

Item 10 - Correspondence

From: [Coello, Catherine](#)
To: [MCP-Chair](#)
Subject: FW: Letter regarding the Parks Proposal
Date: Wednesday, June 12, 2024 2:52:43 PM
Attachments: [BRCHCA Letter to Artie Harris.pdf](#)
[image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)
[image005.png](#)

From: Harris, Artie <Artie.Harris@mncppc-mc.org>
Sent: Friday, June 7, 2024 12:54 PM
To: Coello, Catherine <catherine.coello@mncppc-mc.org>; Thompkins, Melissa <melissa.thompkins@mncppc-mc.org>
Cc: Branda, Ilana <Ilana.Branda@mncppc-mc.org>
Subject: FW: Letter regarding the Parks Proposal



Artie L. Harris
Chair

Montgomery County Planning Board
2425 Reedie Dr, 14th Floor, Wheaton, MD 20902

MCP-CHAIR@mncppc-mc.org
o: 301.495.4628



From: BRCHCA President <president@brchca.org>
Sent: Thursday, June 6, 2024 2:22 PM
To: Harris, Artie <Artie.Harris@mncppc-mc.org>
Cc: Mike Heyl <mikehey1@verizon.net>; chiefmar@comcast.net; eileensarsfield@gmail.com
Subject: Letter regarding the Parks Proposal

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Dear Chair Harris,

Attached please find a letter from me as the president of our citizen's association for the Byeforde-Rock Creek Highlands neighborhood. We had anticipated testifying but understand this is not possible as the Planning Board meeting on June 13 is a working session.

This letter reflects what the testimony would have included.

Thank you very much for reviewing this letter which I will also forward to members of the Planning Board. Please let me know if you need any other information.

Sincerely, Eileen Sarsfield

Mr. Artie Harris
Chair, Montgomery Planning Board
2425 Reddie Dr.
Wheaton, MD 20902

Dear Chair Harris

We are writing in advance of the Montgomery Planning Board meeting being held on June 13, 2024. We truly appreciate your review of Montgomery Parks' proposal to modify the Open Parkways Program. The Byeforde Rock Creek Highlands Citizen's Association (BRCHCA) supports the proposed modification to the Open Parkways to **reopen the 0.7-mile section of Beach Drive** between Cedar Lane and Connecticut Avenue on a permanent basis. The proposal represents a reasonable compromise that is supported by the data collected over the last four years. If approved, it will help to ensure the safety of our neighborhood, meet Montgomery County's pedestrian safety goals, including Vision Zero, while still providing the public with over two miles of Open Parkways.

Over the last four years, our neighborhood has expressed significant concerns with the closure of this particular segment of Beach Drive. This includes testimony presented to the Planning Board in March of 2023 in the context of the Pedestrian Master Plan as well as an in-person meeting with Chair Harris in February of this year. Our focus is on the 0.7-mile section of Beach Drive between Cedar Lane and Connecticut Avenue:

- This segment is adjacent to the Capital Beltway and serves as a primary commuter route between 495 and NIH, and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (and Rockville and Bethesda).
- It also serves as a jump off point from the Beltway when there is traffic and congestion. **Whenever there is traffic stacking, GPS apps such as Waze and GoogleMaps send drivers off of the beltway and onto Culver Street as a by-pass to the traffic.**
- Culver Street is a residential neighborhood street in Kensington and parallels the 0.70-mile stretch of Beach Dr. between Connecticut Ave. and Cedar Lane.
- **Culver Street has no sidewalks or traffic calming measures in place.**
- The street is narrow with many blind spots and cars parked along both sides of the road.
- There are many families with young children as well as residents with special needs who live on this road.
- Unlike Culver Street, **Beach Dr. has a pedestrian footpath** (and has since 1976).

The unintended consequence of the closure of this 0.70-mile segment of Beach Drive has resulted in re-directing over **1700 cars each weekend** onto narrow residential streets that were never intended to handle this volume. Because Culver Street does not have sidewalks, speedbumps or other traffic mitigations, the sheer volume of cars alone creates a significant safety issue for our neighbors, especially those with children playing or riding their bikes.

We believe that the data support re-opening this segment. Since the fall of 2020, there have been five (5) traffic studies performed on Culver Street. The cut-through traffic volume has increased steadily each time the traffic has been counted. Overall, there has been a **45% increase in traffic volumes** since the first assessment in 2020. Moreover, the data show that the increases are exponentially higher each time counted. For example, there was an increase of **30% between counts taken in January and September of 2023 alone.**

The data also show a direct correlation between the closures in the traffic volumes. In December of 2022, then Parks Director Michael Riley stated, **"...increase in Friday traffic is significant ... re-opening Beach Drive is the best approach to address legitimate neighborhood concerns."**

Our neighborhood was grateful when these unsafe volumes prompted the removal of Friday closures. After this modification was implemented, Friday **traffic volumes decreased by more than 60%**. Unfortunately, traffic volumes on Saturdays and Sundays have continued to grow. At the time the program was modified in 2022, the Friday traffic count was at 952 cars. By comparison, the latest traffic counts (September 2023) show that **Saturday volumes (963) now exceed the Friday volume that was considered sufficiently unsafe** to modify the program in 2022.

Conversely, weekend **pedestrian usage on Beach Drive has sharply decreased**. Data collected by Montgomery Parks using two counters located on the segment between Cedar Lane and Knowles Ave. – the segment that is currently proposed to remain in the Open Parkways – show that the average weekend pedestrian/cyclist **usage of Beach Dr. has decreased by 73% on Saturdays and 70% on Sundays** since the program started in 2020. These publicly available data are not reflected in the Parks staff report.

Although it was not until Q4 2023 that counts were taken on the segment between Connecticut Ave. and Cedar Lane, the data collected here consistently showed less usage than the Cedar to Knowles segment. Indeed, the **usage of this segment was 35% less on average**. Hence, removing this particular segment from the Open Parkways program makes sense based on usage alone.

We do recognize that a percentage of the public comments oppose re-opening this 0.70 mile segment of Beach Drive. We understand that **half of the comments come from outside of the 20895 and 20814** zip codes contiguous to the sections of Beach Drive impacted by Open Parkways program. As a result, we urge the Planning Board to view all of the data in context as we believe that the data collected by the county over the last four years presents a more accurate reflection of the situation when compared to anecdotal opinions from an all comers sample of public opinions and comments. Moreover, our neighborhood – the Montgomery County residents most impacted by the Open Parkways Program - is significantly outnumbered by special interest groups and those in the public at-large whose safety or neighborhood is not adversely impacted by the closures. With an over 70% decline in usage of Beach Drive on Saturdays and Sundays, the data disprove those comments opposing re-opening the segment based on usage or popularity. On the other hand, the spillover traffic in our neighborhood has grown – and continues to grow – to unsafe volumes. Re-directing cars away from a closed road to a residential street also does not help the environment.

Our support for re-opening this segment is and remains safety based. **The risk of diverting an increasing volume of cars down a residential street for the benefit of a road closure with decreasing usage presents a very simple risk-benefit calculation**. When one considers that the closed road has a sidewalk/pedestrian pathway while the residential street does not, the risk to benefit disparity is even more profound. **Safety should ALWAYS outweigh popularity**.

In sum, the proposal to shorten the length of closure on Beach Dr. is a practical, multi-stakeholder negotiated compromise and common sense solution to a legitimate and recognized safety issue that our neighborhood has endured for far too long. It is data driven and properly prioritizes safety over popularity. It is also consistent with Vision Zero and the county's pedestrian safety goals while continuing to provide over two miles of Open Parkways for the public benefit each weekend. **It does not eliminate anyone's ability to enjoy the Open Parkways Program**. We urge the Planning Board to make the right decision – one that is based on the data and in the best interest of safety. We would be happy to provide any additional data or information that would be helpful as the Planning Board makes this important and impactful decision.

Thank you!

Eileen Sarsfield, President

From: [Lukacs, Kyle](#)
To: [Joan McDermott](#); [MCP-Chair](#); [Kira Lueders](#); [Jeff Griffith](#); [Susan Priester](#); [Bianca Scherr](#)
Subject: RE: Beach Drive closure
Date: Wednesday, June 12, 2024 10:08:58 AM

Thanks for reaching out Joan! I'm adding a slide to our presentation for tomorrow which will highlight the viewpoints of Kensington Estates as described below.

Cheers,

Kyle Lukacs

Trails Planner, Park Planning & Stewardship Division

Montgomery Parks | The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Office: 301.495.2502

From: Joan McDermott <jbmcdermott2@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, June 12, 2024 8:20 AM

To: MCP-Chair <mcp-chair@mncppc-mc.org>; Lukacs, Kyle <Kyle.Lukacs@montgomeryparks.org>; Kira Lueders <kklarl@yahoo.com>; Jeff Griffith <jeffgpra@gmail.com>; Susan Priester <kecatreasurer22@gmail.com>; Bianca Scherr <bianca@thescherrs.com>

Subject: Beach Drive closure

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Mr. Lukasc,

Kira Lueders of the Parkwood Residents Association (PRA) forwarded your email address and said that you would welcome input on the Beach Drive closure proposal from residents of our area, Kensington Estates. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute the points below for consideration by the Planning Board.

What I cannot understand is how this proposal could be made without contacting the associations representing residents in the abutting neighborhoods. Montgomery Parks should be aware of the Planning Board's HOA and Civic Association database. The traffic study done in response to the Byeforde community's complaints was quite thorough. Why was no study done on the area between Knowles and Cedar? Our neighborhoods already see cut-through traffic. That is why there are speed bumps on Parkwood.

Testing the MCAtlas for HOA/CA information, I see that the site does not work as it should. I receive notices of proposals to the Planning Board, but I saw errors and omissions in my search. I was able to retrieve contact information for current officers of Parkwood and KECA, but Parkwood is not shown as an area. That should be corrected on the map.

Comments for my perspective on Kensington Estates:

Kensington Estates is the area north of Parkwood, south of Knowles and west of Summit Avenue. Rock Creek Park and Beach Drive are to the west, so closures of Beach Drive have a big impact on our residents. I drive on Beach between Franklin and Grosvenor almost every day.

As President of the Kensington Estates Civic Association (KECA), I have surveyed subscribers to our listserv and submitted the assembled comments to the Planning Board. I first learned of the proposed Open Parkway changes from a posting on the Parkwood listserv on May 9th. Knowing that there would be a range of opinions here, and with my time limited by a week away and planning for KECA's Block Party on June 1, I posted a message to our listserv with links to Montgomery Park's staff report and comment submission. I hope that some readers took the time to visit the website and submit comments. These comments are mine.

Parkwood's survey results are what I would expect here: most people would oppose closing Beach on Friday, and most people like having Beach open for recreation on the weekend. There are some who would never close the road, and others who would love to have the road permanently closed to traffic. KECA does not have a position on the proposal.

Montgomery Park's proposal to close Beach at 9 AM on Fridays does not take account of Kensington Parkwood Elementary School's (KPES) schedule. The school's start time is 9:25, and parents are not allowed to drop off children before 9:10 AM. The school is about 0.1 mile up Franklin Ave from Beach Drive. School buses travel from Franklin to Beach to Grosvenor, and they travel up Tuckerman to the bus lot. Our middle school and high school buses use that route, too. I think that most of our residents would prefer that Open Parkways stay limited to weekends.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Joan McDermott

Joan McDermott, President
Kensington Estates Civic Association
4407 Puller Drive
Kensington, MD 20895
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From: [CAROL PLACEK](#)
To: [MCP-Chair](#)
Subject: Written testimony submission for Item 10 June 13, 2024 Montgomery Planning Board
Date: Tuesday, June 11, 2024 1:59:46 PM
Attachments: [MNCPPC testimony June 13 2024 Beach Drive closure.docx](#)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

I am submitting the attached written testimony for the June 13, 2024 Montgomery Planning Board meeting, Item 10, Permanent Operating Hours and Extents for Beach Drive.

My name is Carol Placek, 10246 Parkwood Drive, Kensington MD 20895

I am a Parkwood resident, against closing Beach Drive at all on Fridays and want the short segment of Beach Drive from Franklin Street to Grosvenor Lane/Rockville Pike to stay open to cars at all times to let Parkwood residents efficiently enter and leave their neighborhood. There is an adjacent protected pedestrian trail along this short stretch of Beach that will safely allow both cars and pedestrians to navigate.

There are two types of impacts from the Beach Drive closure - increased cut through traffic on streets in Parkwood, and the increased travel time, stress and inconvenience for Parkwood residents to enter and exit the neighborhood efficiently. For me, the increased travel time to enter/exit the neighborhood is important.

Parkwood residents were not informed of or included in planning this study, so the burdens on Parkwood residents of not being able to use Beach Drive to access Rockville Pike at Grosvenor was not even considered in the Parks Department planning study.

The short road segment from Beach at Franklin north to Beach at Grosvenor/Rockville Pike is crucial to efficiently reach Rockville Pike to access the eastbound beltway, Grosvenor metro, the Montgomery mall area, and Rockville Pike. This road segment is only about 10% of the distance from Connecticut to Knowles. Furthermore, it has a pedestrian walkway, protected by cement barriers, adjacent to Beach along the entire stretch, so pedestrians and cars can both use this stretch of road safely. Keeping Beach Drive open to cars at all times from Franklin to Grosvenor was not even considered, yet in a vote of the Parkwood Residents, Association, 43% preferred this option.

The planning study did not even collect data for how many cars enter or exit the neighborhood at Beach/Franklin, so Parkwood resident use of this road segment was not and could not be evaluated.

The burden on Parkwood residents every time they have to detour when Beach is closed is unacceptable and unnecessary.

I tested the drive time to access Grosvenor metro via Beach and via Strathmore Ave. to Rockville Pike.

Driving Route	Time	Number of traffic signals/ Unsignaled left turns
Beach to Rockville Pike	3 minutes	1 (Right at Grosvenor on to Rockville Pike) / 0
Strathmore to L Rockville Pike	12 minutes	4 (3 along Strathmore, 1 on Rockville Pike)/ 1 (left onto Strathmore from stop sign Parkwood Drive)

Post-pandemic traffic on Strathmore/Knowles Avenue is now terrible, especially at Friday rush hour, so trying to turn left onto Knowles from Parkwood, where there is no signal, can take more than five minutes, and multiple cars are waiting to turn left onto Parkwood! Traffic is backed up along Knowles from Connecticut to Beach starting at 3pm. Strathmore is the only road connecting Wisconsin to Connecticut Avenues between the beltway and Randolph Road, so it already carries a huge traffic volume for a two lane road.

It is totally unfair to impose 15-20 extra minutes of extra drive time and stress on Parkwood residents every time they need to exit/enter of their neighborhood or on their guests who are trying to visit them. The extra travel time reduces the amount of time I might have to exercise.

At a minimum keep this short stretch of Beach Drive open at all times. Alternate routes have multiple traffic lights, school entrances that slow traffic, and heavy rush hour traffic that takes more time and adds stress for Parkwood residents. There is already a pedestrian trail next to the road, plus there is the bike

trail in the park. Maybe the "open Beach Drive" option worked during the pandemic without too much inconvenience, but the pandemic is over and horrible traffic has returned.

I have lived in Parkwood and used the trails in the park for 37 years, and feel that the trail in the park is totally adequate. As a biker, I also have shared the road with cars along Beach Drive without any problems. There are also so many not great weather days where Beach is closed and no one is using it, that I feel it is a real waste to close it for three days a week. Plus in bad weather car traffic is worse, while Beach Drive sits there empty.

Finally, a comment from a neighbor:

Another consideration. I've noticed that when Beach is closed, Parkwood and Cedar becomes a destination itself as a park entry. The street gets congested and becomes parked up from Cedar to Conifer there. Lots of dangerous driving, kids in the road, wacky u-turns, bikes in the road etc as people kids and dogs unload. Every day Beach is closed, people are dumping food container garbage all over this segment of road. Finally, all these parked cars can make resident street parking at the houses on this stretch of Parkwood encumbered.

Thank you,
Carol Placek
10246 Parkwood Drive, Kensington MD 20895

From: [Alison Gillespie](#)
To: [MCP-Chair](#); [Harris, Artie](#); [Pedoeem, Mitra](#); [Bartley, Shawn](#); [Hedrick, James](#); [Linden, Josh](#)
Cc: [Figueredo, Miti](#); [Flusche, Darren](#); [Councilmember Andrew Friedson](#); [Fani-Gonzalez's Office, Councilmember](#); [Glass's Office, Councilmember](#); [Office of Councilmember Balcombe](#); [Councilmember Jawando](#); [Sayles's Office, Councilmember](#); [Katz's Office, Councilmember](#); [Stewart's Office, Councilmember](#); [Councilmember.Luedtke@montgomerycountymd.gov](#); [Councilmember.Mink@montgomerycountymd.gov](#); [Councilmember Albornoz](#)
Subject: I support keeping Beach Drive car-free each weekend
Date: Sunday, June 9, 2024 2:52:19 PM

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Members of the Planning Board:

I am writing to express my support for the open parkways program and for keeping Beach Drive car free each weekend.

I recently wrote an opinion article expressing my support for the Greater Greater Washington website. Below is the text of that article. You can also read it [online here](#).

I hope you will vote to follow the Parks' staff recommendations regarding the future of this positive and extremely popular program.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Alison Gillespie

Keep Beach Drive car-free on the weekends

On a recent Sunday morning, people were making their way up and down Beach Drive between Kensington and Rockville in Maryland, where the road has been closed to cars and open to people who want to walk, ride or roll their way up and down the paved street. Serious cyclists were there, but so were grandparents with babies in strollers, wheelchair users, and children learning to ride their own small bikes without training wheels. “I love roller skating here,” one young woman told me. “Until the parks offered this I had no place to put on my skates and really fly.”

Earlier this month, Montgomery Parks leadership announced that they would like to make this innovative use of paved parkland permanent, with a few changes. They have asked citizens to weigh in with comments [on this portal](#) before Thursday, May 30.

Their proposal would ensure that the weekend car free days remain in place year round, permanently. It would also slightly shorten the length of the closure by a little more than half a mile in order to accommodate the requests of some nearby residents who want to drive through the area in cars. But Parks is also recommending a slightly longer car-free time overall by bringing back Fridays as a car-free day.

Noting that they had taken several years of data on usership and done several years of outreach, Miti Figueredo, Montgomery Parks director, said in a press release that she “she is excited to move forward with a project that makes more parks space available for recreational uses like biking, walking, and skating.”

A successful experiment

Since 2020, Montgomery Parks has been running the wildly popular Open Parkways program on Beach Drive and in two other locations – Little Falls Parkway and Sligo Creek Parkway. Over the last year, the open parkway on Beach Drive [was used more than 135,000 times](#) according to the Montgomery Parks trail counting devices.

By proposing to make this program permanent on Beach Drive, our local park system is doing what many other land use agencies have done all over the world and around the US, and for good reason. Closing roads to cars either sometimes or all the time can reap huge benefits for communities that are starved for places to play. [This includes many cities large and small](#), including Paris, New York and Bogota and San Francisco. It also matches a [similar decision made in 2022 by the National Park Service](#) on the southern side of Beach Drive in Washington, DC.

The decision to close Beach Drive on weekends in Montgomery County also perfectly matches the goals of the county’s new [Thrive 2050](#) plan, which emphasizes getting people outside, social and active. As their own [Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan](#) also states, “parks, recreation, and open spaces provide active, social, and leisure opportunities that are essential to the high quality of life for Montgomery County residents.”

Montgomery Parks should be commended for taking this step. This kind of creative adaptation of pavement especially makes sense along Beach Drive, which is nestled like a long green belt of relief inside an intense amount of urban development. The road is just a short distance from many apartment buildings and condos in Rockville. It is also a very short bike ride away from Bethesda and Wheaton, both of which are now experiencing building booms and huge increases in multifamily homes.

Building in our urban core makes sense both fiscally and environmentally, as it encourages residents to use existing infrastructure like Metro. Making those areas livable by providing access to green space like Rock Creek for exercise and relaxation is an important component of that livability.

We also shouldn’t just think of parks and parkland as valuable to those who live immediately adjacent to them. Rock Creek Park in particular serves as valuable open space for millions of people in our region. It is close, accessible and available to a huge chunk of the population. It is best realized as a park, not a parkway.

Lean into what’s working

I consider the open parkways program to be a key amenity to living in the downcounty area. As someone who lives just south of Wheaton and next to the Capitol Beltway, I often take advantage of the shady ride afforded by Beach Drive and Sligo Creek Parkway. It is just a few short miles and minutes from my house. I only really began seriously riding a bike when I turned 50 in 2019, and was horribly intimidated by riding on streets near cars when I began. As the pandemic burned on, I found I was drawn to the safety and security of a closed parkway and was able to gain confidence there. Now, more secure in my skills, I ride there because I love the community feeling it brings to exercise with so many of my neighbors all around. It is truly one of the best parts of this community.

Some may chafe at losing a favorite shortcut for driving via car to Rockville Pike a few days a week. But our parks shouldn't be serving as just commuter shortcuts, and Montgomery Parks leadership should be congratulated for thinking innovatively and adapting to changing times and needs of all of its residents.

Residents have been asked to comment on this proposal and I hope that many will visit the [Parks portal before the May 30 deadline](#) and state their support for making this open parkway permanent and available to all every week Friday-Sunday.

From: [Kira Lueders](#)
To: [MCP-Chair](#)
Subject: June 13, 2024 meeting agenda item #10
Date: Friday, June 7, 2024 2:22:02 PM
Attachments: [PRA.BeachDr.pdf](#)

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The Parkwood Residents Association (PRA) is sharing this letter that was sent to the Park Service in response to plans to close Beach Drive on Fridays. Parkwood is a neighborhood of 936 homes, which abuts Rock Creek Park, and Beach Drive is a road parallel to Parkwood Rd between Cedar Lane and Knowles Avenue.

Kira Lueders, PRA president

As a part of the County's Open Parkways Program, Beach Drive is currently closed to traffic from Cedar Lane to Knowles Avenue beginning on Saturday at 7:00 AM through Sunday at 4:00 PM EST / 6:00 PM DST. A draft recommendation of the staff of the Montgomery County Department of Parks to the Montgomery County Planning Board dated May 2, 2024, recommends that in addition to the Saturday/Sunday closure, Beach Drive also be closed on Fridays beginning at 9:00 AM and continuing through the weekend.

Parkwood is a residential community that borders Beach Drive on its southern and western boundary. The Parkwood Residents Association surveyed its members regarding this proposed change. The overwhelming majority (80%) of the members of the Association voted AGAINST Parks' recommendation to close Beach Drive from Cedar Lane to Knowles Avenue on Friday. We therefore ask that the Montgomery County Department of Parks NOT close Beach Drive to traffic on Fridays and that it remain open as it now.

We must point out the Planning Board usually notifies neighborhoods of issues under consideration that are going to affect them. As president, I and PRA vice president Jeff Griffith receive such notices and are able to share that information with Parkwood residents who might want to comment. There was no notice about this issue. We did not know this proposal had been made until hearing about it from a fellow resident on May 9th, with a deadline to comment to Parks by May 30th, and the Planning Board hearing on June 13th. Nevertheless we convened a meeting of the membership to discuss Parks' proposal and followed that with a survey of all members. The result as noted is clear opposition to Parks proposal.

We regret that in this instance Montgomery Parks did not consult in advance with the Parkwood community, whose members are the ones who would be most affected by this proposed change. This section of Beach Drive has not been closed on Fridays since December 2022.

We would look forward to an open discussion with Parks staff about our concerns. We are especially worried that the opening of Beach Drive from Connecticut to Cedar will drive more drivers into the Parkwood neighborhood when they find that Beach is closed at Cedar on Fridays, as Parks is proposing. This is yet another reason for not closing Beach Drive from Cedar to Knowles, and certainly not before more traffic studies can assess the impact of closing Beach Drive from Connecticut to Cedar.

In addition, while most members support the closure of Beach Drive on the weekends, we want to explore with Parks options for allowing residents to enter and exit our neighborhood at selected points via Beach if that were feasible.

Kira Lueders, PRA president
Jeff Griffith, PRA vice-president