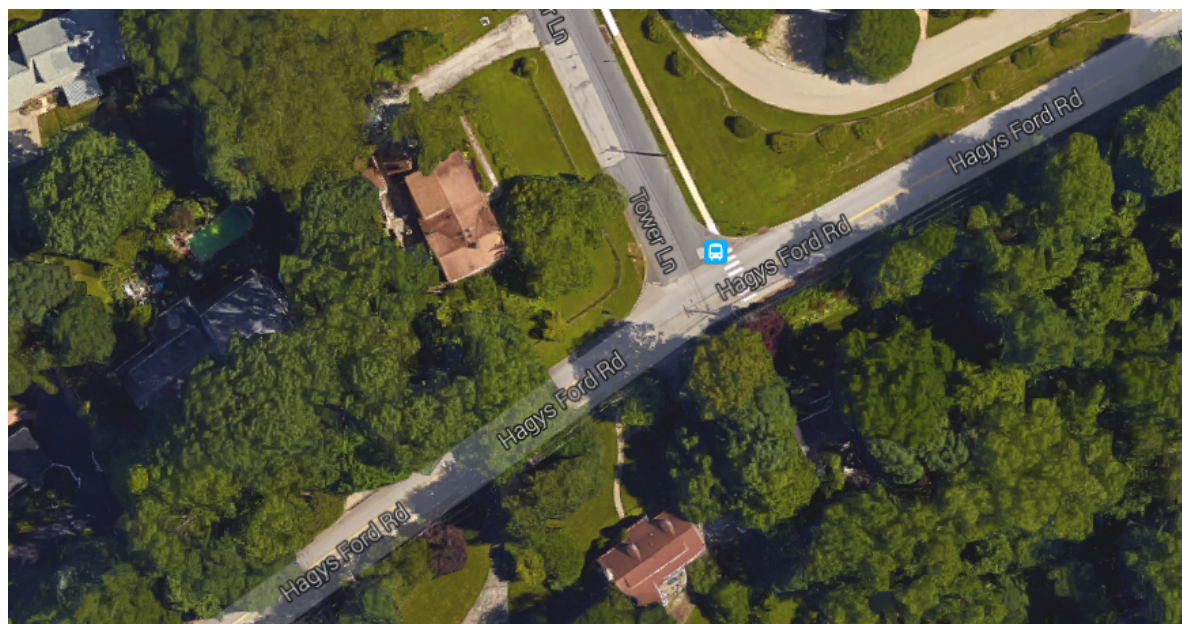
PVCA will launch a community education campaign to encourage cutting of vegetation and removal of obstructions along the Hagys Ford Road corridor. The campaign will include the design and mailing of a “Did you know” style educational flyer as well as web site and Facebook postings. PVCA members received an update earlier this week on pedestrian safety concerns, including encouragement to cut back hedges in pedestrian walkways and around corners and intersections. PVCA will also look into working with school HSAs to create a pedestrian safety campaign for students.

Over the past year, PVCA has also spent its own time and money greening and beautifying two of our main traffic triangles along the Hagys Ford Road corridor. Hundreds of native plantings and bulbs have been added to the islands at Old Gulph Rd. and Bryn Mawr Avenue and Hagys Ford Rd. and Righters Mill Rd. We look forward to watching these spaces fill in to meet their full botanical potential, a reflection of our growing sense of community. These will also serve as educational resources for residents concerning native plants. Details of these plantings can be found on our website, pennvalleycivic.org.

Appendix: Hagys Ford Road Corridor Intersections



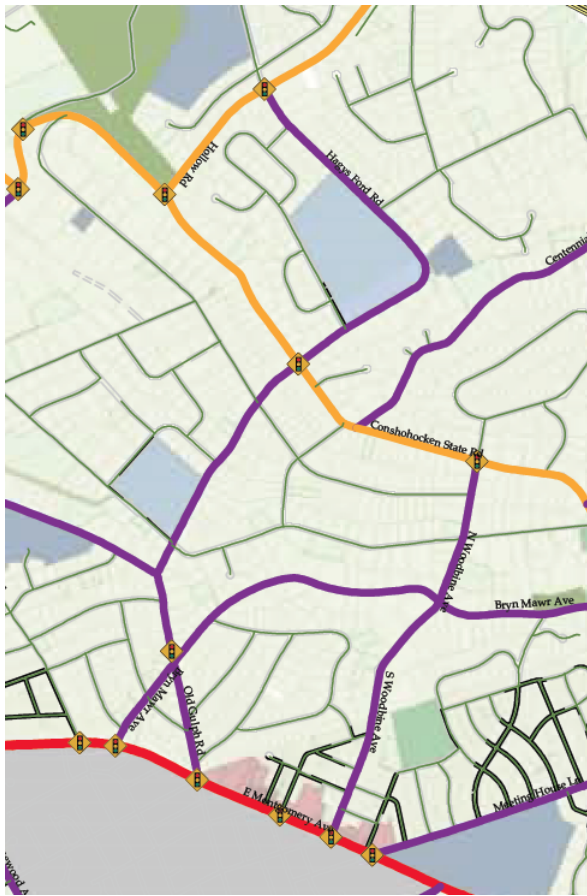
The Hagys Ford Road Corridor



Intersection of Hagys Ford and Tower Ln – Crosswalk needed across Tower Ln



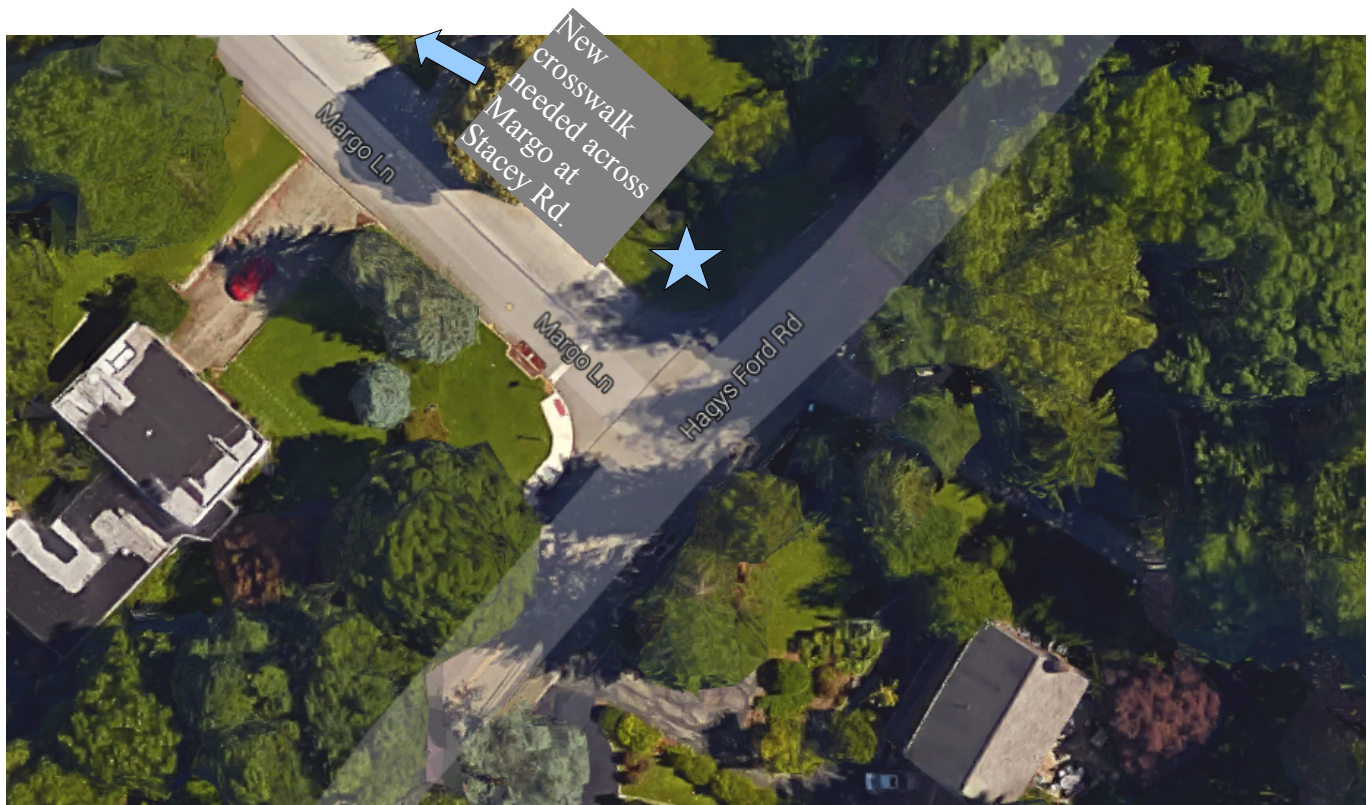
Intersection of Hagys Ford Rd and Conshohocken. Requesting 4-way crosswalk and walk signals tied to traffic signals at this busy intersection.



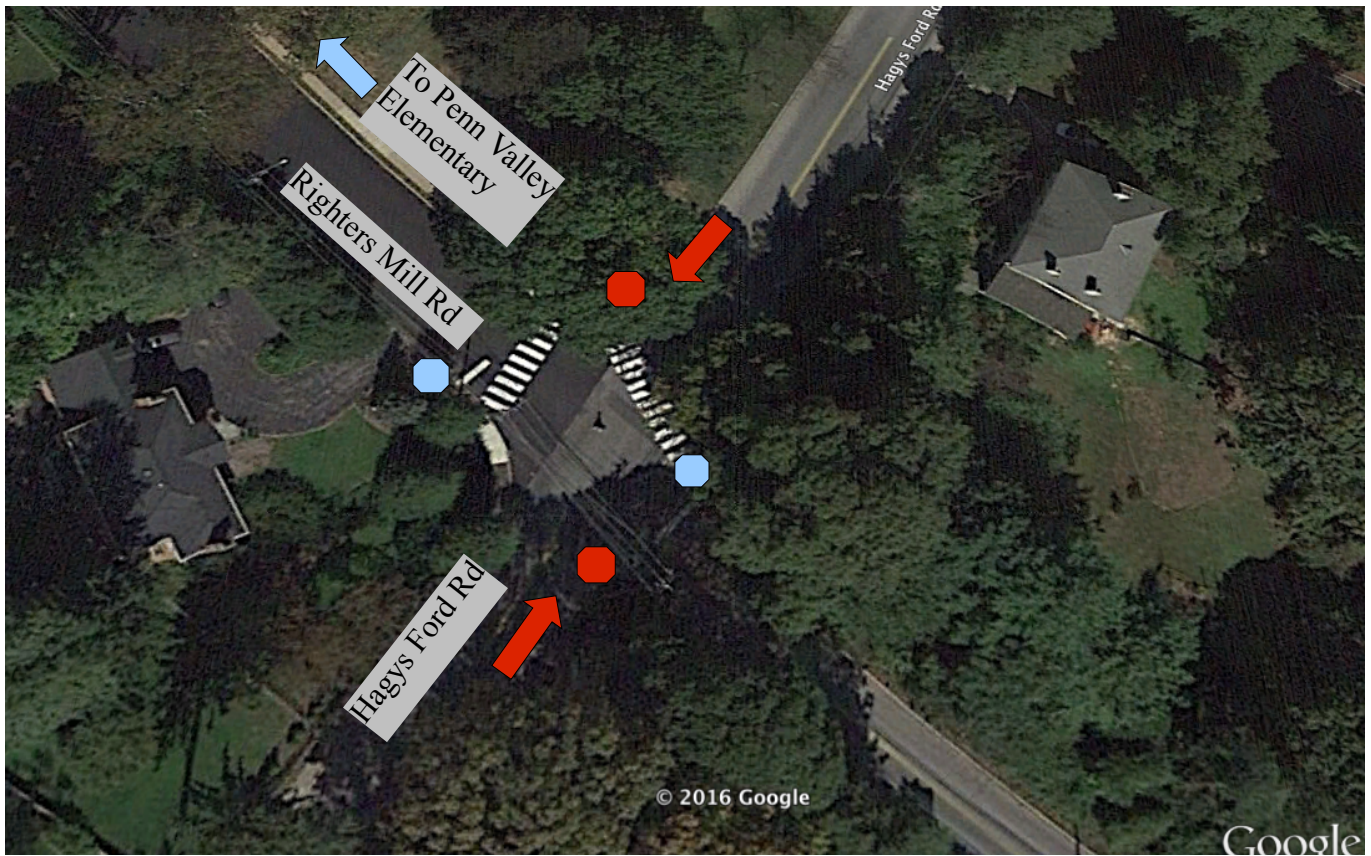
Map c7 (pg 69), Comp Plan Functional Classification Map showing Hagys Ford as a tertiary artery. Note intersection with Conshohocken, a secondary artery.



Intersection of Hagys Ford and Fairview Rd. Crosswalk requested across Fairview on the west side.



*Intersection of Hagys Ford and Margo Ln. **Blue star** denotes desired location of a blinking school zone sign at this important entrance (main entry for drop off and pick up) to Penn Valley Elementary. New crosswalk also requested across Margo Ln at Stacey Rd to accommodate existing walkers.*



Busy intersection of Hagys Ford and Righters Mill Rd. Note that the west crosswalk needs widening to improve visibility for cars turning into this primary entrance to Penn Valley Elementary. We are also requesting a 4-way stop here to calm speeding traffic on Hagys Ford Rd. in addition to other measures as recommended by the Township. Desired stop signs are in red. Existing stop signs are in blue.



Intersection of Old Gulph Rd and Hagys Ford Rd. This aerial photo is outdated as painted crossbars now do not exist at all stop signs. PVCA requests stop bars and a 3-way crosswalk.

Model intersection in the Hagys Ford Rd corridor



PVCA considers this intersection at Hagys Ford Rd and W. Flat Rock Rd (across from Welsh Valley Middle School) as a model intersection in the Hagys Ford Rd corridor. Note the presence of a 3-way stop, stop bars, crosswalks and pedestrian crossing signage. We believe this should be replicated at the even busier intersection of Hagys Ford Rd. and Righters Mill Rd.