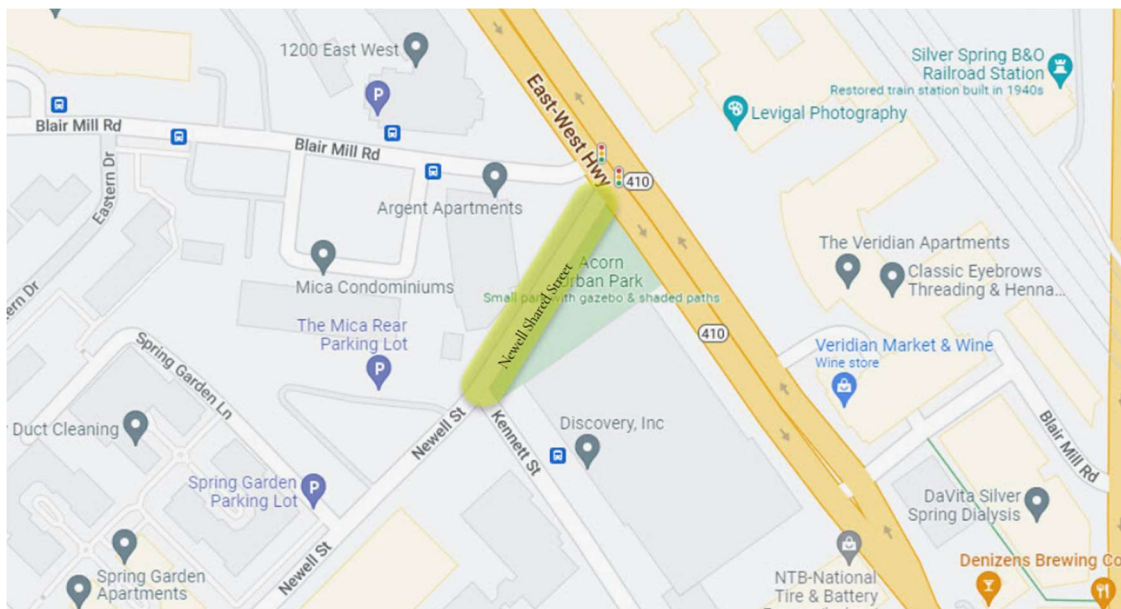


# Statement from Montgomery County Department of Transportation on the Management of Newell Street as a Shared Street

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**For Immediate Release: Thursday 1 September**



## **Newell Street - Background and Looking Forward**

In August 2022, Montgomery County announced that after Labor Day, Newell Street would transition to management as a “Shared Street” instead of a “Streeterly”. A Shared Street can be closed to cars to operate as a gathering place and is open to traffic at other times. Some shared streets are designed as an environment that accommodates vehicles while being integrated into a larger civic space. A Shared Street is the recommended treatment of Newell Street in the Silver Spring Downtown Plan adopted by the County Council in May 2022.

## **How Did We Get Here?**

Beginning in September 2020, just after the height of the pandemic, the County and Montgomery Parks partnered to operate and manage one block of Newell Street for expanded

outdoor public gathering space as part of a County program. While it was never actually a “Streeterly” it was considered part of that program which included several locations throughout the county. Typical Streeteries integrated multiple restaurants with existing outdoor cafes while Newell Street is adjacent to residential uses. When implemented, Newell Street was temporary and was expected to last only through the fall of 2020.

MCDOT conducted a limited survey in late 2020 to get a sense of the benefits and impacts associated with the temporary use of the street. The survey showed that many people enjoyed the picnic opportunities and the expanded area for use by children and families. A smaller number reported unhappiness with the notice provided, the appearance of the street, and disruptive activities brought closer to residents. Some residents and businesses also described difficulty navigating in the area, impacts to deliveries, and impacts to building operations. Notwithstanding these impacts, the use of the street was viewed as successful by the County and the Parks Department.

The County announced an extension of the use of Newell Street for gathering several times in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Discussions about the management of the space occurred on a regular basis involving the Urban District, Montgomery Parks, and MCDOT over those two years to modify programming in the space and to coordinate responses to complaints.

In Spring 2022, Montgomery County announced that the Newell Street temporary park expansion would continue until at least Labor Day. During this period, the County received petitions supporting the temporary park extension and continued to receive complaints about its unintended use and quality of life impacts such as smoke and noise affecting immediately adjacent residents.

In Spring 2022, the Montgomery County Council considered and adopted the Silver Spring Downtown Plan. The plan recommends implementation of a larger local park more suited to active uses on the site of the “NTB” building, one block away and work is already underway by the Parks Department to implement this recommendation. For Newell Street and Acorn Park, the plan recommends the conversion of Newell Street to a Shared Street and maintaining the contemplative nature of Acorn Park.

As Labor Day 2020 approached, MCDOT, in consultation with the Urban District, Montgomery County Police Department and Montgomery Parks, determined that the temporary extension of the park or “Streeterly” should transition to management as a Shared Street, consistent with the Master Plan recommendations. In this model, the street will be closed on a regular basis to support community activities but will otherwise reopen to vehicles. In the longer-term, the street can be redesigned to be more easily closed to vehicles and to better integrate into the adjacent park and sidewalk areas.

This decision was not an easy one as we know the temporary park extension has been popular and successful by many measures. However, this change acknowledges that the temporary condition had been extended well beyond the planned timeframe. It also considered the balance of localized impacts and direct disturbance to individual residences with the

community-wide benefit of the space. It is also consistent with the final direction of the Council in the adoption of the Master Plan for Silver Spring.

### **Where are We Going?**

The plan is to learn from the temporary implementation as Newell Street is rethought for the long-term. In the short term, the County will design and deploy a standardized traffic control plan to restrict vehicle access so that Newell Street can be used for community events or for community use. At other times, the street will be open to vehicles.

Residents and community groups will be able to coordinate with the County to schedule the use of the street for a public event. The County will review requests and identify the parameters such as the hours of the event, the type of activity proposed, or the anticipated attendance. Once an event is approved, the County will implement the traffic control measures so that the event can proceed. Periodically, the County may also close Newell Street to vehicles for general community use. Acorn Park will continue to operate as a park and Montgomery Park's approval is needed for events in the park.

This fall, MCDOT will also engage a landscape architect to develop ideas for the redesign of Newell Street. This effort will identify the right-of-way considerations and design options to facilitate community use, integration with Acorn Park, and efficient closure to vehicles. If an option emerges from this effort with community support, capital funding for its implementation can be sought.

### **How Does the Community Get Involved?**

The County will coordinate with Parks and community organizations to identify community events or when Newell Street can be available for community use. As a starting point to the conversation, the County has identified around 50 days for possible vehicular closure over the next nine months based on holidays and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) winter and spring breaks.

The County expects to get underway with planning for the future of Newell Street this fall and will schedule community listening sessions and workshops on how to achieve the best outcome for the redesign of Newell Street. We would like to obtain community input about those features that were most liked and disliked about the temporary use of Newell Street to inform these conversations. In addition, Montgomery Parks has begun engaging the community in the design of the new interim park at the NTB property which will be larger and better suited to active use and will complement the smaller more contemplative Acorn Urban Park. The property was recently acquired, and construction is expected to begin in 2023.

The County looks forward to working with the Silver Spring community to implement this plan. Please feel free to share your feedback with us via email at [newell@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:newell@montgomerycountymd.gov).