



**Government of the District of Columbia
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3/4G**

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**ANC 3/4G Testimony Before the
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Performance Oversight Hearing on the
Department of Transportation
February 26, 2021**

Chairperson Cheh and members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment, I am Lisa R. Gore, a Commissioner with ANC 3/4G, representing Chevy Chase, Hawthorne, and Barnaby Woods. I represent Single Member District 1, which serves Hawthorne and portions of Barnaby Woods. I want to thank you and the Committee for the opportunity to testify on the District Department of Transportation's (DDOT) performance. I am testifying on behalf of our Commission, which authorized this testimony at its February 22, 2021, meeting by a vote of 7 to 0 (a quorum being 4).

Our ANC interacts more frequently with the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) than any other District agency. In the last year, we have worked with DDOT on street paving projects, sidewalk installation and repair, the reconstruction of Oregon Avenue, the

Chestnut Street Sidewalk project, Broad Branch Road Rehabilitation project, Slow Streets designations, and development of traffic calming measures. We are encouraged that DDOT continues to improve its services and want to expressly thank former Director Marootian and his staff for their commitment to ensuring safe, multimodal transportation for our community. We also look forward to working with Interim Director Everett Lott and his team to advance our community's transportation needs. Nevertheless, two overarching problems continue to persist with our interaction with DDOT — effective communication and the timeliness of repairs.

Slow Street Initiative

The Slow Streets initiative was a hallmark project implemented under Mayor Bowser in June 2020, to reimagine the use of public space for "safety and health during the public health emergency." All Slow Street had a designated speed limit of 15 miles per hour.

On September 29, 2020, DDOT notified individual members of the ANC 3/4G that it planned to make Tennyson Street, NW, from Western Avenue to Oregon Avenue a Slow Street. This directly affected three (3) Single Member Districts in our ANC. The notice indicated that the time for comments would close one week later, on October 6, 2020. The entire comment period fell between the ANC's meetings, so there was no opportunity for the ANC to provide its input. While we support Vision Zero's objectives and the need to make our streets safer, DDOT's proposal to make the entire length of Tennyson Street a Slow Street without providing an opportunity for ANC input was inconsistent with its long-standing practice of seeking community and ANC feedback. The ANC was particularly concerned that DDOT failed to

comply with the notice requirements under the ANC law. D.C. 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's September 29, 2020, notice with an intent to announce DDOT's decision on October 14, 2020, provided the ANC only 11 days notice, excluding weekends and holidays. The planned implementation date of November 11, 2020, provided only 29 days' notice, not the 51 days that the statute required. There were ardent supporters of DDOT's proposal as well as many residents who expressed reservations and concerns. To do its job, the ANC needed to provide its constituents an opportunity to express their views. To get that input, the ANC requested DDOT modify its timetable and allow the ANC to hear the community's opinions at its October 13, 2020, meeting. We also asked for DDOT's attendance and participation at our October 13th meeting so that everyone could understand DDOT's proposal.

Unfortunately, the ANC could not adequately vet the proposal due to the short notice from DDOT, the lack of adequate program information, and legal discrepancies between the ANC statute notice requirement and this temporary pandemic response program. Our Commission voted 6 to 0 (a quorum being 4) not to support DDOT's proposal to make Tennyson Street, NW from Western Avenue, NW to Oregon Avenue, NW a "slow street." The

Commissioners and our constituents raised legitimate concerns about the proposal, including the possible impact on nearby streets if Tennyson was designated as a Slow Street. Without answers to those questions, we could not support moving forward with DDOT's proposal. Unfortunately, DDOT's lack of community engagement confused members of the community. DDOT could have possibly prevented this situation by implementing an appropriate community engagement process.

Chestnut Street Sidewalk Project

The ANC has previously testified and expressed its concern for the urgent installation of a sidewalk on the north side of Chestnut Street, NW, as quickly as possible. Three main reasons necessitate this project: (1) Chestnut Street, NW is on the E6 bus route (when it resumes service); (2) Chestnut Street, NW connects Oregon Avenue, NW to Western Avenue, NW and is a common shortcut; (3) Chestnut Street, NW is also a frequently used detour during construction projects on Oregon Avenue, NW, exacerbating traffic and speeding through the end of 2021.

It's important to note that residents' and the ANC's efforts to get sidewalks on Chestnut Street go back to at least 2009. DDOT assured residents that sidewalk installation was imminent on several occasions, only to disappoint them again and again. On April 30, 2018, former Director Jeff Marootian spoke with residents on Chestnut Street about sidewalks but did not publicly commit to a timetable for installation. On June 28, 2018, he advised that DDOT was in the process of selecting a design contractor, and at the March 26, 2019, ANC meeting, Zahra Dorriz from DDOT stated that the sidewalks for Chestnut Street were being designed.

In June 2019, former Director Marootian wrote in an email to residents that DDOT would construct sidewalks on Chestnut Street in 2020, after completing Phase 1 of the Oregon Avenue Reconstruction Project. And on September 16, 2019, he reaffirmed that DDOT would begin constructing the project once Phase 1 of the Oregon Avenue Reconstruction Project was complete. On December 11, 2019, DDOT representatives stated at a public meeting that Phase 1 of the Oregon Avenue Reconstruction Project would be finished in July 2020. Phase 1 of the Oregon Avenue Reconstruction Project has been completed, and DDOT has not begun installing a sidewalk on Chestnut Street.

At the ANC's February 8, 2021, regular public meeting, Samer Alhawamdeh, project manager at DDOT, provided the most recent update on the sidewalk project's status. Mr. Alhawamdeh stated that DDOT had taken steps to expedite the project design schedule. He noted the project is currently in the contracting and procurement stage, and the solicitation package is still pending review and approval. He anticipates construction to begin in Spring 2021 and will last approximately four (4) months. Interim Director Lott has expressed his concerns for implementing this project timely and providing options to expedite the project schedule. We are appreciative of Interim Director Lott's efforts.

However, it's important to note that residents are understandably frustrated by what appear to be never-ending delays and postponements. This is an urgent safety issue, made more acute by the increased traffic on Chestnut Street as a detour from Oregon Avenue construction

closures. We urge the Committee to hold DDOT to its overdue promises and to insist that DDOT install the Chestnut Street sidewalks on a high priority schedule.

Military Road-Chevy Chase Parkway Intersection

The Commission has been working with DDOT and nearby residents to get changes made at the intersection to reduce vehicle accidents. Two years ago, after reviewing accidents records, the Department took a number of steps, including installing a sidewalk on the east side of Chevy Chase Parkway, eliminating several parking places along Military Road to improve visibility for drivers and erecting pedestrian crossing signs on Military Road. It also proposed making Chevy Chase Parkway one way heading north but dropped the idea after the proposal prompted strong opposition by residents of nearby Legation Street who were concerned the move would increase traffic on their street.

Accidents have continued to occur. The Department concluded last September that more safety measures were needed and re-floated the one-way proposal. Neighbors near the intersection have been trying to secure a meeting with DDOT to discuss alternatives, but thus far have been unsuccessful. We ask that the Department meet with neighbors and the Commission and implement further safety measures before someone is killed or another person is seriously injured at the location such as happened last Labor Day.

Infrastructure Maintenance

We recognize the challenges that DDOT faces as it works to repair and maintain our aging transportation infrastructure and make critical safety improvements. We do not expect perfection, and we understand that mistakes will occur, and requests for remediation require

prioritization across the city. However, the ANC is concerned that the time lag between 311 or other requests is too long, especially when DDOT offers no explanation for the delays when pressed for an answer. There continues to be instances when residents do not receive the required notice on their street. DDOT must properly maintain community infrastructure to keep our residents safe. In addition, the ANC is concerned that DDOT properly maintains community infrastructure installations, especially green infrastructure installations. Green infrastructure, including bio-retention cells and impervious pavers, must be adequately supported and cleaned to prevent failures that will undermine their storm water maintenance function and may lead to higher costs associated with repairs. To this end, DDOT might consider a program that allows neighbors to “adopt” green infrastructure, including bio-retention cells and impervious paver projects.

Thank you.