



MCPB Item: 6  
Date: June 12, 2025

June 5, 2025

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Miti Figueredo, Director of Parks *MF*  
Darren Flusche, Deputy Director of Parks *DF*  
Andy Frank, P.E., Division Chief, Park Development Division *AF*  
Christie Ciabotti, Division Chief, Park Planning and Stewardship *CC*

**FROM:** Joshua Arnett, P.E., Engineering Supervisor, Park Development Division  
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**SUBJECT:** Beach Drive Open Parkway Traffic and Usage Briefing

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## INTRODUCTION

In June 2024 the Montgomery County Planning Board approved a permanent Beach Drive Open Parkway program, closing the road to vehicles from Knowles Ave (MD 547) to Cedar Lane to allow full pedestrian and cyclist use, from 9:00 AM Fridays through Sunday at 4:00 PM Standard Time / 6:00 PM Daylight Savings Time. The Planning Board requested Parks study Open Parkway usage and traffic impacts throughout the following year and return in June 2025 with an informational briefing.

Since the Planning Board approval, Parks has monitored Open Parkway usage and collected traffic counts at over nine locations throughout the area. The Open Parkway user counts continue to reinforce the popularity of the program, with an average of over 2,250 users near Puller Playground enjoying a vehicle free parkway every weekend.

Traffic counts show anticipated detour routes are being used as expected, with no adverse impacts to detour intersection levels of service. An increase in traffic along Parkwood Drive when Beach Drive is closed is noted. However, the increase is not “cut-through” traffic but shifting neighborhood driving patterns influenced in part by Kensington Parkwood Elementary drop-off and pickups. Overall, peak hour volumes along Parkwood Drive when Beach Drive is closed are in-line with typical weekday peak volumes, and overall traffic conditions on Parkwood Drive appear functional and in-line with other neighborhood connectors throughout the county.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Beach Drive is a Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (Parks)-owned roadway that runs through Rock Creek Park from the DC border north to Garrett Park Road. Beach Drive provides access to several parks, playgrounds, roads, the Rock Creek Trail, and surrounding neighborhoods.

In 2020, Montgomery Parks initiated the Open Parkways Program, which closed portions of Sligo Creek Parkway, Beach Drive, and Little Falls Parkway to motor vehicles during the weekends, to provide additional outdoor recreational space during the COVID-19 pandemic. This program proved very popular. When closed to motor vehicles, the parkways are a welcoming venue for walkers, joggers, cyclists, rollerbladers, and people safely participating in various other forms of recreation. The program averaged over 3,800 visits each weekend in 2020 and over 1,000,000 visits since its inception.

The Beach Drive Open Parkway was originally implemented from Knowles Avenue to Connecticut Avenue (MD 185) and operated from 9:00 AM Friday morning through Sunday evening at 4:00 PM Standard Time / 6:00 PM Daylight Savings Time each weekend. The Beach Drive Open Parkway operated under these parameters from 4/3/2020 until 12/16/2022 when the operating days and hours were reduced to start at 7:00 AM Saturday in response to concerns about increased neighborhood cut-through traffic along Culver Street.

In June 2024, the Planning Board approved a proposal by Montgomery Parks to reduce the extents of the Open Parkway by 0.7 miles to just Cedar Lane to Knowles Avenue (MD 541) and to establish permanent operating hours in line with the original operating hours starting at 9:00 AM Friday instead of 7:00 AM Saturday. These changes took effect on Friday, June 21, 2024.

At the time of approval, the Planning Board requested Park staff study traffic conditions along adjacent residential roadways and Open Parkway usage throughout the upcoming year and provide an update around June 2025.

This report is a supplement to the previously published May 2024 Planning Board report, *“Recommendation for Permanent Operating Hours and Extents for Beach Drive Open Parkway”*. The May 2024 report includes additional project background, traffic data, and modeling to support the overall Open Parkway program. Additional information is included in the appendices.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

Leading up to the June 2024 Planning Board Meeting, Montgomery Parks conducted an online survey which collected over 750 responses. A variety of viewpoints were expressed in this survey both for and against the restoration of the original operating hours as well as the reduction in the total length of the Open Parkway. Overall, 52.3% of all survey respondents who shared an opinion on the operating hours supported the restoration of Fridays with 47.7% opposing the change. The level of support varied greatly based on location with those in the adjacent zip codes of 20895 and 20814 opposing the restoration of the Friday operating hours by 68% and 70% while all other responses supported the change by 85%.

Montgomery Parks has continued to engage and coordinate with the Parkwood Residents Association and Kensington Estates Civic Association since the June 2024 changes. Both groups have provided input on where to monitor for cut-through traffic, relayed concerns and issues, shared input from their communities, and collected and shared additional data for Parks to review. Parks has shared traffic count data, bicycle and pedestrian user count data, and helped support and advocate for neighborhood projects by coordinating with MCDOT and MDSHA.

In May 2025, Parkwood Residents Association and Kensington Parkwood Elementary School Parents Teacher Association (PTA) sent letters to Parks requesting the removal of Fridays from the Open Parkway program. Copies are included in the appendices. Both Parkwood Residents Association and Kensington Estates Civic Association also oppose any operational timing adjustments to Friday, such as delayed start times or seasonal closures. A formal public input period was not conducted in advance of the June 2025 Planning Board informational briefing. As noted above, a significant amount of public support for a three-day Open Parkway closure was received prior to the June 2024 Planning Board decision, as detailed above.

## **BEACH DRIVE OPEN PARKWAY USER COUNT SUMMARY**

The Beach Drive Open Parkway continues to be a popular program with over 100,000 users recorded south of Puller Playground since the Friday hours were restored on June 21, 2024. Montgomery Parks operates a trail counter along Rock Creek Trail near Wildwood Road along with two Open Parkway Counters at Wildwood Road and Puller Playground. The Wildwood Road Counter was vandalized and the corresponding data was lost so the numbers below focus on the Puller Playground Open Parkway Counter and the Wildwood Road Trail Counter since the Friday operating hours were restored.

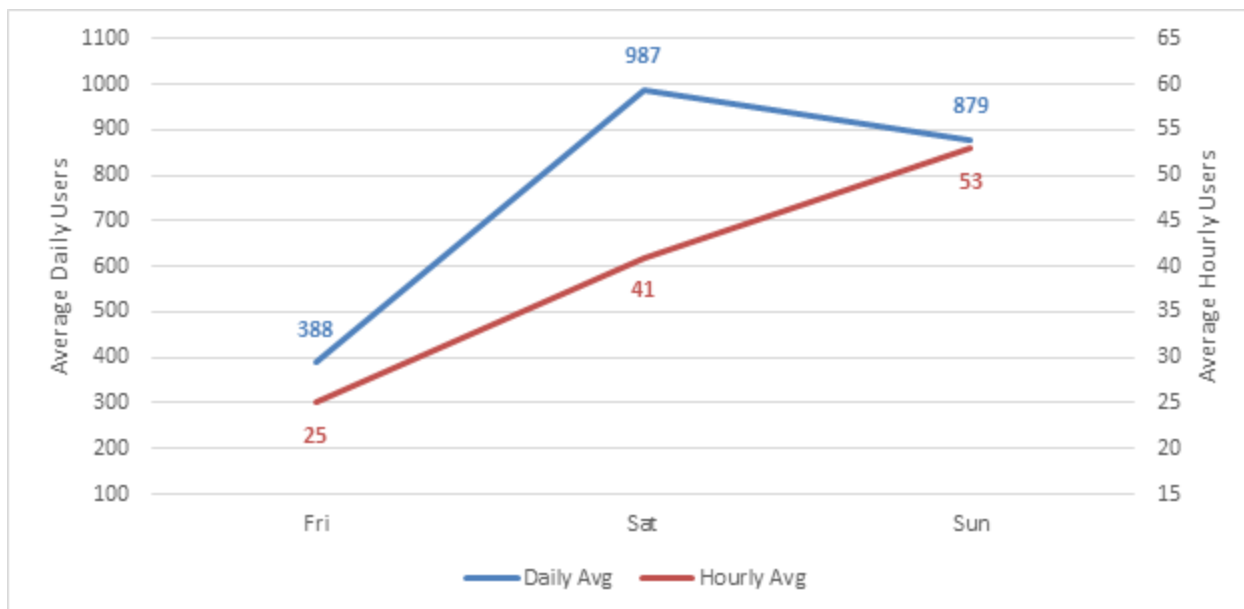


Figure 1. Daily and Hourly Open Parkway Usage at Puller Playground Counter

At the Puller Playground Counter, a total of 105,905 users were counted between 6/21/24 and 5/11/2025 there were 39 days with over 1,000 users counted, accounting for over 25% of all possible days. Every month had days which surpassed 1,000 daily users except for December, January, and June. September and October each saw 8 days with over 1,000 users likely due to moderate temperatures.

When looking at daily use of the Open Parkway, we see the highest use on Saturdays with an average of 987 users, followed by Sunday with 879 users, and Friday with an average of 388 users for a total weekend average of 2,254. The hourly average, or the average number of users while the Open Parkway is active, is highest on Sundays with an average of 53 users per hour followed by Saturday with 41 users per hour and Friday with 25 users per hour. The highest total for Friday is 793 users on 11/8/2024, 1,769 users on Saturday 5/10/2025, and 1,414 users on Friday 9/8/2024.

The table below shows how usage patterns have shifted over time. While usage declined from the initial high usage during COVID to the period between December 2022 and February 2024, usage in the past year has increased.

	Friday		Saturday		Sunday	
Puller Playground Counter	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total
April 2020 – December 2022	784	92,524	1,578	209,807	1,475	174,044
December 2022 – February 2024	-	-	916	24,749	708	42,461
June 2024 – May 2025	388	18,214	987	46,372	879	41,319

Figure 2. Average and Total Usage by Day

## TRAFFIC STUDY

The May 2024 Planning Board report, *Recommendation for Permanent Operating Hours and Extents for Beach Drive Open Parkway*, included traffic counts and modeling that identified the anticipated detour routes for vehicle traffic when Beach Drive is closed to vehicles.

### Beach Drive

Beach Drive is a two-lane, Park-owned roadway extending from the Washington D.C. boundary (south of which is National Park Service roadway) to MD 410, and from Jones Mill Road to Garrett Park Road. Like other Park roads in the County, they were built to provide access to recreational and natural amenities. The segment of Beach Drive applicable to the Open Parkway program is between Knowles Avenue (MD 547) and Cedar Lane, approximately 2.2 miles. This stretch of Beach Drive receives over 5,000 vpd with a peak hour volume of up to 560 vph. The stretch between Grosvenor Lane and Knowles Avenue receives more traffic than between Grosvenor Lane and Cedar Lane, and a significant amount of traffic on the applicable segment of Beach Drive is utilizing Grosvenor Lane to access MD 355. Typical weekday morning peak hour traffic occurs from about 7:45 – 8:45 AM and afternoon peak hour from 4 – 5 PM.

### Northbound Beach Drive Detour

Most northbound Beach Drive traffic is destined to or originates from the MD 355 corridor. The anticipated detour route is MD 355 to Strathmore and Knowles Avenue.

### Southbound Beach Drive Detour

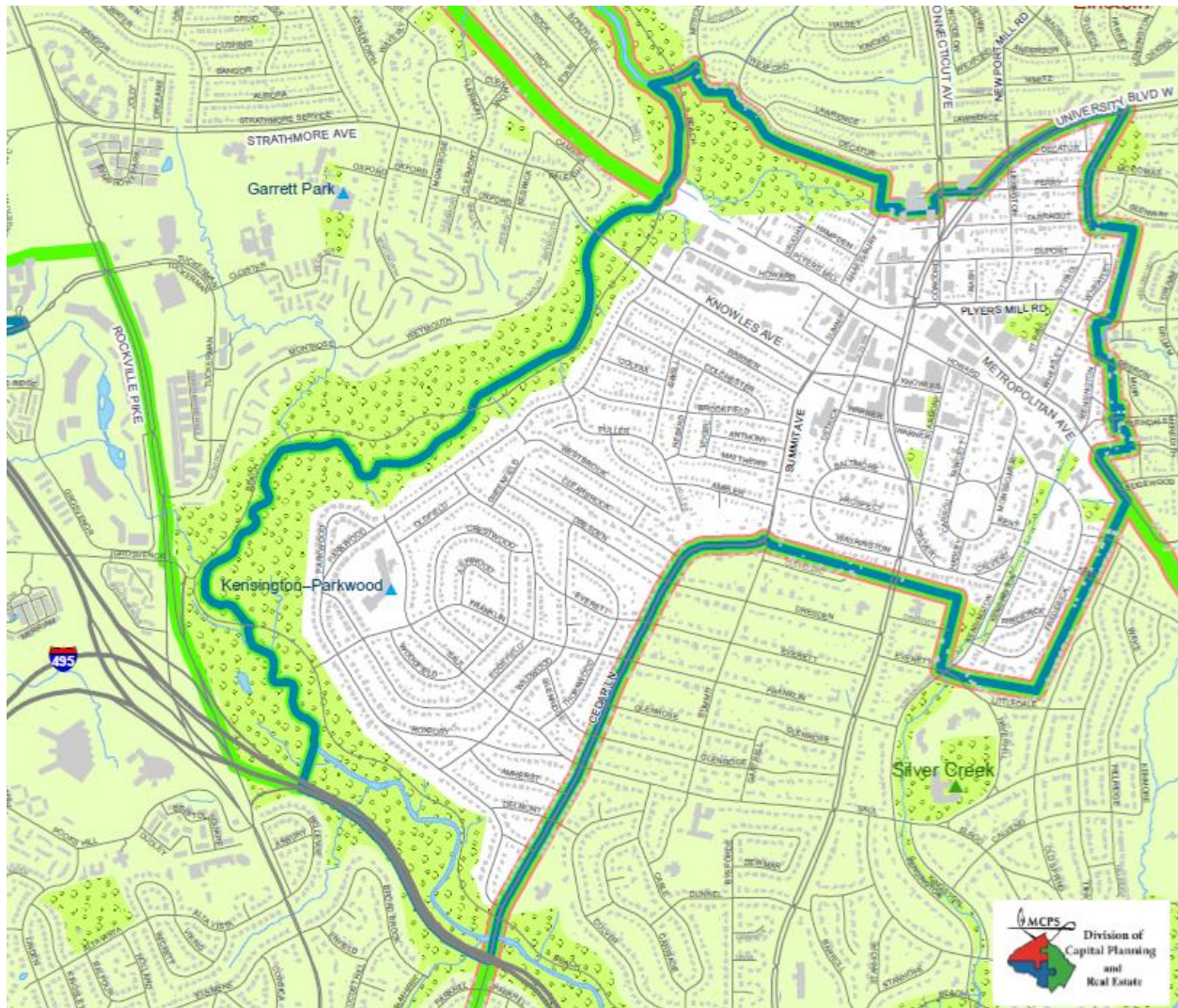
Like northbound traffic, most southbound Beach Drive traffic is destined to or originates from the MD 355 corridor. The anticipated detour route is MD 355 via Knowles and Strathmore Avenue.

### Parkwood Drive

Parkwood Drive runs almost parallel to the proposed closed segment of Beach Drive from Knowles Avenue to Cedar Lane. The segment from Knowles Avenue to Saul Road is classified as a “Neighborhood Connector” in the County’s *Master Plan of Highways and Transitways*. The signed speed limit is 25 mph and there are traffic calming features (speed tables) present along the northern segment from Puller Circle to Knowles Avenue. Speed tables are also present along Parkwood Drive south of Wildwood Road.

Recent March 2025 counts (which included several locations throughout the Parkwood Drive neighborhood, described further below) show a typical morning weekday peak of about 150 vph south of Kensington Parkwood Elementary and about 200 vph north of the school. Peak traffic typically occurs from about 7:30 to 8:30 AM.

Kensington Parkwood Elementary School, which starts at 9:25 AM and ends at 3:50 PM is in the neighborhood. The figure below shows the school boundary:



*Figure 3: Kensington Parkwood Elementary School Boundary (Courtesy Montgomery County Public Schools)*

Several neighborhood streets around Kensington Parkwood Elementary where counts were taken, including Saul Road and Franklin St., are also classified as “Neighborhood Connectors”. Knowles Avenue, Cedar Lane, and Summit Avenue are “Area Connectors”.

In June 2024, as part of the approval of the Open Parkway operational hours and extents, the Planning Board asked Parks to study traffic conditions along adjacent roadways to confirm traffic impacts along the proposed Beach Drive detour route as well as assess potential cut-through impacts to the Parkwood neighborhood. Parks contracted with STV Inc, a national traffic engineering design firm, to obtain traffic counts and summarize results. **Additional supporting data is available in the appendices.**



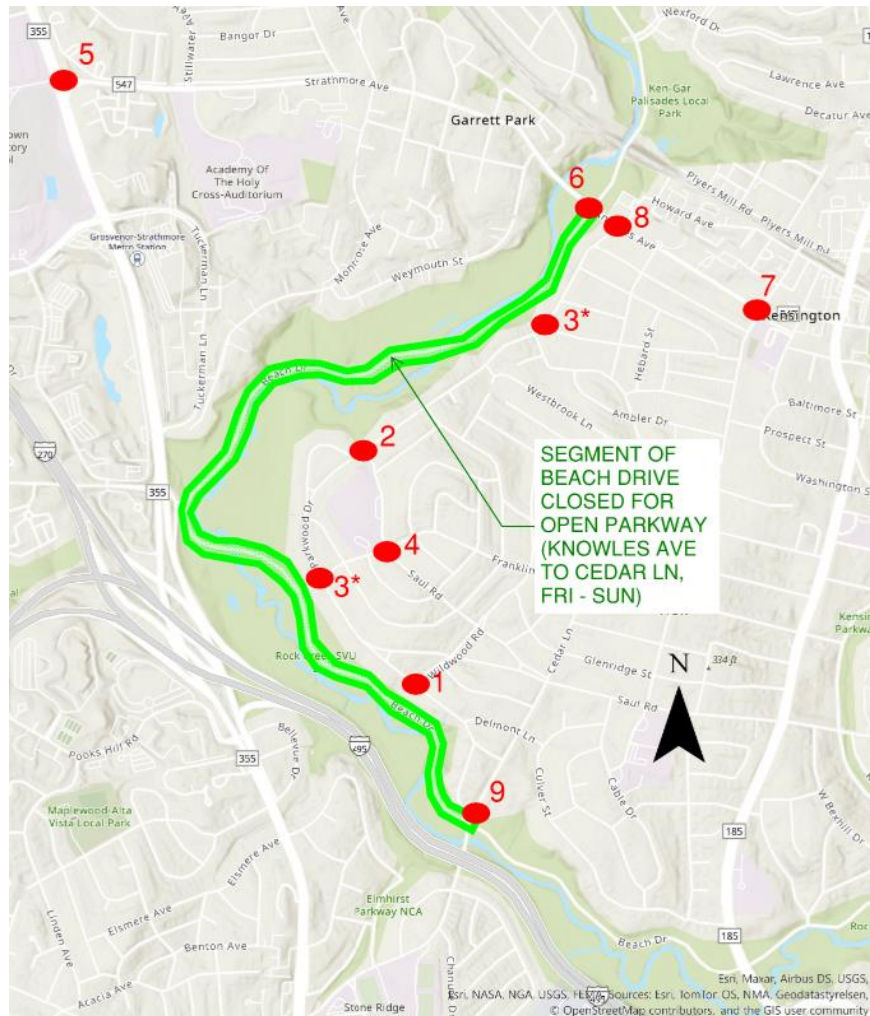
## **Traffic Data Collection**

Park staff met with residents of the Parkwood Residents Association to help identify several locations in the Parkwood neighborhood for traffic counts. Overall, counts were conducted at (9) locations around the closure extent. The location of the counts was chosen to confirm traffic impacts along the proposed Beach Drive detour route as well as assess potential cut-through impacts to the Parkwood Drive neighborhood.

1. Parkwood Drive at Wildwood Road
2. Parkwood Drive at Saul Road
3. Parkwood Drive at Brookfield Drive\*
3. Parkwood Drive at Franklin Street\*
4. Franklin Street at Saul Road
5. MD 355 (Rockville Pike) at MD 547 (Strathmore Avenue)
6. MD 547 (Knowles Ave) at Beach Drive
7. MD 547 (Knowles Ave) at Summit Avenue
8. MD 547 (Knowles Ave) at Parkwood Drive
9. Cedar Lane at Parkwood Drive

\*#3, Parkwood Drive at Brookfield Drive, was shifted to Parkwood Drive at Franklin St. for the March 2025 count after coordination with residents, to help clarify patterns traffic patterns during school drop-off.

The traffic count locations are also shown in the figure below:



*Figure 4: Traffic Count Locations*

Traffic data was collected during three separate periods, while schools were in session, via 13-hour turning movement counts. Counts were conducted on Thursdays (when Beach Drive is open to vehicle traffic) and on Fridays (when Beach Drive closed at 9 AM to vehicle traffic).

- Thursday, September 12 and Friday, September 13, 2024
- Thursday, January 23 and Friday, January 24, 2025
- Thursday, March 27 and Friday, March 28, 2025

For the March 2025 counts, Parks coordinated with Parkwood Residents Association to shift the location of count #3 from Parkwood Drive at Brookfield Drive, to Parkwood Drive at Franklin Street to help study the effects of Kensington Parkwood Elementary School operations. The counts were originally scheduled for May 2025 but were moved up to March 2025 to capture impacts from federal government “return to office” mandates.

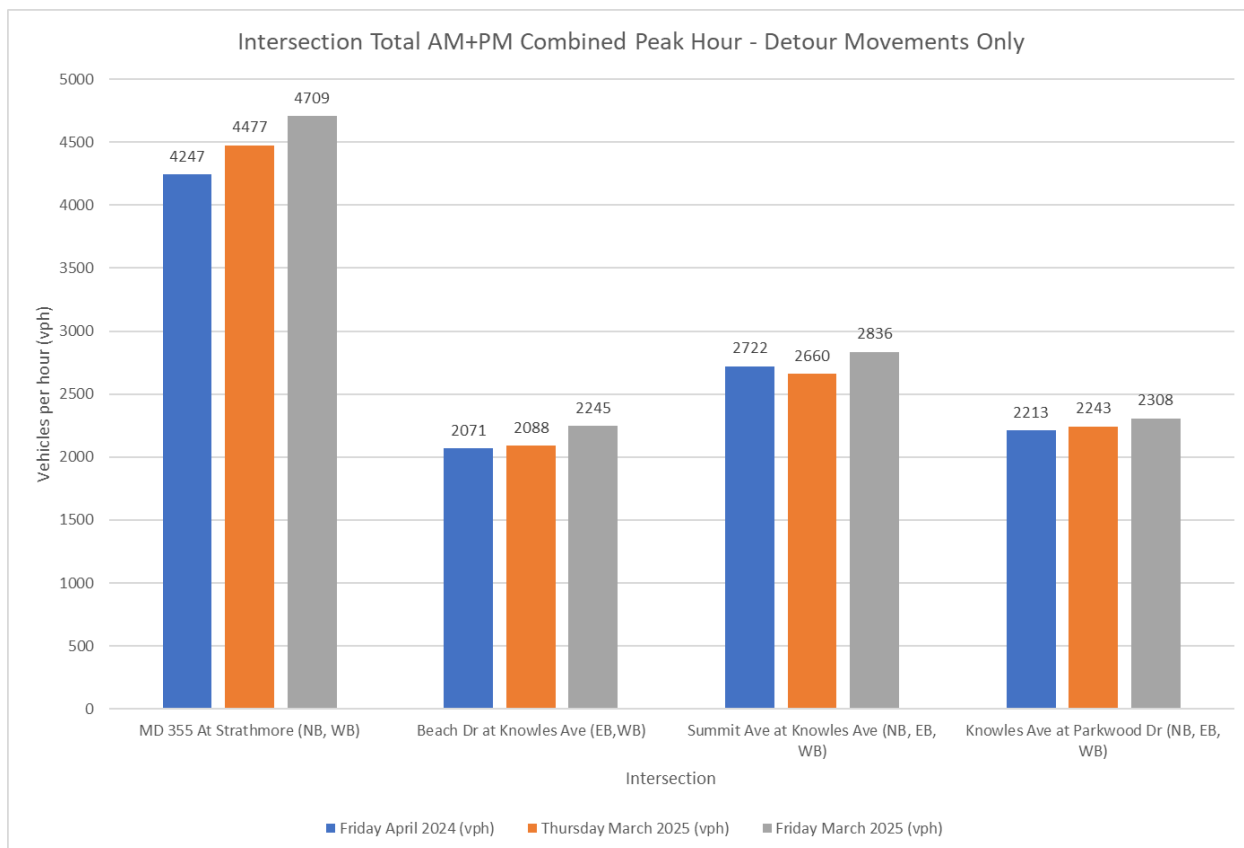
Traffic data tabulations are available in the appendices.



## Traffic Analysis

### General Traffic and Detour Patterns

Traffic volumes are generally slightly higher on area roadways in March 2025 compared to April 2024, and vehicles appear to be utilizing the anticipated detour routes along MD 355 and Cedar Lane when Beach Drive is closed on Fridays:



*Figure 5: Detour Intersection Comparison*

The figure above compares the total combined morning (9:15-10:15 AM) and afternoon (5-6 PM) peak volumes at the four intersections identified as the Beach Drive closure detour routes. Volumes are shown for April 2024 (when Beach Drive is open), Thursday March 2025 (when Beach Drive is open) and Friday March 2025 (when Beach Drive is closed). Volumes in 2025 are either slightly higher or comparable to 2024 at the studied intersections. Volumes are higher at all locations on Friday compared to Thursday, when Beach Drive is closed to vehicles, indicating that vehicles are utilizing the anticipated detour routes along MD 355 and Cedar Lane.

### Intersection Level of Service

The May 2024 Planning Board report modeled Beach Drive closure impacts to level of service (LOS) at existing intersections throughout the Open Parkway area, with results forecasting no change to most intersections except for MD 355 at Strathmore Avenue, which could potentially degrade to LOS “D” from LOS “C” with added detour traffic. Based on March 2025 counts, MD 355 at Strathmore is still operating at a LOS of “C” during the

afternoon rush hour, with only about 2 seconds of additional delay compared to 2024 analysis. Other intersections are also operating at existing levels of service, even with added detour traffic.

#### Parkwood Drive Traffic Impacts

Parkwood Drive has a peak volume of over 200 vph (morning) and 220 vph (afternoon) north of Saul Road on a typical weekday. On Fridays, Parkwood Dr experiences a slight increase in peak hour traffic in the 9 – 10 AM hour and the 3:30 – 4:30 PM hour, coinciding with start times and end times at Kensington Parkwood Elementary School. These slight increases in the Friday volumes are still less than the typical weekday peak volumes occurring earlier in the day.

The traffic increase is not classified as traditional cut-through traffic, as counts indicate the additional traffic is not driving end to end and vehicles are accessing a destination (such as Kensington Parkwood Elementary or residences) within the neighborhood. Rather, when Beach Drive is open, it is used by traffic accessing and departing the neighborhood, as well as to and from Kensington Parkwood Elementary, via Franklin Street. Once on Beach Drive, traffic can access Cedar Lane, Knowles Avenue, or MD 355 via Grosvenor Lane.

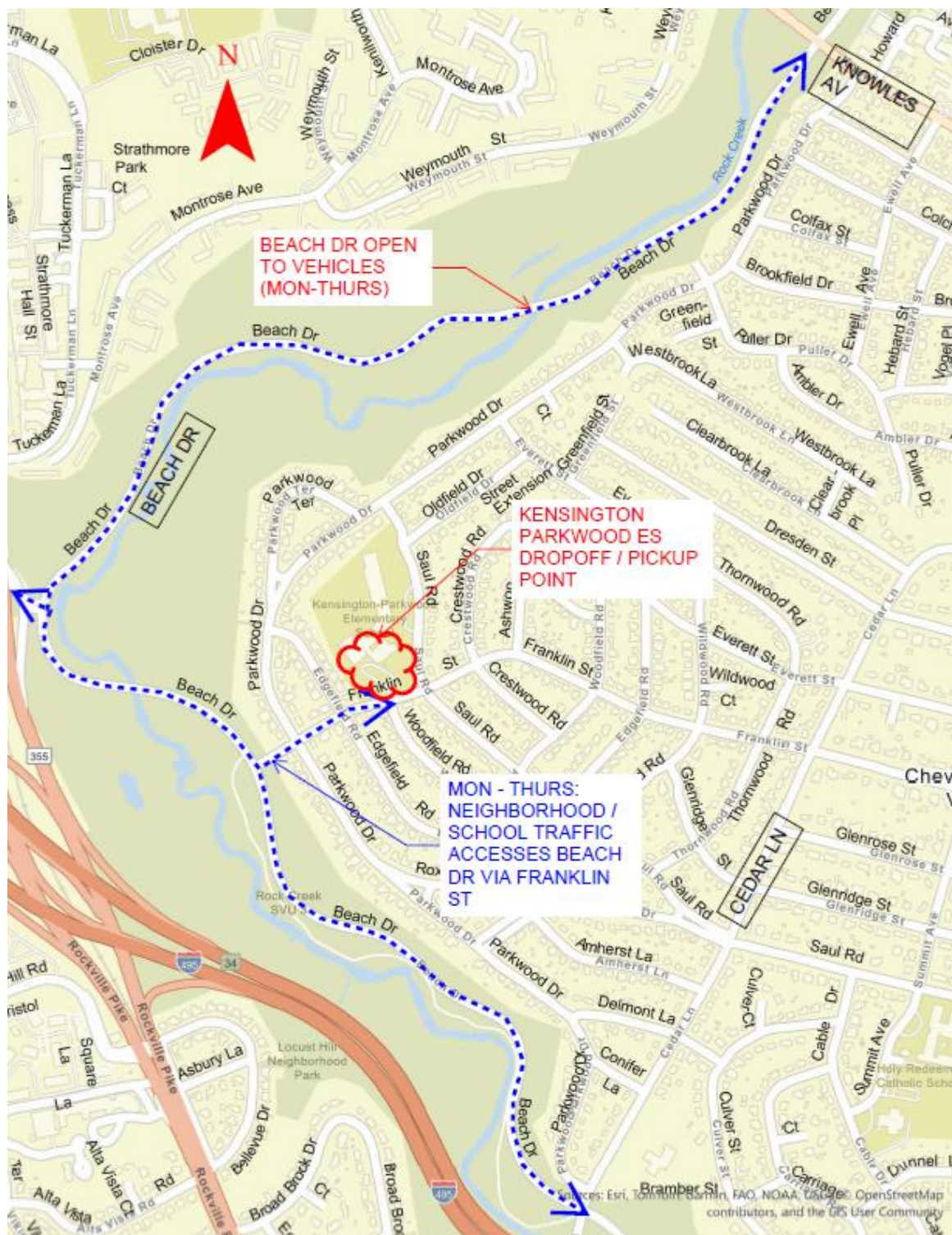


Figure 6: Neighborhood Access to Beach Drive (Mon-Thurs)



When Beach Drive is closed, neighborhood traffic is diverting to use Parkwood Drive to access Cedar Lane and Knowles Avenue.



Figure 7: Neighborhood Access (Beach Dr Closed Fri-Sun)


Counts also show slightly higher peaks along Saul Road and Franklin Street when Beach Drive is closed, showing that traffic is using those as secondary routes to access Cedar Lane or Parkwood Drive.

The closure of Beach Drive slightly increases local neighborhood traffic along Parkwood Drive, and traffic to and from Kensington Parkwood Elementary School is a factor in traffic patterns when Beach Drive is closed. No increase in “cut-through” traffic was discerned from the traffic counts. However, the peak volumes on Parkwood Drive when Beach Drive is closed is still less than the typical weekday peak volumes which occur from 7:30 – 8:30 AM.


## **CONCLUSION**

In summary:


- The Beach Drive Open Parkway has proved extremely popular with users enjoying the recreational space offered by the closure of the road to vehicles, with approximately 105,000 users counted since the original operating hours were restored.
- Leading up to the June 2024 Planning Board decision, and in the subsequent year, Parks has coordinated with the Parkwood Residents Association to conduct traffic counts and respond to concerns. A detailed summary of public input is available in the previous May 2024 Planning Board report. In May 2025, the Parkwood Residents Association and Kensington Parkwood Elementary PTA sent letters to Parks requesting removal of Fridays from the Open Parkway program. A formal public input period was not conducted in advance of the June 2025 Planning Board informational briefing. However, a significant amount of public support for a three-day Open Parkway closure was received prior to the June 2024 Planning Board decision, as detailed in the May 2024 Planning Board report.
- Traffic counts conducted at nine locations throughout 2024 into spring 2025 show that traffic is utilizing the anticipated detour routes along MD 355 and Cedar Lane when Beach Drive is closed.
- Existing intersections along the detour routes are operating at the same levels of service, even with the added detour traffic when Beach Drive is closed.
- No increase in “cut-through” traffic on Parkwood Drive was detected from traffic counts. Vehicles are using Parkwood Drive and surrounding roads to access locations within the neighborhood such as Kensington Parkwood Elementary, not as a bypass.
- Peak volumes on Parkwood Drive slightly increase on Fridays when Beach Drive is closed, with the largest impacts occurring during morning and afternoon drop-off and pickups at Kensington Parkwood Elementary School. The primary impetus behind the increase is traffic that utilizes Franklin Street to access Beach Drive must divert to using Parkwood Drive and other roads when Beach Drive is closed. The peak volumes experienced when Beach Drive is closed is less than the typical weekday morning peaks occurring from 7:30 to 8:30 AM. Overall, Parkwood Drive remains a functional roadway with conditions and volumes consistent with similar neighborhood connectors throughout the county.

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# MCPB Item 6 - Beach Drive Open Parkway Traffic and Usage Briefing 6.6.2025

Final Audit Report

2025-06-09

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