

BEACH DRIVE OPEN PARKWAY - 2025 PROGRAM UPDATE: FRIDAY CLOSURE ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS



Description

This report provides a summary analysis of public outreach collected by Montgomery Parks on potential alternatives to a full-day Friday Open Parkway closure to vehicles along Beach Drive. This initiative was last discussed by the Planning Board on June 12, 2025.

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SUMMARY

- During a June 12, 2025 briefing, the Planning Board directed staff to evaluate potential alternatives to a full-day Open Parkway closure of Beach Drive on Fridays.
- This staff report evaluates six potential alternatives that include eliminating or modifying Friday Open Parkway closures, limiting closures to specific times of year, and modifying the roadway segment where the Open Parkway closure would occur.
- Public Input on the six alternatives was collected via online survey between July 14 and August 24, 2025.
- Community feedback strongly supports the Open Parkway Program operating on Saturday and Sunday. Opinions about the Friday Open Parkway and alternatives to it were mixed.
- Analysis of the feedback break downs responses from adjacent neighborhoods, county-wide, and all respondents. There were different preferences based on these geographic distinctions.
- None of the proposed potential alternatives were ranked overall as more favorable than the current condition in the full survey results. Adjacent resident respondents prefer two alternatives over the current condition.
- Respondents from the adjacent zip codes viewed eliminating the Friday Open Parkway closure as a more favorable option than the current configuration and also viewed opening vehicular access to MD-355 on Fridays more favorably than the current Friday–Sunday closures.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Review public input and make a determination to either: i) eliminate the Friday Open Parkway to address neighborhood vehicular traffic concerns while maintaining Saturday and Sunday; or ii) delay the start time of the Friday Open Parkway to 12 PM.

Staff do not recommend the other alternatives for the following reasons:

- Opening vehicular access to MD-355 increases the operational burden on the Parks Department.
- Delaying the start time until 4 PM provides insufficient benefit to Open Parkway users while failing to fully address neighborhood concerns.
- Seasonal closures were not popular among any group of survey respondents.

BACKGROUND

The Beach Drive Open Parkway Program has been a popular program with more than one million trips counted since it began as a pilot in April 2020. While it opened new areas for recreational access, the closure to vehicles resulted in changes to local travel patterns with other associated impacts which have made aspects of the program controversial and resulted in revisions to the operating hours and extents.

In June 2024 the Montgomery County Planning Board approved a permanent Beach Drive Open Parkway program, closing the road to vehicles from Knowles Avenue (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. At that time, the Planning Board requested that Parks study the Open Parkway usage and traffic impacts during the following year and report back.

A year later, on June 12, 2025, Montgomery Parks presented an analysis of usage and impacts of the Open Parkway using vehicular traffic counts collected throughout the neighborhood, and bicyclists and pedestrian counts from the Open Parkway. The year-long data collection showed a popular program, with approximately 2,250 users near the Puller Playground enjoying the Open Parkway every weekend. Recorded traffic counts confirmed that anticipated detour routes were used as expected, with no adverse impacts to detour intersection levels of service. However, an increase in traffic along Parkwood Drive and the Kensington Parkwood community when Beach Drive is closed was noted, influenced by shifting neighborhood traffic patterns and Kensington Parkwood Elementary (9:25 AM – 3:50 PM) school traffic.

During the June 12 update, the Planning Board focused on the local traffic impacts, and what alternatives might help address and mitigate local concerns. The Planning Board requested that Parks collect public input on a suite of potential alternatives. The survey results and analysis of potential alternatives are detailed in this report.

This report is a supplement to the previously published June 2025 Report, “*Beach Drive Open Parkway Traffic and Usage Briefing*” and the May 2024 Planning Board report, “*Recommendation for Permanent Operating Hours and Extents for Beach Drive Open Parkway*”. These reports include additional background information, data, and analysis.

PUBLIC OUTREACH OVERVIEW

Several potential alternatives were developed based on input from the Planning Board, area civic associations, and the public.

Alternatives Considered:

1. **Remove Friday Open Parkway:** Beach Drive remains open to vehicular traffic, no recreational access on Fridays.
2. **Allow vehicular access to 355 on Friday only:** Allow vehicular traffic on Beach Drive between Franklin Street and Grosvenor Lane for direct access to MD 355.
3. **Delay Open Parkway start time on Fridays to 12 PM:** Avoid morning commute and morning school traffic disruptions.
4. **Delay Open Parkway start time on Fridays to 4 PM:** Avoid morning commute and morning and afternoon school traffic disruptions.
5. **Seasonal Closure (Fridays) during summer (Memorial Day to Labor Day)**
6. **Seasonal Closure (Fridays) during daylight savings time (early March to early November)**

A public survey was conducted from July 14th through August 24th, 2025, to collect feedback on these alternatives. More than 1,300 responses were received to supplement previous outreach shared with the Planning Board. The survey asked people to rate potential alternatives on a scale of Least Favorable (1) to Most Favorable (5).

Previous outreach identified concerns around the Friday Open Parkway closures related to increased neighborhood cut-through traffic, speeding traffic, inconvenient detours, minimal recreational use, emergency access concerns, and more. This document builds on that previous analysis to identify the specific pros and cons of each potential alternative and to document community sentiment, see Public Input Analysis Summary section below.

The full results include those who reside within Montgomery County (63%), reside outside of Montgomery County (6%), and those who live in either, but omitted a zip code (31%). The Montgomery County results are inclusive of the results from both the 20895 (32%) and 20814 (14%) zip codes which are the communities adjacent to the Open Parkway area (Figure 1). The results are presented in full, along with the results for Montgomery County alone and the adjacent zip codes alone due to the complexities and nuances surrounding these alternatives.

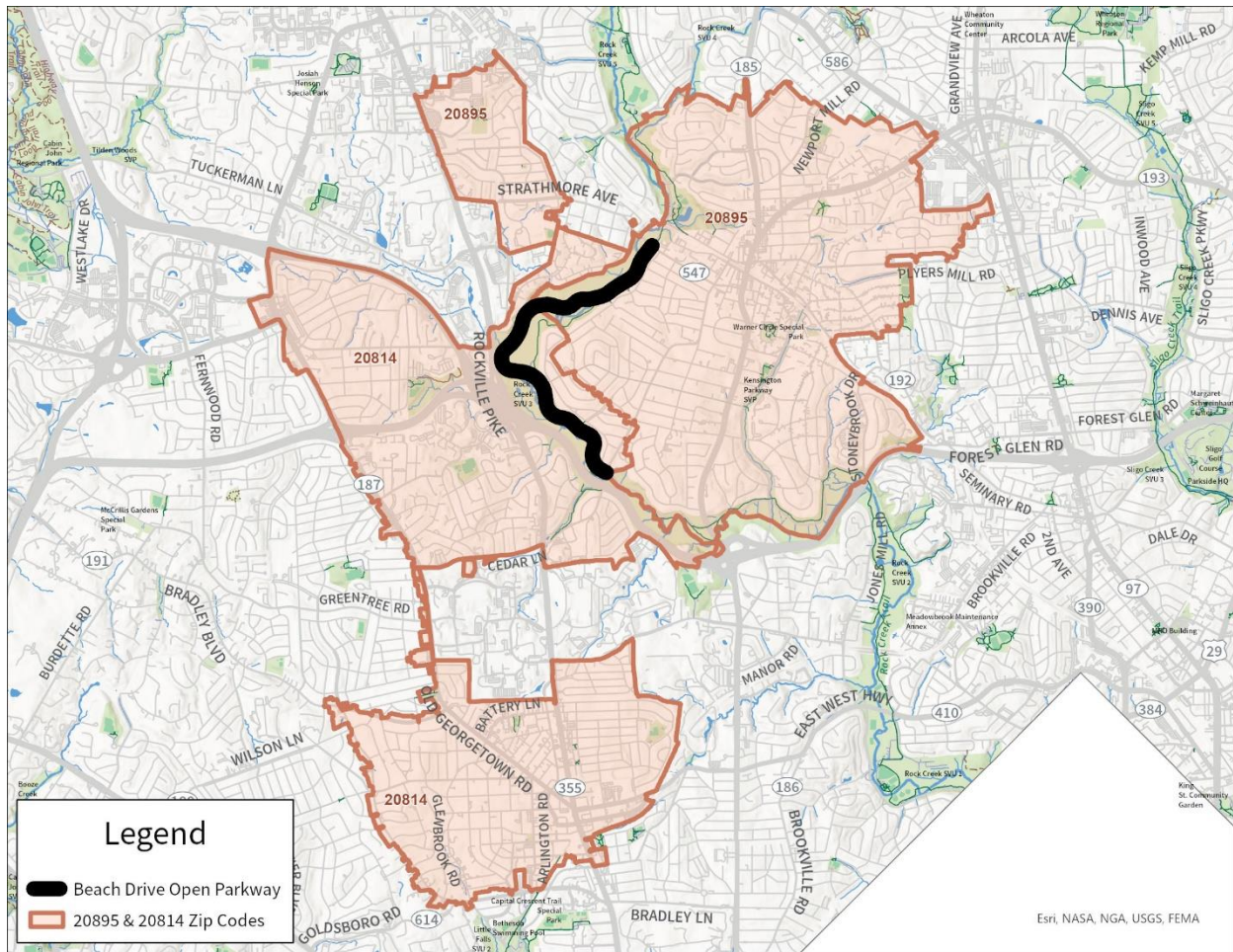


Figure 1. Map of Current Open Parkway Extents & Adjacent Zip Codes

PUBLIC INPUT ANALYSIS SUMMARY

Divergent views on the different alternatives highlight the complexity of a change to the Friday Open Parkway closure. All of the alternatives were rated by the overall group of survey respondents as less favorable than the current configuration (Open Parkway Friday through Sunday).

The weekend Open Parkway program continues to maintain popular support among all geographic groups. Friday's Open Parkway is viewed as unfavorable by respondents in the County or the adjacent zip codes (20895 and 20814).

Removing Friday's Open Parkway and keeping Beach Drive open to traffic was the most favored alternative by the adjacent zip codes and was the only alternative to be rated favorably on average when analyzing Montgomery County and local results (eliminating respondents from outside Montgomery County).

Additional alternatives to a full Friday removal are ranked below based on the results of public feedback:

Alternatives	Full Results	Montgomery County	20895	20814
1. Open Vehicular Access to MD-355 from Franklin St*	2.27	2.36	2.61	2.49
2. Delay the Friday start time to 12:00 PM	2.05	2.09	2.12	1.82
3. Delay the Friday start time to 4:00 PM	1.89	1.96	2.03	1.91
4. Operate the Open Parkway seasonally during the Summer	1.65	1.82	1.82	1.75
5. Operate the Open Parkway seasonally during Daylight Savings Time	1.64	1.69	1.69	1.53

Table 1. Potential Alternatives Ranked Based on Average Rating

*This alternative may cause increased cut-through traffic from outside the neighborhood, provides a reduced Open Parkway experience, and has a greater capital and operational cost for Parks.

Operationally, any alternatives to the Beach Drive Open Parkway program could be implemented within a short timeframe. However, adjustments to detour signage and traffic gates may be required.

PUBLIC INPUT ANALYSIS DETAILS

CURRENT CONFIGURATION

Survey responses provided insight into the potential alternatives. The responses were polarized with 41% of responses rating the current configuration as Least Favorable (1) and 48% rating it Most Favorable (5). These numbers flip when filtering for local results with 48% in Montgomery County, 60% in 20895, and 66% in 20814 rating the current configuration as Least Favorable. Table 2 below shows the average rating of the current configuration along with the votes grouped by favorability with anything above a Neutral Favorability (3) indicating a positive response.

	Rating	+		-	
		%	#	%	#
Full Results	3.15	52%	707	44%	597
Montgomery County	2.84	44%	383	52%	455
20895	2.33	31%	139	64%	289
20814	2.18	27%	55	70%	141

Table 2. Current Configuration Responses

Several responses were from those who live in Virginia or Washington, D.C. and value the recreational access and car-free experience provided by the Open Parkway. These 87 respondents rated the current configuration a 4.52 and the viewed the previous Saturday to Sunday closures favorably at a 3.84. A 12 PM delayed start time (2.09) and eliminating Friday (1.72) were the highest rated alternatives amongst this group though no alternatives were favored. These results are not included in the local analysis.

Table 3 below presents the average rating for the current configuration, eliminating Friday, and each potential alternative. Opening access to MD-355 was the only alternative to be rated higher than

Except for eliminating Friday completely, opening access to MD-355 at the 20814 and 20895 level was the only alternative viewed more favorably than the current configuration with the ratings for both still below the neutral (3) rating.

	Current Configuration	Eliminate Friday	355 Access	12 PM Start	4 PM Start	DST Only	Summer Only
Full Results	3.15	2.83	2.27	2.05	1.89	1.64	1.65
Montgomery County	2.84	3.11	2.36	2.09	1.96	1.63	1.70
20895	2.33	3.54	2.62	2.11	2.02	1.70	1.82
20814	2.18	3.69	2.51	1.83	1.92	1.54	1.75

Table 3. Overall Responses

ELIMINATE FRIDAY ENTIRELY

+ No Adverse Friday Open Parkway Closures

- No Friday Recreational Open Parkway Access

OVERVIEW

Eliminating Friday would revert the program back to the previous 7:00 AM Saturday start time. This avoids the entirety of the Friday Open Parkway impacts while opening Beach Drive to recreational access early Saturday morning.

	Rating	+		-	
		%	#	%	#
Full Results	2.83	41%	557	49%	676
Montgomery County	3.11	48%	423	43%	378
20895	3.54	59%	267	31%	142
20814	3.69	64%	129	30%	60

Table 4. Eliminate Friday Responses

PUBLIC INPUT

When asked about the potential to eliminate Friday, 44% rated the option as Least Favorable and 36% rated it Most Favorable. However, the support for eliminating Friday increases as the results are filtered to the local level with 43% in Montgomery County, 51% in 20895, and 58% in 20814 rating it Most Favorable. Eliminating Friday is the only alternative to be rated favorably on average when looking at the Montgomery County and local 20814 and 20895 zip code results.

While the support for eliminating Friday is strong, there are also nearly 600 responses that rated the previous Saturday to Sunday closures favorably including 48% of those in 20895 highlighting how popular this program is outside of Friday. Those who found the current configuration Most Favorable still rated the previous Saturday to Sunday closures favorably on average except for those responses from 20814.

VEHICULAR ACCESS TO MD-355

- + Increased Vehicular Access to MD-355
- + Friday Recreational Access Maintained
- Diminished Friday Open Parkway Experience
- Potential for Cut-Through Traffic

OVERVIEW

The loss of vehicular access from Franklin Street to Grosvenor Lane and MD-355 using Beach Drive on Friday is one of the key reasons for the changes to local driving patterns as those in the Parkwood neighborhood must travel farther to Cedar Lane or Knowles Avenue to reach Rockville Pike. This alternative would allow vehicular traffic on Beach Drive between Franklin Street and Grosvenor Lane on Friday only, which would reduce the volume of vehicles utilizing Parkwood Drive and adjacent roads. The Open Parkway would be active for recreational use on Friday between Cedar Lane and Franklin Street and Grosvenor Lane to Knowles Avenue and along the full extent on Saturday. This alternative would require a new gate and operationally would require multiple visits to the Open Parkway to adjust gates. The existing trail running along Beach Drive has a small buffer, narrow trail width, and a substandard bicycle and pedestrian crossing over Rock Creek at the bridge.

	Rating	%	#	%	#
Full Results	2.27	19%	262	53%	721
Montgomery County	2.36	21%	184	51%	445
20895	2.61	26%	121	43%	187
20814	2.49	26%	52	49%	96

Table 5. MD-355 Access Rating

PUBLIC INPUT

Opening vehicular access between Franklin Street and Grosvenor Lane was the most favorably viewed alternative with 19% of respondents finding it favorable. The lowest number of respondents (568) rated this option Least Favorable across all alternatives.

Comments in favor of this alternative agree it would alleviate local traffic congestion by maintaining access to MD-355 which would eliminate most of the associated inconvenience of a Friday closure. Some think that vehicular access should be maintained throughout the weekend while others questioned what impact this would have on neighborhood cut-through traffic. Parks has identified a local traffic problem due to the Open Parkway Closures with vehicles taking longer routes to enter or exit the neighborhood, but this alternative might induce non-local drivers to utilize Parkwood Drive, Saul Road, or Franklin Street to access MD-355 increasing potential cut-through traffic.

Arguments against this alternative highlight the lack of open car-free space in the County, availability of alternate routes for vehicles, presence of Friday bicycle commuters on the Parkway, and potential for confusion between users.

DELAYED START TIMES

- + Avoids AM Commute Conflict
- + Avoids KPES Drop-Off Conflict

- Conflict with PM Traffic Remains
- Reduced Recreational Access

OVERVIEW

Two potential alternatives would push the Friday start time back from 9:00 AM, in the current configuration, to either 12:00 PM or 4:00 PM. These alternatives would reduce the impact on morning commutes and school drop-off at Kensington Parkwood Elementary School (KPES) which are two of the most frequently cited impacts. A 12:00 PM start would provide some access during winter daylight hours when the sun sets early in the day and limits the potential use.

	Rating	+		-	
		%	#	%	#
Full Results	2.05	14%	190	63%	857
Montgomery County	2.09	15%	135	62%	548
20895	2.12	16%	71	63%	274
20814	1.82	11%	21	70%	137

Table 6. 12:00 PM Start Time Ratings

	Rating	+		-	
		%	#	%	#
Full Results	1.89	11%	151	67%	909
Montgomery County	1.96	13%	111	65%	569
20895	2.03	14%	60	62%	268
20814	1.91	13%	25	65%	127

Table 7. 4:00 PM Start Time Ratings

PUBLIC INPUT

Many comments reiterated the impact of the Friday closure on morning commute times, route choices, and the arrival process at Kensington Parkwood Elementary School with some appreciating the reduced impact and compromise of a delayed start time.

The 12:00 PM start time was rated more favorably than the 4:00 PM start time, apart from those responses from 20814. Those who supported eliminating the Open Parkway on Friday preferred a 4:00 PM closure to minimize the closure impacts; however, many stated that the delayed start time did not do enough to mitigate the core problems surrounding the Friday closure and that both options would still interfere with Friday evening commutes. Some suggested pushing the start time back even further until 6:00 PM or 8:00 PM to avoid this conflict.

Those who expressed support for the current configuration preferred the 12:00 PM time to maximize recreational access.

SEASONAL FRIDAY CLOSURES

+ Prioritizes Recreational Access during Warmer Months

- Reduces Overall Recreational Access
- Confusing Schedule

OVERVIEW

Two alternatives would make the Friday closure seasonal to allow for additional recreational access during warmer more popular months while preserving vehicular access during colder winter months when recreational use potential is lowest. One alternative considers keeping the Friday closures during Daylight Savings Time (March – November) while the other considers a summer or pool season duration closure (Memorial Day – Labor Day).

	Rating	%	#	%	#
Full Results	1.64	7%	91	74%	1,010
Montgomery County	1.63	7%	59	74%	653
20895	1.69	8%	33	75%	324
20814	1.53	4%	8	73%	144

Table 8. Seasonal Daylight Savings Time Ratings

	Rating	%	#	%	#
Full Results	1.65	7%	98	74%	1,005
Montgomery County	1.70	8%	68	72%	634
20895	1.82	10%	42	70%	302
20814	1.75	8%	16	70%	137

Table 9. Seasonal Summer Only Closure Ratings

PUBLIC INPUT

The seasonal closures were the lowest rated alternatives with 60% of responses rating them as Least Favorable and only 7% finding them favorable at all. Many thought they would be confusing for both drivers and recreational users and would be difficult to implement, causing safety concerns. Others believed the Friday impacts were still too great even on a seasonal basis. Those who disliked the Friday closures found the shorter Summer only closure to be more favorable than the Day Light Savings closure.

Some found the summer closure preserved recreational access during warmer months, but overall support for this option was very limited with less than 10% of responses rating either option as favorable. The potential loss of Open Parkway access outside of these limited windows on nice days during the Fall and Spring shoulder seasons was the primary complaint about seasonal closures.

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Beach Drive Open Parkway Planning Board Report - Friday Alternatives

Final Audit Report

2025-10-24

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