

Dear County Council Members:

I am writing to express concerns with Section B-4g of the proposed Montgomery County Master Plan. I am a resident of Byeforde Rock Highlands (BRCH) and have lived in Kensington for almost 40 years. My family has lived in Kensington since 1959. Like you, our neighborhood supports a safe pedestrian experience in Montgomery County.

Section B-4g seeks to make current weekend closures of Beach Drive permanent. However, the closure of Beach Drive between Connecticut Ave. and Cedar Lane is misguided and creates a major pedestrian safety issue for our neighborhood. This section of Beach Drive serves as a primary means for commuters to travel to and from the Beltway with direct access to Rockville and Bethesda, including NIH and Walter Reed – the latter of which each have shifts that operate 7 days a week. When Beach Drive is closed, non-local/cut through drivers are redirected onto residential streets that were not designed, nor equipped to accommodate such excessive volumes of traffic. What is of primary concern is that the closures result in cars forced into a neighborhood that has no sidewalks, narrow streets with cars parked on both sides, several blind spots and no traffic calming measures of which to speak. It is simply too dangerous to walk or run on the street, walk pets, or for children to play or ride their bikes.

Traffic counts conducted by Montgomery DOT show that traffic increases in our neighborhood by over 100% each Saturday – a weekend which is supposed to have the lowest traffic volume. Weekend traffic averages show an 82% compared to weekday volumes. By simple math, doubling the volume of cars down a narrow residential street without sidewalks is at odds with the goals of the Pedestrian Master Plan – to create a safe, comfortable and appealing network for pedestrians.

What is also concerning is that Beach Drive already has a sufficient pedestrian pathway that has been in place since the 1970s. Montgomery Parks has not provided any data whatsoever demonstrating the need to close Beach Drive. Montgomery Parks also has not conducted any traffic studies to support the closures – neither before its implementation nor as part of the plan to make it permanent. Montgomery Parks does not even have any data showing the volume of pedestrian and bicyclist usage of Beach Drive (for the section between Cedar Lane and Connecticut Ave.) when it is closed.

To date, Montgomery Parks has ignored our concerns, has not considered any reasonable alternatives and has even referred to us “those but the cut through traffic people” in internal communications. These communications also show that Parks personnel enjoy the closures on a personal level and cannot even pretend to be objective or to make safety their priority. We have proposed reasonable alternatives that have been ignored. For example: (i) starting the closure on Beach at Cedar Lane and extending it to Summit Ave.; and/or placing protected bike lanes on Beach Drive between Cedar Lane and Connecticut Ave.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the County to consider revision of this section of the Pedestrian Master Plan to ensure the safety of Montgomery County residents and to meet the goals of other programs, such as Vision Zero. Decisions made without data or the input of those impacted have consequences.

Sincerely

Kevin Vess