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**ANC 3/4G Testimony before the
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
on Improving DDOT's Slow Streets Program
November 16, 2020**

Thank you Chair Cheh and members of the Committee for this opportunity to address ways to improve the Department of Transportation's Slow Streets initiative in light of numerous resident concerns about the "effectiveness of the initiative due to confusing signage, poor communication, and perplexing street choices to serve as slow streets."¹ I am Randy Speck, Chair of ANC 3/4G, and I submit this testimony on behalf of our Commission, which approved it by a vote of 4 to 0 on November 9, 2020 (a quorum being 4).

On May 29, 2020, the Mayor announced a Slow Streets program with the following characteristics:

- Slow Streets would be restricted to local traffic only and the speed limit is set at 15 mph to support neighborhood-based safe social distancing while walking,

¹ Notice of Public Roundtable on the District Department of Transportation Slow Street Initiative, available at <https://bit.ly/3eoWone>.

running, or cycling;

- Drivers could only use a designated slow street if their destination is within two blocks of the Slow Street;
- Residents, emergency vehicles, deliveries and trash collection vehicles would continue to have access to Slow Streets;
- Streets with bus routes would not be eligible; and
- The program would be in place only for the duration of the public health emergency.²

DDOT described Slow Streets as

intended to facilitate essential recreational activity for adults and families to promote physical and mental health. By allowing these activities on neighborhood streets throughout the District, residents will be less likely to travel to DPR or NPS facilities that can become overcrowded, particularly as the weather improves.³

On July 17, 2020, the Council passed legislation requiring DDOT to identify “modifications to roadways in each ward that will create space for uses other than for motorized vehicles and to set a timeline for implementation.”⁴ This law required DDOT to report on the identification of five additional miles of street modifications by October 15, 2020, and to implement five additional miles of street modifications by November 1, 2020.

² “Mayor Bowser Announces Plans to Open “Streeteries” and Lower Citywide Speed Limit as DC Reimagines Roads and Public Space,” May 29, 2020, available at <https://bit.ly/3emdUbn>.

³ “Frequently Asked Questions About Slow Streets,” District Department of Transportation, available at <https://bit.ly/38i1Qr1>.

⁴ “Connected Transportation Network Emergency Amendment Act of 2020,” B23-0772, available at <https://bit.ly/3oThy1l>.

On September 29, 2020, DDOT notified some ANC 3/4G commissioners — but not all of the commissioners whose constituents would be affected — that it planned to make Tennyson Street, NW from Western Avenue to Oregon Avenue a Slow Street.⁵ The notice indicated that the time for comments would close one week later, on October 6, 2020.⁶ This entire comment period fell between the ANC’s meetings so that there was no opportunity for the ANC to provide its input. On October 8, 2020, the Commission requested an extension of the comment period until after its October 13, 2020 meeting so that it could consider a resolution that would be entitled to great weight.

DDOT responded on October 9, 2020, “that the Slow Street Initiatives is a little different from other DDOT projects, as it does not require a [Notice of Intent] due to it being a response to the public health emergency.” DDOT indicated that it would “continue to accept feedback, monitor and review the communities comments through” its online questionnaire, and “announce the locations by October 15th.” DDOT further clarified, however, that “the comment period is not extended[;] we will review the

⁵ So far as the Commission is aware, no commissioner or community member requested that Tennyson Street be designated as a Slow Street. This includes requesting from DDOT any such communication and being told there was none.

⁶ DC Code Section 1-309.10(b) provides that “The executive branch . . . shall give 30-days written notice, excluding Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays, of: . . . (2) the intent to change the use of property owned or leased by or on behalf of the government; to . . . each affected Commission, the Commissioner representing a single-member district affected by said actions, and to each affected Ward Councilmember. . . .” Section 1-309.10(q) extends the 30-day notice period to 51 days during the public health emergency. DDOT did not comply with this notice requirement. The Connected Transportation Network Emergency Amendment Act of 2020 does not mention any notice requirements, and it does not appear that DDOT was absolved of its obligation to notify ANCs of proposed changes to the use of public streets.

comments we receive and will have to decide on the locations before the 15th, [and] therefore the comments period cannot be extended.”⁷

At the Commission’s request — and supported by a community-driven petition with 106 signatures from ANC 3/4G residents and 17 from other District residents supporting “transparency and community input into traffic changes”⁸ — DDOT’s Vision Zero Director, Linda Bailey, attended the Commission’s October 13, 2020 meeting to discuss the Tennyson Street proposal.⁹ At that meeting, she said that Slow Streets was a “traffic calming program,” even though nothing on DDOT’s website described it as such. She said that they chose streets for this program that (1) were local, residential streets (typically without a center line), (2) were not a bus route, (3) had been the subject of “complaints about cut throughs” or had requested traffic calming or speed humps,¹⁰ and (4) were “connectors.” She said that Slow Streets were considered “light interventions” whose success depends on community support — “community support is key.”

Commissioners and constituents raised several concerns about DDOT’s proposal. First, DDOT acknowledges that it did not consider the impact of diverted traffic on other streets if Tennyson were made a Slow Street. Tennyson has sidewalks to accommodate pedestrians and recreation activities while some of those alternative streets do not.

⁷ DDOT was apparently relying on the reporting and implementation requirements specified in the Connected Transportation Network Emergency Amendment Act of 2020.

⁸ “Support Transparency & Community Input into Traffic Changes,” change.org, available at <https://tinyurl.com/y6oy36zu>.

⁹ The meeting video of the discussion with Director Bailey is available at <https://youtu.be/1-orFmzDGs?t=6522>.

¹⁰ Tennyson Street had long been the subject of requests from its residents for speed humps, and three speed humps had been installed.

Moving traffic to those streets could make the community less safe. Second, DDOT relied primarily on a history of “anecdotal” complaints from Tennyson Street residents about the need for traffic calming. DDOT did not have any data to support this choice or to compare Tennyson Street with the need for traffic calming on any other streets. Third, DDOT limited the comment period to one week and gave the ANC no opportunity to consider community input and to offer its views. For a program that depends on “community support,” DDOT made no attempt to determine whether residents wanted Tennyson to be a Slow Street. Fourth, the Commission and DDOT heard from dozens of its constituents that designation of Tennyson as a Slow Street would increase traffic on Rittenhouse Street, Upland Terrace, Beach Street, and Worthington Street — none of which DDOT had analyzed to determine whether they would be suitable for that traffic.

On October 14, 2020, the Commission advised DDOT that it did not support the proposal to make Tennyson a Slow Street. The Commission is not opposed to the Slow Street concept, but concluded that the Tennyson Street proposal had not been adequately vetted or studied, that the one-week comment period was inadequate, and that DDOT had not considered the possible impact on nearby streets. The Commission is open, however, to future proposals for Slow Streets within ANC 3/4G that are backed with data and analysis or to considering appropriately noticed traffic calming measures on any streets in our neighborhood.

Our Commission’s experience suggests the following improvements in DDOT’s Slow Streets program:

- DDOT should make clear the purpose of Slow Streets — whether it is an explicit traffic calming measure or a temporary public health emergency measure to permit recreational activities;
- DDOT should select candidates for Slow Streets based on data and analysis, not simply on history of traffic calming complaints from residents on the prospective Slow Street;
- DDOT should consider the impact that designation of a Slow Street is likely to have if traffic is diverted to other streets;
- DDOT should provide well-publicized public notice to all affected residents — not just those on the designated Slow Street — and to the ANC to permit a reasonable opportunity for comments; and
- DDOT should consider standards for how it will evaluate the degree of community support that will be required for approval of a Slow Street.

We support the objectives of Vision Zero and the need to make our streets safer.

We also appreciate the extraordinary circumstances of the public health emergency, and the need to act expeditiously. In this instance, however, DDOT acted on the basis of limited anecdotal information, neglected to collect any relevant data, conducted no analysis of the likely ramifications, and provided inadequate notice to permit the ANC or residents to express their views. DDOT should take steps to ensure that it does not repeat these mistakes.