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Dear County Council Members:

We are 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 22 years. Like you, our neighborhood supports a safe pedestrian experience in Montgomery County.

Our family also consists of an adult daughter who uses a motorized wheelchair to get around the neighborhood. In 2004, we petitioned Montgomery County to put a sidewalk in for school children who are accessing Holy Redeemer School, popular MCPS designated bus stops and to make it safer for our elderly neighbors who were trying to access streets for evening walks and socialization when feeling isolated. At that time, Montgomery County officials reviewed and acknowledged the traffic concerns and installed the requested sidewalks. For your reference, here is the article in the Washington Post

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2004/04/29/sidewalk-issue-splits-kensington-community/09d048ef-839e-4063-baa5-119a12724b07/>

We have experienced firsthand, the need to jump onto someone's front lawn to avoid oncoming traffic coming both ways. Our daughter cannot get out of the way when she is in her wheelchair. It puts our elder neighbors, who do not have the physical agility, at risk as well. If Montgomery County acknowledged the safety issue in 2004 when Beach Drive was open, how could they not acknowledge it as a much bigger issue now with Beach drive is closed? This current situation has only increased the traffic coming into the neighborhood.

Our understanding is that this change was made during COVID when public establishments, schools, company offices were closed and it was meant to be temporary. Now, 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 has created 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 the 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

Rick and Eileen Spencer