



January 21, 2025

Dear Council President Stewart and Member of the Montgomery County Council:

My name is Manny Hidalgo, and I serve as Executive Director of Shepherd's Table in Downtown Silver Spring. For over 40 years, we have provided hot, nutritious meals and social services to thousands of people experiencing food insecurity and homelessness in Montgomery County. In 2024, we served over 168,000 meals; in our history, we've never missed a meal service. Since 2016, we have been serving out of Progress Place, located at 8106 Georgia Avenue, a building owned by Montgomery County's Department of Health and Human Services adjacent to the Silver Spring B&O Railroad Station. In November 2023, construction of the Metropolitan Branch Trail began at the train station, significantly disrupting our operations. We have lost more than half of the available parking, leaving only 15 spaces for a building with 50 employees, dozens of volunteers, and hundreds of meal and shelter guests.

I have been mainly concerned about the lack of parking for volunteers, many of whom are elderly. Our meals program relies heavily on about 36 volunteers daily (12 per meal service), and we could not operate without them. We have been asking them to park at Parking Lot #4 on Fenton Street for over a year, usually about 2/3 empty. In addition to the financial burden, the distance from Progress Place is also burdensome, particularly in the winter. Nonetheless, we could ask the staff of Shepherd's Table to park in that lot and leave the few spots available for volunteers at Progress Place. Currently, that solution is cost-prohibitive, but if you were to support Council President Stewart's Expedited Bill 29-24 Transportation – Parking Permit for Specialized Service Providers, we could afford to implement this solution. The bill would make it very affordable to have all Shepherd's Table staff parking at Parking Lot #4, and it would be a win-win for the garage, which is significantly underutilized.

Thank you for understanding how important this issue is for Shepherd's Table and the 3,000-plus annual volunteers who serve with us.

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