

**Testimony on the Downtown Silver Spring and Adjacent Communities Plan  
from Alison Gillespie on behalf of Open Streets Montgomery  
February 17, 2022**

Thanks for the chance to speak tonight.

I attended many meetings about the DTSS plan over the past year, and overall I see a lot to like in this final version, especially as it concerns parks. Tonight I'm here speaking on behalf of Open Streets Montgomery, a coalition led by myself, Peter Gray and Kristy Daphnis working to rethink existing paved spaces for things other than driving in our urban areas.

I want to specifically address the need to make Acorn Park permanently include Newell Street and further ask that the expanded park be run by Montgomery Parks, not by the Department of Transportation as is called for in the plan.

Two years ago, the county did a fantastic thing and closed off Newell Street in South Silver Spring at the request of many neighbors who wanted safe, open-air recreation space during lockdowns. The result was that a very tiny park that was almost never used due to its unpleasant proximity to cars became a popular neighborhood town square.

As the COVID months wore on and became years, the park was a place where people could meet, socialize, and even enjoy Parks and Recreation Department programming. Planners always talk about the process of placemaking, and this was organically occurring placemaking happening in real time. Part of the reason for this was that South Silver Spring had long been a "park desert" – and was lacking open space for families to play. Many had been hungry for this kind of open space among the high-rises for years before lockdowns ever happened.

We are disappointed that the county has dragged its feet on making this new, wonderful expansion permanent.

The DTSS plan calls for the road to be closed but used as a "flex street." While we are big supporters of flex streets, we do not think this is the right location. We think that it would be better to leave the paved area as an open space that could sometimes be used by vehicles during special events or large emergencies.

Part of our concern is that you would have the same small space run and managed by two entities that have very different mission statements and goals, and measure success by very different metrics.

But also, DOT's primary mission, in most circumstances, has been to manage space along our roadways for the primary purpose of mobility - vehicular, pedestrian, and cyclist traffic. While DOT may have dipped its toe into more "recreational" uses of street space with its "Shared Streets" program over the past 2 years, Newell Street and the opportunity it presents over the long term involve a much different set of management skills - event management, noise management, recreational programming, etc.

To most users of this space, the distinction between the MCDOTs rules and Parks' rules will be confusing, and having two agencies to talk to about anything like vagrancy, litter, noise or other safety issues may prove to be a real problem for the community moving forward. In my experience the Parks department is excellent with such issues.

So again, we at Open Streets Montgomery request that you make Newell Street's closure permanent and put it under the control of Montgomery Parks, NOT the Department of Transportation.

Thanks for your time and attention.